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Time-Space Compression and the Role of Television in DeLillo's White Noise and Wallace's "Little Expressionless Animals"

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> "The dominant of postmodernist fiction is ontological. That is, postmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like[...]: 'Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?'"
> — Brian McHale, Postmodernist Fiction

> "A strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us [...] As space appears to shrink to a 'global village' of telecommunications [...] and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is (the world of the schizophrenic), so we have to learn how to cope with an overwhelming sense of compression of our spatial and temporal worlds."
> — David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity

> "For most people, there are only two places in the world. Where they live and their TV set."
> — Don DeLillo, White Noise

In his reading of Don DeLillo's White Noise—a novel many have deemed the quintessential postmodern novel—Mitchum Huehls argues:

> Formal innovation and experimentation can effectively create the experience of a meaningful temporality for readers [...] White Noise is an ideal text for this venture because its content concerns one man's attempt to gain knowledge of his future while its form exemplifies a uniquely American version of the postmodern novel closely tied to television, commercialism, and the ideological mystifications of global capital.[1]

Similarly, the "formal innovation and experimentation" of David Foster Wallace's 1989 collection of short stories, Girl With Curious Hair, situates itself in the temporal, spatial, televisual, post-Fordist, postmodern situation so well, it is as if the specific impetus behind the collection was to examine the effects of the postmodern condition on characters situated within such an untenable, diaphanous, and angst-riddled situation. In other words, Wallace and DeLillo produced texts representative of an ethos of time-space compression and its effects on the postmodern world – particularly through the medium of television.

If we are to characterize the contemporary situation and/or literary movement DeLillo and Wallace are so often grouped into as postmodern – and such a statement has evoked a substantive debate amongst both cultural and literary theorists – the economic and cultural aspects of the contemporary situation as well as the representative literary devices must be studied. Postmodern fiction is often meta-fictional and self-reflexive, meaning it reflects on the medium in which the narrative inhabits. Further, a distinct subset of fiction termed postmodern (in addition to the works studied in this essay, see Curtis White's Memories of My Father Watching TV, Thomas King's Green Grass, Running Water, and Tim Gautreaux's short story "Welding With Children," amongst others) reflects upon the medium of the television, often using the device to frame the narrative, situate the text, as a plot device, and sometimes the television is employed to such an extent as to grant the medium agency (often as a disembodied

character inserting its voice within the dialogue of the narrative). If meta-fiction is self-reflexive with respect to the medium of fiction, these narratives dealing with television indicate a culture that frames its experiences through a myriad of mediums, hence, to borrow a term from Bolter and Grusin (1999), experiences are remediated, and further, postmodern individuals are "remediated sel[ves]."[2]

As Harvey reminds us:

> Realist narrative structures assumed, after all, that a story could be told as if it was unfolding coherently, event after event, in time. Such structures were inconsistent with a reality in which two events in quite different spaces occurring at the same time could so intersect as to change how the world worked.[3]

David Foster Wallace and Don DeLillo realized this, and in their fiction, compress dual narratives, flashbacks, and events in disparate places in the same time within what often reads like a linearly structured narrative. Certainly, neither Wallace, nor DeLillo's literary work can be categorized simply as a product of the American realists (nor even American realists with postmodern updates). However, all authors mentioned have been influenced by, shaped by, and often infuriated by our society's onward progress of technological achievements, particularly the progression of telecommunications devices and mediums.

In Kern's The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918, he grants that "the telephone, wireless telegraph, X-ray, cinema, bicycle, automobile and airplane established the material foundation for new modes of thinking about and experiencing time and space."[4] The modernist reaction to this change in telecommunications technologies, and the accompanying temporal and spatial paradigm shifts—according to the examples of Joyce and Proust—was to present their narratives in a plurality of spaces, or by building a plurality of individual experiences through time. According to Harvey:

> James Joyce, for one, began his quest to capture the sense of simultaneity in space and time during this period, insisting upon the present as the only real location of experience. He had his action take place in a plurality of spaces [...] Proust, for his part, tried to recover past time and to create a sense of individuality and place that rested on a conception of experience across a space of time.[5]

Further, to go back to Kern's assessment of the period, "The two most innovative novelists of this period […] transformed the stage of modern literature from a series of fixed settings in homogenous space […] into a multitude of qualitatively different spaces that varied with the shifting moods and perspective of human consciousness."[6]

