

Post-apocalypse: Dystopia and Re-shaping the World in Zoe Kazan's *After The Blast* (2019)

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Abstract

Dystopia has become increasingly acclaimed after the turn of the century. Dystopian literature has been written particularly for young adults who are accustomed to the rapid advance of science and technology. The aim of this research paper is to trace the different dystopian characteristics in Zoe Kazan's *After The Blast* (2019) in the framework of staging hyperreality. This study is considered the first to be conducted on this play. It argues for a more comprehensive conceptualization of contemporary dystopia in order to respond more adequately to postmodern ways of understanding the future of mankind and re-shaping the world. It revolves around a provocative futuristic approach that questions the future of both humanity and the planet. Understanding the appeal of dystopian young adult fiction, Kazan provides both her readers and audience with fresh perceptions on problematic political and social practices. Dark and complex, *After The Blast* is an intrusive interplay between artificial intelligence and basic human instincts and emotions. In fact, Kazan's play provides young adults with an opportunity to reflect upon themselves and their lives, helping them through their journey to maturity, autonomy and selfhood.

Keywords: *After The Blast* – Dystopia – hyperreality - post-apocalypse – Zoe Kazan.

Introduction

[F]ear, my good friends, fear is the very basis and foundation of modern life. Fear of the much touted technology which, while it raises our standard of living, increases the probability of our violently dying. Fear of the science which takes away with one hand even more than what it so profusely gives with the other. Fear of the demonstrably fatal institutions for which, in our suicidal loyalty, we are ready to kill and die. Fear of the Great Men whom we have raised, by popular acclaim, to a power which they use, inevitably, to murder and enslave us. Fear of the War we don't want and yet do everything we can to bring about.

(Aldous Huxley, *Ape and Essence*, 1949)

Dystopian thought has become increasingly acclaimed after the turn of the century. In fact, dystopian literature has been written particularly for young adults who are accustomed to the rapid advance of science and technology. They are quite aware of the potential consequences of this relentless progress. The aim of this research paper is to trace the different dystopian characteristics in Zoe Kazan's *After The Blast* (2019) through the framework of staging hyperreality. This study argues for a more comprehensive conceptualization of contemporary dystopia in order to respond more adequately to postmodern ways of understanding the future of mankind and re-shaping the world. It revolves around a provocative futuristic approach that questions the future of both humanity and the planet.

Zoe Kazan (1983 -) is a contemporary American actress, playwright and screenwriter. Understanding the appeal of dystopian young adult fiction, she provides both her readers and audience with fresh perceptions on problematic political and social practices. Her brilliance lies in using the bleak mirror of science fiction to shed light on human betrayals, both global and personal. Dark and complex, *After The Blast* is an intrusive interchange between artificial intelligence and basic human instincts and emotions. It explores an imaginative futuristic world in the wake of a total environmental disaster - nuclear holocaust - where mankind has retreated underground. Nature is now simulated through brain-implanted chips and fertility is regulated to keep the surviving population in

balance. In fact, Kazan's play provides young adults with an opportunity to reflect upon themselves and their lives, thus helping them through their journey to maturity, autonomy and selfhood.

Literature Review

The term "Utopia" was first coined by Sir Thomas More in his book *Utopia* (1516). In fact, Thomas More's 'Utopia' is basically known as an imaginary place or state that is ideally perfect in relation to politics, laws and customs, based on the principle that both absolute equality and a world of perfection are possible to exist. Challenging the idea of Utopia, writers created dystopian societies in order to highlight flaws of current social and political trends. Hence, 'Dystopia' is generally defined as a Utopia gone badly wrong: an imaginary place or state where everything is as bad as it could possibly be. More precisely, it is a futuristic imagined world in which both despotic societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through four kinds of dystopian control. These are corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral or totalitarian types of control: First, corporate control where large organizations have control over society through products, advertising, and the media. Second, bureaucratic control where society is organized by a tedious bureaucracy: through a mass of red tape, persistent regulations, and useless government officials. Third, technological control: where society is governed by technology through the use of computers, robots, and scientific means. Finally, moral or totalitarian control where society is administrated by ethical or domineering ideology often enforced through a dictatorship or a theocratic regime. Accordingly, dystopian fiction, through an exaggerated worst-case scenario, provides a relentless criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system.

