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The Death of Technology and the Emotional Vacuum in Don Delillo's *The Silence* (2020)

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Dedication

To my parents who loved me unconditionally.

To my siblings who stayed patient with me most of the time.

To my friends, especially best friends, who have been supportive through it all.

This body of work is dedicated to you.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Allah who gave me all the strength and guidance to complete this work.

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Abstract

Originally, technology had been considered as a sign of progression and human evolution, yet many invalidated its negative aspects forgetting it can be a double-edged sword. That is to say, despite changing the human life for the better in many ways, technology is destructive if not used wisely. Thus, this dissertation explores the death of technology and the emotional vacuum in Don Delillo's dystopian novel *The Silence* (2020) in addition to other issues such as consumerism and the disconnection from oneself and others. Using the theory of postmodern nihilism, this paper analyzes how the novel portrays dread, paranoia and melancholia after the sudden shutdown. The process of this study includes the approach of literary criticism as well as the descriptive analytical method. The results show that over-reliance on technology caused mental disorders especially identity crisis and detachment from reality after the technological failure.

Keywords: Don Delillo, *The Silence*, Death of Technology, Postmodern Nihilism.

ملخص

كانت التكنولوجيا تعتبر علامة على التقدم والتطور البشري، لكن العديد تغاضوا عن جوانبها السلبية ونسوا أن بإمكانها أن تكون سلاحا ذا حدين. و على الرغم من تغيير حياة البشر إلى الأفضل على أكثر من نحو، إلا أن التكنولوجيا مدمرة إن لم تستخدم بحكمة. وهكذا، تكشف هذه الأطروحة توقف التكنولوجيا والفراغ العاطفي في رواية دون ديليلو *The Silence (2020)* بالإضافة إلى مسائل أخرى مثل النزعة الإستهلاكية و الانفصال عن الذات و الآخرين. باستخدام نظرية عدمية ما بعد الحداثة، تحلل هذه الأطروحة كيفية تصوير الرواية للرغبة، جنون العظمة، والكآبة بعد إيقاف التشغيل المفاجئ للتكنولوجيا. وتشمل عملية هذه الدراسة النقد الأدبي وكذلك الأسلوب التحليلي الوصفي. وتظهر النتائج أن الاعتماد المفرط على التكنولوجيا تسبب في اضطرابات عقلية خاصة أزمة الهوية والبعد عن الواقع بعد توقف التكنولوجيا المفاجئ.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دون ديليلو، *The Silence*، موت التكنولوجيا، عدمية ما بعد الحداثة.

Résumé

La technologie était considérée comme un signe de progression et évolution humaine, pourtant, beaucoup ont invalidé ses aspects négatifs en oubliant que cela peut être une arme à double tranchant. C'est-à-dire que malgré le fait qu'elle améliore la vie humaine à bien des égards, la technologie est destructrice si elle n'est pas utilisée à bon escient. Ainsi, cette thèse explore la mort de la technologie et le vide émotionnel dans le roman dystopique de Don DeLillo *The Silence* (2020) en plus d'autres problèmes tels que la consommation et la déconnexion de soi et d'autres. En utilisant la théorie du nihilisme postmoderne, cette étude analyse comment le roman dépeint la terreur, la paranoïa et la mélancolie après l'arrêt soudain. Le processus de cette étude comprend l'approche de la critique littéraire ainsi que la méthode analytique descriptive. Les résultats montrent que la dépendance excessive à la technologie a provoqué des troubles mentaux surtout la crise d'identité et le détachement de la réalité après l'échec technologique.

Mots-clés: Don DeLillo, *The Silence*, Mort De La Technologie, Nihilisme Postmoderne.

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General Introduction

General Introduction

The postmodern era witnessed a significant shift in many areas of study, especially in literature. Surviving world wars drove writers to redirect their attention towards more profound and pessimistic narratives when dealing with historical or political issues. Notably, the end of the Second World War fueled an essential belief that characterized postmodernism. It is known as nihilism, a philosophy that rejects all human values, morals, and even spiritual qualities. Therefore, it is the firm belief that life is meaningless and purposeless in all aspects. Although the idea emerged way before, the relevance and significance of meaninglessness was intensified during the 20th century; people lost the virtues that previous generations glorified. They felt disappointed and let down by the world. Hence, pointing fingers at authorities and God's fate and doubting the entire existence remained the only option to make some sense of what they had gone through.

Similarly, science fiction was also vital in several postmodern works. It became so popular in the 1950s due to the technological advancements and innovations at that time and world wars that inspired themes of violence and battles within the genre. Postmodern writers use science fiction to explore the endless possibilities of what science and technology may be capable of, the consequences of particular inventions, the creation of sophisticated nuclear weapons for future generations, and their repercussions on humanity and the entire planet. Hence, science fiction played a significant role in postmodern-nihilistic-based writings. Authors of this genre highlighted the dystopian aspect of science and technology; they suggested alternative endings to specific events. In addition, they tackled the idea of a parallel universe, interactions with extraterrestrial entities, life on Mars and so forth.

The representation of postmodernism in American literature in relation to postmodern nihilism is found in many works of American writers, including the novelist, playwright and

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short story writer Don DeLillo. He lived before, during, and after World War II and witnessed the radical change in society's norms and behaviors. DeLillo drew inspiration from this shift and turned it into pieces of writing in which he critiqued the new standards, ranging from rejecting the traditional values to challenging God's existence. Furthermore, he portrayed the American society from his point of view and criticized it for being consumerist.

DeLillo has dealt with multiple issues such as, language, identity and fear, especially in his most recent work *The Silence* (2020). In particular, he sheds light on the fear and paranoia that came after the disappearance of technology. Fear was a predominating element throughout this novel for the characters' journey was all about facing their apprehension in the aftermath of the enormous digital disruption.

Subsequently, this research aims to explore the death of technology in *The Silence* and how it portrays dread, paranoia, fear, and melancholia using a postmodern nihilistic perspective. In other sense, this study showcases the emotional vacuum that the characters entered throughout the novel. One's identity disturbance is also explored.

To elaborate, there were many instances where the characters looked at a blank, dead screen looking for themselves and wondering whether they know who they are, or looking at their reflection in the mirror and questioning what they see and if it is real or just smoke and mirrors.

In addition, the over-reliance of individuals on technology led to a collective emotional instability during the disruption, which was exuded in the form of small riots in the streets, paranoia and endless questions, which is why DeLillo considered it an important issue to be tackled throughout his novel.

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The problem of this research is to figure out why the death of technology has negatively impacted the emotional state of humans. The research questions to be answered are: how does the end of technology cause an emotional vacuum? The massive shutdown caused a turmoil within each character which led to multiple disputes, how did the characters react? In what way was the postmodern nihilistic attitude depicted through the characters' behaviors?

In order to answer the research questions mentioned above, it is hypothesized that humans' over-reliance and obsession with technology may eventually cause chaos and psychological void if a sudden shutdown occurs. Similarly, the shutdown may also lead people to behave strangely and struggle with understanding themselves as well as having a constructive exchange with other humans.

This study is worth researching because its primary purpose is to find reasonable answers to why humans rely on technology to an exaggerated extent and why the disruption of the latter negatively impacted the characters' behaviors in this novel. Furthermore, the relationship between one's identity and intelligent devices is to be explained.

A number of studies have been conducted on this topic. Starting with Will Slocombe who analyzed in his thesis "Postmodern Nihilism: Theory and Literature" the relationship between postmodernism, nihilism and the sublime. He explained the origins of nihilism and the sublime in relation to the Enlightenment, then he added that nihilism was constructed as a temporally-displaced form of sublimity and discussed the progression of nihilism from the modern period into the postmodern days. In addition, the critic Irving Howe wrote an essay titled "Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction" where he shed light on postmodern issues in America and the difficulties that the post-war American novelists struggled with.

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Anthony Miccoli wrote the book “Posthuman Suffering and the Technological Embrace” in which he argues that humans in the age of technology tend to adjust themselves to be compatible with machines and computerized systems which closes the gap between humans and technology with the inclusion of Delillo as one of the writers who, through their works, represent the failed posthuman ontologies.

Moreover, a work by Slađana Stamenković titled “Human Identity In Hyper-reality: The Hyperreal Self In Don Delillo’s *Cosmopolis* and *The Silence*” discusses the interference of hyperreality in human lives through technology and the media which influence how people view both themselves and the world. The American writer Bailey Trela criticized in his essay “A Prophet on the Bleeding Edge: On Don Delillo’s *The Silence*”, the overall content, the use of certain words and expressions and compared *The Silence* to Delillo’s previous works asking whether the new apolitical approach in the novel was intentional or not. Also, in an article under the title “Delillo’s (The) *Silence*”, Stefan Herbrechter collected multiple resources as to include various interpretations and different points of view while analyzing the novel. Lastly, in an article for *The New York Times* titled “In Don Delillo’s New Novel, Technology Is Dead. Civilization Might Be, Too”, Joshua Cohen describes Delillo as an outstanding writer in terms of his style, themes, and even the intentional use of certain quotes throughout the novel.

Delillo discussed similar themes to those of *The Silence* in other works such as, death, fear and uncertainty in *White Noise* (1985) and *Falling Man* 2007. The themes of consumerism and individualism in *Underworld* (1997), in addition to power, technology, and violence in *Cosmopolis* (2003). Paralleled with *The Silence*, these novels reflect Delillo’s opinion on his society. On the other hand, this research concentrates on analyzing the death of technology and

the gaps it caused in the characters' mindsets and some sorts of emotional emptiness it created afterwards.

Examining this literary text requires a methodology to be applied. The approach that helps analyze the progression of the events and the characters' behaviors and reactions throughout the novel is literary criticism that can go hand in hand with the descriptive-analytical method that has been selected.

