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(Dis)utopian Landscapes in Don DeLillo's Fiction

Don DeLillo Kurgusunda Dis(ü)topya Manzaraları

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Abstract

The concepts of utopia (a good place) and dystopia (a bad place) might be arrived at and developed by one's contact with the (constructed) reality and comprehension, yet frustration and discontent with it, and one's pessimism and optimism over a better present and future contingent upon the place and time in which one exists. The former has a long history, whereas the latter is a work in progress. That is, one cannot simply distinguish between the two by asking whether the latter is primarily precautionary and reactive, cautioning us what not to do, whilst the former is proactive, pointing us towards the right direction. Both the former and latter may have similar motives, namely, to demonstrate the dark characteristics of one society by comparing it with another, fictitious culture. Someone's utopia might alternate dystopia, or many traditional utopias from the past include aspects that modern readers would identify as dystopian. On the other hand, one could argue that dystopia serves as the worst-case scenario, presenting a degraded, collapsing, and/or collapsed society, be it socio-culturally, economically, or technologically, worse than another, yet still hopeful for a drastic change for the better. Utopia could be received as the best-case scenario for people in a society considering its socio-political demise. Shortly, both utopian and dystopian scenarios would fit into an extended framework of contemplations on a catastrophe that would either signal a tremendous shift for the better or result in an apocalyptic nightmare. Drawing on the standpoints of Giles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard and tracing Don DeLillo's fiction, this paper seeks to explore the notion of dystopia, the future assumptions that dystopian fiction puts forward, and the challenges and issues it highlights, such as digital surveillance, technological control, the disappearance of individualism, uncertainty, and dread.

Keywords: Utopia, Dystopia, Deleuze, Baudrillard, Don DeLillo.

Öz

Ütopya (iyi yer) ve distopya (kötü yer) kavramlarına, insanın (inşa edilmiş) gerçeklik teması ve kavrayışı, hayal kırıklığı ve hoşnutsuzluğu ve daha iyi bir şimdiki ve gelecek zamana yönelik karamsarlığı veya iyimserliği üzerinden karar verebiliriz. Bunların ilki derin bir geçmişe sahipken, ikincisi halen devam eden bir çalışmadan ibarettir. Yani, ikisi arasındaki temel ayrım, ilkinin proaktif olup bize doğru yönü işaret ettiği, ikincisinin öncelikli olarak uyarıcı ve tepkisel olup olmadığı, bizi ne yapıp ne yapmamamız gerektiği konularında uyarması üzerinden yapılamaz. Her ikisi de herhangi bir toplumun karanlık yönlerini hayali diğer bir kültürle karşılaştırmalı olarak sunmak gibi bir odağa sahip olabilir. Birinin ütopyası, bir başkasının alternatif bir distopya olabilir veya geçmişten gelen birçok geleneksel ütopya, modern okuyucuların distopik olarak tanımlayacağı yönleri içerebilir. Distopyanın en kötü durum senaryosu olarak hizmet ettiği, sosyo-kültürel, ekonomik ve teknolojik olarak çökmüş ve/veya çökmekte olan bir toplum sunduğu ve ötekinden daha kötü olduğu, ancak yine de bir umut vaat ettiği iddia edilebilir. Ütopya, sosyo-politik yok oluşu içeren bir toplumda yaşayan insanlar için en iyi bir senaryo olarak algılanabilir. Kısaca hem ütopik hem de distopik senaryolar, ya daha iyiye doğru büyük bir değişimi işaret eder ya da kıyamet benzeri bir kabusla sonuçlanacak bir felaket üzerine geniş bir tefekküre sığınır. Bu makale, Giles Deleuze ve Jean Baudrillard'ın bakış açılarından yararlanıp Don DeLillo kurgusunun izini sürerek, özellikle distopya kavramını, gelecek varsayımları, olası zorluklar ve problemleri dijital gözetim, teknolojik kontrol, bireyin ölümü, belirsizlik ve korku kavramlarına odaklanarak ele alacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ütopya, Distopya, Deleuze, Baudrillard, Don DeLillo.

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(Dis)utopian Landscapes in Don DeLillo's Fiction

The concepts of utopia (good place) and dystopia (bad place) might be arrived at and developed by one's contact with the (constructed) reality, and comprehension, yet frustration and discontent with it, and one's pessimism and optimism over a better present and future contingent upon the place and time in which one exists. Discussions over good places (utopias) and bad places (dystopias) still exist. The former has a long history, whereas the latter is a work in progress. Unlike the former, the latter is undoubtedly a far fresher concept, arriving only from the late nineteenth century and lacking any apparent literature or tradition (Claeys, 2013, p. 14). It is difficult to discern between the two. That is, one cannot simply distinguish between the two by asking whether the latter is primarily precautionary and reactive, cautioning us what not to do, whilst the former is proactive, pointing us in the right direction. The former as well as the latter might have similar goals, namely demonstrating the dark aspects of one society by juxtaposing it with another, fictional one (Vieira, 2013, p. 352). Someone's utopia may be an alternative dystopia (Claeys, 2013, p. 7), or many conventional utopias of the past have characteristics that modern readers would readily recognize as dystopian (Vieira, 2013, p. 352). For Krishan Kumar, dystopia is the "shadow" of utopia (2013, p. 19), while for Lawrence Davis, it is a "alter ego" (2013, p. 23), or it frequently refers to utopias gone wrong (Gordin; Tilley; Prakash, 2010, p. 1). On the other hand, one could argue that dystopia serves as the worst-case scenario, presenting a collapsed and/or collapsing society, be it socio-culturally, economically, and technologically, worse than another and/or the worst, yet still hopeful for a drastic change for the better. Utopia could be received as the best-case scenario for people in a society considering "the collapse of so-called grand narratives that are believed to foster human progress and secular perfectibility" (Vieira, 2013, p. 354), and socio-political demise. Shortly, both utopian and dystopian scenarios would fit into an extended framework of contemplations on a catastrophe that would either signal a tremendous shift for the better or result in an apocalyptic nightmare. In this paper, I will examine the concept of dystopia by drawing on the perspectives of Giles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard and analyzing Don DeLillo's fiction. Specifically, I will explore the future assumptions presented in dystopian literature as "harbingers" (Kumbet, 2017 p.186), as well as the challenges and issues it brings to light. These include topics such as digital surveillance, technological control, the erosion of individualism, uncertainty, and dread.

