The Struggling "I" in Postmodern American Narratives

By

Afruza Khanom

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

Department of English
Dhaka University
April, 2012.

DECLARATION

This dissertation – submitted to the Department of English, Dhaka University, Dhaka – is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work except where otherwise stated. It has not been submitted previously anywhere for any award.

Signature: 

(Afruza Khanom)

Date: 01.04.2012

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

In my capacity as supervisor of the candidate's dissertation, I certify this dissertation is the student's own work and to the best of my knowledge all sources of information used have been acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

Supervisor: Professor Fakrul Alam

Signature: .....Fakrul Alam.....

Date: .....03/04/12.....

Professor
Department of English
University of Dhaka

Abstract

Supervisor: Professor Fakrul Alam

Title: The Struggling "I" in Postmodern American Narratives

By : Afruza Khanom

Postmodernism refers to a heightened degree of self-consciousness which suggests fragmentation, collage, hybridity, and the presence of diverse voices in any narrative, especially those concerning identity. In a postmodern society the discourses from which the self arises are multifarious and unstable. The formation of the self is, therefore, never a completed project. Thus, we see that the struggle of identity which was, in modern times, considered an internal struggle, is now considered an external one of opposing forces at work in the formation of a self.

Postmodern American authors question prevailing political, social, philosophical and artistic structures thereby revealing those structures to be either inconclusive attempts at reality or hyperreal narratives that replace the real. Through their writing, these authors have attempted to explain the extremity of flux and tension in the formation of a self. The literary works of Don Delillo, John Barth, Ursula Le Guin, and many others, both directly and indirectly, portray the instability of gendered and mediated versions of reality reflected upon by theorists such as Fredric Jameson, Julia Kristeva, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault and many others. Thus, Postmodern American short stories, novels and films show how the postmodern rejection of metanarratives in favor of contemporary mini-narratives, destabilizes the concepts of reality, history, and identity on both personal and national levels.

In this dissertation, I examine the formation of postmodern American identity based on the narratives and images derived from exposure to a postmodern culture which promotes euphoria and self-satisfaction yet undercuts the formed identity with a strong sense of instability and dissatisfaction. Consequently, through the discussion of a selection of writings from Postmodern American Literature and four American Films, I show that the depthless self-narrative of the postmodern American subject, in its aspiration towards unlimited freedom, finds itself helplessly in need of a sense of direction. Too many self-centered choices and too little stability results in never-ending unfulfilled needs. Ultimately, the unlimited freedom for the construction of identity results in unlimited dissatisfaction. Thus, the postmodern "I" is found to be constantly struggling with desperation and unfulfilled needs as it moves from one subject position to another.

The Struggling "I" in Postmodern American Narratives

By

Afruza Khanom

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

Examined and Approved by:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Acknowledgements

I thank Almighty Allah for giving me the strength to travel a path of scholarly enlightenment.

Next, I am indebted to Professor Fakrul Alam for his patience while my meandering thoughts took stylistic form. He is an immense scholarly figure whose supervision itself is motivation enough for this type of research. His critical eye was vital in developing my argument, and his rigorous style demanded the best writing I could produce. I thank him, deeply.

Equally important is the support my family provided. I thank – my parents for their love and emotional support; my 12 year old son Ifty who patiently took time to play with and watch over his 2 yr-old brother; my brother and his wife for helping to keep an eye on my little son; my in-laws and especially my brother-in-law, Monju, for running errands whenever needed; And last but not least, my husband whose busy absence gave me the space to think and write.

I would also like to thank Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, Associate Professors – Nuzhat Amin and Shamsad Mortuza, Department of English, and Md. Mofizur Rahman, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism – for their constructive criticism which helped me focus my arguments. I must also thank Professor Tahmina Ahmed who has encouraged me ever since I was a first year honors student.

Finally, I must thank the University Grants Commission, Bangladesh, for the PhD Fellowship which resulted in a deputation from the Ministry of Education that has enabled me to pursue my studies with uninterrupted concentration.

Contents

Introduction

(Re)Writing Identity: The Never-Ending Project

> If you want to know me, then you must know my story, for my story defines who I am. (McAdams 1996, 11)

Postmodernism refers to a heightened degree of self-consciousness which suggests fragmentation, collage, hybridity, and the presence of diverse voices in any narrative concerning identity. As the discourses from which the self arises are multifarious and unstable, the formation of the self in America from the 1960's onwards is never a completed project. Accordingly, in postmodern literature as postmodern authors have reconsidered their claim to authority and meaning, characters have lost depth and have begun to be portrayed self-consciously and ironically. Identity, thus, emerging from a postmodern society, has become a patchwork of diversified perspectives and role-playing selves both in literary narratives and self-narratives.

Postmodern theories have established the importance of narrative in the understanding of the world around us. Postmodernism questions and subverts the authority of grand-narratives as they exert power that restricts behaviour and is prejudiced towards ideological control systems. But the role of narratives in constructing reality cannot be denied from political, sociological, psychological, philosophical or literary standpoints. Therefore, we find grand narratives of self and society constantly displaced by mini-narratives which allow for diversified worldviews and constructed versions of reality to exist on a parallel plane.

As a result of the newly established importance of narratives, the term "narrative", once valued only in literary spheres, is invariably used in disciplines as diverse as history and psychology. Identity is now understood and examined by theorists such as Dan McAdams and Paul Ricoeur through concepts stressing narratives of the self. It turns out that these narratives assist in the construction of a self through interaction with various social discourses and situations. Since these multiple discourses simultaneously present

in postmodern society are in contest with each other, the narratives spun from them are very unstable. Therefore, the identity constructed from these narratives is considered fluctuating, fragmented and unstable.

The fragmentation of the Cartesian self originate in the Romantic age and, eventually as fragmentation intensified it developed into the schizoid self of contemporary life. The Cartesian self was considered, by modern theorists, to be the essence of a human being that thrived prior to language and social affiliations. But the postmodern era has brought an end to such a concept of the self. The self was once variably referred to as the core of an individual, the soul of man, and the essence that made each man, woman and child who and what s/he claimed to be. Postmodernism, on the other hand, initiated the rise of concepts which see the self as having regressed to a highly impressionable state from which constant transformation is possible.

In the modern age Sigmund Freud saw the "I" as struggling for equilibrium under the pressures of the id/ego/superego triad. Freud's theories signaled the beginning of the fragmentation of the self in modern psychoanalytic theory. The strain of discussion of a fragmented self intensified in postmodern times. This discussion can be tracked through varied routes, and range from the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan to gender theories of Julia Kristeva and the discursive theories of Michel Foucault, to mention only three of the many postmodern theories and theorists that paved the way towards understanding postmodern subjectivity.

These theories related to postmodern concepts of self-formation go against traditional ideas of stability, unity and especially the concept of *essence*. Postmodern theorists are highly suspicious of any concept that suggests the idea of an essence in regard to the self. The postmodern subject is considered to be chameleonic. And, as Patricia Waugh points out in"Postmodernism and Feminism", the postmodernist agenda "proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse every time we think or speak" (Waugh 346). Waugh's assertion identifies the characteristics of a postmodern self as 'precarious, contradictory' and "constantly reconstituted." In any consideration of the postmodern society, the self derived from it seems "precarious" because it is perceived to be unstable, "contradictory" because it is unreliable, and since it is in constant reconstitution it is an endless "process." She

further posits the view that "individual subjectivity is [. . .] a result of historically variable discursive operations" (346). She emphasizes the postmodern shift towards "relativity" and "a receptiveness to ideas of difference, plurality, fragmentation, non-totality, aesthetic self-fashioning, contingency and language games"(346).

Thus, we see that the struggle of "I" that in modern times was considered an internal struggle, is now, in postmodern times, considered an external one in which the "I" is under pressure from opposing forces at work in the formation of a self. This pressure to "be" can be understood as a series of identity crises faced by the postmodern subject.

The term "identity crisis" was developed during the Second World War, by Erik Erikson, an American psychologist, to refer to patients who had "lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity" and to a state in which adolescents felt a contradiction in their wants and needs. In "Conceptions of Self and Identity", Roy F. Baumeister tells us that identity crisis may arise in regard to a modern self when, "identity is inadequate for dealing with the behavioral issues and conditions that confront a person" and seems to occur "in response to various life and environmental demands that reveal the inadequacy of one's identity"(182). Among the various motivations that Baumeister cites for the development of identity of people, in reference to other theorists, the main three are the desire (a) to maximize self-esteem, (b) to gain and maintain control, and (c) to get confirmation of views of themselves from others. (Baumeister 179-184)

Building upon Baumeister's discussion of the modern self we can say that in postmodern society self-esteem, control and confirmation of self-views, still remain important elements in the consideration of identity. What has changed is the emphasis on where the source of these elements lie. They do not reside inside the individual as predispositions towards inherent virtues and values; rather, they are considered, in a postmodern world, as externally situated. As a result, along with the all encompassing urge *to be* someone comes the frustration of not knowing what is real about oneself. In the postmodern world the process of *becoming someone* and achieving an identity as opposed to naturally *being someone* has become the crux of existence. And thus,

modernism's singular concern with an identity in crisis, has become postmodernism's plural concern of it being in crises.

These crises have become a major concern for postmodern authors who have attempted to explain the extremity of flux and tension in the formation of a self through their writings. Postmodern American short stories, novels and films show how the postmodern rejection of metanarratives in favor of contemporary mini narratives, has destabilized the concepts of reality, history, and identity at both personal and national levels. For example, the literary works of Don Delillo, John Barth, Ursula Le Guin, and many others, both directly and indirectly portray the instability of gendered and mediated versions of reality reflected upon by theorists such as Fredric Jameson, Julia Kristeva, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and others.

The three "masters of suspicion"[1] have laid the foundations for nearly all these postmodern theories of the self. The whole concept of subjectivity has changed with the introduction of these theories into the psychological, sociological, philosophical, and literary arena. The ego has dissolved into a fluid entity constructed by forces beyond the control of a single human psyche.

Deriving from Sigmund Freud's theory of the Unconscious, most postmodern critical theories of the formation of the self are, in one way or the other, influenced by Jacques Lacan's theory of the "Mirror-Stage." Lacan can be referred to as the first postmodern psychoanalyst to initiate the shift of thought towards ideological influences on the formation of the self. Theorists as diverse as Louis Althusser (Post-structuralism), Fredric Jameson (Marxism), Julia Kristeva (Feminism) and many others have all extended Lacan's concept of the necessity of the image of the Other for the formation of the self.

However, the TV screen and other media now replaces Lacan's mirror and the World Wide Web has become a network of consciousnesses outside the body giving identity limitless possibilities. Such possibilities give rise to instability and fluidity. The self in such a realm can be anyone without the limitations of society, friends, family, religion, social class etc. Ultimately, an absence of limitations, moral or otherwise, proves to be a dangerous thing. For the postmodern is a realm of illusions. What the silver screen

[1] A now popular term first used by Paul Ricoeur in "Freud and Philosophy" to refer to Freud , Marx and Nietzsche.

has given to actors, media images have given to the masses: a chance to be anyone they please. Confronting gender distinctions and constructing identities without boundaries have become commonplace occurrences.

The postmodern theories I discuss in the course of this dissertation, to emphasize the external influences on the construction of self-narrative are, a selection of theories pertaining to language, psychoanalysis, feminism and gender, capitalism, and technology. These theories regarding forces behind the construction of postmodern selves converge on the following points :

(i) A self is not an essence but a construction.

(ii) The formation of a self can be interpreted in philosophical, psychological, ethnical, sociological, postcolonial, and economic terms i.e. in terms of multiple disciplines which, in a postmodern world, overlap and merge.

(iii) A self is constantly changing in accordance with the worldview which forms it.

(iv) The self having lost its strong foundations is fluid and fleeting.

(v) The journey to understand a self extends outward to material conditions and external pressures as opposed to introspection and the journey inward.

(vi) Emotions and feelings in relation to a self are not unique and are conditioned responses .

(vii) The body is a site for self formation.

(viii) Gratification of psychological and bodily needs is complexly involved in the formation of a self.

(ix) A self, seemingly free, is actually bound by various paradigms in society and language.

On the whole, the postmodern world has brought on a breakdown in all fundamental belief systems and fixed worldviews thereby changing the way the world and the individual interact. Instead of a dialectic interaction, the relationship between self and world is a dialogic interaction. The self appears to be struggling with each and every element of society and culture in order to be born as an "I." Stripped of all sense of stability a self is an unsure amoebic entity which may at any time restructure itself into any system of thought, language, society or culture based on illusory needs of postmodern identity.

The five chapters into which this dissertation is divided discuss the narrative construction of American Identity as it is reflected in postmodern American narratives. Chapter One, "Narratives of Identity: America, Americans and Postmodern Identity" discusses the issue both at national and personal levels. It focuses first on the identity of America as it is has been traditionally written as a valorized heroic white narrative, and then its transformation, in postmodern times, to an imperialist narrative that has suppressed narratives of oppression and injustice. The chapter also discusses personal identity as it appears in postmodern America. It is divided into ten sections. Section i deals with the connection between narrative and identity; Section ii deals with the connection between language and identity; Section iii discusses the problematics of historical identity; Section iv explores the metanarrative of American supremacy; Section v discusses the imperialist identity of America; Section vi deals with suppressed narratives and the influence of the American Dream; Section vii is a critical discussion of Kurt Vonnegut's portrayal of American national identity in *Breakfast of Champions*'; Section viii briefly examines postmodernism's affront on American personal identity; Section ix discusses gendered identity in Postmodern America; and finally Section x is all about the postmodern American "I".

Chapter Two, "Multiple Identities of the Postmodern Author" shows how postmodern narratives of American literature have brought about changes in the identity of the Author. The Author in a postmodern text is himself under scrutiny for creation of a text that he himself is unsure of. This chapter has nine sections which individually discuss the author being transformed in various ways into a character and reader, someone self-reflective and self-conscious, as well as an intertextual referent/plagiarist, ironical, protean and, a shaman.

Chapter Three: "Postmodern Possibilities for Feminist Narratives" discusses how postmodern narratives give rise to questions of identity that expose the multi-dimensional conditions involved in the oppression of women. The chapter has five sections. In the first section, I apply Judith Butlers' theory of "gender as performative" to the discussion of Bobby Ann Mason's short story "Shiloh" to show how the reversal of gender roles affects identity construction. The second, a discussion of Grace Paley's "The Pale Pink Roast," focuses on self-victimization as it appears when sexuality is used for establishing an

empowered identity. In the third section, Lynne Tillman's "Living with Contradictions" is discussed with emphasis on the crises of identity in contemporary experience as a result of exposure to a culture influenced by the language and images of the media. Next, is Ursula Le Guin's "She Unnames Them." This narrative has been discussed in the light of feminism as proposed by Julia Kristeva in "Women's Time." The fifth and final section of this chapter delivers a reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in the light of Audre Lorde's discussion of black feminism. This chapter exposes the damaging effect of dependence on the outside world for identification in the formation of a self.

In postmodern times, where disciplines have merged and theories have overlapped, movies and media images can effectively be referred to as visual texts, which act as access points to understanding theoretical currents. Chapter Four, "The Paradox of Postmodern Identity: Contemporary American Film and Narratives of Addiction", is a discussion of postmodern identity as it appears in corresponding images portrayed in American films. The formation of postmodern identity has been discussed using examples from filmic narratives. The sections are linked to identity thus: Section i is about the role of images and memory in identity construction (Film: *Memento*, 2000); Section ii is about the role of consumer culture in identity formation (Film: *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, 2009); Section iii is about addiction as a destabilizing factor in identity construction (Film: *A Scanner Darkly*, 2000), and Section iv is about the possibilities of identity construction through use of technology (Film: *Avatar*, 2009).

All the aspects of postmodern identity discussed in chapters One to Four, are brought together in Chapter Five, "Narratives of Postmodern Identity in Don Delillo's *White Noise*." Each of the elements of the text contribute, in one way or another, to Delillo's exposition of how society contributes to the alteration and construction of the identity of postmodern subjects. The eventual product (self) of this highly mediated postmodern culture is constantly restless and highly unstable.

At the end the concluding chapter, briefly sums up all that has been discussed in the dissertation to prove that the postmodern subject, though seemingly free from all trappings and limitations, is actually bound, by its own dissatisfaction and uncertainty. The postmodern subject, in its search for unlimited freedom, finds itself helplessly in need of a sense of direction. Thus, it seems that the postmodern promise of unlimited freedom for the postmodern "I" leads to a path of unlimited frustraton and dissatisfaction where no subject position is satisfying enough to be retained.

Chapter One

Narratives of Identity : America, Americans and the Postmodern "I"

In the postmodern world of unstable realities, identity is considered a construct of narratives that one tells to others and one's self. From its beginnings in literary theory, "narrative" has been seen in various contexts to examine the construction of social and political identity in both literature and history. In the postmodern world, narrative is no longer solely understood to be a representational literary form. Rather, recent adoption of this term into social, philosophical and psychological discussions posits it as relevant to concepts of social epistemology and social ontology. These concepts conceive that it is through narrativity that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and narrativity that we constitute our social and political identities.

Taking this narrative aspect of identity construction into account, history too is no longer considered merely an untainted documentation of the past that reveals the identity of a nation. This change in attitude is largely due to the word "historiography", now used alongside history, which indicates the constructedness of the mythical narratives that build a nation's sense of identity. These mythical narratives, though based on historical facts, are politically formulated. As a result, these narratives are actually stories reflecting partial truths which hide and distort more of the past than they reveal. These partial narratives thereby, create an identity for the nation instead of revealing an unchanging identity based on whole facts.

This chapter looks at the way traditional American historiographic narratives have attempted to create a distinctly American identity by valorizing the struggle of white American ascendancy through the suppression of ethnic and multicultural narratives. It also contains brief discussions of how narrative and identity are linked, how postmodernism destabilizes both personal identity and national identity and how, out of a destabilized national identity the base for the postmodern American "I" came into being.

The chapter is divided into the following sections: (i) Narrative and Identity, (ii) Language and Identity Construction, (iii) History and Historiography, (iv) The Metanarratives of American White Supremacy, (v) Imperialism: American Style (vi) Suppressed Narratives and the American Dream, (vii) Kurt Vonnegut's Ironic Narrative of American National Identity in *Breakfast of Champions,* (viii) Postmodernism's Affront to American Personal Identity, (ix) Gendered Identity in Postmodern America and, (x) The Postmodern American "I".

Before discussing the issue of how the mythical identity of America and the personal identity of Americans has been influenced by the new understanding of the importance of mini-narratives, it is necessary to discuss how narrative came to be associated with identity in the first place. The first section charts the movement of the term "narrative" from narratology to political and social identity theories.

(i) Narrative and Identity

As mentioned above, "narrative" has its roots in literary theory. Susana Onega and José Angel Garcia Landa in *Narratology* give a succinct definition of narrative as, "a semiotic representation of a series of events connected in a temporal and causal way" (3). In their view, "films, plays, comic strips, novels, newsreels, chronicles and treatises of geological history" can be considered narratives "in this wider sense."(3) Narratives can, therefore, be constructed using a wide variety of semiotic media: written or spoken language, images, gestures and acting. Significantly, this all-encompassing description of narrative can significantly be applied to understand the multifactorial aspects of self-construction. For, narrative psychologists like Sarbin (1986) or Kenneth Gergen (1988; 1991) have proposed an understanding of identity as narrative identity, which is understood to be the narrative of a person's life as it is experienced and expressed in stories.

Before postmodernism, identity was thought of as being formed through direct and indirect interaction with others inside and outside the family but restricted to a certain locale and culture. Ralph Waldo Emerson comments on the social aspect of identity construction in the manuscript fragments of ''Private Life'' (January 1840) when he

mentions the 'being' as linked by ''the manifold cord – the thousand or the million stranded cord which my being and every man's being is.'' Expounding this metaphor, he framed himself as ''an aggregate of infinitesimal parts'' and conceded that "[e]very minutest streamlet that has flowed to me is represented in that man which I am, so that if every one should claim his part in me I should be instantaneously diffused through the creation and individually decease [. . .]." (Emerson 251). What this means is that there is already a fixed sense of self upon which social influences play their part.

This fixed sense of self has its root in the various social and political structures that govern a certain society. Overarching social customs and mindsets create meaning for the individuals participating in communal life in any given society. There is a certain rigidity in determining one's position in society according to status and acceptable behaviour. This rigidity finds force in the metanarratives of religion, morality, social custom, tradition etc. These metanarratives, working at the background of total societies give meaning to all actions, and by extension to all identities.

In the wake of postmodernism, the perception of the fluidity of social structures led to a total revision of concepts related to identity construction. The "manifold cord" that Emerson refers to as part of the social bond within individuals has permutated into a "thousand or the million" fragile wavelengths and there is no one to "claim his part" because all value systems have become images. Thus, identity is now seen to evolve out of influence from the abstract realm of television, cinema and computer screen.

The radical indeterminacy and conceptual deconstruction of essentialism due to the new virtuosity of identity has lead to a desire towards psychological and emotional fulfillment through the creation of mini-narratives. Mini-narratives are, therefore, used to impose meaning on the fragments from which a self is constructed, as opposed to the metanarratives that once determined identity. Thus the use of mini-narratives to construct a sense of identity reintroduces time, space, and analytical relationality to the understanding of identity. Previous essentialist approaches to identity excluded these considerations. The "narrative identity" approach embeds the subject within relationships and stories that shift over time and space. Whenever the question of self/identity arises, we face newly the challenge of narrative reconstruction.

Narratives fashion selves just as selves fashion narratives. It is a reciprocal relationship maintained by the images and signifying systems prominent in society. This is what Barbara J. Socor implies in her essay "The Self and its Constructions: A Narrative Faith in the Postmodern World" when she comments on the self as being a social contrivance in the following manner, "the self which is embedded within the narrative - as the implied "I" telling the tale, like the narrative itself - is a social contrivance." What is implied here is that society simultaneously creates space for self-narratives and again constrains them within its norms. This aspect of containment gives the self-narrative a sense of stability.

Yet, the narratives offered by postmodern society are not derived from or based on the metanarratives of religion, morality, or heritage. Those were the metanarratives that could support the concept of a stable identity. What society now offers is an abundance of mini-narratives that either conform and merge, or confuse and contradict each other. Since a narrative spans time, it allows the "I" to tell stories that speak of varied situations, attitudes and timelines through language and various cultural artifacts, therefore creating an "I" that transcends time and place. This postmodern "I" is unbound by metanarratives and is, in that sense, epistemologically and ontologically free.

In another sense, the absence of metanarratives has destabilized personal identity. In her essay, "Giving an Account of Oneself," Judith Butler comments on the destabilizing power of postmodern mini-narratives in the following way, "Any one of those are possible narratives, but of no single one can I say with certainty that it is true (Butler 26). She continues voicing the realization that the narration changes each time one starts narrating for it is never possible to include every 'story' concerning a self. Each description changes according the point of view it is narrated from. As Butler states,

> [. . .] my narrative begins in media res, when many things have already taken place to make me and my story in language possible. And it means that my story always arrives late. I am always recuperating, reconstructing, even as I produce myself differently in the very act of telling. My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I have no definitive story. (Butler 27)

Butler's statement clearly identifies the problem of narrative which intentionally or unintentionally leaves out the narrating of "that for which" she has "no definitive story." It is this incompleteness in the narration that allows for the constant restructuring of a narrative.

However, there has to be some sort of unifying principle that gives meaning to an identity, no matter how momentary an identity construction is. This unifying principle which was previously taken care of by the metanarratives governing society is now attempted through emplotment. The necessity of a sense of direction in the absence of metanarratives is fulfilled through emplotment. It acts as a device to construct a fictitional unity within a small narrative. In "Theorizing Narrative Identity: Symbolic Interactionism and Hermeneutics," Douglas Ezzy comments on the self-continuity established by narratives in the following way,

> A narrative conception of identity implies that subjectivity is neither a philosophical illusion nor an impermeable substance. Rather a narrative identity provides a subjective sense of self-continuity as it symbolically integrates the events of lived experience in the plot of the story a person tells about his or her life. (239)

So it seems that through emplotment of life-events, the narrative conception of identity provides a certain sense of self-continuity. This self is not a difficult-to-comprehend philosophical or abstract notion. Rather, the self is something that can be accessed and manipulated through varied routes. The sense of self-continuity is the result of the temporary integration of lived experiences. As the narrative is restructured, the narrative self turns out to be subject to change, reversal, and surprise. Thus the narrative self is not a constant self, identical through time.

Anyhow, no matter how temporary the effect of emplotment may be, it is through the emplotment of a narrative, as Paul Ricoeur tells us in *Time and Narrative,* that "the subject both appears as a reader and the writer of his own life." (Ricoeur, 1988, 246). As reader and writer of his/her own narrative identity, the postmodern subject strives to attain continuity to establish a meaning to support the identity that has been constructed. Trinh Minh-ha in *Woman, Native, Other* considers the fulfillment of the need of continuity as a means of evading a void that would envelop her in a meaningless world.

For her, "the order and the links create an illusion of continuity," on which she places a high level of value, "for fear of nonsense and emptiness" (Minh-ha 649). Thus, the search for a sense of coherence is the drive behind the selection of memories which are used to construct identity through narration. This emphasis on momentary reality blurs the line between truth and falsity since what may be true for the present moment, may be false in the next. As situations and contexts change so does the meaning of what is and is not true.

The need for coherence is necessitated because connections and links to objects and their referents are not solid in postmodern America. The significance of daily events in the understanding of identity is no longer linear or dialectic. Linear narrative develops into a branching system of intertextual references linked by causal connections i.e. identity has become a dialogic construct. The causal connections that go into making this dialogic construct, "allow for different self-defining narratives that potentially contradict one another to exist within one life story" (McAdams, 2001). As a result, the freedom to be whoever one wishes to be and whenever one wants to be, appears. For, the narration of the life story is able to satisfy the needs of the (then constructed) self, and those who interact with it. In other words, the atmosphere of postmodernism allows manipulation and random selection of the stories that construct a narrative identity.

Postmodernism has imbued all with skeptic doubt. As in personal identity so in history, narratives at once promise meaning and yet undercut it with a sense of multiplicity and temporality. Trinh Minh-ha describes the duplicity of the postmodern situation through an anecdotal reference to the experience of storytelling. She observes that as a child when her grandmother told her stories the question never arose whether the stories were true or not. There was a clear understanding that "a story was a story" (Minh-Ha 654). But now there is no clear division, especially in matters of narrative and history.

In "Grandma's Story" of *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh Minh-Ha writes - "I am made to believe that if, accordingly, I am not told or do not establish in so many words what is true and what is false, I or the listener may no longer be able to differentiate fancy from fact" (654). The postmodern dissolution of the boundaries between fact and fiction have complicated the understanding of the stories we tell in order to make sense of our

lives and surroundings. The effect of this problem of indeterminacy is mostly noticed in identity at both personal and political levels.

Hayden White refers to the problem of indeterminacy of fact and fiction in historical narratives in "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact". He discusses an interesting concept of narrative that can be applied to this discussion of identity construction. White sees the narrative as "a process of decodation and recodation in which an original perception is clarified by being cast in a figurative mode different from that in which it has come encoded by convention, authority, or custom" (1726). This concept can be applied to clarify one's understanding of the use of narrative in identity construction. I would like to (re)write this definition so as to fit my discussion.

Applied to this context of the discussion of postmodern identity construction in the context of contemporary America, White's concept of historical narrative would be as follows: "convention, authority, or custom" would translate into culture; "decodation" would translate into deconstruction and negation of the previous identity; "original perception" would translate into the previous (established) concepts of identity in circulation; "recodation" would translate into the (re)construction of a new identity; and, "a figurative mode" would translate into the adoption of a new signifying system. Therefore, the concept of narrative identity I propose, derived from White's concept of narrative, would be – *narrative identity is a process of reconstruction, deconstruction or negotiation of a previously established identity into a new identity through the adoption of a new or temporarily prevailing signifying system, the reality of which would be based on the transformation and adaptation of signifying systems of the culture in question.*

But, in a postmodern world, signifying systems are constantly shifting and unstable. The identity constructed from such systems is naturally expected to be as free-floating and as unattached to the subject, as meanings are detached from words and images. This brings us to the next topic of discussion i.e. how language as a medium of narrative expression constructs identity.

(ii) Language and Identity Construction

As we have seen, identity depends on signifying systems for it to be a meaningful construction. The postmodern focus on language as characteristically having a loose connection between signifier and signified, implies a decentralization of the subject. This is because the fragmentary language of postmodern discourse brings with it intertextual references which destabilize the solidity of singular meaning. Intertextual references carry the aura of possible identities for a subject.

Through her writing, the Mexican American writer and activist Gloria Anzaldua emphasizes the importance of language in identity construction. She remembers being punished and rebuked by her teacher's racial comments, "If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it go back to Mexico where you belong"(893). She reacted against the accusation of being incomprehensible. But her reaction instilled her with a sense of pride as she realized that an insult to her language was an insult to her. She asserts - " I am my language. Until I take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (Anzaldua 898). She reveals how her shame and 'low estimation of self' came from repeatedly being told in her childhood that her language 'was wrong.' She considers the affront to her language to be an attack on her sense of self - "Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self" (897).

The irony is that, though America, in an attempt to be threat-free of 'alien' presence, marginalizes where it promises tolerance; it binds where it promises freedom; it suppresses where it promises expression; and it oppresses where it promises equal treatment; Nevertheless, it still has been overtaken by cultural diversity. This diversity finds expression not only in language, but also in style, pop culture and consumer choices.

The problem is that by allowing "others" of different ethnic and national backgrounds into one's private speech through linguistic and cultural changes, one initiates the negation of the private self. Anzaldua's 'mestiza' consciousness becomes a dangerous concept for the American self which sees any encroachment as hostile. She indirectly asks for the consciousness to assume a fully relational and volatile position.

This position acquired through language transforms the self as outside influences change perceptions and attitudes.

This volatile position of the subject within language is seen by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* to dissolve subjectivity. He observes the change that occurs to the subject in the following way,

> The social subject itself seems to dissolve in this dissemination of language games. The social bond is linguistic, but is not woven in a single thread. It is a fabric formed by the intersection of at least two (and in reality an indeterminate number) of language games, obeying different rules.(86)

Lyotard refers to the effect of the embedded plurality in the meanings of linguistic terms which are determined by a given society. What Lyotard tells us is that social language has become extremely complicated. The languages of the sciences and the arts are attaining more and more notations and symbols than one can logically track. The social subject, therefore, loses stability as identity is "splintered" and "we are all caught in the positivism of this or that discipline" (Lyotard 86).

However, linguistic variety has not only resulted from new concepts in the arts and sciences. Exposure to other languages results in the picking up of certain words and cultural norms. By adopting and modifying the context and meanings of those words and norms new possibilities for identity are found. In contemporary America this manipulation occurs mainly in and through media. Before media made other cultures easily accessible, all cultures were contained within the boundaries of their own regions. Media has changed this. Now a cocktail of cultures and languages, appears on the screen. Media language, especially in the form of written and visual advertisements, manifests itself in the language of the new generation of subjects who build their personalities in accordance with what they see and hear on TV, cinema or the computer screen. The effect of a cocktail of cultures is enhanced by advertisements that have become part of a powerful visual signifying system, which produce meaning outside the realm of the advertised product. This detachment of signifier and signified is what language has become for the postmodern subject

The language of media distorts the face of perception. As a result, it interferes with what Pierre Bourdieu in "Distinction –A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste," refers to as the consumer's "naturally competent selection" of appropriate products, practices, and preferences. The postmodern consumer is deprived of choice as advertisements cloud their judgment. Enticing images and catchy phrases are used to manipulate the consumer so that 'wants' become 'needs'. In "Advertising and the Technology of Enchantment: The Portrayal of Beauty in Women's Fashion Magazines" the author Brian Moeran also comments on the perception modifying character of the detached signifiers and signifieds of commercial language and imagery. He shows that "fashion magazines present beauty as a system of magic"(11). He equates the language of advertising with that of a "magic spell" which has the ability to conjure up an alternate reality and dispel the unwanted within the consumer who is subjectified by consumption and taken in a sort of trance to the world of dissatisfaction. Referring to Alfred Gell, he posits the enchantment offered by images in advertisements as "probably the most sophisticated psychological weapon" (Moeran 12) used to control the thoughts and actions of others. Gell tells us in "Technology and Magic," the enchantment exerts influence by way of exploiting the "innate or derived psychological biases so as to enchant the other person and cause him/her to perceive social reality in a way favorable to the social interests of the enchanter" (Moeran 12). Language, therefore, is subjected to an all encompassing consumerism and commercial exploitation which has made it a commodity.

In this consideration it is not only language that has changed; identity has changed with it too. Language used as propaganda even affects the identity of a nation. In most cases national narratives are affected when media is used for political reasons. Thoroughly understanding the power of media narratives in creating reality, politicians have created support for their political initiatives, especially in dealing with controversial projects. Mediated propaganda and the fear it generates are essential to the American government's ongoing construction of narratives which establish the need for war. For example, the justification for the Iraq war as portrayed by the American media now seems quite exaggerated. With no overwhelming discoveries of threatening bomb factories where Iraq's "weapons of mass destruction" were said to be created, the

necessity of the emergency and severity shown in America's attack on Iraq now seems doubtful.

What such statements signify is that the media has the power, through suggestive images and language, to create realities. In "Spectacles of Terror, and Media Manipulation: A Critique of Jihadist and Bush Media Politics" Douglas Kellner shows how a discourse of war can be built through repetitive language and selective images. For him language as a tool of manipulation. Language used by the Bush Administration placed Iraq as a demonic presence which had to be fully eradicated. Some of the words and phrases repeatedly used are "evil", "terror", "terrorists", "a war between good and evil", "eradicate evil from the world", "to smoke out and pursue... evil doers, those barbaric people", and even the word "crusade." As Kellner informs us, the "Pentagon at first named the war against terror "Operation Infinite Justice," until they were advised that only God could dispense 'infinite justice,' and that Americans and others might be troubled about a war expanding to infinity"[. . .] The new name for the "war on terrorism" became "Operation Enduring Freedom" (Kellner 6). The war, from that point onwards, became a war waged in the name of freedom against the reign of terror.

Through language Iraq was given a new identity. The nation was made into being the "Terrorist Other" but as Kellner points out, "The terrorist Other, however, does not reside in a specific country with particular military targets and forces, but is part of an invisible empire supported by a multiplicity of groups and states" (8). This fluid identity of the terrorist Enemy gave America, as an *upholder of justice* and *a doer of good,* the justification to attack any country or group that is (in their view) supporting terrorism(my emphasis).

Moreover, the constant media coverage by American news channels made the war into a spectacle. As Kellner writes, "The television networks themselves featured logos such as "War on America," "America's New War," and other inflammatory slogans that assumed that the U.S. was at war and that only a military response was appropriate"(10). Emphasizing that such zealous war spirit had not been seen since World War II, he notes that, the "Media frames shifted from "America Under Attack" to "America Strikes Back" and "America's New War"- even before any military action was undertaken" Thus, America created a "reality" which gave it a pretext for the attack and created a narrative

in which it appeared as the superhero triumphant against evil and anarchy. So what we see is that language creates narratives that have the power to create a nation's identity as Iraq becomes the "terrorist", so America becomes the "superhero". After the war different stories are narrated. These narratives then start to build negative sentiments even inside America.

As a nation, America has lost a fundamental aspect of its projected identity because of the Iraq war. This is because narratives other than what American networks revealed, were intervening in the war scene. "There were over twenty broadcasting networks in Baghdad for the 2003 Iraq war, including several Arab networks, and the different TV companies presented the war quite diversely" (15). These narratives question the narrative of America as a benevolent power. As a result, the identity of America as a nation out there to help other nations who desperately needs its help, is now viewed skeptically. Just as the necessity of the Vietnam war is still questioned in American national history, so the Iraq war is bound to raise questions about the necessity of America's intervention in Iraq's affairs.

So we see that national identity is brought into question by narratives which arise from perspectives other than the official one. The realization of the possible manipulation of facts in the narration of events which constitute a country's identity leads inevitably to the question of historical narration. History, in contemporary thought, is regarded as one of many possible narratives. The preferred term now-a-days is historiography – the narrative interpretation of historical facts. The next section of this chapter discusses such a historiography and the effect of this change on the identity formation in America.

(iii) History and Historiography

As mentioned previously, during the 1970s there was a surge of interest in narrative due to the emphasis literary critics gave to "narratology"- the systematic study of narratives. By linking histories with their discussion of novels these critics greatly enlargened the application of narratives as a way of understanding the world. As a result, they made it possible to see that many histories are politically motivated narratives and thus of dubious relevance. As postmodern theorists removed the wedges that thrust their

disciplines apart, an affinity between "narrative" and "identity" could clearly be noticed by theorists as far apart in their ideology as Paul Ricoeur and Dan McAdams. In favor of constructivist theories of identity development, the general consensus that arises is that both national and personal identity are constituted by and constitutive of narratives.

American identity formation is thus indispensably connected to its political agenda. Thus, any destabilization of the official political narrative of the nation leads to a massive uncertainty about what the word "America" and "American" is supposed to denote. The uprooting of the idea of a perfect Eden where all movement was and is towards progress is deeply and critically questioned by the experience of Americans of varied ethnic groups. The Latin American situation, for example, is one of poverty, depravity, and oppression. Their peoples are totally differentiated from Americans of highly developed urban city scapes.

National identity, therefore, as reproduced in history is no longer unquestionable. Postmodernism questions the barriers that contain the myth of American White supremacy. The prevailing American myth glorifies the courage of white settlers against the wilderness and triumphant narratives of booming economic prosperity has been destabilized by a new series of narratives revealing oppression, ethnic cleansing and slavery. America as a nation now has to come to terms with its identity as an imperialist nation which has long denied the rights of Native Americans, deprived hyphenated Americans of a pure sense of nationality, as well as suppressed and enslaved Afro-Americans. At the same time, the role of nation-builders who through historiographic narratives had raised the accomplishments of those of Anglo Saxon descent to the status of heroes and martyrs is now under question.

In the case of America, the bias in the recording of history, is influenced by its affinity to and preference for spectacle. Spectacle is part and parcel of American society. The evidence of such spectacle can be noticed in the extraordinary importance placed on literally any subject, personal or social, as received through the media that catches mass attention. Spectacle evolves through incessant discussion of a certain subject, looked at from varied perspectives as it streams through the media. Then, this same subject is left aside by the laws of society, allowing spectacle to have its temporary albeit temporary hypnotic hold. It then disappears as if it had never existed. Its place is taken by something

else. Fredric Jameson sees this as reflective of "... an alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history" (Jameson 1967). He continues to voice his concern about such image making saying, "we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past, which itself remains forever out of reach" (ibid). His concern about the search for America's history through pop images signals the tension about the uncertainty of those images to properly reflect the past. The fear is that the nation will lose the identity that it had previously established through historical accounts.

The significant disintegration of the prevailing legends and metanarratives governing society and the consequent replacement of those metanarratives with a postmodern polyglot of mininarratives, is inseparably connected to the loss of a stable identity. For example, the disintegration of the metanarratives of white supremacy in American society and their effects on national identity formation as a result of this disintegration is discussed below.

(iv) Dissolution of Metanarratives of American White Supremacy

As historians and thinkers inspired by postmodern attitudes o f skepticism began questioning American legends and myths, its metanarratives of supremacy started to lose ground. It was through the postmodern theories concerning 'metanarratives' (Lyotard), 'power and 'episteme' (Foucault), 'discourse' (Derrida), and 'simulcra' (Jameson) that the blind eye of many Americans began to be cleared. It became clear to them that simulacra – a false perception of stable truth – had enveloped the American people. Metanarratives had disguised the political power play at work. All through American history Anglo-Saxon whites had been constructing narratives that justified their actions to the world and also to themselves. The founding myths of Americans conquering western frontiers and colonizing "uncultured" races created a false sense of superiority for White Americans that came to cherish such narratives.

When Europeans first came to America in order to organize and establish colonies, they brought with them a well-developed ability to manipulate and create propaganda and polemic. Susan Manning in "Literature and Society in Colonial

America" observes that in order to establish conformity within colonies American writers actively "exploited a division between verbal and concrete realities" (Manning 4). She suggests that by using the English language as their medium, they thrust a wedge between language and meaning, and "between the facts and the way they are described" (ibid). She goes on to personify such self-conscious use of English as a 'double-agent' which could not guarantee the truth but rather "betrayed the truth it seemed to discover" (Manning 4). America, afterall, was not the harmonious paradise that it was made out to be. There was always the struggle between the needs of the community and the needs of the individual. It was the growing concept of overwhelming prosperity that induced every man to think of himself. And, in sharp contrast to the myth that society prospered alongside the individual it seems that the individual struggled with his own needs in opposition to the needs of his community. This inconsistency arose as a form of conflict within the American consciousness and found expression in the so-called "American Dream."

On observing prosperity in the trade of the American colonies (then under British rule) and its potential as a market for British goods, England started interfering in the American economy. British Parliament imposed a series of taxes and tariffs on American merchants hailing from the American colonies. This ultimately led to the Great American Revolution and to the 'liberty' of its people. But unbeknownst to most Americans, not conscious of their roots in European kinship, the imperialist mentality remained occluded in the American consciousness. This created a sort of 'superiority complex' within the American race which is at the heart of America's own exploits abroad and within the country itself.

This sense of superiority was constantly rejuvenated by narratives circulating throughout the country that found resonance within the American consciousness. These narratives powered the nation and gave Americans "the illusion of eternal strength and health, and of the essential goodness of the people" (Feder 332). Propaganda was spread in favor of colonialism, emphasizing the need to extend *civilization* to the *uncivilized* people of the world. Edward Said's criticism of French and British colonialism in Africa as expressed in *Orientalism* can be used here to describe American bids to expand their power. As Said tells us,

> "The important thing was to dignify simple conquest with an idea, to turn the appetite for more geographical space into a theory about the special relationship between geography on the one hand and civilized and uncivilized people on the other." (*Orientalism* 216)

Political narratives were woven to support conquests of other nations. Rationalizations and 'dignity' were invested in imperial, economic and military expeditions which masked the true intentions of those who conducted them. The acquisition of space and power was masked under the pretence of extending the benefits of civilization on a people who were "uncivilized". This aspect of masking one's true identity is further discussed in the next section on American Imperialism.

(v) Imperialism : American Style[1]

It is interesting to note Carole Boyes Davies' "American" has become "synonymous with United States imperialistic identity" and also "identified with European 'discovery' and the destruction of native communities and nations" (Davies 1000). After WWII America took over, from England and France, the colonial role of exploiting the Orient. But the United States did not wish to appear like an invader or conqueror. Professing friendship and promising to protect the rights of the people of invaded nations, America strove to open up more markets and thus increase exports of American goods.

This may seem as a natural step to be taken by a nation more capable than many, in moving towards prosperity. But, as Alan Trachtenberg observes while writing of the social and cultural context of modern America, "The problem lay in the sheer crudeness and anarchic energy of a rampaging business civilization devoted only to 'vast money making'" (Trachtenberg 283). Americans, thinking of themselves as all powerful, took it upon themselves to command any other nation they wished. The force behind this idea of

[1] Bashing away at America is not at all my intention though, in places of this chapter, it may seem that I am doing exactly that. With no political agenda, this section intends to show that historical narratives are selectively (some are highlighted, some suppressed) written into national consciousness in order to create a notion of national identity.

domination seems to derive from the sudden increase in material wealth through economic transactions in previously unchartered markets.

Frantz Fanon in "The Wretched of the Earth," attributes such an attitude of superiority to socially ill-balanced economic prosperity. Such pride in material well-being leads to the negation of, and hostility towards, others who are considered to be less fortunate and therefore not capable of enjoying the fruits of prosperity and success. As Fanon observes,

> The districts which are rich in groundnuts, cocoa and diamonds come to the forefront and dominate the empty panorama which the rest of the nation presents. The nationals of these rich regions look upon the others with hatred and find in them envy and covetousness, and homicidal impulses. (1583)

Though Fanon's observations refer to the improper distribution of wealth in African colonies, which causes dissatisfaction and unhealthy attitudes amongst the ethnic races there, the mindset he underscores can be used to describe the self-conscious pride that fuels the American consciousness.

Beside the political reasons behind American imperialism there were also economic and cultural reasons. In "America and Cultural Imperialism: A Small Step Toward Understanding" a paper published by DDB Worldwide in 2002, an alternate perspective of America's promise of worldwide economic prosperity is given. After being given an overview of anti-American sentiments in it from the perspectives of France, Germany, the Middle East, Japan, Jamaica, and the UK, we are given alternates to America's commonly used terms of propaganda in the following way -

> Consequently, *freedom, individualism, choice,* and *control* can also be seen as *opportunism, hyper-consumerism, waste and exploitation. Independence* can be seen as *arrogance*, American "*modernity*" can be seen as a *lack of respect* for an older, more mature culture. (10) [emphasis original]

What this reveals is that in most cases countries are not comfortable with America's domination of their markets. America, it seems acts upon the assumption that people everywhere want to live as they do. This leads American businesses to sometimes either

overlook or undermine local cultures. As a result, there is the feeling that America, driven solely by economic interest, will inevitably take a materialistic, self-centered, and domineering business approach that will be detrimental to local markets.

Again, this fear of economic domination by America is indirectly bound with fear of American foreign policy. The presence of America, in most countries, has led, in one way or another, to interference in local policy making. Nearly all political confrontation between America and other nations begins with America's justification that it embarks on military missions only to protect the lives and property of US citizens. Another reason commonly cited by the American administration during military engagements outside the country is its plea for either protecting or establishing democracy. For instance, in 1898, America intervened in Cuban affairs justifying its actions as a step taken to free Cuba from the oppression of its Spanish colonizers. Interestingly, it then considers taking Cuba for itself, by any means possible. Thus, questions now arise about America's motives in attempting to free Cuba from the Spanish.

Moreover, the actions taken in these and similar circumstances is quite questionable. For example, the following extract from a letter written by an American soldier who fought in the war against the Philippines reveals the atrocities committed by the American force in the name of justice :

> The town of Titatia [sic] was surrendered to us a few days ago, and the two companies to occupy the same. Last night one of our boys was found shot and his stomach cut open. Immediately orders were received from General Wheaton to burn the town and kill every native in sight; which was done to a finish. About 1,000 men, women and children were reported killed. I am probably growing hard-hearted, for I am in my glory when I can sight my own gun on some dark skin and pull the trigger.
>
> From A. A. Barnes, soldier, a letter to his parents in NY (Miller, S. 189)

The American retaliation, for the death of a single soldier, worked as justification behind the genocide and destruction of a whole village. The strong animosity felt by American soldiers for the "dark skin" reveals a story different than one of benevolence and sacrifice. Thus the role of American soldiers on foreign soil as keepers of peace and justice becomes highly questionable. In cases such as these, American soldiers are seen

by the locals not as saviours but as aggressors who have switched off any and all sense of humanity. A spark of humanity that does exist and sufaces from time to time and that leads to disclosures such as the ones mentioned above.

The revelation of other versions of the truth, through such private documents has only recently been considered relevant to historical data. Private letters, pictures, diaries are now an acceptable part of historical narratives. And it is these mini-narratives that act against the official story as politicians would have it. Such unofficial documents expose facts that destabilize the official version of events which are usually conveniently constructed by those in power. But it is only with the rise of postmodern skepticism that the prevalence of such manipulation in the narration of events has been widely acknowledged.

"FUN FOR THE BOYS."[1]

Life, Life Publishing Company, New York, August 23, 1900
[artist: William Bengough]

Image-1A

An interesting cartoon[2] by the artist William Bengough published in *Life* magazine in 1900 shows how official narratives (re)write truth. The cartoon titled "Fun for the Boys"[3] (Image-1A) shows US administration rewriting the "Declaration of Independence" as it applies to the colonization of the Philippines in 1898. A close-up view of the edited document sarcastically reveals the double standard adopted by America when dealing with other nations (Image-1B). The changed document reads as follows,

[2] Source of image, http://sheg.stanford.edu/upload/Lessons/Unit%207_American%20Imperialism/Philippine%20War%20Political%20Cartoons1.ppt

[3] This cartoon is an example of how national identity can be constructed upon historical documents that suppress other realities.

Declaration of dependence

We brought the Filipines for $ 20,000,000
Therefore
We hold these lies to be self-evident.
That all brown men are created unequal; that they are endowed, by their rulers
with certain unalienable wrongs
that among these are death, captivity
and pursuit.
That to secure these wrongs
Governments are instituted among
Filipinos, deriving their just powers
From the consent of the undersigned
Old daddy Washington is a has-been.we're it
Inc, Mac, and Teddy

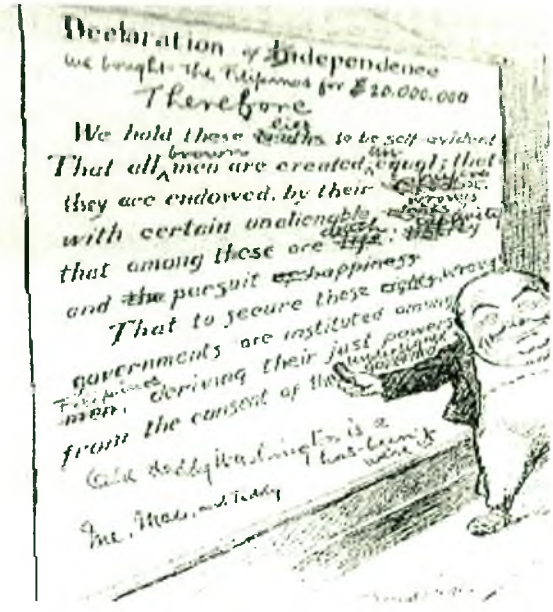


Image-1B

The cartoon fragment ridicules the "Declaration of Independence" in order to expose a narrative of American politics different from that politicians would have people believe. "The Declaration of Independence" is considered the foundation of America's beliefs in freedom and democracy. By rewriting the document as it is actually applied in the case of another country, the cartoonist in this case calls attention to the American belief system which places Americans as supremely just and moral. The question of American intervention in support of freedom is questionable when it can be manipulated to fit the American political agenda in this manner. The disparity of the professed intention of American intervention and the reality of it is self-evident and it questions America's notion of democracy as applied to other countries.

The "Declaration of *dependence"* mentioned above is an imaginary text, yet there are actual documents which do infringe upon the rights of other nations and still attempt to uphold narratives which justify unjust actions. The Ostend Manifesto is one such document that appeared during the administration of Franklin Pierce, the 14th President of the United States (1853–1857). At that time, Pierre Soulé, the American minister to Spain, was attempting to purchase Cuba for $130,000. His bid was rejected by Spain who found it insulting. In response to this bid , Soulé wrote the Ostend Manifesto. In it, he

said that the mere possession of Cuba by Spain was a threat to American security and America would be justified in seizing Cuba by force. The Ostend Manifesto, therefore, provided the rationale for the United States to purchase Cuba from Spain, and stated that Cuba should be seized by it in the name of national security.

The example above shows that national identity has always been structured upon narratives that have attempted to justify the actions of their administrators. In these narratives threats are exaggerated so that military action appear necessary. The difference between these attitudes and postmodern ones clearly reveal the constructedness of historical situations. History, once regarded as the only reliable document of the past, is now under suspicion. Historians now question the role of myth builders and call for restructuring of history departments to emphasize narratives that exist outside the official narrative, since the manipulation of history has been especially noticed as far as national identity formation is concerned. Even outside America, a realization of the need for reassessing primary documents instead of relying on historical narratives has led to many history departments encouraging students to restructure history based on determinate historical materials (archival materials), and perform steady historical studies through criticism of archival materials (ex. Hosei university in Tokyo).

What has been highlighted in the discussion above is that, America, in its past imperialistic maneuvers, tried to project a self-righteous image by disseminating justifications for its actions. Since the current modes of postmodern inquiry do not allow for suppression of opinions, a multitude of conflicting voices can now be heard against the aggressive actions taken by America anytime, anywhere. These voices destabilize America's international identity as a goodwill nation. The next section discusses how America's image is being destabilized by rereadings of the ethnic narratives of the country. Ethnic and black voices were also previously suppressed in American historical narratives.

\

(vi) Suppressed Narratives and The American Dream

Postmodernism's preference for multiplicity and skepticism in regard to all authority has created a favorable atmosphere for uncovering narratives that have, for too long, been suppressed in favor of overarching mythical narratives of self and America. As convincing as American freedom and progress may have seemed in the wake of economic prosperity, the truth is, ethnic and multicultural America has a different story to tell. As was the case with in the African colonies referred to by Fanon (quoted above), economic disparity was causing "glaring discrepancies" in American society. Trachtenberg clearly points out the flaws in the projected image of a "perfect America" when he writes:

> " a perfect America" How could it reconcile its underlying conviction in an ideal community, a perfect 'America',[. . .] the exacerbating hostilities of class, race, gender, religion, ethnic group, which made up the stuff of everyday reality in American cities? Chronic poverty, racial anger and violence, unequal access to political power: these were only the more glaring discrepancies [. . .]. (Trachtenberg 289)

This account strongly challenges the all encompassing image of America as paradise on earth, for all who had the spirit to rise above their lot and take risks in changing their future. This was an image of freedom which seemingly invited all who were willing to venture as entrepreneurs in business to test their fate. The individualist tradition holding each person to be a free agent, capable of making his/her own decisions, choosing his/her own way of life has long been a cultural mainstay of American life. As a result the business spirit that was fostered by America concentrated on the well-being of the individual as opposed to that of society.

The narrative of the self-made man, whose economic prosperity was achieved thereby fulfilling the American dream, has been broadly celebrated and valued, but is also really problematic because it invites attention only to one's self. Instead of concern about the well-being of society the emphasis here is laid on one's own development, aspirations, emotions, and needs. Other persons are relegated to secondary status. Such a

stance is detrimental to the political and social atmosphere of an American society which harbors a diverse population.

America, after all, is not only the creation of European entrepreneurs, but is the result of the work of its African, Asian, and Latin American inhabitants, as well. Within America the sense of superiority (of the White American) caused problems for minority groups and immigrants. Said wonders out aloud in the "Afterword" of *Orientalism*,

> " How can one today speak of Western Civilization except as in large measure an ideological fiction, implying a sort of detached superiority for a handful of values and ideas, none of which has much meaning outside the history of conquest, [. . .] This is especially true of the United States which today can only be described as an enormous palimpsest of different races and cultures sharing a problematic theory of conquest [. . .]"
>
> (Said 349)

His worry is that, the only heritage that Americans can share is one of a "theory of conquest" but that too is "problematic". Indeed, the involvement of the United States in World War I and World War II brought to the surface the extent of how "problematic" this "theory of conquest" is. During World Wars suspicions of white Americans arose about loyalty of other races towards the nation, as a new awareness grew of the Other in and outside American society. White Anglo-Saxon Americans doubted the loyalty of all hyphenated Americans.

Such Americans upheld the grand narrative of superiority among races denying all other (sub) categories equal existence. In "Beyond Identity Politics: The Predicament of the Asian American Writer in Late Capitalism", the author San Juan observes that since the United States began as Britain's colonial outpost, its social formation "has been distinguished by the violent exclusion and subjugation of the American Indians and the subsequent differential incorporation of various racial groups" (548). The white American Nation (which for the most part had European descent) was seething in overwhelming pride in being American, overlooking the fact that apart from Native Americans all Americans were themselves outsiders. White males dominated over African-Americans and Latin-Americans and denied them equal status as citizens proving that the hyphen really does represent a positional superiority.

Latin America, it can be noted here, has always been seen as an anomaly in the history of nationalism as it has lacked the linguistic and ethnic divisions commonly associated with national identities in Europe or Asia. This is because the multiplicity of language and culture of the region has been suppressed as insignificant. It was not until the 1960s that Latin Americans began to address the issue of nationalism directly. The change in concepts regarding national identity spurred by postmodern theories results in a receptiveness of Latin Americans to "the kinds of approach advocated by the various schools of postcolonial, subaltern and cultural studies – particularly theories of narration and discourse analysis, have helped to shape an exciting body of revisionist work, which has taken thinking about Latin American nationalism and national identity in many new directions" (Miller, 203). The hope now is that national identities will no longer be seen as all-absorbing. Instead, variety in language and culture may be considered as part of national historicity.