David Harvey grounds his study of postmodernity – including the study of postmodern literature – in the theoretical assertions of Jameson, who "attributes the postmodern shift to a crisis in our experience of space and time, a crisis in which spatial categories come to dominate those of time, while themselves undergoing such a mutation that we cannot keep pace."[7] For the postmodern writer (and David Foster Wallace in particular), the medium of television allows for this "simultaneity in space and time" through a "plurality of spaces" while remaining in the "fixed settings in homogenous space" indicative of novelistic realism. As Agger and Shelton (2007) remind us, "The blurring of boundaries and compression of space and time provoke the experience […] of being anytime/anywhere."[8] This, if you will, is representative of the increased homogeneity of experiences of postmodern time-space compression. In this way, the wild, confusing narratives and utilization of a "plurality of spaces" of the modernist novel are conflated/compressed within the structure and rootedness of realism, creating the connection-disorientation binary upon which most postmodern narratives are based. In other words, television has become the panacea of spatial plurality. To go to a different place, experience a wholly different space—and here's the key, to feel as if these experiences are authentic—one must only change the channel, and you're there within the blink of an eye.

Harvey expounds on this by asserting, "Mass television ownership coupled with satellite communication makes it possible to experience a rush of images from different spaces almost simultaneously, collapsing the world's spaces into a series of images on a television screen."[9] Of course, the confusion and disorientation inherent in such disparate experiences being compressed to an instantaneous switch is mitigated by the comfort and normalcy of the trip having taken place on the same couch, in the same room, with only the content of the screen having changed. In effect, the television brings with it a connectedness to the outside world while maintaining the homogeneity of space with respect to the living room, all the while furthering the nebulous idea of agency and control via the miraculous, insidious device known as the remote control (and all connotations of this term herewith).

As Harvey reminds us in his 1990 article "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination," "Rapid changes in the objective qualities of social space and time are both confusing and disturbing, precisely because their revolutionary implications for the social order are so hard to anticipate."[10] Similarly, the

simultaneous connectedness and disorientation that came with the invention of, and mass sales/consumption of the television and the spatial-temporal changes associated with this particular medium, sparked a series of postmodern narratives specific to the television, largely through the author infusing the narratives with commercial advertisements seamlessly, creating the ethos of television/advertisement as narrator and/or character and all the strange personifications of technology that comes with such a literary move.

Consider Don DeLillo's eighth novel, the National Book Award winning White Noise (1985). In it, we see the satirical treatment of 1980s American society through Jack Gladney – a professor of Hitler Studies (a department Jack founded but other than for academic careerism, is perplexed as to why) who doesn't speak German, has been married five different times to four different women, and seemingly sees his children on shifts (all indicative of a stark values change in America from the protagonists of most modernist novels) – and his entirely postmodern family, a "recombinant postmodern famil[y] (as Judith Stacey [1990] calls them) that follow in the wake of divorces and recouplings."[11] Aside from the palpable irony apparent (such as the scene where Jack wakes up in a hospital bed surrounded by atheistic nuns who only don the habit to perpetuate the myth of God and, thereby, to placate society) and the obsession with the obsession with death (seen most obviously in the Airborne Toxic Event scenes and Jack and Babette's addiction to Dylar, the drug that supposedly removes the fear of death from the mind) the most obvious literary device is a product of DeLillo's ethos of media saturation creeping up everywhere in contemporary society. In effect, in White Noise,the television and the radio become disembodied voices, spouting advertising slogans ad nauseum in the midst of Gladney's every day conversations with his family, his colleagues, and his friends.

In White Noise, DeLillo seems to support Baudrillard's conception of the oversaturation of images:

> [...]within which no image any longer has any discernable effects, where the proliferating velocity and quantity of images produces a postmodern mindscreen where images fly by with such rapidity that they lose any signifying function, referring only to other images ad infinitum, and where eventually the multiplication of images produces such saturation, apathy, and indifference that the tele-spectator is lost forever in a fragmentary fun house of mirrors in the infinite play of superfluous, meaningless images.[12]

The television, radio, and other telecommunications devices are always on, and the seemingly superfluous insertion of commercial slogans at various parts of the narrative would appear to confirm Baudrillard's theory.