Dis(utopia) in Theory and Practice

What drives us to speculate, hypothesize, and fantasize about utopia and dystopia? Is it, as Eric Fromm argues in his "Afterword to George Orwell's 1984," the near despair about the (present) and future of humans, the change in the course of history, the loss of human qualities, the creation of soulless automatons, and the (human) ignorance of all this? (1963, p. 313). As Margaret Atwood in "Writing Utopia," the critical essay collection *Writing with Intent* puts it:

> Both the Utopia and the Dystopia concern themselves with the designing of societies, good societies for the Utopias, and bad ones for the Dystopias. …But in a Utopia, you get to plan everything – the cities, the legal system, the customs, even facets of the language. The Dystopian bad design is the Utopian good design in reverse – that is, we the readers are supposed to deduce what a good society is by seeing, in detail, what it isn't (2004, p. 106).

According to Atwood, our speculation, hypothesis, and fantasy of utopia and dystopia develop from the designs of societies, including the designs of cities, legal systems, customs, and language itself. The good (utopic) and bad (dystopic) of it are determined by how good and bad the design appears. Sir Thomas More developed the term "Utopia" in 1747 to describe an ideal society in his sixteenth-century hypothetical discussion on government. However, it alludes to a place that does exist nowhere. But how

can one decide a society that does not exist would be ideal? "Why bother to try to improve society, or even to visualize it improved, when you know it's all going to go around again, like clothes in the wash? And how can you define a "good" society as opposed to a "bad" one if you see good and bad as aspects of the same thing?" (Atwood, 2004, p. 98). Both utopia and dystopia, according to Atwood, are generated exclusively by monotheist societies, or cultures that are based on a single concept of the good, as in Plato's *Republic* (c. 375 BCE) or systems that presuppose a single, goal-oriented timeline. From Genesis to Revelation, there is just one God and a one-story arc in this monotheist civilization. A linear monotheist civilization produces many fictitious utopias, as well as numerous attempts to establish the real (good) thing on Earth (2004, p. 98). Before More formulated the concept of utopia, the broad assumptions pointed to Plato's *Republic* (c. 375 BCE) and John the Apostle's the Book of Revelation (96 CE) as the backdrop of modern utopias. The Bible, Dante, and Milton may serve as inspirations for modern dystopias. After More, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travel*, William Morris's *New from Nowhere*, H.G. Wells's *Time Machine*, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, W.H. Hudson's *A Crystal Age*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, Zamyatin's *We*, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, W. H. Hudson's *A Crystal Age*, Charlotte Perkin Gilman's *Herland*, and Marge Piercey's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and many more would be considered to have invested in the formulation of the concept. Another unambiguous assumption recognized among writers and critics is that utopias satirize political and social malaise, namely ills of the time regarding, among others, the distribution of wealth, labor, and power relations, equality, and rights, discipline, and control, yet dystopias warn us against the current predicament including biopolitics, digital surveillance, technological control, commodification and weakening conviction in the future and the sense that real change is no longer feasible (Jameson, 2010, p. 24) projected to collapse the future if not responded to seriously. As Atwood puts it:

> "… but the Utopia-Dystopia as a form is a way of trying things out on paper first to see whether we might like them, should we ever have the chance to put them into actual practice. In addition, it challenges us to re-examine what we understand by the word human, and above all what we intend by the word freedom. For neither Utopia nor Dystopia is open-ended. Utopia is an extreme example of the impulse to order. Dystopia, its nightmare mirror image, is the desire to squash dissent taken to inhuman and lunatic lengths. Neither is what you'd call tolerant, but both are necessary to the imagination: if we can't visualize the good, the ideal if we can't formulate what we want, we'll get what we don't want, in spades. It's a sad commentary on our age that we find Dystopias a lot easier to believe in than Utopias: Utopias we can only imagine, Dystopias we've already had." (2004, p. 100)

Atwood contends that Utopia and Dystopia as genres, in the face of the trials and tribulations of collective existence and the spirits of time, provide us with a setting in which we may engage with imagination by challenging, fantasizing, and redesigning what the representation of the good and ideal might look like. Utopias, according to John Gray (2007), serve as normative models used to legitimize violent acts performed by religious or political groups, and they perpetually lead to totalitarian regimes of power, and totalitarian oppression. Although not all utopias produce oppressive regimes, the rejection of utopianism is frequently attributed to the breakdown of so-called grand narratives such as "reason and revolution, science and socialism, the idea of progress and faith in the future" (Kumar, 2013, p. 19), most notably the belief in human progress, the pursuit of the secular millennium, and secular perfectibility (Claeys, 2013, p. 165). The belief that reasons and science can usher in a new period of peace and prosperity has been waning since the Enlightenment.

