

Don DeLillo's Americana: Technology, Suffering and Salvation

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ABSTRACT: *Don DeLillo's Americana portrays a subject inhabiting in a media-saturated America. The subject is suffering from fundamental alienation, fragmentation, and corruption triggered and developed by media and consumer society. It is the archetypal American condition of the mind or self, and it provides no escape or no salvation. Media and consumer society discussed in this paper transforms the first-person "I" into a third-person singular "We" and creates 'one-dimensional man' "They". This paper will argue the responsibility of literature in today's technological environment and demonstrate how literature produces awareness through its subject matter. Likewise, it will examine the suffering subject and a quest for authenticity and meaning in the heartland of America. Do authenticity and meaning still exist across America? Does media-saturated America provide salvation for its suffering masses? Jean Baudrillard and Marshall McLuhan will constitute the backbone of this paper to bring these substantial cases into the open.*

Keywords: *Don DeLillo, Media, Hyperreality, Technology*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Carl Gustav Jung, a psychoanalyst, and the analytical psychology founder states in his book *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* that 'it is one of the most difficult and thankless of tasks to say anything of importance about the civilized man of today' (Jung, 2014, p.143). Although it narrates the plight of 'modern man,' it is, as a matter of fact, associated with the 'postmodern condition' of man; however, it is difficult to articulate an exact definition for his condition since it is non-directional, incomprehensible, obscure, ambiguous and fragmented. Peter Boxall identifies Don DeLillo's protagonist, David Bell, a situation in *Americana* (2006) as the reflection of the collapse of American consumer culture (Boxall, 2008, p.44). It is the collapse that does not provide any alternatives to escape from, even if Bell chooses 'to escape from the banality of the advertising industry for which he works' (Ibid). In addition to Peter Boxall, Philip Nel identifies DeLillo's *Americana* (2006) with the fascination of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Joyce's Stephen Daedalus develops into an inspirational character that seems to convince David Bell to escape from the labyrinth of the advertising industry. However, there are some alternative ways to explain the exact condition of the postmodern man. In this essay I address David Bell as a suffering subject in the media-saturated technological America, and as the subject who undergoes an ontological crisis as a postmodern image. I examine and ground Bell's crisis and pursuit of 'heartland' and salvation on the theories of Jean Baudrillard and Marshall McLuhan on media and consumer culture. I manifest whether salvation is possible or impossible across media-saturated America.

David Bell, in *Americana* (2006), a wealthy, handsome, and talented, 28-year-old television executive, suddenly decides to leave New York for America's mid-west in order to film the small-town lives of ordinary people and have a close relationship with his homeland although he later discovers that America has reached its end. David Bell's condition in *Americana* (2006) is related to the idea that an 'authentic or unique self has been trivialized' as Randy Laist states (2008, p.52). Likewise, David Bell's postmodern condition is akin to 'the quest of the soul for meaning that begins in *Americana*' as Laist restates Michael Oriard (Ibid). It is, for Douglas Keesey 'to separate the real from the reel in his life, truth from Hollywood fantasy [...] and to get at the unmediated truth' (Keesey, 1993, p.29-30). Bell's travel across America's mid-west is his attempt to discover some truth within the paradox of his busy-ness with media technology – television and film. It is intentionally identified with an enigma since the media technology, as Laist argues, 'undermines the value of the human subject by conceptualizing consciousness as wholly formed by its material environment' (Ibid). As Marshall McLuhan argues in *The Medium is the Message* that the effects of technology are not manifested as opinions

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and concepts, they instead create some changes in the sense ratios or patterns of perception' (McLuhan, 1967, p.41). David Bell suggests that images 'move him (a person) from first-person consciousness (I) to third-person' (We) (DeLillo, 2006, p.270), which underestimates or neglects personal individuality or 'the subject' and identifies him with an object or the masses. Therefore, Bell desires to discover the authentic American heartland and destroys the inauthenticity left behind. In other words, he expects to liberate himself from the superficiality of America.

For Mark Osteen (1996), Don DeLillo's *Americana* (2006) is a *kunstlerroman*, a narrative about an artist's growth to maturity. Like *kunstlerroman* heroes, Bell shows his limitations, enlightenment, and revelation (Osteen, 1967, p.450). Being exposed to 'another dull and lurid year', and his exposure to 'the recurring news of airline disasters and military engagements', and the number of dead and missing' and 'such exactness' seem to be 'a trickle of electricity to the (his) numbed brain' (DeLillo, 2006, pp.3-4). With all these, Bell suggests that he has to endure the monotony of his life by stressing the boredom in Western civilization, and he says, 'the whole point was to separate for the evening and find exciting people to talk to and then at the very end to meet again and tell each other how terrible it had been and how glad we were to be together again. It is the essence of Western civilization' (DeLillo, 2006, p.4).