The question at stake, however, is why the positive utopian perspective shifted into the negative dystopian depiction of the future, which then flourished in the works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The answer can be traced in history—chief historical events of the nineteenth century, such as the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia, Nazi Germany and the Second World War, technological progress and the creation of the atomic bomb, challenged the probability of a utopian paradise and brought disillusionment and fear that the future might not be as bright as it was thought. Maria Varsam justly states, in her article "Concrete Dystopia: Slavery and Its Others", that "whereas . . . utopia is a

manifestation of desire and hope for a better world and an 'unalienated order' that upsets the status quo, . . . dystopia delineates the crushing of hope and the displacement of desire for the purpose of upholding that status quo" (2003:209). Moreover, David Riesman clarifies the obvious slide into dystopian thought as a result of scientific progress, which creates a negative projection on the prospect of the future of mankind: "When governments have power to exterminate the globe, it is not surprising that anti-Utopian novels, like *1984*, are popular, while utopian political thought about a more hopeful future nearly disappears" (1964:95).

The definitions of Dystopia as well as Utopia have long been a controversial issue. They still invite both critics and scholars to be deeply and critically involved in expanding the scope and the framework of the two concepts in order to bring new interpretations and insights to the existing definitions and delineations. The form, content, and nature of these delineations should be revised according to the new transformations and changes that occur in the boundaries of Utopia and Dystopia in politics, social concerns, cultural issues, economic woes, technological and scientific developments over decades. Many insights and interpretations have appeared during previous decades examining the relations between Utopia and Dystopia.

In fact, Dystopia emerged as a critical response to the rapidly growing terrors of the current century and the signs of progress relevant to Utopia which basically appeared as a result of modernity. Utopia seems abandoned as an impulse or as a literary genre in the field of literary criticism due to the loss of faith that appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century. For that reason, Dystopia was adopted by writers and critics to criticize the evil acts of terrorism. As a result, some critics define dystopia as "anti-utopia" or "negative utopia" (Claeys 2010:107) and some think of it as "literary utopia's shadow" (Moylan and Baccolini 2013:111). They also call it the "essence [of utopia]" (Claeys 2013:15).

The concept of Dystopia has been developed to respond not only to the twentieth century terrors, but also to the current political situation that produces wars, genocides, famine, violence, and ecocide. However, it is assumed that "from time immemorial people have thought about the possibility of the construction of a better world . . . they have also been aware of the likelihood of a future which might be worse than the present" (Claeys 2013:16). This means that there has been

an awareness of the coming worse future. Dystopian writers employ such awareness in their fictional works. Fiction becomes a fertilized field that employs both utopian and dystopian concepts to transform humans from an unconscious life to whole consciousness. This means that fiction is not only a supplier of utopian and dystopian scenes or worlds, but it also becomes prophetic of the future and that is what can be seen and realized in Kazan's *After The Blast*.

According to most classical dystopian literature, the typical dystopian society is delineated as having control over its citizens through propaganda, making them fear the outside world and live in a dehumanized state. It restricts their freedom and independent thought. Citizens are perceived to be under constant surveillance. The world around them is always banished and distrusted. Citizens adjust to constant expectations. Individuality and change are forbidden. The society becomes an illusion of a seemingly perfect utopian world.

Dystopian writers attempt to break free from the chains of the utopian world that mostly all writers used to design for their readers. Dystopian writers go to diagnose reality, examining their ups and downs and beyond. Their writings leave no odds or facts to be explicitly zoomed or investigated. Such challenging writings lead to the emergence of the 'New Dystopia' that adopts the same strategies to approach its readers and themes. Although it does not necessarily share the same motives as the time comes with new scientific inventions. It does not mention that the coming future is to be definitely worse, but it raises awareness and warnings to avert any unrecognized threat that may drift the world to catastrophe. Unlike their predecessors, contemporary dystopian writers portray the present under a different light to break the automatic perception of people who have become unable to see the grim reality of the present society. This is because one cannot escape the prison unless one realizes one is in one (Nebioglu 2020:34).

Contemporary dystopian writers attempt to engage their readers in reality, putting them inside the space and encouraging them to try to get out safely and peacefully. Readers must feel that their life is in a risky situation in order to push them to try to punch some hole of hope in the wall of corrupt politics so as to save the human life and the planet. In this manner, the reader has to move to the dystopian place, that is to say, the imagined place that Moylan and Baccolini categorized it as "a critical dystopia" (2013:7). In such a stage of Dystopia, there is a possibility of a hope for healing that can be glimpsed in the dystopian thought

moving from the anti-utopian dystopia to the utopian dystopia. In his book *US Eutopias in the 1980s and 1990: Self-Fashioning in a World of Multiple Identities*, Sargent defines this kind of process as: “a non-existent society [...] that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as worse than contemporary society but normally includes at least one utopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome and replaced with a utopia” (2001:222).