Consider the following scene in which Jack Gladney watched his daughter, Steffie, talk in her sleep:

> I watched her face, waited. Ten minutes passed. She uttered two clearly audible words, familiar and elusive at the same time, words that seemed to have a ritual meaning, part of a verbal spell or ecstatic chant.
> Toyota Celica.
> [...]
> A simple brand name, an ordinary car. How could these near-nonsense words, murmured in a child's restless sleep, make me sense a meaning, a presence? She was only repeating some TV voice. Toyota Corolla, Toyota Celica, Toyota Cressida. Supranational names, computer-generated, more or less universally pronounceable. Part of every child's brain noise, the substatic regions too deep to probe.[13] (155)

In this, DeLillo supports Baudrillard's notion of a fragmented or subverted semiotics, in which the normal sign > signifier > signified linguistic formula has been corrupted to one of sign > signified, neglecting or passing over the signifier entirely. These car names are meant to signify nothing; rather, the semiotic formula becomes sign (Toyota Celica) > signified (pleasant sounding word that more or less means car). Meaning, ultimately, has been replaced by simple sensory response, presuming that a pleasant sounding word will create a subliminal suggestion of calm, happiness/peacefulness, and safety – the very concepts Toyota wants its consumers to equate with their products.

Further, the concept of "images referring only to other images ad infinitum" is elucidated when Murray (a Pop Culture professor) and Jack travel to THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA. Here, Murray explains the image as image meta-culture of postmodernity, as he tells Jack, "We're not here to capture an image, we're here to maintain one. Every photograph reinforces the aura. Can you feel it, Jack? An accumulation of nameless energies […] They are taking pictures of taking pictures" (12-13). DeLillo creates a tourist attraction based only on the fact that it's a tourist attraction. The barn, itself, is practically irrelevant. The tourist destination is only a tourist destination because it's become famous for being a tourist destination. This, of course, is a semiotician's nightmare. Not only does the actual barn carry no significance, but the image itself is meaningless absent of the designation that the image is the most-captured-as-image image of its kind. This is reductio ad absurdum cultural significance par excellence.

However, the role of the medium of television in White Noise is not only one of reducing postmodern media culture to a mise en abyme of meaningless images and sound bites. Consider Douglas Kellner's counter to Baudrillard:

> Thus, against the postmodern notion of culture disintegrating into pure image without referent or content or effects—becoming at its limit pure noise—[...] television and other forms of media culture play key roles in the structuring of contemporary identity and shaping thought and behavior."[14]

In other words, mediated selves are reconstructing their identities around this new reality of oversaturated telecommunications, not just adapting to the new mediums, but rethinking their lives from the new situation.

Jan-Uwe Rogge (1989) argues, "The media form a part of the family system, a part many can no longer imagine living without."[15] Further, Agger and Shelton contend, "The culture industry is a total environment that enmeshes us from morning to night. It is nearly global. It informs and influences us through multiple media reinforcing the power of its messages, which become inescapable."[16] DeLillo supports these addendums to Baudrillard's conception of the postmodern situation, as a large preponderance of events within the novel are interpreted as if they were happening on television, or rethought within the situation of media oversaturation.

In many instances, reality is interpreted as reality television, as if reality and media coverage of reality were conflated to being one and the same (particularly when faced with disaster or tragedy). Towards the beginning of the town being contaminated by the "Airborne Toxic Event," the first tragedy of any kind to fall on their small college town, Heinrich – Jack's smartest child, and perhaps it is his intelligence that makes him most affected by media saturation – has his ear glued to the radio, reporting up-to-the-minute updates in event coverage. Heinrich has an implicit trust in the noises that emanate from his telecommunications devices, so much so that he trusts their reporting more than he trusts the information relayed to his brain by his senses. For example, earlier in the novel, Heinrich engaged in a fierce debate over whether it was raining, trusting the radio weatherman's report that it would rain in the evening over the sensory fact that it was currently raining in the afternoon. With respect to the traumatic event in question, Heinrich's trust in media reporting is firmly cemented. Consider the scene where Babette describes up-to-the-moment symptoms Heinrich's sisters were experiencing:

> Babette's head appeared at the top of the stairway. She said a neighbor had told her the spill from the tank car was thirty-five thousand gallons. People were being told to stay out of the area. A feathery plume hung over the site. She also said the girls were complaining of sweaty palms.
>
> "There's been a correction," Heinrich told her. "Tell them they ought to be throwing up." (112)

Here we have actual medical symptoms unfolding in front of his eyes but again he trusts the radio implicitly over his senses, so much so that the moment the radio broadcast of symptoms of exposure to the toxin move from sweaty palms to vomiting, the sweaty palms of his sisters have been invalidated.