This research is divided into three chapters. The first chapter primarily focuses on the theoretical framework of postmodern nihilism and also the contextualization of science fiction. It provides an explanation to these concepts separately and proceeds to showcase the connection and the similarities between each concept and the other. The second chapter highlights the characters' preoccupation with consumerism, their over-reliance on technology, struggles with their identities and the detachment from others before the technological failure. Lastly, the third chapter showcases the outcomes of the total loss of technology and mainly the characters' reactions and their nihilistic beliefs after the incident.

Chapter one:
**A Theoretical Framework of Postmodern
Nihilism**

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Introduction

Humans' beliefs and values have always been susceptible to the change and the turn of events that occurred throughout history. Following the dark ages, for instance, people were enlightened into new ideologies that helped them challenge their divine authority. The modern period also witnessed a major shift in various fields of study such as art, philosophy and especially literature as to depart from the traditional and outdated lifestyle. Likewise, Postmodern Nihilism came into life because of the deterioration of traditional values and the widespread corruption witnessed by the western culture at the time and to oppose the views of modernists. Furthermore, the association between Postmodernism and Nihilism occurred as a result of the similarities and the interconnected themes tackled by each of these philosophies, those themes include apocalypse, absurdity and void.

Similarly, the American society has also experienced a change of values throughout the centuries whether it was because of impactful international events such as technological advancement, industrialization and globalization or simply because of the diversity of races and cultures in the country along with national crises. American postmodern writers reflect those values through their literature with the integration of science fiction and apocalyptic themes.

Thus, this chapter will provide definitions to the key concepts mentioned earlier alongside other related terms and concepts. It will also provide a deeper look at the theory of Postmodern Nihilism and refer to significant names of theoreticians and authors who were successfully able to reflect the American postmodern nihilistic attitudes through their works.

Chapter One: A Theoretical Framework of Postmodern Nihilism

I. Towards Defining Postmodern Nihilism Theory

The theory of postmodern nihilism and its literature is only understood when bearing in mind that both postmodernism and nihilism have their separate histories and origins although they are related to one concept in common, that is modernism. In fact, during the modern days, the formulation “modern nihilism” was common. Hence, it is safe to add that the period of modernity also contained forms of nihilism. Postmodernism on the other hand was a continuation as well as a break from the modernist ideologies and emerged to showcase the new mindset that human beings adopted when new technologies were introduced, when World War Two left physical and psychological remains and when Capitalism became dominant all around the world.

The literature of postmodern nihilism reflects the nihilistic attitudes of the postmodern societies towards the constant and overwhelming change that occurred throughout their lives, ranging from the excessive appearance of new innovations to wars leaving battle scars afterwards. Therefore, authors of this era tend to shed light on those events and their aftereffects through their novels in order to parallel those works with the readers’ actual experiences.

I.1. A Deeper Look at the Theory of Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a critical theory to delve into because of multiple reasons. First and foremost, its origins are still controversial to this day. In this light, Will Slocombe, in his thesis “Postmodern Nihilism: Theory and Literature” explains: “...despite the fact that the origins of postmodernism are themselves debatable” (77). This means that the exact time at which

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postmodernism emerged remains inaccurate and all the existing dates and timestamps are nothing but speculations.

In addition, postmodernism immerses itself in the particulars of our daily lives, unlike the modern days' attempts to generalize knowledge as to fit within much simpler boxes of understanding. The author Simon Malpas explains this idea in his book *The Postmodern (The New Critical Idiom)*. He says: "Trends such as globalization, the transformations of colonial power [...] and beliefs across the world all appear to point towards a culture that has rapidly become fundamentally different from that experienced by earlier generations" (34). In simpler words, this quote points out the ideas that were overlooked by modernism, but later became the center of interest in the postmodern era. This explains the variety of topics tackled and methodologies applied by postmodern writers. This also makes the postmodern era critical and debatable. To say the least, postmodernism cannot easily fit in a box or be fully appreciated from the surface.

With this in mind, the concept of postmodernism cannot be contained within one simple definition, as it is broad and the already existing definitions vary. Malpas states concerning the definition of postmodernism that:

Unfortunately, finding such a simple, uncontroversial meaning for the term "postmodern" is all but impossible. In fact, as we shall see, this sort of clear and concise process of identification and definitions is one of the key elements of rationality that the postmodern sets out to challenge. (3)

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Malpas elaborates that finding a short, simple definition to postmodernism goes against one of its main principles, which is “escaping the process of definition”(3). Thus, shrinking its intricacies into one short block of words does no justice to it.

The French philosopher and theoretician Jean-François Lyotard on the other hand, defines postmodernism in the introduction his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* as: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives”. In other words, he criticizes and doubts the metanarratives¹ and considers them as an essential feature of Modernism. Hence, he describes the postmodern culture as the end of metanarratives. He later adds that: “A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant” (79). Meaning that postmodernism will always remain related to modernism, and in some ways, the “nascent state” as he worded it, of Modernism is what Postmodernism actually is.

Lyotard then proceeds on what was previously said that the postmodern subject tends to represent the unrepresentable and that the role of postmodern writers must incorporate more than just writing novels. He states:

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable.

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes,

¹ According to lexico.com, a metanarrative is an overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people’s beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences.

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the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining Judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. (81)

Lyotard explains here that the postmodern subject looks forward to reach the potential strength and that postmodern authors who follow the rules while producing their works must replace the philosophers who do not.

Considering Malpas' take on postmodernity and postmodernism, that defining the term is debatable, along with Lyotard's complex definition, one can describe postmodernism as the confrontation of the modern days' principles with a skeptic attitude and the rejection of grand narratives.

Since postmodernism developed from the ruins of modernism, it tends to reject most of the prior beliefs and values. It excludes the idea that absolute truth exists. Thus, suspecting and questioning what was considered valid is one of its essential purposes. Additionally, postmodernism views the human condition as deteriorating, shaky and fragile.

Many theorists contributed to the development of postmodernism. Starting with the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, who was among the first contributors to postmodernism in his writings. Jean Baudrillard, a French sociologist and philosopher, used elements such as "hyperreal" and "simulation" while dealing with his theory in postmodernism. Jacques Derrida, a French-Algerian philosopher, also made significant efforts in post-structuralism and postmodernism; he is well known for his famous theory that is deconstruction.²

² sociologygroup.com defined the term deconstruction as a theory of literary analysis that opposes the assumptions of structuralism. Its primary purpose is to discern the relationship between text and meaning.

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In postmodern literature, authors came up with new stylistic features and applied them in their writings such as, intertextuality, metafiction³ and self-reflexivity. The main themes that postmodern writers prefer to delve into include conspiracy theories, dark humor, irony, fragmentation and randomness. Similarly, postmodernists usually keep the endings to their novels open to interpretation.

I.2. A Deeper Look at the Philosophy of Nihilism

Nihilism as a philosophy went through a long developing process. Starting from its early use in the Middle Ages to its inclusion within postmodernism in the late twentieth century. The word nihilism is originally derived from the Latin term “nihil” which means “nothing” or “nothingness”. Slocombe defines the term as: “The term 'nihilism' refers historically to a perception of something that exists in opposition to particular ideologies, rather than being an ideology of the nihil [nothingness] as such” (6). In other words, Slocombe states that nihilism originally focused on the existence of something that opposes specific ideologies instead of being an ideology itself. Although nihilism can be traced back to the medieval period, it was first used in German and Russian philosophy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which paved the way to twentieth-century nihilism.

Nihilism thus is a philosophy that rejects the traditional human values and sees no constructive purpose to humanity and its existence; it rejects the belief in any religious doctrine and embraces pessimism along with destruction. Nihilists usually tend to condemn humans and God for all the unpleasant things that happen to exist on earth and question the intentions of human beings.

³ merriam-webster.com defined metafiction as fiction which refers to or takes as its subject fictional writing and its conventions.

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In literature, writers explore and demonstrate the ideas of nihilism through the lenses of their characters. Portraying the dark image of humanity and seeking to prove that the human existence on this universe adds nothing but chaos to it and that life has no meaning or purpose. Therefore, destruction and skepticism are the only solutions to cope in this world. Famous writers and philosophers took these themes and turned them into the essence of their works. Among those authors, the French novelist and playwright Jean-Paul Sartre and the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who immersed themselves in nihilism and especially existential nihilism in their novels.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche gives an example of how he views humans through Zarathustra's words: "But it is the same with man as with the tree. The more he seeks to rise into the height and light, the more vigorously do his roots struggle earthward, downward, into the dark and deep - into the evil" (38). This quote argues that the stronger a person gets, the more evil he becomes. In other words, he means that nobody knows how evil they can be until they are tested and put in a position of power. This kind of doubt shows the nihilistic lens that Nietzsche views humans through. In a similar way, he describes life based on the same view saying:

Life-that is: being cruel and inexorable against everything about us that is growing old and weak-and not only about us. Life-that is, then: being without reverence for those who are dying, who are wretched, who are ancient? 'Constantly being a murderer? -And yet old Moses said: "Thou shalt not kill" (100).

Considering the previous saying, Nietzsche explains that life is cruel for most people, including the sick and the old. Thus, growing old is cruel and contradictory to life, seeing the sick and the

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weak also goes to show life's unfairness and finally, "Thou shalt not kill" (100). can be seen as a nod to how flawed religion is according to him. Nietzsche's nihilistic approach showcased a destructive feature in the following:

To be harmful with what is best in us - At times, our strengths propel us so far forward that we can no longer endure our weaknesses and perish from them. We may even' foresee this outcome without wishing to have it otherwise. Thus we become hard against everything in us that desires consideration, and our greatness is also our lack of compassion. (101)

Here, the quote states that if a person wants to maintain his strength and power, he must bear in mind that it will cost him his main human quality, which is "compassion".

