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IN PURSUIT OF ALTERNATIVE ENDINGS – DON DELILLO'S FICTIONAL POST-HUMANS AND THE BOUNDARIES OF THEIR WORLDS

Abstract: Margaret Atwood in her story "Happy Endings" humorously explores conventions of storytelling ultimately emphasizing that the boundary of any story is marked by the limits of human existence. Looking at the stories of the protagonists in the novels *Cosmopolis* (2003) and *Zero K* (2016) by Don DeLillo, this paper examines how the novels challenge our understanding of human subjectivity as well as how they introduce the possibility of alternative forms of human agency in an environment saturated by technology. Maintaining the neo-realist mode of storytelling, DeLillo pushes his protagonists Eric Packer and Artis Martineau to, instead of dying, choose an alternative (im)possible existence which would allow them to step into the unknown as if into an extension of life. By doing so their narratives flow into a parallel time loop, where they become alternatives of themselves, in a state that is an alternative to life different from death. The stories introduce the concept of a proto-post-human existence blurring the boundaries of the natural and the artificial, the human and the machine, and questioning the normalized concept of human identity established through the alternatives of body and mind, life and mortality.

Keywords: posthuman, Don DeLillo, *ZeroK*, *Cosmopolis*, critical posthumanism, alternative, body, dualism

"The only authentic ending is the one provided here:
John and Mary die. John and Mary die. John and Mary die." (Atwood, 1983)

1. Beyond humanism

Margaret Atwood's short story "Happy Endings" (first published in 1983) is often described as an example of metafiction since it exposes the patterns of storytelling and provides a valuable commentary on the assumption that man is a storytelling animal. Her story discloses the types of narratives to which we as humans resort in order to structure the nature of reality around us. However, although their plots may be a question of preference or choice, Atwood leaves little uncertainty about the story endings linking the storytelling process to the limits of human existence and the inevitability of the physical end of life. Contesting this attitude, the stories discussed here are dedicated to the ideas that introduce an alternative understanding of human life and existence and problematize ideas that human existence is marked by stable attributes, that it can be interpreted as physical and non-physical, and that

mind/body dualism operates as a norm. Consequently, the problematizing of the boundaries of fictional (post)humans would allow for different, perhaps less linear story formats that would successfully contradict Atwood's uncompromising, only authentic ending – transforming it into 'John and Mary die…however…'.

First hinting, then openly introducing the posthuman as both the consequence and the precondition of an alternative to the humanist perspective of existence, Don DeLillo's narratives may be read as deliberations on the possibility of conceptualizing entities seen as other-than-human; from the fully endorsed transhumanist narrative of accelerated progress to the posthumanist re-evaluation and the revision of what it means to be human. By setting the limits of time, or space/time, outside the scope of the human lifetime, *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K* challenge our understanding of the fundaments of our being in the world. Both novels offer insight into the possible manifestations of the idea that the posthuman is not simply an enhanced human, but rather an actualization of power relations dependent on the "*cartographies of the present.*" They are seen as a process of mapping where "[T]he present is both the record of what we are ceasing to be and the seed of what we are in the process of becoming: it is here and now, but also virtual" (Braidotti, 2017, p. 11).

DeLillo's millennial fictions[1] from slightly different angles all hypothesize about the nature and possible realizations of changes for humanity driven by the acceleration of technological progress. However, it is important to emphasize that the fictions in question, in deliberations on the possible resulting posthuman, offer a juxtaposition of transhumanist and posthumanist perspectives that are not always easily differentiated[2]. On the one hand, both *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K* on the surface introduce what appears to be the affirmation of the techno optimist ideas of transhumanism; that is, they advocate the model of posthuman which could or should be the result of a radical transformation of human's biological features and social circumstances by the means of advanced technology. The transhumanist perspective thus maintains the traditions of humanism which initially generated ideas of "categorical dualist ontology as the basis of the special status of human beings"(Ranisch & Sorgner, 2014, p. 7). On the other hand, the ideas associated with posthumanism are usually described as a break with humanism, "a variety of positions that reject basic humanist concepts and values"(Ranisch & Sorgner, 2014, p. 8). Domna Pastourmatzi (2014) considers science fiction as a literary genre complementary to the transhumanist outlook and pinpoints transhumanism as "historically-specific, culture-specific, masculinist, technocentric, American-inspired, capitalist framework with roots in the two-hundred-year-old industrial-military-scientific complex" (Pastourmatzi, 2014, p. 272). The novels analyzed here could be read as science fiction since their initial setups coincide with the transhumanist perception of humans as limited and defective, open to the idea of techno-transcendence or willingness to undergo

[1] This especially refers to the novels *The Body Artist* (2001) and *Omega Point* (2010) that are not discussed in this paper.