David Bell highlights his boredom with his life and recurring events and conversations with the people around him. He says, 'it was one of those parties which are so boring that boredom itself soon becomes the main topic of conversation' (Ibid). He is unhappy with his life, 'waiting for some change, some new dispensation, to complete the displacement of the older' as David Cowart states in 'For Whom Bell Tolls: Don DeLillo's *Americana*' (1996, pp.601-2). Bell's professional environment, the media industry, develops his perception and mind. Cowart states that it is DeLillo's perspective, which explains the reality in the American consciousness with the images from television, from the film, from magazine journalism, photography, from advertisement, and images sometimes even from books' (Cowart, 1996, p.604).

A filmmaker and successful television executive David Bell closely interacts with the world around him with his 16mm camera, and plans to recapture his own past and converts these images and pictures into a movie to create his first-person consciousness since he sees the bombardment of media technologies around him, and would like to get replace his third-person knowledge with his first-person by creating his own film. Through this, Don DeLillo manifests Bell's boredom and suffering as the effects of over-exposure to media technologies, and Bell is disturbed and uncomfortable with the American people's trivialization of Vietnam War, and with continuation of their monotonous everyday lives. He says, 'the war was on television every night, but we all went to the movies. Soon most of the movies began to look alike, and we went into dark rooms and turned on or off or watched others turn on or off or burned joss sticks and listened to tapes of near silence' (DeLillo, 2006, p.5). In spite of the war images screen out on television, people continue enjoying their own lives.

Tired of monotony, of the image bombardment from TV, 'a creator and victim of the televisual hyper-real', 'blue-eyed David Bell, as a successful executive, would like to 'go out West anyway in a few months to do a documentary on the Navahos' (DeLillo, 2006, p.10). 'As the first time in his life he feels the true power of image' when he watches *From Here to Eternity* (1953) acted by Burt Lancaster.

'Burt was like a city in which we are all living. He was that big. Within the conflux of shadow and time, there was room for all of us, and I knew I must extend myself until the molecules parted, and I was spliced into the image. Burt in the moonlight was a crescendo of male perfection but no less human because of it. Burt lives! I carry that image to this day, and so, I believe, do millions of others, men, and women, for their separate reasons. Burt in the moonlight. It was a concept; it was the icon of a new religion. That night, after the movie, driving my father's car along the country roads, I began to wonder how real the landscape indeed was, and how much of a dream is a dream' (DeLillo, 2006, p.12-13).

Burt Lancaster's image screened mesmerizes David Bell and becomes stuck between the concept of the real and hyper-real, and between the first-person to third-person consciousness. Rather than adopting the first-person consciousness, Bell is fascinated with the illusion of Burt Lancaster. From another perspective, it is his escape from the false and deceptive world, a world of display of a hyper-real saturation of the mass media, the artificiality and superficiality. Hence, he avoids living in the third person, and determines to search for an authentic American heartland. He says, "I began to understand the attraction of pathological lying. To construct one's reality, then bend it to an implausible extreme, was an adventure even more thrilling than the linguistic free falls of the network. I think I went at it fairly well for a novice. I learned that in an atmosphere of seclusion, intimacy, motel-confessional [...]" (DeLillo, 2006, p.58). David Bell constructs the first-person consciousness by getting rid of his father's, Clinton Harkavy Bell's bombarding lectures on the importance of advertising and media. Clinton Bell suggests that the package of the product is much more important than the product itself, which implies the significance of the image, sign, and model. 'Images, styles, and representations are not the promotional accessories to economic products, and they are the products themselves' as Edwin Gibson states in 'The Reel and the Real: Mass Media, Technology and the American 'heartland' in *Americana*' (Gibson, 2018).

However, David Bell is fatigued with his exposure to media and one of its contents, the advertising products, and he says that people are 'no more than electronic signals and they moved through time and space with the stutter and shadowed insanity of a TV commercial' (DeLillo, 2006, p.24). Marshall McLuhan, in *Understanding Media*, says 'all media are active metaphors,' and 'we see ourselves as being translated into the form of information' (McLuhan, 21994, p.64). Bell's metaphor in *Americana* (2006) is his third-person consciousness as 'a media apparatus.' His consciousness is identified with a television transmission when he says, 'I was just beginning to go black, in-network parlance' (DeLillo, 2006, p.60), and 'my head seemed to be a telephone delivering an endless busy signal' (DeLillo, 2006, p.80), and 'I was like a movie camera catching documentary glimpses of everyday life in a prison' (DeLillo, 2006, p.101).