In his book *Being and Nothingness* Jean-Paul Sartre expresses his nihilistic tendencies using irony and lying as part of the human existence. He says: "In irony a man annihilates what he posits, within one and the same act; he leads us to believe in order not to be believed; he affirms to deny and denies to affirm; he creates a positive object but it has no being other than its nothingness" (47). Meaning that a person would lie to be believed, he would deceive himself for personal satisfaction; these contradictions show how ironic the ways human beings use in order to survive and cope with their lives. The depiction of irony and self-deception in the previous quote reflects a nihilistic perspective. Sartre also described lying to oneself as "self-negation" (47) and considered it as "bad faith" (48).

Sartre's view about freedom and responsibility in the closing parts of his book, which is that the necessity of freedom must come with responsibilities, can be regarded as nihilistic. The quote says: "The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that man being condemned to be free

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carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being” (553). Here, Sartre asserts that humans must be “condemned to be free” (553) but that freedom to him will eventually bring overwhelming restrictions and responsibilities which can be considered as both a blessing and a curse. He then elaborates with the following:

In this sense the responsibility of the for-itself is overwhelming since he is the one by whom it happens that there is a world; since he is also the one who makes himself be, then whatever may be the situation in which he finds himself, the for-itself must wholly assume this situation with its peculiar coefficient of adversity, even though it be insupportable. He must assume the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it. (553-554)

He proceeds to explain here that this responsibility is overwhelming for understandable reasons; he is responsible for making himself as he is responsible for the world and he must not complain.

On similar grounds, Slocombe discusses nihilism in relation to “nothingness”, like Sartre previously, he says that: “There are a number of ways of formulating nihilism throughout history and such formulations distinguish between different ideological applications of nothingness” (10). Slocombe argues here that nihilism was formulated in different areas of research and study. Thus, the philosophy of nihilism applied varied in accordance with each of these fields which resulted in a variety of nihilist forms ranging from ethical nihilism, which deals with nihilism in ethics, to other “divisions” or “family trees” as he chose to word them, which deal with other philosophical areas. Slocombe continues to mention the different divisions of nihilism, which range from simple to complex, along with major figures concerned. He goes:

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The simplest of these divisions are those such as Karl Jasper's distinction between nihilism as the "denial of values" or the "denial of being", and Nietzsche's "passive" and "active" nihilism. One of the most complex "family trees" of nihilism is suggested by Carr, who defines five varieties of generic nihilism: epistemological, alethiological (Carr's spelling), metaphysical or ontological, ethical or moral, and existential or axiological. (10)

In this quote, Slocombe mentions simple divisions of nihilism and includes names of major philosophers and theoreticians associated with each division, such as Nietzsche and Jasper. He then refers to Carr's formulation as one of the most complex "family trees" (10).

I.3. Exploring Postmodern Nihilism

As mentioned earlier, both postmodernism and nihilism had their own histories and origins. Yet, they also had certain commonalities. First is the fact that they both are a product of the enlightenment, in addition to the fact that they had ties with modernism; for there was even a "modern nihilism" prior to the postmodern era, and postmodernism is considered as a break and also as a continuation to modernism.

Furthermore, it is thanks to those common features which postmodernism and nihilism agreed upon that led to the creation of a new form of nihilism that goes hand in hand with postmodernism. As Slocombe said: "postmodernism creates a new formulation of nihilism – 'postmodern nihilism'" Slocombe discusses the difference between "modern nihilism" and "postmodern nihilism" in the following:

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there are only two formulations of nihilism – 'modernist nihilism' and postmodern nihilism'. 'Modernist nihilism'

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summarizes those earlier revolutionary formulations of nihilism that sought to escape from certain strictures but which reinforced themselves: authoritarian nihilism. 'Postmodern nihilism', in contrast, is that which attempts to escape from even its own strictures. Postmodernism suggests the possibility of a reflexive nihilism that is not cultural ennui but a liberating (or, at the very least, ethical) turn away from ideological processes: anti-authoritarian nihilism. (148-149)

Here, Slocombe argues that modern nihilism's main objective was to escape certain structures while postmodern nihilism aims at escaping all kinds of structures, even its own. He continues to say that postmodernism embraces a liberating nihilism rather than a cultural one.

I.3.1. Are Postmodernism and Nihilism the Same?

Although postmodernism and nihilism are two distinct concepts, some people mistake them for each other to this day; some even consider postmodernism as nihilism and vice versa. The reason of this lies in the fact that they both reject traditional values and deal with almost the same recurring themes such as meaninglessness, failure and lack of faith in God humanity. With this in light, Ashley Woodward explains in his book *Nihilism in Postmodernity: Lyotard, Baudrillard, Vattimo* that:

Nihilism is thus closely associated with the postmodern in many of its seminal appearances. The decline of traditional values and the bankruptcy of the Enlightenment ideals of rationality and progress are recurring themes in these early works, and these themes are also prominent in philosophical theories of nihilism and later theories of the postmodern. (21)

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According to this quote and to what was mentioned earlier, the theories of postmodernism and nihilism have dealt with similar themes in similar ways. To elaborate, they both rejected the ideals of the enlightenment and sought to replace them with new ideals that tended to be more deprecating and pessimistic.

The formulation of “Postmodern Nihilism” occurred eventually due to the dynamic factors of both nihilism and postmodernism. The long lasting association between the two philosophies and even the accusations towards postmodernism that it is “nihilistic” or it entails nihilism were misconceptions that people believed because they ignored the origins of both postmodernism and nihilism. Moreover, if one reads and analyzes the histories of these two philosophies, and especially in relation to the enlightenment and the modern period, it will finally become clear that the formulation “Postmodern Nihilism” is intentional and not accidental. In this regard, Woodward explains:

...the discourse of the postmodern has had nihilistic resonances from some of the earliest uses of the term. Given this association, the current link often made between nihilism and the postmodern is more than accidental; in a historical light, the relationship between nihilism and the postmodern appears highly motivated. While the idea of the postmodern achieved prominence in the ninetenseventies and -eighties, the term originated much earlier. (20)

Given the quote above, Woodward argues that postmodern ideas were in the spotlight during the later decades of the twentieth century. Yet the term originated and was used way before. He adds: “Throughout the twentieth century, various historians, sociologists, and literary critics have employed the idea of the postmodern in ways that resonate strongly with nihilism” (20). In other

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words, thinkers of the twentieth century used the postmodern ideas that seemed similar to those of nihilism.

Woodward referred to C. Wright Mills and his work *The Sociological Imagination* in which he described the postmodern period as the new dark age considering the decline of the enlightenment reasoning. Woodward says: “C. Wright Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) presents the postmodern age as a new Dark Age, characterised by a breakdown of the Enlightenment connection between reason and emancipation” (20). The description of the postmodern era here gave a nod to nihilism because of the themes used and the way the scenery was portrayed by Mills. Hence, this work exhibited the parallel between postmodernism and nihilism and is considered as postmodern nihilistic.

Many postmodern writers excelled and had an indubitable impact on the literature of postmodern nihilism including the American literary critic Irving Howe who wrote critical essays such as “Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction” and books in which he expressed his hate for capitalism in America. Another writer named Jerzy Kosiński, whose works included satire and fiction such as *Being There* and *The Painted Bird*. Don DeLillo, whose works are also an essential part of postmodern nihilism literature including *White Noise*, *Cosmopolis* and *The Silence*.

II. Science-Fiction

Science-fiction, or sci-fi, is a form of fiction that deals with the impacts of hypothetical or already existing scientific experiments and innovations on human beings, planet earth and other planets, outer space and the universe and so on. The term was first used in the early twentieth

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century and coined by the American inventor, writer and publisher Hugo Gernsback who was among the essential figures of this genre.

Science-fiction is connected to the world's technological development. In other words, it draws inspiration from the current progress in science in order to explore certain concepts and views in different forms. Henceforth, technology and science are not the essence of science-fiction, it is the interpretations and the alternate consequences suggested by writers that makes the genre what it is and stand out from other genres.

II.1. The Rise of Science-Fiction

First and foremost, science-fiction was not considered a legitimate literary genre in the twentieth century, according to Gerald Alva Miller, Jr. in his book *Exploring the Limits of the Human through Science Fiction*, critics had to trace back early uses of the genre in order to give it credibility:

In order to legitimate science fiction, critics of the genre began to develop histories, generate overarching theories, and demonstrate the possibilities inherent within the genre's form and content. In the struggle for science fiction's literary recognition, sci-fi critics began sketching genealogies that stretched back to a variety of "legitimate" authors in order to argue that science fiction represents a natural outgrowth of pre-existing literary modes, particularly those that dealt with the fantastic, the uncanny, and the marvelous... (5)

Miller here sheds light on the attempts by science-fiction critics to legitimize the genre as a stand-out, distinct from the other genres whether by collecting old literary works and information

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about authors who used sci-fi-like elements or by arguing that certain modes of literature grew to become science-fiction.

Adam Roberts argues in his book *Science Fiction (The New Critical Idiom)* that the initial use of science-fiction remains unknown and that critics have different opinions on the matter. He states: “Where does science fiction begin? Read the critics of the genre and you can take your pick of possible starting points, for the identification of the point of origin for SF is as fiercely contested a business as defining the form. Different critics have their own favourite jumping-off points” (37). In other words, Roberts says that the already existing starting points of science-fiction are nothing but speculations, so one must have his own take on the entire history of the subject because even critics see it from different angles. He then adds that in spite of the fact that old writings featured what some may consider as scientific elements, it is still impossible to label them as science-fiction. He says:

It is hard – indeed, I would argue, impossible – to identify sciencefictional texts written before 1600; not because there is any shortage of fantastical or imaginative tales, nor because the focus of literature was purely mundane. On the contrary, there are many prior works that take protagonists to the Moon or further into the solar system...The problem with the pre-1600 version of outer space was that it was conceived as a pure and religious realm, a geocentric series of spheres of which only the lowest (ours) was subject to change, and everything above the level of the Moon was incorruptible, eternal and godly. (38-39)

Roberts’ statement discusses the ineligibility of pre 1600 fantastic literature to be identified as science-fiction because the inclusion of outer space and moon landing was all based on religious

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reasons which eliminates the scientific aspect of it. Roberts' book *The History of Science Fiction* included similar ideas to what was previously said. He goes to write: "Ancient authors were comfortable with the literary idioms of what today we would call 'fantasy', 'magic realism', 'satire' and even, in a sense, 'surrealism'... Though delightful, the book is difficult to read as SF: it is, in a core sense, a religious and even devotional fable." (22). Similarly, Roberts here pinpoints the religious aspects of ancient works which removes them from the science-fictional category.

