Post-Truth and Literary Resistance: Dystopian Echoes in Contemporary American Fiction

Constantin Ilas
(Faculty of Economics, University of Stefan cel Mare, Suceava, Romania)

ABSTRACT: *This article examines how contemporary American fiction engages with the cultural and political conditions of the post-truth era through a resurgence of dystopian aesthetics and narrative strategies. Anchored in the works of Don DeLillo—particularly White Noise and Zero K—the study explores how literary form responds to the erosion of epistemic authority, the commodification of fear, and the saturation of media-driven realities. DeLillo's prescient prose is read alongside more recent voices, including Jennifer Egan and Colson Whitehead, whose novels extend the dystopian impulse to interrogate surveillance, racialized state violence, and algorithmic determinism. Through close textual analysis, the article identifies recurring motifs of simulation, fragmentation, and paranoia, arguing that these novels do not merely depict dystopia but function as acts of resistance against the normalization of disinformation and ideological manipulation. Drawing on critical frameworks from postmodern theory, media studies, and political philosophy, the study positions contemporary American literature as a crucial site for reasserting the value of narrative, memory, and moral imagination in an age increasingly hostile to truth. The paper concludes by reflecting on the pedagogical and cultural significance of reading fiction as a counter-discursive practice in the post-truth condition.*

KEYWORDS: post-truth, American fiction, Don DeLillo, dystopia, disinformation, literary resistance, narrative ethics

I.   Introduction

In the last decade, the rise of the term *post-truth* has signaled a growing cultural and political crisis surrounding the nature of truth, reality, and public discourse. Officially named the Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year in 2016, *post-truth* describes a situation where "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." Scholars such as Lee McIntyre and Ralph Keyes have described the post-truth condition not merely as a lapse in fact-checking or journalistic standards, but as the culmination of deeper philosophical and cultural trends that undermine the foundations of shared reality. McIntyre, in *Post-Truth*, identifies the phenomenon as "a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe something whether there is evidence for it or not" (McIntyre, 2018). He argues that post-truth is not ignorance, but the strategic rejection of expertise, rationality, and evidence when they conflict with personal or political agendas. Keyes, writing earlier in *The Post-Truth Era*, similarly critiques a cultural shift toward "casual dishonesty," noting that society has grown increasingly tolerant of lies told for comfort, expedience, or entertainment (Keyes, 2004). He traces this trend through domains such as advertising, memoir, and politics, suggesting that the erosion of truth begins not with state propaganda but with everyday evasions and distortions normalized over time. Both scholars emphasize that the real danger of post-truth is not misinformation alone, but the erosion of the very epistemic frameworks that allow for dialogue, consensus, and democratic governance. Within this context, literature—long a domain for exploring moral ambiguity, contested meaning, and the limits of knowledge—becomes increasingly vital. Fiction's capacity to render complexity, dramatize ethical conflict, and interrogate ideology positions it as more than a mirror of post-truth culture; it

emerges as a potential site of resistance. Through narrative form and rhetorical subtlety, literature trains readers in interpretive labor—an essential skill in a time when truth must be actively discerned rather than passively received.

Postmodern theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, Linda Hutcheon, and Fredric Jameson have extensively examined how narrative strategies such as irony, fragmentation, and metafiction operate as both reflections of and resistances to the conditions of late capitalist culture. Baudrillard's theory of simulacra suggests that in the contemporary media-saturated world, representations no longer refer to any real object or experience, but instead form a self-contained system of signs—what he calls "hyperreality." In this world of endless reproduction and media spectacle, the line between truth and fabrication collapses, leaving individuals suspended in a field of images that simulate meaning without substance (Baudrillard, 1994). Hutcheon, in *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, builds on this idea by describing postmodern narrative as a form of "complicitous critique"—a mode that acknowledges its own artifice while using parody and pastiche to undermine ideological authority (Hutcheon, 1988). Meanwhile, Jameson famously describes postmodern culture as marked by "the waning of affect" and a "depthless" aesthetic, where historical memory is replaced by cultural nostalgia and surface-level representations (Jameson, 1991). These critiques provide a theoretical framework for understanding the fiction of Don DeLillo, especially *White Noise* and *Zero K*, both of which have been widely recognized for their portrayal of media saturation, existential uncertainty, and simulation as the dominant mode of experience. Mark Osteen, for instance, reads *White Noise* as a novel in which fear is commodified and circulated through media and pharmaceutical industries, arguing that DeLillo constructs "an economy of fear" where anxiety itself becomes a consumable product (Osteen, 1998). Duvall likewise emphasizes DeLillo's formal strategies, particularly his use of minimalist prose and recursive narrative structures, as a means of foregrounding the psychological and ontological consequences of living in a culture overwhelmed by simulation and noise (Duvall, 2008). Together, these critical perspectives position DeLillo not merely as a chronicler of postmodern anxiety but as a formal innovator who uses narrative to resist the flattening effects of post-truth culture.. However, limited scholarly attention has been paid to how DeLillo and other contemporary authors construct a *literary resistance* to post-truth culture through dystopian echoes, ethical storytelling, and formal innovation.

This paper investigates how selected works of contemporary American fiction engage with the post-truth condition through dystopian aesthetics and critical narrative forms. Focusing primarily on Don DeLillo and extending the analysis to Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* and Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, the study identifies key themes such as hyperreality, disinformation, surveillance, and moral disintegration. Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks from media theory, political philosophy, and literary criticism, the paper argues that these texts enact a literary resistance that challenges the normalization of ideological manipulation and the erosion of truth.