Heinrich's not the only character who requires media to validate an event. Earlier in the novel, while Jack is picking up yet another of his children from a previous marriage, nine-year-old Bee, a horrific plane crash is narrowly averted. One passenger recounts, in vivid detail, his harrowing experience – the plane dropped nearly 3000 feet, the pilots announced they would crash (adding –landing to crash soon afterward to allay the passengers' concern), and miraculously, the engine restarted at the last possible moment, and they landed safely. Bee, just as Heinrich presumably would say in her circumstance, says to her parents:

> "Where's the media," she said.
> "There's no media in Iron City."
> "Then they went through all that for nothing?" (92)

Though this exchange could be reduced to an "if a tree falls in the forest" hypothetical taken to its illogical extreme, this mindset is the norm throughout the novel. Consider Jack's crisis after the crisis of the Airborne Toxic Event had finally ended:

> This is the most terrifying time of our lives. Everything we love and have worked for is under serious threat. But we look around and see no response from the official organs of media. The airborne toxic event is a horrifying thing. 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? (162)

In other words, DeLillo posited, "If a disaster happens, and no media is there to cover it, did it matter?" According

to Bolter and Grusin, "[…] television programs need to win the moment-by-moment approval of their large, popular audiences, to evoke a set of rapid and predictable emotional responses: television must produce immediacy as authentic emotion" (187). The mediated selves within the novel, forced to look at actual tragic occurrences, can only comprehend them in terms of media coverage of tragedies, or the lack thereof; hence they require the validation of immediacy for their authentic emotion to be processed mentally. Without the "As Seen On TV" stamp of validation, the characters suffer yet another traumatic reaction – that of invalidated traumatic experience. In contrast to Jack's confusion over the images of images culture that surrounded THE MOST PHOTOGRAPHED BARN IN AMERICA, the postmodern individual needs the media coverage (taking pictures) of the event-seen-as-if-it's-on-TV (of the event unfurling as if in pictures) for the event to be validated as an event.

Harvey diagnoses postmodernity as having the attributes of volatility and ephemerality. Hence, "the first major consequence has been to accentuate volatility and ephemerality of fashions, products, production techniques, labour processes, ideas and ideologies, values and established practices."[17] With respect to White Noise, these categories apply quite nicely in certain ways. For example, that the "ideas and ideologies, values and established practices" are woefully ephemeral and volatile is brutally obvious in the Gladney family dynamic. Consumerism is represented often as a sea change, completely changing from one year to the next, from moment to moment – as indicated by the opening scene in which the students of Gladney's college are dropped off by a wave of station wagons, each one indistinguishable from the next. Further, even academia is seen as ephemeral and a scholar's value and job security is presented as being highly volatile – of which Harvey has written, "The turnover time of ideas in academia has also accelerated. Not so long ago, to publish more than two books in a lifetime was thought to be over-ambitious. Nowadays, it seems, leading academics have to publish a book every two years if they are to prove they are still alive"[18] – as Jack Gladney is a chair of a department he founded, Hitler Studies, and even though he's the chair, his grasp on the field is tenuous at best, as he often makes up lectures on the fly and is in a state of perpetual stress over being found out for not knowing the German language. Harvey claims further:

> Themes of creative destruction, of increased fragmentation, of ephemerality (in community life, of skills, of lifestyles) have become much more noticeable in literary and philosophic discourse in an era when restructuring of everything from industrial production techniques to inner cities has become a major topic of concern.[19]

However, the one thing that's neither ephemeral nor volatile – rather, it could be considered the only static, permanent thing in Gladney's universe – is the television.

The success of the novel lies largely in DeLillo's ability to produce a connection-disorientation binary that blurs the lines of such rigid categorization. The television is part comforting, and part horrifying, as its pervasiveness throughout the novel smacks of a society raised on, informed by, and completely reliant on the televisual medium. As Harvey hinted, such a rapid change is found quite disturbing by the postmodern author. However, DeLillo's work reminds us that this particular disturbing change has so permeated our society so as to become familiar, pervasive, and an undeniable temporal-spatial aspect of contemporary existence.