Furthermore, Miller, Jr. adds that when science-fiction eventually started getting more literary recognition, critics showed less interest in its origins and definitions in order to focus on its functions as a separate literary genre:

As science fiction has achieved ever more minimal recognition as a legitimate form of literature while simultaneously becoming a progressively slippery genre to define, critics have increasingly turned away from examining the origins of the genre or defining its traits and instead begun investigating why science fiction seems to more and more represent a privileged genre for contemporary critical theory. (7)

Miller discusses the shift that occurred as science-fiction became a legitimate genre; its definition became more complex and critics stopped digging up its history and started analyzing its connection with contemporary critical theory.

II.2. Post-apocalyptic Fiction

Post-apocalyptic fiction is a science fiction subgenre that deals with human beings and their civilization as it comes to an end. A post-apocalypse is the aftermath of a certain apocalypse which caused damage to the living as well as their atmosphere. Thus, post-apocalyptic surroundings are mainly dangerous and very hard, if not impossible to survive in. With this in light, post-apocalyptic novels tend to rely on the conditions of those surroundings in order to tell their stories appropriately. Furthermore, the stories of this subgenre can be set immediately or even decades after a destructive incident occurs. Post-apocalyptic fiction stories primarily fall under the categories of adventure and survival. Similarly, the most common idea in all of them is the corruption of the governing system. The types of the apocalyptic events in the subgenre may be centered around the climate and its threats, a certain pandemic that impacts the entire planet, or even an extraterrestrial apocalypse which puts the lives of humans along with other living beings in danger.

In mid twentieth century, most people were concerned about communism and the cold war which led post-apocalyptic writers to mirror that in their literature. In the later decades of the century, plagues and deadly diseases were spreading like wildfire in the world, and writers reflected the concerns of people about them in their books. The present day on the other hand, humans are worried about everything; viruses, wars, natural catastrophes and technological dominance and that opened a wide realm within the subgenre to explore even more topics. This period is referred to as ‘current golden age’. Post-apocalyptic books include *I Am Legend* By Richard Matheson, *Into the Forest* by Jean Hegland, *This is the Way the World Ends* by James

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Morrow, *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia E. Butler and finally, *The Girl with All the Gifts* by M. R. Carey.

II.3. Post-Apocalyptic Fiction and Delillo's Writings

Don Delillo is one of many influential postmodern authors who included post-apocalyptic fiction within their works. He tends to mirror the American society through his novels; corruption, politics, and Americans' behavior are recurring themes in his books. For instance, *Underworld* (1997) which is a dystopian⁴ novel, depicts the impacts of consumerism⁵ on the American society. Plastic bags were found everywhere in the streets of New York which represents the physical deterioration. The nuclear fallout is also a major theme in the novel; it is portrayed through the characters' concern with the aftereffects of the fallout. Similarly, *Zero K* (2016) explores themes like fear, power, and screens displaying threats in facilities where they freeze people claiming they can revive them later on. *White Noise* (1985) also dealt with fear of death, consumerism and everyday struggles especially existential as well as identity crisis. *Cosmopolis* (2003) delves into themes such as money and power, crowds, technology and violence. Finally, *The Silence* (2020) describes the death of technology and the reaction of the American society during the event. Other themes were explored in this novel like consumerism and identity.

⁴ According to dictionary.cambridge.org, dystopian means relating to a very bad or unfair society in which there is a lot of suffering, especially an imaginary society in the future, or to the description of such a society.

⁵ The term is explained in details in the following chapter.

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Conclusion

In the light of what have been said, postmodern nihilism was the center of attention of many thinkers throughout the second half of the twentieth century. A plethora of disputes and debates occurred while attempting to define the main concepts of this philosophy. Postmodernism for instance, refused to fit inside one box of definition and scholars are to this day still studying it. Thus, a simple definition to postmodern nihilism in its entirety is likely going to result in misleading information, let alone the fact that it does not suffice or do it justice. Moreover, the inclusion of science fiction within postmodern literature, bearing in mind that there are many elements in common between the two, drove many postmodern thinkers to oppose the idea of defining the term.

This chapter pinpointed the relationship of postmodernism with modernism and the enlightenment. It also shed light on how postmodernism is considered as a break and also as a continuation to modernism. In addition, the beliefs of nihilism existed way before postmodernism emerged which is the main reason as to why many people accused postmodernism of being nihilistic and even used both concepts interchangeably. The fact that nihilism had different forms before postmodern nihilism came to life was also discussed in this chapter. Finally, the history of science fiction along with its origins and how it became a legitimate genre in the early twentieth century then developed to be integrated with postmodern works was explored in details.

Chapter Two:
**Exploring Consumerism and Over-Reliance on
Technology in *The Silence***

Chapter two:
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Introduction:

The main concerns of Don DeLillo in his previous works often included issues related to science, technology and apocalypse. *The Silence*, on the other hand, has encompassed all these elements in order to mirror the American society in a period during which technology seems to be a vital feature in the human's everyday life. It has also tackled other issues, such as the emotional vacuum that each character went in after the death of technology. Hence, this chapter aims at exploring the minds of the characters in the presence of technology which overtook a significant part of their lives. In addition, consumerism is an issue that DeLillo dealt with in order to showcase its consequences on the characters' attitudes and parallel them with those of the Americans.

The Silence is an apocalyptic novel that was published in 2020 which coincided with the spread of the global pandemic COVID-19. This led people to speculate and wonder whether DeLillo chose this theme intentionally or not, though he denied the speculations. The story of *The Silence* took place in New York in the year 2022 where five individuals agreed to meet in order to watch the Super Bowl. However, a sudden turn of events occurs as technology shuts down in its entirety, and the rest of the novel highlights the aftermath of this event and concentrates on the characters' analyses and theories along with their conflicts on the matter individually and collectively.

I. Exploring *The Silence* by Don Delillo

I.1. An Overall Look at the Synopsis of *The Silence*

Don Delillo was born on November 20, 1936, in New York. He is well known as a novelist, playwright and an essayist whose works often portray the dark side of the American society as he witnessed the cultural shift caused by World War II, consumerism and politics, especially capitalism. Delillo graduated from Fordham University, New York in 1958 and worked as a copywriter for a number of years. He released his first short story *The River Jordan* in 1960 and his first book *Americana* in 1971 after working on it for years, followed by *End Zone* 1972. His writing career was not planned and his major influences included "...the major influences on me have been European movies, and jazz, and Abstract Expressionism." (Dangerous Don Delillo 14).

The Silence is Delillo's latest novel, published in 2020. It is a dystopian post-apocalyptic work that showcases his nihilistic tendencies as a postmodern writer. The story is set in 2022 America where technology seems to encompass every entourage that no individual can function without it, it starts in a plane where the first couple is heading to their friends' house in New York to watch the Super Bowl until their plane suddenly crash lands and all devices and screens die simultaneously. Whatever caused the crash-landing, was also responsible for the shutdown. Furthermore, this incident turns everything upside-down for the characters and leaves them in shock while trying to speculate and come up with theories that align with their situation in order to make some sense of it, or at least mitigate the fear and panic caused by it. The disputes over the situation intensify as the story continues to progress.

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Additionally, Delillo depicts certain issues in *The Silence* in a way that reflects his real society along with its attitudes. Consumerist images for instance were all over the plane where lots of unnecessary luxuries were present and in the house of the second couple where Diane referred to her husband as "...a consumer who had no intention of buying something" (*The Silence* 15). The struggle with one's identity and being was also tackled throughout the novel. The characters' doubts and questions over who they are after the shutdown of technology and the concentration on each character individually showcased that. Besides, it also proves how connected these people were with technology and their screens.

I.2. *The Silence* and the Representation of the American Society

Just like in his previous works, Delillo represented the American society in *The Silence* through his own lens. In other words, it was represented through the behaviors of his characters along with all of their complex traits. To elaborate, Delillo used consumerism in *The Silence* as to critique the materialistic demeanors of the American society. He also applied this in *Underworld* (1997) where he depicted New York streets full of garbage and waste as a consequence of consumerism. The characters' over-reliance on technology is also no different, for most humans nowadays find it hard, if not impossible, to go on with their daily lives without being connected to the virtual world. Television sets, laptops, mobiles and all screens were important elements in the novel which explains the panic and the emotional vacuum that occurred after the death of technology. Those behaviors can be paralleled with those of actual Americans for the obsession and the overuse of technology in real life became normalized which may cause turmoil if similar incidents happen.

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The Silence also centers on other themes and ideas that are found in the lives of the Americans such as nostalgia and uncertainty of life. The critic Irving Howe sheds light on these themes in his essay “Mass Society and Post-Modern Fiction” asserting that Americans live in the era of the end of causes which evokes a sense of nostalgia for a belief in them (36-420). Nostalgia first occurred in the plane where Jim and Tessa were recalling their memories in Paris and when Tessa was documenting them in her notes for her future self, if she stays alive. Tessa says: “I need to see it in my handwriting, perhaps twenty years from now, if I’m still alive, and find some missing element, something I don’t see right now, if we’re all still alive, twenty years, ten years” (12). Through these words, it is understood that Tessa always writes her daily achievements so she can remember and reminisce about them in the future. Similarly, Diane longs for her past as a college professor when she talks to herself in the following:

I feel so simpleminded. A college professor who quit too soon. A would-be inspiration to my students, one of whom sits next to me here and now [...] I want to resume teaching and return to my classroom and speak to my students about the principles of physics. The physics of this, the physics of that. The physics of time. Absolute time. Time’s arrow. Time and space. (47)

Through the words of Tessa and Diane, Delillo depicts the importance of life and nostalgia to the American society and how everybody wants to leave something to come back to in the future.