Out of her anger and suffering for being marginalized and pushed away from mainstream America, Gloria Anzaldua, a major Mexican activist, advocates for the creation of a 'mestiza' consciousness in *Borderlands*. She proposes for the adoption of the "mestiza consciousness" since it is able to anticipate and cope with the collision of diverse cultures within one consciousness. The struggle of 'borders' within that consciousness would lead to a heightened tolerance of contradiction and ambiguity. The new mestiza consciousness that she advocates would consist in creating a new level of consciousness which would encompasses unlimited possibilities of reality. Such a consciousness realizes that the psyche can only cope with diversity by remaining flexible and open to alien concepts. By acquiring Anzaldua's proposed mestiza consciousness America could accommodate the other races. Maybe the mestiza consciousness is what America needs to be the multicultural society it claims to be.

Of course, Anzaldua's proposal and advocacy for a 'mestiza consciousness' may be seen warily by many Americans when it is stated as an imperative for social integration of opposites. The Americanization of immigrants became a priority to such Americans. Within America those who are of a culture or ethnicity either than European White American have long been termed as 'aliens.' If a person looked, worshipped, or acted differently than the majority of Americans, then that person would be seen as alien;

a foreigner, even if born in America is not referred to as true American. An ironical depiction of the prevalence of such an attitude can be seen below (Image-2):

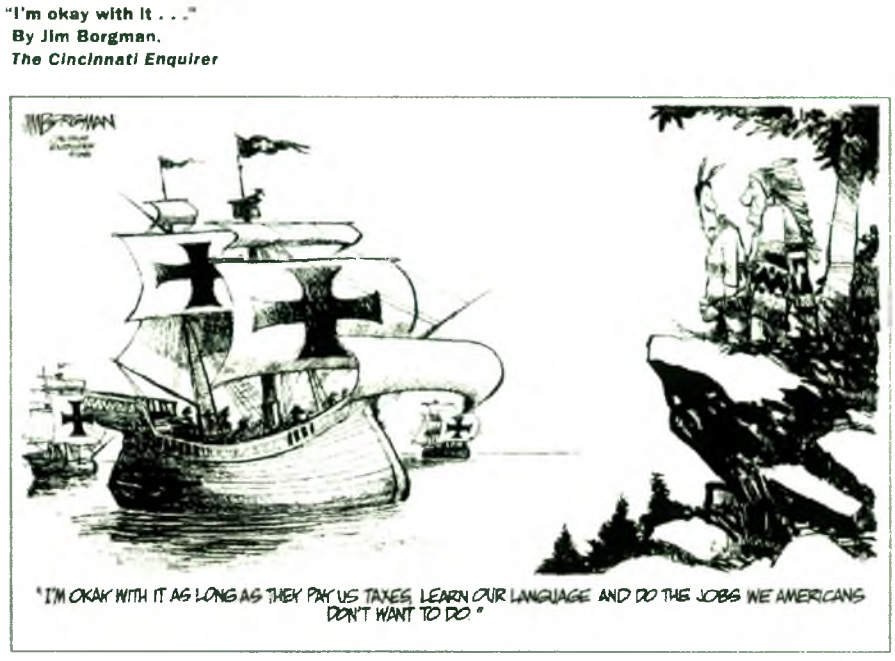


Image-2: "I'm okay with it. . ." [4]

The cartoon reprinted above comments ironically on the type of assimilation called for, which requires the immigrant to relinquish his culture and language and adopt that of the dominating race, as a prerequisite to participating in the American dream of success. The promise of the nation was and is that acceptance into the mythical narrative of the American dream would lead to upward mobility and acceptance into mainstream America.

This 'dream' is so enticing that inaccessibility to it creates a 'double-consciousness' in even those who have the courage to speak up against marginality. Hence American ethnic groups demand to be integrated into American society and demand equal status. Even for writers such as W.E.B Dubois, the need to be accepted in society resulted in psychological and emotional conflict between the demands of mainstream America and the demands of the immigrant's national culture. The plea for

[4] http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/content/immigrants_curriculum/11_pdfs/unit1_lesson1.pdf

Americanization, with its emphasis on assimilation and integration, finds expression in the popular concept of the 'melting pot'.

The analogy, derived from Israel Zangwill's 1908 play *The Melting Pot.* The narrative accompanying it was quickly adopted into the meta-narrative of American superiority in an attempt to revivify patriotic feeling. Zangwill saw America as "God's Crucible, the great Melting Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming!" The 'American he waited for would be a "fusion of all the races." It is interesting to note that Zangwill's highly celebrated term specifically evokes the "races of Europe". Patriotic Americans considered the term appropriate for creating unity out of diversity. The concept had traditionally been perceived as the best way of articulating the multi-ethnicity of America. But this idea can now be seen as a greatly misleading one.

Great American Melting Pot
by Richard Crowson,
The Wichita Eagle, March 28, 2006

Image-3

According to multiculturalists of the postmodern era, the "melting pot" analogy is a greatly oppressive one. It presents the whole nation as one large pot in which blending and 'melting' occurs, resulting in a culture which is described as characteristically "American"(Image-3)[5].

For multiculturists, the preferred term nowadays is 'salad bowl' where diversity retains its own flavor yet combines with national fervor to make a whole. As such the identities of each original culture are not extinguished; rather, they add flavor and variety to the whole. The previous analogy fails to acknowledge marginalized languages and cultures.

The intrusion of suppressed narratives has resulted in an identity crisis for most white Americans for the simple reason that their woven story of supremacy is now being questioned by previously unheard voices. In effect the breakdown of the official story has created space for other stories and voices to be heard. The postmodern era has made space for contradictory and varied standpoints to exist even in relation to the identity of a

[5] http://www1.cuny.edu/portal_ur/content/immigrants_curriculum/11_pdfs/unit1_lesson1.pdf

single individual. For America, the concept of a unified national identity with a clear idea about what the words "America" and "Americans" stand for has increasingly become a more and more complicated one. The exposure of this contradiction in American identity has been the concern of many postmodern narratives. The next section discusses the contradiction in American identity with reference to Kurt Vonnegut's postmodern text *Breakfast of Champions.*

(vii) Kurt Vonnegut's Ironical Narrative Of American National Identity In *Breakfast of Champions.*

Kurt Vonnegut, a leading postmodern writer, recalls in *The Paris Review* that since the time he was the smallest child at his family supper table, the only way he could get attention was by being funny. His constant efforts to learn from radio comedians how to make jokes resulted in his books being "mosaics of jokes" (Geyh 85). With narratives full of satire and irony, Vonnegut tactfully exposes the follies of America and Americans. Especially in his novel *Breakfast of Champions* he comments on racism, slavery and a host of other realities of American society that are commonly ignored by most social and political historians.

Vonnegut wrote *Breakfast of Champions* in the 1970's after observing the civil rights movement of the 1950's and 1960's and the black movement of 1960's and 1970's. These movements brought various gender and racial issues to light that were previously hidden beneath myths of prosperity and utopian visions about America. Through Kilgore Trout, the narrator of *Breakfast of Champions,* Vonnegut undermines American national mythology by treating sarcastically several symbols and historical fallacies that are "full of question marks" (Vonnegut 17).

Vonnegut effectively criticizes the social and political history of America by distancing himself and others from it. This distancing is achieved through Kilgore Trout's narrative about an America which he discusses, in a matter-of-fact sort of way. To him its existence must be seen as one country among "one quadrillion nations in the Universe" (17). Trout, a science-fiction writer himself, complains that schoolchildren are taught lies about American history. Schoolchildren were repeatedly told to memorize

with joy and pride the year 1492 as the year their continent was discovered by human beings. But he points out that there were already millions of human beings living "full and imaginative" lives on the continent then. Indeed 1492 was the year that "sea pirates began to cheat and rob and kill them" (18). These and many other ironic statements invert the grandeur of American history by reducing the narrative of exploration and discovery into one of piracy and slavery. This points toward the way history is used to mask reality and build national identity on mythical narratives that are intentionally implanted into the consciousness of the nation.

Kilgore Trout, as Vonnegut's spokesman, questions the ability of these "sea-pirates to create a government which became a beacon of freedom to human beings everywhere else" (19). The symbol of this freedom is like an "ice-cream cone on fire" (19). Through this metaphor, Vonnegut exposes the truth about the kind of freedom that America dangles before other nations. The offer of freedom that seems like a utopian ideal of tranquility and soothing peace actually holds unrest, turmoil, fire and destruction.

Vonnegut further undercuts America's promise of freedom and equality by explaining to readers that the sea pirates, who were "white", used "black" human beings as "machinery" (19). This emphasizes the racial distinction and imposed slavery and mistreatment of people whose skin color was not "white". Vonnegut stresses the fact that color "was everything" (19) by singling out race whenever a new character is introduced. For example, the novel's protagonists—Dwayne Hoover and Kilgore Trout are introduced as "two lonesome, skinny, fairly old white men" (16) and the unnamed "black bus boy" and "black waiter" Trout glimpses in West Virginia are singled out. Through the adjectives of color the reader is constantly confronted with issues of race.

Racial discrimination is also brought to the forefront through short anecdotes. Dwayne's stepfather, had told him the reason – "Why there were no Niggers in Shepherdstown"(185), something that he clearly remembers. Shepherdstown, Dwayne's stepfather explains, "didn't want Niggers in their town, so they put up signs on the main roads at the city limits and in the railroad yard" (186). When a black family arrives in Shepherdstown one night during the Great Depression, not seeing the signs a white mob attacks and murders the father. This happened during World War I, when

black Americans migrated in large numbers from the rural South to the more urban, industrialized North.

But indications of slavery and racial prejudice are still apparent in contemporary Midland City. We see that most of the black characters either work in menial, low-paying jobs or have spent time in prison. This implies that members of the black community are deprived of opportunities open for whites. The freedom promised by the government when they set black communities free from slavery and bondage rings hollow for them. With little or no education, limited opportunities and a society which looks down on blacks, postwar America has lost its image of righteousness.

Vonnegut blames the economic system of America for the injustices plaguing its society. He explains that America has adopted an unfair economic system. He emphasizes the imbalance brought about in the spread of wealth due to a system in which "everybody . . . was supposed to grab whatever he could and hold on to it" (21). The result of such a system, Kilgore Trout tells us, is that the Americans who were "very good at grabbing and holding, were fabulously well-to-do. Others couldn't get their hands on doodley-squat" (21).

Vonnegut, the character-writer, holds out an empty hand and says, "I hold in my hand a symbol of wholeness and harmony and nourishment. It is Oriental in its simplicity, but we are *Americans*, Kilgore, and not Chinamen" and then magically discovers an apple in his hand. His contention is that Americans need abstract symbols to become solid material reality so that they can literally consume it. An apple is, in that sense, a fitting image. It is "richly colored and three-dimensional and juicy" fitting the requirements of Americans. It has the potential to become a symbol of the United States with mythical properties through the legend of Johnny Appleseed as well as traditional associations with homeliness such as fresh baked apple-pie and nation building.

But, Vonnegut's proposal of the apple as a symbol cuts both ways as he comments that Americans need symbols that " have not been poisoned by graet [sic] sins our nation has committed, such as slavery and genocide and criminal neglect, or by tinhorn commercial greed and cunning" (225). Immediately the reader sees that even this symbol of "wholeness and harmony and nourishment" is tainted with the poison of greed and cunning through its association with the story of Adam and Eve. The narrator refers

to the story of Genesis thus: "What was the apple which Eve and Adam ate? It was the Creator of the Universe" (158). Both Adam and Eve "ate" an apple. This act of consuming implies that the obsession with consumption has literally done away with religion and authority.

Technology has assisted in the capitalist ventures of America. It has helped Americans gain control over other countries by "threatening to shoot big rockets at them or to drop things on them from airplanes"(20). And while in some countries people were forced to eat gravel, Americans were unwilling to share their wealth with them. Rather, advancements in science and technology gave them the power to "take whatever they wanted from anybody else" (21). Reflective of the imperialist attitude of America in its dealings with other nations, Trout's America is a duplicate version of Vonnegut's real life America where unfair military exploits are given undue justification.

Vonnegut's ironical comments expose the fact that history itself is narrativized. Facts and fragments are all combined through the historian's technique of emplotment that depends on his own socio-cultural orientation and ideological beliefs. Also, the language in which s/he documents or interprets events is crucial to the representation of the past. The historical document, in such a context, becomes as uncertain as the person's identity. The postmodern belief that the historical text is susceptible to one-sidedness, since it is a narrative like any other, suddenly opens it up for reassessment, rewriting, and restructuring. Furthermore, the realization that total objectivity or neutrality is unattainable leads to self-reflexive and, of course, ironical rewriting of the historical text. One can approach the historical text only by giving it alternate readings of reality.

The instability of national identity, resulting from alternate readings of reality manifests itself in personal identity too. The next section looks into the destabilizing effect of these narratives of alternate reality on the personal identities of Americans.

(viii) Postmodernism's Affront to American Personal Identity

Postmodernism became prominent in America in the course of the 1960's. Because of it the American narrative of superior individualism fell under siege. The "Declaration of Independence" itself, supposedly reflective of the 'American mind' sanctions the pursuit of happiness. Happiness for the postmodern American translates into the power of consumerism. 'Buying', however, is now more of a image-building hobby than an undeniable necessity for sustenance. In "Producing American Selves: The Form of American Biography" Rob Wilson states the effect on identity of the American transition to postmodernism, in the following way – the American "once proud of self-origination and a stance of sublime transcendence toward politics and the marketplace-has given way to a poststructural "American Jeremiah" infiltrated by capitalist materiality." Americanism has now become synonymous with capitalism. A culture of abundance has lead to the observation that "Americanism is no more than its mechanical production of pleasure" (Trachtenberg 291), powered at first by imperialism, then by individualism and capitalism.

In his recently published book *Amerique*, Jean Baudrillard characterizes the US as "the only great primitive society of modern times." He refers to American society has been referred to as the most elaborate form of European rationalism or nihilism, and as the rude, horrendously misbehaved offspring of Europe, an overblown former colony of Europe" (qtd. Mathy 280). Commenting on a postmodern America where everything is publicized, Baudrillard writes, "This is a society that is endlessly concerned to vindicate itself, perpetually seeking to justify its own existence" (ibid) Nothing is private here anymore, everything needs validation in the public eye. The human eye probes into "what you earn," and "how you live" (ibid). Baudrillard continues his deconstruction of the American as being subject to commodification to the extent that all actions of a subject and even the subject itself becomes a commodity.

Similarly Fredric Jameson in "The Political Unconscious" examines capitalism as it works to commodify humans as both the object and the subject of consumerism. He sees capitalism as the main element in postmodern power structures. He considers the worldwide evolution of capitalism as presenting "on the one hand the nightmare of total

control and on the other the polymorphous or schizophrenic intensities of some ultimate counterculture" (Jameson 1953).The 'schizophrenic intensities' he is so wary about are nothing but the emotional euphoria felt by the postmodern subject as he creates and recreates himself and the reality around him. These intensities, he fears, are creating a "counterculture," that is to say, a culture of consumerism that sustains "schizophrenic intensities."

"Schizophrenia" thus becomes the psychic norm of the postmodern through which the postmodern subject experiences pure emotion. The euphoria of creation, boosted by the constantly changing preferences of consumer consciousness, disintegrates into a succession of instants. Instant meals, fast foods, and disposable cutlery, packaging, napkins, and clothing became the norm in commodity production and use. In *The Condition of Postmodernity* David Harvey refers to Alvin Toffler's terming of America as a "throwaway" society (Harvey 286). He expounds on the dynamics of the term as follows, the term "meant more than just throwing away produced goods, but also being able to throw away values, lifestyles, stable relationships, and attachment to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being" (Harvey 286). This "throwaway" society reflects a sort of schizophrenic lifestyle of insignificance and non-absolutes. This lifestyle which celebrates instability, diversity and continuous transformation has now become synonymous with American personal identity.

But it is not only the reassessment of history, ethnic revival and a culture of consumerism that has destabilized American identity for America has long been struggling with gender and feminist issues. These issues are addressed briefly below.

(ix) Gendered Identity in Postmodern America

Postmodern explorations of gender portray the complexity of the ideas surrounding masculinity and femininity as the most prominent of gender types. This complexity is a prominent feature of American gender relations. Though gender is a psychological construct that entails how we think of ourselves as men or women, it is also a social construct that reflects the cultural context in which we live. Athough society's expectation of what masculinity and femininity mean varies from culture to culture, there are similarities in regard to what the "essence" of each gender signifies.

In Western cultures, stereotypically masculine traits and characteristics like authority, power, aggression, competition, and domination have been valued over stereotypically feminine traits and characteristics such as compassion, sensitivity, and intuition. Usually feminine traits are considered adaptable and perfect for domestic life while masculine traits are suited to work outside the home. Such ideas place women within the home and men, as breadearners, outside it.

Feminists have continuously been fighting against such fixed roles. The idea is that women and the roles they play are unjustly undermined putting the female gender in a crisis of identity especially in regard to her femininity. They argue that since gender is constructed, it can be changed. Feminists have thus used gender arguments to highlight the compromised position society has placed them in. But the problem with most feminist approaches is that instead of raising the respectability of their roles in the family (mothering and childcare, psychological and emotional support to spouse, homemaker etc.) they have concentrated on expressing dissatisfaction at having to perform roles which place, in their view, undue demands on them.

But, in recent times, the other side of the coin is being shown. In the USA the publication of Susan Faludi's *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man* (1999) has raised debates surrounding the "identity crisis" of men which rises from, in her view, undue demands placed on men based on images of masculinity. Faludi, well-known as the bestselling feminist author of *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1991), appears to sympathize with the predicament of modern man (Gauntlett 6).

Faludi thinks that contemporary society is just as depressing and constricting for the average man and that men deserve to be heard. Upto now, in having to live up to traditional standards of masculinity, men have been under pressure to be perfect providers. The emphasis is on the fact that not women alone but men also need to be freed from constricting gender stereotypes. Considering the traditional role of men as equally oppressive as those of women, she feels that men have been 'betrayed' by a society which turns them into "bread-winning robots, subject to the whims of the employment market and disconnected from quality relationships and parenthood" (Gauntlett 9).

Similar ideas have been expressed in Britain with the publication of Anthony Clare's book *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis in 2000.* Quoting from Clare's book Gauntlett cites his observation that men, as providers for their family, were once proud of this role. But, it is in jeopardy as contemporary women show that they can do everything that men can. As women take on the role of provider they appear to be bringing up families "perfectly well without the father being present at all, and scientific advances seem to be making men unnecessary to reproduction itself" (7).

As a result of the change in social circumstances brought about by gender questioning of roles, it has becomes necessary for men to renegotiate their place within this new culture. As more and more women are enter the workplace in America, the picture-perfect image of domesticity is seriously being questioned. Men are now being asked to undertake their responsibilities as parent in ways other than the traditional one of just financial provider. The re-inscription of roles means that men have to find a new, modern, useful place for themselves in the world.

Contemporary society has become as disorienting for men as it has been for women since both sexes have now become victims of the culture of consumerism, appearances, and glamour. The merging of masculine and feminine spaces in advertising and media culture have made identity ambivalent for both men and women. For example, women are being told that they must be bold, intelligent and competent and yet alluringly beautiful from tip to toe. The insecurity that women are made to feel about their looks and competence is now being felt in some male circles too!

Advertising is out to make the perfect consumer i.e. a subject who is never satisfied with the conditions life has offered him/her. Men, too, are now feeling the stress of their accomplishments not meeting up to the standards of a society which is obsessed with appearances. Men's fairness creams, styling gels, no-sweat deodorants etc. are taking men to mirror gazing and feelings of dissatisfaction previously unknown to them. This proves all the more that gender is created by society and in many ways it influences how we think of ourselves.

As America is, now, itself consumed by consumerism there remains no space to remove one's identity from the effects of a capitalist society. Advertising has become ubiquitous, creating needs out of wants; creating lack instead of fulfillment; and making the subject conform to a consumer culture which creates and sustains instability. Neither men nor women are exempted from the consumerist agenda. But there was a time when shopping for style items and cosmetics was considered frivolous. Contemporary society sees things differently and men are becoming as susceptible to marketing strategies as women. In that sense, consumerism places both men and women in the same space in that they assume the subject position of the consumer.

Kathy L. Peiss documents an interesting feature of the history of advertising in America in her essay "American Women and the Making of Modern Consumer Culture." According to Piess, Modern American consumer culture arose after 1890 as an outcome of a synergy of economic and cultural forces. . . .the modern ad agency promised to create a national market of consumers, indeed, to systematize desire." She cites the case of the feminist Frances Maule who argued that advertisers relied too much on "the good old conventional 'angel-idiot' conception of women" rather than seeing them in the concrete terms of their daily lives"

As consumerism has flourished there has been a growing sense that consumption involves not only the purchase of goods but an entire way of life. Piess notes that, "Shopping was transformed from a functional activity of women into a form of leisure." The woman consumer was stereotyped as being "emotional and impulsive", and being driven by "inarticulate longings" and "dormant desires." The overall picture being projected is that "If men responded to the intrinsic qualities and function of a product, women dwelled on its social and psychological effects, its style and smartness." Piess

considers consumerism as, "the mass-market's model of the woman consumer tended to reinforce the gender divide" and that at a time when "traditional roles were challenged from many quarters."

She goes on to emphasize the voyeuristic element in the display of female images in the mass media which present youth, beauty, and sexuality in ways that often aggravate negative experiences reinforced by these gender roles. She points out that the making of the female into the object of voyeuristic pleasure was not and is not limited to male manipulation. Female advertisers who are also "easily submerged in the celebration of female beauty" found it to be "an end in itself" and "conventional notions of women – in terms of beauty, frivolity, and romance – resurfaced." Feminists found themselves caught in contradictory impulses.

Interestingly, whatever freedom the American woman got out of the Suffrage Movement she jeopardized by giving in to the new language of persuasion i.e. the fragmented language of advertisements. The desires and enticements, as well as images of 'perfect' beauty built an unending well of insecurities that could never dry up. The media image of the American woman, therefore, consumes any sense of self-appraisal that the average woman could wish for.

Profound insecurities regarding her beauty lead the American woman to feel insignificant and out of fashion if somehow lacking the latest in clothes, cosmetics and accessories. Consumer culture thus builds on these insecurities and accordingly provides incentive to exploit the subject as consumer. Gradually, the void created by these insecurities seems to swallow any sense of self of the postmodern subject apart from that related to consumer goods. So as styles change the person adopting those styles changes too.

What is noticeable here is that the postmodern subject is not worried about the transitions necessary for change. She is willing to go to any extent to make her body and consciousness fit the demands of contemporary culture. Unaware of the domination and victimization at play, she is willing to go that extra mile. As Bordo mentions in "Material Girl," it is not just exercise, hair and cosmetics any more, its more about contact lenses, and cosmetic surgery and more permanent forms of body modification.

Women are willing to endure pain and risk getting under the scalpel again and again until perfection is up to the set standard. Even Madonna, who is constantly portrayed as a postmodern subversive culture figure, has developed "in obedience to dominant contemporary norms, a tight, slender, muscular body." The Madonna, who once contrasted herself to anorexics, who she once saw as "self-denying and self-hating, completely in the thrall of imposed standards of worthiness" (Bordo 1111) is now ashamed of what she was and embarrassingly states, "I didn't have a flat stomach any more" (ibid). It is as if she had cut the slack for imposed standards of worthiness. Or, is it that she is fed up with constantly changing roles and identity ?

Whatever the case may be, it seems that Madonna had anticipated the condition of the subject in a postmodern American society of instabilities. Changing one's self-presentation through fashion and an obsessive interest in body culture is now a common phenomenon. With its consumerism, mediated experience and preference for simulated experience, American society provides the perfect environment for the postmodern "I".

(x) The Postmodern "I"

The prospects for identity construction in America have been interestingly stated by the novelist Bharati Mukerjee. In an interview with Bill Moyers in 1990 she euphorically states, "You see for me, America is an idea. It is a stage for transformation [. . .] suddenly I could be a new person [. . .] where I could choose to discard that part of my history that I want, and invent a whole new history for myself. It's that capacity to dream and then try to pull it off, if you can" (Moyers 1990). This is what postmodern America offers: a possibility to create and recreate identities; to discard that part of personal history which is unwanted and invent 'a whole new history.' In "Narrative, Moral Identity and Historical Consciousness: a Social Constructionist Account," Kenneth Gergen is surely right in observing that the remolding of identity in postmodern societies is a continuous process of "construction and reconstruction; it is a world where anything goes that can be negotiated" (Gergen 7).

Authors and philosophers now look outward for an answer to the oldest question in human history- *Who am I ?*. The search to understanding the self is no longer an

introspective search for a soul; rather, it is a journey outward, away from nature, towards man-made cultures and societal distinctions; towards politics and economy; towards the hyper-real and simulcra; and towards technology and the internet. The process of entry into and formation of the American identity is, in fact, more complex and varied than can be explained by any single concept.

In postmodern societies cultural blending allows for or rather creates a chameleonic personality. Postmodern concepts emphasize the instability of the language, culture and society in which identity is constructed. Postmodernism shows that the meaning expressed through language is unstable and varied according to context and interpretation; that culture is no longer untainted by other cultures; rather, cultural life is seen as a series of texts interacting with other texts, producing variations in meaning, perception and thought streams. Society, subject to intense commodification in nearly all spheres, prefers impermanence over permanence, fluidity over stability, and inconstancy over constancy. All this leads to a new type of schizoid subjectivity. The postmodern "I" is not a monolithic construct; rather, it represents a multitude of "I" positions in contradiction to each other in relation to time and place. The narrative rendering of these subject positions allows for much conflict and controversy within a single entity.

The postmodern self is referred to as a *subject* as if it were an entity involved in a social and psychological experiment the outcome of which would result in the acceptance or rejection of the end product. In the postmodern world the process of *becoming someone* and achieving an identity as opposed to naturally *being someone* became the crux of existence. But along with the all-encompassing urge to be someone comes the frustration of not knowing what is real about oneself. Therefore, there exists a constant doubt and questioning about the identity of a person.

Postmodern theory owes its questioning of identity to its roots in poststructuralism where it is taken as a given that "identities must be dissolved, unbound, or at least thoroughly spliced and diced wherever they appear" (Wicke 12). In such an atmosphere of fragmentation and uncertainty, postmodern identity verges on schizophrenia as temporal. In it spatial distinctions are in disarray and psychic and emotional life have gone haywire.

Fragmentation of the subject emphasizes a heightened intensity of 'jouissance' to be experienced from free-floating fragments of meaning which can be arranged in any combination or permutation thinkable 'as a series of pure and unrelated presents' (Jameson *Postmodernism* 27). This appeal of momentarily experienced excesses of emotion gradually turn life into a superficial façade in which the postmodern subject is forever seeking satisfaction through the sensationalism of spectacle. And, therefore, as David Harvey comments in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, "The immediacy of events, the sensationalism of the spectacle (political, scientific, military , as well of those of entertainment), become the stuff of which consciousness is forged" (Harvey 54). In a fully postmodern social milieu the American consciousness has become a devout lover of sensationalism and spectacle.

Consequently, as the child exposed to postmodern American society is, maybe, immature, certainly it is no longer a purely innocent entity. This child grows up with a sense that *happiness* and *joy* are an all time must at the expense of everything else. As a result, disregard for the consequences of actions and speech, derives not from being innocently unaware but, from being irresponsibly callous. This is the dire drawback of being brought up in a society where all moral and social standards are relational. In "Out of History: French Readings of Postmodern America," Jean-Philippe Mathy[6] succinctly emphasizes the superficiality of such an existence in the following words – "No referentiality, no moral depth, no representation, no critique, not the shadow of a thought, everything is there, immediately given [. . .]" (280). The postmodern American subject lives in and for the moment devoid of all concern of consequences.

In the postmodern world, one reason why personality does not develop and progress into a definite identity is because in it time loses its linear dimension. The postmodern American identity is carefree, whimsical, risk prone, hyperactive, creating a world of one's own, in a state much like that of Julia Kristeva's 'semiotic' state - a state where there are no regrets, no consequences, no guilt because the postmodern world it thrives in has no pre-judgmental criteria. Nothing matters except the moment.

[6] Jean-Philippe Mathy is Professor of French and Comparative Literature at the University of Illinois. He is the author of "Extrême-Occident: French Intellectuals and America" (1993) and "French Resistance: the French-American Cultural Wars" (2000). He has written extensively on French civic republicanism and issues of national identity.

According to Kristeva's theory the semiotic, is a pre-linguistic, pre-symbolic space. Contrary to this state exists the symbolic. This is the realm of social order constructed through language. Kristeva sees the relationship between semiotic and symbolic as a dialectical relation. That is to say, the semiotic still remains, though too repressed in order for the symbolic to take precedence and the child to be oriented in a system of meanings. This indicates that the semiotic is never fully repressed and may, therefore, appear from time to time, enabling the subject to adapt and transform to the needs of the crises of the moment. This means that the subject is always in the process of renewing his/her identity and is, therefore, constantly a "subject-in-process".

In contemporary American society where any and all repression is seen as oppressive, the self appears to be in a childlike semiotic state equal to that of Kristeva's subject-in-process. It is as if the postmodern American resists growing up, attaining stability and assuming responsibility. In an attempt to hold on to the unique experience-gathering of the immature consciousness the postmodern "I" resists attaining maturity. But the backlash to such immature experience gathering is that it is deprived of any and all sense of responsibility.

Henderson's internal voice, in Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* that shouts, "I want, I want, I want" seems to resonate even more intensely in every American. In contemporary American society, the words - *I need, I need, I need* – seem to close in from all sides. The need of the consumer supersedes all other needs. The human body itself becomes a commodity as consumerism seeps into every aspect of postmodern living. From the TV screen to the written word, from the vocalized speech to the American consumer consciousness, each and every object seems to be amenable for consumerism.

As Jean Baudrillard observes in "The System of Objects", American consumerism encourages the subject "to regress and be irrational" (Baudrillard 410). He quotes a certain Dr. Dighter to show how the consciousness of the postmodern American works. According to Dr Dighter the concern of marketing and advertising is to make the average American, "to feel moral even as he flirts, even when he spends, or when he buys a second or third car" (Baudrillard 410). In other words, consumerism creates a

narrative through which average Americans can justify the need to spend in excess of their earnings.

The most overt narrative illustration of the postmodern search for identity is through consumer goods. Advertisements in the media have become so natural to the viewer that their actual intention of creating a void within the subject goes totally unnoticed and uncriticized in mainstream culture. The insecurity caused by fleeting images take on a quality of need which constitute a drive or craving for consumer goods. Baudrillard further develops his discussion with reference to Pierre Martineau author of *Motivation in Advertising* (1957) in expressing the view that "people define themselves in relation to objects." He cites the following extract from Martineau -

> The conservative, in choosing and using a car, wishes to convey such ideas as dignity, reserve, maturity, seriousness . . .Another definite series of automotive personalities is selected by the people wanting to make known their middle-of-the-road moderation, their being fashionable . . . Further along the range of personalities are the innovators and the ultramoderns. (qtd. Baudrillard 413, 1998).

Consumer objects, therefore, become extensions of the self which happens to be active at that moment in time and space. The postmodern self that appears fluctuates because it derives its identity from the superficial significance of designer outfits, cosmetics, prosthetics, apartments, cars and even eating habits, replacing the centralized power of the grand-narratives of philosophy and religion; these elements compose the psyche of the postmodern subject.

In the postmodern world where it is nearly impossible to differentiate between real and unreal, necessity changes its form and "advertising takes over the moral responsibility for all of society and replaces a puritan morality with a hedonistic morality of pure satisfaction" (Baudrillard 410). It is a type of need for satisfaction which cannot be met. As Alfred Gell observes in "Technology and magic", "Advertising does not only serve to entice consumers to buy particular items; in effect, it guides the whole process of design and manufacture from start to finish, since it provides the idealized image to which the finished product must conform." (Gell 1988: 9) As the "idealized image" is constantly in flux, in and out of vogue, there is no way of conforming to that particular

image. This constant shift in taste and aspiration and 'ideal' leads to incomplete development of consciousness.

American consumers, therefore, become obsessed with images that flicker on the screen. They change their looks and their aspirations are modified in accordance with the images manipulating their consciousnesses, though each time they are duped into thinking each decision is personal. This social setting is especially destabilizing for American women.

They change their identity according to the messages they take in from the consumer culture they are engulfed in. Uncertain about who s/he is and who s/he wants to be, the postmodern subject puts on and discards personalities. The situation echoes the one Trinh Minh-ha contemplates in *Woman, Native, Other* -

> "I" is itself infinite layers'.. . Of all the layers that form the open(never infinite) totality of "I", which is to be filtered out as superfluous, fake, corrupt, and which is to be called pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic? (Trinh T. Minh-ha 649)

The postmodern "I", therefore, is in hyperdrive. It is constantly changing positions, in a media world which perfectly accommodates for its flux. Through these layers of identity it becomes quite difficult to know which is constant and which is just a phase. So, every aspect of identity becomes as uncertain as any other.

Postmodern identity is obsessed with the image that is to be put on display for others. Everything is on show. Nothing is private anymore. Nothing is *not* worth showing. Susan Bordo in her essay "Material Girl" writes about "the normalizing power of cultural images and the sadly continuing social realities of domination and subordination" (Bordo 1114). The female body is targeted through emphasis on skin, hair, body contour; nothing is left out of the list of targeted products except *perhaps* intelligence.

Anyhow, the truth is that self-identification through consumption cannot bring about a sense of satisfaction because there is no end to consumerism. The psychological response to the temporariness and instability of value systems in both the private and public spheres is manifested in a certain psychological and emotional distancing noticed in postmodern subjects. For the postmodern subject, nothing is long-lasting or seriously

worth worrying about. The longetivity of concern about, for example, a devastating accident is about the same or even less important than what to wear at a party.

David Harvey comments on such a change in human priorities in the following way – "the blocking out of sensory stimuli, denial, and cultivation of the blasé attitude, myopic specialization, reversion to the images of a lost past (hence the importance of mementos, museums, ruins), and excessive simplification (either in the presentation of self or in the interpretation of events)" (Harvey 286). The past is only relevent and accessible through its artifacts. All news is told in a matter-of-fact sort of manner, making human death tolls a matter of spectacle and sensationalism instead of grave human tragedy. This emphasizes the superficiality of postmodern existence where all meaning is established in and through the media.

In *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Jameson describes a similar 'waning of effect' which signifies a draining of emotional depth. In this postmodern culture of television, advertising and media manipulation, the self loses depth and becomes a "shallow artifact of cultural production." Messages of advertisements lure the average American into a simulated contradictory world of intense pleasure, self-gratification and absolute narcissism. As Richard Kearney observes in *On Stories,* TV talk shows and commercials have infiltrated private spaces in such a way that "the most secret realms of experience" for the masses has been reduced to "voyeuristic immediacy and transparency" (Kearney 10).

Signs, images and new sign systems dominate the consciousness of the consumer. The image becomes all-consuming. Searching for reality is fruitless in a world where there is nearly no differentiation between the image and what is solid, for "All that's solid melts into air." As David Harvey mentions in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, "the image serves to establish an identity in the marketplace." The acquisition of a significant sign system created by a particular image, as Harvey states, "by extension, becomes integral to the quest for individual identity, self-realization and meaning" (288). This explains the popularity in America, of image consultants who train people to 'Fake it, till you make it.'

The image of the self is to be built in a way as to totally eclipse the unacceptable. People willingly accept the change desired in them. They learn to walk, talk, dress, and

even eat differently. And, of course, it is with comparative ease that Americans in the mainstream do that. This is possible because no one is troubled by the loss of something they have not experienced in the first place i.e. a stable sense of self. As Bill Brown notes in his essay "Identity Culture", published in *American Literary History,* "America is an identity culture definable not by an identity but by the fixation on identity" (165).

Nevertheless, postmodern instability and the constant creation of identities does have its benefits. According to Todd Pittinsky, Margaret Shih, and Nalini Ambady, the writers of "Identity Adaptiveness: Affect across Multiple Identities," multiple self-representations allow for better adaptation to adverse situations. They state that less stable identities easily adapt to adverse situations. In the case of such subjects there is less debilitating internal conflict noticeable when faced with disagreeable circumstances. According to their observations, "Individuals who are less complex, having fewer identities and roles, are more likely to be debilitated by a negative event. In contrast, individuals who have more complex self-representations may be protected from negative events because of the buffer offered by additional identities when one identity is adversely affected" (Todd, et al 507).

In other words, the complexity of postmodern self-construction with its incessant mutability can work as a positive psychological and emotional coping mechanism. The instability of postmodern identity maybe a possible solution to the tensions that arise from the bombardment of ever-conflicting images. But the downside of such adaptability is that no common frame of reference or stable standpoint remains for an individual's ethical agency. As a result in postmodern contexts, all ethical judgements become situational.

Ethics, in the greater scheme of postmodern living, is replaced by 'jouissance' and greater tolerance of cultural and social situations. This raised level of tolerance, however, ultimately leads to indifference. As Jameson suggests in "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," "there is very little in either the form or the content of contemporary art that contemporary society finds intolerable and scandalous" (661). After all, this new ability to encompass contradictions and tolerate ambiguity should not be allowed to neutralize awareness of wrong doing and manipulation. In "Composing Postmodern Subjectivities in the Aporia between Identity and Difference" Bruce McComiskey urges

the postmodern subject to be aware of the power structures manipulating and motivating him or her instead of being a bland receptor of continuous change. In his words, "Postmodern subjectivities must not disperse into a politically impotent multiplicity of different individuals" (McComiskey 353). His fear is that if that should happen manipulation in the hands of "centralizing authorities" would occur, thereby coagulating differences into "politically impotent universalizing identities" (ibid). The term "politically impotent", as used by McComiskey suggests a draining of psychological awareness, a situation that leads to the creation of a non-thinking being.

The possibility of becoming easily manipulated and simultaneously unethically manipulative does not seem a far cry from what postmodern subjects are becoming. In "Multiple Selves in Postmodern Theory: An Existential Integrative Critique" Louis Hoffman, cites a quotation from Rollo May's "The Cry for Myth" (1991) in which the author expresses her concern at the lapse in time and space occurring from the constant shift in perceived reality and construction of worldview, which eventually takes its toll on the American psyche. For May, "the addiction to change" and "chameleonic tendencies" of modern Americans which allow them with comparative ease to "play any role the situation requires of them", could naturally result in "superficiality and psychological emptiness" (Hoffman 17). The loss of a true self leaves the postmodern self as often having a conviction of never having embodied a true sense of self.

American identity is, therefore, fixated on the moment. One finds in America an obsession in hyper-stimulation that is not sustainable in ordinary, everyday life. As a result, the postmodern subject wavers between euphoria and boredom. Without change in identities, multiple subject positions cease to exist in the hyperventilated consciousness of the American consumer. Life becomes unbearable without the power to purchase and create alternate realities regarding one's self and one's surroundings. Consumerism sustains this hyperventilated situation as it thrives on novelty and change, constantly creating a sense of need and deep dissatisfaction.

What this chapter has shown then is, that the postmodern world has opened up space for the discussion of history on both personal and national levels in relation to newly thriving mini-narratives. These mini-narratives quite powerfully rewrite the metanarratives of the past and influence the interpretation of those narratives in the

present. Also, since narrative and identity are seen to be intricately linked, it is inevitable that the breakdown of meta-narratives should affect the concept of personal identity. American metanarratives and personal narratives both suffer drastic changes in the advent of postmodern skepticism. As a result, the national identity of America and the personal identities of Americans have both lost their previous image of permanence and integrity.

As for the gender question, both masculinity and femininity are under scrutiny. With its emphasis on consumerism postmodern America has merged these identities into the single identity of the consumer. With no foundation to stand on, the postmodern "I" therefore, struggles to be someone significant, at least, for the moment.

Having discussed the effects of postmodern American narratives on political and social identity in chapter One, this dissertation will now concentrate on the effect of postmodern American narratives on the identity of the literary author.

Chapter Two

Multiple Identities of the Postmodern Author

As we have seen, postmodernism's suspicion of authority has led to the substitution of metanarratives with previously suppressed mini-narratives. This has led the postmodern self becoming fragmented, disoriented, unstable, and unreliable. The preceding chapter, about national and personal identity, showed how the postmodern "I", constantly struggles to make sense of its shifting identities in the political and social milieu in America. The singular "I" compensates for its instability by branching out and assuming a number of subject positions. And since identities having solid foundations no longer exist, postmodern identities are protean, and are constantly being created and re-created in adherence to the demands of a mediated society. Life is no longer about stability, authority, continuity, unity, or closure. There is no finality to anything or , for that matter, any type of identity. These aspects of postmodern society and identity have had influential ramifications for the identity of the author in postmodern literary narratives.

When such postmodern identity construct enters the literary realm, there are inevitable consequences of its mutability, which are noticed in the changed aspects of authorship and related elements of the narrative. Maintaining authority in any situation involves having a solid standard for comparison and identification and also having the power to consign limits. Unfortunately, the postmodern world offers no such stable standard and is suspicious of any limitations. The narratives themselves lose identity as traditional characteristics and norms of diverse genres are mixed and distorted. Many theorists see postmodernism as a threat to narrative because, as they claim, "Narrative is being superficialised and consumerised out of existence" (Kearney 10). But it seems that postmodern rewriting of narratives does not spell the end of the story; on the contrary, it allows for the opening up of alternative possibilities of narration and points of view. This chapter looks at how the literary narratives of postmodern America have been affected and in turn themselves affect the identity of the author.

Since s/he has lost all authority the author has been declared dead by theorists such as Roland Barthes and has been brought into question by the likes of Michael Foucault. Postmodern discourse has adopted Barthes' "death of the author" quite wholeheartedly. The question that now arises is not so much as to *what* Barthes means by the referring to the death of the author but *why* the idea was so popularly accepted. The answer resides in the multiplicity of postmodern identity which has made the author just another postmodern subject position thereby deeming it as easily assumed as it is discarded. A postmodern understanding of the author allows us to see him or her as a historically and culturally dependent subjectivity, constructed along the lines of gender, sexual orientation, class, and nationality. This stance destroys the authority of the author, once seen as omniscient, and above doubt, question and criticism. Authorship, thus, no longer offers immortality and is as perishable as any other concept or object in the postmodern world.

A number of renowned writers have attempted to clarify their position as authors of texts as well as determine the effect their writing has on their identities. For example, Michel Foucault in "What is an Author?" observes, "Writing is now linked to sacrifice and to the sacrifice of life itself: it is a voluntary obliteration of the self that does not require representation in books because it takes place in the everyday existence of the writer" (Foucault 1624). Each and every day the writer experiences the lives of the characters s/he writes about. Like the postmodern subject, postmodern authors struggle to attain identities adaptable to the situations they create for their characters. They willingly obliterate their own existence and merge with their characters.

In "Sorties", Helene Cixous, shows the multiplicity of the postmodern self and its attempt to approach the other through the act of writing. She writes:

> Writing is the passageway, the entrance the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me — the other that I am and am not, that I don't know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live, that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me. . ."(Cixous 583).

Cixous' goes beyond passive brooding and thinking. She lives through the transition from the self to the other: a transition that simultaneously disturbs and changes her. Her experience of the self in creation is more fulfilling than just trying to understand how she

thinks and what she feels. For her writing is a "course that multiplies transformations by the thousand" (ibid). She sees through writing the possibility of female emancipation, she dreams of a "she" who crosses the boundaries of herself to reach out to the other. Like a traveler of unknown places . ". . . she approaches, not to do away with the space between, but to see it, to experience what she is not, what she is, what she can be." (ibid)

Paul Ricoeur, for his part, sees the text as having two distinct authorships in the sense that the self writing the text and the self reading the text are both working on distinctly different levels and gathering different meanings from the text in accordance with the orientation of the subject within a certain discourse. It seems that the writer can only become an author after the death of the egotistic self and a metamorphic rebirth into the text. If this is the pivotal situation of authorship then it raises questions about the omniscience of the writer, who in becoming part of the text is naturally modified by the text's readership. The meaning and messages that the reader both instills and takes from the text become the cornerstone of the writer's authorship.

Gloria Anzaldua, in an interview with Ann E. Reuman, published by, The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States, expresses her view that the identity of the author is a "fictive construction" (ibid); she sees it as something that requires transition and transformation and not as something that is unchangeable. The self that writes and reads is for her "the imaginal self, it's the dreaming self, the fictive self" (Reuman 5). She talks about how she would, if she got a chance to rewrite *Borderlands*, besides discussing "the everyday, historical self that is positioned in race, class, ethnicity, sexual preference, age, profession-all the social positions" (Reuman 5), she would also concentrate on "the 'I' who writes, the 'I' who is in the text, and then the 'I' who reads what is in the text and reflects on it, and even puts that reflection in the text" (ibid). Through these words Anzaldua reconceptualizes authorship from being the "I" positioned above and out of the text to one who appears in it and consequently, reads and reflects on it.

Postmodern identity construction, therefore, involves letting go of all reservations. The same is expected of postmodern narratives. Ultimately, postmodern identity and the narrative accompanying it becomes diverse, non-judgmental, and hyperreal. Each composition, instead of being a single narrative, becomes a compilation of multiple

unitary narratives which simultaneously exist and overlap within a single text. Through emphasis on language, textual narratives create fictional worlds which engulf even the author, thereby presenting the world of extra-textual (real world) experience as fictitious and constructed.

The author can no more sit in a position above the text and be sure of the end product of the narrative or determine how it will be interpreted by the reader. The author cannot objectively show the ongoing thoughts of characters for objectivity itself is under question. The author cannot even show happenings in a linear movement (backward or forward) for, without historicity, the then and there is all there is to be had. Therefore, in postmodern narratives, an author accepts him/herself to be both creator and creation. As such, in the postmodern literary sphere, there are authors whose authority is forsaken in favor of that of the reader; authors whose narratives are non-linear and incoherent because of the playful and idiosyncratic mixing of forms, genres, disciplines, and systems all within one work; authors who like the characters they use within the narrative, are in a constant process of construction; authors who realize that the medium they work with (words/language) is as indeterminable as that which it represents (reality or rather a form of it); and finally, authors whose narratives are self-reflective, self-reflexive, and self-conscious in the attempt to reveal their own artificiality and textuality.

Modern narratives had shown the possibility of multiple perspectives while limiting themselves to the portrayal of a unified whole. In contrast, the postmodern narrative breaks down the single vision. Its intent is to reconstruct it into a chaotic vision of multiple possibilities.

I identify below, nine major changes that the identity of the author undergoes as s/he becomes postmodern. These are as follows, (i) author becomes character, character becomes author, (ii) author becomes writer, reader becomes author, (iii) author is replaced by language as origin of text (iv) author becomes self-reflective and self-conscious, (v) author purges him/herself of ghosts of the past (vi) author becomes intertextual referent/plagiarist (vii) author becomes ironical (viii) author becomes protean and, (ix) author becomes a shaman. The changes brought about in the postmodern American narrative in relation to the author function due to the questioning of the stable Cartesian self are discussed and clarified below. The first section looks at the

reappearance of authors within their texts after James Joyce refined them out of existence in the modern age and Barthes pronounced them dead in the postmodern.

(i) Author Becomes Character, Character Becomes Author :

After entering the postmodern scene the invisible author of modernism needed to be visible again for the reader. The easiest way for that to happen seemed for the author to step into his/her novels, literally, doing away with the border between the real and the fictional. The proliferation of the real into the fictional allows for the author to become a literary construction like any other character. Postmodern narratives thereby deprive the author the right to sit in a Godlike position above the text and direct the outcome of the narrative or determine how it can be interpreted by the reader. Such narratives respond to the loss of a "real" self by contaminating the personal space of the author with doubt as to whether he is creating or is being created.

Modernist authors like James Joyce wanted the author to sit aloof from his text and observe total objectivity in presenting subject matter. In a modernist strain Joyce sees the author (artist) as eventually being "refined out of existence". Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) muses on the role of the artist in the following words:

> The personality of the artist, at first sight a cry or a cadence and then a fluid or flambent narrative, finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak ... the artist, like the God of creation, remains within or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his finger-nails. (Joyce 194-95)

Such objectivity is not acceptable to postmodernists who recall the author into the text not as an observer or guide but as doubtful an entity as the characters that they create.

The author may return to his text but not in his full authority as an author for he now realizes he has none. As Roland Barthes notes in his essay "From Word to Text", the author returns to his text as a "guest" (1473). He outlines the position of the author as he enters his narrative as one of the characters in the following manner:

> "If he is a novelist, he is inscribed in the novel like one of his characters, figured in the carpet: no longer privileged, paternal, aletheological, his inscription is ludic. He becomes, as it were, a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work:.. "
>
> (Barthes, From Work To Text 1473-74).

Although once he had a position of supreme authority over the text and the world created through the text, the author is no more in control. He has some significance as a "paper-author." The author need no longer be sought out to give meaning to the text. The existence of his text would no longer rely on his power of identity; rather, his position in the text places him on a fictitious plane of existence which relies on the text. Naturally, there is now more freedom for the meaning to emerge. There is no longer a single construct or meaning to be evolved from the text; rather, multiple interpretations are allowed in the critics' arena which ranges from psychoanalytic to feminist to ethnic to postcolonial.

But then again such freedom of movement in the realm of meaning also combines a certain level of chaos, meaninglessness and uncertainty. One is reminded of Pirandello's "Six Characters In Search Of An Author" in which the author is nowhere to be found and where he leaves his characters chaotic and helpless, stuck with unfinished narratives and storylines. Sometimes it seems as if the father figure is Pirandello's spokesman in his search for unattainable reality represented by characters that are more 'real' than the figures they are based on. Authorial intervention, therefore, is embedded in the text as one of the many narratives present within it.

In many ways, Pirandello's text anticipates the metafictional turn in postmodern American narratives. Pirandello, we remember, was introduced in his text by the producer who comments furiously,

> "Ridiculous! Ridiculous! What do you expect me to do if the French haven't got any more good comedies to send us, and we're reduced to putting on plays by Pirandello? And if you can understand *his* plays [. . .] you're a better man than I am!" (Pirandello 1671).

Taken literally, this would imply that Pirandello is worthless as a writer and his writing has no appeal to the masses. But this comment actually places the fictional and the real

face to face with the reader who is left to smile and yet he has to question himself and find out if the statement is true or not. The dilemma in turn creates an ontological instability within the text which gives characters a grounding in reality and the author a grounding in fictionality.

Similarly, most postmodern texts problematize the distance between the author and the narrators of the novels by allowing the author to appear in them as a character who is also a writer. This destabilizing of the author's position turns him into a text. As a text he himself is written and rewritten in varied contexts. For example, *Dunyazadiad* a novella from John Barth's *Chimera*, shows how the author emerges in the text and is gradually modified by it. The author interacts with his creation and is therefore also in part created by it as the boundary between reality and fiction is blurred. Barth, for example, appears in the text of *Chimera* as the genie, "a light skinned fellow of forty or so, smooth-shaven and bald [. . .] pleasant enough in appearance, except for queer lenses he wore in a frame over his eyes" (Barth 418).

In this text, as in other texts of his *Lost in the Funhouse* series, Barth directly confronts issues of selfhood and authorship. The self awareness of his characters (narrators depicted as authors) as they struggle to define their identity, leads to their desperate need to continually insert their presence into the stories they narrate. He appears with a pen which is referred to as his "stubby little magic wand". The author function within the narrative changes; no longer omniscient and "refined out of existence", having become just another character in a text being written and revised continuously. Once the author projects himself into the text and literally steps into his fictional world, it is inevitable that, sooner or later, he will be unable to control the narrative of which he too is now a part.

Thus, the author seems to have lost his privileged position outside and beyond the fictional world, from where he can have a totalizing view of his creation. Maya Merlob comments on this change in the ontological space of the author in postmodern narratives in the following way, "The authorial space is no longer extratextual: it is swallowed as it were, by the text, as it becomes part of its representation. . . . This textualization of that which was usually considered part of reality, and thus not fictional, further complicates the distinction between reality and fiction" (Merlob 25). What is

being emphasized here is the blurring of boundaries between the real and the fictional as there is no space above and beyond fiction. Instead of the fictional world pertaining to the real world, the real world pertains to the fictional; ontological spaces are thus confused.

The question to ask is: *Why*, after so much effort to remain outside the text in modernist writing, does it become necessary for the postmodern author to appear within the text? The answer is simple. In the postmodern age, there is no depth. Since everything is expected to be exposed in clear light, there is a questioning of the all-powerful aspect of authority as the conflict, contradictions, dilemmas and tribulations of authority come to light. Naturally, with all his indecisiveness, the author's doubts and fears also appear within the narrative as a statement that nothing is fixed and above questioning or revision. In a postmodern world narratives thus create a reality of their own and, thereby, reconceptualize the authority of authorship.

The writer is not the person who has completed the meaning of the text; rather s/he is the one who intends to write and therefore, the person who appears in his/her own fictional world struggling to somehow make things work. Speaking to his alter-ego, Scheherazade, Barth tries to explain both the worlds he occupies i.e. that of the ongoing narrative, and also that of the 'real', which is equally as fictive and based on narratives of fiction. As J.G.Ballard observes of the fictitious nature of all life experience in the postmodern society,

> "We live in a world ruled by fictions of every kind – mass merchandising, advertising, politics conducted as a branch of advertising, the instant translation of science and technology into popular imagery, the increasing blurring and intermingling of identities within the realm of consumer goods, the pre-empting of any free or original imaginative response to experience by the television screen. We live inside an enormous novel"
>
> (Ballard 310).

His contention is that nothing original can be felt anymore since even our responses are programmed or are in tune with or against prevailing fictions of every kind which are continuously projected through the mass media. This is a fretful situation over which no single commanding voice can have control.

In accordance with such contingent existence, the author's voice, as reflected in the text, loses omniscience and becomes fretful about the outcome of the narrative that constitutes the text. A good example of the author's apprehensions about the outcome of the narrative is to be found in Paul Auster's *City of Glass*. The omniscient narrator that opens the novel and tells of Quinn's unremembered dream reduces his position to being just the 'editor' of Quinn's red notebook. At the end of the novel, Auster appears as a character-writer and a friend of the narrator who now sees that events "that follow this last sentence will never be known." He postulates that, "it would be foolish even to hazard a guess" (Auster 157) about them.

The uncertainty of both ontological and epistemological reality is also a concern of Brian McHale in *Postmodernist Fiction*. Hale sees the main difference between modernist and postmodernist novels as the order in which questions of ontology and epistemology are raised. McHale argues that real individuals, places or events are incorporated in the postmodern fictional world in a way which primarily raises ontological questions. These, in turn, immediately raise epistemological questions.

For example, in John Barth's *Chimera* through the writer-character, the author presents his doubt about his creative talent. This is brought to light in his lament "I can't conclude it" (Barth 442). As a result the narrative ends up being open-ended and Scheherazade's (the alter-ego of the writer) anxiety is heightened since she has to leave the narrative open-ended. Her predicament becomes all the more real when she frets about the conclusion of her narrative. The reader is allowed the chance to identify with her doubts and the mingling of real and fictional occurs again.As alter-ego Scheherazade functions as a foil to the writer-character, exposing the writer's doubts through questions that anticipate those that would normally arise within a reader's consciousness.

A further example of the blurring of boundaries between real and unreal worlds is seen when John Fowles the author of and narrator in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, supports the random acts of Sarah, the heroine of his work. He comments, "It is only when our characters and events begin to disobey us that they begin to live" (Fowles 299). Fowles' comment emphasizes the helpless condition of the writer who seems to have lost control over his own characters and the narrative they construe. Their defiance entitles them to life outside of his control.