The main contribution of this paper lies in its synthesis of post-truth discourse and literary analysis. It positions contemporary fiction not as escapist or merely reflective, but as an active counter-discursive force—one that offers epistemological clarity, ethical engagement, and imaginative alternatives to a culture increasingly dominated by disinformation. By mapping the intersections between literary form and truth politics, this paper aims to extend current scholarship on the political role of fiction in late modernity.The article is organized into six sections. Following this introduction, Section II outlines the theoretical underpinnings of the post-truth condition and its cultural manifestations. Section III offers a close reading of Don DeLillo's *White Noise* and *Zero K*, analyzing how these texts articulate resistance through irony and narrative complexity. Section IV examines dystopian motifs in Whitehead's and Egan's fiction, identifying literary strategies that reflect and counteract epistemic collapse. Section V discusses the ethical dimension of storytelling in a post-truth society. Finally, Section VI concludes with a reflection on literature's potential to reassert narrative integrity and intellectual responsibility in an age of disinformation.

Furthermore, the post-truth paradigm has not only reshaped media consumption and political rhetoric but has also challenged traditional academic disciplines to reexamine their foundational assumptions about authority and meaning. Literary studies, situated at the intersection of narrative, history, and interpretation, offers a unique vantage point from which to interrogate these shifts. As digital misinformation spreads with unprecedented speed and emotional precision, the slow, reflective nature of literary engagement emerges as a countervailing force. The importance of storytelling—particularly when embedded with ambiguity, irony, and resistance—becomes magnified in a cultural climate where simplistic binaries dominate discourse. This study's interdisciplinary methodology reflects this complexity, aiming to provide a literary cartography of resistance that is both theoretically grounded and textually specific.

II. The Post-Truth Condition and the Literary Imagination

The emergence of the post-truth condition is not simply a byproduct of technological evolution or political decay; it reflects a deeper cultural shift in the way reality is constructed, mediated, and consumed. As McIntyre argues, post-truth is "a rejection of reasoned debate in favor of tribal belief," a symptom of epistemic fragmentation accelerated by digital media and ideological polarization (McIntyre, 2018). This condition, rooted in distrust toward traditional knowledge authorities, is reinforced by what Zuboff describes as the logic of *surveillance capitalism*, wherein human experience becomes raw material for data extraction and behavioral prediction (Zuboff, 2019). In such an environment, distinctions between truth and fiction, authenticity and fabrication, collapse into spectacle.Literature, particularly the novel, has long served as a site for exploring the tension between perception and reality. In the postmodern era, writers increasingly foregrounded this instability, aligning with theoretical frameworks like Baudrillard's concept of *simulacra*, in which signs no longer reflect a real referent but instead create a hyperreality of self-referential images (Baudrillard, 1994). This severance between signifier and reality, Baudrillard argues, produces a condition in which "the real is no longer what it used to be"—and fiction reflects precisely this loss of ontological grounding. Fictional texts thus act not only as representations of the post-truth condition, but also as critiques of it.

DeLillo's *White Noise* exemplifies this phenomenon, portraying a world in which media-saturated individuals consume simulated experiences as substitutes for genuine emotion or knowledge. In a scene emblematic of this, characters travel to visit "The Most Photographed Barn in America," only to remark on its spectacle rather than the barn itself—a moment that crystallizes Baudrillardian hyperreality. Eco's *Travels in Hyperreality* similarly observes that American culture tends to fetishize "the absolute fake," often preferring constructed illusions over authentic realities (Eco, 1986). In such a landscape, the act of storytelling itself—its structure, rhythm, and trust in coherent meaning—becomes a fragile political gesture.What distinguishes the post-truth condition from previous epistemological crises is its open embrace of disinformation as a political tool. Arendt's warning in "Lying in Politics" that modern propaganda aims not merely to deceive but to erase the distinction between true and false becomes newly relevant in an era of "alternative facts" and institutional gaslighting (Arendt, 1972). For Arendt, the danger lies not in the lie itself, but in its cumulative effect: a population for whom the difference between reality and narrative ceases to matter. Such erosion of factuality is not just a civic threat—it is an existential one.

In this context, literature's traditional functions—truth-telling, ethical inquiry, psychological realism—acquire new weight. As Mark Fisher observes in *Capitalist Realism*, contemporary culture often seems trapped in an ideological loop, where even dystopia is commodified and repackaged as aesthetic (Fisher, 2009). Against this inertia, literature can perform an act of interruption, offering readers not escape, but a reframing of the very coordinates of experience. This is especially true in the form of the *systems novel*, a genre DeLillo is often associated with, wherein the complexity of modern life is mirrored in layered, non-linear, and intertextual narratives (Mendelson, 1981).

The novel, particularly in its postmodern iterations, responds to this challenge by adopting strategies of fragmentation, metafiction, and ironic distance. As Jameson notes, postmodern literature often reflects the

"waning of affect" and the emergence of depthless cultural forms (Jameson, 1991). Yet these same techniques—used critically—can also unmask the structures of ideological manipulation. Hutcheon emphasizes this dual function of postmodern irony, which both exposes and undermines dominant narratives, allowing literature to become "complicitous critique" (Hutcheon, 1988). In other words, fiction acknowledges its own limits while still enacting a form of cultural resistance.