Bell, like everyone else in the postmodern consumer society, is engulfed and bombarded with too much information and too many signs, symbols, and images which, as he suggests, have an omnipotent effect on him. As Mark Poster says, 'advertising, with its signs, is mass society, causes to arise receptivity, mobilizes consciousness, and restructures itself with its collective process, and by advertising the masses express their agreement' (Poster, 2001, p.10). Bell's hunger for more knowledge about media technologies and media industry, and his hunger for fame and success brings his awareness on his suffering; suffering from his over-exposure to the world full of signs, symbols and images, and from exhaustion, and losing his first-person consciousness. Although consumer society with its objects, products, and advertising offers the subject an opportunity of total fulfillment and liberation, it transforms the subject "I" into a third-person consciousness "We" and zombify. Bell questions the ambiguity, nullity of his life. Hence, Bell decides to leave New York for the mid-west and travels to an unspecified desert island in Africa as a voluntary self-exile suffering from the uncertainty of his existence. That questioning becomes deep once he watches a man taking photographs of a photograph (a photo from Vietnam War) that shows a woman who is holding a dead child in her arms. For Bell, media access to snapshot a war scene creates an image/s for the masses, and those masses makescopies of the copies. It implodes the meaning of the war from its real content, and this imploded meaning discomforts and dissatisfies Bell. Jean Baudrillard argues that 'the masses have neither pastnor future; they have no desire to fulfill: their strength is actual, in the present, and sufficient unto itself' (Baudrillard, 1983, p.3). The masses trivialize the meaning of a war photographer and transform this photo into an everyday object to be posted on any medium.

In contrast to what David Bell expects from his travel across the country turns out to be different, and it allows him to compare and better understand reality. In other words, he recognizes the existence of hyperreality in New York, and then across the country. Bell sees that America is not real, but hyperreal, and his salvation does not exist there. Like Brand (his friend), David Bell also experiences a 'New Yorkinsanity and violence,' the bombardment of images, signs, codes, and models. Hence, he runs away from the pandemonium and shelters in a sanitarium to purify himself, clean his brain from too much knowledge.

Bell's condition is related to the Baudrillardian fatalistic view of the world. In his reference to *Fatal Strategies* (1990), Douglas Kellner argues some key points such as objects dominancy over subjects, and he suggests that the uncontrollable 'obscene proliferation of an object world, and it surpasses all attempts to understand, conceptualize and control it' and he says, 'objects and events in contemporary society are surpassing themselves, growing and expanding in power. The ecstasy of the objects is their proliferation and expansion to the degree, to the excellent; [...] the real more real than the real in television' (Kellner, 1998, pp.155-6). The sovereign power of the object, dominant over the misery of the subject, seduces human beings with commodities, capital, fashion, the sexual object, media, politics, information, codes, and models (Kellner, 1998, 157). The growing supremacy of object, its growing fascination, seductiveness, and ultimate domination of himself articulate Bell's condition. To get rid of his misery and suffering, he would like to purify his physical and psychological state from the 'supremacy of objects,' from their 'charms and traps,' through his travel across the country. William G. Little argues that Don DeLillo admits America's becoming a virtual wasteland since 'the products and byproducts of technological advance people more liable to physical ruin', and the contemporary culture has too much faith in waste which implies that producing too much waste means too many useless products in the physical environment (Little, 2002), and too much exposure to waste in the wasteland, the physical environment in America, reminds Bell his misery and suffering. He says;

'Things had changed hardly at all. Only materials had changed, technologies; we were still the same nation of ascetics, efficiency experts, haters of waste. We have been redesigning our landscape all these years to cut out unneeded objects such as trees, mountains, and all those buildings which do not make practical use of every inch of space. The ascetic hates waste. We plan the destruction of everything which does not serve the cause of efficiency. Hard to believe, he said, that we are ascetics. But we are, more than all the fake saints across the sea' (DeLillo, 2006, pp.117-8).