The shift from utopia to dystopia often signifies a lack of clarity on the conditions for a good society, rather than a loss of faith in humanity's capacity to create such a society in the future (Vieira, 2020, p.

354). In other words, the dystopian refusal of modernity, namely modern reliance on techno-scientific progress, automation, and mechanization contributes to the lack of clarity about what defines a good society. The lack of clarity and uncertainty, as Frederic Jameson argues, might be linked to postmodernity, globalization, overpopulation, the explosion of the masses and multiplicities, the desertion of the countryside, the growth of the megacity, global warming, and ecological disasters (2010, p. 36). Only in the twentieth century do humans receive the potential to impact change on humanity through nuclear technology, genetic manipulation, and major biosphere modification considering they have now assumed the position of divinity as the creator and destroyer of life (Vieira, 2020, p. 356). Anti-modern thinkers view these scenarios to be potential dystopian futures, one of which involves the elimination of humans because of the upheavals and imbalances brought on by modernity and the anti-modernists' solid belief that they have the power to both create and destroy life. Don DeLillo's writing, as examined in this article, showcases certain characters who experience the adverse impacts of such scenarios and have abandoned their faith in humanity's potential to build a good society in the future.

DeLillo's Fiction: Utopia Becomes (Dis)utopia

Modern American writer Don DeLillo's fiction is rich in contexts of modern technology that blur the distinctions between humans and technology, presenting a solid ground for looking into these issues. Characters in DeLillo's works have access to contemporary technology and struggle with detachment and unrest in the face of rapid advancements in technology and cultural upheaval. DeLillo's works explore the physical and mental consequences of being in a dystopian setting characterized by fast technological advancements and frequent examination of social and cultural norms. While some struggle to navigate in this rapidly changing environment, and often appear alienated and estranged, others yield to dissatisfaction and despair. DeLillo depicts a (dis)utopian world where technological advances transform the human experience and long-held beliefs are questioned. While some characters are frequently at the vanguard of technological progress, either as pioneers who embrace the new potentials provided by technology or as victims that struggle to cope with its destructive repercussions, others consciously desire to escape. In Don DeLillo's fiction, one could also encounter such manipulations and disturbances of dystopia – media-saturated, and hyperreal America, where the masses stand as commodities, "soulless automatons" (Fromm, 1962, p. 313). In such a dystopia, escapism develops among these characters as their final resolution and response. This entails seeking refuge from the artificiality, technological dominance, commercialization, and excessive reality of America by escaping to rural areas in search of authenticity and originality. In these settings, individuals embrace a profound feeling of satisfaction, security, and fulfillment. His writings delve into a wide range of topics, including the potential of dystopian consequences of political conflicts, the dread of nuclear war, and many more.

Don DeLillo, in his essay "In the Ruins of the Future" published in Harper's Magazine, presents a (dis)utopian world in which "capital markets have dominated discourse and shaped global consciousness" (2001, 1st para.) and multinational corporations have become more significant, and dominant compared to governments. In the essay, he addresses how 9/11 transformed many things that America had previously mandated: "The primary target of the men who attacked… was not the global economy. It was America that drew their fury. It was the high gloss of our modernity. It was the thrust of our technology. …It was the blunt force of our foreign policy. It was the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life, and mind" (December 2001, 2nd para.). DeLillo argues "In the Ruins of the Future" that America is facing an explosive response from terrorists that has been developing for years and appears inescapable (December 2001, 3rd para.).

In his novel *Falling Man* (2007), DeLillo pens how the dominance of financial markets, rationalism reinforced by technology, rationalism in disguise of godlessness, omnipotence, and the bluntness of foreign policy, as well as the influence of American culture, might be considered as the contents of a bad place (dis)utopia), and an unstable today and unknown future (dystopia) that occupies people's thoughts and lives. *Falling Man* (2007) reads the story of 9/11 as "the mother of all events" (Baudrillard, 2003, p. 4); "the World Trade Center was destroying itself committing suicide in a blaze of glory […] implying a sense of desire for sublime" (Maffey and Teo, 2018, p. 9). It portrays the account of how people fell from skyscrapers that were demolished in a terrorist assault. The plot begins when the first skyscraper falls. Keith Neudecker, the main character, and survivor, instead of going to the hospital, sees his estranged wife, Lianne. Before arriving home, he must "go through checkpoints, barricades, and barriers patrolled by troops in gas masks" (*Falling Man*, p. 24). He finally arrives home, hoping to return to normalcy with his estranged wife. In conversation with his wife, the fall scene means differently for each. Keith portrays a dystopia saying, "That's where everything was, all around him, falling away, street signs, people, things he couldn't name" (p. 246). Victims are falling, objects are falling, and the system is falling, that is the political and technological system. It proves that U.S. power is falling and is in decline. For Sven Cvek, this fall scene would suggest "as anti-Arab violence, irrational and non-representative reaction" (2014, p. 9). 9/11, as the representation of violence between/among nations, proves that racializing, radicalizing racial, religious, political, and economic formulations demand reformulation urgently. It also signifies the downfall of US power and the necessity for reformulation to incorporate various races, nationalities, and religions. Although *Falling Man* (2007) might be read as the story of a trauma, it reflects a historical crisis and hints at a dystopia, the crisis of global relationships among nations. It is, for Sven Cvek, the falling of the empire that has severe nationalist supremacy over other nations around the globe; the militarization process is prevalent, and the liberal imagination is also collapsing at the same time – a collapse of Humanism that celebrated man as 'the measure of all things' for more than a half-century (Cvek, 2014). It is, on the other hand, the death of utopia, the desire to build a good place. It is rather a story of a bad place, dystopia. A man jumps from the upper floor's window and perishes in the air. US hegemony over the less-human outside vanishes in the air; its hegemony over the annihilation/elimination of the spirit of diversity disappears in the air.