Moreover, the ethical potential of literature is not merely rhetorical or symbolic. Nussbaum argues that literature cultivates empathy by inviting readers into the interiority of others, enabling a kind of moral rehearsal (Nussbaum, 1997). In a time when emotional manipulation is a tool of disinformation, this capacity for nuanced, non-binary engagement becomes revolutionary. Similarly, Rorty suggests that solidarity and political hope do not arise from abstract universalism but from shared stories and contingent vocabularies (Rorty, 1989).DeLillo's work exemplifies this turn. In portraying characters overwhelmed by data, simulation, and ambient dread, he dramatizes the psychological impact of a society no longer grounded in shared truth. His novels do not offer easy resolutions but insist on the necessity of *recognizing the artificial*—a first step toward ethical re-engagement with reality. As such, literature becomes not just a mirror of the post-truth condition but a potential counterforce to its expansion.The crisis of epistemology in the post-truth era can also be contextualized through what Bruno Latour identifies as the weakening of the "modern Constitution," where the boundary between facts and values becomes increasingly porous (Latour, 1993). Literature, in this light, occupies a dual role: both a mirror of fractured consensus and a site of potential rearticulation. As readers navigate fictional texts that blur historical, subjective, and imagined truths, they engage in what Paul Ricoeur calls "narrative identity"—a process by which self-understanding is formed through narrative coherence amid fragmentation (Ricoeur, 1992). Thus, the act of reading itself becomes a political and existential endeavor, fostering interpretive agency in a time when meaning is often outsourced to algorithms and memes. In a culture that privileges immediacy and virality, literature's demand for attention, reflection, and re-reading functions as a subtle but profound form of cultural resistance.

III.   Don DeLillo's Literary Resistance

Don DeLillo has long been regarded as one of the most prescient chroniclers of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century American consciousness. His novels are densely layered responses to the epistemological anxiety, cultural overload, and existential fragmentation of the postmodern era. In the context of post-truth, DeLillo's fiction performs a double function: it diagnoses the erosion of shared reality, and it enacts resistance through aesthetic form. In works such as *White Noise* (1985) and *Zero K* (2016), DeLillo constructs narratives that do not simply depict a disordered world—they structure that disorder in ways that expose its logic and challenge its effects on the human psyche.In *White Noise*, the story of Jack Gladney—a professor of "Hitler Studies" in a small liberal arts college—unfolds in a universe overwhelmed by media loops, technological fetishism, and pharmacological numbing. The Airborne Toxic Event, the novel's central catastrophe, becomes a symbol for both environmental and epistemic instability. As Mark Osteen notes, "the characters' dependence on media, drugs, and manufactured experiences is symptomatic of a culture in which the real is mediated out of existence" (Osteen, 1998) . Rather than respond to the toxic cloud with critical thought, the characters consult televised updates and rely on sensory disconnection. Literary critic Tom LeClair argues that *White Noise* "closes the loop" by constructing a narrative that is both saturated with mediated fear and structurally recursive, thus embodying the very cultural paralysis it critiques. According to LeClair, the novel's engagement with fear—whether ecological, technological, or existential—is not merely thematic but architectural. The narrative loops back on itself through patterns of repetition, delayed revelations, and fragmented epiphanies, mimicking how postmodern individuals absorb and circulate media-driven anxieties without resolution (LeClair, 1988). This narrative architecture reflects a broader cultural logic in which emotional responses are shaped by systems of information that render truth secondary to effect. In this framework, fear becomes ambient and commodified—a background hum rather than a rupture. DeLillo's characters do not so much react to catastrophe as metabolize it passively, responding to the toxic cloud, pharmaceutical regimes, and media alerts with a sense of scripted fatalism. LeClair's insight draws attention to how *White Noise* critiques not only the content of post-truth culture

but its repetitive form: the endless recycling of panic, reassurance, and resignation. The loop is not simply a narrative device; it is a cultural indictment. In dramatizing this circuit, DeLillo's novel anticipates the digital echo chambers and algorithmic feedback loops that would come to define post-truth discourse decades later. Through LeClair's lens, *White Noise* emerges not only as a commentary on simulation and fear, but as a formally innovative text that models the very epistemic entrapment it seeks to expose. This paralysis is not incidental—it reflects a deeply embedded cultural condition that Fisher would later describe as *capitalist realism*, the idea that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (Fisher, 2009).What makes DeLillo's work particularly relevant in the post-truth age is his persistent interrogation of how language, authority, and spectacle intersect. In one scene, Jack and his colleague Murray visit "The Most Photographed Barn in America." As they observe other tourists taking photos, Murray explains, "Once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn." The hyper-awareness of mediation—of the barn as symbol, not structure—renders authentic experience inaccessible. This moment epitomizes Baudrillard's notion of the *simulacrum*, where representation precedes and replaces the real (Baudrillard, 1994). But DeLillo does not merely echo postmodern theory; he dramatizes its consequences on ordinary life. The barn is not just an intellectual metaphor—it's part of Jack's disorientation, his inability to locate meaning amid layers of cultural noise.