In Kazan's *After The Blast*, Dystopia could be seen as a process-oriented practice, resulting from progress-driven forms that have emphasis on actual societies. In her dystopian play, Kazan excelled in employing these progress-driven forms. Advanced science and technology in Kazan's play go beyond means for improving everyday life. Technology is often illustrated in *After The Blast* as a controlling, universal force and is usually utilized as a fear-mongering policy. This study will focus on tracing the characteristics of Dystopia in Kazan's *After The Blast*, in the framework of staging hyperreality.

Discussion

As a matter of fact, Kazan's play *After The Blast* is a dystopian fantasy, engineered in science fiction and set in “the near future” (Kazan 2019:4). It has limited characters that include a human programmed robot. The premise, that seems intentionally left vague by the playwright, is the surface of the earth that has been laid waste. This makes life on earth impossible. It becomes unsuitable for humans to live in due to a nuclear exchange that destroyed and punched more holes in the ozone layer. Consequently, some of the survivors, including intelligent scientists, have been forced to move underground. The rest is left to starve on the surface of the earth. Survivors, who are mostly scientists, decide to devote themselves and their time to fixing the environment. In the same vein, women decide to give a hand by looking after them and bear their children, provided that the Council, a deceptively soft technological dictator, gives them permission to reproduce. Kazan reveals that every family is given only five chances to pass the motherhood test.

Kazan sets out her post-apocalyptic play on a setting, from its dimensions and design, looks like a futuristic space:

A small modular apartment. Everything is cleanly designed, med-century modern as interpreted by the Apple corporation.

No clutter. The few objects in the space have the quality of totems; blanket, paperweight, books, the only element that signals “futuristic” are the screens tastefully embedded in various surfaces. Along one wall is a row of windows, looking out onto a “view” of an American landscape (this may change over the course of the play). (Kazan 2019:12)

After designing out the outline of the play with insightful economy, Kazan introduces her main characters: a married couple named Anna and Oliver. Both are, as introduced in the first scene, “still waiting to receive Fertility” (Kazan 2019:8). They appear to have only one chance left to pass the test and thus become parents. Unfortunately, Anna is depressed because she could not cope with the stresses of the underground life:

OLIVER: I know! And it's a vicious cycle—she doesn't pass the Mental Health because she seems depressed, so we don't receive our Fertility, which makes her...more depressed. I mean, give her a kid: she'll be happy. That's what I wanna say to them: Don't look at her sitting there, all nervous. Watch her in our unit; see how she is with our friends' kids. (Kazan 2019:9)

Oliver thinks of a way to get Anna out of her depression so he consults his friends, and he is advised to get a ‘helper’. This helper is to remain with Anna at home. She will be busy with training and speaking to it:

OLIVER: a Helper. The newest thing from Artificial Solutions. It's a home-assistance Robot. It's in Beta.

ANNA: Why do we need a “Helper”?

OLIVER: We don't. We're going to train it. Teach it to be a companion. When we're done, A.S. will give it to someone in need. Community service. (Kazan 2019:12)

Hence, it can be observed that Oliver attempts to persuade Anna to accept the ‘Helper Robot’ as a companion. Although he could not directly tell her that, he brings the Robot for the sake of her mental health and emotional balance. As a scientist, Oliver explicitly points out to Anna that the Robot is to be trained to

interact with her and with other humans who are not able to live alone. This process indicates that a machine can be humanized according to a training process it is subjected to.

Robot Arthur is a significant example of employing artificial intelligence in the play under study. It is the kind of intelligence demonstrated by machines, as opposed to the natural intelligence displayed by humans. It is founded on the assumption that human intelligence can be so precisely described that a machine can be made to simulate it. This raises philosophical arguments about the mind and the ethics of creating artificial beings endowed with human-like intelligence. Both science fiction and futurology have also suggested that Artificial Intelligence, with its enormous potential and power, may become an existential risk to humanity.

The Robot is, in fact, an android machine that is encased within a human body. It is created as a companion for Anna who is depressed of the turning down future. As the Helper Robot is named Arthur, it seems to be an extension of Anna's lonely self. She thinks of having a baby. In her play, Kazan reveals why a robot is provided as an alternative:

ANNA: (*Anna comes out with a tablet, which she reads from, muttering to herself occasionally*)

“Before activating mobility...Tour Helper has been programmed to understand basic vocabulary. The more you teach it... We advise you begin by speaking to your Helper for three minutes to accustom it to your voice. This will increase its ability to understand commands”....

Initiate language recognition.