DeLillo's protagonist in *White Noise* (1986), Jack Gladney, suggests the impossibility of 'touching the fabric of salvation' (DeLillo, 1986, p.31) once he sees that the waste surrounds people, and this waste is done intentionally. Baudrillard's concept of simulation and simulacra that provide a satisfactory explanation for the

structure and restructure of the physical environment. Douglas Kellner says, 'the role of style, aesthetics, and functionalism' is a sort of the 'triumph of signifying culture over nature that produces a new artificial environment and evacuates the aesthetic dimension of any oppositional potential' (Kellner, 1989, p.77). In other words, the authenticity of the natural environment is exchanged with its artificial one, which has no signifier or no referential sign. According to Kellner, 'the society of simulations controls an individual's range of responses and options for choice and behavior,' and the individuals need to behave within the framework of codes, messages, and models in the realm's economics, politics, culture, and everyday life' (Kellner, 1989, p.81). Don DeLillo in *Americana* (2006) recounts a simulated postmodern consumer society in which his main character Bell suffers from artificiality and inauthenticity of simulated America and is in pursuit of the true meaning of life through both physical and spiritual travel across the country.

Curtis Yehmert, in his article 'Like Some Endless Sky Walking Inside: Subjectivity in DeLillo' states that Bell, too, 'uses the media to escape responsibility for their own lives, and he escapes from 'the mediated environment to flee their own inwardness' (Yehmert, 2001, p.359). Bell consumes the media to look back upon his past to remake his first-person consciousness "I" and to recover his authentic self. With this rational discovery, Bell develops his transformation into a wiser person who is much more enlightened and closer to his first-person singular "I" identity. Elise Martucci, in *The Environmental Unconscious in the Fiction of Don DeLillo*, says, 'David Bell's dreams are manipulated by media images offering false promises of stability, prosperity, and happiness' and he is defeated through the 'image and likeness of the image' (Martucci, 2012, p.41). Bell's expectation for regeneration may be futile, although there are visions in the land; his regeneration dreams are exploded, which is a great disappointment for him. An idea of a good life for Bell and other people is manipulated with the images, products, signs, and codes. However, Bell knows that these advertising images and symbols are misleading, and this good life does not exist as a matter of fact. Martucci says, 'through David Bell's journey across the country and his meditation on the environment of the image, DeLillo demonstrates how pastoral fantasies and postmodern advertisements each represent a willful ignorance of reality, where death and violence are present' (Martucci, 2012, pp.42-3). Bell is in pursuit of an idyllic America that never exists. Television, as a powerful medium, displays a world full of products for people and fascinates people with these products. Although television screens out the reality for people, the truth is produced from products, images, signs, and models, which is not real but hyper-real. In the hyper-real world, the model or symbol comes first, and its actual role is concealed from the postmodern consumer or the spectacle. According to Kellner, 'the entire façade and ecosphere of neo-capitalist societies are hyper-real, in that more and more areas of social life are reproductions of models organized into a system of models and codes' (Kellner, 1989, p.83). In this hyper-real society, highway and urban freeway transportation systems, fashion, architecture, housing developments, shopping malls, media, and products produce hyper- simulations for the masses.

Television, with its commercials, has a tremendous impact on the viewer since it manipulates people and forces them to change their lifestyle in such a way that they are transformed into the third person. Since 'to consume in America is not to buy; it is to dream,' and advertising suggests that 'the dream of entering the third person singular might be fulfilled' (DeLillo, 2006, p.270). Furthermore, television commercializes products and constitutes a new hyper-reality that is 'more real than real.' As there is nothing left behind the flow of codes, signs, and simulacra, people's thoughts and behaviors are defined within the framework of these codes, and models. Jean Baudrillard touches on 'the abyss of meaning,' which emphasizes that the masses 'do resist the imperative of rational communication' since they desire spectacle, not meaning (Baudrillard, 1983). According to Baudrillard, messages are given to them, and they only want some sign, they idolize the play of symbols and stereotypes, they idolize any content so long as it resolves itself into a spectacular sequence' (Baudrillard, 1983). In effect, this develops a 'superficial layer of the societies' and 'the masses living most of their times in panic or haphazardly, above and beyond any meaning' (Baudrillard, 1983, pp.10-11). Jean Baudrillard says the silent majority is the only social referent because they do not have any representation, they do not express themselves and reflect on themselves, but they constitute a model as a representation. In other words, they do not have authority; they have withdrawn into their silence; they are no longer a 'subject (Baudrillard, 1983, p.22). The mass – the silent majorities are transformed into the spectacle fascinated by illusionary and representational identities.