DeLillo in *The Silence* (2020), "continues to illustrate his belief that "we" depend on disasters to consolidate our visions" (Herbrechter, 2021, p. 1). The novella develops among five characters at a Super Bowl party in an apartment in 2022 Manhattan on Sunday – two couples in their late Middle Ages, one who survives the airplane crash and the other wait for their arrival, and a young man, quoting from Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. On this day, all technology suddenly comes to a halt, and silence dominates everywhere, a digital shutdown (Preston, 2020). It seems as if "this is the casual embrace that marks a dystopia; the fall of world civilization" (*The Silence*, 2020, p. 16). It is time for these people to be present and have a conversation:

> "…Being boring. Living life"
>
> "Is this something that they've always longed for, subliminally…?",
>
> "And the streets, these streets… Crowds dispersed. Streets empty".
>
> "I am done with all this. Sunday or is it Monday? February whatever. It is my expiration date" (Max, the party host).
>
> "What if all this is a living breathing fantasy? […] Has time leaned forward […] or has it collapsed?" (DeLillo, 2020, p. 24).

This silence is a 'global silence' that foreshadows a post-technological silence; threatens to consume humanity and their (dis)utopian environment. In *The Silence* (2020), characters lack access to modern technology, and must accept their mortality; cultural death; the end of the Earth; the end of time (Cohen, 2020). Characters are left to relativity, uncertainty, and incompleteness of time; present continuous time and the future time become relative, uncertain, and incomplete within this 'global silence,' technological shutdown; "the Now cannot exist except as fiction […] without technology, this lack of a present – or the fictionality of the present – will once again become palpable to our/[their] own experience […] each of us/[them] lives in our own discrete, individual present […], and it will make us/[them] insane" (Cohen, 2020, 9th para.). They cannot tackle this (dis)utopian landscape and take refuge in isolated rooms and places. DeLillo seems ambiguous between the yearning for a utopia and the 'frustration about a dystopia – the (traditional humanist) human reality, desires to "rehumanize, re-member and reinvent" (*The Silence*, 2020, p. 22). While the novel might dismiss dystopia, it implies the urgency of a utopia to rehumanize and reinvent humans to tackle the problems of a changing world. In his article "Technology in the Dystopian Novel," Gorman Beauchamp argues that the dystopian novel, in showcasing an admonitory predicament of the future, employs fear: the fear of technology (1986, p. 53). This is the fear of essentially authoritarian technological determinism, a futuristic Frankenstein's monster (p. 55). This is a historical perspective that claims that science and technology actively contribute to the construction of reality, hence introducing human uncertainty into the nonhuman world. Historically, dystopias have expressed a refusal of modernity, and that refusal has recently evolved into a refusal of humans as the agents who brought about modern life and its concomitant problems. Such a view is consistent with modern observations on the Anthropocene, a geological epoch defined by humans' long-term effect on the earth (Vieira, 2020, p. 357). Kumar underlines the picture of the future that any dystopia implies as it "picks out the most distinctive and novel features" of each time and "presents them in the form of an imaginatively realized society" (cf. Vieira, 2013, p. 3). For instance, the twentieth-first century's conflicts, which include wars, revolutions, and struggles against colonialism, racism, sexism, speciesism, and homophobia, to name a few, are all referred to as the dystopian century (Sargent, 2013, p. 11) which is considered to be caused by fact that the traditional human concept prioritizes human hegemony over nature and ecological systems has been destroying the planet for a long time. In such a dystopian environment, "What a Human and his/her brain – or rather the Brain and its Human – would resemble now when they leave the planet forever, before its destruction; that, the story does not say. So ends the (postmodern) fable we are about to hear" (Lyotard, 1999). The concept of humans' desertion of the dystopian planet before its destruction suggests that humanity would need to adapt to a new environment to survive. Lyotard's statement might imply a degree of doubt and ambiguity about what these changes would entail and what repercussions would there be. This uncertainty might reflect the complicated and unexpected nature of the ecological predicament we face, as well as the difficulties in finding ethical, and sustainable solutions. Overall, Lyotard's remarks raise critical concerns regarding the link between humans and the environment, as well as how we may need to adapt and evolve in dystopian environments. This might also imply that "we need the dystopia to remind us that our dystopia(n) (century) could get worse, but we need the eutopia, even more, to remind us that better, while difficult, is possible" (Lyotard, 1999). Likewise, Jonathan Jong argues that technological or sociopolitical progress is inherently utopian, but humans' over-reliance on science and technology to bring about a better world is driven by dystopian impulses that combine two fears: the fear of technology itself and the fear of a technological utopia (2019, p. 2). The dystopian imagination envisions an alternate future in which utopia is realized but human urges remain sharp beneath the oppressive structures of a technologically advanced civilization. If dystopias provide us that manipulating and controlling past and present information is essential for order, then to fight today's dystopias, we must distribute knowledge, recover memory, access free information, produce critical thought, build hope, and resist (Baccolini, 2013, p. 45). As Baccolini and

Moyland put it in their "Introduction" to *Dark Horizons*: "Dystopian imagination has served as a prophetic vehicle, the canary in a cage, for writers with an ethical and political concern for warning us of terrible sociopolitical tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia's underside" (p. 2). As the narrative begins in the middle of the nightmarish society, cognitive alienation is initially stifled by the immediacy and normalcy of the setting. The protagonist, as well as the reader, is inherently present in the current reality, completely engrossed in society without self-awareness. Nevertheless, an opposing narrative arises as the citizen of the dystopian society transitions from initial relief to feelings of isolation and defiance, moving from an early understanding to taking decisive action that ultimately leads to a transformative and catastrophic event aimed at restructuring the social order.