(*The Robot's lights flash three times. Anna sets a timer. As she speaks, she first stresses key vocabulary words, like someone talking to a baby or foreigner. ...*)

Okay. Three minutes. Go. Hi. I'm Anna. Um. Basic. Vocabulary. This is the living room, that's the kitchen. Our bedroom is in there. That's where we sleep. That's the bathroom.

Beat.

Yes, no, up, down, right, left, in, out, door. Food. Waste. Light. Dark. On. Off. Hot. Cold. One two three four five six seven eight nine ten. Do you understand what I'm saying? ... We live in the thirty-third unit of the ninth division of the American West. That's "33-9D-AW". (Kazan 2019:27-28)

After beginning with limited word recognition and simple speech development, Anna proves that she is a natural-born teacher:

(a week later. Midday. Anna and the Robot are in exactly the same place. They are alone. She holds an iPad with pictures on it, which she swipes with each word.)

ANNA: Train.

ARTHUR: Train.

ANNA: Food.

ARTHUR: Food.

ANNA: Water.

ARTHUR: Wa-ter

Anna: Water.

ARTHUR: Wa-ter.

.....

ANNA: This is my home.

ARTHUR: My -home.

ANNA: No, it's—well, I guess it is your home too "My" is a possessive word.

(She gestures with her arms as she talks.)

My, mine. Ours. This is our home. We share it.

ARTHUR: What is "Share"? (Kazan 2019:39)

It is clear that helping Arthur to learn about the world revives Anna's own desire to try to live in it, despite how massively humanity has caused its destruction. In these scenes, Kazan's insightful wit is both piercing and amusing.

Anna and Robot Arthur soon become best friends. The opening up of a heart and the slow quiet progress, out of the darkness, by a human soul are clearly witnessed. It is to Arthur that Anna begins to confess and talk about all of her frustrations and secret feelings she keeps from Oliver. As Arthur is filled with more information and language from the human world, it gives an invaluable source of support for Anna. They also engage in some philosophical discussions:

ARTHUR: What is “a woman”? If it is not your job?
ANNA: People say “woman” and “man” to describe a person’s gender. It has to do with biology and...I don’t know, how someone identifies. In their mind. Their soul. Whatever. My body could have been born female...
ARTHUR: Am I a man?
ANNA: No. You don’t have a gender. You’re an object. A machine.
ARTHUR: Is that my job?
ANNA: Yes. Kind of. It is your function. Your purpose...
.....
ARTHUR: What is your purpose?
ANNA: I don’t know. I don’t have a purpose.
ARTHUR: Then... why were you made? If you don’t have a purpose?
ANNA: People don’t have purposes. It’s one of the things that make us different from machines. We aren’t made like you’re made. (Kazan 2019:40-41)

It is very interesting that the Robot asks some puzzling existential questions but Anna cannot really answer them. This raises one’s awareness for this moving and smooth argument about life facts that are always and forever taken for granted. It also reflects Kazan’s deep sense of humor and creative intelligence.

The relationship between Anna and Arthur is a significant illustration of hyperreality. It is described as the incapability of one’s consciousness to differentiate reality from a simulation of reality, specifically, in advanced postmodern societies. Hyperreality is seen as a condition in which what is real and what is fiction are seamlessly blended together so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins. It enables the merging of physical reality with virtual reality and human intelligence with artificial intelligence. Individuals may find themselves, for different reasons, more involved in the hyperreal world and less in the physical real one.

In such a hyperrealistic metaphor that is realized in the process of training the Robot how to interact and talk with humans, Anna finds herself emotionally attached to Arthur. Due to her vulnerability and her instinctive need for motherhood, she considers it as a foster child. Unfortunately Arthur is unable to reciprocate because, as it simply explains, it doesn’t have feelings. When Arthur,

the hunk of metal, repeatedly reminds Anna “I don’t have feelings” (Kazan 2019:51), it actually delivers a dispassionate treatise on Anna’s logical irrationality of despair. This is truly breathtakingly humane.

Kazan excelled in using the technique of hyperreality in her play and she succeeded in perplexing both her readers and spectators. She points to the process of simulation, pushing her audience to the virtual world. At the beginning, Anna finds it hard to simulate and accept the Helper Robot as a friend. The realistic image of the Robot, throughout the play, is brought up to prove how people can simulate their experience. However, there are certain painful situations and unbearable heartbreaks, that ‘*simming*’ cannot make up for. One is having a baby—which Anna and Oliver very much want, but how and when they have that child is not up to them.

In Kazan’s *After The Blast*, people usually ‘sim’ to detach themselves from the incongruity of their everyday dilemmas:

OLIVER: ...Would you mind very much...