Similarly, through the short story, "Little Expressionless Animals" (which first appeared in the Paris Review, then subsequently in his 1989 story collection, Girl with Curious Hair), David Foster Wallace advances the thesis that television, as a medium, is both responsible for and indicative of a vast cultural change—particularly in the zeitgeist of contemporary Americans. As Claus-Dieter Rath (1989) argues, "Viewers experience themselves as being 'socialized,' as belonging to a kind of electronically constituted society whenever and as long as they watch television."[20] Robert McLaughlin claims, "Wallace sees television as both the biggest challenge to serious fiction's relevance in today's society and the cause of contemporary Americans' isolation and loneliness."[21] As for television's pervasive role in society, Wallace himself argues, "For younger writers, TV's as much a part of reality as Toyotas and gridlock. We literally cannot imagine life without it."[22]

In "Little Expressionless Animals," Wallace intentionally situates his fiction within the medium of television. Wallace pens the tale of Julie Smith, the twenty-year-old girl who, for approximately three years, was undefeated – and so dominant so as to have rarely even allowed her opponents to answer one question correctly – on the television game show Jeopardy! In it, Wallace presents not just the behind-the-scenes politics-as-absurdity of the television industry, but the on-screen aspects as well, all the while presenting these situations and characters in such a way that the narrative serves as a perfect example of the time-space compression concept of speed-up and turnover in "a 'throwaway' society."[23]

Before delving into the specifics of the story, the term "throwaway society" must be made clear:

> In the realm of commodity production, the primary effect has been to emphasize the values and virtues of instantaneity [...] and of disposability [...] The dynamics of a 'throwaway' society [...] meant more than just throwing away produced goods (creating a monumental waste disposal problem), but also being able to throw away values, life-styles, stable relationships, and attachments to things, buildings, places, people, and received ways of doing and being.[24]

In other words, the "disposable" or "throwaway" aspects of most consumer products – think fast food wrappers, disposable diapers, Styrofoam cups, etc. – that had been designed for the purpose of increased convenience for consumers, had become such a way of life, that this newfound concept of instantaneous consumer goods which could be used once, and then thrown away, had infested the worldview of Americans like a cancer, and the concepts of convenience and instant gratification crossed over into the realm of values.

Consider the role played by Julie Smith in "Little Expressionless Animals." As a contestant on Jeopardy!, Smith found herself on the other side of the television screen, embedded in a game that repeats five times weekly, ad infinitum. As a game show, Jeopardy! is bound by ratings, sponsors, and other vestiges of contemporary capitalistic entertainment. Hence, turnover is the de facto state of the situation. For the game show to succeed, presumably, the contestants must change daily, and if not daily, weekly, so as the sense of novelty doesn't wear thin on the viewing public – novelty with respect to the simple desire to see a different face, but more so with respect to the distilled, sound-bite life stories told by each contestant to Alex Trebek so as to provide the human element to the otherwise bland, fact-and-information show. The questions themselves are trivial – new ones written constantly by the staff of researchers in the employ of the production company – and thus disposable bits of knowledge that can be replaced with equally random and virtually unimportant facts, figures, and events within the viewer's mind. Just as Bolter and Grusin argue that television needs immediacy as emotion, emotion must be produced in easy to digest sound bites.

The contestants too, are largely trivial, with very few – save the encyclopedic brain that was Ken Jennings and his $2.5 million, seventy-four day winning streak – able to remain in the public eye, and fewer still able to capture the sustained interest of the viewing public. The contestants, too, are disposable.

David Foster Wallace plays around with these certainties of volatility, ephemerality, and disposability, complicating them at every point. In the story, Julie Smith resided in a world where disposability – particularly her own disposability – was a crass certainty. Further, Julie was in an instant gratification relationship with one of the show's researchers, Faye Goddard, and if found out, would have been brought under charges of tampering and kicked off the show. Finally – and here's where David Foster Wallace shows his brilliance – Julie is a child of disposability; as an eight-year-old, she and her five-year-old autistic brother were abandoned by the side of the road, the scene progressing as follows:

> The children's hands, which are small, are placed on the wooden post. The woman tells the children to touch the post until the car returns. She gets in the car and leaves. There is a cow in the field near the fence. The children touch the post. The wind blows. Lots of cars go by. They stay that way all day.[25] (3)

This is a raw, emotional scene, though it's presented simply as the progression of visual cues and minor events. Presented perhaps as an inevitability, as nothing but a series of sensory images, as a matter-of-fact certainty of postmodern life, no different than any set of images flickering on a screen – set with the ultimate instant-gratification medium, television, as a backdrop.

Toward the beginning of the short story, the producers are lining up the very people that could potentially make Julie Smith a disposed-of contestant:

> Dee squints at her clipboard. "So how many is that all together, then?"
> "Nine," Faye says softly. She feels at the sides of her hair.
> We got nine," says the director; "enough for at least the full four slots with a turnaround of two per slot" The rain on the aluminum roof of the Merv Griffin Enterprises building makes a sound in this room, like the frying of distant meat. (6)

This is presented simply; presented as presentation, which is much like Alain Badiou's idea of mathematics-as-ontology.[26] Further, the auditory/visual imagery of rain-as-frying-meat is not just a disturbing simile but serves to commodify the rain in a way that places it in the realm of the disposable, the volatile, as well.