Similarly, we see characters beginning "to live" as they discuss their own possible futures in the narrative towards the end of *Dunyazadiad* and as they take decisions about the novel, attempting to influence the author regarding their fates. Barth's Scheherazade strongly rejects a traditional fairy tale happy ending thus: "I haven't decided yet whether or not I care to end the story that way." Dunyazade is amazed at Scheherazade's stubbornness. She looks at the genie (the writer-character) and declares, "Not care to? [. . .] Doesn't she have to, if it's in the book?"(Barth 430). She, therefore, points out the incongruence of Barth's position as author who, even in his presence as the genie within the text has no power over the characters in the novel. He has lost power as an author even in this artificial, fictional world, as well as the world he comes from. Therefore, it is inevitable that, once the author manages to project himself and literally step into his fictional world he will be unable to control the unwinding of the story as he is now part of that which he is trying to create.

(ii) Author Becomes Writer, Reader Becomes Author :

In " The Death of the Author" Roland Barthes writes of the nature of writing thus: "Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing" (Barthes 1466). The body of writing which Barthes refers to had previously drawn its identity from the author, the father figure, the omniscient creator and the source of the creative voice. As Barthes observes, in contrast to previous notions of the author which placed him or her in existence before the text as one who "thinks, suffers, lives for it," on the same level that a "father would to his child," the "modern scripter is born simultaneously with the text [. . .] there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*" (ibid 1468).

Uncertain of his capacity to control, the author and, therefore, he has no control over his narratives. That which is seen in American society, is also reflected in the American narrative – all authority is lost. Authority is lost not only in even the most personal of situations, it is also lost in authorship. Consider, for example, in American society the responsibility of the constant nurturing of a child after birth is seen by fathers

embodying patriarchal attitudes, to be the sole concern of the mother. Again, many feminists consider "childbearing and childrearing roles" as being at the heart of women's oppression (Shulamith 81). Therefore, traditional parenting is forsaken to give space to individual urges of desire, proving that the parent is not above the desire of consumption and consummation.

Similarly, the author accepts no responsibility for the way his work is ultimately presented. It is as if the text is sent into a world of constantly shifting views and ideologies to fend for itself and explain its own being as best as it can to any reader/audience. The writer, somewhat vulnerable to public taste and opinion, leaves his/her child (the text) with its incomplete nurturing, in the hands of the reader. Each reader brings a different set of experiences to the understanding of the narrative. Different voices embedded in the consciousnesses of different readers find a distinctive resonance in narratives. Such resonance depends on the experience of life as seen through the images and sounds of society. Once the text is thus released into the world to search for completeness in the hands of others, the author cannot control how others receive it.

Foucault suggests that in studying a work, "it would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker: the author function arises out of their scission - in the division and distance of the two [...]" (Foucault, 1631). It is precisely "this division and this distance" between the author and the writer as well as between the author and the narrator which allows for the postmodern switching of roles, namely, that of the reader becoming the author of a text. For, according to Foucault, the author function is neither to be sought within the writer nor within the narrator. The author function emanates from sources outside the text.

Postmodern explorations in narrative have given voice to sources of meaning other than what the author tries to impose on the text. As Barthes notes in "The Death of the Author", the text is "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture"; "every text is eternally written *here and now*" with "no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins" (Barthes 1468). He explains that in order to ensure the future of writing, it is necessary to do away with the myth of authorship. Thus, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author" (ibid 1470).

But the death Barthes refers to is not total annihilation. Rather, it seems that Barthes is here intimating a stepping back in favour of the reader, and suggesting a move away from the authoritative role once occupied solely by the author. The reader, therefore, witnesses the return of the author, not as a resurrection but as a rebirth. A resurrection would involve return of the same state or function. But what the reader sees is a rebirth into the realm of the fictitious, a return as author within a narrative where s/he has limited control over what is written on the pages of the mind or consciousness of the reader.

The reader thus takes up an important role in the postmodern narrative. With signs and signifiers left to play freely and arrogate meanings floating at random, it is up to the reader to complete the text through his/her own understanding. Authorship, in this view, consists of the construction of meaning within the text. That being said, it must also be stressed that neither the writer nor the reader can alone confer meaning on the text and arrogate the role of author by excluding each other.

Meaning within the text, then, is co-created by both writer and reader: authorship is a joint project. The reader reads, absorbs and interprets the text at will, taking on the role of the author as s/he authors the meaning of the story. The traditional role of the writer/author is, in this process, turned upon itself as s/he is partially relieved of powers and replaced by the interpretive faculty of the reader.

This enhances the intimacy of the reader with the writer and the text by taking the reader into the private space of a writer. The reader becomes a sort of confidante of the writer anxious about the future of the text s/he has written. Like the audience's identification with characters within a soap opera, the reader seems to look and read into the events of the narrative. The whole process underscores the reader's involvement in the meaningful interpretation of the text.

The progression of the postmodern into the literary sphere, therefore, has lead to a re-evaluation of the traditional role of both the author and the reader. Authorship is now placed as a subject position which anyone can aspire towards as soon as s/he starts reading the text in search of meaning. Each reader approaching a text with his/her own experience of life gives it a different meaning and a different ontological reality.

An interesting notion of the combined role played out between the writer and reader is also mentioned in Barth's *Dunyazadiad*. Here, Scheherzade considers narrative as a love relation between the author (writer) and reader:

> "Narrative, . . .was a love relation, not a rape: its success depended on the reader's consent and cooperation, which she could withhold or at any moment withdraw; also upon her own combination of experience and talent for the enterprise, and the author's ability to arouse, sustain and satisfy her interest- an ability on which his figurative life hung as surely as Scheherazade's literal." (ibid 428)

The analogy used here to describe the relationship between reader and writer emphasizes the active collaboration between the reader and the writer as they jointly take on the act of creation. Their endeavor, incorporating co-operation, sympathetic bonding and mutual agreement in crossing borders, leads to the text (the object of their relationship) and imbues it with life and meaning. As a result, "the reader is likely to find herself pregnant with new images"(428). So, it turns out that the text is only partially instilled with meaning by the writer and is dependent on the reader for full semantic completion. The reader, therefore, becomes an integral part of the making of the text into narrative.

Barthes further emphasises the importance of the reader's role in the following segment in which he identifies the reader as a "space" where all contesting meanings of the text are finally worked out and given sense :

> . . . a text is made of multiple meanings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space where all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost. (ibid)

The author, then, is just a subject position and the "reader is the space where all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed." It is left to the reader to find meaning and signification within the text.The reader's concentration is no longer fixed on what the author wishes to reveal. On the contrary, the reader searches for the text's relevance from his/her perspective, questioning, interpreting, and responding to the text, and in the

process creating meaning and significance. A symbiotic relationship exists, as it were, between the author and the reader; the text is neutral host for both. The one is significantly dependent on the other for existence. It is for this reason that texts have been turned inside out i.e. reassessed and at times, rewritten.

It is this reader who himself/herself is born of fiction in a world ruled of "fictions of every-kind." As a result, J.G. Ballard comments that "the writer knows nothing any longer. He has no moral stance. He offers the reader . . .a set of options and imaginative alternatives" (Ballard 311). Consequently, texts once considered to be authoritative and unquestionable are now being scrutinized for all types of readings. A classic text like *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, once considered a masterpiece of survival and the story of a lone man's triumphant struggle against the wilderness, has now become a portrayal of colonial supremacy and imperialist expression of mastery and dominance over unsuspecting natives.

The reader/writer's ontological space has been further complicated by the access to the World Wide Web which has uniquely bridged the previously overwhelming gap between authors and readers. Open portals, blogs, and social networks all combinedly and individually allow for transformation of the reader into author. Be it through letters to a newspaper editor or outlets through the internet, the reader gains access to authorship. An interesting comment by Walter Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," refers to the volatility involved in the act of reading and writing, long before the World Wide Web had even come into the social scene. His contention is that, "At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer" (Benjamin 1178). Benjamin's comment is based on the observation that the "increasing extension of the press" towards the end of the nineteenth century made publishing much easier. It is at that time that an "increasing number of readers became writers" (1177) as they were able to express their opinions in one print form or another.

But if authorship is taken to mean the production of meaning in a text, the reader is already an author of meaning, by contradicting or complimenting what the writer sets down, in his/her acceptance or negation of it. The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre

has made some interesting comments in this regard[1]. Sartre clearly states that the writer and reader see the same text differently. The reason for this is that the writer's own subjectivity imposes limits on what he can and cannot write :

> "When the words form under his pen the author doubtless sees them, but he does not see them as the reader does, since he knows them before writing them down." (Sartre 1338)

He also sees a close affinity between the process of reading and writing. In his words, "The operation of writing implies that of reading as its dialectical correlative and these two connected acts necessitate two distinct agents" (Sartre 1338). For him, "Reading seems, in fact, to be the synthesis of perception and creation" (ibid). As he reads, the reader is not in the process of re-inventing and discovering; rather, he has to invent as a primary act because "the literary object, though realized *through* language is never given *in* language" (ibid 1339).

Sartre gives the reader the position of interpreter for the writer's text because "every book contains an appeal, so is this presence of self already a transcendence of self." And as interpreter of the text the reader finds an entry into a maze of meanings.

> Thus, for the reader, all is to do and all is already done: the work exists only at the exact level of his capacities; while he reads and creates, he knows that he can always go further in his reading, can always create more profoundly, and thus the work seems to him as inexhaustible and opaque as things. (ibid 1340)

Thus reading has been transformed from a passive act of receiving meaning to an active act of endowing meaning, a collaboration between one who projects and one who receives and interprets. Therefore, according to Sartre, writing can only find fulfillment through the process of reading but that reading has to be done by the other, because the self of the writer, when re-reading his text, will encounter the limit of his own subjectivity:

[1] Bringing Sartre, the major representative of the philosophical movement called "existentialism," into a discussion of postmodern narratives and identity may seem irrelevent and out of place. But, his philosophy does, in many ways, anticipate the major thoughts of postmodern theorists. Despite the fact that he is typically attacked as the very antithesis of postmodernism, the contemporary resonance of his philosophy in relation to the reader of a text as source of meaning, is not to be belittled.

> Thus, the writer meets everywhere only *his* knowledge, *his* will, *his* plans, in short, himself. He touches only his subjectivity; [. . .]. If he re-reads himself, it is already too late. The sentence will never quite be a thing in his eyes. He goes to the very limits of the subjective but without crossing it. (ibid 1338)

In contrast to most postmodernist conceptions of the writer, Sartre sees him as contained within his own subjectivity. The writer's perception of his text will be limited to the way he inscribes meaning to his surroundings. No matter how hard he tries to cross the limits of his subjectivity he will never be able to see the world of his text as his reader does. Thus, the mood and mindset with which a text is approached greatly influences the writing of it. The proof of such influence is noticed in the varied emphasis of subject matter and technique at various stages of a writer's life.

But what was observed over longer periods of time is now concentrated in the variety of viewpoints offered in postmodernist fiction. In contrast to Sartre's observation of the dominance of the writer's subjectivity that encourage limitation in the meaning of the text, one can appreciate the freedom offered by postmodernist revisions. The multiplicity of a postmodern self allows the transgression of the borders of subjectivity which limits the narrative to a singular semantic position. This stance also emphasizes the necessity of a search for meaning in perspectives other than that of the writer.

Perception is greatly significant on both entering and leaving the text. This involves perception of the writing self, the reading self and of the subject position authoring the text. Writing, authoring and reading, in this sense, form an interesting trio. As a result, all that is seen needs to be understood and analyzed. Nothing is to be taken at face value for the reader's perception changes the meaning of a text. Before the text acquires significant meaning it goes through a process of assimilation into the reader's perceptual world. That world is, in turn, constructed from the discursive influence of his/her direct or indirect experience.

Perceptual anomalies that can be noticed from reader to reader and, writer to writer, allow for the transformation of the literary text. The text, thus, becomes as unstable as its creators. Just as an object can take on different hues due to light effects and shading, the same text can convey different meanings to different readers. Even if

there are no solid standards attached to the reading consciousness, as in postmodern criticism, the text is still subject to the *gaze* of the reader. This *gaze* of criticism is conditioned as s/he is by various cultural and linguistic influences.

However, it may be argued that reading has never been a passive act. In all ages there has always been a certain amount of emotional and intellectual investment of the reader bound up with each interpretation of the text. But what the postmodern literary turn has given the reader is the license to use his/her perspective without being accused of missing the point that the writer intends. The emphasis is on how the text works itself out on the reader as opposed to what the writer wished to convey. That is why the text raises innumerable questions but instead of answering them with finality it suggests possible answers which float aimlessly and freely within the text without situating themselves as *the answer*.

As we have seen in this discussion, the writer in the contemporary scene shares his/her authorship of the text with the reader. The previously singular authority of authorship is thus shared with the reader. But that is not all that challenges authorial supremacy. The next section shows how language in postmodern narratives has come to be considered more important than even the author.

(iii) Author is replaced by language as origin of text :

In *The Nature of Narrative*, after speculating that "language is probably even older than man himself," Scholes and Kellog surmise that, "It may have been as many as a million years ago that man first repeated an utterance which had given pleasure to himself or to someone else and thereby invented literature. In a sense, that was the beginning of Western narrative art" (Kearney 6) Originally creative writing was introduced into society as a means of glorifying themes of love and war; at times to provide relief from the banalities of living; perhaps most of all to give people a means to uphold their sense of power and control over circumstances. Indeed, narrative was for just that purpose until recently.

Of late, due to postmodernist revisions of narrative form, authors have lost a major part of their previous power and control over circumstances, especially in the

context of conferring meaning. The postmodern concept of floating signifiers in which uncertainty has emerged between the signifier and signified has left the author struggling with language. The author's helplessness in pinning down distinct meanings through specific words reveals the arbitrariness of linguistic terms.

As Alain Robbe Grillet observes in *Towards a New Novel*, "Whereas the essentialist conceptions of man are facing their extinction (with the notion of 'condition' from now on replacing that of 'nature'), the surface of things has ceased to be for us the mask of their heart. [. . .] It is, then, the entirety of literary language that must change" in order to allow for "the difficult way forward for the new art of the novel." (Grillet 303) Grillet's insistence on the necessity of literary language to change seems to find fruition in the formulations of Roland Barthes who substitutes language as the author as the text instead of the writer.

Postmodern revisionings of the importance of language in the construction of meaning has increased to the extent that Barthes can pronounce in his "Death of the Author" that "it is language that speaks not the author: to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality (not at all to be confused with the castrating objectivity of the realist novelist), to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs', and not 'me'" (Barthes 1467). He extends this point by noting that, "Linguistically, the author is nothing more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing more than the instance saying *I* : language knows a 'subject' not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation that defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it"(ibid). The exhaustion that Barthes writes of is a result of the uncertainty of the 'condition' of the writing subject whose writing hand, "cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin — or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins" (Barthes 293). Language seems to thrive without the author for it eludes all possessive restraint.

Even though the writer has no control over the meaning of his/her text, s/he may establish, somehow, a certain level of understanding. For example, in John Barth's *Dunyazadiad* section of *Chimera* the character Sheherzade and the writer-character both show a similar bent of thought. Their conversation is extremely fulfilling for both. The

language which these characters use shows how, regardless of the existence of heterogenous elements in their speech, communication is established between them: "Can you understand English? I don't have a word of Arabic."[...] We didn't know these languages he spoke of; every word he said was in our language (Barth 419)).

This regression from meaningful language attached to a contained socio-cultural experience to free-floating signifiers and the playful prominence of form over matter, all signify the emptiness of depth, openness of meaning, and uncertainty of history which arise from the fragments of postmodernism. These fragments symbiotically thrive in notions of the self and the other.

Such writers do not focus on objects as pregivens, but on how they might be made to reveal themselves. This has resulted in an overwhelming sense of uncertainty over whether s/he has been able to present the narrative in a way that can interest the reader, since as postmodern writers postulate, everything has already been said in every way possible. The resultant lack in the writer's self-confidence leads to a constant fear of failing to meet the mulifarous needs of the reading public. This in turn, leads to self-consciousness and self-reflexivity.

(iv) Author and Text Become Self-Reflexive and Self-Conscious:

As mentioned above, postmodern authors lose their authority both to readers and to language. This brings authors down to earth and to more human conditions as they have to leave their modernist space of supreme authority. The collaboration in the joint authorship of a text is furthered by a metafictional technique known as self-reflexivity. One of the major effects of this technique is that it creates a bond of solidarity between the reader and writer that is less judgmental and more sympathetic since authorship consists in the sharing of the ontological space of the narrative. Postmodern authors and their narratives, therefore, are self-reflective, self-reflexive, and self-conscious in an attempt to reveal their own artificiality and textuality. Postmodern authors, in this way, continuously question their ability to build and control a fictional world.

As the fictional world and real world merge and intertwine it is difficult for postmodern authors to remain undisturbed by the constant shifting of ontological spaces.

The possibility of overlapping ontological spaces of reality and fictionality is considered by John Barth in *Chimera* as follows :

> They speculated endlessly on such questions as whether a story might imaginably be framed from inside, as it were, so that the usual relation between container and contained would be reversed and paradoxically reversible [. . .] what human state of affairs such an odd construction might usefully figure. (Barth 426)

Such dwelling on the ontological space of fiction and the interminglings of the human state of affairs are common practices in postmodern texts. It is interesting how the two worlds (the fictitious one and that of apparent reality) consist of parallel storylines, corresponding subject positions, and analogous nomenclature which not only have a disorienting affect on the reader but also impacts on the writer who tries to fit into the world which s/he partially creates and which partially creates him/her.

The self that has no stable foundation of undaunting truth to rely on now looks for its place in a mediated and constantly metamorphosizing world. Disorientation and the question of one's place in ontological space is indeed a symptom of self-consciousness. From such self-consciousness a manifestation of doubt and uncertainty is clearly noticed within the text. The ensuing doubt is a clear signal of the lack of confidence that results from the realization that the subject has little or no control over his/her own being. The realization that external forces play a significant role in making a person who and what they are suddenly dawns upon the individual, destroying any narcissistic idea of uniqueness.

Post-modern self-reflexivity is also interlinked with the nostalgia consisting of constructed identities which directly or indirectly privilege an imaginary past and place. The extreme rootlessness of postmodern existence is sought to be overcome by an attempt to establish a specific grounding in place and time. Therefore, autobiographical elements are seen woven into postmodern texts which allow for the insertion of the self in-between spaces and places. This of course, also amounts to the therapeutic value of any self-reflexive act that attempts to understand events, actions, and thoughts in epistemological and ontological spaces.

The next section shows how the self-reflexive return to the past through the text is actually an attempt to come to terms with the haunting presence of the past in the present. For the postmodern author, rewriting of the past is a means to release that which has been suppressed in and by traditional narratives. It is a means of delivering stories of the past that struggle to find a sense of meaning and a form of expression from the suppressed fragments that somehow reside in a writer's consciousness.

(v) Author Purges Him/Herself of Ghosts of the Past

Neither suppression nor repression are seen as positive attitudes in postmodern theory. As postmodern authors put history (both personal and national) under scrutiny and rewrite segments of it which for some reason or another trouble their consciousnesses, the suppressed narratives of the nation and the subject come to light. The release of these suppressed narratives helps postmodern authors to purge their consciousnesses of these ghosts of the past. This is another element of change affected by the instability of postmodern narratives.

Unlike the struggle to achieve stability and unity from destabilized fragments of the self in modernism, the postmodern struggle of the "I" is to come to terms with its fragmentation. Instead of modernist suppression of feelings of alternate reality, postmodernism encourages expression and acceptance of unacknowledged realities. By writing autobiographical elements into a narrative authors attempt to release any feelings and emotions that may be attached to those segments of the past. For example, Kurt Vonnegut has based many characters on people he knew in real life. Even the suicide of his mother is tersely mentioned in *Breakfast of Champions*.

Rosario Ferre, a feminist and prolific writer, emphasizes the relation of self-reflectivity to understanding identity in the following way, "As a writer, it is my means for self-definition, the tool to express my idiosyncracies, my personality. I write because I want to know how I think" (Ferre 484). It is through her rewriting of history that she wishes to purge her country of the injustices she has noticed.

From the beginning of time narratives have had powers invested in them which have allowed them to address psychic as well as physical suffering. Even writers of

the modern age such as Virginia Woolf found therapeutic quality in writing. Woolf's work on *To the Lighthouse* was helpful in making her gain clear understanding of her relationship with her mother. In *Moments of Being* she writes

> Until I was in the forties - ...the presence of my mother obsessed me. I could hear her voice, see her, imagine what she would do or say as I went about my day's doings. (Woolf 93)

It was only after she had written *To the Lighthouse* that she was purged of her obsession with her mother. She sees her writing as a psychoanalytic experience through which she overcame a lifelong struggle. Her mother's spirit haunted her. She was successful in exorcising it only after she came to terms with her feelings. Through writing *To The Lighthouse* she performed a kind of purgation that brought about a kind of maturity and objectivity that was to ballast her subsequent writings.

Postmodernist authors insert their lives into the texts they write. Their blurring of reality and fiction is presented in such a way that commonly known or accepted ideas about an event or person is consciously brought into doubt. This doubt is created by writing contradictory scenes that bring out aspects of a character that purposely challenge the neatness of a historical account.

Normally, a historical novel deals with events and personalities which are consistent with verifiable public records circulating at the time. But postmodernists intentionally go against such stability and fictionalized accounts so that the fictional is suddenly passed off as true. The possibility of the *real* status of fictional events and *fictional* status of real events leads one to suspect the already narrated text of history. An interesting example of such blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction is given by Linda Hutcheon when she questions the reliability of historical narratives in *The Politics of Postmodernism*. She cites examples from Barthes' postmodern autobiographical work - *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. She directs the reader's attention to the note that introduces the text. This note warns the reader not to take the narration literally; rather, it is to be read "as if spoken by a character in a novel" (Hutcheon 49). She takes this as signifying the entrance into "the problematized zone of postmodern self-representation"

(ibid). She also sees the title as calling attention to itself as, in her words, "a parody of the French series of *X par lui-meme*" (ibid). But we can go further in our analysis of the title. In a postmodern strain, one instantly questions oneself of the extent of fictionality that will go into the (re)creation of the textual Roland Barthes. Will he be consistent with the ideas circulating about his personality? or, Will the narration be strained and drained of factual information to the extent that a new persona will come out of the narration ? And, is the text eventually hiding aspects of his personality so as to uphold a mythical identity? Or, is it playfully and mystically revealing unknown sides of him? If personal history can have so many facets of reality then it is natural to question social history which involves so many components.

Similarly, the text of a history writer is questioned for signs of bias towards a certain race and naturally fails the test of neutrality. As a result, the author can no longer claim absolute neutrality. No longer can s/he show happenings at a distance (backward or forward) for, without historicity, the then and there (with all its intertextuality) is all there is to be had. As Hutcheon tells us of the subjective element in any type of history in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, "Knowing the past becomes a question of representing, that is, of constructing and interpreting, not of objective recording" (Hutcheon 81). So, with objectivity in question, writers look back at their past as a means of coming to terms with it.

Such purgation is a common phenomenon in postmodern literary creation. The therapeutic ethics of postmodern narrative texts imply the rewriting of personal texts and the transformation of such texts into acceptable narratives. Almost every single writer, through his or her writing, has attempted to understand the world as s/he experiences it. Therefore, postmodern narratives assist writers in their quest for positioning themselves within the flux of the postmodern condition.

(vi) Author Becomes Intertextual Referent/ Plagiarist :

Like self-reflexivity and insertions of autobiographical elements, plagiarism, for the postmodern author, becomes a way to cope with his/her own insecurities. As self-reflexivity enables sharing authorship with the reader; and insertions of autobiographical elements allow co-existence with the ghosts of the past; plagiarism, apparently, helps one with coping with the burden of tradition. Tradition here refers to the bulk of literature each epoch of writers produces, which the works of succeeding writers are expected to surpass. Postmodern authors see plagiarist texts as an escape route from the pressures of having to live up to that tradition. Postmodernists continuously proclaim the death of originality because of their conviction that all artistic and literary forms and techniques have already been exhausted.

Consequently, postmodernists consider plagiarism as just another form of postmodern intertextuality. Intertextuality refers to how contemporary cultural environments are marked by duplication, interpenetration of texts and the circulation and recirculation of images, sounds and words in multiple forms and formats. Thus, these narratives embody the openness of postmodern texts which, like the identities of their authors, become "a field without origin" (Barthes 293).

Intertextuality is thus linked to critiques of "originality" and "authorship". Challenged in the 1970's by Roland Barthes in" Death of the Author" and Michel Foucault in "What is an Author," these two concepts have come to be considered in postmodern thought as having allowed writing to be contained and manipulated by a consumerist agenda. Intertextuality attempts to break the myth of originality and, at the same time, frees the text from the idea of the author as having sole authority over the text. As Geyh postulates, the postmodern writer usually creates intertextualities "with parts of the book that have traditionally been thought of as 'outside' or secondary to the main body of the text, such as footnotes and indexes, book jackets and back-cover blurbs" (Introduction xxiii).

But as with any other attempt in the transformation of ideas there are always those authors who are extremist in action and who feel the need to cross the line of propriety set by others. Kathy Acker is one such author who feels comfortable in transgressing

boundaries to the extent that for her no boundaries seem to exist. Acker, a self-described literary terrorist, uses plagiarism (or piracy, as she likes to say) as a formal strategy and attempts to use literary forms, especially the novel, as stages for textual performance art. In a world where nothing *belongs* any more and everything is assessed on the basis of performativity, plagiarism finds legitimacy as a means to an end. Many see plagiarism as the freedom to use information as it is found in an expanding world without borders. It is easy to see how such concepts arise in a space of moral and ethical uncertainty which lacks a centered notion of self.

Therefore, though plagiarism has always been considered one of the most detested and unethical tactics of writing in critical thought: the postmodern era has given rise to an abundance of plagiaristic texts which unabashedly build their narrative on other sources of literature. Daniella Carpi in "Hermes: God of Thieves. Plagiarism in Twentieth Century Literature" sees such literary plagiarism in the context of the new found freedom of the author who forfeits his possession of the text and sees it as a reworking of existing ideas through language. She sees it as a reconstruction of the previous text through the eyes of the reader. The author is released from the tension of finding ways to be original and can play around with meaning and styles. For her, plagiarism introduces a new creative force which can playfully resist the "heavy weight of tradition." As she puts it:

> The heavy weight of tradition creates in the writer a desire to exorcise in some way the fear of the death of creative originality and gives rise to the playful, demystifying re-presentation of previous works, in an attempt to desecrate genres and precursors, re-creating them overtly and covertly at the same time. (Carpi)

Thus, plagiarism introduces a playfulness of representation that demystifies the literary work. In this sense both intertextuality and plagiarism in literary narratives calls into question the authority of the author. They, thereby, further detach authorship from the act of writing.

Intertextuality and plagiarism both shift the responsibility of creating meaning within the text upon the reader. In both cases the reader's knowledge of primary texts enhances and establishes the meaning of the newer ones. As a result, "The meanings of these postmodern narratives emerge in the intersection between the old and the new texts

as they play off one another in the mind of the reader" (Geyh xxiii). Examples of such narratives, as Geyh points out, are John Barth's *Dunyazadiad* (1972), Kathy Acker's *Great Expectations* and Sherman Alexie's *Captivity*. These texts are plagiarist reworkings of, respectively, the fifteenth century *A Thousand and One Nights*, Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* (1860) and Mary Rowlandson's *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682).

The idea behind postmodern intertextuality and plagiarism in literary narratives is that all narratives are connected to each other in a web-like maze of references and inferences. As the author in Barth's *Chimera* says to Dunyazade, " from my point of view, [. . .] I'll admit - it is a story that we're coming to the end of . All these tales your sister has told the king are simply the middle of her own story — hers and yours I mean, and Shahryar's and his younger brother Shah Zaman's" (Barth 429). Through Dunyazade's words, Barth implies that there is no narrative that can be all-encompassing. The linear development of beginning, middle and end is not possible because all narratives are intermingled with and impregnated by other narratives. Narrativity, therefore, is not a linear construct unfolding hierarchical relationships and events: it is a much more complicated thing than that.

What becomes clear from the discussion above is that the space of moral and ethical uncertainty which lacks a centered notion of self gives rise to all sorts of coping mechanisms. These mechanisms, taking the form of self-referentiality, intertextuality, and even plagiarism are, in fact, part of a process of coming to terms with the loss of belief systems, especially, the loss of belief in the powers of individuality, of uniqueness which have resulted from the excessive exercise of freedom.

The next section disusses the use of irony as it appears in postmodern narratives as another adaptive change within the author. The author, it seems, becomes ironical as a response to a postmodern world that lacks cohesion.

(vii) Author becomes Ironical :

In *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Ironic Imagination* (1981), Alan Wilde sees irony as a response to a world that lacks unity or cohesion. Indeed, irony, seems to be a norm of consciousness which accompanies the breakdown of grandnarratives in postmodern societies. As belief systems topple one after the other irony appears. Wilde, sees this as a mode of consciousness, which arises as a perceptual response to a meaningless world (Wilde 2). The use of irony in postmodern narratives is significant as it helps to counteract the feeling of helplessness in the postmodern subject by giving him/her a false sense of power over his/her circumstances. It embodies a feigned disinterestedness and displays a certain lack of concern and playfulness on the part of the author. This attitude exhibits a sense of freedom for the individual to say and act without being afraid of consequences.

Irony involves a powerful sense of liberation. As Dario Fo in "Dialogue with an Audience" (1979) observes, "Irony has always been an explosion of liberation" (Fo 327). The user of irony exercises the liberty to speak beyond what is acceptable: to pinpoint the incongruence that lies at the heart of complacency; and to open the eyes of others and make people laugh about, "the conditions they are subject to" (ibid). But this laughter has a "but" to it since irony requires a certain detachment from the targeted subject in order to really *bite* at the issue. In other words, a certain level of distancing from the subject is required for the ironical portrayal of a situation or person. Such emotional distancing suggests the lack of deep emotional involvement. After all, it is difficult to be ironical if one truly empathizes with the targeted subject. The attaining of emotional distance, therefore, is all the more easy for the postmodern subject who has no deep-rooted and stable convictions.

Irony, therefore, indicates a certain lack of empathy. For, how can a person make an ironic comment and laugh *at* a person as opposed to laugh *with* that person, if empathy is involved. So irony calls for a certain impassivity to people, places and situations. Since lack of deep attachment is one of the major features of postmodern life, impassivity naturally accompanies it. For the omnivorous postmodern subject who has to have all and be all without having to worry about consequences, it is quite natural that irony should be

part of his/her narrative world. So with the emphasis on impassivity, emotions such as sympathy and empathy lose significance. The heightened impassivity of the postmodern subject as expressed in the subject position of the author is a result of its own epistemological and ontological uncertainty. The incoherent self-narrative of the author, therefore, manifests itself in the form of irony.

An interesting aspect of such postmodern irony is its playfulness. One does not sense here the usual bitterness associated with an ironical comment or situation. It is as if the author intentionally plays with the reader and playfully challenges him to guess his/her position on a subject which may or may not be what it seems. Such a stance also reveals the loss of authority of the author who can no longer impose his thoughts on the other. Rather, he lets his observations flow freely within the text and allows the reader the freedom to come to his own conclusions. Through irony, therefore, he suggests but does not impose. Postmodern irony comes to show not only both sides of the coin but also holds the coin up in a varied light.

Barthes makes a similar observation in *Mythologies* where he sees irony creating "a world without depth" because after removing all sham and pretense "it self-consciously reveals all that would previously be hidden from sight, thereby resolving all possible criticism" (Barthes, 1972, 117). The ontological perspective that is created in this way is "without contradictions because it is without depth" (ibid). Irony is also revealed in the haphazard structural design of the postmodern narrative with its playful and idiosyncratic mixing of forms, genres, disciplines, and systems, all within one work. This playfulness is also a ramification of the unstable self. Therefore, the bitterness that usually arises as a response to encountering digressive behaviour is replaced by playfulness. Since there is no strict norm of compliance there is an air of doubt, and with it an atmosphere of possibility for change.

The next section looks at how all the changed aspects of authorship as mentioned above result in another trait of the postmodern author, i.e. his/her becoming protean.

(viii) Author becomes Protean:

Postmodernism explores questions of ontology or being, which are duly addressed both explicitly and implicitly within postmodern texts. As emphasised above, the role of the author becomes just another subject position which any reader can assume. This results in a substantial change in attitude towards the narrative and in what to expect within it. The reader's conceptions of the author's role and intentions, which change with each generation or social group of readers, naturally make the author's identity and the role s/he plays in relation to the text all the more inconsistent. Such inconstancy of roles and intentions are central features of postmodern narratives. This is what Foucault reveals through his writing :

> "The author function [. . .] does not operate in a uniform manner in all discourses, at all times, and in any given culture; it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer, purely and simply to an actual individual in so far as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy." (Foucault 1631)

The postmodern emphasis on freedom to choose the who, what and when of identity is reflected in the segment above extracted from Foucault's "What is an Author?". He sees society as providing situations that ecourage the presence of multiple subject positions. The author function in a discursive role like any other, open for any individual to occupy. So what Foucault implies here is that the author position is not the sole property of a singular writer. Rather, anyone can assume the position by confering meaning on to a text.

In a postmodern world where the private space of the individual is bombarded by diverse discourses the subject is situated in a space that provides access to multiple perspectives. The essence of the self loses all sense of continuum as everything becomes an endless present. Without reference to a stable past, the present in itself becomes meaningless. The subject struggles to adapt to the unstable realities that it is subjected to.

This is the postmodern self which is spatially constructed and which allows for massive change in identity, especially in the cityscape of postmodern society.

The possibility of the simultaneous presence of a multiplicity of selves within the scope of a single postmodern text does away with the concept of the all-knowing author who intentionally controls a narrative. The unitary self is no longer in control; rather, it is controlled by the cultural and linguistic apparatuses of society that give rise to a multiplicity of role-playing selves. Therefore, the concept of unitary authority loses ground and evolves into the uncertainty of the identity of the self behind the creation.

In such situation, it is the text that creates the author. The language of the text is saturated by cultural and linguistic expressions from varied sources. These expressions act as minority discourses which each sway the subject in varying degrees and, act as catalysts in the construction of multiple selves. In writing *The Protean Self* (1993) Robert J. Lifton identifies this quality of the postmodern self and accordingly refers to it as protean. A brief discussion of the portrayal of identity in Paul Auster's *City of Glass* will clarify this aspect of postmodern authorship.

The novel places the main character Quinn within the "nowhere" of New York and within "a labyrinth of endless steps" where he is always left with "the feeling of being lost" (Auster 444). This "nowhere" is set in a postmodern cityscape of emptiness and meaningless confusion. He feels lost even in the space of his own being. Like all postmodern selves struggling to adapt to the hustle and bustle of city life, Quinn attempts to keep up with "the speed with which it kept changing" (ibid). He has reduced himself to a "seeing eye" and thereby "he was able to escape the obligation to think" and reach a certain level of "salutary emptiness within" (ibid).

Ultimately, the author Quinn creates an alternate self whom he names William Wilson, who is the author in his stead. Again, he gradually identifies more and more with the character Max Work. As Max suffers while solving his cases it is Quinn that feels "somewhat exhausted by his efforts". Quinn has become a "triad of selves" (445). As the narrator points out, "If Wilson was an illusion, he nevertheless justified the lives of the other two. If Wilson did not exist, he nevertheless was the bridge that allowed Quinn to pass from himself into Work" (445). Therefore, the author, narrator, and detective all reveal intricate connections with each other on the level of identity construction.

This implies that an author is like the characters within the narrative, in a constant process of construction. The connection between writer, reader and character is significantly questioned when, in postmodern narratives, we find a story about an author telling a story about the creation of an author. In the process of writing it is, as if, the author splits up and assumes an alternate identity which cannot be identified as the writer, the character, the narrator or even the reader of the text.

This confusion in regard to authorial identity is furthered by the very possibility of the existence of multiple selves. These selves are embodiments of the other as they appear in one's consciousness due to the saturation of the subject with diverse discourse. Commenting on the abundance of selves involved in the creation of a text Helene Cixous writes:

> "[. . .] there is no creation possible, whether it be philosophical or poetic, without there being in the inventing subject an abundance of the other, of variety: separate people, thought-people whole populations issuing from the unconscious, and in each suddenly animated desert, the springing up of selves one didn't know [. . .]." (Cixous 581)

The self is, therefore, a saturation of the other. Through the transfer of authorship of a text, the text becomes, in this sense, a conduit for releasing the self from boundaries and extending it towards the other. Any emphasis on fixed authorship would deprive the text of its autonomy and limit it to its owner, something unthinkable for a postmodern artifact.

This emphasis on the open-endedness of the text has its root in the open-endedness of the identity of the postmodern subject. If the writer of the text says all there is to be said with finality, then there can be no chance for multiple interpretations. All roads of interpretation would lead to an uncontested understanding of the text. But in reality that is not so. Therefore, authorship finds justification in being left open-ended and without an imposed limit.

As mentioned above, in coping with multiple situations, the author, among other things, becomes protean in identity. The shape-shifting quality of the author allows for creation to occur but the author's loss of power over the text in both the real world and the fictional world leads to a search for meaning in other spaces. The postmodern author therefore, incorporates magic and the fantastic into the text to, at least, give him/herself

an apparent sense of control. The next section shows the shamanistic aspects of postmodern authorial identity.

(ix) Author becomes Shaman :

As Richard Kearney in "Where do Stories Come From?" observes, one of the earliest roles of the shaman was to use narratives to tell stories which provided "symbolic solutions to contradictions which could not be solved empirically. In the process, reality itself would find itself miraculously transformed" (Kearney 6-7). The emphasis lies on how the shaman brings into sight unseen reality and thereby manipulates observed reality. The shaman's *becoming* involves transformation and often entails themes of death and rebirth before actual power is attained.

Similarly, postmodern authorship entails metaphorically dying when sacrificing authority and rebirth when being introduced into the text as a character. In this shamanistic tradition postmodern authors perform magic by blurring the boundaries of the real and the unreal. They conjure up ghosts and insert fantastic or magical elements into an otherwise realistic narrative.

This shamanistic aspect relating to the identity of the postmodern author is expressed in the tendency of using the narrative technique of "magic realism". Magic realism is a narrative technique that can alter a reader's lived reality. Thereby, it gives the writer a feeling of significance emanating from within the text and extending to the reader. The primary author i.e. the writer of the text, thus shares with the reader his/her feeling of disorientation.

The approach of the shaman is concerned with healing. Similarly, the postmodern author through the use of magic realism attempts to heal the wounds of the past by giving voice to the oppressed. S/he gives them expression in situations which would ordinarily offer them no space. This space initiates a process of healing by opening up possibilities for the unheard to be heard. Therein, the postmodern author not only interacts with the reader but also suggests how the text could be received as narrative of healing.

Postmodern authors alternate between pleasure and pain as they attain freedom from human limits by expressing what they want in whatever way they want; yet, they

are pained by the rootlessness of their situation. Like shamans they suffer in their transformation. For example, in "The Path of the Red and Black Ink," Gloria Anzaldua mentions that writing for her is not so much an analytical activity as a shamanistic process of transformation. Anzaldua is engrossed in her creation to the extent that she has to "struggle to 'disengage' or escape" from her "animated story" (187). Transformation becomes part of her life narrative. Her ontological reality changes as she changes herself.

Thus Anzaldua exclaims, "I change myself. I change the world" (188). And, because dreams have a fundamental function in shamanism, Anzaldua writes of her "awakened dreams". Dreams thrive in an ontological space between the real and the unreal. They offer entry to a world where like narratives of magic realism fact and fiction exert the same power of transformation. As an author, Anzaldua's dreams emphasize on shifts i.e. changes. "Thought shifts, reality shifts, gender shifts: one person metamorphoses into another" (187). This is a magical transformation of the author that defies the limits of time, space and gender.

Similarly, the shaman seeks to reconcile the sick person to his illness by placing it in the context of timeless myths and beliefs. This is an escape route to the creation of alternate realities and alternate worlds. Magic realism does for postmodern narratives what a shaman does for the sick. By adopting techniques of magic realism the postmodern author initiates a sort of psychological healing of the postmodern psyche which has no stability to turn to, no sense of essence to cling to, and no unique faculty to be proud of or call its own.

Authorship is no longer considered something that is a heavenly gift bestowed upon the gifted few. No longer are inspirational muses evoked as heavenly creativity harps upon the senses promising the catharsis of extreme emotions. No longer does the author wait diligently for the exact moment of creation when s/he will be overcome by the need to write because of what s/he feels inside, the expression of which is felt to be essential to one's existence. Authorship now searches for a meaningful existence within the consciousness of the masses. And the author as shaman attempts to initiate the healing of past wounds by creating magical worlds where anything is possible. This

space initiates a process of healing by opening up possibilities for the unheard to be heard, the unspeakable to be spoken and the unaddressed to be addressed.

To sum up, in postmodernism the word "author" signifies a subject position which is left open for anyone to assume. The author is neither completely the writer nor the reader. It is a subject position connecting the writing process of the writer, to the interpreting and intellectual process of the reader. In postmodern fiction, the writer has partially forfeited his omniscient authorship status and re-entered the text as one or more of his characters. S/he attempts to hide his/her insecurities through an ironic detachment to his/her themes and narratives. With no apparent depth attached to the narrative, the author becomes incoherent and whimsical in an attempt to break all linearity in the text. The completion of any possible meaning of the text now lies within the ontological and epistemological realm of the reader.

On the whole, authorship now includes transgression of every sort of literary convention seen in every age of literature. Such transgression happens and in the process the author him/herself has become transmogrified in every sense of the word. Everything and anything is possible in a narrative which no longer has any binding principle either from the author as authority on what he writes, or from the reader as social, moral and cultural guaranter of meaning. Postmodern authors thus become self-reflective, plagiarist, ironical, protean and shamanic because they no longer have incontestable authority over the identity of their texts or themselves. Their transformations are a means to cope with the destabilization of their ontological and epistemological worlds; and, an unconscious attempt to discover meaning and acquire a sense of direction in a constantly changing postmodern world.

Consequently, the effect of postmodernism as reflected in the narratives of women becomes a crucial field of discussion. The next chapter looks at how postmodern attitudes have seeped into the consciousnesses of American women and affected their identities, by focusing on selected postmodern American short stories, namely, Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh" Grace Paley's "Pale Pink Roast", Lynne Tillman's "Living with Contradictions", Ursula Le Guin's "She Unnames Them" and Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*.

Chapter Three

Postmodern Possibilities for Feminist Narratives

The previous chapter has shown how the fragmentation and instability of society linked to identity constructions in postmodern America has affected the singular identity of the author and made it assume multiple identities. These transformations in authorial presence and attitude appear in postmodern narratives, firstly, as a means of coping with the destabilization of ontological and epistemological worlds; and, secondly, as an unconscious attempt to discover meaning and acquire a sense of direction in a confusing and disorienting world. This chapter moves further into literary postmodernism and its relation to identity by focusing on an understanding of the world of women portrayed by female writers through a selection of postmodern American literary narratives.

After its advent in the 1960's, postmodernism was seen with suspicion in feminist theory for a long time. One of the reasons for this attitude is that postmodernism was considered by many leading feminists as a force emerging from the writings of western male authors. Their accusation is that only the male point of view and their writing found preference in the canons of society. In their view the lack of women writers in early postmodernist literature at that time created a void in the representation of women's experience and led to the distorted portrayal of women by men; it was as if their voices did not exist.

This view of the void in regard to the suitable portrayal of women's experience and also the suspicion that postmodernism breaks the possibility of a singular sense of womanhood to fragments, gave rise to an inhospitable attitude towards postmodernism on the part of many female writers. For example, in her essay "On the Politics of Literature", Judith Fetterley accuses American literature of being male. According to her, the "quintessential American experience" in writing appears to be - "betrayal by woman" (562). She analyses a number of works by representative male writers to prove her point. As an American female reader she complains that,

> Our literature neither leaves women alone nor allows them to participate. It insists on its universality in specifically male terms. (Fetterley 561)

The accusation here is that though American literature has female characters, the narrative is almost always presented from a male perspective. Conversely, male renderings of female situations, especially the female psyche, leave something to be wanted. Perhaps the only possible exception is Molly's stream-of-consciousness at the end of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, but he is not an American writer. Fetterley continues her discussion by referring to Elaine Showalter's "Women and the Literary Curriculum" in which Showalter looks at the "immasculation" of American literature through neglected female writers.

However, recent anthologies of Postmodern American Literature are starting to prove Fetterley wrong and show that postmodernism can allow for the acknowledgment and presence of previously silenced voices. Therefore we now see writings of authors from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as well as women in the American literary scene. And more germane to the thesis of this chapter, we can also see postmodernism enabling women to assert their presence in American writing through narratives concerned about questions of identity.

The inclusion of differing women writers in postmodern anthologies is thus a significant move towards recognizing that the experiences of women differ significantly in accordance with race, place, historical time and situation. In "Notes Toward a Politics of Location" (1984), Adrienne Rich conveys a similar idea when she refuses to use generalizing sentences that begin with the phrase, "women have always. . .". Her objection is that the word "always" "blots out what we really need to know: When, where and under what conditions has the statement been true?" (639). This means that the oppression women face differs in degrees, depending on when, where and under what conditions the oppression takes place. This understanding of women's' experience based on situation, historical and social condition are all compatible with postmodernism's diversified view of the world.

Nevertheless, many contemporary feminists feel threatened by postmodernism's destabilization of the common platform attained by "women" which has allowed them to speak as a unified group. Yet it appears that the questioning of all givens by

postmodernism has set up alternate platforms for dissent concerning representation, reality and fixed givens in all political, social and economic spheres. This, in turn, allows for the entry of feminisms, as representative of the varied experiences of women through discussions of race, color, gender, social standing etc that can become part of the postmodern experience.

Nancy Hartsock, a feminist philosopher known for her work in feminist epistemology and for her "standpoint theory," however, looks at postmodernism with suspicion. Her fear is of losing the critical edge attached to words such as gender, patriarchy, etc. These are words that feminism has acquired and armed itself with from years of struggle against male dominance. She fears losing the right to speak from a woman's standpoint and is apprehensive about any ceiling off of an area that could restrict a woman's voice. This fear is strongly voiced in her essay, "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories", where she questions the motives of postmodernists thus :

> Why is it exactly at the moment when so many of us who have been silenced begin to demand the right to name ourselves, to act as subjects rather than objects of history, that just then the concept of subjecthood becomes 'problematic'? Just when we are forming our own theories about the world, uncertainty emerges about whether the world can be adequately 'theorised'? (196)

Hartsock, therefore, sees postmodernism as a continuation of the tendency to deny women subjectivity and moral agency; in effect, she feels it can destroy any possibility of displaying a women's standpoint. She sees the movement as an affront to any possibility of articulating women's problems.

Seyla Benhabib voices a similar concern in "Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance" when she refers to postmodernist theories which celebrate the death of the autonomous, self-reflective subject. She holds such theories responsible for undermining "the feminist commitment to women's agency and sense of selfhood" (146). Though postmodernism challenges the essentialist notions of identity on which many feminist debates are founded, it seems that the parallel positioning of multiple identities within postmodernism has been advantageous for feminist narratives. Because of its

diversity, postmodernism allows for understanding of contradictions within subjectivity that were once termed as frailties of women. As feminists work toward broader definitions of women's identity, activities, and desires, more and more women writers have ventured to explore female identity as simultaneously innate and socially constructed.

But contrary to popular belief about the antagonism between feminism and postmodernism, feminism has benefited from postmodernist interpretations of identity as primarily linguistic and cultural constructs. The departure from a concept of subjectivity based in nature suggests that gendered identity is constructed on the basis of society's concept of what it means to be male or female. In American society, "Women" is a label distinguishing a category, consisting of many sub-categories, of often inadequately appreciated human-beings (like previously unacknowledged colonized races and minority groups) who have, only recently begun coming into their own. This paradigm is now acceptable, because of the linguistic turn taken following the work of Ferdinand De Saussure who has shown that the relation between signifier and signified is not a given. All meanings can, may and will change in accordance to context and culture.

Therefore, the claim that the meaning of being a woman is constructed rather than inherent in female bodies means that biological orientation need not be considered as the only binding principle for social identity. This claim opens up the possibility of intervention in the processes that construct gender, thereby giving many feminists, the opportunity to unravel and contest the complex cultural, linguistic and symbolic ways through which gender construction occurs.

Feminist explorations of gender as a social construct have led to suggestions that men and women feel and think differently due to their different upbringings. Each culture has power structures that construct the identity of its people. Conventions, themes, and styles all seem to be in line with the cultural atmosphere of the place of origin. But in recent times the merging of cultures in postmodern society has been transforming the narratives that prevail and influencing the level of acceptance of those narratives.

Postmodern literary narratives have accompanied and benefited from the emergence of a more tolerant and creative atmosphere. This atmosphere has given the narratives of women the capacity to boldly exist at par with that of men whilst exposing

the conditions of their oppression. Thus, feminist interpretations of life-narratives imbue postmodern literature with multiple perspectives of previously normalized experience.

Such writing and re-writing of narratives, that emphasizes the contradictions inherent in all created personas give new meaning to the idea of reading. Each persona embodies a different mindset which in turn leads to different interpretations of the same event, contingent on persona shifts. Adrienne Rich, known for exploring such themes as women's role in society, racism, and the Vietnam war, emphasizes the importance of looking back at literature with fresh eyes. This act of re-vision, as she calls it, results in self-knowledge for women and a clear understanding of their condition. In her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing As Re-Vision" she writes,

> A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see and therefore live afresh. (Rich 18)

A realization of Rich's advocacy for a feminist perspective in approaching literature is a positive step towards exposing the trappings of life, society and language as experienced by contemporary woman. This realization can enable women to see and therefore acknowledge their oppressed situation in society. This awareness in turn can allow them to change the circumstances of their life. Such re-appraisal of literature as functional propaganda and textual simulation of personal history has created new perspectives for many feminist debates.

Postmodernist women writers, thus, seek to revise the conventions and themes of American literature in multiple and innovative ways. Through their fiction these women writers have harnessed the intellectual energies of feminists. They have translated the increasingly impenetrable theories of the various strands of feminism into the everyday concerns of ordinary women. Texts of postwar American women writers present narrative possibilities reflecting the changing and conflicting attitudes that flourish in feminist debates as the roles of women in society change. In *Women in Political Theory* Diana Coole argues that, contemporary society is not simply modern or postmodern and that,

> women, especially, occupy a variety of worlds, traditional (as wives and mothers), modern (as workers and citizens) and postmodern (as consumers and participants in contemporary culture), each with its own oppressions, opportunities and politics. (Coole 222)

Coole's observation points towards the difference in the nature of oppression and opportunities that play out in the lives of women placed in constantly demanding social roles. Contemporary women's lives encompass all types of roles from traditional to modern and postmodern ones. Proper functionality of these shifting roles within society calls for distinctive personality traits. This characteristic of contemporary life, and the heightened multi-tasking ability of the postmodern individual is where freedom lies. Postmodernism, therefore, permits the simultaneous presence of diversified worldviews. Conflict and contradiction thus impact on the literary arena through the narratives of the period.

Many American female writers stifled by the representational techniques used in traditional narration that were used to deny them a voice in the social arena have thus started to modify them. Activist or not, they are intent on using their literary skills to present life stories closer to the social issues that concern them, namely, issues concerning gender and race, which translate into life stories different than the one-dimensional stories previously written. The failures of traditional storytelling to reflect the lived social conditions of women of varied race and social standing have led to increasing narrative experimentation, both in theme and technique, in postmodern American women writers. As a result, the depiction of the themes of love, sacrifice, family etc. have changed to a large extent to include previously unshown and unheard perspectives.

The silence of the female subject has been broken by postmodern possibilities. These possibilities have found expression in the open-endedness of most postmodern narratives. The storyline is to be completed and understood by the reader as s/he thinks and feels best. All of the narratives discussed in this chapter are characteristically open-ended and leave the reader wondering about the outcome of events.

Postmodern narratives such as those discussed in this chapter show the female self struggling with forces inside and outside its immediate surroundings. In such narratives women are no longer portrayed as complacent and happy housewives willingly suffering all for the benefit of their family. We come across women struggling to come to terms with their own needs and the demands of society. Like Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's late 19th century narrative *Awakening*, these women seek satisfaction beyond the limits of the family. Contemporaries of Kate Chopin were shocked by her depiction of a woman who dares to leave her husband and have extra-marital affairs. But depictions of such characters have become quite common in later narratives of the 20th century. Chopin was taken to task in her time for being nonjudgmental in the depiction of Edna's character. But now postmodern feminists have brought back that very character into their discussions viewing her position as a courageous one.

The work of Judith Butler is typical of the treatment of subjectivity and autonomous agency in feminist postmodernism. In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" Butler draws upon the phenomenological theory of 'acts' espoused by Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau Ponty and George Herbert Mead to extrapolate on Simone de Beauvoir's claim, " one is not born but, rather, becomes a woman." The theory of 'acts' seeks to explain the mundane way in which social agents constitute social reality through language, gesture and all manner of symbolic social signs.

Butler theorizes gender as an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. This means that "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler 519). For the construction of a self, this translates into an identity constituted by performative acts. These performative acts refer to the repetitive actions in day to day life which are discursively considered as gender specific. She writes :

> If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style. (520)

If, therefore, gender can be interpreted not as a biological given but, rather, as an interpretation of various performative acts that have an arbitrary relation to gender then the subversive repetition may initialize the possibility of a differently gendered position. This is significant in understanding a postmodern phenomenology where the word 'woman' would be freed of the impositions laid upon it by expectations of gender identity. Such an approach to gender shows how naturalized concepts of gender might be understood as constituted and hence capable of being constituted differently. Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh" can thus be seen as a literary interpretation of Butler's theory of identity as performative. In this story, the change of roles performed by a husband and wife lead to a totally different set of power relations within the marital bond.

Since its inception, though, the feminist movement in America appealed primarily to a white, middle-class audience which took its cue from its highly progressive French counterparts. As a result, the fight for equal rights in American homes and in the workplace quickly turned into extremist outbursts in favor of unwarranted sexual freedom. The libertarian-feminist and radical feminist paradigm thus emphasized that feminists should, among other things, reclaim control over female sexuality and use it as a form of power. This extreme version of sexual freedom advocates for a transgression of socially respectable categories of sexuality. It refuses to draw the line on what counts as politically correct sexuality. This in many cases, has dire ramifications for the initial objectives of the feminist movement i.e. the struggle for freedom from oppression and establishment of equality between the sexes.

Accordingly, in fiction women have been seeking a space beyond the nuclear family that consists in a male provider and a housewife raising children. Since the 1980s there has been an explosion of creative work by women engaging in and contributing to feminist efforts and debates begun in the 1970s. The choice to live outside the marriage bond is seen as progressive and gender neutral behavior.

For example, in Grace Paley's "Pale Pink Roast" the main character Anna, makes love with her ex-husband (the father of her child) even though she has already married someone else. After this transgression she is in tears as she tries to justify her actions to her ex-husband as well as to herself. On the other hand her ex-husband's ego is satisfied

by her confession that *she* "did it for love" but still he blames her and then happily leaves the apartment, somersaulting into the crowd.

Such narratives are distressing, considering the fact that the feminist movement was meant not only for the emancipation of the mind and body but was also designed to raise the self-esteem of women and free them from the shackles that society had put on them. Feminists have encouraged women to cease seeing a good woman's life as defined through service to others. Feminism has encouraged them to focus on their own desires and independence. Unfortunately, it has also emphasized the removal, denial and ultimate exclusion of all that is troublesome and hard to deal with. That also includes, according to them, the removal of men from the equation of happy relationships.

Feminist theories and theoretical foundations were, thus, initially inflected by an angry attitude. The title of Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970), implies that modern society "castrates" women, imbuing them with self-hatred and men with contempt. Like Simone de Beauvoir, Greer sees marriage and love as powerful vehicles in the enslavement of women and the perpetuation of consumer capitalism (Quinn 123). As such, self-centered thoughts cultivated in a highly sexualized and commercialized culture are often positively celebrated as a sign of women's liberation and empowerment.