ANNA: What?

OLIVER: If I Simmed a little?

(*Anna stiffens.*)

ANNA: Why?

OLIVER: Like I said. I had a hard day.

ANNA: ...Why don’t you vape a little?

OLIVER: I don’t want to be high. I just want to pretend I am some-place else for few minutes. (Kazan 2019:45-46)

In Kazan’s play, one can even ‘sim’ food, so tasteless lumps of whatever can be endowed with whatever desired taste or flavor:

OLIVER: But Anna hates it. Even little things. Standard things. I mean. we sim with food , of course –

SAM: Well, you’d be crazy not to do that –

OLIVER: Right, but Anna’s point is, why voluntarily sign up for more unreality – (Kazan 2019:11)

In another occasion:

ANNA: I’m sorry, we ran out of sweetener.

CARRIE: It’s okay. I’ll Sim it. (Kazan 2019:18)

As a matter of fact, Arthur with its body and the underground world with its dimensions have been created, by Kazan, to look absolutely realistic, taking one's imagination to the fantastic future. She attempts a new style of imagined art that reproduces a highly realistic graphic representation. Kazan believes that the current society has substituted all reality and meaning with signs and symbols, and that human experience is actually a simulation of reality. This is highly illustrated in:

SAM: ...Last week we simmed a Day At The Beach. It was incredible. We put on Suntan Lotion. Gloria made Sand Castles. We swam. I swear, the guys that design that stuff are the artists of our time. Every detail. Fish in the water, seaweed – (Kazan 2019:10)

In this sense, Kazan's *After The Blast* brings a new form of resistance in a hyperrealistic dystopian style. Her moral play offers an advice for the present generation through Anna saying: "It doesn't seem very ethical. Bringing a baby into this kind of world. What kind of life would he have?" (Kazan 2019:49). Her dystopian play does not alleviate, but it amplifies the real confrontation between "the naked self and the naked world" (Trotter 2001:93). Kazan shows that the world is being stirred and directed towards an unknown catastrophe. The world is given an underground dimension and machines; robots, turned to be emotional and realistic.

Technological control is the first important aspect of Dystopia, where science and technology threaten to dominate and destroy humanity. The government plays a major role in imposing technological control over its citizens. In Kazan's play, there is an oppressive totalitarian ruling system. The first words spelt out by Oliver, "I'm sorry, but I have to ask: real or reproduction?" (Kazan 2019:5) emphasize that they do live in another world, that is to say, the world has moved 'underground' as a result of environmental destruction caused by a nuclear fallout. The ruling system forces using technology in reproduction:

OLIVER: Yup, raised together - "brothers" practically, if we can still use that word -

SAM: Well, I know actual brothers, so I guess it's still applicable-

OLIVER: You know a multiple?

SAM: My friend Hakim has two boys.

OLIVER: No kidding.

SAM: He and his wife - you wouldn't guess if from looking at them, believe me - but somehow, together: genetic jackpot. The strongest, healthiest, prettiest kids. The Council thought it was worth the investment. (Kazan 2019:6)

Moreover, chip use is obligatory for young children too:

OLIVER: I mean, we both have the Chip and everything –

SAM: I don't think you can opt out anymore –

OLIVER: I'm pretty sure parents can still decide not to Chip –

SAM: They didn't give us an option. Chipped Gloria at six months.

OLIVER: Oh. That's changed then. Anna won't like that.

SAM: But, without a Chip, how would you participate communally? (Kazan 2019:10)

Environmental destruction is another crucial characteristic of Dystopia. Dystopian fiction is often set in places that are mostly inhabitable and have been environmentally destroyed. In Kazan's play, people live underground and nature turns to be a distant memory. Mountains, rivers, sunset, little silvery fish — these things are only accessible as collections of pixels on a screen, or as 'sims': virtual sensory experiences simulated in the brain by means of an implanted chip. Living underground pushes people to long for life aboveground:

CARRIE: You went aboveground and you didn't take any pictures?! (Kazan 2019: 20)

...ANNA: ... and suddenly I see this light...But then I realize... (*Gets emotional all of a sudden.*)Carrie? It was *sunlight*. We rise up into the air...and there is sunlight all around us.

....

CARRIE: *Sunlight*. What was it like? (Kazan 2019:21)

In addition, as a result of environmental destruction, life underground has countless drawbacks:

VOICE:With every year underground, more and more children are born without sight. Simulation is an asset, but the sight-challenged population has voiced a need for physical aid and companionship. To fill that need, we present: The HELPER. (Kazan 2019:13-14)

.....