David Bell defines who and what he is once he suggests that he would like to be Stephen Daedalus, a protagonist in James Joyce *Ulysses* (1904), who is Joyce's alter ego. Rather than getting in touch with his authentic self, Bell gets in touch with Burt Lancaster first and then with Stephen Daedalus self. Although David Bell hopes to discover his character to its fullest, he is engaged in Stephen Daedalus' nature. His disillusionment with the world makes him discover new identities and self and adopt them. His disbelief in the unreality of his mental experience fascinates him through Burt Lancaster and Stephen Daedalus, and hence, he grounds his self onto Lancaster and Daedalus. Likewise, David Bell's story in *DeLillo's Americana* (2006) is similar to David's in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (2007), who escapes from the middle-class American social conformity in search of an authentic American environment. In that sense, both *On the Road* (2007) and *Americana* (2006) are

related representations from James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1904). On the other hand, David Bell's story is inspired by Jean-Luc Godard's *À bout de souffle* (1960) that similarly records the traveling stories of despair and criminal protagonist. Don DeLillo's postmodern protagonist struggles to respect his mental experience and selfhood in a culture increasingly hostile to individual thought and individual identity. Moreover, DeLillo portrays David Bell's self-limitations and self-transformation capacity in the postmodern consumer America where they shop; hence, they are:

'One of the important things money buys is speed. Speed and a glimpse of death. We drove sports cars and motorcycles in open competition, rode beach buggies over the desert, raced motorboats on the artificial lake near the campus. Several students owned planes, and if you were friendly with one of them, you could go up to L.A. for party weekends, and on the return, flight test your desire for early poetic death. The force behind these activities was essentially spiritual. There were many injuries, several fatalities, and we reacted to these with professional dispassion. That's something money can't buy' (DeLillo, 2006, pp.147-8).

It articulates that physical activities, although they are bought or consumed with money, are done for existential reasons. In other words, people attempt to discover spirituality and meanings since they already know that media technologies trivialize, diminish their sense of self and implode spirituality and meaning. Hence, they detach themselves from the consumerist and conformist physical activities in their physical environment. The spiritual journey across the country comes to mean Bell's amnesia, his desire for loss of memory, and becoming anew, and his escaping from the vacuity of his third-person consciousness while he is in New York and escaping from exploitation and destruction of postmodern American culture.

As in the postmodern society, consumption as the networks of objects consumes the center of life, all activities of people. Jean Baudrillard develops his argument in *The Consumer Society* (1970; 2016), giving the wolf-child example, he says, and 'a wolf-child becomes a wolf by living among them, so we are ourselves becoming functional objects. We are living the period of objects: that is, we live by their rhythm, according to their continuous succession' (Baudrillard, 2016, p.18). The relation between Baudrillard's argument about the consumer society and St. Dymphna's incest story is that people – the masses commoditize St. Dymphna's account and make use of it for their benefits, and from this morally corrupted story, many people with mental problems were cured due to the intercession of St. Dymphna. However, like the masses, David Bell hopes for help from her story. The story fascinates him, and the notes on the primitive religions of the world is an alternative ground for his spiritual existence. 'All those magnificently people affected madness makes him feel small and well-dressed' (DeLillo, 2006, p.157). These religious notes and stories are alternatives to David's existential difficulties since electronic communication networks and media technologies trivialize his sense of self.

Another alternative argument for the trivialization of the sense of self by media is that American conformist and consumer culture empties the value for human life by exploiting and destroying the subject and replaces it with the objectified and commoditized world of objects. DeLillo's protagonist, Bell, like the masses in America, strives to value his mental experience and selfhood in a culture that is against the concept and the existence of subjective thought and identity. Maybe, therefore, as a psychological or spiritual journey, he drives to parts of the Southern and Midwestern United States and then travels to North Africa in pursuit of magic. He says, 'the more magical a race is,' my mother said, 'the less significant the individual is. Magic overwhelms everything. We in the West value human life almost desperately because we have no magic. 'God is magic,' Jane said [...] 'No. God is the opposite of magic [...] We all have magic in us, some more than others, but everything we've been taught tends to bury the magic' (DeLillo, 2006, p.184- 5). David Bell's desire for an authentic experience and his passion and expectation for magic in the heartland far from home come from debilitation and suffering from the hyper-real productions of the media company. Consumption of commodities for Baudrillard in *The Consumer Society* (1970; 2016), refers to happiness, wealth, success, prestige, eroticism, modernity, and the like, and Baudrillard's description of the consumerism is a magical thought which reigns over-consumption, and this magical thought is also defined as a primitive mentality since it is a belief in the omnipotence of signs (Baudrillard, 2016, p.27). As Bell says, the more magical a race is, the less significant the individual is. Magic overwhelms everything. The magic in Baudrillardian respect reduces the individual to an insignificant level and an object. In other words, magic as a reference to the omnipotence of the signs overtakes everything and transform everything into an object. Baudrillard, on the other hand, does not relate growth, progress, and happiness to consumption; on the contrary, he suggests the opposite of these words on the subject of use. In this respect, he criticizes the traditional perspective, which conceives consumption as the satisfaction of needs; instead, he addresses that needs are socially constructed. He means that consuming magic does not bring happiness and fulfillment, but rather exploitation and destruction.