DeLillo's fiction, as examined in this paper, invents ((dis)utopian world); the nonexistent, unnamable, and unimaginable have all but disappeared (Boxall 2006). It has witnessed the transmission of the cultural reality by the forces of globalized capital, technoscientific progress, automation, and mechanization which includes no escape. In *Great Jones Street* (1998), for example, one can discover the representation of exhaustion in a (dis)utopian world. It narrates a famous rock 'n' roll star Bucky Wunderlick, tired of "'the excess,'' 'a devouring neon,' 'outrage,' 'hysteria in limousines,' hysteria in the frenzy crowds, 'knife fights in the audience,' 'bizarre litigation,' 'treachery,' 'drugs' and 'pandemonium'" deafening crowds, hysterical teenagers who care about his image as a singer, not his songs as pieces of art"(DeLillo, p. 3), leaves his band in the middle of a tour and isolates himself in his unfurnished apartment on Great Jones Street in New York. Wunderlick abandons the music market economy that has transformed him into an image, a symbol, a commodity, and/or a virtual image. Wunderlick, by taking drugs, escapes from the fans and music authorities to silence and oblivion; from media-saturated, technologized America to his safe chamber, which never secures him. This ultimately indicates that Wunderlick's withdrawal is impossible. Utopia turns (dis)utopia, namely, what was meant to be a good place turns into a bad place. That is, Wunderlick escapes from a bad place that includes 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu, 2001), of the music market economy. Symbolic violence "inscribes itself in the habitual patterns of perception and behavior, which are accepted and unquestioned […] It ensures that order of rule is maintained without requiring the expenditure of physical violence" (Han, 2013, p.78). Wunderlick refuses to embrace patterns, such as his service to the economy, to satisfy the audience, and leaves the band and isolates himself in his unfurnished apartment in New York. He escapes a utopian environment in which power and control are protected; challenges power relations (in the music market economy), that make power and violence appear natural. Despite his resistance, Wunderlick, as his response to this (dis)utopia, surrenders and kills himself by consuming drugs at the end of the story. His response to (dis)utopian environment is to submit to death. In his article "Postscript on the Societies of Control," Gilles Deleuze contends that discipline is a pervasive concept in disciplinary societies, whereby it extends from one enclosed setting to another. This progression may be seen, for instance, when it moves from the home to the educational institution, then to the military barracks, and subsequently to the industry. Similarly, it can be traced from the hospital to the jail (2017, p. 3). In control societies, however, these are replaced by ultra-rapid forms of free-floating control processes, such as pharmaceutical production, molecular engineering, genetic manipulations, and salaries based on merit that motivates the masses through challenges, contests, and highly comic group sessions. Individuals have evolved into "dividuals," (italics in original) as have masses, samples, data, markets, or (data) "banks" (p. 4). Technology, including fields such as medicine and eugenics, creates effective social systems and maintains stability in society, but this comes at the cost of limiting human freedom. Society maintains power via the use of biotechnological, pharmaceutical, and psychological engineering, which leads to the development of conditioned subjectivity and allows for self-regulation. Marcuse characterizes this conditioned subjectivity as 'happy consciousness,' a perceptual state in

which a person acknowledges the ethical doubts about the status quo but complies with its constraints since their essential needs and desires are fulfilled (Marcuse, 1991). However, Dystopian literature, according to Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner, is "concerning fears of machines or technology negatively affirm social values such as freedom, individualism, and the family" (Ryan and Kellner, 1990). Dystopian literature on technology indicates that humans must ultimately triumph over technology by fetishizing nature and savagery above technological progress. This duality is technophobic and anti-progress, indicating that dystopian writing about technology supports a Luddite perspective of technology in which people should return to a more natural state of being without technology's dehumanizing influences (Jong, 2019, p. 16). In DeLillo's *White Noise* (1986), one could argue that technology appears as a metanarrative of the century. However, considering destructions such as wars, environmental disasters, exhaustion, and depression led by technology, one discovers that DeLillo approaches technology as the metanarrative with distance and skepticism. How his characters escape from such a technologized and media-saturated social structure and retreat into seclusion typifies this distance. In his narration, these characters witness disasters through technology, which mediates and softens their sense of disaster and produces a profound fear of death; it penetrates their daily lives through which their dependence on these systems seems inevitable. Characters in the novels desire and consume disasters, yearning for more disasters to happen through which they avoid death. Watching disasters on TV creates a sense of belonging, and a duty to witness these disastrous events. "Each disaster made (them) wish for more, for something bigger, grander, more sweeping" (DeLillo, 1986, p. 64). For example, *White Noise* (1986) narrates the story of Jack Gladney, with his wife Babette and their four children, the chairman of the Hitler studies at the College-on-the-Hill. They, as the whole family, are exposed to media technologies, to the disasters screened, "mudslides, brush fires, coastal erosion, earthquakes, mass killings, et cetera" (p. 66), and they "relax and enjoy these disasters" (ibid). Witnessing disaster through TV saturates the Gladneys with a sense of intense fulfillment: "The darker the (disastrous) news, the better, and the severity of the disasters replicated through TV desensitize them (and the American society in general)" (Maffey and Teo, 2018, p. 6). Maffey and Teo argue that since morphed reality has superior potency and effect; "the television becomes more real than reality itself and represents a hyperreal world from which real disasters become "hallucinogenic pleasure(s)," (p. 5) drug-like pleasures. The Gladney face "The Airborne Toxic Event," a chemical spill that forces them to abandon their homes suddenly and escape from death and survive. Though disasters screened through media distance the family from reality, and though "Jack senses it is not taking place because these occurrences happen to poor people who live in exposed areas […] These things don't happen in places like Blacksmith" (DeLillo, 1986, p. 114), it becomes excruciating once they face reality. In fear of death, and in hope for a long life, Dylarama, an illegal pharmacological substance is what they embrace, yet they cannot prevent death. Their escape, on the one hand, proves that the Gladneys experience discomfort and unrest and that they feel uneasy with the weakness and mortality of their body on the other. In this context, Dylarama holds the hope of overcoming their mortal bodies and escaping from the dystopian environment. It depicts a (dis)utopian palliative society that needs perpetual anesthesia: a small dose of poison that induces pleasant dreams. And enough poison at the end for a peaceful death. In contrast to utopia, dystopian novels, which are considered dark, display a worse society in the future than in the present. It presents an undesirable future world controlled by totalitarian regimes, in which power and technology become the primary methods of controlling the people. Because these regimes' control mechanisms see individualism as a danger to their power, they impose a type of collectivism that cancels out all individual differences and reduces heterogeneity in all aspects of life to a forced homogeneity. People are constantly monitored; freedom and human rights have become a luxury; and justice is merely an expectation (Nebioğlu, 2020, p. 22). Dystopia hopes for a brighter future by escaping the ills of the present. That is, dystopian writers believe that the current ills of society and the death of the main characters in their texts will bring about a shift in the present society while offering