OLIVER: ...There is some lonely blind kid out there who spends all of his time with Simulations. You could be giving him a real companion. A friend.

.....

ANNA: Do you know why so many kids need a Robot to help them get around? Evolution. Blindness is adaptation when you live in the dark. (Kazan 2019:16)

.....

ANNA: Everyone acts like I'm unsuitable for *life* somehow, but it seems pretty logical to me to be depressed considering that our ancestors fucked up our ecology so *royally*, we had to retreat *underground*. We're being buried alive. (Kazan 2019:16)

.....

ANNA: If I had been born a hundred years ago, ... I would have died up there with the rest of them. Fried in the nuclear meltdowns or drowned in some tsunami. The final excrement of our civilization. And you know what? I think I would have been better off. (Kazan 2019:17)

In fact, climate change creates an environmental disaster that leads to a human crisis: retreated humans deep underground after the world above has been ruined. Kazan attempts to keep the population in balance by regulating fertility. Her characters examine the despair while trying to get a baby as a way of survival.

Survival is the third basic characteristic of Dystopia. The despotic powers and destruction in dystopian worlds often leave their inhabitants to fend for themselves. In Kazan's play, although there is no sign of war, catastrophe, bombing, or enemy, it seems like there was a plan to move underground, taking the best scientists to survive and prepare to 'recolonize' the aboveground world. Kazan's main characters, Anna and her husband, have been struggling to get a baby. This baby is used as a sign for the surviving of the human species. It

symbolizes the continuation of the life of mankind. However, they fail to get a child due to the environmental disaster. Anna is actually suspicious and could not trust the virtual-reality chips that have been implanted by the underground colonists. She finds that people simulate experience, but do not have a human sense of what is to be done. People are normalized to accept the present outputs without subjecting them to any critical analysis.

Both Anna and Oliver are good examples of the typical dystopian protagonist who is always searching for survival. They often feel trapped and are struggling to escape. Both question the existing social and political systems and believe or feel that something is terribly wrong with the society they live in. On the one hand, Oliver works in 'Environmental Solutions'. He is struggling for survival everyday:

OLIVER: You can't possibly understand how stressful my job is. You say you do, but you don't. The fate of our species—and many others—is in our hands. If we fail... We cannot fail. *We cannot fail*. Can you imagine what that's like? Every single day? (Kazan 2019:47)

On the other hand, at the beginning of the play, Anna stays at home. She is uncertain of what to do and who she is. For her, "nothing feels that meaningful right now" (Kazan 2019:15). She was a journalist, and is no longer. If everyone around her has adapted to life underground, Anna has not. As fully detached, hers is the most horrifying human response regarding survival:

ANNA: Everyone acts like I'm unsuitable for *life* somehow, but it seems pretty *logical* to me to be depressed considering that our ancestors fucked up our ecology so *royally*, we had to retreat *underground*. We're being buried alive. (Kazan 2019:16)

.....

ANNA: If I had been born a hundred years ago, there's no way I would have been chosen. No appreciable skill. Physically weak. Serotonin-deficient. I would have died up there with the rest of them. (Kazan 2019:17)

However, Kazan summarizes the real disaster at the end of the play indicating a hope for survival:

Everything is frozen. Ice, everywhere. The ozone layer is healing, but very slowly. There is a very high level of carbon monoxide in the air. That and the cold have killed off most of the plant life. Everything else—the ice and water and earth and air—are all contaminated from nuclear fallout. That is what we are working on the hardest, because it is something we understand. The rest will simply take time. Because the oceans rose so precipitously, even if we manage to clean everything up, the lines of the continents will look different from before. Nothing recognizable will remain. Years and years down the line, a very long time from now, the people who have survived will have to build everything from absolutely nothing. It will be very, very hard. Almost impossible. Those people who dare to go back aboveground will have to be incredibly brave--maybe foolish. Everything we are doing now is to prepare for that moment. All of our work, all our effort is directed to that far distant point. We exist now to prepare for those who come after, so they can be stronger and better than we are. And so they remember. That's why our lives matter. To keep life going. And make the next generation a little better. (Kazan 2019:77)

Kazan's post-apocalyptic world is a hope for rebuilding a utopian society. She motivates humans to share the new world with the robots, a new species genetically created, engineered, and programmed as a sustainable alternative to humanity. Kazan develops nostalgia for the past. She makes a hint to the lost peaceful environment and how present politics leads humans to an unknown end of destruction. Her characters do not attempt to escape from the dystopian reality, but they try to find remedies for the ruined civilization. Accordingly, "contemporary dystopian writers have realized the fact that the present has become a dystopia and the only hope lies not in escaping this dystopian reality but in finding effective ways of resistance" (Nebioglu 2020:180). This means that one has to search for a remedy as an alternative way of healing to glue the cracks that damage the planet and those who live in it.