At this point, I feel I must digress for the purposes of an explication of terms. Ontology – a loaded term – is defined, in the most bare-bones sense of the word, as the study of being. Though this seems simple enough, libraries could be filled with different conceptions of Ontology, from Heidegger's being and dwelling, to the religious connotations associated with the difference between "being" and "Being" to being as existing, to being as determined

by identity (and all the debates associated with identity and identity politics herein), and so on and so forth, all rejected by Alain Badiou's 1988 assertion that mathematics is ontology (stripped of all identifiable characteristics within particular multiples, mathematics is simply the presentation of presentation and hence says what can be said about pure being, or being qua being). Though it is not entirely certain which particular rigid definition of ontology is being discussed – and it must be held as a possibility that all such definitions of Ontology are fair game – the general notion that postmodern fiction is concerned with the questions posed by the study of being is an easily defensible thesis. Here, I must once again remind the reader of Brian McHale's claim, in Postmodernist Fiction (1987), that the dominant in postmodern fiction is ontology. Further, critics such as Frederic Jameson appear to agree with this assertion and, in effect, the critical consensus reveals, "The process of representation, not the object represented, would be the subject matter of postmodernism."[27]

Hence, it is not Julie Smith the individual – and all the particularities that make up the identity of this individual – striving toward a particular goal, Julie Smith the human entity whose aspirations will propel the plot forward, or Julie Smith the mind which sees the world in a peculiar, yet interesting way which is being plumbed here. Rather, Julie Smith the multiple (or, if it helps you follow the analogy better, the "item thus presented"), Julie Smith the commodity, and Julie Smith the particular item which falls in the set of "Jeopardy! contestants" that is being examined and further, the process by which this particular multiple is represented. This Julie Smith is subject to the volatile winds of change associated with the capitalistic situation in which she resides. This Julie Smith is an ephemeral particulate of the larger situation. This Julie Smith is disposable.

When the ratings begin to drop – an occurrence any successful television show will experience – Merv Griffin, the instrument of capitalism himself, attempts to dispose of her (in the sense that the novelty of her has worn off, and the commodity of the contestant must be replaced with another) while maintaining the particularities that made her as a commodity bring the show's ratings to an all time high. In other words, he's looking for a cosmetic replacement – a simulacrum – and believes the perfect simulacrum of Julie Smith would be her autistic brother:

> "The potential point," Merv murmurs, "is can the brother do with datum what she can do with datum." He switches the paper clip to his left hand. "Does the fact that he has, as Faye here put it, trouble being in the world, together with what have to be impressive genetics, by association" he smiles, "add up to mystery status? Game-show incarnation?" He works a cuticle. "Can he do what she can do?" (27)

However, it's important to remember that even though Julie Smith is eventually disposed of – at the hand of her brother, no less – Julie Smith is not instantly disposed of. Rather, she proves to be a paradigm-shifting commodity for the network, and goes on a three year undefeated streak. In other words, Julie is able to buck the trend of the "throwaway culture," for the time being, as the higher-than-ever ratings force Merv Griffin to view her as a valuable commodity, and the hard-and-fast idea of the five-day-at-most champion is subject to turnover. Consider this scene:

> Griffin murmurs to his right-hand man. His man has a shiny face and a black toupee. The man nods, rises:
> "Can't let her go. Too good. Too hot. She's become the whole show. Look at these figures." He brandishes figures.
> "Rules, though," says the director. "Five slots, retire undefeated, come back for Champion's Tourney in April. Annual Event. Tradition. Art Flemming. Fairness to whole contestant pool. An ethics type of thing."
> Griffin whispers into his shiny man's ear. Again the man rises.
> "Balls," the shiny man says to the director. "The girl's magic. Figures do not lie. The Triscuit people have offered to double the price on thirty-second spots, long as she stays." He smiles with his mouth but not his eyes, Faye sees. "Shoot, Janet, we could just call this the Julie Smith Show and still make mints." (24)