better alternatives for the future. This is referred to as "transgressive dystopia" (Nebiolu, 2020, p. 30) since it entails a transgression of moral or social boundaries. The events of 9/11, the war on terrorism, environmental catastrophes late capitalism, and globalization contributed to a flood of dystopian works dealing with optimism in the face of pessimism in the new century through various forms of terror, violence, multiplicity, fragmentation, and subversion. They avoid a negative worldview in favor of hope and transformation. This is conveyed in the context in such a manner that the protagonists, with a glimmer of hope, attempt to discover different opportunities to escape the dystopian world in which they have been trapped. Readers might encounter the protagonists' resistance in the narration, and escape and potential happiness in their alternative lives in the end. Readers might not encounter protagonists' hopeful transgressions in totalitarian regimes; potential change and transformation would not be a promise. That is, protagonists are subject to the strict rules of the totalitarian state (Nebioğlu, 2020, p. 34). In this way, contemporary dystopia promotes a change and a transformation in the characters (and readers) through their interpretation of the present. Alternative societies shown in contemporary dystopia are not fictitious depictions of a hypothetical future that is worse than the present, but rather fictitious re-presentations of the present, the harsh reality of the existing society that appears to be unchangeable. Jean Baudrillard in his *Simulation and Simulacra* argues that simulation is the creation of models of the real without its original reality. It is, indeed, hyper-real. The area no longer precedes or survives the map (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 3). It implies that the map no longer refers to reality. It is a referential illusion. He contends that the substitutes of the signs that the real signs substitute for the real. He describes the term "simulate" as feigning to have what one does not have (Baudrillard, 1983, p. 5). For Baudrillard, simulating is more than just acting. It jeopardizes the distinction between the real and false, the real and imagined. He employs Disneyland as an example of a simulation order. Disneyland, according to Baudrillard, is a game of 'illusions and phantasms,' with attractions like Pirates, The Frontier, and Future Word. The American crowd is drawn to this little social microcosm, the miniature and communal religious delight, by this fictional and illusionary universe. The crowd parks their cars outside, queue, then become disoriented just before the exit. They remain inside with the warmth and affection of toys and gadgets. However, when they return to their automobiles in the parking lot, they discover that they (feel) completely isolated (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 24). As the American crowd fails to distinguish the dystopian reality of Disneyland (of the present society) from its fantastic pretenses, contemporary dystopia emerges to emphasize that it is the 'real' country, the 'real' world that is a (dis)utopia. Contemporary (dis)utopia is a microcosm of the real present, just as Disneyland is a microcosm of real America (Yanar, 2018). With the dystopian views that exist in society, contemporary dystopian writers do not hold an ambition to safeguard the future by enacting changes in their societies. They additionally do not imagine a better society as an alternative to the one we have now. On the contrary, what they achieve is a transformation, individually as well as collectively, to rescue the present. The dystopian works produced in the twenty-first century stand out for their process orientation as well as efficacy in making people recognize their potential and the forces of life that challenge, transform, and create new ways of living as well as being in the present (Nebioğlu, 2020, p. 35). Dystopian writers are no longer compelled to set dystopian societies in the distant future. Even if some writers conform to the tradition of locating them in the future, they avoid emphasizing the time reference. Second, they become more likely to contribute to the protagonists in their resistance. Resistance in contemporary dystopia, on the other hand, is not limited to concealed rebelling actions or secret escape plans; rather, the main characters resist by discovering methods to fight and escape both within and against the prevailing system, as well as by researching ways to destroy it. These developments in contemporary dystopia allow readers to identify that they are living in dystopia and should take action to alter their present society. Contemporary dystopia does not offer established schemas for ways to enhance contemporary society but rather raises people's awareness of their power and the potentiality of life to transform and create. For example, in DeLillo's *Americana* (2006), David