In order not to be exploited and ruined, David Bell plans to make 'a long messy autobiographical-type film, a long unmanageable movie full of fragments of everything that's part of his life (DeLillo, 2006, p.205). Obsessed with framing his life as a movie, he and his ex-wife move through their life together as though Fellini is following them with a camera. With this, David Bell manifests his desire to turn his first-person

consciousness "I" from third-person singular "We". Seeking the foundational in self and culture, Bell is in pursuit of spiritual completeness in his mysterious and solemn journey, which, though, it started as an autobiographical film making.

Andrea Lombardinilo states in her article 'The meta-language of an absent world.' Baudrillard, McLuhan, and the media consumption' that the informational use shaped by radio and newspapers change to the degree that electricity and digitalization modify the ratios between the sense and reality. Besides, the truth in the virtual environment demonstrates the power of the new electric devices since they produce an experience of daily lives (Lombardinilo, 2017, p.45). David Bell's exposure to hot medium and cool medium in America explains the actual reason why he is in pursuit of his sense of self and his first-person consciousness. While hot medium reinforces his passivity with its low participation, and overexposure, cool medium like television, which uses low-definition and engages his several senses less entirely in that it requires much more his interaction than the hot medium. Participation in the media reinforces the goal increases the effect of the media and its transformation and exploitation, of its participants – the spectacle, people, become the victim of the media, and the means of media glorification. Media proves, spreads, and increases its power with the participation of the masses, and the masses are trivialized, passivized, depersonalized, and objectified, and they become the means of media hegemony. David Bell, in DeLillo's *Americana* (2006), does not prefer to participate in this process of trivialization of the media and sets off on a sacred journey across the country, and escape from his postmodern suffering.

David Bell feels like 'a million other people. Ten million. But inside (his) head, the action is constant. He would like to slow it down by smoking grass, but unfortunately, he can't slow it anymore' (DeLillo, 2006, p.252). Bell, not being able to find redemption, suppresses his suffering with some alternatives like smoking grass, as it numbs and anesthetizes him. Sullivan, Bell's friend, says, 'America can be saved only by what it's trying to destroy' (DeLillo, 2006, p.256). It illustrates that America is at the threshold of destruction; generally speaking, it destroys the authentic physical environment and replace it with simulations, second, the idea of consumerism is put forward, and the media technologies reinforces this idea with advertising. As Marshall McLuhan states, the power produces meaning politically, ideologically, culturally, and sexually. He argues that the demand for more production of political, ideological, cultural, and sexual implications imploded the meaning. The meaning was left behind; all revolutionaries introduced and reinforced themselves with more and more production. Today, everything has changed: meaning is produced everywhere (McLuhan, 1983, p.27). The masses consume the meaning; however, they do not reflect it, and they become the silent majorities. America, in that sense, can only be saved unless it destroys meaning, and unless it stops producing meaning for the masses. David Bell, therefore, pursues the purpose - redemption with his sacred journey across the country, and with his autobiographical film as they both make him reflect on his ontological existence in the postmodern consumer America. Wild, one of the members of the film-crew, says:

'...Too many people think automation is the answer to everything. It is a fallacy. I work with good men. They do their job, and they like what they're doing, and they don't even squawk. Systems planning is a truly American art form. We excel at maintenance. ...A lot of countries can't do that[...]There are three great economic powers in the world. America. Russia. And America in Europe. We have to show them where to put the nail. But the Russians still lag. They lag in industrial research, in computerization, in automated systems. They lag. We know how to plan things, like the overall corporate policy, like inventory management, like distribution, like site suitability. We're experts in containerization, unit loads, electronic data processing, feasibility studies. We know how to zero in. What's so terrible about that?' (DeLillo, 2006, pp.264-5).

What Wild says here supports Sullivan's argument on American destruction. Wild and Sullivan glorify American automation or mass-production in other words. System planning, maintenance, production, management, and distribution are what America excels at. Furthermore, they champion America on containerization, unit loads, electronic data processing, and feasibility studies. In short, mass-production is exalted. This exaltation may also be ironic, and they express their disturbance with being the postmodern conformist and consumerist America. Marshall McLuhan addresses that mass-production produces the masses who do not choose, do not produce differences (McLuhan, 1983, p.35). America, with its mass-production, becomes the hegemony on the screen of people's private life with media technologies, but there is no resistance from the masses to this hegemony. McLuhan says, 'the masses do not at all constitute a passive receiving structure for media messages, whether they be political, cultural or advertising' (McLuhan, 1983, p.42). America reinforces its mass-production and consumption through the media – 'that is the media which envelops the masses.' For McLuhan, it is Mass (age) is the media. The masses are the mirror image of the media and the mirror image of American consumer culture.

