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TESIS DOCTORAL

Visions of Dystopia: Reflections on the Post-Fordist Factory in
Contemporary Science-Fiction

Visiones de la distopía: reflexiones sobre la fábrica posfordista en
la ciencia-ficción contemporánea

D.ª Debora Rinaldi

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ciencia-ficción contemporánea

Autor: D. ª Debora Rinaldi

Director/es: Dr. David Walton

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DE LA TESIS PRESENTADA PARA OBTENER EL TÍTULO DE DOCTOR

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses a selection of prominent science-fiction films and series with the objective of contributing towards the configuration of a cognitive map (intended in the Jamesonian sense of the mapping out of human existence under contemporary capitalism, and of the complex social relations that structure our lived reality (1988, p. 347-360)), focusing on the *Black Mirror* Netflix anthology by Charlie Brooker and Annabel Jones (2013), the cyberpunk series *Altered Carbon*, also aired by Netflix and directed by Laeta Kalogridis (2018), as well as *Blade Runner*, by Ridley Scott (1982), and its sequel, *Blade Runner 2049* directed by Denis Villeneuve (2017). The concept of cognitive mapping is described by Fredric Jameson as the description or prediction of a new aesthetic characterised by its pedagogical and cognitive function, which charts and coordinates the conscious and unconscious representations within narratives of the subject's real living conditions and their relationship to the totality of class structures and relations (Jameson, 1988, p. 347).

Through the analysis of these films and series, I aim to uncover the untapped potential of a materialist analysis predominantly based on the theories of Italian workerism and post-workerism. Workerism is a political and cultural movement which originally emerged in Italy in the early 1960s. Also known as *operaismo*, it centred its theory on the antagonistic mass-worker in the setting of the Fordist factory. Post-workerism, or *post-operaismo* shifts its focus from the workerist emphasis on the mass-worker to a new subject of production, who within post-Fordist production is no longer located within the factory, but in society at large. Due to their focus on the changing nature of production and on the changing composition of the worker, as well as on intellect as the driving force behind production, when applied to

science-fiction narratives, these theories can help provide a current, detailed social analysis, thus they are beneficial to the project of creating a cognitive map of post-Fordism. I will apply the theories of prominent workerist and post-workerist theorists such as Franco Berardi, Paolo Virno, Carlo Vercellone, and Antonio Negri.

Through the interpretation of the narratives, symbolisms and characters in the films and series, I will provide an analysis of the emerging reflections of post-Fordism. This implies a focus on commodity fetishism, as well as on the characteristics of immaterial production and its effects. My study will be focused on the composition of the post-Fordist subject, examining socio-psychological characteristics as shaped by the requirements of production, as well as ways of relating and confronting the world connected to post-Fordist capital, raising awareness of how the intensification of immaterial production and consumption have affected the way individuals confront their social reality and interactions as reflected in the narratives.

I will also explore the dynamics of antagonism and dissent emerging within the films and series, pinpointing on one hand the impulse for radical change and awareness of the limitations of capitalist relations, and on the other hand, awareness of the biopolitical power and its resulting ideological hold on the subject. I will locate within the narratives symbolisations of conflict as the motor for the development of capitalism. Finally, I will analyse the prospect of new forms of dissent as represented in the narratives, focusing on the contrast between the affirmation of political alternatives as opposed to tactical subtraction as a necessary stepping stone for the creation of a new form of consciousness. Through my analysis I will provide a new perspective within studies of contemporary science-fiction to contrast with those that focus on existential and ethical aspects, as well as with postmodernist interpretations and analyses which focus on the power structures within capitalist society.

ABSTRACTO EN ESPAÑOL

Mi tesis analiza una selección de películas y series de ciencia-ficción con el objetivo de contribuir a la configuración de un mapa cognitivo (entendido en el sentido jamesoniano de la cartografía de la existencia humana bajo el capitalismo contemporáneo, y de las complejas relaciones sociales que estructuran nuestra realidad vivida (Jameson 1988, pp. 347-360)), centrada en la antología de Netflix *Black Mirror* (2013) de Charlie Brooker y Annabel Jones, la serie ciberpunk *Altered Carbon* también emitida por Netflix y dirigida por Laeta Kalogridis (2018), así como en *Blade Runner*, de Ridley Scott (1982), y su secuela, *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) dirigida por Denis Villeneuve . El concepto de cartografía cognitiva es descrito por Fredric Jameson como la descripción o predicción de una nueva estética caracterizada por su función pedagógica y cognitiva el cual traza y coordina las representaciones conscientes e inconscientes, dentro de las narrativas, de las condiciones de vida reales del sujeto y su relación con la totalidad de las estructuras y relaciones de clase (Jameson, 1988, p. 347).