This theme continues and deepens in *Zero K*, a novel that centers on a facility where death is suspended through cryonic technology. The protagonist, Jeff Lockhart, is caught between skeptical realism and spiritual yearning as he confronts his father's decision to undergo voluntary suspension. The Convergence—the name of the facility—evokes both transcendence and authoritarian control. Its aesthetic is minimalist, quasi-religious, and militarized, echoing what Jean-François Lyotard might call the postmodern *sublime*: an overwhelming confrontation with the unrepresentable (Lyotard, 1984). Yet this sublime is not divine—it is clinical, curated, and ultimately hollow.Duvall notes that in *Zero K*, DeLillo's minimalism "stages the failure of grand narratives without succumbing to nihilism," offering instead a confrontation with our own desire for narrative coherence (Duvall, 2008). The post-truth condition is embedded in this confrontation: the characters long for certainty, permanence, or even transcendence, but DeLillo offers only the mediation of those desires. His prose in *Zero K* is intentionally sparse, echoing the stripped-down emotional life of his characters and the sterile perfection of the facility. In one passage, Jeff reflects, "Isn't it human to want to be fooled?"—a line that serves as both an ethical question and a diagnosis of our cultural fatigue with truth.

Both *White Noise* and *Zero K* critique not only the collapse of meaning but also the systems that commodify and exploit this collapse. Language itself becomes suspect, infused with corporate jargon, spiritual euphemisms, and recursive abstractions. In this linguistic landscape, DeLillo adopts a style that is simultaneously clinical and ironic, forcing the reader to confront the absurdity and weight of words. His characters often speak in disconnected fragments, reflecting their own detachment from reality and mirroring the fractured public discourse of the post-truth age.Despite this fragmentation, DeLillo's work resists the cynical nihilism that often accompanies postmodern diagnosis. There is a recurring attempt—however fragile—to hold on to moments of sincerity, relationship, and perception. When Jack is exposed to the airborne toxic cloud, his first instinct is not survival but the realization that "death has entered our lives." This confrontation with mortality, though clouded by media distraction, remains a trace of authentic experience. Likewise, in *Zero K*, Jeff's doubts serve not to mock his father's choices but to seek meaning beyond the Convergence's sterile promises.

What emerges from DeLillo's fiction is a form of *literary resistance* that does not reject postmodern form but retools it. His novels mimic the incoherence of a disinformed world, yet in doing so, they invite the reader to critically reassemble meaning. Osteen describes this as DeLillo's "economy of fear," where fear is not just thematized but formalized through rhythm, structure, and pacing (Osteen, 1998). This literary strategy aligns with what Linda Hutcheon calls "critical postmodernism"—a mode that both acknowledges the constructedness of reality and seeks to critique it from within (Hutcheon, 1988).In the post-truth era, DeLillo's relevance lies not in offering solutions but in dramatizing the stakes of losing the capacity for shared meaning. His resistance is

not didactic but formal, not political in the traditional sense but deeply ethical. By rendering the dislocations of postmodern life with such precision, DeLillo equips his readers with the tools to perceive those dislocations more clearly. In an age of simulation, the novel itself becomes an act of seeing.

This interrogation of authorship and media spectacle is developed even more explicitly in DeLillo's earlier novel *Mao II* (1991), where the protagonist—a reclusive writer named Bill Gray—embodies the tension between private literary labor and public ideological spectacle. In *Mao II*, DeLillo stages a direct confrontation between the novel and terrorism, suggesting that the image, not the word, has become the dominant medium of political power. "What terrorists gain, novelists lose," Gray famously states—a line that crystallizes DeLillo's concern that literature has been displaced as a vehicle of truth-making. In a post-truth context, this dynamic is even more potent: terrorism, like disinformation, bypasses discourse and appeals directly to affective spectacle. DeLillo's engagement with this idea anticipates the epistemic challenges of the twenty-first century, where the writer must navigate a cultural field in which language is increasingly subordinated to image, and meaning to manipulation. By staging the decline of literary authority within the novel itself, DeLillo performs the very crisis he seeks to illuminate—one in which the storyteller becomes both marginal and necessary, silenced yet essential.

One cannot ignore the broader trajectory of DeLillo's oeuvre, which consistently returns to the theme of how systems—whether governmental, technological, or linguistic—absorb the individual into abstract logic. In *Underworld*, for instance, the Cold War's affective residues are mapped through baseball, nuclear fear, and the detritus of history, demonstrating how cultural symbols accumulate contradictory meanings over time. DeLillo's use of "found language" (corporate jargon, news fragments, surveillance transcripts) anticipates the chaotic media ecology of the 21st century, prefiguring the ways in which language is repurposed, diluted, and weaponized. In all these cases, his fiction does not offer closure but instead cultivates what Duvall calls "a reading posture of uncertainty"—training the reader to dwell in the ambiguity that post-truth rhetoric seeks to obliterate. His characters' anxiety is not only psychological but ontological: a desperate search for anchorage in a world of infinite signifiers.

IV. Echoes in Contemporary Fiction

While Don DeLillo provides one of the most sustained and structurally refined engagements with the post-truth condition in late twentieth-century literature, he has not written in isolation. His legacy has informed a new generation of American writers who similarly confront the cultural effects of epistemic collapse, simulation, and narrative erosion. Authors such as Colson Whitehead and Jennifer Egan extend DeLillo's concerns into the twenty-first century, adapting his strategies—fragmentation, genre experimentation, and metatextual irony—to fit their own political and aesthetic terrains. Whereas DeLillo's vision is often clinical and meditative, these newer voices explore the same cultural anxieties through more explicitly dystopian or digitized forms. In doing so, they broaden the scope of literary resistance, showing how post-truth culture not only reshapes political discourse but also reconfigures memory, identity, and temporality itself.