[2] A detailed discussion on the transhumanist and critical posthumanist approaches to the concept of the posthuman fall out of the scope of this paper. For more information, please consult Ranisch and Sorgner (2014), Braidotti and Hlavajova (2018) or Nayar (2004).

processes of desirable enhancement. What is more, the recurrent themes of the genre are readily revisited both in *Cosmopolis* and *Zero K*:

> the conceptualization of the human body as a mere assemblage of parts and pieces, infinitely malleable by technical means, and the fantasy of extracting the self, mind or consciousness from the flesh in order to achieve cybernetic immortality (Pastourmatzi, 2014, p. 275)

However, it is necessary to point out that DeLillo layers his stories by introducing ideas both alternative to the sci-fi concept of the overwhelming "singularity" (or the omnipotent AI) and those deeply challenging to the transhumanist worldview by successfully "constructing metaphors for the interrogation of traditional dualisms and normative paradigms" (Pastourmatzi, 2014, p. 276). One of the most effective challenges to the transhumanist paradigm is DeLillo's strategies of defamiliarization and restructuring of the experience of the present which evokes Rosi Braidotti's *cartographies of the present* (2017, p.10) and the perception of his protagonists as a posthuman subject operating both as a record of what they are ceasing to be and an announcement of what they would become.

1.1. The Promise of Homo Deus vs. Here and Now

> Technology is our fate, our truth. It is what we mean when we call ourselves the only superpower on the planet. The materials and methods we devise make it possible for us to claim our future. We don't have to depend on God or the prophets or other astonishments. We are the astonishment. The miracle is what we ourselves produce, the systems and networks that change the way we live and think. (DeLillo, 2001)

DeLillo is offering a critical portrait of the techno-centric and primarily masculinist culture of digital capitalism that exchanges traditional religion for technology as its source of spiritual experiences. In that respect, technology symbolizes protagonists' desire to shape and re-create their subjectivity towards the transhumanist ideals perpetuating the dualist ontology. Yet, both novels also explore the limits of this techno-promise of infinity and expose the protagonists' complexities which fall outside the scope of transhumanist ideal situating them as posthumans in the here and now.

A "living being" in this context can be described as "any entity which codes information (in the physics sense of this word) with the information coded being preserved by natural selection." (Tipler, 1994, p. 124). Tipler explains life as interpreted information processing where the human mind (soul) is a complex program governing the process. Complying with this perspective is the understanding of a "person" according to Turing, who set the foundations of AI. Turing determined that 'a person' may be defined as a computer program able to pass the Turing test (cf. Tipler 1994:124). Comparing this idea of mind-as-computer to the medieval Christian ideas of the soul, Tipler (127) offers Aquinas' explanation that the soul is "the form of activity of the body", that is, the soul requires a body to think or feel, as computer program requires hardware to process it.

Cosmopolis muses on the idea of achieving immortality by uploading one's mind into the network, which is predominantly a transhumanist setup and assumes that the "personhood" in the sense described by Tipler may be perpetuated regardless of the nature of the "processing unit". However, this idea opens questions about the boundaries of the self in addition to issues related to security and control further elaborated on in *Zero K*. What is more, the novel emphatically confirms that humans are complex entities that cannot simply be disarticulated. DeLillo seems to choose the twist in the plot that focuses on Aquinas' account that the soul needs the body to think or feel which reverberates in the ideas of critical posthumanism, namely, monism, which "highlights the embrainment of the body and the embodiment of the mind: all matter being one and immanent to itself" (Braidotti, 2017, p. 17). Intensifying the debate on the technological possibilities of extending life by circumventing the concept of data and networks, *Zero K* elaborates further on the transhumanist (theoretical) experiment of disembodied consciousness in isolation:

> You are completely outside the narrative of what we refer to as history. There are no horizons here. We are pledged to an inwardness, a deep probing focus on who and where we are… You are about to become, each of you, a single life in touch only with yourself. (DeLillo, 2016, p. 237)

However, in the interlude "Woman's body in a pod" the result of the experiment deeply questions the initial premises and returns the focus to the process of becoming.