Bell, a wealthy, handsome, and talented 28-year-old television executive, resolves to leave New York for America's Midwest to document the small-town lives of regular people and maintain a strong contact with his birthplace, despite later discovering that America has come to an end. Randy Laist (2008) argues that Bell's "authentic or unique self has been trivialized" in *Americana*. Similarly, David Bell's postmodern predicament is analogous to Michael Oriard's "quest of the soul for meaning that begins in Americana" (ibid). Douglas Keesey defines it as "separating the real from the reel in his life, truth from Hollywood fantasy [...] and getting at the unmediated truth" (Keesey, 1993, pp. 29-30). Bell's journey across the American midwest is an attempt to find some truth inside the dichotomy of his preoccupation with media technology - television and cinema. It is associated with an enigma because, as Laist says, media technology "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 and concepts, they instead create some changes in the sense ratios or patterns of perception (1967, p. 41). David Bell suggests that "images move him from first-person consciousness ("I") to third-person ("We")" (DeLillo, 2006, p. 270), which underestimates or neglects his individuality or subjectivity. 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 dystopian America. Being subjected to "another dull and lurid year," "the recurring news of airplane 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, p. 3-4). With all of this, Bell suggests that he must endure the monotony of his life by highlighting 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 meet again at the very end 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" (2006). Monotony and image bombardment from TV, "a creator and victim of the televisual hyperreal," "blue-eyed David Bell," as a successful executive, "goes out West anyway in a few months to do a documentary on the Navahos" (DeLillo, 2006, p. 10). One might relate Bell's situation to the Baudrillardian fatalistic view of the world. In his reference to *Fatal Strategies* (1990), Douglas Kellner argues that the uncontrollable "obscene proliferation of an object world, and it surpasses all attempts to understand, conceptualize and control it" (1998, pp. 155) 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" (1998, p. 156). The sovereign power of the object, dominant over the misery of the subject, seduces human beings with commodities, capital, fashion, sexual object, media, politics, information, codes, and models (Kellner, 1998, p. 157). Bell's situation is articulated by the object's developing supremacy, its appeal, seductiveness, and final dominance over himself. To alleviate his grief and suffering, he wishes to cleanse his physical and psychic condition of the "supremacy of objects," as well as their "charms and traps," by traveling across the country. William G. Little (2002) 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, and too much exposure to waste in the wasteland, the physical environment in America, reminds Bell his misery and suffering.

DeLillo explores in *Americana* how individuals should not customize themselves for the benefit of society at large. "If they let themselves be what they want to be, both physically and spiritually, they can kill a lot of the dead inside them" (DeLillo, 2006, p. 360). Although this celebrates human freedom to do anything they desire physically and spiritually, it is unimaginable since the postmodern consumer environment engulfs and envelops individuals with its media technology. Bell's retreat to a distant

island to escape American consumerism demonstrates his preference for first-person awareness over the 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). This is David Bell's "unveiling movement from mystification to enlightenment and revelation" (Docherty, 1991, p.186). Although David Bell determines that there is no such (authentic) place anymore in America, he nevertheless seeks and maintains his real, 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 lacks inspiration and optimism. Despite his nihilism, David Bell fights hegemonic systems' unsustainable limits. The system cancels past values and significance. Within this self-annihilating dystopia, David Bell will resist and find redemption.

As the final discussion of this paper, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of 'the plane of transcendence' and 'the plane of immanence' could bring a novel standpoint to dystopia discussions. Transcendence hints at a center, logocentrism, and binarism, and the plane of transcendence is where one establishes a foundation or solid point of reference for one's thought. Any ground relating to binarism implies transcendence because transcendence continually offers an illusion of a division between body and mind, internal and external, inside and outside. It excludes life's multiplicity and virtuality to confined forms, so limiting its infinity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 47). Transcendence reduces life's flows, refuses the divisions that exist, and categorizes its fluidity and mobility. The challenge with transcendent dystopia is the nature of the society that produces it. The genre of dystopia arose around the beginning of the twentieth century, coinciding with the rise of fascism, communism, and World Wars I and II. It was described as a disciplinary period in which a transcendent source of power restricted humans inside control zones and banned diverse and multiple lifestyles and beliefs. As a result, transcendent dystopia evolved as a response and opposition to this authoritarian power, envisioning its probable demise in the future yet hoping for a better future (a better world), including a non-totalitarian, non-oppressive, non-patriarchal, non-utopian future. The twenty-first century abandoned transcendent discourses such as fascism and communism but embraced neoliberal capitalism and freedom (in the economy, ideology, and social life) as a new discourse, leading to the growth of liberal democracies, free market economies, and the betterment of human rights and liberties. It canceled out the transcendent center, a tyranny of transcendence while embracing the plane of immanence, which included boundless expanses, movement, fluidity, and flexibility. Immanent dystopia, as the new pattern, fosters optimism using a rhizomatic system based on a network of continuous connections, rather than a binary system of thought, a finite point, or a location. It includes the possibility of unlimited new life possibilities, boundless and... and alternatives. It does not present its main characters with only two solutions to two opposites; rather, it presents various possibilities and offers multiple strategies of resistance and alternate styles of life. That is why the protagonists could depart from the established conventions and prescriptions. One might read such departure from the solid conventions through various possibilities in DeLillo's *Zero K*[i] (2017), in which DeLillo discusses how new technologies (such as bio- and Nanotechnologies) "control the fragile boundary of between life and death […] and investigates the portrayal and implication of the presence of technology and the philosophical reasoning behind it" (Maffey and Teo, 2018, p. 2). The novel represents a desire to end life and embrace death as the human species is corporally and conceptually impotent, weak, and egotistical, and hence should be escaped through such advanced technologies. In *Zero K* (2017), Ross, Jeffrey Lockart's father, is a billionaire in his sixties who lives with his wife, Artis. Ross is one of the most significant investors in a firm called the Convergence, a scientific research center on a distant and secret campus, where human bodies are cryogenically frozen, a "cryonic suspension" (p. 8). Through