I.3. *The Silence* and the Detachment from Reality

Delillo pointed out the issue of disconnecting from reality as a consequence of being over-connected to electronics. This issue is tackled by Jean Baudrillard in his book *Simulacra and Simulation* in which he states that: “It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality

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(ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle” (12-13). Meaning that it is becoming harder for one to distinguish between reality and the representation of reality everyday, due to the media. The characters became robot-like, or bot-like objects that only function in the presence of power and technology. The said issue was pinpointed in many instances throughout the story: in the plane, for example, where Tessa suggests to her husband Jim to find something to kill time with, she goes: “Did you sneak a look at your phone?” (11). and also in “But you’re happy about the screen. You like your screen.” (13). The two statements reflect on how real technology users interact when facing similar situations, finding a distraction by looking at their screens. Furthermore, another example of how robotic humans can be is in the following description: “Jim was standing straight up, expressionless. A tall white android” (29). Here, the expressions on Jim’s face by knowing that the world may not be the same after the shutdown made him look like a dysfunctional device or robot that needs power to work.

Delillo also highlighted the issue of advancement in science and technology and how it may be more of a curse than a blessing by weakening our systems and lives. Through the words of the woman in the clinic who describes her life and surroundings after the death of technology. The woman says:

The more advanced, the more vulnerable. Our systems of surveillance, our facial recognition devices, our imagery resolution. How do we know who we are? We know it’s getting cold in here. What happens when we have to leave? No light, no heat. Going home, living where I live, above a restaurant called Truth and Beauty, if the subways and buses are not running, if the taxis are gone, elevator in the

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building immobilized, and if, and if, and if. I love my cubicle but I don't want to die here. (29)

Here, the woman speaks in panic while explaining how the entire world may turn upside down if nobody finds a solution or a comforting explanation to their situation and describes technology and systems as “the more advanced, the more vulnerable” (29).

II. The Characters' Attachment to Consumerism

Consumerism refers to the idea that promotes the consumption of products in large and increasing amounts and that people can only be happy if they keep buying and consuming goods. From an economic point of view, consumerism is a key factor in economic growth. Thus, it is believed that encouraging consumption results in major economic success. However, consumerism is criticized for its consequences on consumers socially and psychologically, as well as its negative impact on the environment.

Delillo is among many authors who reflect the behaviors of people around them in their characters. He often delves into issues that most Americans struggle with in their daily lives through making them parts of the traits of his characters. Consumerism, to Delillo, is one of the issues that dominate the American society and he dealt with it in several works such as *Underworld* (1997) where he highlights the environmental consequences of consumerism by focusing on the waste that comes with the products that people buy every day. It is explained in the words of the protagonist and his wife: “Marian and I saw products as garbage even when they sat gleaming on store shelves, yet unbought. We didn't say, what kind of casserole will that make? We said. What kind of garbage will that make?” (*Underworld* 121). The perspective of

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the couple while looking at products in sale leads one to contemplate the actual risk a consumerist mind can bring.

In the opening chapters of *White Noise* (1985), DeLillo intentionally describes long lists of goods. In the first page for example, he writes:

The roofs of the station wagons were loaded down with carefully secured suitcases full of light and heavy clothing; with boxes of blankets, boots and shoes, stationery and books, sheets, pillows, quilts; with rolled-up rugs and sleeping bags; with bicycles, skis, rucksacks, English and Western saddles, inflated rafts.

(White Noise 1)

The reason as to why he keeps adding long lists of goods is simply to describe the characters' overwhelming consumption. In *The Silence*, consumerism is described in various instances. In the plane for example, Jim and Tessa picked business class just to get more space and luxury during the long flight:

They'd decided to fly business class despite the expense because the cramped space in tourist on a long flight was a challenge they wanted to avoid this one time [...] Eye mask, face moisturizer, the cart with wines and liquors that an attendant pushes along the aisle now and then. (12)

This statement shows how the couple wanted to avoid boredom by picking business class, along with its luxuries, yet they still ended up being bored, Jim was reading his screen aloud and Tessa was writing in her notebook to kill time. Consumerism was highlighted again in the house of the second couple. Diane thinks of Max as a consumer in the following: "A stream of commercials

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appeared and Diane looked at Max. Beer, whiskey, peanuts, soap and soda” (15). Here, Delillo refers to the excess of consumerism again by adding another list of goods. Diane proceeds to describe him saying: “Max doesn’t stop watching. He becomes a consumer who had no intention of buying something. One hundred commercials in the next three or four hours” (15). She explains to Martin how her husband turned from a consumer who only watches into a consumer who buys, thanks to the commercials. The same idea was referred to in *White Noise 1985*: “I shopped for its own sake, looking and touching, inspecting merchandise I had no intention of buying, then buying it” (*White Noise* 84). Here, Jack expresses how he had no intention of buying but he eventually did, just like Max in *The Silence*.

II.1. The Characters’ Reflection of the American Society

Just like the way Delillo perceives the real Americans, the characters in *The Silence* are average people who want to succeed and live a simple life. However, technology is all around them and they seem to be obsessed with it that when the apocalypse happened, they strangely turned into different people and began to look for answers and solutions. The same reaction is expected from the actual people that Delillo depicted in the novel.

The characters normalized the existence of technology as part of their lives and turned it into a vital element that one would not function without. In the fourth chapter, Diane tries to imagine how the situation has affected everyone else and how they are coping with it. She says: “Think of the many millions of blank screens. Try to imagine the disabled phones. What happens to people who live inside their phones” (26). These questions would not be strange to the real Americans if a similar incident occurred as they are in fact living inside their phones and most of their lives are virtualized.

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Moreover, Delillo formed the intricacies of his characters in a way that resembles the people he sees and interacts with in his life. Hence, their smallest behaviors including their facial expressions are intentionally built. Max for example, he was a consumer and had a gambling⁶ history which represents a lot of Americans his age: sitting on a surface, watching TV and betting their money on games. In addition to this, Max kept turning to Martin in order to find answers concerning the situation: ‘What is happening to my bet?’ He looked to Martin for an answer [...] He repeated the last phrase and looked at Martin for confirmation of its eloquence” (17). He knew how smart Martin is, so he was the only option to take answers from. Diane also thought of Martin as a know-it-all and looked to him for solutions: “On an impulse she borrowed Martin’s phone, thinking it might be more adaptable to the current circumstances” (18). Diane chose Martin’s device instead of anything else because her instincts believed that everything about him should also be smart and reliable. The previous statements showcase how Americans, when facing similar situations, look up and turn to the smartest person they know to find answers or to blame.

III. The Impact of Technology on the Characters

Technology had a significant impact on the characters of *The Silence*. They find it all around them and use it for multiple purposes: entertainment, communication and even filling time. Each individual in the novel is consumed by a particular thing in technology: Max with his Television, Diane communicates with her daughters through her phone, Jim and Tessa use planes to go on vacations and Martin seems to be overwhelmed by his knowledge of technology and Einstein theories that center around human evolution and progress.

⁶ According to dictionary.cambridge.org, gambling refers to the activity of betting money, for example in a game or on a horse race.

III.1. The Importance of Technology to the Characters

The characters consider science and technology as indispensable features of their lives. They collectively agree that the development of the human race mostly relies on how much technology is involved and how far it can go. They also have their individual takes on what is really important about technology and which part of it each of them is drawn into. Max for instance, he tends to watch his television screen on a regular basis and it became one of his priorities to keep watching and putting his bets on games; he did it for a long time that even his wife Diane says: “I am waiting for him to die first so he can tell me in his final breath how much money he has pissed away in the years of our something-or-other partnership” (15). This statement shows how much time Max spent watching and betting. Similarly, Diane does not get to meet her two daughters that often, she rather talks to them through her phone every now and then which makes the presence of that device important to her. Jim and Tessa like to travel the world so they can see new places and make new memories, they usually travel by plane. They also need a vehicle to transport from their friends’ house to theirs.

Moreover, Tessa spends some time to work online as well. Delillo describes what she does in the first chapter saying:

She also spent time, online, as an editor with an advisory group that answered questions from subscribers on subjects ranging from hearing loss to bodily equilibrium to dementia. (11)

The statement explains what Tessa does for a job, aside from being a poet. She is an editor which means that the presence of the internet is also necessary in her life.

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Martin on the other hand seems to be invested in technology when it is centered around his theories and speculations, especially those related to Einstein. His main concerns throughout the novel include his knowledge of Einstein's 1912 Manuscript on the Theory of Relativity. His obsession with him is no new to his former professor, Diane, who tells her husband about it in the second chapter, she says: "Nobody is smarter than the Chinese except for Martin [...] He quotes Einstein day and night. That's pretty smart" (17). His intelligence and devotion to Einstein led her to believe that Martin is smarter and superior to the Chinese. Martin confirmed Diane's statement saying:

I'm sticking with Einstein no matter what the theorists have disclosed or predicted or imagined concerning gravitational waves, supersymmetries and so on. Einstein and black holes in space. He said it and then we saw it. Billions of times more massive than our sun. He said it many decades ago. His universe became ours. Black holes. The event horizon. The atomic clocks. Seeing the unseeable [...]

(18)

The previous quote confirms the dominance of Einstein and every theory he brought over Martin's mind. His understanding and analyses of the 1912 Manuscript are beyond ordinary that he quotes it religiously every day. He also believes that the current people are living in a world that was predicted by Einstein many decades ago. Thus, the importance of technology to Martin lies in the idea that it may be destructive, or rather disruptive, eventually.