On the surface, the setting to which the novels refer is an elaborate transhumanist construct. Although the potential "awakening" of AI may not be a reality, the hardware, machines that are joined into vast data processing networks, are in the base structure of the contemporary social environments and on occasion, they seem capable of recognizing and reacting to our behavior and emotion, that is, they demonstrate intelligence. DeLillo recognizes that the existence of such operational networks may be among the principal causes of the change in our perception of what it means to be human and that is the focus of *Cosmopolis.* Yuval Harari in his book *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (Harari, 2016) elaborates on the change in the world brought about by the human need to control and harness the powers of nature and, ultimately, the world around us. Harari (ch.1) points out that the real dangers, which largely threatened the persistence of life such as famine, war, and disease, have been reduced to the level of manageable incidents, and that it was achieved by "building complex networks that treat human beings as units of information" (Runciman, 2016). He takes Tipler's idea of life-as-code a step further by claiming that we are designed as data-processing machines, that we are in fact algorithms, and that by manipulating the data we can be in control of our destiny. DeLillo toys with the ideas of transgressing the human's biological boundaries directing his protagonist's aspirations for alternative existence in the transhumanist direction. Yet, he also prevents simplistic interpretations of humanity as a collective or the position of an individual in the world. This is the final thought *Cosmopolis* leaves us with – if the source of power resides in the collective, in the networks – groups, corporations, religions, states – joined into vast structures of interconnected

information flows, will all of what we are become data in the network, or will some portion of it have to be irrevocably lost?

2. *Cosmopolis* – The future belongs to crowds

In his earlier novel *Mao II*, published in 1991, DeLillo approaches the topic of the power of the collective, interpreting it as a complex social organism relying on the compliance of an individual. *Cosmopolis* elaborates on the idea of networking by adding the virtual dimension to it and by building the entire narrative around the perspective of the protagonist as a "single node" in the network. The narrative seems structured around the movement between complex references, however, if we closely follow Eric Packer's, the protagonist's, physical movement in his fictional environment, we will notice that his trajectory is rather linear, going from the Upper East Side in a straight line to the Upper West Side or Hell's Kitchen. This slow movement in physical space inside a long white limousine, designed almost as a barrier against the outer world and its interferences, overlaps with the patterns of movement of various impalpable networks projected through the protagonist and his explicit desires. Only occasionally does his path intersect with other people, establishing different levels of contact, thus generating in the reader's mind fragments of the protagonist's history. The record of Eric Packer's last day on Earth is a palimpsest of "single lives in momentary touch" (DeLillo, 2016, p. 237) overlapping with "movements and counter-movements of contemporary culture"(Morrison, 2003), the data flow trapped in a loop of time.

Eric Packer believes in data as the foundation of our world:

> In fact, data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process. This was the eloquence of alphabets and numeric systems, now fully realized in electronic form, in the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet's living billions. (DeLillo, 2003, p. 24)

His understanding of the world around him is reflected in the perception of immortality as a new cultural belief that life can be extended in the stream of information – "People will not die. Isn't this the creed of the new culture? People will be absorbed in streams of information" (DeLillo, 2003, p. 104). Packer as a character is designed as a typical representative from the privileged matrix (capitalist, masculinist, technocentric), not only likely to endorse transhumanist fantasies of power via disembodied information and consciousness but also unable to step out of the frame of thinking that perpetuates the mind/body split and reinforces the traditional humanist ideology according to which rationality is the measure of achievement. Packer is the spokesman of a particular culture, a voice that cannot be heard on the street, away and above the existence of the people as a collective. In his limousine, his movement is obstructed by traffic jams, visitors, distractions of his own design, and violent events he observes indifferently. Yet, his existence would not be significantly affected by the gridlock, nor by the unpredicted flow of data, despite

catastrophic losses in the currency market. The change would be the consequence of an encounter with a human individual in physical space, someone whose "data" was linked to Packer, yet whose existence he was not aware of; an individual driven by desire who decided to kill Packer "in order to count for something in [his] own life" (DeLillo, 2003, p. 187). DeLillo materializes Eric Packer's demise in this encounter with Benno Levin's free will, however, the crash is initiated by Packer himself – the transhumanist desire for transcendence becomes his *hamartia*:

> [He] always wanted to become quantum dust, transcending his body mass, the soft tissue over the bones, the muscle and fat. The idea was to live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data, in whirl, in radiant spin, a consciousness saved from void. The technology was imminent or not. It was semimythical. It was the natural next step. (DeLillo, 2003, p. 206)

The story ends with Packer "alive in original space" (DeLillo, 2003, p. 209) in a time loop waiting for the shot to be fired, while his future stays frozen in the glass of his watch (206) stalled in a gridlock. The pain he feels "interfered with his immortality" (207), as he realizes that "the things that made him who he was could hardly be identified, much less converted to data" (207). Notably, the perspective DeLillo adopts relativizes the (trans)humanist emphasis on the mind shifting the focus of the pain that is embodied. Eric as a posthuman subjectivity above all is imagined in his own mind as a "networked being" in interaction with "sensate intelligent interconnected devices" (117) which represent the intelligent network able to process and manipulate. On one hand, Eric desires technology as the extension of self, he depends on the connection. On the other, DeLillo suddenly delegitimizes Packer's self-image challenging the reader – what is an individual's, and Eric's role in the networks of data flow and what is it that makes him real? The series of ostensibly casual encounters (posing as one of the bodies in the street or visiting the barbershop) culminate in the one with Benno Levin bringing his bodily existence to the foreground. Consequently, he realizes there is something more to him that is untranslatable, untransferable, which as a result will be irrevocably lost:

> He'd come to know himself, untranslatably, through his pain. He felt so tired now. His hard-gotten grip on the world, material things, great things, his memories true and false, the vague malaise of winter twilights, untransferable, the pale nights when his identity flattens for lack of sleep, the small wart he feels on his thigh every time he showers, all him, and how the soap he uses, the smell and feel of the concave bar make him who he is because he names the fragrance, amandine, and the hang of his cock, untransferable, and his strangely achy knee, the click in his knee when he bends it, all him, and so much else that's not convertible to some high sublime, the technology of mind-without-end. (DeLillo, 2003, p. 207)

Harari tells us that the dataist project predicts that our individuality and specific needs will be considered and addressed by the networks of power if we are fragmented into "biochemical subsystems" that can be monitored and manipulated by algorithms. DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* in this respect is a narrative with a dystopian flare, however, together with *Zero K* it adds a political dimension to this transhumanist

setup: not all humans will benefit from the extensions of life-as-a-code whether through the integration into the networks or by severing contact. Only the privileged, the "heralds" of the new age, those who adopt the idea and adapt themselves without hesitation will become new "gods" who will own the end of the world – "We are not witnessing the flow of information so much as pure spectacle, or information made sacred, ritually unreadable" (DeLillo, 2003, p. 80).

3. *Zero K* – when Everybody wants to own the End of the World

In this meditative narrative, once more Don DeLillo introduces the theme of mortality and fear, which is present in all his novels, approaching it from an inverted perspective. The concept of death as the imminent end of life (of the body) is exchanged for a form of the extended and separate existence of body and consciousness, as an unknown form of life in the unknown future. The story draws on ideas related to the human desire for immortality, simultaneously questioning the ability of human beings to truly understand their existence and their place in the world:

> There were several other figures, some female, and the bodies were clearly on display, as in a museum corridor, all without heads. I assumed that the brains were in chilled storage and that the headless motif was a reference to preclassical statuary dug up from ruins. (DeLillo, 2016, p. 232)