It must be said though that such feminist ideals turn a blind eye to the fact that such behavior inherently gives their male counterparts more freedom to be irresponsible and ultimately treat women as sex-objects. This self-aware objectification provides an illusion of empowerment, a "false freedom". When we look across society, the effect of these choices is to *reduce* rather than increase women's freedom because they become victims of their outward image and the role it plays in the entrapment of a sexual partner. The freedom they dream of conflicts with the life they live. This leaves them unsatisfied and depressed even though these women live life on their own terms.

One of the major reasons for the unfullfillment of desire is that these desires are fashioned in accordance with the media screen. On the media screen which approves feigning of reality, all emotions are shown in the extreme. Though every intense moment is an illusion, it is those moments that make living outside mediated experience seem quite bland. In *Media Culture*, Douglas Kellner provides insight into this postmodern occurrence which he associates with identity in the following way,

> Advertising is as concerned with selling lifestyles and socially desirable identities, which are associated with their products, as with selling the product themselves. (252)

Lifestyles and identities are marketed through media images. These images create the sense of insufficiency. What makes marketing strategies a success is that though the postmodern self seems in control of its own thoughts and actions as expressions of the self, in actuality, it is motivated in its choice by advertisements. Therefore, what happens is that one does not know what one desires; rather, the market decides what one should desire. As the market changes so do the needs of the desiring self, which is relentless in its pursuit for satisfaction.

The strong influence of such mediated knowledge is further examined by Jean Baudrillard who claims in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, that "reality itself has become hyperrealist". For Jean Baudrillard, the hyperreal has consumed the real in every sphere of our lives :

> Today everyday, political, social, historical, economic etc., reality has already incorporated the hyperrealist dimension of simulation so that we are now living entirely within the 'aesthetic' hallucination of reality. (432)

These are conditions of the hyperreal as mentioned by Baudrillard. Hyperrealism is a sort of perpetual dream state where anything and everything is possible. By the term "hyperreal" Baudrillard refers to a state where knowledge has lost touch with reality to the extent that it even creates reality as we know it. Reality is lost because there is now no way of differentiating between the "real" and what is made to look real. The things that are made to look real are not connected to the real; rather, the connection is to what can be imagined as the real. Accordingly, the media and society as a whole no longer imitates reality; it simulates it, in the process entering the state of the hyperreal. Such dependence on the hyperreal makes identity construction quite complicated as it is in a constant condition of temporality and change.

The hyperreal exists through the replacement of commonplace emotions with the *signs* of those emotions:

> The consummate enjoyment [*jouissance*] of the signs of guilt, despair, violence and death are replacing guilt, anxiety and even death in the euphoria of simulation. This euphoria aims to abolish cause and effect, origin and end, and replace them with reduplication. (Baudrillard 432)

Simulation is an important idea for Baudrillard in that he considers the media to have spread the simulated world and projected it in such a way that it has become more real than reality. Euphoria has become the all consuming emotion of postmodernist culture. All other emotions lose importance because of the euphoric reduplication of the simulated images of those emotions.

Media and simulated reality presented through the media have done their best to destabilize any sense of reality since all social, political, and even personal contexts are interpreted through the media. Since knowledge of the world around us, upon which actions and reactions are based, comes to us through screens of manipulation (TV screen, computer screen, movie screen etc.) it is difficult to determine the direction of identity construction in the postmodern context. Baudrillard's thesis that our lives are totally engulfed by an "'aesthetic' hallucination of reality" can be understood by close analysis of our day to day lives and the relationships we have. Lynne Tillman's story "Living with Contradictions" can be used to exemplify this point of discussion in which the constructed self, based on media images, is totally uncertain of itself and its relationships.

Anyhow, the contemporary voice of consumer capitalism and the tremendous effect of the media in the construction of self cannot be overlooked. In "Introduction: Feminism and Postmodernism Or, The Way Things Are", Jennifer Wicke and Margaret Ferguson assert that a feminist approach to postmodernism allows for a greater understanding of how the media influences construction of the self :

> A feminist postmodernism will understand the mediated nature of knowledge and representation as well as the altered political subject produced by these mediations. (Wicke and Ferguson 5)

This sentence is a realization of the fact that feminist postmodernism allows us to understand how day to day experiences are highly influenced by the media. The media, in a postmodern world, not only creates knowledge in the way that it chooses to represent it, but also modifies and creates the subject that encounters these mediations.

In postmodern society, culture and literature have shown that symbolic meaning is not a given; rather, it can be manipulated to fit any number of contexts. Postmodernism allows for the insertion of context in each and every discussion of identity construction. Therefore, through the depiction of alternate experiences, as opposed to that of men and each other, women can rightfully assert their presence in society and induce the kind of approach that is needed for emancipation. But, in the belief that the language and symbolic system circulating in Western society is patriarchal, theorists such as Helene Cixous call for a rejection of the male symbolic system through which women are denigrated. She calls for a female language which is free from restrictions of patriarchal power.

Similarly, in "Women's Time", Julia Kristeva sees most women considering themselves to be casualties of the psychosocial order of language that constructs the fundamental social bond. Language and concepts having been built from patriarchal ideology, women feel left out of the socio-symbolic contract. They find their relationships to be fluid and without self-upholding elements:

> In this sense of psycho-symbolic structure, women, . . . seem to feel that they are the casualties, that they have been left out of the sociosymbolic contract, of language as the fundamental social bond. (Kristeva 24)

The socio-symbolic contract of language through grand narratives has for too long deprived women of their proper place by refusing to acknowledge their contribution as homemakers and providers of support for their spouses.

In the essay "Women's Time" Julia Kristeva considers the level of sacrifice necessary in order to establish social order. Self-need is the instrument that heightens violence and therefore, it is what must be controlled. Of course, Kristeva does not advocate total sacrifice; rather, it is a balanced sacrifice equal to that in motherhood that she wants. She celebrates the 'I' that attempts "the slow, difficult and delightful apprenticeship in attentiveness, gentleness, forgetting oneself" (31). In her view, too much self centered liberty (the so-called good substance) could result in absolute anarchy:

> Anthropology has shown that the social order is sacrificial, but sacrifice orders violence, binds it, tames it. Refusal of the social order exposes one to the risk that the so-called good substance, once it is unchained, will explode, without curbs, without law or right, to become an absolute arbitrariness. (29)

Here, she advocates for a measure of control and sacrifice which would allow the development of a self that would not embody the excesses and arbitrariness of libertine feminism. Many postmodern literary narratives, in the strain of Kristeva's thought, have come to reflect the changed mindset and contrasting debates about feminist ideals and targets of achievement.

Ursula Le Guin's "She Unnames Them" is one such narrative that proposes a rewriting of the linguistic and social codes determining identity. Though her narrative starts off by subversively writing a sort of sequel to the Biblical Genesis story from a woman's point of view and questioning the authority of Adam (Man), she ultimately wants to talk things over, thus implying that there would be an alternate solution if only Adam would try.

This is a non-radical feminism which seems to echo Kristeva's take on feminism where there is not only place for sacrifice, tolerance, and understanding but also a space where one can retain a certain individuality. The moderate feminism of Ursula Le Guin seems to advocate for a major change in the symbolic system here but she does not advocate total dissolution of bonds. In other words, she hesitates. As in the feminism promoted by Julia Kristeva in "Women's Time", she sees a *new generation* of postmodern feminists existing parallel to radical feminists in time and space who can have a positive impact on the process of change and who can accommodate the other within their social theory. These feminists attempt to achieve a positive balance between their needs and the needs of the other (family, society etc.). It is a feminism that promotes motherhood instead of sterility; that supports partial self-sacrifice in order to embrace the other instead of total self-centeredness. It is not what radical feminists would think of as important or in many cases acceptable to their cause.

For example, in *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone states, "The heart of women's oppression is her childbearing and childrearing roles"(81). With the prevalence

of such ideas women experience themselves as holding inferior subject positions that are essentially unintellectual and focused only on reproduction and on nurturing. Firestone's negative attitude towards motherhood and her acceptance of childbearing as oppressive, reinforces patriarchy's degradation of that role. Patriarchal society has always viewed the role of the mother and the homemaker as a non-demanding and unintellectual pursuit. With the advent of feminism, women have tried to prove themselves competent outside the home rather than within it. Even Simone de Beauvoir who is celebrated for having brought the issue of female experience into the public sphere through her detailed analysis of women's oppression in the foundational tract of contemporary feminism *The Second Sex* (1949), has perpetuated this mindset by demeaning motherhood and referring to the child in the womb as a 'parasite'.

Postmodern feminist theories, though, have brought a change in the portrayal of motherhood as a negative social role. For example, Julia Kristeva sees the adaptability of motherhood as affecting a positive balance between the symbolic and semiotic positionalities that one experiences within society and the family. The adjustments a woman is willing to make for the life of someone else shows the extent people are actually capable of going to for another human being.

Kristeva views the sensibilities and awareness associated with motherhood as positive aspects of existence. Feminists like Julia Kristeva have brought understanding and humanity into the male-female equation. In her essay *Women's Time* Kristeva emphasizes the possibilities that arise from a moderate consideration of the male-female situation. Kristeva sees motherhood to be the fulfillment of womanhood and a celebration of existence in the semiotic pre-verbal state before entrance into the symbolic patriarchal system. Motherhood is the expression of acceptance of the other as one with the self. Only motherhood can affect the amount of self-sacrifice needed to sustain both the semiotic and the symbolic. She speaks of motherhood as a positive aspect of womanhood and as an aspect of creation. It is a merging of genetically different individuals into a new combination of possibilities. Motherhood makes allowances for the acceptance of an other outside the self in ways that no other concept can.

If we merge Butler's concept of performativity with Kristeva's notion of motherhood the end effect would be realized in a construction of a non-gender specific

subject position equinanimous to that of a mothering role. This subject position would call for performative acts from the mother that showed her capable of enacting the role of caregiver and nurturer, and thus endow her with a greater sense of humanity.

In such a case, the biological identity of a person would easily be surpassed by the tolerance and nurturing of an other with a sensitivity and understanding that would rise above the denial and marginal positioning of the other. It would initiate a social situation which would affect a change in what is acceptable gender-wise in society if a male would try to be as good a caregiver and nurturer as a female. In postmodern feminism, therefore, the performative can be a relevant site of gender and identity construction in so far as it enacts and enforces gender neutral humanity and permits space for everyone in all social and political contexts.

In "Age, Race Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" Audre Lorde calls for a such a reassessment of feminism which would be inclusive of the varied life experiences of black women. She accuses white feminists of constructing the feminist movement on their own terms. Forsaking the demands of "women of color", white feminists, she believes are easily beguiled into believing that if they are "good enough, pretty enough, sweet enough, quiet enough" (633), and also, have well-behaved children, and make the right choices in marriage, then they will be allowed to "co-exist with patriarchy" (633) relatively peacefully. Lorde stresses that overcoming oppression is not that easy, especially for black women. She continues,

> But Black women and our children know the fabric of our lives is stitched with violence and with hatred, that there is no rest.[. . .] For us, increasingly, violence weaves through the daily tissues of our living — in the supermarket, in the classroom, in the elevator, in the clinic and the schoolyard, from the plumber, from the baker, the saleswoman, the bus driver, the bank teller, the waitress who does not serve us. (633)

Lorde's words find resonance in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, a novel which depicts the oppression faced by black women in society powerfully. The depictions are nothing like that depicted by white feminists in their narratives. In this novel we see the central character Pecola's life bears out Lorde's accusation of the racial injustice at work

everywhere in society. Pecola is either made fun of or totally ignored in the classroom or the schoolyard, and by the baker, the saleswomen and even in her own home.

Lorde also argues that feminist advancements within black communities are hampered by women who are afraid to go against communal attitudes. As participants striving for a gender neutral cause against common white oppression, they feel any type of grouping may be a sign of betrayal of that cause. As a result, the fact that Black women are degraded within their own community and families is commonly kept quiet. Lorde continues,

> . . . some Black women still refuse to recognize that we are also oppressed as women, and that sexual hostility against Black women is practiced not only by the white racist society, but implemented within our black communities as well. (634)

Oppression is at work not only due to white racist society but also from within the black community. Black men have been shown to oppress women of their own community, perhaps as a reaction to their own powerlessness.

The only protection against oppression that works from within one's community and for that matter one's family, is not allowing it to be internalized. In Lorde's opinion,

> As women we must root out internalized patterns of oppression within ourselves if we are to move beyond the most superficial aspects of social change. (Lorde 636)

What is clear from the above statement is that the perpetuation of all kinds of oppression can be curtailed by refusing to internalize them. By putting a stop to internalization one grows stronger and, in time, immune against the negative power structures at work in society. As a result, the formation of the self gets a positive milieu from which to construct itself.

So we see that postmodernism allows for the presence of multiple narratives within a single race and within a single gender. In *Postmodern Blackness* Bell Hooks considers postmodernism's critique of essentialism beneficial in that it allows African-Americans "to affirm multiple black identities, varied black experience" (2482). She observes that such a critique also challenges colonial imperialist paradigms of black identity. In such a paradigm it is assumed that all black identity is the same and blackness

is represented "one-dimensionally in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy" (2482).

As Hooks observes, the positive aspect of postmodern positioning is that it allows for the incorporation of "displaced, marginalized, exploited, and oppressed black people" (2480). Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* reveals a similar idea that blackness is not a one-dimensional experience. Black experience varies as internal, as well as, external factors influence the formation of identity.

Postmodernism, therefore, has changed the current total atmosphere from one defined by singular and definitive perspectives into one which is tolerant of multiple perspectives and lifestyles. This transformation has given postmodern women writers the freedom to express themselves and their ideas through their writing notwithstanding the fact that they have no control over the way it will be interpreted through differing contexts. This chapter will analyze how these women writers negotiate innovation in narrative, both thematically and technically, with social critique and how they depict the struggles of the subject in self-construction.

Based on an understanding of the feminisms discussed above, the following sections of this chapter focus on the postmodern concepts of identity construction as follows : Judith Butlers' theory of "gender as performative" is applied to a discussion of Bobby Ann Mason's short story "Shiloh," showing how the reversal of gender roles affects identity construction. Ideas of radical feminism are then applied to Grace Paley's "The Pale Pink Roast" which focuses on how women, in an attempt to empower themselves by constructing sexually dominating identities, sometimes give their male counterparts freedom to be irresponsible and ultimately treat women as sex-objects. Next, Baudrillard's ideas of conditions of the hyperreal are applied to a discussion of Lynne Tillman's "Living with Contradictions" in a section that concentrates on how a mediated experience of life translates into the contradictions and emptiness that lie at the heart of a postmodern self. Afterwards concepts from Kristeva's "Women's Time" are applied to a discussion of Ursula Le Guin's "She Unnames Them" showing how language constructs identities. Finally, the fifth and last section of this chapter, Audre Lorde's discussion of black feminism is applied in a reading of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* exposing the damaging effect of full dependence on external cues for identity construction.

I begin with a discussion of Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh" showing how the change in gender roles performed by men and women within the family, lead to a different set of personality traits and preferences. The change in performative roles is seen to affect the identities of those persons, both inside and outside the family. This challenges the concepts of masculinity and femininity as consigned to the sexes by gender.

(i) Gender Identity as "Performative" in Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh"

In literature, contextualizing and intertextualizing shows how gender is in fact a historical construction. Traditional ideas of ideas of womanhood are different from what we consider to be 'female' nowadays. The seeming naturalness of enacting gendered characteristics makes it all the more difficult to break out of the mold of gendered identity. Postmodern narratives, though, show possibilities of rewriting ideas about gendered identity.

Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh" (1982) is a postmodern story that can be effectively used to discuss postmodern identity construction, given that it focuses on shifting identity, (a) by portraying gender as performance, (b) by emphasizing the variable meanings of signs and signals that communicate meaning, (c) by showing the intrusion of technology and postmodern cultural icons at crucial moments of a relationship, (d) through the depiction of the superficial knowledge of both cultural history and personal history, (e) by the gradual weakening of the male point of view through portraying lack of understanding and (f) through temporal shifts that are indicative of major changes in identity.

In "Shiloh", Mason depicts the subversion of gender specific behavior, possible due to changes in social and personal circumstances. She shows the constitution of an alternate subject position and sense of selfhood for Norma Jean, the wife of an injured truck driver, when she is forced to take up the role of provider for her family, a role normally assigned to the male.

The narrative begins with Leroy Moffitt, the recently injured truck driver, watching his wife exercising in a position which reminds him of Wonder Woman. From

the very beginning, the reference to Wonder Woman sets the stage for the portrayal of a strong-minded modern woman who, in this case, is Leroy's wife Norma Jean. The comparison to Wonder Woman is significant. In the pantheon of American superheroes Wonder Woman was the only female champion to be found in Western narratives at that time. In contrast to the gentle housewife who had to be protected by her husband, Wonder Woman was an icon of female beauty, strength and courage. She was also much stronger and swifter than her male counterpart. The Wonder Woman comparison also highlights the overt sexuality which empowered women had begun to express.

However, Norma Jean is Marilyn Monroe's real name. Marilyn Monroe is still remembered as a sex symbol and an iconic feminine beauty. This equation strongly suggests how the Norma Jean of Mason's story, like Marilyn Monroe, has gradually come to break free of her traditional gender identity in an aspiration to become a modern woman who performs a significant role outside the confines of domesticity.

By equating Norma with Wonder Woman, Leroy parodies the newly built workforce image of American women prior to World War II. The image consists of a person, who in spite of being female has a facial expression and a posture (bending her arm as if to show her muscles) that suggests that she is strong, outspoken, daring, bold and capable. This image became popularly known as Rosie the Riveter. This poster image and many other such images were used by the media to lure women into the workforce of pre-war America. This newly portrayed sense of identity for women is seen as an image of power, contrary to traditional depictions of their limited role within the family. Traditionally, the ideal woman was imaged as a smiling, pretty, lovable wife who would readily and merrily remain in the home to cook, clean, and remain busy with household chores such as caring for the husband and children. Such stereotyping is a reminder that gender is a historical construct since ideas of womanhood have changed over history.

image 1
J. Howard Miller's "We Can Do It!", commonly referred to as Rosie the Riveter

The social background of "Shiloh" has changed due to the effects of two World Wars and the Civil War. During wartime American society underwent drastic changes. The scarcity of men then led to the employment of women in work traditionally done by men. Jobs such as those in factories, previously considered suitable solely for men were now performed by women. Since society began to sanction work for women outside the family, especially jobs in factories, education, sales, medicine etc., the limits of gender performance were redefined. So it turned out that gender specific job roles were brought into question, substantiating the claim that "what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (Butler 520). Once able to prove their worth in jobs outside the home, after the war most women refused to return to the limited confines of their homes. Women all over America were subject to social changes that led to an awareness of their sense of self and their repositioning in society so that they could be seen as capable of working at par with men.

In Mason's story Leroy's accident leaves him with a steel pin in his hip and the possibility that he will not be able to drive his truck again. This leads to a reversal of roles within the family unit. Norma has begun to earn for the family; we see her do outside work, play music to her own liking, go to college, and stay up late to read and write, even her choice in food changes. She rebuilds her whole identity. Norma wants to leave Leroy, possibly because her relationship with him is too stifling for her now. She feels that he does not understand her needs. She believes that her marriage to Leroy has left her wanting something. Changes inside and outside the home now enables her to realize and express her feeling of emptiness. For a major part of her life she had been deprived of a sense of self which, at this moment, allows her to rise above patriarchal domination and internalized oppression.

That this change in Norma finds positive resonance in her world is emphasized by the fact that the population of the town she lives in has hardly increased in the previous 20 years. One of the first things Leroy notices is that the sign at the edge of town indicates the population as being 11,500 which, he observes, is only 700 more than it posted 20 years ago. This seems to refer to the changing attitudes of women in society. Apparently, more and more women have come into their own in matters of marriage and childbirth. The point implies the prevalence of feminist attitudes which echo Shulamith

Firestone's idea that oppression within the family enacted through childbirth and childrearing, have led to reduced childbirth.

In addition, in the depiction of Norma's transformation into a modern woman who disdains entrappings of family life, it seems that Mason's story echoes Firestone's idea that domestication destroys the spirit of a woman. Norma feels she can only be free if she can rid herself of the duties associated with her role as wife and daughter. This mindset works as a commentary on the changing times which manifests itself in new self-awareness. In accordance with radical feminist beliefs, it can be stressed that if such changes in attitude are not initiated within the family, then the impact of the denial of self-expression would result in an outburst that would dissolve marital bonds.

Postmodern feminist narratives such as "Shiloh" depict personal situations which show that individual acts and practices enact and reproduce pervasive and political structures. The recognition that personal situations can be understood on a social level as echoes of similar or near-similar situations, enables and empowers the subject. Thus in Mason's story it is obvious that for a long time Norma has internalized her oppression by scaling down her aspirations and embracing gender compliant goals. Even though Leroy is on the road for most of the time, she has never complained to him of her loneliness or told him how his absence affects her. It seems that she has internalized patriarchal values and norms which have become integrated over time into her sense of self.

Such internalized oppression seems to have conditioned Norma's desire about the things she was doing for Leroy whilst suppressing her own preferences. When Leroy was at home, after the long absences required of him by his profession, their usual routine was to stay in bed, watch TV and play cards. Then Norma would cook all his favorite dishes such as fried chicken, picnic ham, and chocolate pie, never once complaining of his absence. The complete suppression of her desires and needs perpetuates and assists in patriarchal domination. Through such conditioned response and actions she seems to have collaborated in her own subjugation.

After Leroy's accident, Norma takes a job that changes her. She now takes cereal, but leaves the bowl in a mess as she goes out even before Leroy wakes up. Even though they occupy the same space, physically and mentally they seem to live separate lives. Leroy knows he is going to lose her. Negative feminist attitudes towards domesticity

propel Norma in directions she had never even considered before. The situation is further aggravated when one day her mother discovers her smoking a cigarette. For Norma this is an intrusion on her privacy. It is a destruction of her own private world where she has the freedom to indulge in the fantasy of being in control. We can feel a tension between Norma and her mother as a reaction to Norma's new found identity.

Thus we see the meanings of signs and symbols change in accordance with context and temporality. Smoking, for instance, is generally considered a man's thing. For Norma, smoking is a positive expression of her freedom which allows her to act like a would. While she smokes she creates her own special fiction of being in control and being part of a man's world. But on the other hand, her mother sees Norma's smoking as a negative expression of autonomy where she intentionally resists conforming to traditional behavior. Thus, her actions symbolize the changes that have overtaken her and gradually transform her.

Similarly, Leroy's notion of building a log cabin which traditionally symbolizes life and hope, becomes a romantic fantasy as he realizes that "Subdivisions are spreading across Kentucky like an oilslick" (Mason 273). The emptiness of his proposal is further emphasized when Leroy and Norma pass the log cabin at Shiloh where tourists are busy looking for bullets in it. The cabin thus becomes a monument of death. It symbolizes the past; a relic for those caught up in historical times. These are indications of changes in a society that is maneuvering social relationships towards superficiality.

Again, Mabel's advice to Leroy to go to Shiloh "as a second honeymoon" in order to improve his relationship with his wife turns sour when they get there. At the Civil War Battlefield in Shiloh, Tennessee, Norma suddenly breaks out of all her inhibition and tells Leroy that she is going to leave him. As the Civil War is quite significant for the feminist movement, so Norma's actions are significant in constructing her identity. What is clear is that meanings are not permanently attached to either objects or actions. Thus Norma's actions transform her identity and gestures at how far she is willing to go to be free.

The formation of Norma's identity is further influenced by technology and postmodern cultural icons. It seems that at crucial moments of their relationship something mechanical intrudes and stops them from bonding. For example, Norma and

Leroy were at a drive-in movie when their baby died in the backseat of their car without them noticing. The death of the child at the age of only four months and three days is a tragic event that none of the parents has been able to overcome.

Now since the child is out of the equation and Norma's husband is no longer in a dominant position she seems to be free of all self-sacrificing tendencies. She has become more and more absorbed in her own hobbies and concerns. Even the tunes she plays on her electric organ have changed. In lieu of tunes from *The Sixties Songbook* she plays music that sounds like that of a hard rock band. Then she switches to a Latin rhythm version of "Sunshine Superman" and "Who'll Be The Next In Line ?" The Latin tunes have a sort of carefree exuberance and quite clear sexual implications. Perhaps if the child had survived a different sense of self would have emerged from the situation.

Other such instances of technology or cultural icons coming in the way of sincere conversation can be found, for example, at the moment when Leroy feels the need to get reacquainted with Norma. Then "the oven timer goes off" (277). He feels awkward in even thinking of bringing up the topic of their lost child because he had either read somewhere or heard on the talk-show *Donahue* that "for most people losing a child destroys the marriage" (272). When Norma eventually reveals how she feels about the marriage, Leroy cannot make a connection because, for some reason, "he is wondering about white slabs in a graveyard" (280), which to him seem like a subdivision site etc.

It is only when they sit together "by the kitchen window watching the birds at the feeder" (277) or, when they laugh together in Shiloh as Norma talks about Mabel saying, "Well, we've seen it. I hope she's satisfied" (279), that a momentary connection is created. Otherwise, they are two people moving in different directions. Both characters are trying to deal with changes in their identities that find expression in actions and words that reveal their frustration and confusion which is accompanied by a helpless search for a sense of direction.

When they reach the Civil Warfield they find that it is not at all what Leroy had expected it to be. The richness of history that Mabel claims to be linked to this battlefield is now accessed through its commodification. History is commodified when tourists look for bullets in an old log cabin, a movie is shown every half hour. Leroy and Norma see monuments and historical plaques everywhere. They buy a Confederate flag for Mabel

and they eventually find a picnic spot near the cemetery. And, indeed, they literally consume history as they consume their food there. Thus it is through objects, details and narrated stories that the past becomes significant in the present.

Narrated details, therefore, write and rewrite historical identity both at the national and personal level. In the same manner, Norma rewrites the past of their relationship and changes their identity as a happily married couple when she tells Leroy that she is dissatisfied with her situation. He then realizes that, "the real inner workings of a marriage, like most of history, have escaped him" (281). His happy memories and her sad ones seem to be two perspectives of the single narrative of marriage.

But it seems those "inner workings of a marriage" have escaped Norma too. When Norma tells Leroy of the dangerous position their marriage is in, he wonders out loud, "What did I do wrong?"(280). To which, she answers "Nothing". Again he asks, "Is this one of those women lib things?" She replies, "Don't be funny"(280). What is noticeable here is that though both realize there is something wrong with their relationship, neither knows exactly what has happened or what to do about it.

As a result, Norma is confused. She performs a modern, more gender neutral subject position in her identity construct but she still feels empty. The pressure of breaking norms is as strong as the pressure to conform: and she feels caught in the middle of her needs and limited by what she needs from others. She needs Leroy to give her space to be her own person. Yet she needs him to console and hold her when she breaks down in tears after her mother catches her smoking. Though as she exercises and raises weights Norma seems strong and powerful, she simultaneously looks "small and helpless" as she "sits holding her knees together" (277) on a kitchen chair, after her mother indirectly blames her for her child's death. Transition and performance are not as easy as it seems. She is confused about her identity: not only about who she is, but also about who she wants to be.

The realization that any marital bond involves self-sacrifice on the part of both parties involved and does not call for compromise only on the part of women is an important element in postmodern narratives. Such realization, as depicted in Mason's story, indicates the acceptance of the social constructedness of gender identities. Men, too in postmodern narratives, are required to adjust to the complicated situations that

arise within the family. Leroy's acceptance of the fact that, "it was clumsy of him to think that Norma would want a log house" and his resolution to, "think of something else" is a positive step towards making allowances for Norma's new found sense of self within the intensities of the family.

As Norma takes on a more masculine role within the family, Leroy adopts a more feminine role. After his accident, Leroy's masculinity is constantly under question. Against the myth that men do not worry themselves about details, he becomes much more sensitive. He now makes things from craft kits and is much more appreciative of details. He listens to his wife patiently as she talks about types of creams though the only petroleum products he understands the need for (axle grease, diesel fuel) are linked to his truck. He tries to reinforce his image of masculinity through the symbolic notion of building a log cabin but is undermined every time he mentions his plans to Norma and even when he mentions it to her mother.

It is Leroy's acceptance and willingness to adapt, however, that underscores the hope embedded in Bobbie Ann Mason's narrative. His willingness to change is the kind of optimism revealed in postmodern feminisms which find space enough to let differing mindsets occupy the same space without overpowering each other. And it is in Leroy's acceptance of Norma's transformation and his resolve to change himself to adjust to that change, that performing bodies find the space to assume alternate positionalities.

In regard to narrative technique, Mason emphasizes the instability of identity roles by weakening the authority of the male point of view. The story is narrated, though in the third person, from Leroy's point of view. It begins with the phrase -"Leroy Moffitt's wife", in describing Norma. This indicates a strong voice of authority and possessiveness. But, as the narrative progresses there is a weakening in that voice. The description falters as Norma drives the car to Shiloh. "and Leroy, sitting beside her, feels like some boring hitchhiker she has picked up. He tries some conversation, but she answers him in monosyllables" (279). Leroy is no longer in control of the situation. In addition, he constantly doubts his capability of understanding the situation.

The changing aspects of Leroy's identity finds a way into the text through sentences and phrases that attempt to justify his actions, such as, "This is a *Star Trek* pillow cover" (274) and "All the big football players on TV do it" (ibid) when Mable

sees his needlework and in descriptions such as those that show the ex-truck driver opening and pouring a bottle of beer into two glasses "dividing it carefully" (277). His diminishing authority is reflected metaphorically with the idea that "he tends to drive a car rather carelessly" (277) and also through his helplessness in identifying the reasons behind Norma's changing identity, all he can say is "something is happening". Many other examples could be cited which show the parallelism between Leroy's hesitant masculinity and the narrative that describes it. Similarly, the narrative referring to Norma's newly emerging identity parallels the strength and masculine traits she endeavors to attain and yet, it too falters when her femininity causes her to hesitate and break down into tears and relative uncertainty.

The thematic uncertainty and instability of identity and thus, power relations within the family are furthered by the combination of silence and speech within thee narration. The fact that power relations fluctuate and Leroy is no longer in control is indicated by Norma's silence on various occasions after being asked questions by Leroy or, at times when he expects her to respond to what he has said and she does not. For example, when Leroy attempts talking about plans for their log cabin while Norma is busy exercising, he suggests jokingly, "You and me together could lift those logs. Its just like lifting weights" (275). She doesn't respond - she gives no answer, not even a smile. Again, on their way to Shiloh, Norma is driving, and he attempts to make conversation. But conversation is not possible because "she answers him in monosyllables" (279). So we see the absence of speech indicates shift in power structures related to identity.

Temporal shifts within the narrative also indicate the effect of their changing identity on the narrative and on themselves. For instance, we get to know that Leroy "likes to lie on the couch and smoke a joint and listen to Norma Jean play 'Can't Take My Eyes Off You' and 'I'll Be Back'" (273). The there is a time shift, introduced with the word "Now", which echoes the change in his situation where Norma prefers playing "Who'll Be the Next in Line?" (276). As if she is prepared to let go of her marital relationship and move in other directions, Leroy's authority has diminished to the point where he speaks and Norma hardly listens. This continues throughout the narrative with scenes that contrast the before and after of their life together and their individual identities.

Another aspect of the narrative implies a possible shift in identities is Norma's ambiguous gesture of raising her arms as she turns towards Leroy while standing on the bluff. Leroy understands the gesture as an exercise for the chest muscles. Her intentions are unclear as to whether she is beckoning Leroy or not as she stands close to the bluff over the Tennessee river. It is, as if she feels that she is on dangerous ground. Her attempt to soar may be successful or may end in tragedy. Leroy rushes towards her as best as he is able to do. It is difficult for him to catch up with her. Whether or not he can reach her and accompany her through the transition of her self is thereby questioned.

In the end, the reader is left with an image of Norma standing with outspread arms on the edge of steep bluff over the Tennessee river. The narrative does not explain how Norma wants to change her situation. The reader is left to wonder: Will she jump? Will she fall back into her husband's arms who is now willing to support her transformed attitudes? Will she divorce him and go away on her own? The narrative thus remains open-ended and suggests multiple possibilities at the end. However, we do sense the conflict and helplessness that Norma feels as she attempts to attain a more dominant self identity as if she herself is uncertain as to which path she should take.

Mason's story seems to support Judith Butler's theory that gender is performative and that the femimine roles assigned to women in society force them to adhere to certain identity types. Once those roles are restructured a woman thinks and feels differently about her situation, though what is noticeable is the frustration, confusion and loss of direction that accompanies those changes.

A similarly opened-ended short story namely, Grace Paley's piece "The Pale Pink Roast", is discussed in the next section. The discussion emphasizes the importance of a clear understanding of what true freedom from patriarchal domination means, in terms of resistance to the dominating power structures that influence identity construction.

(ii) Victimization of the Self in Grace Paley's "The Pale Pink Roast"

Identity then, can be seen as largely dependent on the performance of gender defining roles. But, according to liberal feminists another path of empowerment consists in using one's sexuality to attain power over the other. The next story to be considered is, Grace Paley's " The Pale Pink Roast" (1959), shows how empowerment through sexuality actually consists in an identity construct which embodies a false promise of freedom that cannot be fulfilled and, considering the complicated emotions involved, can neither be justified .

Paley was among the earliest American writers to explore the lives of women. She began publishing in the late 1950s, just as the second wave of the feminist movement began. Her works focus on the everyday lives of women. Regarding her writing, Paley comments in the following terms:

> I was a woman writing at the early moment when small drops of worried resentment and noble rage were secretly, slowly building in the second wave of the women's movement. I didn't know my small-drop presence or usefulness in this accumulation. (Geyh 94)

This statement indicates that her narratives are imbued with feminist ideas. She intended to raise the awareness of women about the injustice and double standard prevailing in society which subjugated women physically, emotionally and psychologically.

Paley's short story "The Pale Pink Roast", part of the short story collection *The Little Disturbances of Man*, depicts the difference in situation of an ex-married couple, Peter and Anna, caused by social conditions and patriarchal power structures. The story is effective in discussing feminist attitudes to identity construction because in the story Paley (a) goes against traditional norms by emphasizing the female point of view; (b) shows sexual transgression of a woman outside her marriage; (c) explores unconscious motivations for Anna's actions; (d) uses a narrative which exposes the imbalance in dominant ideology; (e) investigates the shifting power relationships between men and women, and of course; (f) narrates a story that resists closure.

In "Pale Pink Roast", Paley focuses on the unhappiness of a divorced mother who feels the responsibility towards her child as a burden that restrains her and forces her

to make decisions which she otherwise would not have taken. She ultimately gives her suppressed desire expression but it is difficult for her to accept the position it puts her in. Contrastingly, we are given the description of the father who in a carefree state of mind easily shakes off all his responsibilities and yet is quite comfortable with the decisions he takes.

Through her storytelling Paley goes against traditional norms by emphasizing the female point of view, gender-bending characters and also by leaving the narrative open-ended. Paley rewrites maternal characters. Women, as they appear in her narratives, are no longer complacent about their situations for they have begun to transgress imposed boundaries. A psychoanalytic approach to Paley's story shows how Anna's sense of self and her decisions and thoughts are unconsciously motivated by the inequalities she notices in her condition and that of Peter.

Anna's behavior has a feminist twist to it. She cuckolds her new husband by having an affair with her ex-husband. Peter leaves in the expected manner, laying all the blame on her for not telling him that she had a second husband. Why does Anna expose herself to such meanness? Why does she feel the sexual attraction to a person she knows to be an egocentric, selfish playboy? Their marriage was not one to be proud of, judging from Peter's flirtatious and carefree nature, and the fact that he had unhesitatingly left his child with someone else, even though he was meeting Judy (his daughter) after quite a long time.

If Anna was bold enough to go through a divorce why was it that she had subjected herself to accusations by Peter, that she had seduced him, when he was the one who kissed her first? Peter's accusation is quite offensive:

> You're great, Anna. Man, you're great. You wiggle you ass. You make a donkey out of me and him both. You could've said no.(Mason 98)

Always, everything is a woman's fault. Even though he himself is a playboy and fools around he can afford to be judgmental because he has the full force of patriarchal structures to support him The knowledge that Anna has remarried changes things for Peter who had only recently offered her a sporadic sexual relationship free of any commitment, by saying, "You know, we could have had some pretty good times together every now and then if you weren't so resentful" (Mason 98). The question again is Why

does Anna expose herself to such injustice? The answer seems to lie in her desire to give herself the power to become more aggressive and somehow challenge the situation she is in.

Anna feels the pressure of suppressing her needs and aspirations because of social circumstances. She is economically dependent on her husband for her financial needs. This makes her feel helpless and powerless. The fact that she permits the incident with Peter to happen shows that she is unhappy in a situation where she is forced to get remarried to provide for herself and her child. What happens with Peter seems to give her momentary escape from the reality of her situation through the realization of a sexual fantasy. To cope with the injustices she feels are pulling her down she seems to have created an inner world of desire and fantasy. It is this inner world which has unconscious and uncontrollable control over her subjectivity. In the likeness of a liberal feminist, she becomes sexually aggressive, both in language and in action. For this one moment of gratification and wish-fulfillment, she rises above all restrictions and escapes the reality of her situation.

Escapism is generally associated with feelings of powerlessness or pointlessness, a major issue in postmodern thought. It manifests itself as a means of engrossing one's attention with alternate and fictitious realities, and, it also involves absolving oneself of responsibility through the realization that one has no power to change the prevailing circumstances. But escapism is not a solution to a situation of dominance; rather, it is a perpetuation of the injustice by a denial of dominance. Such denial manifests itself in willing enactment of oppressive situations that increase one's restlessness and entails masochistic self-sacrifice, resulting in further frustration. Rootlessness is enhanced through the realization of meaningless sexual exploits. Such a frail mode of empowerment cannot be a solution to the oppression of society.

Anna, therefore, cannot be happy even though she has attained her fictional empowerment. After all, she has used her body to exert power over Peter. It is not an object, but part of her identity. How she uses her body is part of the definition of her identity. Anna, thus, feels the need to justify her actions through her confession. "I really mean it, Peter, I did it for love". Anna cares as she says these words. This proves that this is not an act she is proud of. As a result, the only justification she can find is that she

acted out of love for Peter. Her words uplift Peter's ego and gives him the satisfaction of being needed and loved. He is happy feeling he still has the upper hand even as she admits her emotional dependence.

Anna struggles with this contradiction within herself. She acts, as if, she were in control of the situation at hand and then, suddenly she breaks. When Peter takes off his shirt she cannot but admire his physique. But then she thinks of what she had read somewhere, i.e. "cannibals, tasting man, saw him thereafter as the great pig, the pale pink roast" (Paley 96). On the one hand, she attempts to deny and suppress the desire she feels for Peter by equating him with a piece of meat. Like the fox in Aesop's fables who could not get the grapes and turned its desire into disgust by thinking the grapes were extremely sour, Anna attempts to attach a repelling image to Peter. She objectifies him as a "pale pink roast". This attempt on her part signifies the high level of attraction that she feels towards him.

On the other hand, this cannibalistic image shows her wish to consume him. In physical terms, this translates into the sexual aggressiveness she has displayed in language and action which is contradicted in her tears and submissive plea that she did it for love of him. It appears, then, that Peter is not the subject of her desire. What seems to have happened is that she has projected the desire for the unattainable image of Peter onto his physical body. In the process she has equated the image of cannibalism with her carnal desire and the equivocal meaning presented by the metaphor of the pale pink roast exposes the contradiction in her self.

Indeed Anna lets this sexual transgression happen because of love, but not because she loves Peter. She loves the carefree, healthy, image he projects. It is an image of total control; an image of power over his situation; an image of carefree indulgence. Apparently, Anna is so fascinated by this image of power and indulgence that she is willing to forget what she knows about him and his image. She forgets her past experience with Peter which must not have been perfect or it would not have ended up in divorce. Viewed in that light, it seems that her action is reflective of the masochistic sacrificing of her self.

Paley's story brings out the frustration of someone bound in an unsatisfactory relationship. The story displays the psychological and emotional bondage of women

within marriages which they are forced into by circumstances. It seems Anna admires Peter for the life spirit that marks all his actions. For one moment of satisfaction she forsakes her conscience. She does not want to think of the consequences of her actions, feeling that she could get away at being as unconcerned as Peter. Her action is an attempt at the subversion of dominance but she ultimately satisfies male concepts of the female as being weak, emotional and out of control.

Anna's strong desire for empowerment finds expression in her need to disempower Peter. She seduces him, seeking empowerment through her sexuality. Expressing her sexuality may be interpreted as a bold step to feel alive and take action against patriarchal forces. But paradoxically, this attempt at empowerment will perpetuate patriarchal domination. Peter leaves the flat happily, not bothered about their child, and not expressing any regret or showing any concern for her situation. Leaving the whole burden of guilt on Anna, he steps outside to be lost in a crowd, making sure to brush his hair before he does so. Just because one willingly takes part in a sexually motivated action, does that raise the act to one of empowerment? It seems not. Or, we would not be seeing Anna's tears and her attempt to justify her actions.

Grace Paley's narrative reveals that women endanger themselves by giving in to their emotions. Women have to be strong in order to free themselves from manipulation by members of the opposite sex. There is also a pathetic side to this story as the reader feels that women have experienced subjugation for so long that even after being disappointed, as Anna has been, they are naïve enough to think of life in romantic terms, continuously hoping for things that cannot be.

We get the feeling that Peter and Anna's marriage has failed because there was a strong lack of reciprocal love between them. The physical attraction is there but the psychological bonding is absent. The bond that ties a couple together and that raises the marriage above mere physical needs is just not there. It as if women such as Anna have adopted strong feminist ideals without fully understanding what they are supposed to do in order to be free. Feminism is not always about cutting lose all bonds, as radical feminists tell us: Rather, it is also about encouraging a symbiotic space within any relationship where disparities in identity can exist without chaos.

On the whole, we see reflected, in Anna's character portrayal a sense of self that is confused, contradictory, self-victimizing, and self-destructive. Anna suffers both emotionally and psychologically because of the situation she is in. The tormented self has been created from the anguish and tears intensifying from her attempt to break free from the helplessness and powerlessness of her situation by means of a sexual aggressiveness which she cannot come to terms with.

Paley's critique of patriarchy, however, cuts both ways. It is against men, of course, but it is also against women who participate in their own victimization. The narrative can be read as a critique of the double standard perpetuated by the dominant ideology. Patriarchy allows a sense of freedom as long as it does not conflict with the narcissism of domineering male subjects and the positions they assume. The perverse and partial vision Peter upholds is characteristic of that dominant group. He colors Anna as resentful, vindictive, mean and so on. The only time he sincerely says something good is after she has boosted his ego by saying she allowed such sexual transgression on her part, out of love for him. Thus the romantic illusion of perfect and constant love makes most women, like Anna, unable to see their own victimization as they search for perfection in identity structures, as embodied by the likes of Peter, that have not been fair to them.

This search for perfection, empowerment and meaning in identity structures is a compelling struggle of the postmodern "I". But it seems that in spite of the all-pervasive penetration of sexuality in contemporary media and culture the promise of empowerment falls far short of expectations. In employing sexuality as a means to attain an empowered identity, women only get frustrated and give in to further helplessness accompanied by a loss of direction. Thus, the unlimited freedom of postmodern conceptualization and identity construction does not always lead to euphoria and unlimited happiness since there are grave pitfalls that one must be wary of.

The next narrative to be considered is written in a form known as the "short-short story", otherwise termed as "flash fiction" and "sudden fiction". Though quite short (less than 1500 words) it, like a good commercial, quite effectively draws out its point. In this case, the narrative shows that the attempt at unconstrained freedom within postmodern social narratives has rendered relationships stale and language inadequate. Nothing can satisfy the unquenchable thirst of unlimited desire. And, identity constructions are shallow and unstable.

(iii) Simulacrum, Mediated Selves and "Living with Contradictions"

In very few words and phrases, Lynne Tillman's story "Living with Contradictions" (1982), reveals the instability and unreliability at the heart of all postmodern identity constructs, especially those in American society. The aspiration of attaining unwarranted freedom leads postmodern subjects to reject any idea that even suggests domination or conformity to tradition. The only suggestions for identity construction that are accepted on a personal plane are those that emanate from media images of contemporary culture, as reflected in magazines and commercials.

The story "Living with Contradictions", based on the experience of life in contemporary America, can be discussed as it relates to postmodern self construction, with reference to the following: (a) portrayal of the contradiction at the heart of postmodern relationships; (b) use of aphoristic, commercialized language; (c) experiments in self construction; (d) commodification of language and emotions; (e) depiction of the oppression of mediated images; (f) blurring of reality; (g) use of female point of view; and (h), use of the short-short story form.

Tillman's story portrays some of the demands that social and sexual freedom place on contemporary relationships. Ironically, the kind of intellectual and sexual freedom that is portrayed in contemporary lifestyles seems incomplete and lacking in depth even to the characters themselves. Deficient in emotion and instinctual drive, everything seems to be programmed into a hyperreal mode of existence that complicates the sense of self of the protagonist Julie and her partner Joe.

Julie and Joe have been living together for three years and yet have no proper way of addressing each other. The narrator scrutinizes a relationship where two people of the opposite sex live together yet complicate matters by refusing to commit themselves to each other. As Julie questions her situation she realizes the contradictions at the heart of postmodern relationships which makes her sense of identity unstable and full of contradiction.

This story reveals contemporary American life as having lost all natural affiliation to the real. It begins with the following line, "He didn't want to fight in any war and she didn't want to have a child"(121). Instantly, the reader is faced with the problematics of

the relationship. Neither of the parties concerned wants to conform to a traditional relationship. As is well-known, war and manhood have always been interconnected. Strong associations of *man* as warrior and guardian, as courageous and fearless, as bold and unwavering, have forever been a culturally accepted given.

On the other hand, motherhood has always been associated with the gentle, caring, nurturing, self-sacrificing tendencies of *women*. The fact that the 'he' of the story is unwilling to face war and the 'she' unwilling to have a child tells us that neither of them is willing to conform to traditional roles of breadwinner and protector, on the one hand, and homemaker and caregiver, on the other. The dilemma Julie and her partner face is due to their reluctance to adhere to traditional identity roles. In an attempt to defy all traditional norms they live together, careful not to obstruct each other's freedom, or to ask for explanations, wary of being considered imposing. She attempts to show herself as undisturbed by being in a relationship where there is no pressure of commitment.

In a further attempt to retain neutrality within the relationship, neither Julie nor Joe want to identify themselves as lovers or as husband and wife. Such a stance leads the reader into a whole new territory of interpretation: i.e. the role of language in normalizing or demonizing a subject. The awareness that meanings cannot be imposed on signs and that signs take on meaning according to the context and more commonly that signs engage in creating meanings and thus create social codes leads the narrator to warily use words so that they can sound neutral in referring to relationships. The phrase she comes up with to define their relationship is, "Partners in a pair-bonded situation' (121).

Echoing Kristeva's suspicion of nomenclature that defines a subject through ideological power structures, Julie refuses to use the labels of 'husband', 'lover' and 'wife'. These words are now considered part of a patriarchal sign system that has been unfair and oppressive towards women. So, none of the words "lovers", "husband", "wife", none can be appropriately applied to the relationship because that would taint the situation with the interplay of power structures and preconceived notions. Thus, she demonstrates her knowledge of how dominance is perpetuated through language.

Prevailing ideas are that lovers tend to dominate each other by restricting how and what they do and say and husbands tend to dominate their wives and restrict their freedom of movement outside the home. Thus, a whole range of negative associations

come to mind through the usage of labels derived from patriarchal power structures. These associations include words such as "sacrifice", "subservience", "bondage", "restrictions" etc. Since the word "partner" has no such connotation both players seem to be on a level playing field.

The point is that prevailing discourses find expression in language. Julie's awareness of the power exerted through language reflects the need for change in language in order to resist dominating power structures. A realization of such necessity is seen in the way the word *housewife* has been purged of subjugating associations by being replaced by the word *homemaker*. The replacement of one word by another in an attempt to escape pre-conditioned responses and thoughts reminds one of Michel Foucault's theory of "discursive formations"[1](Foucault 425). Julie attempts to bypass the effects of such formations relating to relationships between opposite sexes by refusing to use stock words and phrases that would come to attribute more meaning to a relationship than there actually is within it. This intent reveals one aspect of Julie's sense of self i.e. her awareness of the influence of discourse on the creation of the self.

Since Julie understands something of the discursive practices involved in identity construction, she asks herself, "What would it be like not to have a contemporary mind?" This is a significant question which refers to a more uncomplicated time before the advent of postmodernism, where there was stability, morality and a fixed reality. But the contemporary mind is now concerned with contexts, relationality, perspectivism, gender, hyperrealism, simulation, etc. in ways which destabilize all previous concepts that were once considered permanent.

This question emphasizes the effect of postmodern discourses of fragmentation and mediated experience upon the construction of identity. Julie knows she has a contemporary mind. This is a mind that is confused by capitalist propaganda, and does not know what to trust and what not to. With a mind and body exposed constantly to

[1] A discursive formation, according to Foucault in his book *Archeology of Knowledge*, is a way of thinking during a particular period of time that gives rise to certain kinds of information. Discursive formations channel power through their normativity i.e., by defining normal and deviant patterns of behaving, desiring, being. It is through discursive formations that power, in the form of discourse, produces identities by producing "knowing subjects".

differing possibilities she can construct an identity which wants to resist entrapment into overwhelming power structures that can affect her thoughts and feelings.

She ponders over the effect of being another person from another time on her relationship. The postmodern world allows her to experiment with her self. This is also a realization of the fact that social change is a result of, and results in, an overall change in mindsets. This in turn, affects the way individuals perceive reality. And that affects the emotional temperament of the individual, determining how s/he interacts in society.

Thus the fleeting nature of all postmodern experience makes it difficult to place faith in any type of relationship. Julie comments on changes in the way we interact as she contemplates life and relationships before the advent and upsurge of capitalism. She realizes that capitalism affects contemporary social relations. Yet, ironically, when she refers to feudal relationships before the advent of capitalism she says, "Feudal relationships. I want one of those" (121), as if such a relationship was something you could buy from the supermarket. Here Julie seems to be echoing Douglas Kellner's observation that lifestyles and identities are marketed through media images. Consumer marketing has, thus, destroyed the concept of authentic identities.

But that is not all, consumerism has also made language a commodity. As a commodity its presence in the marketplace has changed its identity. Language has lost its innocence. It now manipulates and creates reality. And it has been corrupted by an all-pervasive commercial agenda. Language had, for a long time, been a medium for expressing one's perception of reality. In consumer culture, language is now used to create reality: nothing can be deemed original or real anymore. Everything has to measure up to standards developed by the media. It presents images and language that permits and perpetuates the circulation and establishment of falsification in the form of alternate truths and possible realities. Identification with such images and language involves creating a self that is an imitation of a simulated reality. Being casual now involves a kind of intentional dressing down that must put on the appearance of being casual. Expressing love involves flowers, chocolates, and cards etc. And being the perfect person involves being vocal, confident, pleasant to look at, well-dressed, financially solvent and, of course, having a perfect body.

Commodification of language and the self has, therefore, resulted in a strong self-consciousness which inhabits the space of intimacy. As a result Julie tells us, "Intimacy is something people used to talk about before commercials. "Now there's nothing to say" (121). Because every intimate utterance has already been said and every image of intimacy already publicized, nothing can match up to the "spectacle"[2] of it. Thus, intimacy is lost as commercials intrude into the personal space of postmodern subjects and spectacle takes preference over the real. Amongst all the turmoil of media images of love and passion, relationships dissolve into confused nothingness.

In consumer society, natural needs and cravings are replaced by intense desire. Compared to images of intense desire, natural and subtle feelings make people feel awkward because of the lack of intensity and exuberance. Intimacy is lost because open sexuality has attained normalcy. In the hectic schedule of contemporary life Julie feels that commercials have contaminated the space people once had for themselves by inflating their expectations to cause and effect. Julie's "There is nothing to say"(121) immediately after the mention of commercials, suggests that there is no language usage that could avoid referring to the media. This implies that the media is gradually pervading the personal realm and claiming everyone's personal space.

The illusory world of commercials and the depiction of false perfection therein, has destroyed any and all acceptance of the natural state of things. On screen images surpass anything that can be expected in life. This results in self-consciousness and dissatisfaction with one's circumstances, which, in turn, creates a void within the subject. Once the void is created a distrust grows which destabilizes faith in one's self and relationships. To fill this void, language and action are modified to create situations that simulate that which is seen on the screen. This ultimately creates a new identity, in accordance with what the subject is exposed to through the media.

The media is not used to communicate and establish truth; rather, it is now openly used to make one believe in lies. Advertising uses language as a medium to create reality and most postmodern subjects cannot tell the difference between reality and fiction. Julie's mention of ivory soap is significant in this regard. Proctor and Gamble write the

[2] "Spectacle" has a special meaning in postmodern theory. A term coined by the French critic Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* it is used to refer to the experience of life through mediated images which modify behaviour and construct new realities.

history of ivory soap, on their website, claiming it to be a connection to the past in the following way :

> During the past 125 years, Ivory has transcended its place in history as more than a soap. Ivory is a connection to the simple, pure times of yesteryear. It represents everyday moments that become special memories. And just as American families have grown so has Ivory, bringing with it the promise of purity and mildness for our children and our children's children. [©2009 Procter & Gamble]

The presentation of Ivory as having become more than a soap as it represents "everyday moments that have become special" brings to mind Linda Hutcheon's claim in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, that in postmodern times knowledge of the past is more about representation than of "objective recording" :

> Knowing the past becomes an object of representing, that is, of constructing and interpreting, not of objective recording.(81)

In the case of ivory soap the claim has been made public and it boldly stares one in the face as a historical fact. No one challenges or feels the need to challenge whether or not the claim is true; no one feels the need to wonder whether or not the soap has fulfilled its promise of "purity and mildness." The image of its fulfilling its claims is all that there is. Innumerable commercials dating from the beginnings of ivory soap show smiling American families all of whom seem to be using it.

The presence of such mediated experience is overwhelming. As Julie stresses, "Its impossible not to be affected" (Tillman 121). It seems that mediated images play the role of a surrogate mother for Julie in her formation as a postmodern subject. The media, as surrogate mother, constantly provides images of consumption, extravagance and extremity for her. Julie, as subject, in accordance with the numerous possibilities provided by these images, considers remaking her identity to match the image that attracts her vision. However, what she considers to be real is actually imaginary and, therefore, constantly unattainable. The thirst for identity, therefore, is never quenched since desire remains unfulfilled. The mediated image can offer access to the imaginary but can never present reality to her without tainting it with versions of the real.

Thus Julie finds herself in a critical situation. On the one hand, she tries to resist a traditional lifestyle, but on the other, she sees through the euphoric lifestyles and relationships offered through images of capitalist consumer culture. The mediated images of life as it is supposed to be affect her. She wants to be progressive but somehow finds all to be illusory. She feels the emptiness in contemporary relationships and the lack of commitment. These are unstable, self-consuming contemporary relationships come and go like new fashions. Unlike in the past, when marriages and love were lifelong commitments, in contemporary society, the dissolution of marriages and love relationships have been normalized to the extent that people think - when one goes, another will come along like a new fashion.