On the other hand, Bell thinks about his own life and understands the irrelevance between his expectations for authentic America and actual America. He says, 'our lives were the shortest distance between two points, birth, and chaos, but what appears on these pages represents, in its orderly proportions, almost a delivery from chaos. Too much has been forgotten in the name of memory' (DeLillo, 2006, p.345). People's lives

are between birth and chaos, which does not seem to offer any salvation for them. David Bell, in that sense, is indicated as a 'product' out of this chaos. In the memory of history, societies and people, like Bell, in these societies have happened to experience incidents that have transformed themselves so far, but on the other hand, they come across much worse experiences than before which put them inside a chaos, and this develops and strengthens their suffering, and their salvation becomes unthinkable and unattainable. While shooting his autobiographical film, David Bell comes across an American family who lives with the Indians, and Bell becomes interested in their lifestyle since he is in pursuit of the authentic. American family enjoys living there as 'there is a lot of love there, although it gets monotonous at times' (DeLillo, 2006, p.355). David Bell spends some time there to experience their authentic life, wants to be sure whether they are sincerely happy or not, which is what he is looking for.

Although the Indians keep on living their ordinary authentic life, David wants to know whether they and the American family experience the real happiness that he has been looking for up to now. Rather than working for the death machine, the American family pursues a simulated authentic life with the Indians, and he says, 'anything's better than working for the death machine. We all try to dress the same way here. Simple and beautiful. But it's not like uniforms. It's just part of the single consciousness of the community. It's like everybody is you and you are everybody. Sex is mostly auto. You can watch someone doing something for himself or herself and then they can watch you do it. It's better that way because it's purer, and it's all one thing, and you can do it ...' (DeLillo, 2006, p.356). Although American families living with the Indians adapt their lifestyle, it is more hyper-real to David Bell since the family does not approve the Indians' way of living but adjust themselves to their routines. In other words, the American family, escaped from materials and products, pursue a hyper-real Indian life instead of an original and authentic Indian life. They all try to dress the same way there to feel their participation in the Indian community. They also pursue a simple and beautiful life; they do not have many materials and objects; they work for their basic daily needs rather than working for the death machine; they are satisfied and contented there since they do not kill themselves for America's death machine.

Living there with the Indians provides an alternative way of living for the people who are exploited in consumer culture. However, people's perceptions of social existence are different from those of Indians. Rather than Indians, people in an American consumer society are obsessed with their possessions, land, customs, words, and ideas, and socially constructed concepts and notions. Furthermore, people are always expected to be ready for new trends such as new technology. It means to be engaged in/with the necessities of the physical environment in order not to be forgotten in the memory of history.

DeLillo's *Americana* (2006) argues that people should not transform themselves for the benefit of the social. 'If they let themselves be what they want to be, physically and spiritually, they can kill a lot of the dead inside them' (DeLillo, 2006, p.360). Although this glorifies the human free will on doing whatever they want physically and spiritually, it is unimaginable since the postmodern consumer environment does not allow that as it engulfs and envelops people with its media technologies. Bell's withdrawal to a remote island escaping from the American consumer society indicates his insistence on the first-person consciousness rather than universal third-person singular. Bell manifests his 'willingness to deal with the complexities of truth, he sees himself as the most successful person; however, he ends in silence and darkness, sitting still, a maker of objectors that imitates his predilection' (DeLillo, 2006, p.347). His calm and shade are regarded as a representation of the impact of media technologies on his consciousness. His preference to go beyond the third-person singular has led to his salvation. From the mainstream minds' perspective, David Bell cannot reach redemption/salvation in the media-saturated America as he is already exploited and abused. His distancing from media-saturated society and set off for the authentic heartland of America has led to his disappointment. His individuality is seen as a product in a world consumed by cinematic, capitalist, and consumerist representations. However, Bell is consciously aware that his quest for authenticity and purity is, in fact, his not turning into a consumer product. For Mark Osteen (1996), this is David Bell's 'unveiling movement from 'mystification to enlightenment and revelation' (Osteen, 1996). David Bell does not suggest that his withdrawal is unsatisfactory, and he concludes that 'there is no such (authentic) place' any longer across America, but he is such a person who pursues and keeps his authentic, conscious self. In that sense, 'postmodernity, as Kellner echoes Baudrillard, is known by its implosion of meaning, reproduction of models of the hyper-real, acceleration of inertia and the implosion of the mass in a dark hole of nihilism and meaninglessness' (Kellner, 1989, p.118). His nihilist future is not full of joy, energy, and hope. However, David Bell is a nihilist who acts against the unendurable limit of hegemonic systems. However, it is the system itself, which negates previous values and destroys the meaning. Therefore, David Bell, in this self-annihilating system, will resist and attain his salvation.