bio- and Nanotechnologies, the main characters, are preserved and cured for their deficiencies for the future, a life in a new world in which such disasters are arguably eradicated, and deaths are expectantly not man-made. “Technology has become a force of nature. We/They can’t control it. It comes blowing over the planet, and there’s nowhere for us/them to hide. Except here (in the Convergence), of course, in this dynamic enclave, where we breathe safe air […]” (p. 245). For both Ross and Artis, the world they endure is dark, a world of disasters full of terrorist attacks, floods, famine, epidemics, and many others. Also, in such a world, man-made death must be defied. First, Artis and then Ross escape from such a world to ‘frozen death’ purposefully and consciously. Although it is, for Artis, “an uncertain farewell” (p. 8) and “a sense of closing down, coming to an end” (p. 20), she “wants to own the end of (her) world” (p. 6). Although technology, in his novels, stands out as an imminent disaster, “a force of nature”, a vital threat to humanity, a trap from which to hide and/or escape seems impossible, one can notice that it stands out as a safe zone/area to escape in Zero K. Namely, technology provides a refuge both for Ross and Artis in which posthumans will embrace and shelter in. In *Zero K* (2017), “DeLillo offers no clear resolution to these [dilemma] of technology, perhaps using the apocalyptic setting as a metaphor for contemporary American society’s reliance on these systems, and the helplessness humans have attained as a result of their dependence and comparative inferiority to technological systems” (Maffey and Teo, 2018, p. 11). I argue that DeLillo hints at the end of such metanarratives that have owned the end of everybody’s world so far. Thanks to biomedical advances and new technologies, it is everyone’s voluntary decision to end their own lives. Bodies will be frozen in Zero K and revitalized in an environment in which man is not seen as the central performer responsible for such disasters and violence, but as a fellow species animate/inanimate, human/nonhuman. Or bodies to be renewed in ecology where death is caused by men rather than by flawed human-made structures. Although disasters are “our bedtime story” (*Zero K*, 2017, p. 52), something out of comprehension, a sense of comfort [and transformation]. The Convergence project is a resignation to the impending end of the planet owing to technology’s lack of control (Maffey and Teo, 2018, p. 11). I contend that DeLillo’s *Zero K* (2017) portrays technology as a threat and a sanctuary from dystopia. The novel’s protagonists, Ross and Artis chose cryonic suspension to escape their world’s brutality and instability. This decision is a voluntary response to the (dys)utopia that has marked human history for ages. Convergence is a surrender to the inevitability of technological change and a transformational place in which humans may reinvent their connection with the world. In this approach, *Zero K* (2017) suggests that technology is neither intrinsically good nor harmful but rather a tool that may be employed for either. It also unleashes its positive energy to modify, transform, and establish new pathways of being, freeing its heroes from its transcending bonds. This also suggests that there is no linear progression into the future in immanent dystopia, but rather a significant reliance on the inherent potentialities of the present as a source of resistance. Immanent dystopia additionally represents a dystopia without a future, nonetheless, it is a dystopia with hope as well as its unique perfection (Nebioğlu, 2020, pp. 44-49). Hope is introduced into a dystopian vision through the embodiment of a new temporality as is seen in Ross and Artis’ choice of cryonic suspension, that is a temporality that repositions the future in the present, the future, a life in a new world in which such disasters are arguably eradicated, and deaths are expectantly not man-made.

Conclusion

We still might not have a clear understanding of what drives us to speculate, hypothesize, and fantasize about utopia and dystopia. We might imagine that both utopian and dystopian scenarios would fit into an extended framework of contemplations on a catastrophe that would either signal a tremendous shift for the better or result in an apocalyptic nightmare. Don DeLillo’s works in this paper indicate the human condition in a (dis)utopian technological age. Protagonists live in a (dis)utopian (unpredictable and dangerous) environment, yet they also can transcend their boundaries through becoming someone

new, becoming dead, commodity, and becoming null. In this sense, his works present a drastic current predicament (a dystopia) or a future vision (maybe a utopia) in which technology is not a cause of dread or doubt but a source of liberation and transformation. These works explore the apocalyptic facets of our modern society, especially the demeaning impacts of technology, the demise of genuine connections with others, and the death of individuality. His pieces reflect a hyper/techno-capitalist society where the main character's search for meaning collapses into an unconventional and dystopian existence. His works typically give an even perspective on the possibility of both utopian and dismal ends. His depiction of a good place (utopia) is frequently characterized by a subtle, unattainable quality. In a society overwhelmed with media and consumption, his characters constantly seek meaning and contentment. The pursuit of an idealistic existence by the protagonists contrasts dramatically with the reality of a society saturated with media noise, environmental concerns, and personal fear. DeLillo's approach to utopia and dystopia is profoundly established in his social critique. His works encourage readers to evaluate how technology progress, consumer culture, and cultural transformations influence our perception of a potentially good or bad future. While he frequently demonstrates these, his narratives serve as insightful findings on the human predicament in a world that is constantly shifting.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical Approval

Ethics committee approval is not required for this study.

Author Contributions

This research and all its stages were conducted by one author.

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Notes

[i] *Zero K* is the name given to a unit. *Zero* indicates -273.15 degrees, and *K* indicates a physicist named Kevin.