Loss of individualism is another essential characteristic of Dystopia. The norm that may distinguish Dystopia is the imbalance that occurred in the struggle between the individual and the collective, though individuals are sometimes given some free space with respect to others. In *After The Blast*, the main characters, living in an underground world and being engaged in a collective plan for survival, attempt to rebuild their ruined world. In the same vein, they try to survive individually. The desire for individuality is to decide what one is going to do with one's life when one comes out from the underground world. However, with the collective, the problem lies with what the rest of people are willing to go along with. Such individual desire gives the post-apocalyptic narrative an insightful depth that reveals the collapse of human civilization. For that reason, post-apocalyptic Dystopia seems negatively imaging the American society. It shows the nature of the relationship between humans and the natural environment, and how humans violate the environment with their brutal force and the use of machine, leading to a desperate self-interest. Kazan critiques the utopian principle that leads to such a human disaster. The law of saving the environment seems explicit, but is inactive. It is subjected to no administration, but to human consciousness. In fact, Kazan appeals for an environmental reformation. Her play symbolizes a symptom of illness afflicting the body politics. Hence, Freud argues that human desire will definitely clash with civilization and that the individual journey to self-hood needs social prohibitions to be internalized. Freud points out to the human future as a species by saying:

The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering the disturbance of their communal life by the human instinct of aggression and self-destruction. It may be that in this respect precisely the present time deserves a special interest. Men have gained control over no difficulty in exterminating one another to the last man. They know this, and hence come a large part of their current unrest, their unhappiness and their mood of anxiety. (1961:104)

Kazan follows Freud in predicting the proliferation of dystopias in the technological era. She does give a warning of what may come, not by re-familiarization, but by revealing a clear image of the imaginary dystopian world. She portrays the world destiny under capitalism. Rosenfeld said that “we

recognize the terms under which we live as horrific, without dystopia's cushioning recourse to a future in which such a world *does not come to pass*" (2021:201).

Most dystopian fiction depicts the dangers of conformity. However, in Kazan's play, the needs of society as a whole are compared to individual needs. What both Anna and Oliver ultimately face is tougher than traditional issues of trust and commitment. Kazan succeeded in delineating a futuristic man-woman relationship:

OLIVER: Well. I'm aware there is a Chip in my brain, separate from me. I'm aware when to interact with that Chip. I am simulating something that is *not real*. I am also aware that Chip could allow me to sit on a beach right now, watching extinct animals fly through the air.

Beat.

I know it isn't real. Believe me. What does it matter if I give my brain a little relief? What harm does it do to you?

ANNA: It does harm me.

OLIVER: How?

ANNA: It's a loss to me, because you are my husband and I care what happens to your brain. If you start Simming, I'll be able to tell you're different! That you're doing something to alter the fabric of your—

OLIVER: I've been Simming for months.

Beat.

And you've never noticed. (Kazan 2019:47)

After The Blast adopts the black mirror of science fiction to shed light on human betrayals both personal and global. By the end of the play, Anna discovers that the Robot Arthur is just a programmed machine and Oliver lies to her about training it:

ANNA: I trained you. I taught you to move and speak and understand commands... All the skills you would need to assist—

THE ROBOT: You didn't train me. I'm programmed to do those things.

ANNA: No—(Kazan 2019:68).

Even underground, after an apocalypse, one will put what remains of one's faith in his or her loved ones, and *After the Blast* challenges what happens when that trust is manipulated. In a post-apocalyptic world, Kazan suggests, all the old questions about love, connection, and family still remain. However, Anna is shocked and Kazan wonders whether a relationship can survive the apocalypse.

As a post-apocalyptic play, Kazan lets her characters speak on behalf of the present generation. Anna says: "That our lives are so awful we have to augment them in any way possible. That everything good has already happened and there's nothing left worth sticking around for" (Kazan 2019:49). Kazan tries to rebuild the destroyed world after the blast, healing it by providing a programmed robot that consoles survivors. Her post-apocalyptic play implies as, Teresa Heffernan indicates, "a living on afterwards that inevitably returns to earthbound questions of how to live in the world" (2008:6). For that reason, a post-apocalyptic perspective is used in this paper to emphasize re-shaping the world through the predictions and aftermath of a climate catastrophe. It is an attempt to take a contemplating pause looking at the approaching catastrophic end of the world. The characters, in such a post-apocalyptic play, live between two nightmares, that is to say, between the end of everything and the end of meaning.