Delillo included technology and its negative aspects in several works of his. Yet, the case of *The Silence* focuses more on the characters' over-reliance on it and their attitudes when they can't have access to it. Furthermore, the novel shows how the characters turned the importance

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of technology into an unhealthy obsession by normalizing and necessitating its existence in their daily lives. To elaborate, the first and second chapters of the novel provided a plenty of expressions that describe the normalized presence of screens around the characters. In the plane for instance, small screens that indicate the progress of the flight were all around the passengers, the following statement explains: “He found himself staring up at the nearest of the small screens located just below the overhead bin, words and numbers changing with the progress of the flight” (10). Here, Jim keeps staring and reciting words and numbers on the screens above him out of boredom.

Another example that showcases the over-reliance on technology is expressed through the words of Tessa when she says: “Did you sneak a look at your phone? [...] Go back to your sky-high screen [...] Activate your tablet. Watch a movie” (11). Here, the presence of the screens below the overhead bin, the smart phone and even the tablet was not enough to kill Jim’s boredom which is a literal demonstration of over-reliance on technology as Jim wanted to try more and different things until their plane lands.

Similarly, the second couple was also used to having screens in their house and using technology every day. Max cannot stay away from his Television screen for a long time; he tends to watch everything, including commercials. DeLillo describes him in the second chapter as follows: “Max was accustomed to being sedentary, attached to a surface, his armchair, sitting, watching, cursing silently when the field goal fails or the fumble occurs” (15). In this description, Max is referred to as “sedentary” which means that he barely does anything productive throughout his day. Many reasons could lead a person to become lazy and inactive and technology is definitely one of them in the case of Max. In addition, as the story continues to progress, it is understood that Max and Diane have never had any kind of interaction with their

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neighbors as they have TV and electronic devices to keep them busy from going outside that often. In the second part of the novel, Max leaves his house to go for a walk and think about how people outside usually act in the presence of technology:

In other times, more or less ordinary, there are always people staring into their phones, morning, noon, night, middle of the sidewalk, oblivious to everyone hurrying past, engrossed, mesmerized, consumed by the device, or walking toward him and then veering away, but they can't do it now, all the digital addicts, phones shut down, everything down down down. (44)

Max thinks about how everyone is often consumed by their devices and seems to be more invested in their virtual life than their actual life.

III.2. The consequences of the overuse of technology on their Identities

Delillo's view of his society is evident in most of his works. *The Silence* depicts the postmodern disconnection that the characters are used to living with. In the opening chapter, Jim and Tessa's conversation shows how detached they are from reality; this is evident in expressions like: "You're happy about the screen" and "You like your screen" and when Jim said: "it helps me hide from the noise". All mentioned expressions showcase the lack of presence and appreciation of real life that this couple lives with. In addition to that, Jim is described in the same chapter as a machine-like entity that goes through a process in the following statement:

His name was Jim Kripps. But for all the hours of this flight, his name was his seat number. This was the rooted procedure, his own, in accordance with the number stamped on his boarding pass. (11)

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According to this quote, the whole process of switching passengers' names with numbers and symbols has resulted in a disruption within their identities as these humans are becoming automated bots. Furthermore, the second chapter follows the interactions between the second couple, Max and Diane, along with their guest and Diane's ex-student, Martin. The three of them also seem to be detached from reality and each one is focused on a particular concern. Martin for instance, is described by Diane as a man who:

[...] barely occupied a chair, seemed only fitfully present, an original cliché, different from others, not a predictable or superficial figure but a man lost in his compulsive study of Einstein's 1912 Manuscript on the Special Theory of Relativity. (16)

Here, Diane observes how Martin is never fully present and is often immersed into his compulsive study of Einstein's 1912 Manuscript on the Special Theory of Relativity. Thus, she tells him to "to return to earth". Later in the 4th chapter, Diane looked at Martin and thought about how his mind does not belong to his body: "She thought of him as a mind trying to escape its commitment to the long slack body with flapping hands that seemed barely attached to his arms" (23). She always knew how smart, yet troubled he was and believed that a mind like his is always trying to escape. As if it is trapped inside his body. Martin tells her about his struggle with the medication that he is on when she asks him. He says: "There are side effects [...] Could be the feeling that others can hear your thoughts or control your behavior" (25). To which Diane replies: "I don't think I know about this" (25). The conversation between the retired professor and her ex-student confirms her thoughts and speculations about his mental wellbeing; Martin's feeling of disconnection could be a side effect of the medication he takes or it is simply who he is. Even Martin himself is not sure about this.

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The characters continue to interact, yet without making any sense. They all seem to be detached from each other and themselves. Diane also seemed to be consumed by the television screen while the game was being broadcasted as she was treating it as a living being that can see and hear her: “Diane nodded as if allowing the proceedings onscreen to continue as planned” (16). In this statement, Diane is as invested in the screen and the game as the rest that she gestures to it to keep going, as if it can take orders from her.

Moreover, Max is impacted by technology and the emotional vacuum it created. In the second chapter, he is described as a man who rarely moves and barely does anything productive, he just sits to watch television and gamble his money on games. Max’s identity issues start to occur later in the story. He pretends to be broadcasting the game in the fourth chapter and seems unstable while doing it, he needs to hear it so he does it himself. He goes: “This team is ready to step out of the shadows and capture the moment [...] Ground game, ground game, crowd chanting, stadium rocking” (24). Max continues to broadcast the game as he imagines it in his head and adds commercial breaks every now and then. He: “Sometimes I wish I was human, man, woman, child, so I could taste this flavorful prune juice” (25). These words seem to represent Max rather than his imaginative commercial. He hardly knows himself and feels more like a product or an object. He confirms that in the second part of the novel, He says: “I’m done with all this. Sunday or is it Monday? February whatever. It’s my expiration date” (37). Max here compares himself to an expired product and even seems to struggle with remembering which day it was.

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Most of the characters in *The Silence* reflect behaviors and personalities of real people whose identities have been disrupted by technology and the virtual world. These people don't know themselves or those around them because of the unhealthy amount of time they have spent inside their screens. Martin refers to this saying:

I look in the mirror and I don't know who I'm looking at," he said. "The face looking back at me doesn't seem to be mine. But then again why should it? Is the mirror a truly reflective surface? And is this the face that other people see? Or is it something or someone that I invent? [...] And what do people see when they walk along the street and look at each other? Is it the same thing that I see? All our lives, all this looking. People looking. But seeing what? (25)

According to these words, Martin struggles with identifying himself in the mirror and is wondering if other people have experienced this state of confusion and whether they can also see his "second self" or not. This feeling of detachment and disconnection from oneself is no strange to people in real life, as many find it hard to distinguish between their real identity and the picture perfect image they have created in the virtual world.

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Conclusion

As observed earlier, the characters of *The Silence* are not thoroughly fictional, for they represent the American society through Delillo's lens. He mirrored the people he has seen and interacted with throughout his life by including their intricacies and personality traits within these characters. Moreover, he added emphasis on major issues in his society, mainly consumerism and its impacts, overreliance on technology, along with its consequences, and identity crisis.

In conclusion, this chapter analyzes those issues by starting with an overall look at the novel then providing a comparison between the American society and the characters. In addition, it continues to shed light on consumerism and its repercussions on the characters (and the American society) physically, socially and psychologically. Finally, it delves into the importance of technology to them as well as the consequences of its overuse on their identities.

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Exploring the Total Loss of Technology in *The Silence*

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Introduction

Despite being undoubtedly useful, technology has severely affected the characters in *The Silence* in several ways. First and foremost, it quickly stopped being a complementing feature in their daily lives and began to be a need. It also affected their attitudes and decisions, making it a priority on their lists. Furthermore, it thoroughly stripped them off their personalities and identities which made knowing who they are a hard task and caused an emotional vacuum that disrupted their social lives as well as led to individual and collective disputes as the novel continued to progress.

In addition, *The Silence* focused on the issue of consumerism and how it developed from merely a casual habit that benefits customers into a struggle that affects humans and their environment. The second chapter highlighted this issue within the American society as mentioned in the novel.

This chapter on the other hand is going to analyze and discuss the aftermath of the death of technology, drawing more attention to the characters' change of perspective when knowing that a life without technology may become inevitable eventually. It also sheds light on their reactions to the blank screens and the silence that prevailed as their virtual identities were taken away from them as well as the disconnection between the characters and the detachment of each one from reality. Finally, the characters' nihilistic attitudes to the total loss of technology will be discussed in details.

I. Portraying the Loss of Technology in *The Silence*

Loss of technology in *The Silence* refers to the sudden massive shutdown of technology that presumably occurred worldwide. The incident happened all at once and affected everyone in the novel; Jim and Tessa for instance were on a plane where they were heading to their friends' house in New York yet they had a life-threatening experience because of the unexpected event. Details of the event on the plane are provided in the first chapter of the novel:

The plane began to bounce side to side. He knew that he was supposed to ignore this and that Tessa was supposed to shrug and say, Smooth ride up to now. The seatbelt sign flashed red. He tightened his seatbelt and looked at the screen while she went into a deeper crouch, her body nearly folding into her notebook. The bouncing became severe [...] He imagined that every passenger was looking straight ahead into the six o'clock news, at home, on Channel 4, waiting for word of their crashed airliner. (14)

From this statement, it is understood that Jim and Tessa were just regular people whose biggest achievement for the day was to get safely to their destination and reacted like anyone in their situation would. However, things did not go as planned because of the crash-landing⁷, which explains Tessa's fear and concern when she says: "Are we afraid?" (14). The second couple, Max and Diane, also went through the experience of the technological shutdown while they were at home, along with their guest, Martin, in front of the TV screen and waiting for the game to begin and their friends to arrive. The TV screen went blank and the three characters sat there

⁷ merriam-webster.com defined crash-land as to land (an airplane or spacecraft) under emergency conditions usually with damage to the craft.