After reading this scene, it's tempting to claim that Julie Smith, through her uncanny ability to recall trivial bits of information faster and more reliably than any other competitor as-of-yet, has managed to reach past the ephemeral and volatile, toward a stability of sorts. One must refuse the urge to do this, as this vignette does not change the inherent volatility of her situation one iota. Rather, it serves to explain another condition of the postmodern, turnover time dominated, society. Harvey claims, "Learning to play the volatility right is now just as important as accelerating turnover time. This means either being highly adaptable and fast-moving in response to market shifts, or masterminding the volatility."[28] Julie does this, as her complete and utter dominance of the other contestants lined-up to dispose of her generates a considerable buzz amongst the viewing public – Americans love a slaughter – and, perhaps more importantly, Julie avoids the other act of trivialization and disposability – refusing to answer the human interest questions posed by Alex Trebek each and every night, thus avoiding disposability precisely because the viewing public does not know what commodity specifically she would be to dispose of. In other words, this

multiple stripped of its particularities, this element of being-qua-being, can't be thrown away until it's been properly digested by the people on the other side of the screen. By not offering any of herself up to the world, Julie Smith resists such digestion.

However, Julie Smith is not just an acted-upon multiple within a television-as-medium story. In other words, she's not just the object of perpetual attempts at disposal. Julie Smith is a product of the "throwaway culture" in the full sense of the term, as indicated by her coldly analytical attitude toward the relationship between her and Faye Goddard, in which she is an agent of disposability. Consider the last conversation Julie has with Faye on the day she will eventually lose her crown as queen of Jeopardy!, the day she will be replaced by her brother. Directly after revealing that a string of men dated her mother but couldn't summon the ability to love her autistic brother and further, that she and her brother were abandoned precisely because a man her mother loved had that particular deficiency – and further still, that Julie forever associated the faces of men with the unmoving faces of expressionless animals, like the cow she stared at for hours on end on the day she was abandoned – Julie says to Faye:

> "Tell them there are no holes for your fingers in the masks of men. Tell them how could you ever even hope to love what you can't grab onto [...] That's when I love you, if I love you," she whispers, running a finger down her white powdered cheek, reaching to trace an angled line of white onto Faye's own face. "Is when your face moves into expression." (41)

In no uncertain terms, Julie, in this scene is an agent of disposability, informing Faye that her love is an ephemeral thing, a fleeting construct of her own internal, psychological issues with men, formed in the kiln of traumatic childhood experience.

Despite the detailed narrative of disposability, the explication of speed-up and turnover time (including the concepts of disposability and instant gratification) is not the only purpose of the television-as-medium in this story, though. Far from it. Much like the ethos of DeLillo's White Noise,Harvey claims:

> Advertising and media images [...] have come to play a very much more integrative role in cultural practices and now assume a much greater importance in the growth dynamics of capitalism. Advertising, moreover, is no longer built around the idea of informing or promoting in the ordinary sense, but is increasingly geared to manipulating desires and tastes through images that may or may not have anything to do with the product to be sold.[29]

Anyone who has viewed a 1980s or 90s Budweiser ad in which beautiful, bikini-clad, women appear out of thin air the moment a can top is popped or a Nike ad in which the images shown have little to no connection to the production or ownership of sporting apparel – until the viewer sees the trademarked swoosh at the end or has watched Michael Jordan shoot hoops to sell underwear instantly understands Harvey's sentiments. Further, Bolter and Grusin state:

> Perhaps more than any other television genre, the commercial insists on the reality of television—not just its power as a medium, but its place in our physical and social world. When the viewer goes to a supermarket, she will see products labeled 'as seen on TV,' as if the presence of the commercial validates the product.[30]

Having already given the example of DeLillo's narrative device of television and radio ads as disembodied voices playing the role of the cultural backdrop, I'll move to the unique, yet similar way in which David Foster Wallace handles this device in "Little Expressionless Animals."

Six pages into the story, Wallace turns the camera's eye from Julie (and often her lover Faye, as well) to Faye's mother Dee Goddard, who is – as you might guess from the trajectory of this argument – watching television. Consider this scene in which Dee Goddard has a direct conversation with the commercial slogans uttered by her television:

> "Let's all be there," says the television.
> "Where else would I be?" asks Dee Goddard, in her chair, in her office, at night, in 1987.
> "We bring good things to life," says the television.
> "So did I," says Dee. "I did that. Just once." (8)

The first clichéd, oversaturated, utterance put forth by the television was NBC's official slogan from 1984-1986 – an expanded version of 1983's "Be there." Dee's reply not only indicates the individual's attentiveness and knowledge of television during the time period, but the resigned-to-its-fate attitude of a society that has no other place they could fathom being than plopped in their respective office chairs, watching network television programs

in the evening. More interesting – as a thesis on the pervasiveness of the medium of television in postmodernity – is the second slogan-and-reaction pairing: General Electric's long-running slogan, "We bring good things to life," with Dee's maternal response, "I did that. Just once." Not only does this scene provide a clever take to the issue of television's role in the postmodern cultural collective consciousness, but it's perhaps the most substantive conversation throughout the entire story. In this, the forced pairing of the image-as-commodity and the maternal response of true human emotion, we have not simply a television advertisement/slogan-as-cultural backdrop like we see in DeLillo's White Noise but a breaking-of-the-fourth-wall conversation with the product of the camera, and thus, the personification of commercial slogans as a simulacrum of real human connection – the last nail in the coffin condemning postmodern America as a "throwaway" society.