4.1 Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*: Dystopia as Racial and Epistemic Critique

Whitehead's *Zone One* ostensibly belongs to the zombie apocalypse genre, but its ambitions reach far beyond conventional horror. The novel's protagonist, known only as "Mark Spitz," navigates a Manhattan divided between zones of provisional control and undead chaos. What is most significant, however, is how Whitehead reworks the trope of the zombie to critique America's racial memory and informational collapse. The novel's narration is fragmented, recursive, and deliberately unreliable, reflecting not just the protagonist's trauma but the larger cultural disorientation surrounding truth and history.As Keith Booker notes, contemporary dystopias often reflect anxieties about "the self's survival in a world of meaningless repetition and overwhelming systems" (Booker, 1994). In *Zone One*, the undead are not only literal zombies but metaphors for post-truth citizenship: emotionally numbed, structurally passive, and susceptible to propaganda. Whitehead blurs the line between fact and fiction within the protagonist's recollections, suggesting that even memory—once the domain

of truth-telling—is now vulnerable to infection.Whitehead's language is suffused with bureaucratic euphemisms and crisis management jargon, echoing DeLillo's critique of institutional language. The term "skels" is used by the survivors to euphemize the undead, a linguistic maneuver that recalls Arendt's warning about the dangers of abstracting violence through technocratic discourse (Arendt, 1972). The novel implicitly asks: what happens when catastrophe becomes background noise—when atrocity is metabolized into the ordinary?Moreover, the racial subtext of *Zone One* positions the novel as a counter-narrative to sanitized dystopias. Whitehead offers a protagonist who is both symbolically and explicitly marked by race, using satire to undermine the cultural mythologies of "resilience" and "recovery." In doing so, he aligns with what Lyotard would call a "differend"— a mode of testimony that cannot be fully articulated within dominant discourse systems (Lyotard, 1984).

4.2Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*: Fragmentation and Digital Identity

Where Whitehead imagines the aftermath of collapse, Jennifer Egan explores its quiet, cumulative onset. *A Visit from the Goon Squad* is less dystopian in setting than *Zone One*, but no less radical in form. Its structure is nonlinear, composed of interlinked stories spanning decades, characters, and genres. The result is a fractured but coherent narrative that mirrors the breakdown of stable identity in the digital age.Egan's most famous chapter, a PowerPoint presentation created by a child, signals her formal daring and thematic clarity. It is not just a gimmick—it is a meditation on how narrative, memory, and emotion are increasingly mediated through digital templates. As Alison Gibbons observes, Egan's use of multimodal storytelling "foregrounds the fragmentation of self and temporality as core experiences of digital life" (Gibbons, 2012). In this context, truth is not denied but dissolved: each character offers a partial, refracted account of events, producing a kaleidoscope of meaning without hierarchy.The post-truth condition in Egan's novel is not marked by overt disinformation but by entropy. Time is "the goon squad" of the title—an invisible force that erodes certainty, connection, and coherence. The characters attempt to market authenticity in an age of manufactured experience, gesturing toward a world where even rebellion is commodified. Fisher's critique of capitalist realism (Fisher, 2009) is especially resonant here: the future in Egan's world is not terrifying—it is banal, anesthetized, post-ironic.Yet like DeLillo and Whitehead, Egan does not surrender to cynicism. In the novel's final chapter, a fictional future influencer named Lulu works in a world governed by social capital algorithms. Still, there is a hint of ethical yearning—a desire to reconnect, however digitally, with a shared sense of purpose. This subtle emotional core underscores Egan's broader resistance to post-truth logic. By fragmenting narrative, she paradoxically foregrounds the need for connection.

4.3 Shared Aesthetics of Resistance

Despite their thematic and formal differences, Whitehead and Egan share a concern with how the self is constructed and destabilized within systems of power and information. Both *Zone One* and *A Visit from the Goon Squad* are populated by characters who struggle to narrate themselves amid collapsing institutions— whether military bureaucracies or media conglomerates. Mark Spitz and Lulu, the respective protagonists of these novels, are not heroes in the traditional sense but witnesses to the erosion of coherence and authenticity. Their fragmented subjectivities mirror the cultural environment they inhabit, one defined by recursive loops of memory, data, and spectacle. In this sense, both authors extend DeLillo's postmodern inheritance by articulating a post-postmodern condition: a literary space where irony, sincerity, and critical resistance coexist uneasily, yet necessarily, within the same narrative frameworks.