'A young writer sees that with words and sentences on a piece of paper that costs less than a penny, he can place himself more clearly in the world. Words on the page, that's all it takes to help him separate himself from the forces around him, streets and people and pressures and feelings' as Don DeLillo says in an interview for *Paris Review* (2017, p.2). Don DeLillo writes and manifests his escape from the outside forces through his fictions. DeLillo sounds that he dissociates himself from the postmodern American society. However, it is, from

the perspective of an outsider, his works which offer a critique of the community and the evaluation of the subject. It shows, besides, a fiction writer's discipline and control, his exercise on bending the language in his way and bending the world in his way.

In a sense, Don DeLillo, in this novel *Americana* (2006), as it happens in his other works 'controls the flow of impulses, images, words, faces, and ideas', and he feels uncomfortable, and he wants to 'let go to a higher place, a secret aspiration' (2017). Like Stephen Daedalus in James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1975), Don DeLillo and David Bell in his *Americana* (2006) trace a religious and intellectual awakening by both distancing him from the society and taking a sacred journey across the country. DeLillo searches for a way for Bell's escape from the impending death or the end of the subject brought about by the media-saturated American society.

Don DeLillo's character, David Bell, becomes 'Nobody' rather than 'Somebody' as Emily Dickinson means in her poem 'I am Nobody? Who are you?' (Dickinson, 1891; 2018). For Dickinson, 'Somebody' is everybody and the masses, and 'Nobody' is a person who keeps his/her individuality and subjectivity. From the sharp eye, Emily Dickinson becomes 'Nobody' by shutting herself down in her house. In other words, she voluntarily likes to keep her authenticity and authentic self by distancing herself physically and mentally from the social expectations of 19th century America. She does not prefer to be 'Somebody.' With this, she means she strongly rejects to be depersonalized, passivized, and commoditized in 19th American society within the social and religious frameworks of the period. Instead, she insists on her Nobody-ness – her individuality and uniqueness in her own house and her private space. Besides, with a 'Frog' in the 'bog,' in her poem, Dickinson may be satirizing the people who struggle, challenge, and long for their recognition in the media-saturated hyperreal society. It may be, in the contemporary sense, the movie stars, athletes, politicians, lawyers, and others who desire to be on television. The individual subject should insist on embracing his/her individuality and authentic self by not involving and participating in the circle of consuming in contemporary America. S/he should declare, as Emily Dickinson does, on his/her 'Nobody-ness' rather than 'Somebody-ness,' not in the postmodern 'bog,' not like 'a frog,' but like an individual subject. Rather than performing deformed and devalued practices, the subject should pursue more authentic, original, and personal values in the contemporary consumer society.

It is examined and argued that people's active participation in the consumption accelerates the disastrous future, and the 'fullness of being' that comes from waste offers no real protection to anyone' as Stacey Olster claims (2008, p.88). Everything in contemporary consumer society should be judged by their freedom consequences. For Karl Marx, humanity should leap from the realm of necessity into freedom since the essentials limit people to pursue social, cultural, and economic rationality. For Marcuse, 'the structure of human existence would be altered, and liberated from the work world's false needs and false possibilities.' Then the individual would be free to exert autonomy over a life that would be his own [...] This goal within advanced industrial civilization means the 'end' of technological rationality' (1994, p.2). David Bell in *Americana* (2006) know the existence of the 'false needs' and 'false possibilities' in his environment. Therefore, he decides to alter his life by liberating from these 'false needs' which are defined by technological rationality. Bell's spiritual pilgrimage is their escape from the media and consumption rationality so that they will be 'free to exert their autonomy' over their lives. However, both have resulted in despair and destruction. Contemporary America, as it is in T.S. Eliot's 'Waste Land' (1922), is an 'unreal city, under the brown fog of a winter dawn' where people like Bell are suffocating every day, and that is why they are in pursuit of a safe and secure environment where they can rehabilitate themselves. Don DeLillo emphasizes that even though media have surrounded contemporary America with its contents to such an extent, there is still a hopeful hope to escape from this bombardment of the images and signs and the hyper-reality that it creates. Don DeLillo eventually addresses that the subject will not be consumed. It is still possible for the subject to quit the world of consumption and get away from the entrapment of media and its contents.

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