The story is structured into three segments, the first one titled *In the Time of Chelyabinsk* introducing the narrator Jeffrey Lockhart as he arrives at a techno facility named "the Convergence" placed in an environment devoid of reference (nominally described as a desert in Kazakhstan) and clearly outside his comfort zone. The compound is a facility supported by the donations of millionaires such as Jeffrey's father Ross, and it is advertised as a place where life can be extended beyond the limitations of the body and the disturbances of everyday life, shielded from uncontrollable events from natural disasters to wars and intentional destruction. The technological aspect of the facility is based on experiments into cryogenics that are meant to preserve and prepare their subjects for the promised extension of existence into an indefinite future in a state of hibernation of the (repaired) body and disembodied consciousness. Jeffrey accompanies his father, with whom he does not have a close relationship, and his stepmother, Artis, who is terminally ill, since they both have decided to undergo the procedure with which they cease to exist in the plane we recognize as real life and become an alternative to themselves as "bodies in a pod" (DeLillo 2016). Jeffrey hypothesizes about the nature of the facility, skeptically approaching the entire concept of the "life in a pod". He confronts the reader with the all-pervasive fear that the novel *White Noise* (1985) labeled existential dread, examines the vast spaces where belief encounters doubt and questions who we are and how our place evolves within this deafening silence.

The main philosophy of the compound is revealed in the third part, *In the Time of Konstantinovka*, two years after only Artis was placed into the cryo-chamber and once Ross decides that he wants to undergo the procedure, despite his good health. Invoking de Chardin's concept of Omega Point, in chapter seven of the second part of the novel we encounter elaborate explanations, almost advertisements for the Convergence philosophy: coinciding with the transhumanist ideas presented in *Cosmopolis*, humans are claimed to already exist as "unfleshed" consciousness worshiping data:

> Haven't you felt it? The loss of autonomy. The sense of being virtualized. The devices you use, the ones you carry everywhere, room to room, minute to minute, inescapably. Do you ever feel unfleshed? All the coded impulses you depend on to guide you. All the sensors in the room that are watching you, listening to you, tracking your habits, measuring your capabilities. All the linked data designed to incorporate you into the megadata. Is there something that makes you uneasy? (DeLillo, 2016, p. 239)

A woman, as she delivers her pitch, locates the source of discomfort in the networks and advocates individual isolation, arguing against dataism, the possibility of data loss, and the dangers of a potential security breach within the network caused by uncontrollable variables. Convergence, thus, maintains the general transhumanist setup, although it disqualifies the concept of human=data and networks as potential "hardware", advocating the preservation of an individual disembodied mind in isolation. Although on the surface the main message of *Zero K* appears to be about a very limited and elitist understanding of humanity, the result of the process of cryopreservation seems to thwart their plans. Similar to the message of DeLillo's earlier novel *Body Artist*, this forces us to realize once more that in order to comprehend who we are, we need to consider ourselves in a situation when "we are not rehearsing who we are" (DeLillo, 2002, p. 110). To recover from trauma, the protagonist of the *Body Artist* retreats to isolation; she becomes a node disconnected from the networks so she may re-compose her identity. In *Zero K*, discontinuing the flow of time, of history seen as "single lives in momentary touch", the Convergence offers "a phantom life within the braincase" (DeLillo, 2016, p. 238) indefinitely extended, yet disconnected from any interaction. Symbolic of this new existence, in one of the stone rooms of the Convergence there is a "huge jeweled skull, the megaskull adorning one wall" (DeLillo, 2016, p. 235). Functioning as an extratextual reference to an installation of Damien Hirst's "Memento Mori," in this context, introducing a paradox, a hint of doubt if "the braincase" existence is an elaborate and complicated procedure resulting in plain and simple death. The promise of the Convergence is access to a new self, re-established as the boundary of the alternative world, a suspended hibernation awaiting the rise of a new machine able to sustain life-as-a-code independent of the network:

> In time you will re-encounter yourself. Memory, identity, self, on another level. This is the main thrust of our nanotechnology. Are you legally dead, or illegally so, or neither of these? Do you care? You will have a phantom life within the braincase. Floating thought. A passive sort of mental grasp. Pingping ping. Like a newborn machine. (DeLillo, 2016, p. 238)