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trying to fathom and make some sense of the situation. It is also described in the second chapter of the novel:

Something happened then. The images onscreen began to shake. It was not ordinary visual distortion, it had depth, it formed abstract patterns that dissolved into a rhythmic pulse, a series of elementary units that seemed to thrust forward and then recede [...] He and Diane checked their phones. Dead. She walked across the room to the house phone, the landline, a sentimental relic. No dial tone. Laptop, lifeless. She approached the computer in the next room and touched various elements but the screen stayed gray. (17)

Here, Max, Diane and Martin were not expecting the sudden collapse of technology as they immediately started checking their smartphones, laptop and computer before they analyzed the situation with own their theories and speculations. Later on, Max went out to ask his neighbors about it then looked at empty streets from his window which implies that people were either stuck somewhere or they went looking for answers just like everybody else. The following statement explains:

Max came back and went directly to the window across the room, looking down on empty Sunday streets. They talked about the doors he knocked on and the doors he bypassed. This became the main subject, doors as paneled structures worth describing [...] This floor, near neighbors, why get involved. One floor down, five doors, three responses, he said, holding up his hand, three fingers extended. Floor below that, four responses, two mentioned the game. (19)

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Max went out to check if the whole building was struggling with the same issue or not just to find out that not only his building, but the whole world was hit by the massive technological shutdown, or rather apocalypse.

Moreover, when Jim and Tessa were taken to the clinic, they noticed that the basic services were badly affected by the shutdown. Staff members running around in their street clothes and only covered with their tunics, blinking red lights all around the establishment and handwritten post notices as the screens that show instructions and lists of people's names were all blank. In addition to that, there was a long queue of people waiting to see the only woman available in the clinic. The woman describes the situation to the couple from her own perspective before sending them to an examining room:

I can tell you this. Whatever is going on, it has crushed our technology. The word itself seems outdated to me, lost in space. Where is the leap of authority to our secure devices, our encryption capacities, our tweets, trolls and bots. Is everything in the datasphere subject to distortion and theft? And do we simply have to sit here and mourn our fate? (28)

These words showcase the shock and panic that the woman went through, especially after a long day of dealing with people who kept asking about instructions concerning where to go, who to see, which floor, which hall, which room (28). And most importantly, the question that kept recurring throughout her day was related to the situation concerning technology, although the woman herself was not sure what the situation was or meant, as she said in the same chapter (5):" I am not here to dispense advice concerning the current situation. What is the current situation?" (28).

II. Outcomes of the Total Loss of Technology in the Novel

In the world of *The Silence*, the death of technology caused a significant disruption to the lives of the characters as well as their surroundings. The sudden issue caught people off guard and turned their daily activities and plans upside down; Jim and Tessa for example, never planned to go to their friends' house late or miss the game, yet the crash-landing took them on a venture in a van full of passengers who also were injured then ended up in a clinic where they observed the shortage of services due to the loss of electronics, waited in a long queue and met the woman who told them about her take on the incident before leading them to an examining room.

Both Max and Diane were caught up in their daily habits that they did not see the sudden loss coming which contributed even more to the panic and the emotional vacuum they were in. Max was a gambler and a consumer who sat in front of his TV screen very often. However, the technological failure took away both of those qualities which put him in a dark spot and disrupted the sort of balance he thought he had. Diane was a college professor who got retired too soon, nobody knows why exactly but the death of technology made her rethink her choices and life decisions, especially whether she quit too soon or not. The presence of technology in this case was merely a distraction as Diane did not have to think of anything work-related or even future-related. Adding to the fact that she was also in contact with her daughters through the internet and losing that as well meant fewer distractions.

Martin was all about Einstein, he was the type of person who would quote him in every situation, or as Diane says: "He quotes Einstein day and night. That's pretty smart" (17). The shutdown had different outcomes on Martin, it could be because his obsessions had always been

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different from everybody else's, or it could simply be a result of his mental illness and the medication that he takes. Furthermore, the technological failure seemed to fuel Martin's mind with energy to talk enthusiastically about his theories, the ones he inherited from Einstein thanks to the 1912 Manuscript on the Special Theory of Relativity. He first dropped the Chinese hackers theory as a joke when the TV screen went blank, and then things escalated gradually until it reached an existential point. He says:

It could be algorithmic governance. The Chinese. The Chinese watch the Super Bowl. They play American football. The Beijing Barbarians. This is totally true. The joke is on us. They've initiated a selective internet apocalypse. They are watching, we are not. (17)

When Martin cracked the joke in front of the Max and Diane, it was almost obvious that something was not right, even Diane noticed and thought about it for a moment. The statement goes: "He was not a man who wisecracked about serious matters. Or were these the only matters he found funny? (17). which could mean that when Martin saw his theory coming to reality, he almost thought it was a funny thing, or it was because he could hardly believe that it actually happened.

The death of technology also had inevitable outcomes around the characters. The digital traffic warden for example, it never seemed to work as Jim and Tessa were walking, streets were almost empty except for some areas where small riots took place. In addition to that, it was cold and there was no heating and no lights. Subways and buses were not working, as well as building elevators and many other services.

II.1. The Characters' Reactions to the Total Loss

When the screens went blank and all the other electronics died, the characters in *The Silence* felt like they have been failed by technology and that they are doomed if nobody finds an answer or solution to this massive shutdown. To begin with, Max and Diane's first reaction was what anyone would do in an impulse; they tried all possible options to see if they can bring the TV screen back to life. The second chapter of the novel describes this in the following words:

Then the screen went blank. Max hit the power button. On, off, on. He and Diane checked their phones. Dead. She walked across the room to the house phone, the landline, a sentimental relic. No dial tone. Laptop, lifeless. She approached the computer in the next room and touched various elements but the screen stayed gray. (17)

The words mentioned above show how Max and Diane first reacted to the technological apocalypse which is by starting with simple actions, like turning their TV set off then turn it back on to see if it works. Shortly after, the couple as well as the rest of the characters began to draw their own conclusions and theories on the situation until it all escalated and turned into an existential debate. Diane for instance, she finds herself doing and saying things she would not usually say, as when they tried to identify the weird noise that came from the blank TV screen: "Just then there was a snatch of dialogue coming from the blank screen. They tried to identify it. English, Russian, Mandarin, Cantonese? When it stopped, they waited for more. They looked, listened and waited" (17). Just after this statement, Diane claims that whatever these words are, they do not seem earthly but rather extraterrestrial (17). And later she realizes that she would not normally say that and even questions her own humor. Furthermore, she says as the conversation

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between the trio continues to progress: “I am foolishly trying to imagine all the rooms in all the cities where the game is being broadcast. All the people watching intently or sitting as we are, puzzled, abandoned by science, technology, common sense.” (18). Here, Diane seems to be concerned about what could be happening elsewhere and whether everyone is on the same page as them or if they are as worried as they are. She also borrows Martin’s phone thinking that it might be more “adaptable to the current circumstances” (18). That is because everyone in the room knows how smart Martin is and his confidence in his theories made him seem more like a reliable source of information, or the only source of information they have.

Moreover, despite the burden that Diane and Max put on Martin’s shoulders, he still did not hesitate to find answers to their questions. The first thing he did was to mention Einstein and his theories which he believes in and tends to quote religiously. He says:

I’m sticking with Einstein no matter what the theorists have disclosed or predicted or imagined concerning gravitational waves, supersymmetries and so on. Einstein and black holes in space. He said it and then we saw it. Billions of times more massive than our sun. He said it many decades ago. His universe became ours. Black holes. The event horizon. The atomic clocks. Seeing the unseeable. North-central Chile. Did I say this? (18)

The previous statement shows how indulged and dedicated Martin is to the works and theories that Einstein had brought to life as if he was his actual teacher. Adding to the fact that Martin indeed sees himself in Einstein. Later in the sixth chapter, Martin reveals his own take on the

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situation, claiming that it might be a simulation⁸ or a future that has yet to take place in their lives. He goes: “Are we living in a makeshift reality? Have I already said this? A future that isn’t supposed to take form just yet? [...] Artificial intelligence that betrays who we are and how we live and think” (30-31). Martin’s theory came after a long conversation he had with the couple next to him about the technological issue. He slowly started questioning everything, even his sanity. He then points out the issue of always being regarded as the savior or the problem solver in other people’s lives:

And one of the students recited a dream he’d had. It was a dream of words, not images. Two words. He woke up with those words and just stared into space. Umbrella’d ambushade. Umbrella with an apostrophe d. And ambushade [...] There I stood listening to the young men and women discuss the matter, the students, my students, and I wondered, myself, what to make of the term. Ten men with umbrellas? Preparing an attack? And the student whose dream it was, he was looking at me as if I were responsible for what happened in his sleep. All my fault. Apostrophe d. (31)

Martin’s story about being put on a pedestal and always expected to do the right thing and find solutions to everything implies how mentally exhausted and drained he became, especially when it got to matters that were out of his hand. That could also be a nod to how Max and Diane view Martin as they looked to him for answers about the situation just as his student did with the term that he had dreamed of.

⁸ According to twi-global.com, A simulation imitates the operation of real world processes or systems with the use of models. The model represents the key behaviours and characteristics of the selected process or system while the simulation represents how the model evolves under different conditions over time.