Julie notices such "Consumerism in love" (122) as all her friends constantly talk about newfound relationships and lovers. Relationships are treated as material objects, to be temporarily used and then thrown away without any misgiving. She states that love relationships are as temporary as a film, "that lasts an hour and a half, feature-length, and then you're hungry again"(122). This implies that the concept of romantic love, as portrayed in the movies, is largely responsible for the constant and repetitive search for a soulmate. There is a sort of desperation in the narrative tone which reflects the hopeless search for meaning and constancy in love. This suggests that inconstancy and non-commitment relationships can only lead to self-objectification.[3]

The postmodern situation fills the subject with insecurities, doubts and dissatisfaction at every moment and in every emotion. This is consumerism at work. It is the all-consuming hunger of a capitalist society which can never be content with what it has. Consumer culture constantly creates and recreates a void within the postmodern subject. This void initializes an accumulation of varied commercial products which become the basis of a new expression of the self. Everyone reaches to fulfill a dream or a fantasy, but it is a dream that every other person participates in. In commercials, there is always a blurring of boundaries between the real and the manufactured. But as we are

[3] From this point of view, it appears that contemporary western women are only disadvantaged to the extent that they allow themselves to be turned into objects. The greater freedom that women, for example, enjoy in American life allows them to establish themselves to be more than just sex objects. Ironically, though, they use this freedom to be sexually aggressive which, in turn, takes them back to attaining the position that they wanted to escape in the first place.

told, no amount of voyeuristic intensity can match up to "being held"(121). This implies that advertisements have affected change within the subtle moments of intimate relationships. Instead of relationships being enriched with love and subtlety, intimate moments consist of the lure of sexuality and desire.

Like the marketing strategy that consists in repeating an idea or a statement until it becomes the truth, through repetition Julie tries to establish the truth that they are not a couple. That truth is, "The great adventure, the pioneering thing is to live together and not be a couple" (Tillman 122). The postmodern subject is never appeased as postmodern conditions and media images tell it to aspire to be anything and have everything.

The problem with media images is that postmodern subjects become accustomed to accepting all the images they are bombarded with as true. They unquestioningly accept excesses in the portrayal of emotions, actions, and the unique wordplay as true and proper reality. But, like a child who thinks s/he is in control and knows everything around him/her, the postmodern self is just, "an infant out of reason, speaking reasonably about the unreasonable" (Tillman 123). For, there is no truth to turn to which is above question. There is no image to turn to that is not somehow manufactured. There is no idea that has not been deconstructed. And there is no emotion left pure enough to resist the commercial agenda.

The ramification of a self, which is constantly recreated anew in accordance with its aspirations toward images of consumption is a constant restlessness for euphoric experience. But it is difficult to keep up the constant euphoria demanded in such a situation. It is the paradox of postmodern subjectivity that it offers an individual full control of who and what s/he wants to become, yet appears to be most limited as it succumbs to images supplied by the media which manipulates those postmodern subjects towards consumerist ends. As a result, all subject positions entail the construction of identities which end up thinking of the same euphoric lifestyle, devoid of both commitments and a stable sense of self.

Lynne Tillman's use of form and language matches the restlessness of the postmodern attitude of consumerism. The form of this piece of "sudden fiction"/ "short-short story is appropriate for the short attention span of readers who live fast lives and need change every other moment. The aphoristic language of the short sections come out

like the messages of commercials. And like the message of commercials that are repeated till they become true, in the story we are repeatedly reminded that Julie and Joe are not lovers. But like those messages that hide the truth, for all the repetition, "Julie couldn't abandon her desire for love" (Tillman 123).

So, what we see is that postmodern identities constructed out of the myth of consumerist freedom severely lack contentment, which is the prerequisite of true happiness. This lack of contentment leads them to self-centeredly question how much benefit they have gained out of any and all relationships. This not only destroys relationships it also destroys any prospect of stability for that identity. Thus, the postmodern "I" becomes irrational, doubtful, discontented and restless in its search for a mediated image of perfection that can never be attained. This story reveals the disorienting effect of the spectacle of media images on the American postmodern "I" that manifests itself in the instability central to all postmodern identity constructs.

As Tillman shows suspicion of nomenclature as being a social mechanism through which dominance is perpetuated, so Ursula Le Guin sees nomenclature as part of a patriarchal sign system that has been unfair and oppressive towards women. The next section will feature a discussion of Ursula Le Guin's short story "She Unnames Them" which focuses on how language has been traditionally used to construct preconceived notions of identity. The story proposes total subversion of authority by taking back all names though at the end of the story it does seem that such a desperate action results in complete uncertainty of identity and again positions the subject at a loss in the quest for happiness.

(iv) Language, Identity and Ursula Le Guin's "She Unnames Them"

In this day and age of postmodernist theories, we realize how names and referents carry with them vast expanses of preset attitudes, ideas and extensive positive and negative connotations. In *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* Mary Daly chalks this path for women's emancipation which consists in breaking down oppressive power structures that are at play within language itself. She complains that women have been deprived of the power of naming : ". . .Women have had the power of naming stolen from us." Referring to the Genesis story of Adam's naming the animals and the woman, she emphasizes the powerlessness of a situation which is partial because there is no dialogue between the sexes. She, thus, proposes that vast changes must be made to the semantic field as "universal imposing of names by men has been false because partial" (8).

Ursula Le Guin's *She Unnames Them* is a narrative exposition of the same idea. Embedded within the plot of Ursula Le Guin's "She Unnames Them" (1988) is a subversive version of the story of Adam and Eve, in which, Eve calmly takes action against the oppression of the symbolic system which excludes her opinion and takes her presence for granted. Postmodern feminist authors, such as Le Guin, concerned with interactions between language and gender vent their frustration at a language which dismembers their intentions, dislocates their sense of self and eludes their grasp. The story "She Unnames Them" is significant in the discussion of postmodern identity formation because in this story Le Guin, (a) rewrites history from a feminist perspective, (b) highlights the oppression embedded in linguistic signifiers, (c) comments on gender disparity within the marital relationship, (d) constructs a narrative of identity which sets apace the breakdown of linear temporality, (e) breaks the frames of normalization, (f) instills an awareness of suppression, and yet (g) leads identity to a path of uncertainty.

LeGuin's story is a narrative which shows through Eve's characterization a subversive story of a long silenced women's point of view. Only recently Eve, as a symbolic representative of female subservience, has gained the power to rewrite the Genesis story. Having been subservient for so long to a male order, she now attempts to break the bond of compliance. She begins, significantly, by taking back all the names

that Adam, as a symbolic representative of male dominance, had assigned to living breathing animals.

Assigning a name, to any object or species, indicates the combined presence of authority and power. This power manifests itself in the entitlement of someone to assign a name by which to refer to a certain subject, object, creature or human. In Le Guin's "She Unnames Them" Eve has taken over Adam's prerogative to name the creatures around him. By unnaming all the creatures that Adam has so far named she intends to free them from the domination of preconceptions.

Names categorize and specify subjects. The name as label then identifies certain formulated characteristics that we expect to find within those subjects. Any alterity is subject to question. We grow accustomed to use and reuse names without questioning the reason for their coming into being. As a result, over time these names are normalized, by acceptance of all their positive and negative implications without questioning.

Eve's process of unnaming all living things around her, shows an attempt to free those living things of preconceived notions of what they are. Eve, therefore, subverts the authority exerted through the naming process by unnaming the non-human world and even eventually unnaming herself. Thus Eve attempts to awaken a deadened consciousness, which permits an indifference that allows conditions to stay as they are. This indifference leads to names being 'accepted and ignored' at the same time. This attempt at freeing one's self from language parallels Julia Kristeva's take on the exploration of feminists in contemporary art who attempt "to break the code, to shatter language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnamable repressed by the social contract"[1] (24-25).

The importance of awakening a deadened consciousness as the primary stage of initiating change is emphasized in Le Guin's story by Eve's observation that most of the animals she has unnamed accept their new condition of namelessness with perfect indifference. The significance of the change in situation goes unnoticed to the animals who have accepted their condition as a pregiven. Prevalence of such a deadened consciousness nullifies the expected cataclysmic effect of the unnaming.

[1] Kristeva believes that through this subversive attempt at breaking the bonds of language she is not seeking to establish a "woman's language"; rather, she is attempting to arouse a deadened consciousness.

But the change is significant even though most animals do not realize it. Eve, therefore, feels the fear of going against and destroying everything that she took to be natural for so long because ". . .all the Linnaean qualifiers that had trailed along behind them for two hundred years like tin cans tied to a tail" (525). The reference underscores the naming process. As is obvious, when tin cans are tied to the tail of an animal the sound made by them banging on the road precedes the physical presence of the animal. This image signifies the connotation and denotation carried by the name itself which, however, resides apart from the actual animal. In most cases nomenclature is an imperfect process of identification in which the animal itself has no say. Its identity, therefore, has been defined by the name given to it by others.

Considering that postmodern theorists see identity as a cultural and linguistic construct, losing one's name is, thus, equivalent to the losing of one's identity. Eve's unnaming of creatures somehow equates them all and places them at the same level of existence. There is no high or low, no pride or prejudice, no expectation nor disappointment, and no stereotyped identities affecting relationships. The linguistic absence of symbolic identifiers suddenly does away with all sources of distinction and contradiction.

Such imposition of identity indicates a certain powerlessness. But this powerlessness is veiled to those in privileged positions within the signifying system. To them, there is nothing wrong with the system: all are equal, all are free. Similarly, those who are deprived and oppressed by the system and yet are in denial about their condition of servitude are also unwilling to part with a system that has served them well for so long.

For example, as we are told, "It was with the dogs, and with some parrots, lovebirds, ravens and mynahs that the trouble arose." It is interesting to note that all the birds and, of course, the dogs mentioned as denying to part with their name are domesticated. Habituated to regarding Man as their master, habituated to complete servitude and living under the protection of their masters, they have a false sense of equality and freedom.

What is implied here is that domestication has deadened the consciousness. These animals have no separate identity apart from their connection to their masters. Though they are told of their situation and given an option to change it, they are unwilling to do

so because they were "verbally talented" (525) i.e. they have had some say in their affairs and they are willing to stay as they are. They lack awareness of the injustice embedded in their situation. It is such deadened consciousness that Le Guin, through Eve, wishes to awaken.

Eventually, Eve convinces all animals and birds to give back their names. She then turns to unnaming herself and giving back the all the unwanted names Adam had given her. And he had told her to put her anxiety-ridden load of names down without even asking why she would want to do so. It is at that moment that all the uncertainty, fear, doubts, about her new identity comes to surface.

Eve hesitates. Her hesitation reveals the unwillingness with which she now proceeds towards an uncertain future. She responds to Adam's inquiry about dinner with the answer, "I'm not sure", indicating that she is uncertain of all that she was previously sure of. The line also reasserts the hesitancy on her part which would not be brought into consideration if the answer was a clear – "I don't know". Someone else has made her aware of the need to change her circumstances. And it is "With them" that she now leaves.

> "I'm going now. With the —" I hesitated, and finally said, "With them, you know," and went on out. (526)

Words such as 'finally' and 'hesitated' and her uneasiness clearly convey the message that she would have easily accepted an alternate solution to the problem if only Adam would cooperate and show some initiative.

Adam's indifference makes Eve sad. She sees no regret or anxiety in him. She wants to talk things through but he does not seem to be paying much attention. He is too busy fitting parts and assembling and reassembling them. His actions are symbolic of the man-made social system which he so adamantly builds and keeps together. Creating a whole assemblage, he overlooks the minute parts for what they are, parts of a whole. His indifference and lack of attention seem to reflect his policy of resistance to change. It is his way of saying that things are perfect as they are.

As it is, the image of 'fitting parts' sounds inorganic, lifeless and unalterable, as opposed to the image which the single word 'garden' brings to mind. He is so busy that he fails to see and understand *the person* who prepares dinner. He is totally unaware that

his wife could want anything more out of the relationship. This reflects a mindset that is fixed centered on the notion that what works for him in the family and social arena must inevitably work for the "other".

Eve, in this case, being the "other", finds herself frustrated at his inability to apprehend her stigma. This is a kind of betrayal to her as she is now forced to consider her position in the family and in society as a whole. Feeling disappointed and rejected by all that she has tried to build within the nexus of the family, she chooses, in her own way, to rise against such dominance.

In an attempt to reclaim the identity that has been denied her by the symbolic system at play, Eve exiles herself from the present, hoping to appear in the past and possibly the future. She hopes to be reinserted into a history in which her presence has been overlooked and negatively portrayed. She has alienated herself from the language that has worked for her for so long.

Eve realizes that all things will now appear to her in a different light. Accordingly, as medium of presentation her language must also change :

> "My words now must be as slow, as new, as single, as tentative as the steps I took going down the path away from the house, between the dark-branched, tall dancers motionless against the winter shining." (Guin 526)

Her words must be 'slow' because of her self-consciousness, 'new' because of the inherently new meanings they envelop, 'single' for she now she puts *I* instead of *we* at the forefront of her vocabulary, which is to be *tentative*, for she cannot anticipate what future awaits her in these changed circumstances. The semi-conscious state of unawareness has now receded. She can no longer naively "chatter away" (526).

For Eve, the consequence of her new found awareness is the end of naivety: the end of being oblivious of the oppression that works through language. She can no longer use words without thinking of their negative and burdening effect. Once one breaks free from the illusion that veils the power structures at work in society there is no turning back. Once one is aware of the social and political ramifications of each and every word and deed, each step becomes treacherous, each word a possible flaw.

Since her rebellion, Eve's previous less aware and more conforming identity has now been replaced by one which sees through the false illumination that blinded her

vision and prevented her from seeing the darkness and shadow that lurked behind her happiness. She is now denied the blinding light of false happiness.

The step she undertakes to re-examine the relationship with her husband echoes Kristeva's observation that whether they understand the source of their dissatisfaction or not, women in Europe are faced with the question of where language as representative of the symbolic order has placed them. They want to expose tradition for what it is and then transform it so as to include themselves within it , "no longer wishing to be excluded or no longer content with the function which has always been demanded" of them (Kristeva 24). She seems to suggest that going against the established order is like sacrificing all that one has perceived to be real. This epistemological uncertainty is a difficulty which Le Guin's Eve encounters towards the end of her story: "In fact, I had only just then realized how hard it would have been to explain myself. I could not chatter away as I used to, taking it all for granted" (526). As a result of this realization or newly found perception of the order of things, language is now burdened with the consciousness of being denied a voice.

Now that she is now less stable, more full of doubt, and more suspecting of the world around her, she will see things in a different light. But it is clear from her hesitation that she certainly has not given up on the relationship. Only, forced by circumstance to vent her frustration she still hesitates before leaving behind an identity which has "really been useful." Even till the last moment she shows concern for that which she leaves behind. Undoubtedly, she is prepared to listen if Adam is willing to talk.

What is clear from the discussion above then is that radically going against signifying systems that are considered to exempt and isolate women, and stop them from having a voice in society may be necessary, but only to a certain extent. Total eradication and rewriting of positionalities would only cause disorientation, sadness, confusion for female identity and would not change the mindset of the dominating group. Such an identity for women would not achieve a balance in power structures; rather, it would further isolate them.

The effects of isolation and conflict can have disturbing effects on identity formation. Furthermore, the dependence on mediated images as role models also psychologically and emotionally pushes a subject towards schizophrenia the definitive

psychological norm of postmodernism. The next text to be analyzed is the novel *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. In this novel Morrison portrays the devastating story of the identity formation of a girl child who being isolated both in and outside the family looks for models of identification in a fantasy world influenced by unattainable images of beauty and love.

(v) False Mirrors: Dependence on the World for Identification in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye.*

In an interview in 1978, Toni Morrison describes *The Bluest Eye* (1979) as a novel "about one's dependency on the world for identification, self value and feeling of worth". In her novel, Morrison has emphasized certain social and psychological aspects of identity formation through which the story of Pecola moves towards tragic proportions as she finds herself helplessly lacking encouraging models of identity for identification. By centering on the identity crisis of Pecola, Morrison's novel can be the basis of an interesting study of postmodern self-construction. The aspects of identity formation emphasized in the story are unsuitable for Pecola as models of identity because being derived from the media and cultural prejudice, they undermine her epistemological presence.

The reason why I have selected Pecola as the character most analogous to a postmodern self is because Pecola is an incomplete project in identity formation. In many ways her existence anticipates the identity of a postmodern "I" that is on a constant search for meaning and recognition within an uncertain ontological space. Both Pecola and a postmodern self look for places of identification outside the family; both are obsessed with beauty and false images; both are highly susceptible to outside influence; both display schizophrenic identities; both are trapped in their immaturity; both are unaware of the manipulation at work behind the fulfillment of their needs; and, of course, with no stable community to sustain a positive sense of self both Pecola and the postmodern "I" are unsure about their identity.

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* can be discussed in relation to identity construction in the following ways: (a) the need of a stable identity model from within the family; (b) the

negative impact of non-community: (c) the negative impact of an obsession with iconic beauty: (d) the effects of an unstable sense of morality: (e) the effect of having non-nurturing parents: (f) the disorientation of a self consumed by false images: and of course, (g) the negative effect of dependence on an unstable society for a feeling of worth.

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1969), is the story of Pecola, a black girl growing up in the 1930s. Her experience is both pathetic and eye-opening. In *The Bluest Eye* Toni Morrison clearly depicts the devastating effects of the of lack of a proper role model from within the family for identification and of internalization of oppression and rejection. Morrison shows how prevailing ideas and images of beauty as perpetuated through mediated images and social consciousness is enough to destroy one's self worth. The idea that beauty lies only in white skin, blue eyes and blonde hair, is an affront to the perception of the beauty of African-Americans. The racial implications of the appreciation of such beauty that negates the beauty of the other is quite clear.

In a 1993 "Afterword" to the novel, Morrison explains her stand in favor of a concept of racial beauty that is not meant to justify her retaliation but to show the devastating effect of not being able to love one's being.

> "The assertion of racial beauty was not a reaction to the self-mocking, humorous critique of cultural /racial foibles common in all groups, but against the damaging internalization of assumptions of immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze." (Morrison,"Afterword"168)

Morrison's insight into the damage done by the gaze of others upon the development of one's own self worth is what got her into writing about Pecola. The novel depicts the effect of taking things to heart before one learns how to protect oneself from negative comments. It is only with a strong and stable sense of self that one can shield oneself from adverse verbal and physical attacks. Ironically, the only time Pecola has a sense of self strong enough to retaliate is when she has already lost her mind and is hallucinating while looking into the mirror. Morrison observes about Pecola in her Afterward, "she is not seen by herself until she hallucinates a self" (171).

Interestingly, the sense of "immutable inferiority originating in an outside gaze" that Morrison tells us of, has become an aspect integrated with the postmodern sense of

the self. The postmodern self, like Pecola, consistently faces a sense of inferiority as it faces the "outside gaze" of society which is conditioned by media images. But what makes matters worse for Pecola is that she judges herself against the perception of a mediated gaze emanating not only from the outside but also from within her family. Her family does not provide the sense of security that it should and she has nowhere to turn to for a role model except the images of beauty provided by the silver screen.

Pecola's mother Pauline fails her. She cannot provide her daughter with the strong sense of security and love necessary for the strong construction of the self, because Pauline is too engrossed with herself and the images of beauty that she has derived from the silver screen. Pauline is blind to the needs of her daughter. Such needs, once fulfilled, could have helped Pecola through any situation. Pauline's knowledge of the world is limited to her experience of the world perceived through the images of the silver screen. These are images that provoke ideas about romantic love and physical beauty that destroy both her and her daughter.

> Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another- physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion. In equating physical beauty with virtue, she stripped her mind, bound it, and collected self-contempt by the heap" (Morrison 95)

Movies create an illusion of reality which cannot be met by reality. The void created by the images depicted on the movie screen is sustained by envy and insecurity and results in disillusion with the self and with the condition it is in. It is through comparison and disillusionment that one is overcome with self-contempt.

Educated by a movie screen, Pauline has no sense of self other that that which she has seen portrayed. She is obsessed with " the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought" (Morrison 95). She weighs all beauty with that of the cinema. Naturally, nothing can match those standards. The cinematic experience changes Pauline. This resulted in her judgement of beauty based on cinematic standards:

> She was never able after her education in the movies to look at a face and not assign it some scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one that she absorbed in full from the silver screen. (Morrison 95)

As a result, Pauline does not care much about Pecola since she is neither cute nor pretty. She does not love Cholly more because he is not romantic enough. She demands more of herself and others than logically possible and, thereby, destroys every ounce of self-worth anyone can ever wish to have in her presence. Unknowingly, she assists in her own daughter's ruin since Pecola has never felt love as a presence in her life.

Pecola is always being made fun of for the color of her skin. She is saddened by her experience. But she is not strong enough or confident enough to fight back. Claudia, on the other hand, takes pride in adopting a different perspective that has come from a different upbringing.

> " We were lesser. Nicer, brighter but still lesser. Dolls we could destroy, but we could not destroy the honey voices of parents and aunts, the obedience in the eyes of our peers, the slippery light in the eyes of our teachers when they encountered the Maureen Peals of the world. What was the secret ? What did we lack? Why was it important ? And so what?
>
> (Morrison 57)

The "so what?" is an expression of Claudia's strong resistance to the prejudice she sees in the eyes of her peers and teachers in favor of Maureen Peel, a real life embodiment of the pretty Shirley Temple. It was the extra-attention that Maureen got in the form of "obedience" from her peers and favors from her teachers that troubled Claudia. Claudia wanted to know why such things happened and why though Claudia and her sister (even Pecola), were nicer than Maureen they were always considered lesser because they were less beautiful. It was this rage that Claudia took out on the blue-eyed, blonde haired, fair-skinned dolls that her parents expected her to be proud of possessing. The doll had none of the attributes she had. Accepting it as beautiful would mean that she was not so. At least no one made her feel that she was attractive. She dismembered the dolls to see *where* its beauty lay.

Claudia is confident of her self because she knows that the origin of her fears is not in something real. She sees it as the fault of all around her that they see white skin, big blue eyes and curly golden hair as beautiful. It is this comparison to that ideal of beauty that acts against the self-esteem of a child. Prejudice is "the Thing" to fear :

"The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us."

(Morrison 58)

She knows prejudice is real but she resists it as best she can. She does not internalize that fear for, as Lorde warns us, it is not to be internalized. Unfortunately, Pecola does internalize the idea that she is not as beautiful as Shirley Temple (image-2). She does not realize that her looks are not her fault. She feels guilty for not having Shirley's beautiful eyes and skin. Pecola's insecurities fill her with a self-loathing that she can never mend until she imagines herself as having blue eyes. By then it is too late to save herself. She is already psychologically ill. Entirely influenced by external images and negative experiences, her identity formation is in jeopardy.

image 2 : Shirley Temple

Pecola is so ashamed of her appearance that she thinks that this is the reason behind her not being loved. Like her mother, she is obsessed with what a beautiful woman should be like i.e. as pretty as Shirley Temple and as glamorous as Hollywood stars. Her hope is that –

> If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, "Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes." (Morrison 34)

The deprivation of her soul leads to her low self-esteem and degraded self image. As a result "she would never know her beauty. She would see only what there was to see: the eyes of other people"(Morrison 35). Judging herself through other people's eyes, she only sees the flaws within herself .

The only eyes she can find that do not judge her for the way she is are those of the prostitutes she goes to talk to, from time to time. Deprived of motherly love, Pecola lacks true nurturing from within her family; thus, the only people she finds she can go to are the prostitutes that live near her.

Claudia, though, clearly feels the love at home. Although it is not the perfect image of the loving family that the reader is confronted with at the beginning of the story, in the extract from a picture depicting the standard American family consisting of fair-

skinned parents with a home and garden where children are happily playing with their pet dog, while their parents watch smilingly. Her family could never manage to measure up to that image. Yet she knew there was love within hers. Even though her mother would get angry at her for getting ill, she knew –

> Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window. I could smell it- taste it- sweet, musty, with an edge of wintergreen in its base- everywhere in that house. . . When I think of autumn, I think of somebody with hands does not want me to die. (Morrison 7)

This sincere love is the source of the strength behind her energy to resist. She feels with all her senses the presence of a love that sustains her, in spite of the fact that she is not as beautiful as Maureen and in spite of the fact that she spoils the bedsheets with vomit and is a difficult child when she is ill.

This is a feeling Pecola does not have. This is why Pecola is so insecure. And this is why she internalizes all the prejudice and injustice that infects her. Unlike Claudia, Pecola has not been brought up in an atmosphere of healthy love. If she would have been prepared that way then she would have been able to say like Claudia,

> Guileless and without vanity, we were still in love with ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our skins, enjoyed the news that our senses released to us, admired our dirt, cultivated our scars, and could not comprehend our unworthiness. (Morrison 57)

Claudia and her sister can fight back because they are "comfortable" in their skins. They rejoice at their connection to the world. They are not ashamed of the scars that tarnish their faces because they are proof of their experience of life and evidence that they were alive and feeling things for real. A positive attitude about one's self can indeed make all the difference.

But Morrison shows another side to the optimism embodied in her depiction of Claudia. It is a mirror image of that which precedes yet echoes the disastrous fate of Pecola. In the same way that Pecola is deluded thinking she is happy to have blue eyes, Marie, one of the prostitutes that appear in Morrison's novel, happily accepts her position in the world with the words "Girl, when I found out I could sell it – that somebody would pay cold cash for it, you could have knocked me over with a feather" (Morrison 42). A

false sense of power is at work here. In both cases it seems that each in their own way have defied and defeated the system of oppression. Unfortunately, neither of them realize that they are still bound within it. Possibly the thought that they had taken things quite successfully into their own hands is what leaves them smiling.

Pecola's story, Morrison tells the reader in the Afterward, is not a representative one; rather, it is quite unique. It is through this story that Morrison explores "the social and domestic aggression that could cause a child to literally fall apart" (168). Pecola ultimately goes insane because of extreme self-loathing that came of pressures she faced both inside and outside the family. She could only accept herself after she had those imaginary blue eyes. It seems that the postmodern self finds itself necessary to be in a fluid state to be constantly ready to change in accordance with the images the media projects. This change becomes necessary for the postmodern self because it internalizes the sense of physical, psychological and emotional inadequacy created by those images.

One could liken the postmodern subject to a child such as Pecola who looks outside herself for a sense of self. Pecola, finding none but those that confront her racial looks, fixates her identity on an image of beauty that cannot be fulfilled and will naturally leave her with a sense of lack. She imagines that she has blue eyes. The only way Pecola could cope with the extreme injustice she faced i.e. not being loved by her mother, being abused by her peers, being ignored by society as a whole, and ultimately being raped by her own father, was by creating a new self that was beautiful and had blue eyes. She refused to confront her feelings regarding Cholly (her father) and what he did. She created an illusory world and an illusory identity for herself, resisting the pressures of a reality that caused her to go insane.

Similarly, in a postmodern world subjects are defiled by the love shown by a consumer culture which projects images of care, concern, love, for one's person, health and body but in reality is just concerned about material gain. The postmodern subject is obsessed with self-construction because it is made to always feel less than perfect in lifestyle, fashion, skin tone and texture, in body structure. The postmodern subject fills the gap of feeling inadequate by constructing selves in accordance with the lack that it feels at any given time. Underlying that lack is a strong sense of loathing for a body not

proportionate enough, for a skin tone not fair enough, for hair not shiny enough, for a breath not fresh enough, for a self not confident enough – the list could go on for ever.

Postmodern subjects escape that feel of lack by buying products that offer a route out of the feeling of not being enough and also by performance of identities and lifestyles which temporarily provide a sense of adequacy. As these products are used, and as these images loom large, a new self is created to match the product or the image that is seen as the ideal. Like Pecola's getting blue eyes the illusion of novelty is acquired through the detachment of the previous self and everything associated with it. One lives in a continuous present, constantly finding oneself in and out of love with the selves that are created.

The discussion of the narratives above clearly shows how postmodernism and feminism can work combinedly to free the subject from overarching power structures active both prominently and discreetly in society. What must be kept in view are realities. The first step against the dissolution of oppression is identifying it in all its guises.

The main questions that arise from an analysis of postmodern women's texts, are as follows: Why do feminists see themselves to be independent and free only when they relinquish their duties as mother and wife? Are these roles so incompatible in their minds with their aspirations and fulfillment? Why sacrifice all the beauty and happiness of a wholesome family relationship in order to prove that it is possible to live without the opposite sex? Why is it that the so-called freedom leads back to paths of uncontrolled and unwarranted sexuality? Why is it that all roads of emancipation lead back to the oppression and commodification of the human form that women have been trying to escape from the very beginning?

The contradiction in postmodern identity is the coming to terms with the necessity of a fully functioning and healthy social life as opposed to a self-centered one obsessed with consumption. Julia Kristeva offers a way out in her advocacy of inclusion of the roles of mother and wife in the psyche of the postmodern female which will also permit the presence of the opposite sex. The postmodern world of life and literature allows for a greater variety of female roles. The possibility for assimilation of opposites that lies in postmodern concepts of identity construction should be utilized to overcome oppression in its naked form (pun intended). Multi-tasking has become the norm. Women should

use this concept to break free of the manipulative stance in sexuality and indeed do their best at constructing an identity that envelops an array of possibilities which are conducive to a climate of mutual understanding.

Finding a congenial atmosphere of self-expression in postmodernism, feminist narratives have begun to voice the concerns of women in groups and as individuals. Stories of women and their pains and suffering are now part of global literatures. Instead of martyrs and wars, gods and superheroes, literature is being acquainted with previously silenced domestic affairs which expose social injustice occurring at a personal level. Now, nearly everyone is nonjudgmental but unfortunately, to an extent, unaware of the political and cultural significance that underlies nearly all narration. Postmodernism, therefore, can be a great ally to the feminist understanding and construction of the self.

However, embedded within these narratives of identity formation is the underlying fear that postmodernism may not be able to deliver all that it promises. As seen in the discussion of feminist narratives above, the freedom promised by feminism is undercut by actions of self-abasement, self-victimization, self-denial and self-detachment which result in a highly destabilized and dissatisfied identity which is unsure of its time and place in society.

But these selves are not confined to feminist explorations of identity construction. Nearly all identities offered by American culture ultimately lead the postmodern subject to relentlessly and addictively pursue goals which offer only temporary satiation. Therefore, what postmodernism promises as unconditional freedom, turns out to be as uncertain as the atmosphere from which it arises.

This compulsion for freedom and significance that works as the drive behind postmodern identity construction can thus, in its repetitive, restless, relentless, irrational form, be seen as kind of addiction that has overrun contemporary American culture. Paradoxically postmodern freedom entails repetition, self-consciousness, dependence and dissatisfaction. In the next chapter, the addictive stances of postmodern identity formation is discussed with reference to contemporary American films as a source of visual narratives which disseminate and reflect "addict identities"[5] of postmodern American culture.

[5] "Addict identities" is a term which refers to identities that demonstrate compulsive behaviour. The use of the term will be clarified in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

Contemporary American Film and Narratives of Addiction.

So far in this dissertation, discussion of American identity construction has been based on written texts concerned directly or indirectly with, the portrayal of American identity both at individual and national levels in Chapter One; changes brought about in the identity of the literary author in Chapter Two; and, the varied aspects of non-traditional and perplexed female identities as portrayed in postmodern feminist narratives in Chapter Three. In this chapter, in lieu of written narratives, the discussion centers on postmodern identity construction as portrayed in visual narratives. In this case, contemporary American films have been discussed as narratives of addiction that reflect on how the constructed identity of the postmodern subject, subsumed in addictive behavior, never matches up to the promise of unlimited happiness and total control of one's life.

In contemporary culture, when disciplines merge and theories overlap, films can effectively be referred to as visual texts which act as access points to understanding social and philosophical crosscurrents. Since it has been established that the importance of media images, in both disseminating and reflecting ideas related to identity formation, is overwhelming, at this point of the dissertation it is pertinent to go further into the discussion of the contradiction that lies at the heart of postmodern identities by analyzing contemporary American films. The discussion in this chapter, in particular, centers on addict identities as created in contemporary American films.

When looking at the culture of contemporary America and at such identities that are born of that culture, one aspect comes to the forefront i.e. the compulsive behavior pattern of postmodern identities. It is common knowledge that in the postmodern worldview, the relation between signifiers and signifieds is constantly shifting. As cultural norms change so does language. That being said, it may be mentioned that, one word which had extremely negative implications in the past is now taking on a more commonly acceptable meaning. That word is "addiction". This word having been somewhat purged of the extreme negativity associated with it, is now used to refer to the compulsive identities commonly seen to evolve from postmodern lifestyles. Those identities of behavioral, psychological and emotional obsession are now referred to as

"addict identities". Such identities show – lack a of intellectual awareness, an absence of rational reflection, ethical relativity, an obsessive drive towards self-satisfaction, and narcissim.

Previously the word "addiction" was used to refer exclusively to a physical and psychological dependence on a consciousness altering substances such as alcohol, heroin or other drugs. But in contemporary culture, addiction has come to assume a variety of meanings across disciplines. As "addiction" is now more commonly interchangeable with the word "dependence", any type of behavior that is compulsively repeated can also be referred to as an addiction. Thus, any dependency that has issues of self-control and that can be identified as something that has negative effects on one's identity or affects interaction with one's immediate surroundings, even if it does not include direct abuse of pharmacological substances, can be regarded as an addiction. Addiction, therefore, is no longer a strictly medical term; rather, in signifying compulsive cultural behavior, it has become a common cultural signifier. Addiction in this sense can be used to refer to obsessive behavior connected to computers, the internet, TV, work, mobile technology, shopping, and even food.

David Forbes begins his analysis of American cultural addiction in the first chapter of his book *False Fixes: the Cultural Politics of Drugs, Alcohol and Addictive Relations* (1994) with the admission, "To say America is an addictive society is to risk saying nothing by saying too much [. . .] we live in a commodity society whose citizens crave techno-fixing for everything and who overdose on cars and designer sneakers" (3). By using words such as "crave" and "overdose", Forbes places compulsive behavior and drug addiction on the same plane of reference. So, what he is actually saying is that American Society breeds addictions in many forms and a highly active consumer culture contributes to the problem.

In contemporary thought, addictive behavior is seen as a response to external social influences. Furthermore, in current usage it does not always imply an extreme debilitating loss of control. Rather, addiction to certain activities is seen by many as pure enthusiasm, as in the case of computer games that are played for hours on end or in the use of mobile technology continually throughout the day. But in reality, this is a denial of the true state of things. What has happened is that America has become obsessed with consumption of material goods and also, for that matter, abstract ideas and alternate signifying systems represented by brand names. The reason for this is that addictions of

all sorts seem to provide individuals with comfort and security in a world that is increasingly seen as being out of control.

What adds to this sense of being out of control is the complete breakdown of traditional institutions that had once provided support against change. For example, with the breakdown of extended and even unitary families, children and adults lack stable support from within caring relations; as religion takes a backseat to worldly affairs, frustration is intensified. *Winning*, then, becomes more important than participating; city jobs require a relocation away from familiar environments; in many cases both parents have started working outside the home and are too busy for their children. As a consequence the child may gradually be emotionally and psychologically distanced from them; the pressure to retain a *decent* lifestyle increases as the bar is raised as to what is *decent*; the media dominates all perceptions; thus perceptions are distorted, manipulated and seen as unsteady etc. All of these changes add to the instability of values and affect social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

As Robert Granfield observes in "Addiction and Modernity: A Comment on a Global Theory of Addiction", "Addiction and dependency become ways of coping with the personal fragmentation experienced in social life". Social life is fragmented due to dislocation through migration, perceived loss of status, affinity towards goods as symbols of identity, uncertainty of social mobility, uncertainty of relationships, breakdown of family support systems, etc. In other words, the main emotion behind addiction is a strong feeling of loss which leads to the kind of ontological and epistemological instability that frustrates and dislocates an individual. Thus, "the dislocation experienced in modern society contributes to addiction because for many, addiction becomes a potent source of meaning in advanced society" (32). Since the advanced society is usually, like America, a consumerist one, sources of meaning perfectly fit the capitalist agenda.

It is common knowledge nowadays that people in modern societies create their identities through the products they consume. Images of consumption in varied forms subsume America on a daily basis. Such images dominate both public and private life, offering the contemporary subject the freedom of lifestyle options which are, paradoxically self-delineating. In other words, the identities offered are of individuals trapped in self-conscious obsession with pure satisfaction. Indeed, the excesses encouraged by a consumer culture verge on the irrational. The consumer is no longer concerned with the sincerity of the portrayal of the media, and is open to diverse possibilities of experience and subjectivities. Whatever the senses experience through

media becomes more real than real. Therefore, the media becomes a major gateway to perception of the world and thereby it (the media) becomes a means of conferring meaning.

Anyhow, it was this kind of submersion in consumption that gave rise to the concept of an addict as a particular type of identity. Gerda Reith points out the attributed characteristics of such an identity in "Consumption and its Discontents: Addiction, Identity and the Problems of Freedom". According to Reith, "The figure of 'the addict' was characterized as a deviant identity; one that was lacking in will power, and whose consumption was characterized by frenzied craving, repetition and loss of control" (289). Addiction, thus, signifies a lack of will power that results in "being overwhelmed and even destroyed by immoderate impulses" (ibid) that problematize relations in the new consumer economy.

Addictive behavior, therefore, entails putting one's 'freedom to choose' at stake by giving in to new forms of enslavement. Such propensity towards self-destruction and self-enslavement is why R. Porter in "Addicted to Modernity: Nervousness in the Early Consumer Society", quite clearly refers to, "the acquisitive society" as an "addictive society" (180). The four types of addiction that this chapter highlights through a discussion of the films, *A Scanner Darkly*, *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, *Memento* and *Avatar* are, respectively, addiction to drugs, shopping, power, and technology. Our discussion on postmodern identity, will now move on to the world of contemporary American film. This is because as a form of mass visual entertainment, films reflect social attitudes in a specific and vivid manner. Like novels, plays, and paintings fictional films often reveal aspects of identity construction through character selection and portrayal, story, editing techniques, language, imagery, and an array of technical apparatus. In this way films are both, contextually and technically, influenced by society and in turn influence society. The generation that is fed and brought up on diversely available media images, adopts them as life-style choices which contribute to self-narration and identity formation. But, before going into a discussion of the films mentioned, it is better to further clarify the addictive stance of the areas under discussion which create addict identities. So before analysis of each of the films there is a brief discussion on the nature of the addictions highlighted.

(i) Drug Addiction and *A Scanner Darkly* (2006)

From the time the word "addiction" being used in medical terminology, it has mainly been associated with drugs and alcohol. Addiction drains the world of meaning as it destabilizes reality and a stable sense of self. According to David Forbes in his book *False Fixes*, a competitive society like America denies the basic dignity of each person, therefore, "Americans take drugs to medicate themselves for feelings of insecurity, sorrow, pain, anger, boredom, or just to become numb. But in other cases they do so to relax, escape, play, be sociable, be powerful [. . .]." (Forbes 11).

For whatever reason someone takes drugs, it turns out that drug-induced solutions are only short lived for that person. Once habituated to taking drugs, an addict needs repetitive and increasingly higher doses of drugs to attain the initial effect. This enslaves the user to a point that no cost is too high or her for his addiction. Loss of trust, friendship, family, and love, are but a few of the losses which ultimately result in a loss of both identity and certainty about one's life.

The false lure of drugs and the illusory sense of power over one's life leads ultimately to disillusionment and addiction bleaks prospects for a meaningful existence for the addict. Life and relationships come to matter less and less as addiction to the drug becomes stronger than all other needs until it eventually blocks out all life. Deprived of meaning, life becomes an erratic and uncertain torturous journey toward insignificance. At times the addict can somehow see the damaged condition of his life, but it is sometimes too late for him/her to turn back or do anything to fix the situation.

To discuss the addictive condition of postmodern identity construction which negates the existence of a stable self that one can turn to, I have selected Philip K.Dick's rotoscopic film *A Scanner Darkly* in which the protagonist Bob, an undercover police officer, is physically and psychologically addicted to a drug named "Substance D". His addiction not only refers to substance abuse, it symbolically parallels the postmodern subject's addictive behavior derived from a culture that creates a similar fragmented, insecure, disoriented, and superficial identity that is obsessed with change.

A Discussion of *A Scanner Darkly* (2006)

This section focuses on how addictive behavior confuses the senses and logic to the extent that it disrupts and disintegrates one's self-narrative, thereby destroying all possibilities of actually enjoying freedom through self-construction. If a single word could be used to encapsulate the postmodern frenzy for detachment and flux, it would be "addiction". The psychological craving is artificially created but once initiated, it becomes inescapable. Addiction destroys the postmodern subject's ability to affect a balance between change and constancy. Change and stability are constantly maladjusted and posited against each other. As a result, personal identity disintegrates and collapses and is never at peace with circumstances.

The film *A Scanner Darkly* depicts a culture of addiction to which, according to the main protagonist Bob Arctor, not even children are "too little to be addicted" (0:16:18-0:16:20) [1]. The addiction to substance D promises the constant euphoric state sought after in postmodern life. The postmodern man/woman is addicted to identity change, instability, euphoria. But living in a constant rush has its downside. The loss of a stable identity results in disorientation, depression, emptiness and loneliness.

At the very beginning of the film, its protagonist, Bob Arctor, is referred to as a "constantly shifting vague blur" (0:5:24-0:5:27). The question mark surrounding Arctor's identity, therefore, begins from the very start. This is intensified by his own utterance, "There's a lot about Bob Arctor you don't know." Even when he is not wearing the scramble suit and his face is clearly visible the question lurks at the back of the viewer's mind, "Who is Bob Arctor?" It seems that he is one of the good guys, an undercover policeman, but then he is asked to put himself under surveillance. This further intensifies the mystery surrounding his identity. Arctor is assigned the duty of watching and reviewing his own actions from 24 hour surveillance tapes. The use of external observation to identify the self signals the postmodern shift from introspection to projection as the criterion for judgement. This shift in observation technique reveals the postmodern emphasis on exteriority or the idea that one's self is to be judged by observation of behavior and speech and not introspection.

[1] Since *I have transcripted* the quotations directly from the films there are no page references to mention. So, I have mentioned the timeframe within brackets wherever applicable.

Due to his addiction, Arcter now lives in a hyperreal realm of hallucinatory images where he is constantly shifting between the real world and the imaginary one. His sense of time, space and self is blurred to the extreme. Living in a constantly aroused state, Arcter becomes more and more dependent on substance D to sustain his feelings of well-being. He does not even realize the seriousness of his condition until it is too late. Likewise, the addictive stance of postmodern technological society goes untraced until it destroys all sensibility. Without it, life becomes totally passive.

Monika Fludernick in "Identity/Alterity", points out that "identity is an accumulation of performative stances and memories of past experiences which creates a continuity of self-understanding between roles and between contexts" (261). The self-narrative is based, therefore, on performative acts. Remembrance of those acts in particular contexts create a sense of identity. Taken to an extreme this indicates the consequences of a loss or confusion of memory that results in a negation of any sense of self or stable identity. As seen in *A Scanner Darkly* Arcter's confusion about the reality of his memories lead him to doubt all that is around him to the extent that he even fails to recognize himself.

Arcter's surveillance recordings interfere with the perception of his own identity. His drug-induced paranoia and cognitive deterioration compromises his sense of self hopelessly. Conspiracy, addiction, paranoia, surveillance, and delusion combine to result in Arcter's breakdown and alienation from any self-image or reliable thought. Arcter eventually thinks, and speaks of himself in the third person. He does not recognize himself as he watches the video footage of his actions. In constantly denying himself a reality and pretending to be what he is not he eventually ends up having a doubtful presence. Not knowing whether he is Bob, Bruce or Fred reflects a sense of helplessness about his identity.

This is a world where even friends cannot be trusted and memories tend to blur. Arcter says he has two children but then he is told they are only figments of his own imagination. Unable to discern what is true and what is not, he is gradually pushed towards insanity. His condition deteriorates as the substance he consumes eventually consumes him and his perception of the world. The fact that he discovers new things about himself when he watches the tapes makes his situation all the more disorienting, especially because he finds that he cannot even trust himself. When he sees himself with a prostitute, an event he cannot remember a few hours later, he realizes that he cannot even be sure about his own actions.

The atmosphere of instability surrounds him due to a constant doubt noticeable in every interaction with others and even in the exchanges that take place within the apparent privacy of the home. The sense of uncertainty and doubt is further augmented by devices of manipulation i.e. untrue fragmented narratives, suggestions of suspicion and doubt (regarding Arcter's involvement in drug trafficking, Donna's relationship with Arcter, whether or not Arcter had a family, whether his friends are truly friends, whether or not Barris was truly insane, etc), media influences on behavior and decision making (Arcter's surveillance tapes, radio narrative which pushes Free to nearly commiting suicide, etc.) and topics of discussion which constantly centre around suspicions of identity.

The focus on the theme of identity is intensified by the discussion of Arcter's friends. The discussion centers on a man who claims to be a world famous imposter. The main interest is how he proudly claims to have evaded detection and managed to pass himself off at one time or another, "as a surgeon at John Hopkins, as theoretical submolecular high velocity particle researcher on a federal grant at Harvard, as a Finnish novelist who won the Nobel prize for literature, as a deposed Argentinean President who married a go-go dancer from Chicago" (0:52:29-0:52:47). The fact that this person got the inspiration to act as a world class imposter from watching a film starring Leonardo Di Caprio (Most probably *Catch Me if You Can)* which he had seen while he was staying at Disneyland seems to suggest that society has become one big simulation and life is no more than mediated experience. Now people create life situations from what they see and hear on media screens. This emphasizes the Baudrillian observation that people today are obsessed with simulation and fantasy as it comes to them through the media. This causes identity construction to be twice removed from the truth.

Arcter implies that all addiction is self-induced because we do not realize the amount of self-disintegration and manipulation that is involved in our dealings with human and non-human technologies. This is clear from his comment on substance D, where he declares "If there were no demand in our society, there would be no market for those legions to exploit" (0:07:02-0:07:07). This also implies that when we are addicted to something we actually give up on our own conscious agency i.e. the ability to determine what is actually going on in our lives. As a result, instead of being in control of our happiness we actually lose control over it.

In *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, N.K. Hayles identifies conscious agency as the essence of human

identity. According to Hayles, "Sacrifice this [conscious agency], and we humans are hopelessly compromised, [and] contaminated with mechanic alienness in the very heart of our humanity". Like Arcter, individuals living in societies that promote unnatural addictive behavior lose their grip on reality and the world which only nurtures fragmentation and dissatisfaction. Under the guise of well-doing newer technological advancements blur the boundaries of the human and the nonhuman, the real and the simulated, thereby releasing energies which where hitherto controlled by societal codes. Such fragmentation leads to addictions to states that destroy all sense of the self and stability and eventually absorb and consume the consumer into realms from which there is no escape. In a postmodern society a subject like Arcter assumes that he is free and in control of his world. Unfortunately, just as Arcter does not see that he is being manipulated into becoming a mindless wreck, so postmodern subjects fail to see how they and their choices are manipulated.

Arcter is an undercover police officer fighting against the pervasive spread of substance D in society. He induces his own drug addiction in an attempt to infiltrate enemy grounds. Unfortunately, what he thought he was feigning and under control is not. He is gradually gripped by an addiction that totally numbs and disorients him and destroys his sense of self. All becomes a blur. Right and wrong, true and false merge and overlap so that he is unable to distinguish his own identity. An assumed identity, for him, becomes more real than a real one.

As in Arcter's life, in today's society technology has infiltrated even the most personal of spaces. Nearly all good intentions fail because one is devoid of the sensibility needed to see them through. Intimate relationships are destroyed as feigned relationships come to the forefront. In "The Matrix: Or, The Two Sides of Perversion" Slavoj Zizek writes of such destruction of intimacy and true friendship in the following way, "In late capitalist consumerist society 'real social life' itself somehow acquires the features of a staged fake, with our neighbors behaving in 'real' life as stage actors and extras. The ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian despiritualized universe is the dematerialization of 'real life' itself, its reversal into a spectral show" (243). Zizek points out the bleak side of postmodern living where every action and reaction in every relationship seems like staged reality. Nothing comes naturally anymore. All actions are simulated according to necessity resulting in extreme confusion about what is real and what is not.

Similarly, Arcter's world allows us to see the downside of a technology-obsessed culture when even physical presence cannot ensure mental and emotional presence. Role-

playing becomes easier and easier. Techniques of deception become much more advanced. This is life on the fast track. No limits, no bindings, no sacrifices, no permanent connections – one is fast paced into a free floating existence that ultimately makes one insignificant.

Ultimately, the euphoria of leading a carefree life with no bindings dissipates. Once Arcter was fed up with the relentless stability of life where "nothing would ever change". The epiphany that he has after hurting his finger on the cabinet door is that he hates everything about his life.

> I realized I didn't hate the cabinet door. I hated my life, my house, my family, my backyard, my power mower. Nothing would ever change. Nothing new could ever be expected. It had to end. And it did. Now, in the dark world where I dwell, ugly things, surprising things, sometimes little wonderous things spill out in me constantly. I can count on nothing. (0:34:03-0:34:54)

He was bored with everything that constituted normal life and with his family and friends. He yearned for something wondrous and surprising – something he could not anticipate. The dark world of addiction gradually isolates and alienates him from all that ever mattered to him – his dedication to the workforce, his intentions to free society of drugs, his values and his interests. And there comes a time when he can "count on nothing." But, eventually he realizes that having no sureity in life is not at all as wonderful as he once thought it to be.

Oblivious of the stability of his previous life and identity Arcter sees everything around him to be inconsequential. He has lost touch with reality and has attained a kind of freedom that is not fulfilling. After losing everything that identified him, Arcter looks at his devastated backyard and sees it to be a waste of space and continues - "A family and children could live here" (1:14:31). The lawn has become a weedpatch, the cat box never gets emptied. Arcter feels a void because he has lost contact with humanity and true care.

Arcter never understands the manipulation at work behind the dehumanization process. He has become a scapegoat. Unknowingly he has been made an addict so that he can someday expose the hypocrisy of *New Path Recovery Centre*. Ultimately he does discover that New Path, the very organization meant to cure and rid society of addiction to substance D, has covert operations through which it is actually producing and distributing it in society. Unfortunately, he is not fit enough to put that information to use.

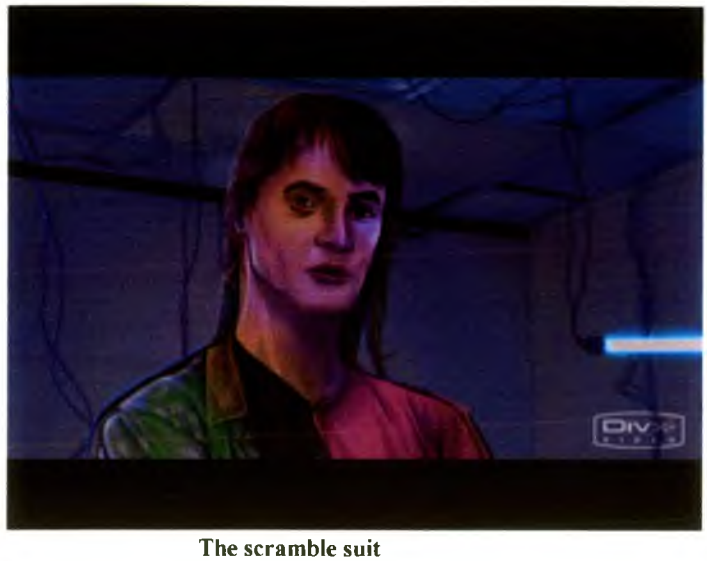
With most of his brain cells damaged due to his addiction to substance D, he has lost all realization of right and wrong, good and bad, friend and foe, human and insect. He gradually lapses into a vegetative state where images, sounds, and language pass him by without actually arousing any sensation in him. Without a sense of purpose in his life Arctor's life becomes meaningless. The fact that he picks up a flower and hides it as a present to later be given to his friends gives rise to hope that he may eventually overcome the passive state he has fallen into.

When Arctor is told of the institute's decision to send him to work in the fields he wants to work with something living. He expresses a desire to work with animals. The fact that Arctor wants to be with something living seems to display a spark of humanity within him. He reveals a trait that he had apparently lost long ago when he spoke of his life with hatred. The hope is that his addict identity is not something permanent and irreversible.

In *A Scanner Darkly* the first technical aspect that adds to the dehumanization of the postmodern subject is the rotoscopic effect applied to the visuals. Rotoscopy is used to create animated characters by tracing an action film with real actors frame by frame. Rotoscoping can be used to create actual cartoons or to create cartoon-like films in which the actors are recognizable and the venues seem real, but the entire motion picture has a cartoon-like quality. The effect of rotoscopy is that it emphasizes the superficiality of the performance that shrouds the world in unreal fantasy.

In this film, this technique captures the pessimistic mood of self-disintegration. The postmodern subject is addicted to change and feels suffocated at any hint of restriction. The constant and varied performances of identity destroy any possibility of stability. Life-narrative is void of depth as it forfeits the real to grab on to the hyperreal and uncertain. The more language is used to manipulate and hide, the more it loses its validity. This breakdown in narrative signals the uncertainty of one's identity where it is difficult to discern who to trust and where even one's own senses cannot be trusted.

This disorientation and dehumanization is furthered by the blurring of boundaries between technology and human entities. Technology, through the creation of "Substance D", the creation of a "Scramble Suit" and then through confusing video footage, assists in totally destroying his critical ability and thereby, his sense of self. In the case of postmodernism, its addictive position in favor of a free subjectivity which escapes any and all control systems seems to hit a blank spot when confronted by the emptiness and indifference that ensues from detachment from a sense of self.



The scramble suit

Arcter's disintegration of identity is physically reconstructed in the film through a device referred to as the "scramble suit". The device scrambles all physical data that would help identify the wearer of the suit. As the rapidly changing image of fragmented faces and voices are projected onto this shroudlike costume it is impossible to identify who is speaking from within. This is the ultimate manifestation of a loss of identity: the assuming of identity that is untraceable, unstable, and non-definable. The positivism of diversity, change and multiplicity seems to dissolve into emptiness and nothingness as any concept of identity becomes meaningless.

Arcter has to refer to himself in the third person in order to retain his anonymity while wearing the scramble suit. This performance of unaffectedness when referring to himself leads to a detachment both emotional and psychological when he refers to the images of himself depicted on the screen. Forced to hide his true identity because of his role as undercover police officer he refuses to acknowledge the image of Bob Arcter that he sees on the screen, as his own. As his addiction deepens, and this performance of denial strongly lays its impressions on his mind, he actually fails to recognize himself as Arcter and begins doubting the screen Arcter's moves. Unfortunately, this situation is then aggravated when he is specifically given orders to tighten surveillance on Bob Arcter as the prime suspect in trafficking illegal drugs. He reports on Arcter's activities with suspicion and doubt. And often he is unable to associate himself with what happens on the screen. This muddle of alternate existences and identities is similar to what postmodern subjects feel as they constantly play out different social roles. Sometimes, as in Arcter's case, it is difficult to discover and understand the person behind the persona. The constant question is - How much is real ? How much feigned?


Arcter hallicinates that his friend is a giant cockroach.

Another way of depicting Arcter's mental turmoil over his identity is through his hallucinative states. These hallucinations occur because his addiction to substance D pits both sides of his brain in a contest with each other. As a result, image and meaning present themselves differently to him. There is a blurring of boundaries between the real and the imaginary. He is confused and disoriented as his hallucinations become more and more menacing for him. When he goes for his medical check-ups he sees the set of doctors he has talked to change, the moment he turns around. He sees his friends turn into gigantic insects and then revert to their human form right in front of his eyes. He sees the prostitute turn into Donna and back - a hallucination (?) that also appears on the surveillance tapes. His hallucinations are so real that he becomes further disoriented.

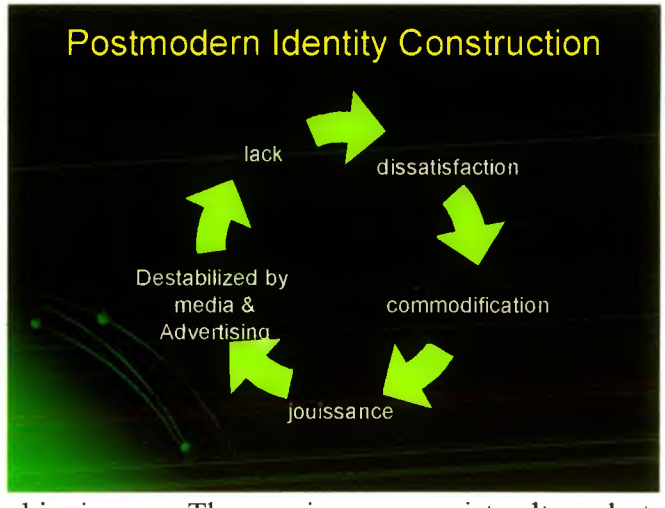
For the most part, *A Scanner Darkly* engages in the disruption of any possibility of a coherent narrative of the self and identity by scrambling the relationship and perception of real and unreal, true and false. Such muddling of opposites is done by instilling doubt in all relationships, whether human-human, or human-machine, revealing a direly pessimistic outlook in which only glimpses of hope can be found. There is a flicker of such hope when Arcter, while working in the field, vaguely recognizes the small blue flowers from which substance D is derived. These are the flowers he manages to refer to as "death rising from the earth from the ground itself, in one blue field" (1:35:01-1:35:15). The implication is that perhaps in the thanksgiving that will follow, he will be able to pass on this information to his friends.