Jeffrey, as a special visitor, is taken to the deep levels of the Convergence where he is fitted into a life support suit and a breathing apparatus to inspect the inner structure

of the cryo-facility as if to be convinced that it is real. Jeffrey as the narrator is designed as a disinterested observer, a sceptic, and due to his distancing, the images of the Convergence reach the reader unburdened with emotional reactions. The Convergence remains a hypothesis, one of the ultimate boundaries of human existence and for Jeffrey, its name is the symbol of re-creating time as a circle by the merging of the end and the beginning (DeLillo, 2016, p. 255). He observes a clay tablet with a quizzical inscription containing mathematical symbols and wonders if that could be a scientific formula of "what happens to a single human body when the forces of death and life join?" (DeLillo, 2016, p. 255), but DeLillo leaves open the possibility that this could be an inscription in a newly designed language that is going to be "instilled with time" into the consciousness of those who enter the capsules: "Signs, symbols, gestures and rules. The name of the language will be accessible only to those who speak it" (DeLillo, 2016, p. 245). What Jeffrey encounters in the deep storages of the facility are endless rows of pods

> The bodies were arranged across an enormous floor space, people of various skin color, uniformly positioned, eyes closed, arms crossed on chest, legs pressed tight, no sign of excess flesh…Here, there were no lives to think about or imagine. This was pure spectacle, a single entity, the bodies regal in their cryonic bearing. It was a form of visionary art, it was body art with broad implications. (DeLillo, 2016, p. 256)

Resembling regal tombs from the distant past, encapsulated bodies, as if yet unborn, stand still detached from the passage of time, from bodily existence and "all the shaky complications of body, mind and personal circumstance" (DeLillo, 2016, p. 244). This image represents the counterbalance to the projections in the empty corridors first presenting devastations by natural disasters: flood, tornado, and wildfire – that Jeffrey experiences as visual fictions of the "mortal coil" – and the final projection, footage from the war zone in Ukraine, that Jeffrey engages with and comes to realize *is* real when he recognizes the person being killed on screen. In the footage, he notices a road sign with the name *Konstantinovka* written in Cyrillic and Roman letters with a crude drawing of a skull above. The sight disturbs him deeply, and he remains standing alone in the corridor, wondering if all those times he stood motionless in the dark room with his eyes shut, trying to suppress the panic, brought him closer to a space such as the Convergence. He wonders if the life in the pod is not an escape from the fear of life, rather than an escape from the fear of death: "Once the dark is total, I will simply stand and wait, trying hard to think of nothing" (DeLillo, 2016, p. 264).

3.1. Woman's body in a pod

> "…naked and absolute, more or less immortal." (DeLillo, 2016)

Although the main events are being filtered through the mind of the narrator Jeffrey Lockhart, between the two sections DeLillo offers us an interlude that opens straight into the mind of Artis Martineau, the mind-in-the-pod. She is represented asking a series of questions through which human consciousness, we presume, would perceive itself. "But am I who I was," she asks (DeLillo, 2016, p. 155) and continues the conversation with her imaginary self, switching between the first and the third person, running a Turing test on

herself. Language, words, feeling the space/time – she is aware but has no referential points to establish meaning. She cannot access what she does not already know, and she is but an attempt at personhood – in the process of becoming, but not there yet. Artis thus becomes the posthuman as the posthuman is perceived by critical posthumanism, registering her ceasing to be what she was and recognizing the seed of what she is to become, inextricably linked to the present. The dialog with herself persists periodically repeating the same questions. With this DeLillo, similarly to what he does at the end of *Cosmopolis*, questions the viability of humanist ideals and calls attention to the discrepancy of the transhumanist yearning for immortality and the limits of humanity. In *Zero K* not only disembodiment but also isolation reduces the being/mind/consciousness to something else: "*She is the residue, all that is left of an identity"* (DeLillo, 2016, p. 160). At the same time, DeLillo clearly undermines the idea that the existence of bodies-in-the-pod as people they once were may be restored once the technological devices become available. There is a loss of self that cannot be compensated, and even if the reverse process ever becomes available, the sentient beings who might exit the pods will have been radically altered by the experience perhaps into the "posthuman critical subject… a complex assemblage of human and nonhuman, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured, which requires defamiliarization from traditional ways of thinking" (Braidotti, 2017, p. 21).