In David Harvey's dystopian view of Epcot Center – a place where the temporal and spatial are so compressed so as to generate the experience that the trip from China to Norway takes only a few steps – Harvey views Epcot as endemic of a larger problem:

> The general implication is that through the experience of everything from food, to culinary habits, music, television, entertainment, and cinema, it is now possible to experience the world's geography vicariously, as a simulacrum. The interweaving of simulacra in daily lives brings together different worlds (of commodities) in the same space and time. But it does so in such a way as to conceal almost perfectly any trace of origin, of the labour processes that produced them, or of the social relations implicated in their production.[31]

In effect, through "Little Expressionless Animals," David Foster Wallace channels Foucault, Badiou and Baudrillard's concepts of the simulacrum. Hence the television becomes a simulacrum of a confidante, a character able to interact in conversations as seamlessly as an actual person – perhaps more so, as the individual itself, replaced seamlessly by the simulacrum of the television, has become entirely disposable.

Through his ontological presentation of the medium of television, David Foster Wallace it seems, has come to the same conclusions about postmodernity as David Harvey. The effects of late 20th century American capitalism have brought about another round of unwieldy time-space compression, and the necessity of speed-up and turnover time have yielded the symptoms of disposability, the intensification of the need for instant gratification, and the need for novelty in entertainment – and by proxy, in every day existence – that's so immense it's possible that everything can be replaced by the electronic simulacrum most Americans stare at for more than four hours a day. Further, the mediated and remediated self can only understand his experiences through previously viewed media. If the individual itself has become disposable in the postmodern situation, it appears a reasonable simulacrum is well equipped to take the individual's place – television. As a citizen of the postmodern situation, I'd like to elaborate on this thesis, and postulate on what might come from such a dystopian idea, but this line of thought too, is disposable and at this point, the novelty has worn off. Time to change the channel.

Endnotes

1. Mitchum Huehls, "Knowing What We Are Doing: Time, Form, and the Reading of Postmodernity," Cultural Critique 61 (2005): 64.

2. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Remediation: Understanding New Media (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999) 230.

3. David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989), 265.

4. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity, 265.

5. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity, 267.

6. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity, 267.

7. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity,201.

8. Ben Agger and Beth Anne Shelton, Fast Families, Virtual Children: A Critical Sociology of Families and Schooling (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 48.

9. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity, 293.

10. David Harvey, "Between Space and Time: Reflections on the Geographical Imagination," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 80 (1990): 425-426.

11. Agger and Shelton, Fast Families, Virtual Children, 6.

12. Douglas Kellner, Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity, and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern (London: Routledge, 1995), 237.

13. DeLillo, Don. White Noise. New York: Penguin, [1985] 1986. References are to this edition.

14. Kellner, Media Culture, 237.

15. Bolter and Grusin, Remediation, 194.

16. Agger and Shelton, Fast Families, 83.

17. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity, 285-286.

18. Harvey, "Between Space and Time," 431.

19. Harvey, "Between Space and Time," 426.

20. Claus-Dieter Rath. "Live Television and Its Audiences: Challenges of Media Reality." Remote Control: Television, Audiences, and Cultural Power, (London: Routledge, 1989), 89.

21. Robert McLaughlin, "Post-Postmodern Discontent: Contemporary Fiction and the Social World," Symploke 12 (2004): 63.

22. McLaughlin, "Post-Postmodern," 63.

23. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity, 286.

24. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity, 286.

25. Wallace, David Foster. "Little Expressionless Animals." Girl With Curious Hair, New York: Norton, 1989. References are to this edition.

26. Alain Badiou, Being and Event (London: Continuum, [1988] 2007), 25-30.

27. McLaughlin, "Post-Postmodern," 56.

28. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity, 286-287.

29. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity, 287.

30. Bolter and Grusin, Remediation, 193.

31. Harvey, Condition of Postmodernity, 300.

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