Though their styles differ, both Whitehead and Egan deploy formal disruption as resistance. Whitehead satirizes political jargon and reframes the zombie trope to critique the racialized erasure of truth; Egan fractures narrative time to illuminate how identity and sincerity are filtered through technological mediation. Their works echo DeLillo's in portraying the affective and linguistic fallout of a post-truth world, while carving their own ethical paths through it. What unites these authors is not simply thematic overlap, but a shared aesthetic logic: each constructs narrative as an unstable, contested space in which language becomes both the medium of disinformation and the site of potential clarity.This convergence of literary technique and political critique situates contemporary fiction as an essential counterforce to the ideological saturation of the post-truth era. In

Zone One, satire exposes the banality of managed disaster; in *Goon Squad*, fragmentation embodies the splintering of the self under digital capitalism. These texts do not aim to restore a naïve realism or to return to pre-digital innocence—instead, they dramatize the consequences of narrative collapse while modeling strategies for ethical engagement. They recognize, as DeLillo does, that the danger of post-truth is not simply that we are being lied to, but that we are becoming unable to care whether truth matters at all.In this sense, Whitehead and Egan continue and diversify DeLillo's literary project. They inherit his skepticism, his formal experimentation, and his acute attention to cultural language, but redirect these tools toward new terrains of disinformation— racial politics, algorithmic identity, digital memory. If DeLillo diagnoses the anxiety of knowing too much and meaning too little, Whitehead and Egan confront the aftermath: a culture in which knowledge is fragmented, commodified, or drowned in noise. Their novels compel readers to reconstruct meaning from dissonance, to sift signal from static. This act of narrative reassembly—demanding intellectual labor, emotional nuance, and historical awareness—is perhaps the most potent form of literary resistance in a world where truth itself has been rendered unstable.

Beyond Whitehead and Egan, other contemporary authors such as George Saunders and Octavia Butler also contribute to this aesthetic of resistance. Saunders, particularly in *The Brief and Frightening Reign of Phil*, uses allegory and absurdism to expose the mechanisms of populist disinformation and xenophobic rhetoric, echoing Orwellian warnings but updating them for a neoliberal context. Butler's *Parable* series, meanwhile, presents a near-future America unraveling due to climate catastrophe and ideological extremism, foregrounding marginalized voices and spiritual survival. These narratives, like those of DeLillo, Egan, and Whitehead, destabilize narrative certainty while offering glimpses of ethical clarity. The multiplicity of these literary responses underscores the diversity of strategies available for contesting the erosion of meaning. They demonstrate that while the cultural terrain may be fragmented, the ethical imperative to resist remains intact— whether through satire, speculative realism, or hybrid narrative forms.

V.   Literary Ethics in the Age of Disinformation

If the preceding sections have shown how contemporary fiction formally mirrors the fragmentation and disorientation of the post-truth condition, the question arises: can literature do more than reflect cultural crisis? Can it intervene, offering not just critique but ethical guidance in a world where truth has become unstable? This section argues that it can—and must. Literature's ethical function lies not in dispensing moral certainties, but in cultivating the capacities most threatened by disinformation: empathy, complexity, memory, and intellectual responsibility.The idea that fiction contributes to moral development is not new. Martha Nussbaum, in *Cultivating Humanity*, insists that literary education fosters the imaginative and emotional engagement necessary for democratic citizenship. For her, reading literature becomes a form of ethical rehearsal, enabling the reader to inhabit perspectives unlike their own and to understand the inner conflicts that shape moral decisions (Nussbaum, 1997). In the post-truth context, such exercises in perspective-taking become urgent. The spread of disinformation depends on the flattening of nuance and the amplification of tribal identity; literature counters this by demanding that readers enter into ambiguity, uncertainty, and contradiction.Moreover, literature teaches us not only what to think, but how to think. In the works of DeLillo, Whitehead, and Egan, the reader is not a passive consumer but an active interpreter. Fragmented timelines, unreliable narrators, and nonlinear structures do not merely frustrate; they invite reconstruction. This aesthetic strategy parallels what Hannah Arendt describes as the work of judgment—our ability to think reflectively without firm rules, to "think without a banister" (Arendt, 1972). The disinformation age thrives on reaction and repetition; literature slows thought down, opening space for judgment and ethical deliberation.

In this sense, fiction becomes an epistemological training ground. Jean-François Lyotard's emphasis on "incredulity toward metanarratives" is often misunderstood as a rejection of truth altogether (Lyotard, 1984). But in fact, Lyotard's postmodern skepticism does not deny truth—it questions the mechanisms by which certain truths are elevated to the level of unquestioned authority. Literary fiction, especially in the postmodern and post-

postmodern traditions, engages directly with this problem by dramatizing epistemic conflict within narrative. When readers encounter multiple versions of events, when stories contradict or remain unresolved, they are not being misled—they are being prepared for a world in which discernment is necessary.The ethical stakes are heightened when we consider literature's relationship to history and memory. As Rorty suggests, solidarity is not built on abstract principles but on "the ability to hear the cries of others" through shared narratives (Rorty, 1989). Fiction thus functions as a medium through which the silenced can speak and the unheard can be imagined. This is particularly relevant in texts like Zone One, where satire and genre conventions are used to foreground systemic violence and historical erasure. The zombie, emptied of individuality and memory, becomes a symbol of a citizenry stripped of agency. In giving voice to this metaphor, Whitehead offers not a solution but a diagnosis—and, implicitly, a call to ethical awareness.The ethical implications of fiction are further magnified in the age of AI-generated content and deepfakes, where the boundaries between authored narratives and algorithmic fabrications become increasingly opaque. Literary texts, in contrast to auto-generated media, are anchored in intentionality and craft—qualities that signal human deliberation in an age of automated output. This human-centered storytelling becomes a form of epistemic trust, asserting the value of authorship and narrative responsibility. As readers become aware of their interpretive role, they also develop an ethical awareness of their consumption habits, resisting the passivity that digital media often encourages. Literary form, by resisting reductionism, reasserts the importance of the interpretive journey itself.

Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* also invites ethical engagement by refusing narrative closure. The characters, dispersed across time and space, are bound not by a single plotline but by the emotional and cultural currents that flow through them. Their attempts to make meaning—through music, marketing, digital connection—fail as often as they succeed, but the novel insists that these attempts matter. In a society where algorithmic predictability threatens to replace human agency, Egan's novel affirms the moral value of uncertainty. Her fragmented narrative structure is not a rejection of coherence, but a reconfiguration of it—a reminder that moral understanding often emerges from assembling disparate parts.Crucially, the ethical function of literature also resides in its resistance to instrumentalization. As Mark Fisher has argued, the cultural logic of late capitalism tends to commodify dissent, repackaging even critique into marketable forms (Fisher, 2009) . Literature, at its best, resists this logic not by standing outside culture, but by turning its tools against itself—using irony, genre subversion, and metafiction to expose the mechanisms of manipulation. This is what Linda Hutcheon calls the "complicitous critique" of postmodern art: the ability to acknowledge one's embeddedness in ideology while still mounting a challenge to it (Hutcheon, 1988).

In light of these perspectives, literature becomes a kind of counter-technology—one that resists the speed, reductionism, and binary logic of disinformation culture. Unlike viral memes or algorithmic content streams, the novel requires time, attentiveness, and reflection. It obliges readers to pause, to reread, to interpret. In doing so, it models the very capacities most urgently needed in a post-truth world: intellectual humility, critical literacy, and ethical imagination. These qualities are not ornamental to democratic life—they are foundational. The rise of post-truth politics, fake news, and cultural relativism has revealed the fragility of our public epistemologies. In such a climate, literature must not be marginalized as entertainment or elitist excess. It must be reclaimed as a civic practice—a way of training attention, expanding moral horizons, and resisting the seductions of simplification. As such, the novel remains one of the last strongholds of complexity in a cultural landscape increasingly hostile to nuance.

VI.   Conclusion: Reclaiming Meaning Through Literary Form

In an era where disinformation is weaponized, epistemic consensus erodes, and reality is increasingly mediated by spectacle and simulation, the role of literature becomes not only relevant but indispensable. This paper has argued that contemporary American fiction, far from being a passive mirror of post-truth culture, actively resists it. Through the works of Don DeLillo, Colson Whitehead, and Jennifer Egan, we observe a pattern of formal innovation, narrative disruption, and ethical urgency that constitutes what can be called a literary resistance—a

mode of engagement that seeks to recover meaning, complexity, and responsibility from a discursive field saturated with noise. DeLillo's *White Noise* and *Zero K* offer foundational examples of how fiction can diagnose and disrupt the logic of hyperreality and existential drift. His characters' struggles with language, mortality, and mediated experience reflect a cultural condition in which truth is no longer a stable referent but a negotiated spectacle. Yet DeLillo does not surrender to despair; rather, he insists that even within the fractured terrain of postmodern life, the act of recognizing distortion can itself be transformative. His narrative strategies—irony, minimalism, recursive structure—do not retreat from confusion but reframe it, requiring the reader to reconstruct meaning actively. This literary impulse is echoed and expanded in the work of Colson Whitehead and Jennifer Egan. Whitehead's *Zone One* employs dystopian satire and genre subversion to expose the racial and political consequences of epistemic collapse, turning the figure of the zombie into a metaphor for both memory loss and moral inertia. Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, by contrast, explores fragmentation at the level of identity and time, mapping the psychic costs of digital life and algorithmic selfhood. Both authors continue DeLillo's legacy while shifting the terrain of inquiry: from Cold War-era existentialism to the contemporary crises of racialized history, data capitalism, and cultural entropy.

At stake in all of these texts is not simply the defense of truth as a static ideal, but the preservation of narrative as a vital human faculty—our capacity to remember, to imagine, to connect. As Nussbaum suggests, literature trains the moral imagination by drawing readers into lives, conflicts, and choices not their own (Nussbaum, 1997). In a post-truth environment where empathy is curtailed and complexity flattened, this imaginative labor becomes a radical act. Similarly, Rorty's call for solidarity through contingent narratives finds its literary expression in these works, which eschew universalism in favor of situated, emotionally charged, ethically resonant storytelling (Rorty, 1989).The political relevance of literature, then, lies not in overt ideology but in its resistance to simplification. The techniques used by DeLillo, Whitehead, and Egan—fragmentation, satire, temporal disruption, metafiction—are not just aesthetic choices. They are strategies for defending nuance in a culture that increasingly trades in absolutes. As Lyotard reminds us, skepticism toward metanarratives does not preclude meaning; rather, it demands that meaning be continually negotiated, questioned, and reconstructed (Lyotard, 1984).