In most postmodern American subjects, similar selves are constructed because of the manipulation of a capitalist society driven by consumption. Addiction is actually encouraged through quick fixes for almost everything. The average American's attention span has decreased and life is lived through images of excess and hyperdriven overachievers who forsake every human relationship to reach their goals. And on the way happiness is somehow lost. Shopping is one of the quick fixes offered by a consumerist society in which identities are up for sale. The next section is a discussion on consumer culture's role in postmodern identity formation where it creates shopping addicts who buy their way into a world of dissatisfaction and temporality.

(ii) Shopping Addiction and *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009)

In his book *False Fixes* (1994), David Forbes writes of consumer culture's addictive stance as follows, "The consumer culture itself has drug-like qualities. The act of consumption with its drug-like quality of desire, tolerance, and renewed demand, now exists for its own sake detached from production and material necessity" (Forbes 13). This "drug-like quality" that he mentions is brought into effect through consumer images that offer status, meaning, value, lifestyles and even subjectivities through purchase of consumer goods. And, as he informs us, the cyclic act of consumption is no longer attached to material needs. This implies that consumption, as a medium of capitalist expression, has created a totally different signifying system for itself in its relation to consumers. It has become a source for identity construction.

Seen in psychoanalytic terms with reference to Lacan's theories, consumption is capitalism's promise (to a subject) toward the fulfillment of lack. Diagramatically this can be expressed as follows:



That is to say, in postmodern theory the subject may be considered as constituted in lack as a result of the destabilizing factors of consumerist culture. The dissatisfaction resulting from that lack propels the subject towards commodification.Commodification is seen as a channel to fulfillment and jouissance. Then again consumerist culture destabilizes the identity of the subject and the cycle continuously goes on.

Capitalist societies thus encourage a consumer culture built on the premise of the economy's need for ceaseless consumption. Lifestyles are bought on credit and selves are literally invented in order to reproduce the existing social and economic order. In late capitalist societies the self, thus, becomes both subject and object of consumerism which enables perpetuation of a consumer society through conformity, consumerism, and self-absorption. Identities are made and remade based on the images they acquire through the media.

Ben Agger posits a similar view in his book, *The Virtual Self: A Contemporary Sociology*. He writes, "For postmodernists, identity is not grounded in history and politics but is a pastiche, a mosaic, made up of ephemeral fragments that fill the person with content, meaning, values" (Agger 110). The "ephemeral fragments" that Agger mentions as being the source of identities do not come from history or politics but, in the thoroughly capitalist society of America, come from consumer images.

Agger further points out an interesting link between self-hood issues and the commercial agenda. In his view, capitalism has a good reason to make self-hood an issue, because, " people must be encouraged to consume far beyond their daily bread: they must also be distracted from the big picture". Capitalist propaganda through advertising images make it increasingly difficult for people to stand outside of their everyday lives and gain a critical perspective on what is happening to them. Postmodern selves, thereby, lose the intellectual alertness and the time and space needed for rational reflection.

At this point, addiction steps in and paradoxically consumes consumers. As a result, consumers yearn for what they do not have. They are ruled not by rationality but their decisions in purchasing objects reveal emotional impulsiveness. A dissatisfaction overcomes them and within moments of their purchase, other things catch their eyes. A certain childishness and whimsical behavior associated with that childishness can be seen. All decisions are made by external influence (commercials) yet addicted selves think they make those decisions themselves.

Media images emphasize extravagance, luxurious lifestyles and unlimited freedom. These images change the perception of people. In "Towards A New Politics Of Consumption"(1999) Juliet B. Schor clearly defines the influence of televised images from their inception into the daily life of Americans. Referring to the advent of women entering the workforce, she writes :

> Neighborhood contacts correspondingly declined, and the workplace became a more prominent point of reference. Moreover, as people spent less time with neighbors and friends, and more time on the family room couch, television became more important as a source of consumer cues and information. Because television shows are so heavily skewed to the "lifestyles of the rich and upper middle class," they inflate the viewer's perceptions of what others have, and by extension what is worth acquiring-what one must have in order to avoid being left behind. (449)

What Schor emphasizes here is that the images of affluent families and the commodities they used, as transmitted through the TV screen, were regarded as indicators of status. As a result, middle income and even low income families aspire towards these images in order to project status and opt for an upward mobility. This is when the consumer was born who, at any cost, was willing to buy into lifestyles much above his/her income.

A superior lifestyle, nowadays, is seen to be one where money, designer clothes and accessories and the latest model gadgets are accessible. Ample time is to be spent in the pursuit of leisure and fun that has little or no religious undertone. Family concerns take a back seat while friends and fun take the forefront. Free of all guilt, responsibility, regret and sacrifice, and divulging in total self-absorption, such lifestyles allure a generation which has been hypnotized into thinking it deserves better than everyone else.

The images sold to the public through TV commercials, magazine advertisements, and billboards, have set standards for the self-image to be produced/replicated. One is offered images of confidence, boldness, and especially freedom to be acquired through the purchase of particular products. Skin care products offer to slow down the aging process and give one looks that spin heads as one boldly walks by with the knowing and fearless smile of being watched with amazement. Brand names signify and enhance the purchase value of products and mobilize the identity construct of consumers.

In "The System of Objects", Jean Baudrillard observes that a brand name plays the role of a signifier which the consumer relates to a host of diffused meanings. The consumer is influenced by and responds to each brand name like "a conditioned reflex" (414). Capitalist regimes create false needs within people to entice them to endless shopping for the acquisition of status symbols embedded in brand names. The brand becomes a mark of identity.

Before the media, the self image was built on what children experienced from the treatment they were subjected to by their immediate family. Importance was always given to manners, morals and behavior. The upbringing of the child reflected family status. The media now provides alternate ideals, values and lifestyles that contradict the commonsensical value-systems of former times. But the postmodern abandonment of truth signals a repositioning of the concept of the self. Postmodern selves are encouraged to view themselves as desiring subjects that cannot live without pleasure, entertainment, acquisition and euphoria.

But it is not that all postmodern identites are forged on voluptuous desire and craving. Michel Foucault offers hope of rising above the manipulation of power with his

argument, "where there is power there is resistance" - (Foucault, 1998: 95). Applied to the addictive stance of consumerist shopping, we can say that, pockets of resistance expressed through speech and action that contradict the normal flow of consumerist behavior, can oppose the addictive stance of consumer society. Of course, it is extremely difficult for one to see the flaws of a system when submerged in it. Submerged in such a culture one cannot totally avoid its influence. But hopefully, one can it resist to varying extents.

For resistance to take effect in a consumer society, it is necessary that the following happen : (1) the first aspect of resistance from the individual or the group is that s/he or they realize that domination is at play from an overarching power structure. (2) The second aspect of resistance is, of course, living within a market economy but being able to actively resist the extravagance and wastage it advocates. What this involves is not a total disregard of available options; rather, it entails moderate use of available choices. It means being able to stay sane without being overwhelmed by the force of repetitive persuasion. (3) The third aspect is that it is necessary to perceive things from a position that allows critical evaluation of the situation. There has to be an ethical level of conduct to conform to. This third aspect is crucial for the effectiveness of the other two aspects mentioned above. Unfortunately, this is an aspect which the postmodern self, in giving jouissance preference above all, lacks. Therefore, there is little resistance within contemporary society because morality is relational within a consumerist society solely propelled forward by economic interests.

To discuss the addictive stance of the act of shopping I have selected the film *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009). Knowing that in a postmodern capitalist society images streaming through the media have a strong destabilizing effect on identity, films like *Confessions*, work to affect a subtle resistance from within the system of capitalism. *Confessions of a Shopaholic* is a romantic comedy and for our purposes a visual text through which the double-faced identity of consumer culture is exposed so that we can discern the manipulative and inferiorizing power that it exerts on postmodern subjects. Consumer culture saturates postmodern subjects with consumer images that deprive them of all sense of propriety.

In *Confessions*, the American protagonist Rebecca's addiction to shopping and its connection to image-building of the self at the expense of all ideals of integrity, frugality, self-worth, sanity and truthfulness is ultimately critiqued by the resistance provided in the form of another character, Brandon. Having been nurtured by a down-to-earth British

father, he sees through capitalism's foibles and shows Rebecca the addictive and negative side of constructing her identity through consumer goods. Usually the addictive stance of consumer culture is hidden by images of freedom. Brandon exposes consumer culture for what it is, i.e. a means to create insecure, manipulative, self-conscious, and confused identities.

A Discussion of *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009)

In a completely different mood than the dark, unfamiliar, noir film discussed above in regard to drug addiction, the film *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009) shows consumerism at work in the identity construction of a young woman named Rebecca. It emphasizes comically the familiar postmodern trend of shopping to build an identity aspiring to power and affluence. It shows how capitalist society creates a void within the subject through consumer images that promise fulfillment through the acquisition of certain objects. The American subject's attempt to fill the void with objects results in a similar unending search for fulfillment, which is encouraged and sustained by a postmodern consumer culture that leaves the subject wanting a stable identity.

The film *Confessions of a Shopaholic* portrays the protagonist Rebecca Bloomwood's aspiration towards a lifestyle which defines her self identity. Rebecca's story beautifully depicts the addictive state of the consumer, where consumers are addicted to buying stuff they are convinced that they need. However, in most cases, their apparent need surpasses the capacity of their pockets. These consumers obtain objects through credit card access to virtual money though this will plunge them into debts that they can scarcely hope of paying back. This is what the addiction to shopping is all about.

The film begins with Rebecca talking about her experience of shopping in childhood. It shows how consumerism creates within her resentment for the things she has and desire for that which she does not. "When I was a little girl there were real prices and mom prices. Real prices got you shiny sparkly things which lasted three weeks and Mom prices got you brown things that lasted forever" (0:0:35-0:0:44). As a result, each time Rebecca enters a shop a psychological restructuring occurs to the effect that she is overwhelmed with a craving for objects she never thought to be necessary. As she puts it: "A store can awaken a lust for things you never knew you needed" (0:02:34-0:02:38). This indicates the psychological and emotional manipulation of a consumer culture which

creates need through advertising and continuous bombardment of images through written, print and visual media which turn the consumer into an addict identity.

Alette is one such fashion magazine that objectifies the postmodern subject. Rebecca is obsessed with being part of that magazine but in a surprising turn of events she ends up at *Successful Savings*, a magazine concentrating on consumer awareness and savings. She buys a pair of spectacles (which she doesn't need), dresses soberly, and acts as if she is in total control of her situation. Thus it is when she starts working for this magazine that she assumes an identity fit for her role yet in total contradiction to her consuming habits.

Her consuming habits are not at all what she shows them to be. A glimpse of her life at home and at malls shows how chaotic and out of control her situation is. Her room is full of more clothes and accessories than it has space for. She lives in a single room at a friend's apartment. She also has a debt collector hounding her for collection of dues, though she frantically evades payment by coming up with an endless array of ridiculous excuses. And at a discount sale she becomes a screaming lunatic. These are not the images she is willing to show others or , for that matter, expose to herself.

Part of her job at *Successful Savings*, a savings magazine, requires her to expose the fraud behind corporate images of honesty. Ironically, though, she adopts fraudulent behavior to play the part. She dupes others into believing that she is a frugal person. Yet, she is constantly struggling with her addiction to shopping. But the difficulty she faces is what all consumers face since consumerism attacks from all angles; and, in so doing it denies her access to the big picture. The reality is that all the tantalizing images that promote products designed to boost self-image actually create and exploit the insecurities of the consumer.

For consumerism to come into effect, the self image is broken by the images of perfection supplied by the media. Postmodern subjects feel psychologically and emotionally insecure when comparing their physical properties to these impossible-to-attain images. It is out of this insecurity and feeling of dissatisfaction that consumerism creates dependency on products. This dependency manifests itself in the form of addictive shopping.

Rebecca is caught up in the constantly changing world of images of extreme perfection. Advertising and women's magazines position women, in particular, as both the subject and the object of consumerism. Consumerism promises women self-transformation and appears to validate women's choices. Though postmodernism negates

the influence of metanarratives and the power structures they encompass, it seems that commercialism is creating a blinding veil of illusion which merges all identities into one – that of the consumer. As a consumer Rebecca seems to be promoting shopping when she says, "It makes you feel so confident and alive and happy, warm" (0:57:36-0:57:39).

But as Baudrillard points out in "The System of Objects", there is no end state of happiness in the freedom that consumerism promises. The freedom of choice that is overemphasized in consumerism is only the result of the resolution of the tension that consumer culture itself creates. The tension referred to here is the anxiety caused by a sense of lack in when the consumer is faced with an idealized image which is then connected to a certain product. This tension is artificially and specifically produced by marketing strategies.

The tension is overcome by purchase of an object. The self created thus in a purely relational and situational context has this false belief that one's freedom lies in one's own hands. Unfortunately, this is not really the case. Rebecca realizes that in her highly valued shops, she is not valued; rather it is her status as consumer that is valued. She is extremely disillusioned whe she discovers that all the warmth she feels in stores is only connected to her consumer status, and entirely superficial. Her euphoric exclamations about what a shop means to her is drastically undercut a few scenes later when after opening her bills, she sadly retorts, " They said I was a valued customer, now they send me hate-mail" (0:15:23- 0:15:28). She realizes that she is only valued for her ability to spend. Her value diminishes the moment she is no longer a customer with money to spend.

Rebecca has created for herself an image of stylish affluence by living much beyond her means. In her spending spree she buys more things than she needs. Most things go to waste in the closet and she can hardly remember what she has stocked. For example, when she needs a dress for an evening out, we discover that she doesn't even know what clothes she has. This indicates the total submission to a culture of extravagance and waste which constructs an identity which is totally unaware of the manipulated and manipulative stance it is in.

In postmodern life everyone is told there is no need to choose or sacrifice one's wants. Media messages such as, "Life is for living" promote the view that anyone can have or be anything (provided s/he has the money to support her). The situational self, having no stable set of values or choices itself, gives in to the pressures put upon it by standards determined by advertising and media culture. Identities refuse to be bound

within tradition or history; as a result, all narratives refer directly to oneself. Self-interest becomes, in itself, addictive.

At the very root of consumer identity, therefore, is a sense of dissatisfaction connected to one's circumstances. A feeling of lack leads to a sort of unstoppable wandering and searching for something that will fill the void. Empty selves continue to move from one commodity to another looking for the one thing that will ultimately satisfy. But the satisfaction promised by the accumulation of products proves to be illusory. Capitalism ensures that objects quickly fall out of fashion and are replaced by better models and upgrades. It thus appears that this feeling of lack is created constantly and endlessly. The wheel of consumerism would slow down if people were to be content with themselves and their commodities. It is a society where all people attempt to surpass their own status in society, not through acquisition of knowledge but through acquisition of goods which help them create an identity that confers a false sense of prestige on themselves and others.

Addict identities lack solidity. Their characters are considered unstable and the elements of trust and integrity are found to be lacking in them. Rebecca cannot control her impulsive behavior, though such behavior threatens to destroy all significant relationships in her life. It is only when Rebecca is confronted by Brandon, whose character is symbolic of a resistance to consumerism, that she admits to being obsessed with shopping. When he asks her *why* she shops she answers, "Cause when I shop the world gets better. The world is better. And then its not anymore. Then I need to do it again" (1:16:40-1:16:50). She is confronted now with a self-image that is deceitful, manipulative, irresponsible, and false.

Yet this is the very image that appeals to Alette herself who offers Rebecca her very own column in the *Alette* magazine which would be titled "Affordable Fashion." But then Rebecca is struck by Alette's complacency at writing false articles about fashions which are not at all affordable. Alette tells Rebecca not to worry about what she writes because the actual cost of the objects would be in small print. Humorously, she exclaims, "And after all what are credit cards for" (1:26:04-1:26:06). But by this time Rebecca has already seen through the masquerade of honesty that capitalism claims. She now realizes how manipulative and deceitful consumer culture actually is. She decides to break out of the bondage of addictive shopping and debt that her habits have put her into.

The resistance Foucault mentions in his later writings seems to be at work in *Confessions of a Shopaholic* in the demeanor of Brandon. The act of resistance reveals

awareness of the exploitative condition in the current situation. It also implies that Brandon's ethical stand comes from a stable set of values. This resistance is possible because, as Brandon points out in an exchange with Rebecca, he was brought up in England by his hard working, down-to-earth father who was there to show him the frivolity and falsehood behind the pursuit of a rich lifestyle such as that of his mother, who is a renowned New York socialite.

Indeed, in this case, as Foucault had observed so perceptively elsewhere, resistance does not come or originate from outside; rather, it is born within the power structures and is most effective when it expresses itself from such a position. Though Brandon has a very famous and rich mother he shows no sign of it in his person or in his actions. He works hard and tries to make a living for himself instead of being influenced by the financial extravagance of his mother. Brandon's mother wanted nothing to do with him as a child. She only wants him after he is old enough to take over the family business. This has a symbolic resonance in regard to corporate affairs. It exposes the fact that actual love, care and feeling is absent in the corporate world. All investments of time and money should yield results. The transformation in Rebecca towards the end of the film is affected through Brandon's unaffected lifestyle.

Brandon's resistance to the allure of power and the clear-sightedness of what actually goes on in the corporate world exposes the addictive and self-destructive stance of Rebecca's situation. The first time Brandon exposes a major corporate fraud is when he makes Rebecca ask the speaker at a shareholders meeting, why the corporate managers took out 23 million dollars in bonus in spite of the fact that the shareholders were facing an 8% loss. It is this resistance that leads Rebecca to ultimately regret her obsessive shopping tendencies.

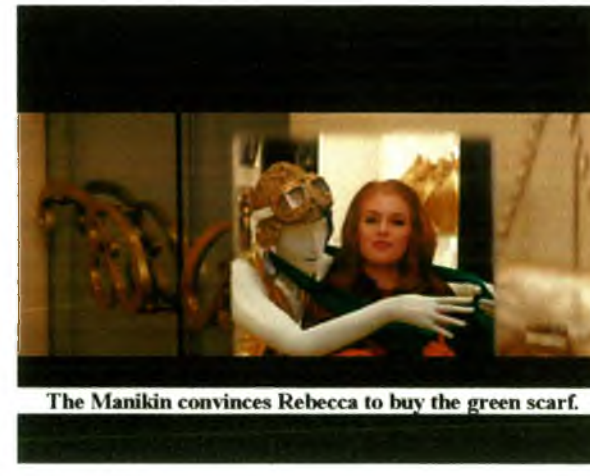
Rebecca sees her fragmented image in mirrors.

Another agent of her transformation and awareness is her father who offers to help her out of her debt by selling his newly acquired RV, something he bought not on credit but out of his life savings. He supports her and when she refuses to let him sell the RV saying, "It completely defines you, completely", her father answers, "Nothing defines me except you and your mother" (1:22:25-1:22:27).

The narrative starts like a fairy tale with Rebecca as a child longing to grow up and possess the beautiful dresses, shoes, and ornaments grown-up girls have and ends up as a romantic comedy with her coming to her senses because of love.

Rebecca sees herself reflected in the mirrors on display in a shop window. Though her image is fragmented she is delighted to see herself reflected as she waves around her "Gucci" handbag. This sequence is significant because it signifies her self as an image becoming an object for manipulation. As a postmodern consumer, she has put herself on display just like the things she shops for when she sees them on display. She is now so defined by the objects she buys that her self-narrative is constructed around the things she owns. Mirrors and images appear on the scene whenever her identity is concerned.

In the film, the manikins speak to Rebecca. Symbolically this signifies consumer culture's persistence in motivating and thereby creating the addict identity of a shopaholic. No matter how little its utilitarian value be, each product is depicted and seen in an exaggerated light. Thus the green scarf becomes a definition of Rebecca. The image overrides any sense of core self. Therefore, confidence comes not from strength within her sense of self; but rather, from the "green scarf". The manikin tries to convince her to buy a green scarf after she reminds herself that she has just received a credit card bill of nine hundred dollars.



The Manikin convinces Rebecca to buy the green scarf.

> Manikin : "The point about this scarf is that it would become part of a definition of you, of your psyche. Mm do you see what I mean? [. . .]Make your eyes look bigger. "
>
> Rebecca : "It would make my haircut look more expensive."
>
> Manikin : "You would walk into that Alette interview confident, more poised. The girl in the green scarf". (0:5:20-0:5:57)

She is made to feel that the scarf was made only for her. Again, her choice of an object and with it a self image are weighed out in front of a mirror. She is encouraged by consumer culture to buy the scarf on credit even though she doesn't have the solvency to buy it.

The depth and distance of an extreme long shot shows Rebecca's vulnerability to the addiction that envelops her existence. As she walks away from the Alette building, she crosses two oversized billboards which loom over her, symbolizing the insignificance of her problems in a capitalist culture which is continually demeaning her self-worth. For, though capitalism shows that it cares about her, it actually does not.

Rebecca walking past an oversized billboard.

Real care involves seeing, hearing, knowing, and feeling but capitalism's objectification of subjects creates false values and distorted visions. Consumer culture entices the eyes of the consumer and manipulates the consumer – yet is itself blind to all except profit. This is signified strategically in the film through scenes which highlight the aspect of the blindness of manipulative forces. For example, the manikin has no eyes. Though it describes the scarf and places Rebecca in front of the mirror it has no visual means to substantiate whether what it tells Rebecca is actually appropriate for her. The printed advertisement of the super sale literally blows into her and settles on her chest, after blindly targeting her and striking at her heart.

Though all advertisements target subjects indiscriminately, individual consumers feel as if the ads are directly talking to them. Each and every ad seems to make them feel as if it were specially made for them. It is, as if, they could access the dream world as frequently as they wanted to. Ironically Rebecca's illusion breaks when she is confronted by the debt-collector on a live talk show. She is shown the falsity of the image of herself formed by a culture which only cares for her spending capacity and nothing else.

By strategically showing the interplay of romantic interest and conflict between Rebecca and Brandon, the effect of society and culture on identity construction is highlighted. The contrast between the selves of a shopping-obsessed American (Rebecca) with a modernist yet sober British self (Brandon) is meant to be instructive. Rebecca and Brandon's attitudes towards shopping are respectively, "You have to savor shopping" (0:46:15-0:46:17) and "You have to strike with precision and get out" (0:46:17-0:46:19). Rebecca is amazed and confused by Brandon's knowledge of fashion and yet his reluctance to make use of it. Brandon explains to her his reluctance to be overwhelmed by the images of consumer culture thus: " I don't want to be defined by clothes, or labels, or family" (0:47:08-0:47:12). His mother may be a renowned New York socialite but he can

resist the temptation of being absorbed into the fashion industry and this reveals a great deal about his identity.

This film depicts the manner in which choices are influenced by consumer logic which baffles common-sense. As a result, addict identities available in a postmodern consumer culture are seen to be manipulative, self-centered, naïve, childish, insecure, and unstable. The next film shows the dark side of obsessing about having full control over one's life and circumstances which results in construction of an identity which is restless, reckless and without constraint.

(iii) Power Addiction and *Memento* (2000)

Both of the addictions mentioned above give a false sense of power. And, it is well known that the lust for a sense of power grips many of us. But, the power I refer to here, relevant to the discussion of addiction in this chapter, is not to be confused with the powerplay one observes in national politics; rather the power highlighted here has to do with control over one's life and circumstances.

With the rise of individualism in modern times people have been reluctant to surrender themselves to power structures that lie beyond their comprehension. Instead, they have hungered for control and power, at least, over their selves. With the inception of postmodernism, when when social cohesion started crumbling due to the collapse of overwhelming power structures i.e. the metannarratives that controlled traditional society, individuals apparently found what they had been asking for, the chance to control their lives.

Unfortunately, postmodern subjects underestimated the task in front of them. Constructing selves from fragmented narratives is not as easy as conforming to a pre-existing tradition. Without *history* as a foundation of the past and without *truth* as a building block for the future, postmodern selves became disoriented and unsure of their place in space and time. Thus began the search to make sense of all experiences and encounters by constructing identities from fragments of an unstable society. This is mainly attempted through mediated images and fluid information. This is supposed to give the postmodern self a sense of meaning and power.

However, once an identity is shaped in postmodern society, one cannot hold on to it because of the unstable relationship between signifiers and their signifieds. As meaning shifts and identity construction becomes meaningless, it becomes necessary to begin the

construction of meaning and identity once again. Through this endless cycle of reconstruction the postmodern self finds a sense of power. It is this power that s/he is addicted to.

Power, therefore, is sustained through the creation of meaningful narratives of the self. A strong narrative of the self renders all previous and present actions justifiable, and enhances the positivity of a constructed identity, at least in the eyes of the self concerned. Much of who we are depends on what we remember of the past and how we interpret our actions on the basis of that past. Thus the accumulation of what we know of ourselves and our actions constructs our sense of the self. Unfortunately, postmodernism emphasizes the constructedness of the past and lays it continuously open to question. Thus the postmodern subject is forced to continuously recreate the past to make it amenable to its present subjectivity, through both written and oral narratives.

In addition to written texts, images play a significant role in constructing the reality which represents the past. In his final book *Camera Lucida* (1982), Roland Barthes refers to the indexical character of photographs emphasizing that photography, in contrast to language and writing, is not just a system of connotations and arbitrary signs but a direct reference to real objects. For him, the essence, or "founding order" of photography "is neither Art nor Communication, it is Reference" (Barthes 77). In this sense, photography refers to the material existence of an object that is made the subject of the gaze of the camera eye.

Photographs, thus, play a significant role in representing the events of the past. With reference to photographic images the past is reconstructed through memory and narrative to give a meaningful sense of the self. Photographs are, in that sense, visual embodiments of the past. They have often been considered documents of the presence of a past reality. But Linda Hutcheon in *The Politics of Postmodernism* questions the indexical character of photographs, something that Roland Barthes once strongly posited as a major aspect in the importance of photographs as references to the past. It turns out that the indexical character of the photographic image has disappeared.

Photographic images are no longer considered objective. We realize that nowadays a photo is just another image that shows us what someone wants us to see. Since photographs act as historical documents chronicling the existence of people, places and relationships, any doubt about their indexical nature destabilizes the past. And considering that their significance grows out of the narration construed of, around and

from these images, which also act as testaments of truth, the same doubt destabilizes both the present and the future.

In the case of personal identity, photographs give passage to the past by their association with memory. One looks at a picture and remembers the events surrounding it. The photograph is then a visual representation of one's history that gains significance through remembrance, which in turn evokes emotion and therefore contributes to personal identity. Thereby, any falsification of narration of the past, be it intentional of unintentional, will affect the construction of identity.

The addiction to power is spurred by the awareness that photos can be used to construct past, present and, therefore, the future. Such addiction leads to self-conscious manipulation of these images. Instead of using photography to hold on to the images of the past, of the fleeting moment, they are now used to create a reality which may even interfere and change the conception of what actually exists. Pictures are strategically used at both the personal level as autobiographical documents selectively placed in albums and published in social networks, and at the political level through journalism which influences public sentiment.

To demonstrate the connection amongst photographs, memory, narrative and identity and the effect of the addiction to power, I have selected Christopher Nolan's film *Memento*. This film will be treated as a visual text and analyzed to reveal the addictive stance towards power involved in postmodern identity construction.

A Discussion of *Memento* (2000)

Christopher Nolan's *Memento* reveals addiction of a different kind than that spurred by consumerism. It is an intensified study of the addiction for power over one's circumstances through establishment of a meaningful self-narrative. *Memento* simultaneously explores how the past plays a decisive role in our very sense of selfhood and identity and how any significant self-narrative creates the reality influencing an identity. The analytic approach taken here treats *Memento* as a portrayal of the protagonist's addiction to power as revealed in his attempt to control his life by manipulating "facts" and restructuring reality, when both his personal history and his identity is brought into question.

Memories play an important part in the construction of personal identity. The self-narratives woven around memories determine how we interpret our experiences. These

personal narratives determine how we see ourselves and others and how we see ourselves seen by others. Personal narratives are strewn around memories of objects and images which give rise to significant anecdotes.

A stable self-narrative, therefore, is usually based on memories of past events, people, places and objects. In *Memento*, the main character, Leonard, has a damaged short term memory. He lives solely in the present for he has no memories relating to the immediate past. His memory span lasts for only about 10-15 minutes or slightly longer. Afterwards, his mind is a blank slate and he has to begin everything over again. In this way his life is like a never-ending loop. The only memories he has are from before his accident. He no longer has the capacity to form, assimilate or retain memories and/or merge new memories with his previous experiences.

Leonard's condition parallels the postmodern condition of unreliability of past reconstructions through language and memory. The doubt surrounding the reliability of even one's own memories contributes to the instability of the constructed self. Thus, personal narratives are considered doubtful constructions of the past and of personal history. This doubt about the truth of historical narratives translates into a questioning of the narratives that comprise personal history, thereby rendering them unstable.

The problem for Leonard is that he tells everyone of his psychological condition and nearly everyone takes advantage of it or attempts to do so. As his past is continuously erased, his sense of self is displaced at every moment. As Teddy points out: "You don't have a clue, do you? You don't even know who you are" (1:05:06-1:05:10). Leonard states emphatically, "I'm Leonard Shelby, I'm from San Fran . . ." But halfway through his utterance Teddy stops him : "That's who you were, Lenny. You don't know who you are, who you've become since the incident" (1:05:19-1:05:23). This scene emphasizes the instability of an identity which is detached from the past and Leonard's helpless condition as he constantly loses control over his circumstances. A life based entirely on the present has no meaning, without coherent connection to historical data.

Within this confusion identity constantly created from shifting realities. Leonard/Lenny is faced by the unreliability of his memories. He tries to overcome this disadvantage by taking pictures of people and places that he thinks he needs to remember. He writes words on the pictures and then derives significant meaning from them. He constitutes reality by piecing together and inferring circumstances from the notes he scribbles on the photos he uses as markers of his route to accessing reality. In most cases

the assumptions he makes are derived from unreliable sources. But Leonard's facts are flawed because they lack reference to specific time, place and especially context.

Visual images are regarded as windows to the truth as indicated by Lenny's need for the Polaroids. Since, Leonard's knowledge of reality is totally dependent on the polaroid photographs that he takes. These images of the past and, also, the "facts" which he writes on them that give his thoughts a specific direction. But Lenny seems to overlook the necessity of context in his use of fragments of discourse. The partial truths he scribbles in the photo borders to refer to an image seem to insufficiently portray events and people and thereby construct a doubtful reality because he has no other frame of reference to turn to. Thus as his notes are undefined by context i.e. defined by *what, when, why* and *where*, the *who* becomes insignificant.

The way he reads those images influences his interpretation of the truth. For example, Lenny's need to look people straight in the eye in order to assess the truthfulness of their story indicates his belief that his sight does not deceive him. But Lenny fails to realize that he is being used by Natalie even though he looks at her directly as she speaks. Though Teddy warns him of her intentions, he refuses to accept the possibility of her being manipulative because beneath Teddy's picture he has already written the words, "Don't believe his lies" (1:43:05-1:43:09). So he misleads himself as much as others mislead him.

As postmodernism teaches, if both memory and documentary evidence provide us only with inaccurate and elusive knowledge about the past, we can never fully know who we are. Therefore, Leonard's reality and identity are in question from the very beginning of the film. In the absence of the proper contextualization of the information he has, his version of reality is doubtful and inconsistent and it destabilizes his identity.

The insignificance of Leonard's identity is further complicated by a language that distorts the truth. Postmodernists believe that language cannot adequately relate truth because there is a disjunction between our words and the realities they intend to reflect. Lenny's self-narrative questions our ability to objectively access and record reality. Ironically, in his attempt to construct a narrative of power, Lenny deconstructs whatever narrative he has already constructed. Through language he (and others) initiate and exert power in a way that controls his actions and the way he thinks.

In *Memento* Lenny's condition is in many ways metaphorically akin to the condition of postmodern identity. Postmodern existence, with its obsessive denial of any form of truth, manipulation of facts and rewriting of history, as well as insatiable desire

for creation of identity is parallel to Leonard's addiction to constantly rewrite a self-narrative leading to a powerful identity. The major difference is that it is his condition that deprives him of a stable sense of the past. He is thus forced to recreate the past at every moment, whereas postmodern identities voluntarily give up connections to the past and intentionally question representation at every move. Deprived of new memories and having no absolute or reliable access to the past except for what he informs himself, Leonard has no concrete sense of the self. So, his condition puts him on a plane similar to postmodern identity which is fragmented, created for the moment, influenced by visual images, and of course, both influenced and created in accordance with the narratives strewn for it by others for their own interests.

Consequently, though, Leonard proudly thinks he is in control of his desperate situation, because he has a system. But he does not seem to realize that he too is susceptible to the mixing up of details and time frames which completely changes the interpretation of his "facts". What *Memento* shows us is that "facts" can mislead especially if they are based on secondhand information. Leonard changes fact no.5 from 'access to drugs' to' drugdealer' just at the point that he is going to tattoo it onto his leg, proving that his "facts" are subject to change and are not as solid as he presumes them to be. Indeed, as we find out at the end of *Memento*, Leonard intentionally writes down a false "fact" which leads him to see Teddy as the murderer of his wife.

As a result, Leonard becomes as easily manipulated as his "facts". The storyline evolves around his "facts". "Facts," he says, "not memories. That's how you investigate" (0:23:05-0:23:07). He keeps track of his search with scribbled notes and clues tattooed on his body and contained in the mass of filed documents. Leonard bases his investigation in what he believes are concrete givens. But each time, the film reveals the context for his suppositions, Leonard is shown to be mistaken.

So, when meanings of images and words shift constantly, it is difficult to reach a proper verdict about the state of things. As his understanding of his surroundings change interaction with others is also altered. This affects the way he reacts to people and situations. This changes the person he is and becomes. He feels no remorse for the killing of men unrelated to his narrative of vengeance, for he has no memory of them occurring; he knows no guilt for he does not remember manipulating the facts which leads to the killing of men innocent of the crime he accuses them of.

Leonard *was* not a killer yet by repeatedly killing people for others, the man he has become *is* one. At the end of the film we realize he has already killed three people

and is clearly intent on killing more just to find purpose in his life. Without the ability to create new memories, without a conscience to safeguard his actions, without someone to ensure he is on the right path, and totally guided now by external stimuli, he seems to be moving in a circle. There is movement but it leads nowhere. His insatiate thirst to put meaning into his life puts him on an unrelenting quest for revenge upon the one who has destroyed his life. First his wife's killer and then Teddy falls into that definition. But to justify the extremity of his actions Lenny sets up Teddy as his wife's killer. Actually, his quest is not for truth; rather, it is for a simulation of truth which will give him some sense of direction and power over the constraints that bind him in his chaotic condition.

He infuses meaning into his life through an endless search for his wife's killer. The only thing that keeps him going is this image he has created in his head of him lying in bed with his wife as she strokes the tattoo which says "I've done it" (1:45:20). He needs something to believe in, something which will show him that his life is important. For him this image is the reality he seeks to attain. Though his wife is no longer there to support or applaud his deeds he simulates a memory where they are both at peace for him having completed what he had set out to do – take revenge. There is no end to his search because he does not want it to end. Ironically, the film suggests that he is responsible for his wife's death. But the event of an insulin overdose that, unknowingly, he himself administered may have lead to his wife's death, is a suppressed memory. Therefore, as he can never posit himself as the killer, he can never find him.

Leonard's image of final success.

Lenny's world is a world of provisionality and indeterminacy. Lenny's identity, through his unwillingness to provide closure to his personal narrative, parallels the postmodern need for continuous regeneration of the self. He defies all possibility of closure and fixity – (a) to his investigation by ripping out pages from the police report Teddy gave him and by destroying the picture Teddy took of him after killing the second attacker; (b) to his malaise, by accepting the fact that his wife survived the attack but not the pressure of dealing with his condition; (c) to his vendetta, by intentionally creating a trail of "facts" that leads to his killing of Teddy as the one who murdered his wife; and,

(d) to his unending quest, by constantly recreating the past and creating a puzzle that can never be solved as a means of coping with the present and giving him a sense of meaning for the future. The constant renewal of his history leads to the inconclusiveness of his self and situation. Each time he restructures the past he creates an ethically questionable version of himself.

Lenny's condition, therefore, signals the ethical danger of living as an endlessly self-creating and unsatisfied being who, having no metanarrative to determine his life, is engrossed in creating meaning to a life he himself has destabilized. Lenny first denies himself all possibility of closure and then looks desperately for some type of finality to his search. Teddy explains Lenny's life to him – what he was, what he has become, and why he does what he does. Lenny is outraged at being in a situation which he cannot control.. He strongly vents his anger and rage at Teddy. He regains control of the situation by making Teddy the target of his next kill, thereby undermining his quest for the truth and contradicting his idea of himself as a person searching for the truth.

Teddy tells Leonard that although his wife survived the attack, she was unable to come to terms with his condition. If we are to believe Teddy then Sammy's story (that Lenny tells everyone), that he had the same condition and he accidentally killed his wife with an insulin overdose, is just a psychological distortion of the fact that Leonard was the one who accidentally did the same. The constructedness of Jenkin's story is clear from Teddy's comment that the story of Sammy Jenkins gets better every time Lenny tells it. This suggests that in each telling he either embellishes it with extra detail or distorts it by leaving out details.

Apart from his own unreliable memories, Teddy is Lenny's only access point to the past. According to Teddy, Lenny's wife actually survived the assault. A corresponding scene shows his wife's eye movements beneath the plastic curtain. It is, as if, she was regaining consciousness. Teddy tells Lenny that the story of Jenkins is a conditioned memory which Lenny uses to protect himself from the truth that it was his not Jenkins'wife that had diabetes. The double memory of Lenny's wife sitting on the side of the bed as in one version of the memory he pinches her thigh and in another he injects a dose of insulin into her, leads one to wonder which version is the true one.

The events in *Memento*, therefore, lead us to question Leonard's version of his wife's death. Possibly, the memory he has is something he has conditioned himself to use in order to cope with his own guilt. It is a sort of defense mechanism of the brain. It seems that Lenny uses the story of Sammy Jenkins to dissociate himself both emotionally

and psychologically from the painful memory of his having killed his wife with an insulin overdose. That is why he feels the urge to keep on telling it to everyone. That is why he has to talk of Sammy. Yet he has to repeatedly remind himself that his wife is dead. He is unable to come to terms with the fact that she survived the attack and died afterwards. He knows, instinctually, that Teddy is telling him the truth. Nevertheless, he denies it and makes sure he never has to confront it again. As a result, his identity becomes evermore problematic.

Lenny has shut out all other aspects of social life except those which pertain to his quest. There are no meaningful relationships, no love, no care, no concern except manipulation of facts and history in an unending urge for fulfillment that propels him forward. His existence is that of a postmodern person who knows no satisfaction and has nothing to tie him down. He is someone who advances forward recklessly with an insatiable desire for control and power. He has become the perfect killing machine, someone with no regrets for the killings he is involved in since he rewrites his self narrative to justify his actions.

Leonard destroys evidence.

The truth of Lenny's narrations of the past is also brought into question in the scene where Sammy is shown sitting in the hospital after unknowingly killing his wife with an overdose of insulin. For one brief moment, as someone passes him by we see Lenny sitting in the chair in exactly the same position instead of Sammy. This immediately supports Teddy's description of events before and after Lenny's wife's death, throwing into doubt all of Lenny's past, present and future. The parallel positioning and repetition of the story of Sammy Jenkins who is afflicted with similar short-term memory loss plays upon the believability of a narrated account of the past. Leonard openly rejects reliability in accounts of memory in a discussion with Teddy at the coffee shop. Ironically, though, it is his reliance on his remembered past that is the basis and justifications of his actions.

The constant reference to "J.G." as his wife's killer and identification of at least three "J.G."s within the film that have ended up dead through Lenny's hands emphasizes the instability of signifiers that are used to represent the truth. Teddy tells Leonard he is the cop who helped investigate the rape of his wife. Since the police dropped the

investigation. Teddy has been finding criminals with the initials "J.G." for Leonard to kill. Enraged at his manipulation at the hands of Teddy, Lenny writes "Do not believe his lies" beneath Teddy's polaroid picture. As a result, he permanently sets off in a false direction which, with the ultimate death of Teddy, he can never escape.

The film *Memento* proposes an ironic reinterpretation of the private-eye genre in which the conventional pattern of heroic self-determination is ironically played out by Leonard Shelby. Instead of the usual sharp-witted detective hero who is determined to piece fragments of the truth together at any cost and ultimately resolves the mystery at hand, we are presented with Shelby, a man who desperately tries to pick up the fragments of his life and identity but finds that the control he thinks he has over his world is illusory. The self-conscious visual style of *Memento* which rebounds time and again through the same strain of events shows reliable narrative and stable personal identity as inadequate and a destructive myth.

All the typical elements of classic film noir, such as alienation, bleakness, disillusionment, pessimism, evil, and particularly paranoia, can be found in *Memento*. This mood is maintained throughout the film by the limited use of characters which emphasizes his alienation and limits of his interaction with other people. Lack of emotional variety emphasizes a deliberate impoverishment in his mental situation. Lack of digressions intensifies the concentration of events around his search for his wife's murderer. His uncertainty reflects the paranoia that has consumed his life narrative. Also, the low-key lighting used in the film adds to the shadiness of his character.

The structure of *Memento* is determinedly non-linear. The same sequences are seen from different viewpoints that alternately clarify and confuse perceptions. Fragments of scenes which initially appear incomprehensible become clearer as the narrative gradually lets out shards of information. The story is told backwards. Scene by scene the audience gets more information about the reasons for the murder Lenny commits in the very first sequence of the film. Strategically this places the viewer at par with Lenny's situation except for the privileged access he has to fragments of the past that Lenny has already lost from his memory. The structure therefore defies conventional story-telling practices in that it enters the realm of cognitive functions where fragments exist before a functional narrative consigns meaning onto those fragments.

The opening scene of Nolan's *Memento* is the only scene in the entire film that literally runs backwards. It is also shown in slow-motion. Indeed, the film's opening sequence establishes the narrative pattern: a hand holds up a Polaroid photograph of a

murder scene, with blood splattered all over the place. The photograph slowly un-develops, fading to darkness. The viewer is then confronted with a gruesome murder which incidentally plays in rewind – the victim's blood seeps up a wall back into his head wound, bullet cartridges spin back into the gun's chamber and the victim rolls over to the position he was in just before being shot. At this point the film reverts to forward motion.

The narrative runs through alternate color and black and white sequences which pull the narrative in different directions. The color sequences run in reverse order and are rewinds of the same events which begin each time a little further in the past. The black and white sequence of scenes, on the other hand, are more or less successively told in flashbacks and seem to reflect Lenny's reconstruction and interpretation of his past (before the accident) and the construction of his present.

In addition, the black and white sequence seems to emphasize a third person point-of-view which naturally brings into question Lenny's interpretation of the past. His doubt, fear and uncertainty are all crystallized in his words and actions in these scenes, whereas in the color scenes he portrays himself in a manner that suggests that he is in total control of his situation. The colored scenes, therefore, effectively reflect the first person point of view of through Lenny's performativity in the world outside his hotel room.

In a film such as *Memento*, time loses its authority. The past, present and future are no longer in any semblance of succession; all are fused into one. Through the dismantling of the authority of time the viewer experiences the trauma that Lenny experiences. This serves to fundamentally disrupt the routine and orderly sense of existence, throwing into radical doubt our taken-for-granted assumptions about time, identity, meaning, and life itself. Leonard's desperate attempt to construct a meaningful narrative is essential for him to restore a sense of order and connection, and to re-establish a semblance of meaning in his life. Narrative and identity are aligned in this text. Through its use of unreliable and biased narrators, the film calls into question the stability of the subject. Essentially, Lenny no longer has an identity because he cannot rework fragments of his past into a meaningful narrative. Throughout the film, Lenny keeps asking himself, "Where am I?". Technically, however, his search for his wife's killer is actually a search for himself.

The technical aspects of this film, mentioned above, show the unreliability of any self-narrative which is bound to distort the truth in one way or another. This is undoubtedly a clear, though rather extreme example of personal narrative, and for that

matter identity. What *Memento* gives us, more or less, is the story of a man who has lost his morality and conscience because he is addicted to power and control which manifests itself in a constant search for an extreme moment of fulfillment that parallels the postmodern "I"s search for "jouissance"[2]. With an unstable identity that will always leave him wanting and a life which he lives moment by moment with limited connection to the past, Leonard is an extreme model of the postmodern "I" who lives only for the satisfaction of knowing he is in control.

Leonard's becoming restless, uncertain, superficially motivated and his being on an unending quest, is a result of his medical condition that has made him as relentless in his pursuit as are other addict identities of the postmodern world. The next section of this chapter, though, discusses the film *Avatar*, a more optimistic depiction of the integration of technology into human life. The film reflects the idea that the addiction to technology expressed through the taking on of Avatar identities as extensions of one's physical bodies, may have positive bearing on social communication and tolerance.

(iv) Technology Addiction and *Avatar* (2009)

In the previous section, we saw how the addiction to power added with the uncertainty of signifieds and signifiers and the process of living life in the moment having little or no sense of past creates an indomitable urge for fulfillment within the subject. This results in assigning it an incomplete, restless, unstable identity that severely lacks a moral conscience. In this section, we see identity construction from the world of greed and manipulation, except that this has a more positive turn by converting addiction to technology from being concerned with self-centered greed to communal well-being.

Technology can be seen as an extension of man's desire to survey, record, control, and manipulate. In effect, technology becomes a system of control over human life, developed by humans, but also de-humanizing. David Forbes cites the electronic media as being capable, like drugs, of "generating fantasy, simulation, or denial of experience, in an instant" (13). Contemporary society is indeed addicted to technology in the form of computers, the internet, mobile phones, TV etc. The fantasy of

[2] In postmodern theoretics, "Jouissance" signifies extreme gratification that is expected from an external event or possession of an object. It is the drive behind postmodern identity constructs that is never fully realized, therefore, jouissance ultimately leads to dissatisfaction and a never-ending search for fulfillment.

technology lies in its capability to extend the senses and provide access to experiences previously unthinkable.

In providing extensions to the senses, technology literally fragments identity. An identity takes on an ethereal form that partially excludes the body by extending the senses. For example, a camera is an extension of the eye; phones, voice recordings and microphones are extensions of the voice, remote control devices are extensions of the hands etc. This sense of power, over and beyond what is physically possible, is where the addiction lies. Postmodern subjects have vast overloads of information yet lack the knowledge that makes such information meaningful.

Ironically, no one seems to be aware of their own victimization at the hands of corporate marketing and technology. We seem to be unaware that technological gadgets not only make addicts out of everyone but also nurture desire and create unhealthy appetites of immense proportions which can never be appeased. As mobile phones and, through them, virtual presences intrude, maintaining virtual relationships becomes more important than maintaining real ones. Absence of physical presence has reduced relationships to words, emotions to emoticons, and gestures to the press of a key.

But Marshall McLuhan, the legendary Canadian postmodern theorist, gave a more hopeful scenario of the integration of technology in human life. He saw technology as a means of establishing a global humanity. His theories about the impact of the media on man have been vastly influential since the publication of his *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1964). According to McLuhan, "now man is beginning to wear his brain outside his skull and his nerves outside his skin: new technology breeds new man" (264). Mcluhan's writings provide a comprehensive framework for the analysis of the effect of new media on the formation of identity.

In *The Medium is the Message*, McLuhan describes the electronic world as, "the final phase of the extension of man - the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society" (19). The centrality of the body in our perception and interpretation of the environment is a major concern of McLuhan and his discussions of technology as extensions of the self. Of course, his writings reveal an optimism about the possibility of technology to build a better world if only humans could control the system instead of being controlled by it.

According to McLuhan, by altering the environment, the media evokes in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think

and act about the way we perceive the world. For McLuhan "men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves." McLuhan sees this as a way to freedom and an escape into a realm which has vast potential for humans. In the *Gutenberg Galaxy* McLuhan writes, "when sense ratios change, men change". Moreover, he expresses the view that "sense ratios change when any one sense of bodily or mental function is externalized in technological form." At times McLuhan views media machines as vehicles of flight into a 'cosmic harmony' that 'transcends space and time' (1995: 238). This sense of power, over and beyond what is physically possible, is where addiction lies.

McLuhan, though, offers a way out of the negative impact of addiction by emphasizing its community building power and its potential to do good on a much larger scale than physically possible. He sees technology as having a retribalizing effect. He sees it as heightening senses of perception and creating community beyond the expanse of one's own locality.

Many popular Hollywood films visually embody McLuhan's concepts of extensions of the self and the addictive stance that accompanies the use of technology. *The Lawnmower Man* (1992), *The Matrix* (1999), and *Surrogates* (2009) represent a few of these movies. However, the recently released film *Avatar* takes the concept of virtual embodiment further than any previous treatment of the concept. The film moves beyond transference of consiousness to a computer network in *The Lawnmower Man*; digital representations of the self in a virtual universe in *The Matrix*; and the controlling of robotic replicas in *Surrogates*, to neurologically inhabiting and "driving" biological entities created from a combination of human and alien DNA in *Avatar*. In this film James Cameron seems to have captured all the philosophical questions of identity formation related to the use of technology. On the one side, we have obsessive and negative use of technology to exert power and on the other side, the hope for positive transformation through technology that reflects McLuhan's view of the technological possibility of the creation of a new type of human, endowed with both an extended consciousness and a thriving conscience.

A Discussion of *Avatar* (2009)

The term "avatar" is a Sanskrit word that refers to the incarnation of a Hindu god, but in common usage today it refers to our use of virtual forms of embodiment. "Avatar" refers to a well-known concept in cyberspace in which a person creates a virtual embodiment of the self that represents them in the digital realm.

Avatar uses digital technology extensively in creating a parallel reality which confuses the boundaries of real-unreal, possible-impossible, representation-creation, and human-nonhuman realms. Apparently, James Cameron had to put his *Avatar* project on hold for 10 years before technology could provide the advanced stage of artistry needed to complete his vision. The story line of Cameron's *Avatar* seems to be a digital realization of McLuhan's dream of universal harmony through technological advancement and also an acceptance that technology has been and will be used for exploitation and warfare. The protagonist's newly aroused perception that the value of our life can be enhanced through interaction with a tribal race is portrayed in graphically enhanced 3D technology.

The film belongs to the science fiction genre. Knowledge of this fact immediately puts the viewers in a position from where they can expect a blurring of the boundaries of reality. At every moment science and technology challenge our sense of what is technologically possible. McLuhan has already anticipated advancements in technology that allow for the "extensions of the self" on both psychological and physical levels, knowing that they lead to questioning the formation of our identities at every level. Digital characters and computer-generated environments help blur the line between imagination and reality.

Technology has, therefore, accentuated the possibility of the mind-body split. By allowing disembodied existence, technology permits new possibilities of playing with identity and dislocates the subject both spatially and temporally from the physical body. Embodiment amplifies our senses. The increase in power which allows one to rise above bodily limitations transforms the senses. In accordance with Mcluhan's *hot and cool* medium we could place Jake, the protagonist of the film *Avatar*, as a "cool" medium who lacks full sensory input (his legs have no sensation in the real world) and therefore he must activate them somehow. As a result his participation level in the interaction with his extended self increases. His consciousness fully locks onto his extended Avatar body.

In this film the switching of identity begins uniquely. When Tommy – a scientist trained for the avatar project, dies an unnatural death –his brother, Jake, an injured ex-

marine is approached (by investors of the project) to fill in his place for the sole reason that he, being a twin, has an identical genome structure. This fact allows him to be accepted by the genetically engineered biological avatar body meant for his brother. The drive for something new and for a fresh start always comes out of a feeling of loss or dissatisfaction with the situation at hand. For the protagonist, Jake, the loss of his brother and an offer to do just that was incentive enough to convince him to join an expedition to Pandora which he initially had no interest in.

This film depicts a world where technology has infiltrated all spaces. This is a quest in a different galaxy. Everything in the home base is linked to technology, the information systems, the grayish and metallic lustre of robotic fighting machines and the army has been dehumanized through their interaction with technology. All they can relate to is getting the mission at hand accomplished without consideration for the interest of other life forms. As an ex-marine Jake is easily caught up in their agenda. His interest also grows because he is promised a new prosthetic leg which promises life beyond his handicap.

The mechanical identities of humans as they integrate more and more with technology to exploit the world around them is deepened by the singleness of the sound effects. No natural sounds are heard. All that can be detected in the background is the sound of metal. The dehumanizing effect of technology adoption is highlighted by the visual deprivation of the base as opposed to the luscious colors of the forest. The grayish color scheme of the base emphasizes human dependence on computers and other machines as access to experience of the environment. The dehumanizing process has gained normalcy so that no one notices how stale the environment of technology has actually become. But most of the aspects of dehumanization emerge out of negation of the humanitarian prospects of technology and in technological advancements which enhance the capability for destruction.

Technology as Extension of the Self - Jake merging with machine

Conversely, when Jake runs in the compound in Na'vi form and experiences life as a Na'vi, it is then that the exilharating background music accentuates his enthrallment.

The more he is taught the naturalistic ways of the Na'vi, the more he becomes sensitive to the natural element surrounding him on Pandora. His interaction with nature changes as he develops a strengthened awareness of the sounds of nature. He not only notices the strong breath of his horse and the strong flapping of wings, he also notices the near silent movement of the varied insects of the forest.

The first time Jake sees an inactive Na'vi specimen on the base – the biological organism which is a cross between human and alien DNA – confined in glass casing he is amazed. As McLuhan prophesizes about human involvement with technology in the terms that "men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves" he too is is fascinated. This initial amazement and fascination then turns into addiction as we see him activate, obsessed with his Na'vi life. He forgets to even eat and sleep as Jake Sully. We see Grace forcing him to eat and take time off from his Na'vi identity, something which he is unwilling to do.

His addiction to his Na'vi identity is initiated by the fact that firstly, he is dissatisfied with his own mobility; secondly, he has no preconceptions about the Na'vi race; and thirdly he has self-interested motivations to infiltrate their race. Though his own race initially rejects him as unfit for the project since he has no previous knowledge of the ways of the Na'vi race; interestingly, when members of the Na'vi race wish to teach him their ways, it is this lack of knowledge that allows him to easily conform because he harbors no preconceptions about their race.

Jake is disembodied only to be re-embodied in a Na'vi body. Jake's consciousness is transferred to this Na'vi body. For him, simulation of life through other bodily experiences is better than real life. He is free of the limitations of his own injured body. For the first time in years he feels whole. Instead of just looking on and studying Na'vi life, he experiences it. He rekindles his emotions as his senses are heightened and as he interacts with nature. As a marine he had gained a strictly one-sided vision of life. He saw what he was told to see i.e. the Na'vi as the enemy. All that he had lost as Jake, the marine, he regains in his Na'vi identity. As a Na'vi, he has a new perspective. He feels, understands and connects. He becomes more than he could ever have expected to be. Ultimately, his conscience is awakened. Along with Grace and a few others he, decides to help those he at first set out to destroy. Thus his transformed body image allows for acceptance within the Na'vi race and ultimately results in a totally distinctive sense of self.