4. Fictional Post-Humans and the Boundaries of Their Worlds

Peter Boxall in his study *Twenty-first-century Fiction* (2013), explains that the "'otherworldly temporality' of the new millennium" (Boxall, 2013, p. 10) becomes integrated into the contemporary novel as an attempt to grasp the "texture of contemporary real" (10) bringing into focus the nature of our reality, especially materiality; both tactile and visual dimensions of it. The protagonist constructed as the fictional posthuman in this context is understood as an alternative to human, the other than human, otherness symbolized in the transformation. However, it is not only to be seen as the alternative that oscillates between the myth of the monster and the hybridity of the techno-body (Sheehan, 2015, pp. 246–252). For the critical posthumanist thinkers, posthuman is "a multiplicity, not a single question" (Braidotti, 2017, p. 13), a *conceptual persona* that illuminates the complexities of the present, defined as both the actual and the virtual (Braidotti, 2017, p. 12) where "singular actualizations of subject-formations" (11) are linked "to immanent analyses of concrete power relations"(11). How does this transfer to 'fictional humans' and where are the boundaries of their worlds? Boxall announces Don DeLillo's post-apocalyptic novels of the twenty-first century as lacking spatio-temporal awareness, that is, the narratives' bonds fail to hold the readers in time and place (Boxall, 2013, p. 27) emulating something that he calls "thin, simultaneous time" (27), or the "insubstantial, instantaneous time" (27) resulting in the "weightless temporality" (27) of *Cosmopolis* and the stalled time of *Body Artist*, which transfers to *Zero K*. Could those be read as attempts at mapping the present?

For Boxall, DeLillo's work is "a symptom and a critique of millenarianism" (Boxall, 2013, p. 29) offering the kind of time that seems to have imploded into

"an unbound chronology of a new century" (29). Boxall claims that the stories of the new millennium reflect technological and political forces that govern our perception of time, thus making the narratives "uncertain of [their] co-ordinates" (29) and the time unreadable. For Eric Packer, time is looping, and although the future is certain and already frozen in the screen of his watch, it is dissolved in the persistence of the present. For Artis Martineau, time is simultaneous and equally real as uncertain: past, present and future, a tangle of repeatedly asked and answered questions of becoming and ceasing to be. Suddenly we can only grasp the space/time as tiny fragments magnified to overwhelming proportions. According to Nayar (2014), critical humanism stands for a new conceptualization of human, "the radical decentering of the traditional sovereign, coherent and autonomous human" (11); it rejects the emulation of stable or fixed parameters claiming that humans should be interpreted as multilayered and dynamic. Emphasizing that "literature 'invented' the human" (11-12), Nayar asserts that literary posthumans coming from different forms of fiction and popular culture maintain their humanity precisely because they also include aspects of non-human, because they are constructed as "an assemblage… enmeshed with the environment and technology" (Nayar, 2014, p. 13). In the process of adapting to a more inclusive definition of human, it is inevitable that the literary form representing it becomes more fluid and dynamic – that the boundaries of the story dissolve and abandon the claim to certainty of Atwood's only authentic ending.

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У ПОТРАЗИ ЗА АЛТЕРНАТИВНИМ КРАЈЕМ ПРИЧЕ: ПОСТХУМАНИ ЈУНАЦИ У РОМАНИМА ДОНА ДЕЛИЛА И ГРАНИЦЕ ЊИХОВОГ СВЕТА

Резиме

Маргарет Атвуд у својој причи „Срећан крај“ (1983) илуструје приповедачке конвенције низањем варијанти исте приче додавањем различитих елемената, но напослетку наглашава да су границе било које приче омеђене трајањем људског живота. У романима *Космополис* (2003) и *Зеро К* (2016) Дона Делила протагонисти и њихове околности искушавају читаочево схватање људског сопства, и овај рад сагледава алтернативне облике људског постојања које протагонисти романа остварују у контакту са технологијом. Дон Делило задржава неореалистични модус приповедања док својим јунацима Ерику Пакеру и Артис Мартино оставља могућност да уместо смрти изаберу алтернативу – (не)могуће постојање у својевољном интегрисању ума у окружење подржано врхунском технологијом. Они тако ступају у непознато, у неки облик алтернативне егзистенције док њихове приповести утичу у паралелне петље времена у којима и они сами постају алтернатива себи негде између живота и смрти. Ове приче разматрају судбину прото-пост-хуманог бића између обећања бесмртног киборга, човека и машине, и алтернатива нормализованог схватања људског идентитета; јединства или дуалности духовног и телесног, живота и смртности.

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