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When Jim and Tessa finally got to their friends' house, they told them about the flight and the failed landing, as well as what happened next. They told them about what they saw outside, saying: "No street lights, store lights, high-rise buildings, skyscrapers, all windows everywhere" (31). Jim and Tessa describe the empty streets they walked by, and how there is no sight of power or light in any of the buildings they have been to. The conversation started becoming more complicated as the five characters brought up the events that took place that day. The statement goes:

The conversation became labored after a while, shadowed in disquiet. Jim spoke looking down between his feet and Diane waved her arms indicating events taking place somewhere beyond their shallow grasp. (31)

Here, the characters begin to piece the events that occurred that day together in order to find a reasonable explanation and make sense of it all. After a while, Max begins to look at the blank screen, as though something may happen, or as if the answer was there. He does nothing but stare at it for a while:

Max looked at the screen as he ate and when he was finished eating he put the plate down and kept on looking. He took the bottle of bourbon off the floor and the glass with it and poured himself a drink. He put the bottle down and held the glass in both hands. Then he stared into the blank screen. (32)

This goes to show the effect of the absence of the TV screen on Max and how he could barely move or function. He seemed absent and expressionless, just like his screen; this could also allude to the idea that the absence of technology meant the absence of life in the novel.

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In the second part of the novel, Max shared his opinion with the rest of the characters and assumed that whatever happened was not caused by humans, or any other earthly creature. Max explains: “We’re being zombified [...] I’m done with all this. Sunday or is it Monday? February whatever. It’s my expiration date” (37). Max’s word choice shows how consumed he is by technology and electronic screens as it feels to him like he lost his humanity and turned into a zombie. Or even worse, he became an expired product that must be disposed of.

When Max walked out, Diane felt like she had to stare at the screen and wait, just like he was waiting. It is described in these words:

He zippers his jacket and leaves and Diane thinks of him walking down the stairs, one step, then another. Her mind is operating in slow motion now. She almost feels obliged to sit in front of the TV set on his behalf, waiting for something to splash onto the screen. (37)

This statement alludes to how serious Max was about his TV set that even Diane noticed and did not want to miss out on anything that could possibly come from the dead, blank screen so she would tell him or even have her own closure.

Moreover, Jim and Tessa seemed to have their own theory on the situation as well. Tessa says:

“What if all this is some kind of living breathing fantasy? [...] What if we are not what we think we are? What if the world we know is being completely rearranged as we stand and watch or sit and talk? (39)

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Tessa expresses through this statement how she feels like that day was not real, and that their whole world is being manipulated just before their eyes yet nobody can do or say anything to make a difference. And then she confirms that she agrees with Martin's theory about time being manipulated and misused. She adds:

Has time leaped forward, as our young man says, or has it collapsed? And will people in the streets become flash mobs, running wild, breaking and entering, everywhere, planet-wide, rejecting the past, completely unmoored from all the habits and patterns? (39)

Tessa expresses how she feels like the time is different and that it has been manipulated by whomever or whatever caused the technological apocalypse. In addition to that, she proceeds to suggest that anything is possible at that point and that people outside might start going wild, breaking and rebelling against everything they used to believe in and trust in the past. She then explains that she foresees more serious incidents in the near future after the death of technology; storms, tornados, landslides and tsunamis were all mentioned. She goes on to express how overwhelmed and panicked she is by everything that she had experienced that day and even before (39).

II.2. The Characters' Postmodern Nihilistic belief

Delillo reflected his characters' postmodern nihilistic values in their demeanors throughout the novel. Starting with Martin, who initiates the conversation after the shutdown with a joke which turned into a projection of his pessimism and lack of faith in humanity. In the fourth chapter of the book, Martin says:

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The face looking back at me doesn't seem to be mine. But then again why should it? Is the mirror a truly reflective surface? And is this the face that other people see? Or is it something or someone that I invent? [...] Do other people experience this, ever? Our faces. And what do people see when they walk along the street and look at each other? Is it the same thing that I see? All our lives, all this looking. People looking. But seeing what? (25-26)

Martin's words exhibit his doubts towards people, and even towards himself. He believes that people are never truly who they are and that they also tend to lie to themselves then create new personas to embrace and convince others that it is who they actually are, which makes it impossible for anyone to identify who the people around them are; not only from the surface, but also deep down since they themselves do not know who they are. Later Martin adds that their situation is: "Nobody wants to call it World War III but this is what it is" (35). Which is what he believes that Einstein had said, in the epigraph of the novel, the quote says: "I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones". Moreover, when Martin begins to detach from the rest of the characters during the conversation, he thinks about his theory regarding the shutdown in relation to Einstein's Theory of Relativity. And even starts questioning his sanity in the process as he has been awake longer than he should have. He goes:

Einstein's Theory of Relativity causing riots in the streets or am I imagining this because it's late and I haven't slept and barely eaten and the people here with me are not listening to what I say. Einstein speaking beyond our current situation, which I've referred to as World War III. (51)

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Martin contemplates his words concerning the situation he and the rest of the characters are stuck in and relates them to Einstein's Theory of relativity. He then refers to that situation as World War III, which could potentially lead to World War IV that was mentioned by Einstein.

Max's attitude was mostly passive. He would sit in front of the blank screen and watch for a while as if his identity is trapped between real life and the virtual, on-screen life. Similarly, Max watched the people outside and remembered how invested they usually are in their phones. The statement details:

In other times, more or less ordinary, there are always people staring into their phones, morning, noon, night, middle of the sidewalk, oblivious to everyone hurrying past, engrossed, mesmerized, consumed by the device, or walking toward him and then veering away, but they can't do it now, all the digital addicts, phones shut down, everything down down down. (44)

This proves how the death of technology turned everybody's life upside down, including strangers in the streets who turned into walking zombies whose purpose became ambiguous for the only means that kept their identities known has eventually been taken away from them.

Furthermore, Diane kept thinking about all the people who were let down by technology. She wonders: "What happens to people who live inside their phones?" (26). She later starts to spiral over many things at once; her job that she quit too soon, the things that might have happened outside which she thinks Max did not tell her and the fact that what happened with technology has always been expected (47). Tessa on the other hand brings up another theory which she thinks everyone believes in. Tessa says:

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From the one blank screen in this apartment to the situation that surrounds us. What is happening? Who is doing this to us? Have our minds been digitally remastered? [...] This is not the first time these questions have been asked. Scientists have said things, written things, physicists, philosophers. (39)

Tessa speculates that humans became merely an experiment to the masterminds and that their brains are being digitally manipulated for an unknown goal. Slocombe referred to this in his thesis saying: “This seems to be the case in the postmodern age, where morals are without justification” (5). Or in other words, the decline of morals has no justification. Tessa continues to base her theory on what has been said by scientists and philosophers, although none of it is an actual fact. She later adds more questions to herself, saying:

[...] But all I want to do now is go home. Jim and I. If we have to walk, fine, yes, in daylight. Will the sun be shining? Will the sun be in the sky at all? Who knows what any of this means? Is our normal experience simply being stilled? Are we witnessing a deviation in nature itself? A kind of virtual reality? (50)

This quote shows how blurry the situation seems to Tessa. She started doubting multiple things at once, if the sun will shine, if something is controlling their lives or if they are in a virtual reality. Jim however, was still processing what happened that day and tried to recall everything that happened, from the crash landing to the clinic then to their friends’ house. He also seemed to question what the word “home” meant to him when Tessa said it: “Home [...] Where is that?” (43). This implies that nowhere felt safe to Jim anymore that even the word “home” lost its essence.

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Conclusion

As observed earlier, all it took for the characters' lives to be turned upside down was the death of technology. Their identities were completely disrupted due to the fact that they were most of the time living inside their screens and smart phones. In addition to this, most of them were unable to communicate their thoughts effectively and often seemed too unstable to be logical with their words, especially Martin, who was going back and forth between his own personality and the one which seems to resemble Einstein's.

To conclude, Delillo's take on his society's over-reliance on technology and its consequences was depicted through the reactions and behaviors of the characters of *The Silence*. Their postmodern nihilistic values included lack of faith in mankind and pessimism towards the world that they might have to continue living in after the sudden disappearance of what they consider as the most important feature of their lives as well as a total detachment from themselves and one another at the end of the novel.

General Conclusion

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Postmodern societies exhibit certain qualities that many scholars and philosophers see eye to eye on. These qualities have been described as dark, pessimistic and reflect the evil side of mankind. However, there were multiple reasons as to why humans embraced such deprecating values such as, technological development including dangerous weapons and all of their missiles, World Wars along with the desperation that prevailed as a consequence and most importantly, lack of faith as well as questioning God's abilities. That is to say, the theory of postmodern nihilism is best fitting to study and analyze Don DeLillo's novel *The Silence*. In addition, Science fiction was also vital among many postmodern writings which makes it essential to delve into.

Don DeLillo's *The Silence* is a post-apocalyptic novel that tackles the complex relationship of human beings with technology and how their devices can be double-edged swords and turn people into empty shells if not used properly. It also deals with human's overreliance on technology and the repercussions they have to struggle with because of that habit, especially after a total technological shutdown occurs. In this regard, DeLillo reflects the American society and its behaviors in the characters of this novel which also makes it a realist work to a certain extent.

Thus, the first chapter of this research paper dealt with the theoretical framework of postmodern nihilism; starting with postmodernism and the theories that revolve around its emergence, which remain uncertain to date, then nihilism and its emergence during the enlightenment and its relationship with modernism as well as its prior forms. And lastly, postmodern nihilism and the contextualization of science fiction alongside the inclusion of sci-fi within DeLillo's works. The second chapter analyzed the novel and its relationship with the American society. Furthermore, it included the characters' struggle with certain issues such as consumerism, which is also an issue within DeLillo's society nowadays, the importance of

General Conclusion

technology to the characters and the severe consequences of over-relying on it before the shutdown. These consequences include an emotional vacuum, disconnection from real world and the detachment of the characters from themselves.

Lastly, the third chapter focused on the outcomes of the death of technology in multiple locations; the plane where the first couple were in the first chapter of the novel, the second couple's house in New York where everybody meets eventually, the clinic after the crash-landing that has no sign of any vital necessary devices. In addition to that, it highlighted the characters' reactions after the apocalypse and the detachment from each character and the other as well as their postmodern nihilistic beliefs, especially in the closing chapters of the novel.

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