This exposes the lack of tolerance between races which do not respect the cultural identity of other races. The distinction that occurs when one bases one's judgment of the other on expectations based on a "one size fits all policy" are finally overcome by Jake when he merges with the Na'vi and experiences life through their senses. This highlights the flaw of a judgmental criteria (in this case American) which negatively projects all other cultures and conditions without actually giving them a chance to be understood. But absorption into an alien culture can cultivate a respect for the other, through understanding and tolerance. Jake initiates the possibility of transcultural symbiosis by assuming a Na'vi identity.

According to McLuhan, sensory balance is maintained in tribal society because they employ each of their senses equally when perceiving the environment. Favoring tribal sensitivity towards instinct and feeling over a literately acculturated sensitivity in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* McLuhan contends of such a learned person that s/he is like a "mindless drone" who is free "only to be alienated and dissociated" (259). Therefore Jake, having no preconception or knowledge of Na'vi culture easily adapts to it, instead of Norm, his highly trained and Na'vi culture literate colleague.

When the Na'vi race greet each other with the words "I see you", we understand how important the act of seeing is. It is an acknowledgement of the other through the sense of sight. That is why humans deem it necessary to replicate the physical body of the Na'vi to become one of them, at least visually. In fact, this is precisely what Neytiri says when Jake asks her to teach him: "Sky people cannot learn. You do not *See*." At one point in *Avatar*, Jake states that who he is as Na'vi seems more real than who he is as Jake Sully.

The importance of visual imagery and preconceived ideas in constituting the truth is further reinforced by the word "Na'vi" that is written in large print on the cover of Grace's book. For the military the word Na'vi represents the enemy but if the apostrophe is deleted and the 'i' substituted with 'y', the word becomes Navy. A slightly different spelling leads the meaning of the word to change totally and then it signifies a branch of the armed forces. But the word, as it appears in the film, signifies a grave threat to the self- interest of humans. This incongruity between what is shown to be and what actually is, applies not only to the identity of the Na'vi but also to that of Jake who is seen as a traitor, and also the "skypeople", who are later seen as "aliens" residing in Pandora.

Though the "skypeople" portray the Na'vi as the enemy, it is they that are actually

the enemy of the Na'vi. Parker clearly states the reason for the whole project at Pandora as he rails at Grace, the head scientist-

> Build schools, teach them English for how long? Relations with the indigenous are getting worse [. . .]. Unobtainium that is what we are here for. It sells at 20 million a kilo. (0:13:28-0:13:52)

One cannot but think that this is a critique of American military missions all over the world which have been spearheading imperialist policies that undermine the cultural identity of non-American races and cultures. Investors have complex motives working behind their funding decisions. Science and scientists are inadvertently entangled in a deadly web as research is used as a screen for military, political and financial gains. Thus, the film also raises questions as to the identity of the "sky people" who initially showed much interest in the culture of the Na'vi as an indigenous race who needed exposure to a more refined culture and education.

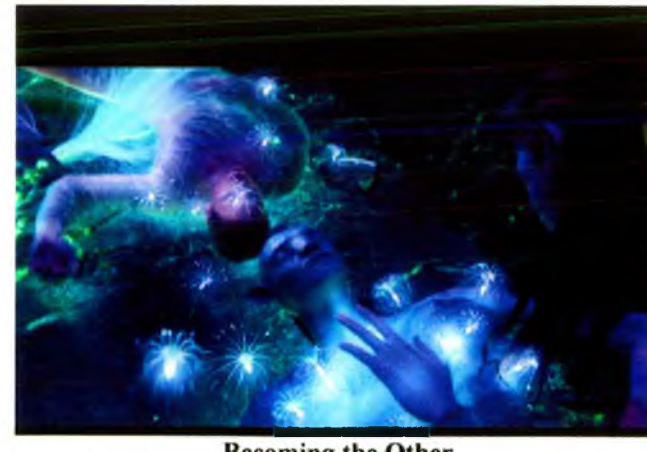
The Bond

In accordance with McLuhan's theory of harmonious emotional integration through tribal sensitivity, in Pandora, Jake is immersed in a world that favors synesthesia with all its varied and simultaneous appeals to the senses. When he attempts to ride a horselike creature he literally connects to it through "the bond", a connection of hairlike threads. He is told to feel "her heartbeat, her breath, feel her strong legs" (0:53:07-0:53:15). This connection enables him to tell her what to do by thinking it. The relationship becomes one of understanding, not dominance. It is the same for all animals and trees on Pandora, for the connection is one of an intricate network of senses extending outside the physical embodiment of a contained body.

Contrasting character roles underscore the role of empathy in assuming roles or in forming new identities. Having no prior knowledge of Na'vi culture, Jake adopts an instinctual approach. Neytiri gives him first hand experience of their culture and their connection to nature. Norm, on the other hand, has thoroughly studied the book on Na'vi culture. Yet he seems to have become the literate "mindless drone" that McLuhan warned of, who is free "only to be alienated and dissociated". He cannot associate with the Na'vi experience without referring to the book written by Dr. Grace. This, of course, in many ways impedes the course of learning naturally on his part.

Graces's realization that the wealth of Pandora "is not in the ground but is all around us" (1:33:16-1:33:20) furthers the concept of a greater consciousness that exceeds the limits of the physical body. Her comment suggests that power is not something fixed, but in the network which contains all consciousness. This is a network of trust, mutual understanding, faith and commitment that is spread, for the Na'vi, all through nature. The film sends forth a positive message: when all races combine to save nature and the power of humanity that lives within us, nature too will save all races. Like the internet the "Eywa" can connect to all and influence all. But, of course, the consciousness behind all should have pure intentions. Jake is allowed access to that network because he has been able to earn their trust; unfortunately, he could not hold on to it. He breached their trust by passing on their secrets to the "sky people." It is only when Jake looks beyond selfish gain and respects and honors the rights of the peoples of Pandora that his identity changes from being a traitorous outcast to a true leader. Indeed, Jake's effective change in identity and person agrees with McLuhan's notion that technology has the potential for universal good.

Moreover, Jake realizes that assuming an identity does not just mean adopting an external form, it is more than that. Becoming someone even through performance somehow initiates a change in habits and thoughts which ultimately leads to full submersion in an assumed identity. Thus Jake becomes a Na'vi not only in form but also emotionally and in full consciousness. By rejecting his past actions as infiltrator of the Na'vi race and spy for the American aggressors as completely demeaning to his humanity, Jake chooses to create a new identity through his future actions. He becomes a savior to the people of Pandora by inspiring them to overthrow the tyranny of the "sky people." In this sense, Jake overcomes both his past identity as a marine and present identity as a harbinger of destruction.



Becoming the Other

For example, when Jake realizes the enormity of his actions against the Na'vi race he waves Grace's book on the Na'vi people in everyone's faces as if to say all scientific research and humanitarian efforts are farcical. As he flings the book away, he shouts, "That's how its done. When a

people sit on what you want, you make them your enemy" (1:34:55-1:35:04). This points to the fact that the identity of a race is sometimes fictionally and negatively projected by another race in order to justify injustices against that race.

The formation of identity in the realm of technology is also stressed through consciousness dispersal. The wormhole-like visualization of the technology assisted connection to the Avatar body happens at high speed and somewhat forcedly whereas at the end of the film the crossing over assisted by Eywa seems to be a synthetic connection, smooth, subtle, and harmonious. Thus, it emphasizes the restructuring of addiction to technology as something that has the potential of greater good. Instead of meaningless and destructive absorption it could be used for selfless acts of humanity.

This chapter, then, has focused on the depiction of postmodern identity formation as it appears on a Hollywood influenced by interdisciplinary studies, consumer culture, addiction (in any form), and technological advancements which allow for diverse approaches to understanding the rise in excess and compulsiveness that is encouraged by contemporary society and culture in the formation of addict identities.

In the preceding pages of the chapter, four major areas of addiction have been singled out to focus on the addict-identities created from compulsive behavior. Each of the areas discussed concentrated on how postmodern subjects use their freedom to be who they want to be in ways that construct addict identities that actually deny them the freedom they dream of. However, the endings of all these films, except possibly *Memento*, indicate that postmodern subjects can rise above their addictive situations. They can permanently overcome their feeling of emptiness and attain a more wholesome experience of life by being less self-centered and more moderate in their consumption.

Upto this point in the dissertation, we have seen, through analyses of national myths, short fiction, and film that the postmodern "I" is continuously being reconstructed. This transmogrification occurs basically in reaction to external elements of society and culture, especially those disseminated by the media. Unfortunately, this apparent freedom of the American subject to be anyone s/he pleases is undercut by a sort of uncontrollable insanity for jouissance that manifests itself in addict identities that are compulsively driven to search for meaning in a meaningless world of excesses.

The next chapter combines all the topic discussions of previous chapters into an analysis of Don Delillo's *White Noise*. This novel is in many ways the classic postmodern text, embodying the quintessential postmodern questions about identity.

Chapter Five

Narratives of Postmodern Identity in Don Delillo's *White Noise*.

After discussing the various features of postmodern identity construction in the previous chapters with reference to social and political narratives in contemporary American short stories and films, I will now embark on a sustained analysis of *White Noise*. Written by Don Delillo, this postmodern novel exposes the depthlessness of postmodern identity constructs that result in restlessness and emptiness within the postmodern "I". Delillo shows that postmodern identities are created from bits and pieces of both verbal and visual information and images. The postmodern culture from which these images and ideas are drawn from is fragmented, polyvocal, and unreliable. As a result, the identities derived from multiple perspectives and mediated instances of experience are totally unstable. The instability of these characters is revealed through their day-to-day interaction with people both within and outside the family, as well as, through their addictions, obsessions and paranoid delusions.

In *White Noise* (1975) as well as novels such as *Americana* (1971), *Mao II* (1991), and *Falling Man* (2007), Dellilo presents a protagonist who is on a journey of self-discovery. But in *White Noise* he not only probes the identity of the protagonist but also those of other characters of his family as they interact between and amongst themselves on various levels. The language they use, their attitudes and habits all reveal aspects of postmodern identity construction which can be discussed on the basis of how identity is dominated and constructed by images, consumer culture, language and addiction. Simply stated, Dellilo's works highlight what is symptomatic about American life and culture in that they reveal and comment on cultural signs and symptoms that can be understood as simultaneously American and postmodern.

In his introduction to *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel*, Bran Nicol writes of the novel as having always been "the artistic form whose special ability is to somehow *represent* society at a given moment, to capture its rhythms and reflect its concerns" (Nicol 9). Accordingly, in his fiction, DeLillo emphasizes the influence of media and technology in creating diverse mindsets, the performativity of social identities, the unsettling restlessness

in all postmodern subjects, the dependence on consumer objects for the expression of identity, the obsession with simulcra and spectacle, the lack of intimacy within familial identity roles and other such postmodern symptoms that pertain to identity construction in a postmodern world facing identity crises all the time.

In *White Noise* DeLillo's protagonist Jack Gladney confronts a new order in which life is increasingly lived in the world of simulacra, where images and electronic representations replace direct experience. This increasingly simulational and non-referential world brings about radical changes in the very shape of subjectivity. This chapter thus sums up the previous discussions about postmodern identity, pertaining to the previous chapters of this dissertation. Consequently, the discussion in this chapter has been arranged more or less in accordance with the previously discussed topics.

(i) Identity Construction through Rewriting of History

(a) National Identity: As discussed in chapter one of this dissertation, a country's national identity is usually based on a series of historical and social myths. Postmodernism's negation of these myths that form the basis of a unified sense of national identity, destabilizes nationhood. Thus, postmodern identities search for a simulation of unity and nationhood in present-day culture. Stacey Olster aptly observes, "the foundational myth to which Jack most frequently returns in an age of multinational capitalism is that of American nationhood" (Olster 81). Nationhood is now seen in terms of financial and status based equality.

> This assembly of station wagons, as much as anything they might do in the course of the year, more than formal liturgies or laws, tells the parents they are a collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation.
>
> (*WN* [1]4)

The event that opens his narration, the annual return of students to the college at which he teaches, is a spectacle that Jack witnesses each September that reassures participants that "they are a collection of the like-minded and the spiritually akin, a people, a nation" (*WN* 4). This search for nationhood in contemporary culture is symptomatic of postmodern culture where national myths and all sense of pride in nationhood have been seriously questioned and

[1] From this point onward, in the case of in-text citation, the novel *White Noise* will be referred to as *WN*.

destabilized by postmodern re-examinations of foundational myths. Therefore, there is the dire attempt to rewrite those myths in present-day terms.

Jack compares the panicked flight of cars during the "air-borne toxic event" to "wagon trains converging on the Santa Fe Trail" (*WN* 159). The Santa Fe Trail has often been romanticized through sagas of constant peril, replete with violent prairie storms, battles with Indians, and thundering bison herds. Harold L. James in "The Santa Fe Trail" gives the following description: "It was a trail of promise. In the mind of its traveler was the dream of freedom and opportunity. [. . .] the sense of adventure was at times lost in drenching thunderstorms, blizzards, sicknesses, and monotonous marches through sun-tortured, dust-choking deserts" (James 107). Similarly, the movement of cars holds hope, promise and opportunity for life. The main difference between them is that the Santa Fe Trail had real and certain dangers, dangers that could be clearly identified. In contrast, the danger is now uncertain and covered with mystery no one knew what they were up against or how to refer to it.

Romanticized versions of the Santa Fe Trail as seen in Western movies emphasize a communal struggle against the hardship of the trail. Wagon trains carrying numerous families whose men women and children were seen fighting against all odds, were hopefully headed towards a better future. In *White Noise* communal identity is constantly referred to as being invested in spectacles such as this where fleeing for one's life from uncertain danger is equated with the struggle of days gone by. From tourist attraction to natural and man-made disaster it is the spectacle that now builds a sense of community.

In "Introduction: The Power of History and the Persistence of Mystery," William Duvall writes of the nation of America as depicted in *White Noise* that we are shown "a thoroughly postmodern, dehistoricized America in which Hitler and Elvis can become nearly interchangeable figures in a culture of celebrity" (Duvall 7). Delillo breaks down historical metanarratives by revisioning historical figures. By bringing Hitler into academia as a subject for study and constructing a whole department around him, Jack has detached the name from the concept of overarching evil. Hitler is discussed from a perspective (Jack's) that somehow mellows the seriousness of Hitler's war crimes by making him a commercially viable product. Jack's debates and discussions which emphasize Hitler's relationship with his mother, on one hand, and his dog, on another, deconstruct the image of Hitler as an embodiment of evil. Then

the image is reconstructed so that we see him as a man powerful enough to have put himself in a leadership position around which academia can gather conferences called on discussions of his image, more than 40 yrs after his death. These Hitler scholars, besides wandering around the campus with laminated name tags, would "exchange Hitler gossip, spread the usual sensational rumors about the last days in the fuhrerbunker" (*WN* 274). It is this emphasis on the scholars' infatuation with gossip and rumors that deconstructs the historical canon of reliability and makes the conference setting as much as a spectacle as Jack's assumed identity. In lacking the solidity of a stable point of view, national sentiment and communal identity centre around fictitious unifying principles.

Thus one of the main dangers for the intensely media-driven society of America is its gradual inability to comprehend any reality other than that which is projected on the media screen. As a result, critical judgment wavers and true historicity is vulnerable to media manipulation. So, as Jack rebuilds the Nazi past through film extracts and documentaries, it is clear that he has lost sight of the Nazi horrors that America as a nation so detested. And through his actions, by applauding Hitler's rise to power he indirectly undermines American nationhood.

Encouraged by the faculty Head, Jack Gladney is motivated by the ambition to assume a significant position as chair of Hitler Studies, a department that he had created. Jack has no specific qualifications that made him fit for holding such a post. He does not know German. He has not examined any official documents, and most of his lectures are based on film clips and movies. His discussions tactfully overlook the gruesome aspects of Hitler's ascendancy to power and centre around anecdotes of Hitler's mother and his pet dog. Even so, he is considered the most important person in Hitler Studies. Thus the consideration of capital gain destroys the ability to think on traditional historical grounds. And as Duvall points out, "In White Noise we see how the pressures of advertising and capital make it so difficult to think historically when the very structures of thought seem to have been co opted by the logic of television genres" (*WN* 2). Jack is completely taken in by the images of Hitler he sees on TV and in the movies. The fascination with Hitler and the power he exerted seems to override the strong sentiment of hate against the man who killed millions in his concentration camps.

Through such a portrayal of events, Delillo makes his reader look critically and reassess his/her position in postmodern America. He encourages one to think historically and go beyond present cultural mindsets that take everything at face value instead of thinking of the deep-seated ramifications of each rewritten version of the past. Since our only access to the past is through partially biased documentation one should be wary about accepting those renderings of past events. The realization that mini-narratives such as those construed by Jack, may be used to manipulate time, space, and perception emphasizes the postmodern cultural trait of uncertainty.

On the other hand, Fredric Jameson in "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" expresses the view that this, "global, yet American culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world [. . .] "(*WN* 23). But American identity, even in that sense, is under siege. Thus we find Jack telling his wife to eat a packet of foreign looking wheat-germ because it is "German" and Japanese cars are seen entering the consciousness of even the youngest of American citizens i.e. Steffie's mumbling of Toyota Celica in her sleep.

In keeping with this commodification of identity, national artifacts are no longer searched for. Rather, they are created through the media. For example, Murray, Jack's colleague, mentions a tourist attraction identified by the signboard "The Most Photographed Barn in America" (*WN* 12). This signboard not only creates an identity for the barn as a historical artifact, it also enhances and maintains that identity. Every tourist that goes there and takes a picture makes the statement all the more real. Thus, out of nowhere communal identity builds up around an image of a barn that may not have been significant at all in the history of America. The simulation of national history, thus, becomes more important than retrieving and upholding it.

In other words, as people create identities both for themselves and for objects and places they encounter without any specific footing in personal history, postmodern concerns and capitalist interests dehistorisize, destabilize, and deconstruct the national identity of America.

(b) Personal Identity: The creation of identity at the personal level is a major aspect of postmodern subjectivity. The fact that identity can be created implies that there is a major level of performance involved in that creation. In Chapter Three, part of the discussion focused on the performative nature of postmodern identity as suggested in the theories of Judith Butler and exemplified through Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh". Similarly, Delillo, through Jack's academic persona, depicts the performative nature of men's roles in society. Jack's academic persona as chair and founder of Hitler studies is an image. It is a simulation of an identity that fits his purpose. In "The Precession of Simulcra", Jean Baudrillard identifies the difference between simulating and pretending as such : "To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. [. . .] simulating is not pretending. [. . .] pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false' , the 'real' and the imaginary' (Baudrillard 93). The simulation carries more of his identity than any other aspect of his being. This identity has been simulated in accordance with media footage, and information revealing bits and pieces of Hitler's identity. And, in simulating Hitler he becomes Hitleresque in his vengeance as we see in his behavior towards Mink at the end of the novel.

As he performs the identity he has literally created for himself, he sometimes experiences a sort of agency panic because he feels he is "the false character that follows the name around" (*WN* 17). This gives rise to the fear that he might be discovered as false. In *The Transparency of Evil* Baudrillard talks about deliberately created images that are merely empty, vacuous appearances:

> Everyone seeks their *look*. Since it is no longer possible to base any claim on one's own existence, there is nothing for it but to perform an *appearing act* without concerning oneself with *being* – or even with *being seen*. So it is not, I exist, I am here! but rather: I am visible, I am an image – look, look! This is not even narcissism, merely an extraversion without depth, a sort of self-promoting ingenuousness whereby everyone becomes the manager of their own appearance. (Baudrillard 23)

Baudrillard's emphasis on self-promotion through image and appearance that lacks depth and stability finds expression in Jack's created image. This persona is divested with elements of awe as Jack puts on weight and always wears academic robes and "glasses with thick black

heavy frames and black lenses" (*WN* 17) whenever he is on campus. Through this created identity Jack he hides "his feeble presentation of self" (*WN* 17) and the fact that though he is the country's leading expert on Hitler, he does not even speak German. He gives the introductory speech at a conference from his compilation of words that sound roughly the same in German and English. Though the persona he assumes is strong and exudes command, Jack is plagued by the feeling that he is a fraud and so he constantly needs to reinforce his identity through accessorization. He changes his name from being simple Jack to J.A.K., a move to which his wife responds quite positively, "To her it [the initials] intimated dignity, significance and prestige" (*WN* 17). Jack thus envelops his name with a sense of mystery.

It is relevant here to note the similarity between the initials JFK and JAK. The initials JFK have long had a significant relation to American history and the identity of a nation. The assassination of JFK is regarded as major event in American history. JAK seems to imply that Jack is building upon that sense of "dignity, significance and prestige" (*WN* 17) that is actually related to the initials JFK.

Jack's position at the college had become his whole identity; at least, that is what he wishes to reveal to others. As a result he has assimilated more characteristics akin to Hitler than he could consciously realize. Jack wants to retain an air of mystery around him, with the hope that his weaknesses will not be exposed. So, like Hitler,"the new Messiah" of the German people, who would quickly leave the stage and disappear from view as soon as his speech was finished, Jack spends a lot of time in his office, hiding. Like Hitler he waits for complete silence before beginning a speech. Like Hitler, who instilled inaccurate autobiographical details in *Mein Kampf* in order to provide a positive image of himself, Jack puts on a show of knowing German. Like Hitler, whose attitude towards women is reflected in his comment that: "A highly intelligent man should take a primitive and stupid woman," Jack seems to have chosen Babette for her simplicity and domesticity.

In *Karl Brandt: The Nazi Doctor* (2007), Ulf Schmidt writes that Hitler treasured the organs through which he exerted his power. For Hitler, organs such as his voice or eyes were his assets as he saw them "as instrumental in controlling the people and the masses. He was hypersensitive to the slightest idea that these organs might be defective." Similarly, Jack is dreadfully disturbed by his run in with Eric Massingale at the local hardware store where Massingale exclaims, "I've never seen you off campus, Jack. You look different without your

glasses and gown"(*WN* 82). Jack is feeling quite uncomfortable by the time Massingale adds, "You're a different person altogether" and concludes his observation saying, "You look so harmless, Jack. A big, harmless, aging, indistinct sort of guy" (*WN* 82). This is not the kind of typification Jack prefers. The assuming of identity is not a pretension, it is a simulation. It is a simulated subject position around which his whole academic career and his sense of self evolves. He cannot think of himself without referring to this identity. It is his source of power without which he is non-significant to others. The unreal thus becomes more real than real. He constantly has to reinforce this sense of self since it is not inborn. This identity is the embodied expression of mediated images of Hitler which are in themselves unstable representations.

Jack is so obsessed with the power that his identity brings him that he claims immunity from the airborne toxic event based on his intellectual status and urban residence. He states that "society is set up in such a way that it's the poor and the uneducated who suffer the main impact of natural and manmade disasters" (*WN* 114). But of course, somehow he still feels insignificant the moment he looks at the manly sincerity of Vernon, his father-in-law. As he tries to evaluate himself on skills usually linked to masculinity he knows that his skills fall far short of what was once expected of men. For example, the mending of a leaky faucet would be no trouble for a man such as Vernon but it would be a major problem for Jack, and he knows it.

By acknowledging the fact that his masculinity is invested in quite different attributes and skills than Vernon, Jack's self-reflection emphasizes the performativity of all gender positions. This also shows the inevitable mutability in a postmodern world where there are no stable standards and all identity attributes are up for grabs. What is noticeable here is that in spite of all his endeavors Jack is not satisfied with his identity. He has to constantly reinforce it. This is indeed a depressive and anxiety-ridden situation where the postmodern subject needs to reassure himself as well as others that s/he is who s/he proposes to be.

(c) Identity of the Postmodern American Family : The postmodern family is neither nuclear nor extended. Its identity lies in a conglomerate of multiple origin and the identities of its members are more diverse than ever before. In the 1970s, E. Shorter (1975) aptly described the emerging post-modern family by identifying three important characteristics: (i) adolescent indifference to the family's identity; (ii) instability in the lives of couples, accompanied by rapidly increasing divorce rates; and (iii) destruction of the "nest" notion of nuclear family life with the liberation of women. The non-nuclear "pastiche" family in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* seems to be such a family. It reflects the artificial and hybrid re-creation of concepts of identity that relate to the familial structure in postmodern American society.

In *White Noise* Jack and Babette's family consists of sons and daughters of their various marriages. The children in the family are as follows: Mary Alice is Jack's nineteen-year - old daughter from his first marriage to Dana Breedlove, Heinrich is the fourteen-year-old son of Jack and Janet Savory, Bee is the twelve year old daughter of Jack and Tweedy Browner, Denise is the eleven-year-old daughter of Babette and Bob Pardee, Steffie is Jack's nine-year-old daughter from his second marriage to Dana Breedlove, Eugene is the eight-year-old son of Babette and an ex-husband in Australia, and Wilder is the toddler son of Babette and an ex-husband in Australia. So from the very beginning the reader gets a sense of turbulent self-centered identities which are together but don't exactly merge as a single family. It seems as if at any time any one of the children will leave or be called upon to leave to live with his/her other parent. This immediately affects any attempt at establishing commonly accepted power-relations within the family. Thus, the family members end up as separate entities that occupy the same space and yet are invested with little sense of permanence.

The sense of stability that was once so valued and strongly felt within the confines of a stable family lineage is totally missing. Marriage vows and lifelong commitments seem a thing of the past. Identities no longer have to live up to family standards: instead, they are concocted from elements outside the family nucleus because there is no centrally dominant tradition to adopt. This postmodern family is no longer organized around the singular authority of the father; rather it is utterly decentered and globally dispersed. Thus, the identity of the traditional family is brought into question.

As seen in *White Noise* the home is no longer a refuge of harmony, serenity, and understanding. On the contrary, in encouraging diversity the postmodern family has become

the site of confrontation between people of different ages and genders. Personal ideologies are not formed from within the family nucleus rather the sources are multifarious. Thus, we see Heinrich constantly challenging his father's views. Denise, Jack's eleven year old daughter, is engrossed reading *Physicians' Desk Reference*. Steffie murmurs "Toyota Celica" in her sleep. Bee's self-possessed, thoughtful and silent presence makes everyone self-conscious. And Wilder, thinking his mother's televised image to be real, approaches the TV set, "leaving a handprint on the dusty surface of the screen" (*WN* 105). Each of the children has a different view of his/her surroundings, and none seem to have solid ideals to turn to.

The difference in the understanding and temperament of these children calls for a different type of family setting. In a postmodern strain Murray, Jack's colleague postulates that "The family is the cradle of the world's misinformation" (*WN* 81) and tolerance of that misinformation is the bond that keeps it strong. In this situation diversity is strong and multiple viewpoints enter the scene. According to Murray, "Facts threaten our happiness and security" (*WN* 81) and "Not to know is a weapon of survival" (*WN* 82). This indirectly comments on the condition of relationships within postmodern families. Interaction is no longer a social event confined to and conforming to specific culture and tradition. Media infiltrates once private places and influences identity from beyond the expanse of local culture. With the bombardment of mediated images it is impossible to tell what a child or for that matter an adult will take away, as experience, from a written, visual or audio message embedded in radio and TV programs or written in newspapers, magazines and tabloids. Thus, for example, Babette in spite of all the nurturing roles she has, and in spite of the awareness of the "brain-sucking" power of media (TV), responds to a printed ad which has dire consequences for her sense of self and the identity of her family.

Members of the postmodern family value autonomy of the individual more than the family unit. Therefore, actions of the individual cannot be considered representative of family and values. As William Douglas observes in *Television Families: Is Something Wrong in Suburbia?* (2003), "the American family has continued to develop along a path marked by increased parental absence from the home and a diminishing family performance" (Douglas 134). With the postmodern emphasis on satisfaction through enjoyment, consumption and self-indulging behavior, individual ambition is given preference over family. Thus, authority, acceptance, sacrifice, obedience, security, and sanctity are no longer words associated with the

home and family. In this sense, the postmodern family space seems to be what Marc Auge in *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995) refers to as a "nonplace." A "non-place" is a kind of physical space that people temporarily occupy as a means en-route to their actual destination. Such spaces in the context of postmodernism can be identified as airports, shopping malls, stations etc. where superficial connections are made. A postmodern family lacks the strength of bondage and authority previously held by traditional families. Instead of movement that leads towards the home and family connections, all emphasis is on action and movement away from the home. This is similar to Babette's staring into nothingness even when she is in the house. The family can no longer provide support and strength. All of that is now sought outside of the family.

Even postmodern children can no longer be thought of as innocent and emotionally dependent on the family. These children with their mediated consciousnesses are thrust into the world quite early. After gaining experience of the outside world from their extensive access to media they are considered to be and compellingly required to be worldly and competent. Thus we see Bee, Jack's eleven year old daughter, sent alone from Surabaya to Iron City. Even though there was a crash landing at the airport where Bee was to arrive, her mother (Tweedy) comments on how safe airports are for children. Tweedy is seemingly unaware of the possible dangers and the emotional pressure of having to travel thousands of miles alone. She justifies her decision to allow Bee to travel alone saying it was a necessary step to independence:

> "Every child ought to have the opportunity to travel thousands of miles alone" Tweedy said, "for the sake of her self esteem and independence of mind. [. . .].
>
> (*WN* 93)

This trend derives from a worldview which places children and adults on the same plane of existence. Children are expected to become adults as adults themselves place personal ambition and achievement over and above family life and family relations. Parents are too busy to provide their children with the attention, care and support that they need. To avoid the blame of irresponsibility, parents justify their actions as necessary preparatory steps taken for self-esteem and confidence. Setting them on their own at such a young stage of life is only possible if parents initiate a detachment in their relationships with their children. This emotional detachment ultimately invades the child and is expressed in self-centered

disinterestedness. These are the children that leave their parents when helpless, lonely and scared in old age to fend for themselves.

Unlike the extended family in which a strong centralized power structure was retained and the elders were unquestioned, in the postmodern family power is dispersed. This has a lot to do with the fact that the members of a postmodern family cannot be said to have a common history. In Delillo's *White Noise* Jack and Babette have been married for less than three years since Wilder the youngest child is from Babette's earlier marriage. The detachment noticed within the postmodern family is justified with arguments of personal freedom.

Yet, the atmosphere within Jack's family signals impending danger of failure. The whole house is considered a storehouse and not a home. Only the kitchen and bedroom are available spaces to family members which signifies over-consumption and impending insignificance. Jack tells us at the beginning of the novel ,

> Babette and I do our talking in the kitchen. The kitchen and the bedroom are the major chambers around here, the power haunts, the sources. She and I are alike in this, that we regard the rest of the house as storage space for furniture, toys, all the unused objects of earlier marriages and different sets of children, the gifts of lost in-laws, the hand-me-downs and rummages. Things, boxes. Why do these possessions carry such sorrowful weight? There is a darkness attached to them, a foreboding. (*WN* 6)

The house fails, therefore, on various levels to become a home. For Jack and Babette, for that matter, objects are not associated with intimate memories and personal anecdotes. They are not invested with history and tradition. On the contrary, as remnants of the unsettling pasts of broken relationships, they are considered a burden that clutter the present. The presence of these objects has a darkness attached to it, a "sorrowful weight". For Jack, and everyone else for that matter, these objects carry "a foreboding" that any time this family could also end like the many others and remnants of it contained in a box, increasing the burden of failure.

Thus the postmodern family is no longer a place where like minded people can enjoy interesting and commonly shared anecdotes. It is not a shared space that is considered a place to feel safe and stable. Rather, it is unstable, unpredictable, and always charged with residual conflict. The only harmony noticed in such uncertainty and diversity is when death and destruction is shown on TV and all eyes are glued to the TV screen. Unfortunately, with no

common history to share. TV becomes the most powerful frame of reference in the postmodern family and, in extension, the postmodern society.

(ii) Changes in Author's Technique

In line with the discussion on author identity in Chapter Two of this dissertation, this section looks at authorial intervention and ironic commentary within *White Noise*. Though the author does not appear in the text, the reader can feel his ghostly presence maneuvering the movement of thought through suggestive association[2] and ironical commentary. In *White Noise*, though, what is noticed is that all reference and discussion centers on TV, radio and consumer products. Thus, the postmodern consciousness seems only to be able to think in terms of mediated knowledge and consumerist lifestyles. As a result, even the author's intrusions which echo through the text find expression through the media. Strategically placed TV and radio commentaries critique the postmodern society through subtle jerks of the consciousness.

Among many of the aspects that change in the narrative related to the destabilization of the identity of the author (as discussed before), two aspects have been discussed below in this analysis of Delillo's *White Noise*.

(a) Authorial Intervention: In modernist experiments, narrative techniques emphasized on "showing not telling" a story (Booth 1976). In other words, the telling phase of narration gave way to the "showing" phase. Characters showing who they were in action and their thoughts, became natural to novelistic expression. This change in narrative technique is seen to continue into postmodern literature. Postmodern narratives dealing with the effect of external stimuli on the formation of the self, show associations within the thought stream that are based on the character's experience of life. As experience in postmodern times has become totally enveloped by mediated messages and images, every thought or reflection that clarifies one's understanding of the world echoes messages that are distributed through the media.

[2] By "suggestive association" I refer to the triadic word sequence that appears in the text from time to time that give the readers' thoughts a slight nudge in a particular direction. Through these triadic word sequences the writer refrains from imposing any authoritative pronouncements. Rather, this suggests that the character's consciousness understands the world through associative thought strains which are embellished with understanding of commercial products.

In *White Noise* the extreme influence of mediated experience is shown to penetrate the consciousness of the characters. Jack understands his world with reference to consumerist images. The narrative technique emphasizes this connection between self and media by placing a triad of consumer products at strategic points within the text. These product-placement triads are examples of how the postmodern self is engulfed by mediated images and sounds. Though these triads seem to be randomly placed a little reflection shows them to be fragments remnant of capitalist culture. In other words, these triads have infiltrated their way into Jack's stream of thought.

These triads are a metafictional device, signifying the author's intrusion into the reality of the novel. That mediated experience now replaces authorial intervention in guiding the thoughts of characters and readers alike, is both technically and thematically expressed by the presence of the triads. Like the chorus in Greek Tragedy, these product names foreshadow and clarify events and actions. The place once secured to "The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost" is now usurped by man made products. For example, "Dacron, Orion, Lycra Spandex" (*WN* 52). This triadic presence of man-made materials seemingly free-float in the postmodern consciousness and signify the role consumerism now occupies in postmodern life.

The triad mentioned above appears when Jack and Babette are on their way back from a supermarket. At this point, Murray has flirted with Babette while talking about the effect of television on the consciousness of society. The specific grouping of consumer materials related to sweatsuits foreshadows the events to come. Babette's obsession with exercise, the wearing of a ski mask to disguise her identity when dealing with Mink, and her becoming someone on whom no consequence is able to penetrate. Rather, it slips off the surface of man-made "no tear and wear" clothes.

For the moment Babette is worried that her recent spells of forgetfulness are obvious enough for Denise to notice them. She deliberately lies to Jack about her Dylar intake. This is but one of the many lies she has been telling her family, leading to the changed person who has to wear a sweatsuit the whole daylong because more than anything *running* has become her life. Though, as Jack points out, it is like many other things a major involvement that is taking over her life :

> "Why do you have to run up steps? You're not a professional athlete . . . Don't make a major involvement out of it. Everything is a major involvement today."
> "It's my life. I tend to be involved."
> "It's not your life. It's only exercise." (*WN* 301)

Over-involvement is a postmodern trait that signals the unrestrained needs of a postmodern self which refuses to constrict itself in any way. It is also indicative of how the media instills habits by repetitive images that create dissatisfaction with one's body and situation. Its lust for immortality and youth denies everything else its place. For Babette family and responsibility must accommodate her needs and newly-formed habits, even if it means allowing her to go out in the rain at ten o'clock at night to run up and down the stadium stairs and continuously lie about the person she has become.

Even the children are not spared from the consumerist agenda. For example, Steffie mutters car brand names (Toyota Celica) in her sleep further signifying how capitalist culture, through brand names, has infiltrated the most private of personal spaces — our dream-consciousness. Technology assists in this infiltration process by providing easy access to funds even when there is none. The triad that comes after Jack's thoughts about Babette's fear of death is "MasterCard, Visa, American Express" (*WN* 100). This follows immediately after he observes that Babette's fear of death stems from a similar fear of "being left alone" in "emptiness" with an overwhelming "sense of cosmic darkness." Ironically, though it seems that in a capitalist society these credit cards offer release from emptiness, the release is temporary. In fact, capitalism-induced consumer culture, through its emphasis on consumption, constantly creates this sense of emptiness. With the loss of belief in religion, consumer objects are seen to be invested with the power to sooth and console. Unfortunately, this is a false hope as is expressed through Jack's maddened urge to throw away his possessions as he realizes their uselessness to console him after he discovers Babette's deception. The anger he feels at Babette is transferred from her to the objects that seem to define identity in a world obsessed with surface details.

The triadic word sequence, "leaded, unleaded, super unleaded" (*WN* 199) refers to different varieties of fuel that are used to power cars. Strategically, this sequence appears after Jack and Babette have been talking about their feelings of death and how Babette's fear has led

her to too drastic an action. At one point Jack tells Babette how he depends on her for strength and how her deception has changed his conception of her and his attitude towards her.

> "You're my strength, my life-force. How can I persuade you that this is a terrible mistake? I've watched you bathe Wilder, iron my gown. These deep and simple pleasures are lost to me now. Don't you see the enormity of what you've done?" (*WN* 199)

Jack once considered Babette as a pure source of energy that propelled him forward. Unfortunately, this has all changed for him and he sees his relationship with her as tainted. This section actually reflects on how the change in one person affects the whole relationship. Domestic scenes of Babette bathing Wilder and doing chores around the house have lost their charm because Jack now sees the person doing them as false and deceptive.

That Babette's actions have taken a toll on their relationship is tactfully foreshadowed by the mention of various types of fuel immediately after they make love. It seems that from this point on their relationship has become mechanical, and is more about needs than emotion and pure love. All the types of fuel mentioned can suffice to power a car. Similarly, Jack hopes to still gain strength from his relationship with his wife, even though it is not as pure as it should be. Even though he cannot see those domestic pleasures in the same light he still hopes to somehow overcome the destructiveness of the situation. He hopes to be able to look beyond the identity Babette has assumed in her quest to alleviate her self-centered fears.

The gruesome effect of Babette's sexual transgression on Jack's identity can be noticed in the way Jack is transformed from being "a big, harmless, aging, indistinct sort of guy" to the savagely angry person who steals a neighbor's car in the middle of the night and rushes with homicidal vengeance with a loaded gun towards the motel where Mink is staying. "Random Access Memory, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, Mutual Assured Destruction" (*WN* 303) are words which foreshadow the events to follow in which Babette's self-satisfying needs will destroy the acquired apparent stability of her family. No matter how Jack tries to avoid the image of his wife's transgression it comes back like a random access memory of a computer chip. It will always pop up from time to time. That Babette's self-centered thoughts prevents her from realizing the seriousness of what she has done is clear when she says "This is not the story of a wife's deception" (*WN* 197). The dangers that lurk in such promiscuousness is brought into the consciousness by the reference to AIDS. Such acts of

desperation ensure destruction of trust, faith, domesticity and health i.e. "Mutual Assured Destruction."

Thus the consciousness of the postmodern self throbs with inconsistencies and mediated thoughts which are used to construct, deconstuct and interpret the world it derives from. Leonard Wilcox refers to these triads as "eruptions" and points out "These 'eruptions' in the narrative imply the emergence of a new form of subjectivity colonized by the media and decentered by its polyglot discourses and electronic networks." The triads, therefore, reflect the power of consumerism in forming identity as the media continuously seeps into the thoughts and actions of postmodern subjects.

(b) Ironical Comments and Floating Signifiers: Irony is a play of words that highlights the opposite of what has been written, said or depicted. Picket fences have come to be associated with happy families and content households. Ironically, Delillo refers to a picket fence in an instance when he mentions the town graveyard. The fence holds up the sign, "The Old Burying Ground, Blacksmith Village"(*WN* 97).

DeLillo's postmodern world is one of free-floating and endless simulacra, a meaning cut off from all bases. Murray expounds solemnly on the unfolding of a new order where the distinction between reality and representation, sign and referent, collapses: "Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn" (*WN* 12). Simulcra has eclipsed the real. The *sign* has destabilized the *referent*. Though Jack holds the information pertaining to his health and in extension his death he is helplessly unable to decipher the symbols himself, he has to wait for his doctor for conclusions. The clerk of the clinic he goes to tells him – "your doctor knows the symbols" (*WN* 281). The information about his own death is out of Jack's reach rendering him helpless before professionals who specialize in death.

Jack challenges the neatness of the historical account of Hitler by bringing to light contradictory scenes and aspects of the character which are not usually highlighted. By removing Hitler from the fixed adjective of *bad* he endows Hitler's identity with a certain inconclusiveness which goes against emphasized historical narratives. In his hands, Hitler is neither a good nor bad man. He loses his awe-inspiring status and becomes someone who has

family concerns; a man who loves his mother; and a man who loves his pet. This is quite a paradoxical take on the man who was the cause of mass genocide in World War II.

The power of language to "state-created terminology" (*WN* 117), is consistently portrayed by DeLillo as obscuring realities that might disrupt the status quo. "Landing" attached to "crash" quiets passengers in a plummeting airplane (*WN* 91). "Black billowing cloud" reassures those in the path of a toxic air mass that "they're" – which is to say, some amorphous authority – "coming to grips with the thing" (*WN* 113).

The narrative style of the novel is, in one way or another, similar to the narratives of television. Like TV, the novel provides an influx of disjointed information which constantly contradicts and confuses singular meaning. The same type of meaningless and misleading narrative is seen constructed in the polyvocal dialogue of the Gladney family.

(iii) Female Subjectivities in a Postmodern Society

This section, in keeping with Chapter Three, discusses the identities of the female characters emphasizing their performative roles and the affect the society they live in, has on them. In their search for freedom from any and all constraints women, unfortunately, somehow entangle themselves in situations that lead to despair.

The absence of traditional parental traits sometimes puts pressure on the child to assume the role of the protector. Babette cares about her father in a way she does not care about her own husband and children. Her relationship with her present family is based on need. She needs Wilder to cope with her troubles. She is obsessed with her own death yet with her father it was a totally different story. She was a totally different person with him. Each and every interaction was sincere. Jack also notices this aspect of the change that has come upon her. Jack sees her bent at the knees, feeling his presence in the kitchen. Jack muses on Babette's reaction.

> What an epic force he must have seemed to her, taking shape in her kitchen this way, a parent, a father with all the grist of years on him, the whole dense history of associations and connections, come to remind her who she was, to remove her disguise, grab hold of her maundering life for a time, without warning. (*WN* 247)

True familial feeling is built on the foundation of a "dense history of associations and connections" which give a strong sense of the self. Vernon's presence brings back, for a while, the Babette that Jack had married. His presence is enough to "remove her disguise" and force her back on the track of sincerity. But of course, this is only "for a time".

Her relationship with her father is something that is good for her. Though he had a lawlessness about him after his wife's death, he had a certain masculinity, rough, down-to-earth quality that was devoid of pretence. Babette could not assume an identity before him. She would watch her father from a window, and express the deepest emotions :

> managing to express love, worry, exasperation and despair, hope and gloom, more or less simultaneously. Vernon had only to shift his weight to arouse in her a series of extreme emotions. (*WN* 249)

Unfortunately, for all his performance Jack cannot arouse such strong emotions. As a daughter she finds stability in her parent even though he never calls and is never around.

Vernon, does not concern himself with dangers he cannot see and control. He only concerns himself with the preventable such as leaky faucets and pays no attention to the uncontrollable. He is sure of himself because he represents an era in which a person knew who s/he was. His presence gives his daughter strength but once he leaves it is gone again.

Similarly, when Babette falls prey to her addictions, Denise plays the role of the mother. In the scene where Denise and Babette quibble about Babette's chewing gum, Denise denies her mother that privilege. The daughter becomes concerned because of the flaws that are evident in her mother. The infallibility and unquestionable status the parent had is now a thing of the past. The diminishing of hierarchical power structures brought about in the postmodern world is also seen at play within the family. Denise challenges and confronts her mother. She refuses to give Jack the Dylar she found, suspecting that he would give them back to her mother. Denise tells Steffie the need to be tough in worldly matters when Steffie runs out of the room, thereby assuming the authority that she had denied her parents.

At first Babette seems to be the ideal wife but later circumstances prove her to be otherwise. Postmodern identities forged for ultimate self-satisfaction take their toll on relationships once considered sacred and everlasting. The husband wife relationship was never under so much pressure as it is in postmodern times where all relationships are put under

the scrutinizing gaze of mediated experience. The normal experience of conjugal life can hardly live up to the mediated experience portrayed on TV and cinema screens.

Babette refers to mediated relationships constantly and even when she thinks of something as intimate as lovemaking. This brings an artificiality to the relationship that is difficult to overcome. True feelings are substituted by simulated emotions. The spectacle of postmodernism seeps into what should have been Jack and Babette's own private space: a space full of personal emotions and anecdotes. That is why Babette is unable to comprehend the seriousness of her deception. She overlooks her transgression and tries to justify her actions by laying the blame on Jack for not being able to see the big picture.

> 'This is not the story of a wife's deception. You can't sidestep the true story, Jack. It is too big." (*WN* 197)

Radio talkshows have taught Babette to be self-absorbed. As a result she cannot see beyond what troubles her directly. She is totally unaware of Jack's feelings and to a large extent she is insensitive to his situation as a betrayed husband who is calmly listening to his wife's sexual indiscretion. The only strong statement that he makes tersely referring to her transgression is when she expresses the need to exercise on the stadium stairs at night. Jack reminds Babette to "Wear [her] ski mask" (*WN* 302). The ski-mask is the disguise she used during her indiscretion.

Babette uses Mink for her own ends. She offers him sexual favors in return for the Dylar he supplies her with. The fact that she refuses to remove her ski mask during her long affair and the comment that it would be un-American to kiss Mink on the face (310) obliquely refers to the materialistic dealings of American social life where intimacy is often denied and therefore relationships can remain on a superficial level. Since Babette hides her identity she, like all caught up in postmodern commercial dealings, loses value and becomes a normal business transaction. Her description of the event is : "I was remote. I was operating outside myself. It was a capitalistic transaction". And all she remembers is a "TV up near the ceiling, aimed down at [them]" (*WN* 194). But this kind of mechanical response is not limited to her illicit affair. Even within her marriage she mechanizes love-making by comparing it to mediated experiences echoing TV, cinema and tabloids.

It seems that in its excessive aspiration towards freedom of expression the postmodern subject leaves behind all sense of morality since all morality, in a postmodern world, is

situational. In *After Virtue* Alasdair MacIntyre offers one possible explanation, of the postmodern world's lack of morality, although he calls it "a disquieting suggestion." Like Baudrillard's scheme, it speaks of *simulacra*:

> We possess indeed *simulacra* of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have – very largely, if not entirely – lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality. (2)

Without ethical values based on strict moral codes the self becomes absorbed in its fears with no foundation to hold it strong. Morality and ethics are now based on consumer ideals and the best choices available for individual satisfaction. As a result, ethics have become situationally motivated. Situational ethics places the postmodern subject in a dilemma as one chooses what is best for one's self (at that moment) without any forethought about future consequences. Naturally, chaos results and for all the apparent explicitness and openness of the postmodern subject it turns out that postmodern subjects are all the more prone to deception and, that too, without having any moral qualms. The postmodern world has changed the ontological implications of spiritual life which was once invested with morality and undoubted truth. As Jack walks through the town graveyard his musings reveal a realization of the changed aspect of morality which has now become situational and favors spectacle. The "Old Burying Ground" is a stark contrast to that of today. He describes the graveyard as having small headstones on which names and dates are barely legible. But those he could make out were "great strong simple names, suggesting a moral rigor"(*WN* 97). This seems to imply the consequences of postmodern ethics where the questioning of every authoritative power, whether political, social and especially religious, has led to the breakdown of ethical values and social obligations. All suggestions of morality are know lying in the ground, nearly forgotten.

Education, like most areas in postmodern culture, has also become a façade. Babette teaches posture. Since the course is quite popular, she has been asked to teach another course. It is not surprising that Denise should question her mother's ability to teach a new course titled "Eating and Drinking: Basic Parameters." Babette has never been good at eating healthy foods as is made clear from Denise and Steffie's sarcastic comments about Babette's food choices:

> "This isn't the lunch I'd planned for myself," Babette said. "I was seriously thinking yogurt and wheat germ."

"Where have we heard that before?" Denise said.

"Probably right here," Steffie said.

"She keeps buying that stuff."

"But she never eats it," Steffie said. (*WN* 7)

Babette buys healthy foods such as yoghurt and wheat-germs but never gets around to eating them. The culture that emphasizes eating such food for health, makes her feel guilty if she does not buy them. So she buys the stuff only to throw them away when they go bad sitting on a shelf. Ironically, Babette is the person chosen to teach others about food. This is a role Denise doubts she is fit for but as Babette explains to Denise,

> Knowledge changes every day. People like to have their beliefs reinforced. Don't lie down after eating a heavy meal. Don't drink liquor on an empty stomach. If you must swim, wait at least an hour after eating. The world is more complicated for adults than it is for children. We didn't grow up with all these shifting facts and attitudes. One day they just started appearing. So, people need to be reassured by someone in a position of authority that a certain way to do something is the right way or the wrong way, at least for the time being. I'm the closest they could find, that's all. (*WN* 171)

Babette was the "closest they could find" to an authority figure. Even though she does not follow the advice she is willing to preach to others. The pretense of it all somehow questions the sincerity involved in an education system which, like many other elements of a postmodern society, has also been infiltrated by capitalism. As Stacey Olster points out, "Elvis Presley and Adolf Hitler, icons free of their historical contexts, are impressed into academic service in exchange for high tuition payments" (Olster 80).

Caught up in the logic of capitalism, where it seems anything that can be traded should be traded, traditional concepts of morality take a back seat. The consumer mindset is not offended by trade-offs. Neither does the postmodern self feel any guilt for crossing limits to attain self-satisfaction. In a world where Babette's sexual transgression, for example, illustrates what happens when people actually put into practice the postmodern idea - *I have to do what is right for me*. In creating their own moral standards, postmodern selves confuse the differences between right and wrong, good and evil. Babette searches for a solution for the fear of death that constantly consumes her. She eventually gets her solution (though it doesn't

work) through an experimental medication named Dylar. In the process of obtaining the solution to her dread she has an extramarital affair with her supplier. But she doesn't seem to be distressed about her indiscrepancy. On the contrary, she justifies it as being something she needed to do. This puts a wedge into the relationship she has with Jack.

Tweedy, an ex-wife of Jack's, says that she needs to know that Jack loves her. This is a strange hope expressed by someone who has already re-married. When Tweedy meets Jack she declares,

> "I thought you'd love me forever, frankly, I depend on you for that. Malcolm's away so much."
>
> "We get a divorce, you take all my money, you marry a well-to-do, well-connected, well-tailored diplomat who secretly runs agents in and out of sensitive and inaccessible areas." (*WN* 87)

Interestingly, even though Tweedy is now married to a diplomat and she has money and connections, she is not happy. Furthermore, she has divorced Jack and taken his money but still expects him to love her. Instances like this show how relationships have become like business deals. If one does not get total satisfaction from an arrangement then the solution seems to be to break the agreement and look in another direction. And if that too fails then one starts reviewing the options. Ultimately, happiness and contentment are no-where to be found.

Janet Savoury, another ex-wife of Jack, is an adept at making money from investments. Suddenly she prefers to live in an ashram. And even though she is known as mother devi now she handles the business side of the ashram which, despite professing religiosity, is the site of scandal. But this contradiction suits Janet well because, as Jack tells Tweedy, it is what Janet always wanted i.e. "Peace of mind in a profit-oriented context" (*WN* 87).[3]

In short, most female identities in the postmodern world are restless, unhappy, insecure, unstable, and unsure of their relationships. They are clearly struggling to come to terms with life and the decisions they make for themselves. But, these signs and symptoms of postmodern subjectivity are not confined to the expression of female subjectivity. We find that under various social and especially economic influences most postmodern subjectivity suffer

[3] This also indicates how commercialism has contaminated the space of religion to the extent that even the identity of an ashram as a place free from worldly interests has changed to become a place tainted by non-religious activities.

the same qualms. This condition of restlessness and disorientation and emptiness can be noticed in the addict identities created by both genders. The obsession noticeable in all these characters, sometimes seems so familiar that one cannot but stop and think at the absurdity which has now become so commonplace.

(iv) Addict Identities

In commenting on the condition of the average American, G.Ainslie in *Picoeconomics* (1992) comments that in varying degrees, "we are all addicts of a sort, battling food, cigarettes, alcohol, TV sports-casts, detective novels, and a host of other seductive activities" (Ainslie 185). This section echoes the discussion of chapter four of this dissertation in which emphasis has been laid on addict identities which display the addiction and obsession of postmodern subjects and the identities they assume. As in chapter four, this section focuses on four types of addict identities, those that are obsessed with control, shopping, drugs, and technology.

(a) Addiction To Control: The euphoria of postmodern identity consists in the ability to actively create a preferred identity out of consumer products which emphasize and extol a certain image regarding the self and personality. But this identity construction, is deeply and secretly undercut with a severe dread of death and nothingness. The constant renewal of who one is based on consumerism and marketable identities, makes the postmodern subject face death in varied forms and images every single day. The fear of death is created by a culture which despises old age, wrinkled skin and complacent lifestyles. In a postmodern world where ethical behavior is judged, not on the basis of morality but on the basis of situational tacticity, it is difficult to approach death with the stoic sensibility and religious fervor of one who is certain of who s/he is. All the instability of postmodern ontology is concentrated into the being of the postmodern subject who always wants to be seen in control of his/her own situation but ironically finds out s/he is not. So, the obsessive fear of death seen in the postmodern subject is actually an expression of helplessness in a world where there are no stable realities to turn to.

The feeling of power derived from creating the self and modifying one's circumstances falls flat when technology, the apparent saviour of the postmodern world, increases the possible ways of unnatural deaths and simultaneously batters gruesome images of death into the consciousness. Postmodern subjects are paranoid about death because it is something they feel they cannot control. For all their advanced lifestyles and surgical endowments, death is temporarily delayed but not permanently thwarted. Jack realizes this double-faced role of technology thus, "Man's guilt in history and in the tides of his own blood has been complicated by technology, the daily seeping false-hearted death"(22). Ironically, Jack's specialty as Hitler Studies chair is also an indication of the obsession with death, although it not his own. He dissociates himself from death parodying Hitler, the embodiment of death. He seemingly deconstructs death by deconstructing the image of Hitler.

DeLillo shows the reader how postmodern characters inhabit a world of uncertainty. Their worlds are all the more intensified by the malaise of forgetfulness that endangers their control over their lives. The Postmodern subject's search for a one-step solution to all troubles seems to result in a condition of forgetting. The postmodern aspiration to have everything, know everything, and thereby be everything leads to an overloading of the senses. This results in a forgetfulness which diffuses the core of thought. There is no emotional and anecdotal attachment to objects since everything is considered to be replaceable. In the attempts to experience life to the fullest the self is constituted and reconstituted every minute of everyday. Enhanced through technology this process of self-transformation makes all subjectivity an unstable entity which has to be continually reinforced or restructured.