Going forward, this literary project offers fertile ground for further inquiry. Comparative studies might explore how post-truth aesthetics manifest in other cultural traditions—Afro-futurist, Indigenous, or diasporic literatures—or how emerging digital fiction experiments with multimodality to represent epistemic instability. Pedagogically, these texts present opportunities for cultivating critical literacy in classrooms, enabling students not only to identify disinformation but to understand its psychological and cultural underpinnings. By foregrounding literature as both a mirror and a tool, educators and scholars can reinforce the civic function of narrative in resisting ideological manipulation.The primary advantage of this study lies in its interdisciplinary synthesis. By integrating literary analysis with media theory, political philosophy, and ethics, the paper offers a framework for understanding literature not as passive cultural commentary but as an active site of epistemological and moral resistance. This approach bridges the gap between literary criticism and real-world disinformation crises, positioning fiction as an instrument of both critique and reconstruction. The article contributes to a growing body of scholarship that treats narrative form as a politically and ethically consequential mode of inquiry.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged. This study has focused exclusively on American fiction and a small sample of authors; further research would benefit from cross-cultural comparisons, particularly in non-Western contexts where truth regimes are differently configured. Additionally, while the paper addresses disinformation abstractly and thematically, it does not engage with empirical studies on reader response, cognitive processing, or narrative persuasion—areas where literary ethics could intersect productively with psychological or sociological data.Despite these limitations, the applications of this study are significant. Within literary studies, it invites a revaluation of contemporary fiction's political function. In education, it supports

curriculum development that fosters critical engagement with narrative complexity, historical awareness, and ethical literacy. In media literacy and civic discourse, it reasserts the relevance of storytelling as a counterforce to ideological manipulation, suggesting that fiction can provide not just escape from the post-truth condition, but orientation within it.Finally, the implications of this study extend beyond literary criticism into civic and pedagogical domains. In secondary and higher education, literature can serve as a framework for media literacy, enabling students to dissect narrative constructions and evaluate conflicting truth claims. Courses that juxtapose fiction with news media, political rhetoric, and social algorithms cultivate interdisciplinary critical thinking skills essential for democratic participation. By incorporating novels like *White Noise* or *Zone One* into curricula, educators can engage students in discussions not only about plot and character but about power, truth, and belief. This cross-pollination between literary study and civic awareness points toward a future in which fiction becomes a cornerstone of cultural resilience.Yuval Noah Harari, in *Homo Deus*, warns that as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and algorithmic prediction continue to evolve, we may be witnessing not just a transformation of political and economic systems, but a fundamental redefinition of what it means to be human. He argues that humanistic values—such as individual autonomy, emotional authenticity, and narrative coherence—are increasingly undermined by data-driven models that prioritize efficiency, predictability, and statistical aggregation over lived experience (Harari, 2015). In such a world, decision-making may shift from conscious moral deliberation to machine-generated optimization, rendering concepts like free will or empathy obsolete in practice, if not in rhetoric. The novels discussed in this paper—particularly *Zero K* and *A Visit from the Goon Squad*—directly confront this impending reality. DeLillo's cryogenic facility in *Zero K* promises transcendence through technology, but instead produces sterility, disconnection, and an eerie simulation of meaning. Egan's fictionalized future, with its algorithmically curated relationships and digital self-branding, reflects the emotional flattening Harari anticipates. Yet where Harari provides a macrohistorical forecast, these literary works reintroduce the human scale: the doubts, longings, and contradictions that resist algorithmic capture. Their formal disruptions and ethical ambiguities do not merely depict a post-human future—they challenge us to reclaim our subjectivity before it is outsourced. By foregrounding inner conflict and narrative multiplicity, these texts assert that human identity cannot be fully encoded, and that literature remains one of the last domains where existential questions are asked without expectation of optimization. In this light, fiction does not merely echo Harari's concerns; it counters them by demonstrating that ambiguity, imperfection, and storytelling are not glitches in the system—but constitutive of what it means to be human.

In the final analysis, literature matters not because it restores certainty, but because it honors ambiguity. In a time when public discourse is driven by polarization and bad faith, the novel's invitation to dwell in contradiction, to engage with multiplicity, and to imagine otherwise becomes an ethical imperative. Through their formal inventiveness and moral gravity, the authors examined here remind us that truth—however fragmented or fragile—remains worth pursuing, and that storytelling remains among our most powerful instruments for doing so.

REFERENCES
[1] L. McIntyre, *Post-truth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2018).
[2] R. Keyes, *The post-truth era: Dishonesty and deception in contemporary life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004).
[3] J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulation* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994).
[4] L. Hutcheon*, A poetics of postmodernism: History, theory, fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1988).
[5] F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the cultural logic of late capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).
[6] M. Osteen, The economy of fear in Don DeLillo's fiction, *Contemporary Literature, 39(2),* 1998, 225–252.
[7] J.N. Duvall, Don DeLillo's Underworld: A reader's guide (New York: Continuum, 2008).
[8] S. Zuboff, *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of* power (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019).
[9] U. Eco, *Travels in hyperreality* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace, 1986).

[10] H. Arendt, *Lying in politics*, in H. Arendt (Ed.), Crises of the republic (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1972) 1–49.

[11] M. Fisher, *Capitalist realism: Is there no alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009).

[12] E. Mendelson, The systems novel, *New Republic, 184(24)*, 1981, 29–34.

[13] M.C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating humanity: A classical defense of reform in liberal education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[14] R. Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[15] B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[16] P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[17] T. LeClair, Closing the loop: White Noise, *Modern Fiction Studies, 34(4)*, 1988, 807–820.

[18] J.-F. Lyotard, *The postmodern condition: A report on knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[19] M. Keith Booker, *The dystopian impulse in modern literature: Fiction as social criticism* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

[20] A. Gibbons, Multimodality, narrative and identification in digital fiction, *International Journal of Literary Linguistics, 1(1)*, 2012, 1–22.

[21] Y.N. Harari, *Homo deus: A brief history of tomorrow* (London: Harvill Secker, 2015).