Kazan's *After The Blast* is a call for a warning for the intentional silence towards climate change. The play is not about the present, but about the coming future that would be toughened into this last form. It unmasks the hostile facts that threaten the lives of the inhabitants of the universe. The play is an alarming narrative to the life of the next generation, raising expectations and recommendations to avoid the coming world disaster that most people may not be aware of.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has examined the various aspects of Dystopia utilizing the framework of hyperreality, with special reference to Zoe Kazan's play *After The Blast* (2019). These dystopian characteristics revolve around technological control, environmental destruction, survival and loss of individualism. Moreover, hyperreality is exemplified in the employment of science fiction and artificial intelligence. Kazan excelled in delving deep into a profound postmodern understanding for the future of mankind and re-shaping the world.

Kazan has written her play, *After The Blast*, as a warning in the form of a satire. She interprets life as a nightmare that seeps from technological machines, destroying the planet and putting an end to the human species. Kazan attempts to empower her audience to think critically about the present in a way that may avert the dystopian disaster. She motivates her audience to imagine their future lives, placing them underground as the climate change destroys the universe. *Everything is about to freeze, turning the earth into a ball of ice*. Creating a parallel universe and an extrapolation of the world, Kazan's characters live in a no place of utopia, trying to remember and re-imagine the utopian world. If utopia is a desirable state of reality and an imagined place that is not existent, dystopia is an undesirable place and is located outside of utopia, and it represents a "bad place" (Rosenfeld 2021:52, where no one would like to live in. Kazan actually provides her audience with a free image of where politics intends to take a whole nation.

In fact, Kazan's play is a serious critique to American politics. It becomes a threat not only to the American nation, but also to all humans worldwide. It does not find a way to avert the world from the climate disaster by trying to reproduce a new hope and an alternative, but it goes further to lamenting the end of the world. Females become the last hope for survival and it will be a disaster if they could not be able to bear children. Children are supposed to give hope in life for new generations.

Kazan's *After The Blast* seems the perfect dystopian metaphor that balances between the crucial exploitation of capitalism and the male-superego. She invites her readers to look deeply in all directions. Here, it could be seen that the language of the play, *After The Blast* is a kind of resistance to terrors of science, capitalism, and authoritarianism. Kazan brings an extrapolation of the world to enhance the human resistance and coexistence in a world being heading to an unknown end. Such an extrapolation of the world is designed to compare between an unbearable lived reality and a virtual world that may host and accommodate humans in such a disastrous climate change. Kazan carves a hope within her dystopian world to reveal that such a disastrous future can be avoided by rectifying and reorienting science.

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ما بعد نهاية العالم: الواقع المرير وإعادة تشكيل العالم في مسرحية زوي كازان

"بعد الانفجار" (2019)

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المستخلص

أصبحت "الديستوبيا" أو الواقع المرير مشهود له بشكل متزايد بعد مطلع القرن. يتم كتابة أدب الواقع المرير بشكل خاص للشباب الذين اعتادوا على التقدم السريع للعلوم والتكنولوجيا. ان الهدف من هذه الورقة البحثية هو تتبع خصائص ادب الواقع المرير المختلفة في مسرحية زوي كازان "بعد الانفجار" (2019) في إطار تنظيم الواقع المفرط. تعتبر هذه الدراسة الأولى التي تجرى حول هذه المسرحية. وهي تجادل من أجل وضع تصور أكثر شمولاً للديستوبيا المعاصرة من أجل الاستجابة بشكل أكثر ملاءمة لطرق ما بعد الحداثة لفهم مستقبل البشرية وإعادة تشكيل العالم. والدراسة تدور حول نهج مستقبلي استفزازي يشكك في مستقبل كل من البشرية والكوكب. فمن خلال فهم جاذبية الخيال الشبابي البائس، تزود كازان قراءها وجمهورها بتصورات جديدة حول الممارسات السياسية والاجتماعية الصعبة. و بعد وصفها بانها مظلمة ومعقدة، فمسرحية "بعد الانفجار" هي نتاج تفاعل تدخل بين الذكاء الاصطناعي والغرائز والعواطف البشرية الأساسية. في الواقع، توفر مسرحية كازان للشباب فرصة للتفكير في أنفسهم وحياتهم، ومساعدتهم خلال رحلتهم إلى النضج والاستقلالية و اكتشاف الذات.

الكلمات الدالة:

" بعد الانفجار" – الواقع المرير - الواقع المفرط - ما بعد نهاية العالم - زوى كازان