Babette's forgetfulness is thus a condition of her postmodern subjectivity. Jack too has the same problem, albeit to a lesser degree. It is for this reason that he assures her when she tells him of her recent forgetfulness, "We all forget [. . .]. It's something that's just been happening, more or less to everyone." But the harmful aspect of not being able to remember the past is that one loses all sense of self – That is to say of who one is, has become and how. Babette's addiction to Dylar leaves her with the side-effect of memory loss. Memory has conventionally been viewed to be of great importance in the formation of identity; we see indications of this notion when Vernon visits Babette and, "the whole dense history of associations and connections, came to remind her who she was" (*WN* 247). Memory loss threatens this concept of individuality, demonstrating a self that is not insulated and protected

from influence. Thus Babette's memory loss might be one reason that Jack complains that she is not the Babette he married. Jack sees Babette's identity shifting and finds that she no longer conforms to his concept of her. Interestingly, Roland Barthes writes in *S/Z* "it is precisely because I forget that I read" (Barthes 229). In the same strain the postmodern subject could say – *it is precisely because I forget that I can be anyone.*

Forgetfulness also implies living without realizing the consequences of one's actions. The weight of the world lies on the shoulders of those who are most aware of their duties. Those who do not realize their responsibilities and do not consider the consequences of their actions can glide through life as undisturbed as a child. Thus Jack envies and admires Wilder's forgetfulness. While roaming around in the supermarket Jack observes Wilder's spontaneity in grabbing what he could and then immediately forgetting about it:

> I liked being with Wilder. The world was a series of fleeting gratifications. He took what he could, then immediately forgot it in the rush of a subsequent pleasure. It was this forgetfulness I envied and admired. (*WN* 170)

For Wilder "the world was a series of fleeting gratifications." Wilder could enjoy the world of sensual pleasure because he was living in and for the present. Even the immediate past means nothing to him.

It is, as if, postmodern subjects want to regress to or remain absorbed in the mental and emotional disposition of childhood. It is an attempt to hold on to the immense pleasure of the moment. In "The Child And Postmodern Subjectivity" David Kennedy writes of the postmodern subject:

> throughout the twentieth century, the adult comes to see herself, like the child, as an unfinished being as well [. . .] . An unfinished being is one in which the relations among the various dimensions of the self are not fixed, but in dialogue for the purposes of ongoing reorganization. In this interpretation, the goal of self-development has not been abandoned so much as infinitely deferred.
>
> (Kennedy 158)

According to Kennedy, postmodern subjectivity involves forever holding on to a childlike emotional and psychological condition and thus remain "an unfinished being". It is from this position that one can infinitely gather elements of self construction and reorganize them at

will. This indicates a lack of the once highly valued emotional and psychological maturity through which logic and sense would take precedence over one's actions.

For the postmodern subject, the development of the self never reaches completion, since it is "infinitely deferred." For all its freedom, it is from this state of incompleteness that the postmodern subject can never release itself. This situation gives rise to restlessness and dissatisfaction with one's condition. A constant endeavor ensues to better the self in comparison with the presently assumed self. The restlessness to become a different person promotes forgetfulness to enable successful transition of the self from one to another. By lessening the effect of conflict and contradiction of character when observed from a stable viewpoint, the act of forgetting smoothens the becoming of another.

But again forgetfulness also assists the postmodern subject to cope with trauma and fear. As Jack observes of Steffie's fear to remove the gas mask – "I knew we would simply have to wait for her to forget the amplified voice, the sirens, the night ride through the woods" (*WN* 161). With all the social, political, natural and man-made disasters of the postmodern world heaped onto the senses, both directly and indirectly, it is forgetfulness that ensures the level of detachment needed to stay sane. This is just the point that Heinrich implies in his discussion with Babette:

> 'That's the point," she [Babette] said. "Every day on the news there's another toxic spill. Cancerous solvents from storage tanks, arsenic from smokestacks, radioactive water from power plants. [...]
>
> "Forget these spills," he said. "These spills are nothing." [...]"The sooner we forget these spills, the sooner we can come to grips with the real issue."
>
> [...] "The real issue is the kind of radiation that surrounds us every day. Your radio, your TV, your microwave oven, your power lines just outside the door, your radar speed-trap on the highway. For years they told us these low doses weren't dangerous." (*WN* 174)

This passage is indicative of the terrible pollution-ridden condition of a postmodern world that is destroying all that is natural. Heinrich's observation actually points toward the fact that the most dangerous things in society are those that we cannot see. As we concentrate on spectacle we become oblivious of what is happening closest to us. Thus, forgetfulness allows the

postmodern subject to live in a pseudo-aware state where things are seen and heard but not profoundly felt.

So what is discerned from the discussion above is that the more the postmodern subject realizes the uncertainty and helplessness of his/her condition in the face of postmodern life , the more s/he becomes obsessed with control.

(b) Addiction to Shopping : In capitalist societies, such as the America Delillo depicts, consumerism has displaced tradition and lineage-based identities. Identities and traits are no longer passed down from father to son or mother to daughter in the form of tradition that upholds family values. The only tradition that the family seem to have in common is the postmodern obsession with shopping. This is what temporarily unites them as a whole. As Jack surrenders himself to uniting with his family as a fellow shopper and consumer he feels himself "grow in value and self regard"(*WN* 84). The more he spends the easier it become to spend, for he feels the sums coming back to him in the form of "existential credit"(*WN* 84).

The fact that, after the brief episode with Massingale, Jack rushes to the shopping mall with his family to re-establish his sense of self critiques the postmodern trend to search for identity in clothes, accessories, and gadgets. It seems that the postmodern subject is identified as free from existential limits to the extent that s/he adopts identities that are easily created and bought in shopping malls. But the insecurity Jack and others feel that makes shopping a constant necessity reinforces the idea of the emptiness of consumerism as a means of fulfillment.

The instability that pervades the being of the postmodern self as a result of coming into being on the basis of unsound images puts it in constant dread of being supplanted. A consuming fear surrounds the subject that the self put on display for others may not be sufficiently perfected and may any time be exposed as false. Roy Baumeister goes on to describe the problematic aspects of the culture's current incarnation of self as value base, and some of the social problems arising from that situation. In a section entitled *The Narcissistic Imperative*, he says that,

> A large part of the burden of self derives from the social pressure to construct and maintain a highly attractive, competent, successful self that is worthy of admiration by self and others. A popular corollary of this belief is that people ought to end up with high self esteem...Americans...are in love with self-esteem. (Baumeister 211)

Jack's created persona gives off an aura of power which dissolves as soon as he steps off the campus and puts aside his official glasses, gown and shoes. To have Massingale make such comments is like being exposed in broad daylight. He runs to the mall to counteract the effect of such a self-diminishing encounter and re-establish his authoritative identity and aura of power, at least within the family.

Even at the mall Jack is self-conscious about how others see him and how that perception reflects upon his identity. Thus he keeps seeing himself "unexpectedly in some reflecting surface"(*WN* 83). But he temporarily gains a sense of power as he attains importance in the eyes of his family when he becomes "one of them, shopping, at last" (*WN* 83).

But this feeling of unity is not long-lasting for after returning from a large shopping spree Jack tells us, "We went to our respective rooms, wishing to be alone". Even in the car on their way back there is total silence. Secluded from outside suggestion it seems they have been drained of their usual talkativeness. There is no intimacy, since no one has anything to say.With a consciousness weighed down with a consumerist agenda they can never be satisfied with themselves or with others. The superficiality on which they build their identities can never give them peace of mind or satisfying relationships.

(c) Addiction to Drugs : Delillo ironically portrays Jack's current wife Babette as the ideal homemaker. Her identity seems to perfectly play out the gender role assigned to her since she seemingly subordinates her own desires to the happiness of all others in the family. Unfortunately, her identity is as false as Jack's official identity but with more devastating consequences.

Babette does everything a mother is expected to do but her heart is not in what she does. She cooks, irons, takes the children to school and takes care of her little one and therefore no one suspects anything is wrong. But Babette is not satisfied with her life. The

instability and uncertainty she feels about life manifests itself in her fear of death. As a quick fix she looks for medication that can give her peace of mind. But for her drugs lead to addiction and thus becomes more destructive to her sanity than her obsession with death. In addition, her Dylar addiction makes her forget things. Therefore, it affects the person she is considered to be.

Her change in the choice of clothes that she wears indicates the transformation that she has gradually undergone. This change is something that Jack did not realize until it began affecting their family atmosphere. After confessing her transgression she openly wears a jogging suit most of the time. Jack objects to her wearing of clothes such as a sweatsuit when she reads to her son or braids her daughter's hair, as it jeopardizes the tenderness of the situation. It is, as if, Babette has become a totally different person. Instead of directly addressing Babette, Jack seems to be talking to himself as he says, "Babette doesn't talk like this"(*WN* 301), and "No one will convince me that the person I know as Babette actually wants to run up the stadium steps at ten o'clock at night" (*WN* 301).

But Babette represents the postmodern emphasis on gender neutrality. Within the postmodern family, motherhood and related responsibility and nurturing of the child is no longer considered natural and instinctual for women. Traditional ideas of the bond between the mother and her children where the mother is reluctant to let them out of her sight for even a moment is questioned. What was once considered natural is now considered a form of oppression. Previously it was not considered a burden for a woman to look after one's own children. Now, unfortunately, in the attempt to denaturalize gendered work division, feminist activism has altered the attitude of women. Quite a few women consider it a sacrifice on their part these days to bear and rear children. The demand that children place upon the time and attention of women is something many women are not willing to tolerate any more. Consumer mindsets are unwilling to accept denial of self-satisfaction in any form and they justify material consumption as a need that must be fulfilled. Motherhood and parenting instead of being a familial duty to be done by the mother instinctually out of pure unquestioning love is now a common household chore to be shared between both parents.

Furthermore, by placing *wants* and *needs* in distinctly separate categories Babette distances herself from the consequences of her actions - "It's not what I want, it's what I need. My life is no longer in the realm of want. I do what I have to do."(*WN* 301). She emphasizes

the necessity of her actions which, to her, is her life. The stress here is on postmodern identities which display a sort of tunnel vision in their emotional life when it comes to their own needs. Children and their needs are no longer placed before the need of the postmodern self. In many cases, children become carers for their parents who have mixed priorities. Thus we see Denise hiding a bottle of Dylar in an attempt to protect her mother from its disorienting consequences.

Babette is willing to go out at night leaving her children alone at home while at other times her motherly and affectionate nature is extended to others as she goes to read to blind elderly people and teach posture to another group. The contradiction here is interesting to note. Babette reads tabloids to the elderly citizens even though these are based on exaggerated truths, scandalous half-truths and at times, total lies.

On the whole, Babette lives a life full of contradictions. She is quite restless though she teaches others to be calm and concentrate on their postures. She plans to teach others about nutrition though she has no basic idea of nutrition herself. She talks about sincerity in her relationship with Jack and yet transgresses all logic. She wants to protect the children against media manipulation and yet she responds to the ad for Dylar. And, the list goes on. On the whole, instead of curing her of her malaise she becomes a drug addict who can never say, "I am ok".

(d) Addiction to Technology : The strongest addiction in the postmodern world is to technology. In *White Noise*, the technologies that most assist in circulating information and images that dissolve any sense of individuality, except for that conforming to the media, are radio and television. Radio and television are shown to be pathways to forgetfulness where one does not have to think. Rather, one's thinking is done for you. As Jack says, in the car during evacuation, "I turned off the radio, not to help me think but to keep me from thinking" (*WN* 126). Babette wishes to take refuge in the radio retreating towards it and moaning as she tries to avoid Jack's questioning.

Like a member of the family the radio seems to participate in all that goes on. When Jack handles the gun, contemplating the action he was to take against Willie Mink, "the man on the radio said: 'Void where prohibited'" (*WN* 303). It is as if this was a warning to Jack that the guarantee of escaping death through the use of the gun would not always be successful and

it would not be wise to use it where prohibited. But more than that, the radio offers a world of retreat, that is to say, an escape from the burden of existence. As Curtis A. Yehnhart comments, "Precisely because media and mediating technology empty the self through systematic detachment, DeLillo's characters are able to use them to distract themselves from unfulfilling lives and boring jobs [. . .] of their own vulnerability and uncertainty" (Yehnert 359).

An echo of the insignificance of human temperaments in a world where every identity boils down to being an expression of chemical combinations seems to be found in the baseless stories that enter the family discussions held in the car. This is reminiscent of Jack's unwilling contemplation that "We are the sum total of our data [. . .] just as we are the sum total of our chemical impulses (*WN* 202). A number of pages later, when Jack and Babette sit together drinking coffee, the radio seems to say 'Excesses of salt, phosphorus, magnesium'"(*WN* 236) in order to bring the reader back to this point of discussion, as if to augment Jack's fear that human beings are nothing more than their chemical impulses. Science has taken over the position once held by religion and continuously instills doubt into the mindsets of postmodern subjects filling them with the fear of insignificance and a meaningless existence, burdens of postmodern identities. Therefore the need for continuous change becomes inevitable.

The centrality of television and radio to the perception of self is quite evident in this novel. Television and radio seem to substitute for communal identity. But as Stacey Olster makes clear, their apparent wholesomeness is contaminated by economic and political interests. She quotes from Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), which postulates that "media spectacle seems to restore a sense of social consolidation to similarly plugged-in viewers"(Olster 80). But as soon as the disillusionment sets in and the disparity between reality and the televised version of it is eliminated, there is nothing positive to hope for. As Murray says of his students,

> "Once you're out of school, it is only a matter of time before you experience the vast loneliness and dissatisfaction of consumers who have lost their group identity." (*WN* 50)

Identities based on mediated superficial images and messages are shown to be both empty and misguided, and characters are left suffering from a sense of existential discomfort. Doubting their previous beliefs, Delillo's characters have nothing to fall back on.

In *White Noise*, the Gladney family refers to what is seen on TV or said on the radio to interpret daily events. Heinrich refuses to trust his senses in observing the weather and chooses to believe the radio instead. He thinks that everything broadcast on the radio is true. The extreme fear of death, in part, resides in the fear of being alone and in apprehension of one's existence and loss of it being insignificant to others. The loneliness one feels is from the loss of a collective identity. Family, friends and kin ensure a continuation of one's time on earth through collective memory. Yet collective memory is now in the hands of the media. The crowd remembers what the media remembers. There is no communal unity in place to ensure remembrance. All that is worth remembering comes through the TV screen. Unfortunately, "Death, like other aspects of the deep structures of subjectivity, is being transformed into images, codes, simulations, and charismatic spectacle" (Wilcox 364). Thus, a man carrying a tiny TV set, at the evacuation centre at Iron City shouts out at having no media coverage to show the exposure to death (the toxic cloud event):

> "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 those people know what we've been through? We were scared to death. [...] Is it possible nobody gives substantial coverage to such a thing? Half a minute, twenty seconds? Are they telling us it was insignificant, it was piddling? [. . .] Shouldn't the streets be crawling with cameramen and soundmen and reporters? [. . .] Our fear is enormous. Even if there hasn't been great loss of life, don't we deserve some attention for our suffering, our human worry, our terror? Isn't fear news?" (*WN* 161-162)

Even though an evacuation centre was set up and steps were taken to protect people from the "airborne toxic event" the man is expressing his outrage because nothing was shown on the news! This implies that every form of suffering is considered meaningless if not validated by the news.

Similarly, after directly observing the devastation of people coming out of a plane that had a crash landing Bee asks where the media was. When Jack replies that there is no media in Iron City, she comments – "They went through all that for nothing?" (*WN* 92). It is as if the absence of media documentation makes all experience, even that of death, insignificant. The

presence of media could have given assurance of a collective experience. As Murray observes, " To break off from the crowd is to risk death as an individual, to face dying alone" (*WN* 73). He characterizes television as the "frame of reference" by which all experience is perceived and understood.

In *White Noise* television also plays a major role in the creation of spectacle and simulated experiences. The constant repetition and interpretation of events both joyful and devastating as narratives of spectacle condition the postmodern self in ways that sometimes comfort and at other times distress. But most of the time it presents events in a way that ultimately sucks the life out of day-to-day life. Nothing seems to match up to the spectacle shown on the TV screen. Neither death nor love seems as fulfilling as when portrayed on the screen. The media has become the collective consciousness of the postmodern human race. TV's blurring of fact and fiction numbs the senses so that no one uses his/her conscience: people believe what they are told and embody televised messages in their thoughts, speech and actions. Murray, therefore, terms the television as a "medium" that, "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, . . .". The control that once myth and then religion exerted over identity has now been replaced by the media.

Television rewrites history as it shifts its focus on events, reinscribing their importance. For example, the fact that Hitler is constantly shown on TV has somehow taken out the dreadfulness associated with him by somehow desensitizing the audience to his image. He has become another chapter in history. As in other cases of postmodern spectacle, all knowledge remains on the surface, the reality of it does not sink in. As a result, as Jack says of Hitler's presence on TV". . . it's not a question of greatness. It's not a question of good and evil". This implies that with the loss of absolutes the postmodern world allows for people to be fascinated by what they see on TV without having to think about moral polarities. The justification of this fascination is to be found a few pages later when Murray says:

> "For most people there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their TV set. If a thing happens on television, we have every right to find it fascinating, whatever it is." (*WN* 66)

Through the TV set the postmodern self is literally spoon-fed information that may or may not be true. Simulations of reality displace fact. Facts turn out to be selective. Everything enters

the realm of Baudrillard's simulcra. Real life situations are compared to that which is seen on TV and thereby become themselves unreal and doubtful.

A further example of how TV makes unreal spectres of real entities is noticed when Babette is seen on it. For Jack, seeing Babette on TV was a disconcerting event.

> Her appearance on the screen made me [Jack] think of her as some distant figure from the past, some ex-wife and absentee mother, a walker in the mists of the dead. (*WN* 104)

The media had already been making Babette a different person. To add to that television has separated the image from language. Deprived of the language that would have made her actions meaningful, Babette becomes an unattached, and unreal image. She has no significance beyond that which can be seen. At that moment, Jack feels a distance and absence as engulfing Babette's image. This was a foreshadowing of things to come. Spurred by the advertisement in the tabloid which had grasped her attention Babette made a choice which completely rerouted her identity. The media had grasped the Babette that Jack knew to be his wife and turned her into someone he could not recognize.

Thus television becomes a presence which foreshadows things and like the chorus in Greek tragedy, comments on all actions. But such comments are made tersely and without direct intervention. The language that comes from the randomized ad or program signifies the consciousness which creates their identities. For example, when, in a love-making scene, Jack and Babette quibble about who should please who, the spontaneous emotion is taken out of love and it seems that everything is just performance. At that moment Jack comments on the extraneous pressure he feels. Love-making had become a carefully planned event. He clearly feels the burden of living up to the spectacle of love that modifies both their behaviors. As Jack says, "I get the feeling a burden is being shifted back and forth. The burden of being the one who is pleased"(*WN* 28). Television also seems to echo this dreadful sense of performance at the cost of spontaneity. As the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco observed, in the age of postmodernism, a person can no longer say to someone, "I love you"; what they can say is, "as Barbara Cartland says in one of her romance novels, I love you" (Eco 67).

The television in *White Noise* seems to comment on what is happening in the relationship of Jack and Babette. For example, when someone turns on the TV set at the end of the hall, and a woman's voice says: "If it breaks easily into pieces, it is called shale. When wet,

it smells like clay"(*WN* 28). This line seems to comment on how undurable their relationship has become as everything is performed to accentuate a sense of perfection derived from mediated experience. It is as if they have forgotten the sincerity and passion of love-making that makes it a natural instinct and a sanctified action within the conjugal bond.

After that we hear of surgeons attaching an artificial flipper (*WN* 29). This seems to be totally irrelevant and yet a little careful thought shows that it is not. The line appears after Jack feels stimulated just after Babette reads aloud from an erotic piece. The artificiality of the situation seems to be echoed in television's reporting of the attachment of an artificial flipper. Again it also foreshadows the artificiality that has affected their relationship. All of Jack's beliefs that, "Babette and I [Jack] tell each other everything" (*WN* 29) are later found to be totally false and their relationship is as artificial as their love-making. Jack lays great importance on total disclosure because he does not "mean it cheaply, as anecdotal sport or shallow revelation. It is a form of self-renewal and a gesture of custodial trust" (*WN* 29) He believes in the creative power of love which, in his words, "helps us develop an identity secure enough to allow itself to be placed in another's care and protection" (*WN* 29). So, it turns out that when this belief is brought tumbling down Jack loses a sense of identity that was largely dependent on a sense of trust and devotion.

Interestingly, though, the Gladneys are aware of the "brain-sucking power" (16) of television, their attempts to reduce the effect of media are futile. They try to "suck" the pleasure out of watching television by making a routine of watching it with them every Friday evening. But ironically televised natural disasters made them "wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping" (*WN* 64). This shows how the media penetrates the consciousness and enhances tolerability. When seen on television it is easier to disassociate oneself from the occurrence and sigh or gasp in the comfort of one's living room. This emphasizes the desensitizing effect of television.

Television thus desensitizes the Gladney family. They watch documentaries as if they were watching movies. This blurring between real and illusion is a major complication of watching television which fascinates children and adults through visuals of blood, destruction, and carnage. Moral inquisitiveness is drained from the consciousness. The love of spectacle destroys all sense of propriety and creates selves which can tolerate the most gruesome televised narratives without caring about moral and social consequences. For example , Steffie

seems so sensitive that she cannot tolerate a husband and wife quarrel on a television sitcom, yet she is perfectly unaffected by "documentary clips of calamity and death" (*WN* 64).

To sum up, even a brief analysis of the novel *White Noise* shows the downside of the *unlimited freedom* exercised by the postmodern subject in constructing new identities. Jack becomes an expert in Hitler studies and with his sunglasses and coat he exudes an air of strength and mystery. He ultimately becomes Hitleresque and addicted to exerting control as seen in his dealings with Mink. Babette tries to break free from her typical role as mother by over-exercising and teaching about posture and food value. In the process she becomes dependent on the drug Dylar. She ultimately ends up being physically perfect yet she becomes a psychological wreck as her drug addiction gradually consumes her. Mink exploits others and eventually, by cashing in on people's fears he becomes as superficial as the capitalist society he represents. The Gladney children are so obsessed with radio and television messages that they cannot trust their own sensory input. For example, Heinrich refuses to accept that it is raining because the weather forecast says it would not, even though he clearly sees the rain falling. And Jack's daughters develop signs and symptoms of Nyodene poisoning after hearing about them on the radio. In addition, the whole family is obsessed with shopping to the extent that even though many items are extraneous, they feel as if their identity is invested in those commercial products. Ultimately, these possessions clutter their living space and add to the boxes of "failed possessions" which testify to failed marriages (*WN* 59).

Jack's ex-wife Janet is so obsessed with money that she manages the business of an ashram where she is now known as Mother Devi. Tweedy, another ex-wife, sends their daughter Bee to stay with Jack for a while and then professes her feelings for him even though she divorced him, took all his money and is now married to another man. The confusion regarding behavior is not limited to these instances. It is if the whole society is suffering from a type of stagnancy regarding one's thoughts and actions.

Even though there is so much information floating around, everyone is helplessly in need of courses and guidance regarding what to do and how to behave in varied situations. It is as if nothing is natural anymore. Even death is not worth mentioning if it is not spectacular and does not happen in front of the camera. This is, in short, the postmodern American society that Delillo gives us.

Even though it is difficult to critically examine a given system of thought and culture when one is submerged in it, Leonard Wilcox tells us that, DeLillo believes "that narrative can provide critical distance from and a critical perspective on the processes it depicts" (Wilcox 363). Thus in *White Noise* Delillo gives us his take on postmodern American culture in an ironical narrative, void of authoritative pronouncements, which exposes the frailty of the postmodern subject and the restless and unsatisfied condition of the identities that attain prominence within it.

Conclusion: Struggling to Escape the Emptiness of Postmodernism's Unlimited Freedom.

In the course of this dissertation I have emphasized how the postmodern revolution has caused the Cartesian subject to be dehistoricized, designified, destabilized, desensitized and even dehumanized. This change has found relevant expression in postmodern American narratives that both inform and are informed by this transformation in the concept of subjectivity. As a result, American narratives show a great paradox in the identities constructed through and by them. In other words, the postmodern subject is seen to be constantly struggling with its epistemological and ontological position within the expanse of limitless possibilities for the construction of identity.

The paradox of contemporary American identity construction is born from postmodernism's highly exaggerated image of personal freedom that promises unlimited happiness. In other words, postmodernism promises access to unlimited happiness through unlimited freedom. Unlimited freedom, in turn, leads to unlimited desire. Accordingly, inspired by the promise of unlimited happiness the postmodern subject, with his/her unlimited freedom, begins a search for an identity that embodies extreme satisfaction or jouissance.

Consequently, the process of creation for the postmodern American self is never-ending. And the search for a meaningful life by constructing an identity that is ontologically and epistemologically significant becomes an unending quest in time and space. With no limits and no end of possibilities postmodern subjects hope to attain an extreme level of satisfaction through their new found freedom.

The uncontrollable necessity to remain unbound by any and all tradition or custom and to attain the freedom to be anyone s/he pleases to be has led to a nurturing of an addiction to change within the postmodern subject. The effects of such addictive behavior have in turn, led to the emergence of addict identities which encourage postmodern subjects to live and die in simulcra. Since there is no end to fantasy and

simulcra, there is no end to possibilities of postmodern identity construction. This infinitesimal realm of possibilities is enjoyed by the subject in a postmodern world which is favorable to diversity and contradiction. As a result of constantly being bombarded with new situations and new possibilities of self-construction, the postmodern subject seems to be constantly dissatisfied and restless.

No longer having solid ideals rising from fixed social structures based in religion, tradition and locale, postmodern subjectivities are swamped by uncertainties. As a result, people ultimately become depressed since they are unable to retain that extreme level of jouissance their limitless expectations swerve them towards. This is the paradox of postmodern identity that offers the likeness of unlimited freedom to individuals yet frustratingly binds subjects to a sense of insignificance in highly uncertain time and space sequences. In the long run, such individuals find themselves hopelessly searching for some sense of meaning which will make life worthy of living.

This conclusion highlights this paradox of postmodern identity that has been discussed in various contexts throughout this dissertation. The postmodern subject is apparently seen to revel in its limitless possibilities of identity construction offered by a multi-dimensional society such as America. But this overwhelming sense of living without boundaries is undercut by a sense of lack of direction and uncertainty. As fun and jouissance become the mantra for postmodern living, the postmodern subject is confronted with the constant and pressing demand for novelty. As a result, stress and dissatisfaction builds up. Becoming free from the restrictions of social custom the postmodern self falls victim to his/her incessant desires. The mediated images that ignite these desires are nearly impossible to replicate perfectly. Even if these images are simulated the experience is nearly impossible to sustain in reality.

Unfortunately, as Emile Durkheim the French intellectual observes, "Unlimited desires are insatiable by definition and insatiability is rightly considered a sign of morbidity. Being unlimited, they constantly and infinitely surpass the means at their command; they cannot be quenched. Inextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture" (Durkheim 1951, 247). So what eventually happens is that one's identity, newly formed from excesses of freedom and unlimited desire, finds no satisfaction. The "inextinguishable thirst" at the root of a postmodern constructed self, takes it constantly

in further directions of identity construction. Since the postmodern world destroys all possible stability all types of identity constructions end up in similar disappointment and dissatisfaction. *This* is the paradox of postmodern identity construction and this is what I have emphasized throughout this dissertation to show that the postmodern American "I" always struggles between wanting to be totally free, on the one hand, and have some sense of purpose, direction and belonging, on the other.

In Chapter One of this dissertation, I looked at the way specific historical narratives have been tailored to valorize American individuality and nationality. Traditionally, historians concentrated on building narratives that supported the concept of a distinctly American identity. But with the advent of postmodernism, American national and personal identity was destabilized. Previously suppressed ethnic and multicultural narratives found voice, proving that White American supremacy had previously been unjustly narrativized at their expense.

History began to be rewritten from unheard and unconsidered viewpoints. As a result, Americanism gradually became equated with a new type of Imperialism. Postmodern writers such as Kurt Vonnegut in *Breakfast of Champions* ironically revealed the manipulation of facts that went into the valorization of Americans and America. Thereby, mini-narratives revealing the harsh reality of slavery and racial discrimination began to destabilize the American projected image of superiority and justice.

The media had a major role to play in both building up half truths and lies, as well as exposing the political manipulation of truth. America started losing the all powerful unquestionable position of benevolent peacekeeper of world justice and human rights. Political power was gradually superseded by economic and cultural power that spread through media networks and the web. Ultimately, consumer identity prevailed over all other identity concerns. As a result, simulacra replaced reality and American society, spurred by hyper-consumerism, showed itself to be superficial and super affluent.

It is in a terrain of consumption that encourages unlimited self-satisfaction that all belief systems crumble and all values except commercial ones are sneered at. Even the minutest amount of self-denial or sacrifice is too much and inadmissible in this hyperactive society. Ethical standards are rewritten, discarding common sense and religious overtones. Everyone must enjoy access to every type of enjoyment conceivable

in postmodern lifestyle and living. Such access should destroy the hierarchy of social class. Yet, in reality contemporary economic structures just break down the class system based on family lineage and reestablish it in relation to money and access to commodities.

One's identity is now determined by the clothes and fashion one adopts and by the commodities one can afford to own. Identity becomes an extension of what one owns. Thus the postmodern subject selects and discards possible identities from the abundance of images it encounters on a daily basis through media and advertising. The postmodern subject produces and reproduces identities for itself in accordance with its situational needs. And since postmodern culture provides both images and means for such incessant chameleonic behavior, the postmodern subject puts on and discards identities with apparent ease.

This may seem the ultimate in providing one the freedom to choose who and what to be since, there is no need to conform to tradition, or cling to one's social upbringing. In the cityscape of postmodern urban living one tells one's life story as one wishes. With no close relatives near to contradict the self-spun narrative, one becomes whoever one projects one's self to be. Yet, the euphoria of having no bindings is not long-lasting. The need for change is so strong that dissatisfaction quickly seeps into the psyche. There is a never-ending urge for jouissance that drives and motivates all actions and thought. Having been derived from constantly renewed simulcra, the urge for jouissance is never fulfilled.

With no ethical boundaries and no traditional certainty to turn to, the postmodern subject remains restless and constantly dissatisfied. As a result, the commodification process of the human subject comes into full effect. The American self, having nowhere to turn to for guidance except for the TV and media, floats in an insignificant non-space. This non-space embodies the paradox of postmodern existence for it simultaneously exists and yet doesn't exist as an ontological hyperreality. It merges, blends, transforms and restructures itself and the identities it nurtures. It is denied fixity as it constantly manipulates time, space and meaning. In this ontological space the postmodern "I" struggles to find significance even though each time it gets near to attaining some sort of meaning, the ontological space shifts and it is deemed insignificant again.

The second chapter of this dissertation looked at what such change in the stability of identity translates into in matters of authorship in relation to literary narratives. Instead of regarding their work as totally their own creation, postmodern authors see their writing as works-in-progress. Clearly writers now realize that their author identity is something that depends on the reception of what they have written. They realize that they cannot control how their work is interpreted and that the reader plays a major role in bringing meaning to the text. Thus forfeiting their privileged position above and beyond the text, most postmodern writers appear in their work, as characters in an attempt to understand how the text evolves whilst self-reflexively questioning their role in the writing project and thereby exposing the frailty of their identities as authors.

Chapter Three furthered the discussion of postmodern identity by looking at possibilities of subjectivity from the perspective of feminist discussion. Postmodernism has long been seen with suspicion in feminist theory, the main reason being that though it provided a favorable atmosphere for previously unheard female stories to be told, it also instilled within many feminists the fear of postmodernism having broken all and any possibility of a singular sense of womanhood to fragments.

Although postmodernism allows the female voice to be heard, the stories being told by postmodern female writers seemed to reflect the downside of a strong liberal feminism. The type of feminism women writers write about negatively portray the position of women within the home. Their stories are usually concerned about the emancipation of women through a drastic change in situation and gendered role playing. But as in most of the stories discussed in Chapter Three, the female characters portrayed in these postmodern narratives are not exactly happy despite their newly found mindset. Indeed, even though they enjoy greater freedom in their activities they never seem to be happy. Rather, they are overwhelmed with a sort of frustration as they are angst-ridden from taking decisions attempting to control their lot.

In Chapter Four, I have discussed addict identities as portrayed in four contemporary American films. Such identities represent the addictive stance of postmodern living enhanced by dependence on power, drugs, consumerism, and technology. The discussion focuses on the impossibility of these addictive states to

provide the extreme satisfaction that they seemingly promise and highlights the emptiness that eventually catches up with those who attempt such lifestyles.

Chapter Five, discussed Don Dellillo's *White Noise* which includes all the previous areas of discussion regarding identity with reference to the postmodern society in one novel. All the characters in it, even that of the youngest child of a family represents a facet of the identity crises that arise due to postmodern social influences.

From the multiple instances of paradoxical identity constructs discussed in the various chapters of this dissertation, a number of characteristics of postmodern subjects come to the forefront. The paradox of postmodern identity construction consists in self constructs that (a) think they are in control but are motivated by incontrollable compulsions; (b) attempt to create and sustain a sense of meaning through self-absorption and over-indulgence in an act of consumption that can only give temporary bouts of satisfaction; (c) experience life through hyperreality that displaces them both epistemologically and ontologically; (d) are seemingly self-reliant and non-communal yet yearn for community; and (e) question authority and are suspicious of any type of social controlling mechanism though both their choices and behavior are manipulated by commercial images.

All the characteristics identified above tend to lead towards a previously inconceivable restlessness linked with each and every subject position. Each identity is incessantly influenced by rapidly changing circumstances, choices, and fashions. Therefore, the need to change in accordance with those circumstances and fashions becomes all-consuming. Since there is no longer the sense of an internal and stable self that is essential, the subject easily manipulates his/her identity. There is no regret, no loss of self-respect, no sense of irresponsibility or feeling of disloyalty to one's true nature or ethical bias because there is none to begin with. This may seem like accessibility to freedom yet the truth is that any type of freedom that denies and negates the presence of at least some sort of restriction and sense of responsibility must be self-destructive.

The chaos of postmodern limitlessness thus finds expression in these postmodern subjects for whom nothing is enough and nothing is fully satisfying. In a fully consumerist mindset the dissatisfaction of not ever having enough is unavoidable. Though advertising professes concern for the consumer's material lackings and offers

multiple options for satisfaction, contemporary marketing policy forbids total satisfaction of the consumer. Identity is commodified and shown to be like a temporary state of mind. Thus, every subject position becomes a commodified product which is playfully manipulated in an attempt to retain a childlike aura of understanding. But, if everyone acts and behaves like children, who is going to be the adult?

Before postmodernism, adulthood was linked with maturity and responsibility, and children could afford to be whimsical, carefree, and unaware of consequences because adults were around to shoulder responsibilities. Unfortunately, postmodern situational ethics cuts the slack to the extreme even for adults. Everyone is encouraged to aim solely at satisfying one's own needs. Commitment and stable relationships are becoming a thing of the past because no one is willing to go that extra mile needed to make a relationship successful. Shopping, for example, is not for necessity; rather, it is for showing off. Thus at every moment, postmodern subjects are rewriting who they are. They consciously manipulate images that project identity. In most cases the identities projected are just a façade and mere superficial entities.

The joyous masquerade of postmodern identities project are diminished the moment they enter houses that forever refuse to become homes. The emptiness they feel is reflected in their obsession with social networking sites. Since the home cannot provide a satisfactory environment for the realization of one's inflated fantasies one turns to such sites just so as to feel that one is alive. Nowadays there seems to be an antagonistic relationship between a person's friends and his/her family. Before postmodernism anyone who befriended any member of the family was thought to be a friend of the family. Yet now, technology has enabled people to maintain relationships which exclude familial interaction to the extent that any inquisitiveness about the surfing interests and social networking of a family member is considered improper and a massive transgression. Here again we are confronted with the paradox of postmodernism which professes openness yet is more private and mysterious than previous movements.

To sum up, what this dissertation shows is that due to postmodern narratives which rewrite history and human experience and can open up innumerous possibilities of being, social identity is now understood as being multi-faceted instead of being stable and singularly unique. This dissertation has focused on the relevance of American narratives

in establishing, upholding, and projecting American identity and has concentrated on how politico-historical and postmodern literary narratives have shaped our understanding of the identity of the average American. This dissertation has also shown how postmodern identity crises have broken temporal and spatial power structures that previously governed narratives leading to a number of changes in the identity power-play in authorship; Possibilities for feminism in postmodern narratives have shown women speaking for themselves yet still somehow bound by a greater uncertainty of being; The addictiveness of postmodern living disorients the subject as to who s/he actually is and/or wants to be. All this ultimately translates into the paradox of postmodern identity that offers a satisfaction that it cannot provide.

Finally, what these American narratives seem to tell us is that total freedom and constant mutability of identity which allows one to do whatever one wants, whenever one wants, and to whatever extent, does not generate unlimited euphoria. Rather, such instability of identity ultimately tires, disorients, empties-out and depresses. This narcissistic glorification of self-indulgement can only leave one without depth and solidity; floating, as if in mid-air. I conclude this dissertation on a positive note, though, noting specifically, that the paradox of postmodern identity that accommodates for opposites can do the following : (i) tolerate the presence of ethnic and suppressed races and cultures, (ii) nurture a type of feminism that includes the other, and, (iii) instead of giving in to the negative aspects of addictive lifestyles offered to the postmodern subject one could set some ethical dimension to one's wants and demands thereby rendering them beneficial to one's sense of identity. Only when such a dimension is achieved then can the struggling "I" of postmodern American narratives find some sense of pure satisfaction and harmony and be relieved of the frustration and constant dissatisfaction that accompanies it.

Works Cited

A Scanner Darkly. Dir. Richard Linklater. Perf. Keanu Reeves, Robert Downey Jr., Winona Ryder, Woody Harrelson, and Rory Cochrane. Warner Independent Pictures, 2006. DVD.

Agger, Ben. *The Virtual Self: A Contemporary Sociology.* Oxford: Blackwell. 2004. Print.

Ainslie, G. *Picoeconomics.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Print.

Anzaldua, Gloria. "Tlilli Tlapalli: The Path of The Red and Black Ink" from *Borderlands* in *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* Ed. Paula Geyh, et al. New York & London: Norton, 1998. 183-191. Print.

Auster, Paul. *City of Glass. Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* Eds. Paula Geyh, et al. New York & London: Norton, 1998. 443-457. Print.

Augé, M. *Non-Places: Introduction To An Anthropology Of Supermodernity*. London: Verso, 1995. Print.

Avatar. Dir. James Cameron. Perf. Sam Worthington, Sigourney Weaver, and Michelle Rodriguez. 20th Century Fox, 2009. DVD.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. "Discourse in the Novel." *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. 32-44. Print.

Ballard, J.G. "Introduction to Crash." *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice.* Ed. Martin Travers. London: Continuum, 2001. 309-310. Print.

Barth, John. "Dunyazadiad." *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* Eds. Paula Geyh, et al. New York & London: Norton, 1998. 415-443. Print.

Barthes *S/Z*. *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel.* Ed. Bran Nicol. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002. 226-230. Print.

Barthes, Roland. "Myth today." *Mythologies.* Jonathan Cape: London, 1972. Print.

---. "From Work to Text." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 1470-1475. Print.

---. "The Death of the Author." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton. 2001. 1466-1470. Print

---. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography.* Trans: Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1980. Print.

Baudrillard, Jean. "The System of Objects." *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. 408-420. Print.

---. "The Precession of Simulcra." *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel.* Ed. Bran Nicol. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002. 91-109. Print.

---. "Symbolic Exchange and Death." *Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology.* 2nd edition. Ed. Lawrence Cahoone. USA: Blackwell, 2003. 421-434. Print.

---. *The Transparency of Evil.* Trans. James Benedict. London: Verso, 1993. Print.

Bauman, Z. "From Pilgrim to Tourist - or a Short History of Identity." *Questions of Cultural Identity.* Ed. S. Hall and P. du Gay. London: Sage. 1996. Print.

Baumeister, Roy F. "The Self and Society: Changes, Problems, and Opportunities." *Self and Identity.* Ed. Richard D. Ashmore & Lee Jussim. New York: Oxford, 1997. 191-217. Print.

Benhabib, Seyla. "Feminism and Postmodernism: An Uneasy Alliance." *Praxis International* 11.2 (1991): 146. JSTOR. Web.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 1166-1186. Print.

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex.* Trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany - Chevallier. New York: Vintage, 2010.

Booth, Wayne C. "Telling & Showing." *Twentieth Century Criticism: The Major Statements*. Eds. William J.Handy and Max Westbrook. New Delhi: Light & Life, 1976. 170-182. Print.

Bordo, Susan. "Material Girl." *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. 1099-1115. Print.

Borgman, Jim. "I'm okay with it . . ." Cartoon. *The Cincinnati Enquirer.* 2006. Web.

Bourdieu, Pierre. "Distinction –A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste." Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1984. Print.

Brown, Bill. "Identity Culture." *American Literary History* 10.1 (1998): 164-184. JSTOR. Web. 10 July 2008.

Brown, Richard Harvey. " Narrative, Literary Theory, and the Self in Contemporary Society." *Poetics Today.* 6.4 (1985): 573-590. JSTOR. Web.

Butler, Judith. "Giving an Account of Oneself." *Diacritics* 31.4 (2001): 22-40. JSTOR. Web. 13 July 2008.

---. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal* 40.4 (1988): 519-531. Web. 3 April 2010.

Carpi, Daniela. Abstract to "Hermes: God of Thieves. Plagiarism in Twentieth Century Literature." *Law and Critique.* 14.2 (2003): 213-223. Web.

Chopin, Kate. *Awakening. Norton Anthology of American Literature* II. Ed. Gottesman, Ronald, et al. New York: Norton & Company, 1979. 545-652. Print.

Cixous, Helene. "Sorties", *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Rivkin and Ryan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. 578-584. Print.

Confessions of a Shopaholic. Dir. Jerry Bruckhiemer. Perf. Isla Fischer, Hugh Dancy, Joan Cusack, John Goodman, and John Lithgow. Touchstone Pictures, 2009. DVD.

Coole, D. *Women in Political Theory.* London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993. Web.

Crowson, Richard. "Great American Melting Pot." Cartoon. *The Wichita Eagle*, March 28, 2006. Web.

Daly, Mary. *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation.* Boston: Beacon, 1973.

Davies, Carol Boyes. "Migratory Subjectivities." *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Blackwell: Oxford, 2000. 996-1015. Print.

DDB Worldwide. "America and Cultural Imperialism: A small step toward understanding." 20 Jan 2002. New York : DDB Worldwide Communications Group Inc. Web. http://www.utexas.edu/courses/kincaid/AI/readings/Cultural%20Imperialism.pdf

Debord, G. Society of the Spectacle. Detroit: Red and Black, 1983.

Dellilo, Don. *White Noise.* London: Picador, 1985. Print.

Douglas, William. *Television Families: Is Something Wrong in Suburbia.* Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003. Print.

Dunn, Robert G. *Identity crises : A Social Critique of Postmodernity.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1998.

Durkheim, E. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology.* Trans. J. Spaulding, & G. Simpson. New York: The Free Press, 1951. Web.

Duvall, John N. (Ed). "Introduction: The Power of History and the Persistence of Mystery." *The Cambridge Companion to Don Dellilo.* New York: Cambridge University Press. 2008. 1-10. Print.

Eco, Umberto. *Postscript to the Name of the Rose.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984. Print.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. "Private Life." *The Early Lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson.* Vol. 3. USA: Harvard, 1972. Print.

Ezzy, Douglas. "Theorizing Narrative Identity: Symbolic Interactionism and Hermeneutics." *The Sociological Quarterly* 39.2 (1998): 239-252. JSTOR. 10 July 2008.

Fanon, Frantz. "The Wretched of the Earth." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 1578-1593. Print

Feder, Lilian. "The Literary Scene." *The New Pelican Guide To English Literature* 9. *Ed. Boris Ford. Vol.9. England: Penguin, 1991.*

Ferguson, Ann, Ilene Philipson, Irene Diamond and Lee Quinby. "Viewpoint Forum: The Feminist Sexuality Debates." *Signs* (1984). Scribd. Web. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/17321220/The-Feminist-Sexuality-Debates-Carole-Vance#open_download>

Ferre, Rosario. *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* Eds. Paula Geyh, et al. New York & London: Norton, 1998. 484. Print.

Fetterley, Judith. "On the Politics of Literature." *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Blackwell: Oxford, 2000. 561-569. Print.

Firestone, Shulamith. *The Dialectic of Sex.* New York: Bantam Books, 1972. First electronic edition published 2000.

Fludernik, Monika. "Identity/alterity." *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*. Ed. David Herman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. 260- 273. Print.

Fo, Dario. "Dialogue with an Audience" *European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice.* Ed. Martin Travers. London: Continuum, 2001. 326-327. Print.

Forbes, D. *False Fixes: The Cultural Politics of Drugs, Alcohol, and Addictive Relations.* New York: State University of New York Press, 1994. Web.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality.* Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978. Print.

- - -. *Power/Knowledge.* Ed. Colin Gordon. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. Print.

Gauntlett, David. *Gender, Media and Identity*. New York: Routledge, 2008. and Taylor & Francis e-library, 2008. Web.

Gell, Alfred. "Technology and magic." *Anthropology Today* 4 (4): 6-9. 1988. Web.

Gergen, Kenneth J. "Narrative, Moral Identity and Historical Consciousness: a Social Constructionist Account." *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness.* Ed. Jurgen Straub. Berghahn Books. 99-118. Print.

Geyh, Paula. Fred G. Leebron, and Andrew Levy, Eds. *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* New York: Norton, 1998.

Ghashmari, Ahmad. "Living in a Simulacrum: How TV and the Supermarket Redefines Reality in Don Delillo's White Noise." *452°f* 3 (2010): 171-185. Web.

Granfield, R. "Addiction and Modernity: A Comment on a Global Theory of Addiction." *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs* 44 (2004): 27-32. Web.

Greer, Germaine. *The Female Eunuch.* Paladin, 1970.

Grillet, Alain Robbe. From *Towards a New Novel. European Literature from Romanticism to Postmodernism: A Reader in Aesthetic Practice.* Ed. Martin Travers. London: Continuum, 2001. 301-303. Print.

Haraway, Donna. "*From* A Cyborg Manifesto." In *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* Ed(s) Paula Geyh, Fred G. Leebron, and Andrew Levy. New York: Norton, 1998. 603-622. Print.

Hartsock, Nancy. "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories." *Cultural Critique* 7 (1987): 196. JSTOR. Web.

Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change.* Oxford: Blackwell,1990.Print.

Hayles, N.K. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics.* University Of Chicago Press. 1999. Print.

Hoffman, Louis. "Multiple Selves in Postmodern Theory: An Existential Integrative Critique" Paper presented at the American Psychological Association's Annual Convention, New Orleans, LA, August, 2006. Paper hosted at www.cospp.edu .

Hooks, Bell. "Postmodern Blackness." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 2478-2484. Print.

Hutcheon , Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism.* 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Ivory Soap. Advertisement. Proctor & Gamble Official Website. Web.

James, Harold L. "The Santa Fe Trail." The New Mexico State Highway Commission. Web. 8 July 2009.

<http://nmgs.nmt.edu/publications/guidebooks/downloads/17/17_p0107_p0118.pdf>

Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001.1960-1968. Print.

---. "The Political Unconscious". *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 1937-1960. Print.

---. *The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism. From Modernism to Postmodernism: an Anthology.* 2nd edition.Ed. Lawrence Cahoone. USA: Blackwell, 2003. 564-574. Print.

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* New Delhi: Surjeet, 1991. Print.

---. *Ulysses* (1922). Introduction Declan Kiberd. London: Penguin, 1992.

Juan, San Jr. "Beyond Identity Politics: The Predicament of the Asian American Writer in Late Capitalism." *American Literary History* 3.3(1991): 542-565. JSTOR. Web. 18 April 2008.

Kearney, Richard. "Where do stories come from." *On Stories.* London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

Kellner, Douglas. *Media Spectacle*. London and New York: Routledge. 2003. Print.

---. "9/11, Spectacles of Terror, and Media Manipulation:A Critique of Jihadist and Bush Media Politics." Web. 6 August 2010. <http://gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/essays/911terrorspectaclemedia.pdf>

Kennedy, David. *The Child and Postmodern Subjectivity.* Department of Educational Foundations, Montclair State University. Scribd. Web. 9 November 2010.

Kim, L.S. "'Sex and the Single Girl' in Postfeminism: The 'F' Word on Television." *Television and New Media* 2.4 (2001): 329-334. Web.

Kristeva Julia."Women's Time." Trans: Alice Jardine and Harry Blake. *Signs* 7.1 (1981): 13-35. Web.

Frank Lentricchia. (ed) "Tales of the Electronic Tribe." *New Essays on White Noise.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. 87-113. Print.

Lacan, Jacques." The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I" in *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* Ed. Paula Geyh, et al. New York & London: Norton, 1998. 1285-1290. Print.

Le Guin, Ursula. "She Unnames Them." *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* Eds. Paula Geyh, et al. New York: Norton, 1998. 525-526. Print.

Lifton, Robert Jay. *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation.* Chicago:University of Chicago, 2003. Print.

Lorde, Audre. " Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. 630-636. Print.

Lyotard, Jean-François. "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Language." *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel.* Ed. Bran Nicol. Edinburgh University Press. 72-90. Print.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue.* Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985. Print.

Manning, Susan. "Literature and Society in colonial America." *The New Pelican Guide To English Literature.* Ed. Boris Ford. Vol.9. England:Penguin, 1991.

Mason, Bobbie Ann. "Shiloh." *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* Eds. Paula Geyh, et al. New York: Norton, 1998. 271-281. Print.

Mathy, Jean-Philippe. "Out of History: French Readings of Postmodern America." *American Literary History* 2.2 (1990): 267-298. JSTOR. 12 July 2008.

McAdams, Dan P. " American Identity: The Redemptive Self." *The General Psychologist* 43.1(2008): 20-27. Web. 10 August 2009.

---. "The Psychology of Life Stories." *Review of General Psychology,* 5.2 (2001):100-122.. Web. 5 April 2009.

McClelland, James. "Losing Grip: Emerson, Leroux and the Work of Identity." *Journal of American Studies* 39.2 (2005). Cambridge University Press.

McComiskey, Bruce. "Composing Postmodern Subjectivities in the Aporia between Identity and Difference." *Rhetoric Review* 15.2 (1997): 350-364. JSTOR. Web.

McHale, Brian. "Change of Dominant From Modernist To Postmodernist Writing." *Postmodernism And The Contemporary Novel: A Reader.* Ed. Bran Nicol. Edinburgh University Press, 2002. 278-300. Print.

McLuhan, M. "The Medium is the Massage: Inventories." *Essential McLuhan.* Toronto: Anansi, 1995. Print.

---. *Understanding Media.* New York: Routledge, 2001. Print.

Memento. Dir. Christopher Nolan. Perf. Guy Pearce, Carrie-Anne Moss, and Joe Pantoliano. New Market Pictures, 2000. DVD.

Merlob, Maya. "Textuality, Self And The World: The Postmodern Narrative in Paul Auster's *In The Country Of Last Things*." *Critique* 49.1 (2007): 25-47. Web.

Miller, Nicola. "The Historiography Of Nationalism And National Identity In Latin America."*Nations and Nationalism* 12.2 (2006): 201–221. ASEN. Web.

Miller, Howard J. "We Can Do It." Poster. USA. 1942. Web.

Miller, Stuart Creighton, *Benevolent Assimilation: The American Conquest of the Philippines, 1899-1903.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982. Print.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. " Woman, Native, Other." *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* New York: Norton, 1998. 649-654. Print.

Moeran, Brian. "Advertising and the Technology of Enchantment: The Portrayal of Beauty in Women's Fashion Magazines." *Creative Encounters* . June 2009. Copenhagen Business School. Web. 5 July 2010.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye.* London: Vintage, 1999. Print.

Mukherjee, Bharati. Interviewed by Bill Moyers. *A World of Ideas: Writers.* Season 1, Episode 12 (1990). PBS. Web.

Nelson, K. " Narrative, Time And The Emergence of the Encultured Self." *Culture & Psychology.* 6.2 (2000): 183-196. Web.

Nicol, Bran. (ed) *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel.* Edinburgh University Press. 72-90. Print.

Onega, Susana and Landa, Jose Angel Garcia (eds) *Narratology.* Harlow: Longman. 1996. Print.

Olster, Stacey. "White Noise." *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo.* Ed. John N. Duvall. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 79-93. Print.

Paley, Grace. "The Pale Pink Roast." *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* Eds. Paula Geyh, et al. New York: Norton, 1998. 94-99. Print.

Peiss, Kathy L. "American Women and the Making of Modern Consumer Culture." *The Journal for Multimedia History* 1.1 (1998). Web.

Pirandello, Luigi. "Six Characters in Search of an Author." Trans. John Linstrum. The *Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces : The Western Tradition* 2. 7th edition. New York: Norton, 1999. 1432-1472. Print.

Porter, R. "Addicted to Modernity: Nervousness in the Early Consumer Society." *Culture in History: Production, Consumption and Values in Historical Perspectives.* Ed. J. Melling and J.Barry. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1992. Web.

Quinn, Edward. *History in Literature: A Reader's Guide to 20th-Century History and the Literature It Inspired.* New York : Facts on File. 2004. Print.

Reith, Gerda. "Consumption and its Discontents: Addiction, Identity and The Problems of Freedom." *The British Journal of Sociology* 55.2 (2004). London School of Economics and Political Science. Web.

Reuman, Ann E. and Gloria E. Anzaldúa. "Coming into Play: An Interview with Gloria Anzaldúa." *Latino/a Identities* 25.2 (2000): 3-45. The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States(MELUS). Web.

Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken:Writing As Re-Vision." *College English* 34 (1972).Print.

---. "Notes Towards a Politics of Location." *Literary Theory: An Anthology.* Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998. 637-649. Print..

Ricoeur, P. *Time and narrative.* Trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer.Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. Print.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things.* New Delhi: India Ink, 1997. Print.

Sarbin, T. R. ed. *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct.* New York: Praeger, 1986.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism.* New Delhi:Penguin Books, 2001.Print.

Sartre, Jean Paul. "What is Literature?." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 1336-1349. Print.

Scholes, Robert E., Robert Leland Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative.* Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.

Schor, Juliet B. (1999). "Towards a New Politics of Consumption." *Consumer Society Reader.* Ed. J.Schor & D.B.Holt. New York: New Press, 1999. 446-462. Print.

Sheehan, Paul. "Postmodernism and Philosophy." *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism.* Ed. Steven Conner. UK: Cambridge, 2004. Print.

Shorter, E. *The Making of the Modern Family.* New York: Basic Books, 1975.

Socor, Barbara J. "The Self and its Constructions: A Narrative Faith in the Postmodern World." *The Opening of Narrative Space* 32 (1997).

Tillman, Lynne. "Living with Contradictions." *Postmodern American Fiction: A Norton Anthology.* Eds. Paula Geyh, et al. New York: Norton, 1998. 121-123. Print.

Todd, L. Pittinsky. Margaret Shih, and Nalini Ambady."Identity Adaptiveness: Affect Across Multiple Identities." *Journal of Social Issues* 55.3 (1999). Web.

Trachtenberg, Alan. "The Social And Cultural Context." *The New Pelican Guide To English Literature* 9. Ed. Boris Ford. England: Penguin, 1991. 281-306. Print.

Vonnegut, Kurt. *Breakfast of Champions.* New York: Rosetta Books. 1973. Web.

Waugh, Patricia. "Postmodernism and Feminism: Where have all the Women Gone?" *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern.* New York: Routledge, 1989. 1-22. Print.

White, Hayden. "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism.* Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: Norton, 2001. 1712-1729. Print.

Wicke, Jennifer. "Postmodern Identities and the Politics of the (Legal) Subject." *Boundary 2* 19.2 (1992):10-33. JSTOR. Web.

Wilcox, Leonard. ''Baudrillard, DeLillo's White Noise, and the End of Heroic Narrative.'' *Contemporary Literature* 32 .3 (1991): 346–365. JSTOR. Web.

Wilde, Alan. *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Ironic Imagination* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. Print.

Wilson, Rob. "Producing American Selves: The Form of American Biography." Boundary 2.18.2 (1991). JSTOR. Web. 9 August 2010.

Woolf, Virginia. *Moments of Being*. Reading: Triad-Granada, 1978. Print.

Zangwill, Israel. *The Melting Pot.* 1905. e-book. Project Gutenberg. Web

Zizek, Slavoj. "The Matrix: Or, The Two Sides of Perversion." *The Matrix and Philosophy*. Chicago: Open Court, 2002. Print.