A través del análisis de estas películas y series, pretendo descubrir el potencial inexplotado de un análisis materialista basado predominantemente en las teorías del obrerismo y el postobrerismo italianos. El obrerismo es un movimiento político y cultural que surgió en Italia a principios de los años sesenta. También conocido como *operaismo*, centraba su teoría en el obrero-masa antagonista, en el marco de la fábrica fordista. El postobrerismo, o post-operaismo, desplaza su centro de atención del énfasis obrerista en la masa trabajadora a un nuevo sujeto de producción, que dentro de la producción posfordista ya no se sitúa dentro de la fábrica, sino en la sociedad en general. Debido a su enfoque en la naturaleza cambiante de la producción y en la composición cambiante del trabajador, cuando se aplican a las narrativas de ciencia ficción, estas teorías pueden ayudar a proporcionar un análisis social

actual y detallado, por lo que son beneficiosas para el proyecto de crear un mapa cognitivo del posfordismo. Aplicaré las teorías de destacados teóricos obreristas y post-obreristas como Franco Berardi, Paolo Virno, Carlo Vercellone y Antonio Negri.

A través de la interpretación de los simbolismos narrativos y los personajes de las películas y series, ofreceré un análisis de las reflexiones emergentes del posfordismo. Esto implica centrarse en aspectos como el fetichismo de la mercancía, el antagonismo dentro de las relaciones de clase y las formas de disidencia, así como en las características de la producción inmaterial y sus efectos. Mi estudio se centrará en la composición del sujeto posfordista, examinando las características sociopsicológicas moldeadas por los requisitos de la producción, así como las formas de relacionarse y enfrentarse al mundo vinculadas al capital posfordista, tomando conciencia de cómo la intensificación de la producción inmaterial ha afectado a la forma en que los individuos se enfrentan a su realidad social y a las interacciones reflejadas en las narrativas.

También exploraré las dinámicas de antagonismo y disidencia que surgen dentro de las películas y series, señalando, por un lado, el impulso de cambio radical y la conciencia de las limitaciones de las relaciones capitalistas y, por otro, la conciencia del poder biopolítico y el consiguiente dominio ideológico sobre el sujeto. Localizaré en las narraciones simbolizaciones del conflicto como motor del desarrollo del capitalismo. Por último, analizaré las perspectivas de nuevas formas de disidencia representadas en los relatos, centrándome en el contraste entre la afirmación de alternativas políticas frente a la sustracción táctica como peldaño necesario para la creación de un nuevo capitalismo.

A través de mi análisis aportaré una nueva perspectiva dentro de los estudios de la ciencia-ficción contemporánea en contraste con aquellos que se centran en aspectos existenciales y éticos, así como con las interpretaciones y análisis postmodernistas que se centran en las estructuras de poder dentro de la sociedad capitalista.

INTRODUCTION

> 'Why talk about dystopia today, here? Because we have to talk about our lives, here, today. We have to both testify and delve into, try to illuminate, what is happening to us all, in and around each of us' (Suvin, 2010, p. 404)

The series *Black Mirror* and *Altered Carbon*, and the films *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* are without doubt among the most popular and acclaimed contemporary examples of science-fiction TV and cinematic media. Their narratives present depictions of dystopian future worlds that speak to the anxieties characterising contemporary society, offering portrayals of social settings plagued by exploitation and inequality. The 'parables of an imperfect present' (to borrow Suvin's definition of science fiction (Suvin, 2010, p. 171)) contained within these works contain a vital gift: a reflected awareness of the need for social change, and the perception of the possibility and necessity of transcending our flawed social system.

The films and series are examples of distinct subgenres: *Black Mirror* is definable as soft sci-fi according to its definition as a genre focused on the anthropological, sociological and psychological aspects of advancements (Pucher, 2007, np), whilst *Altered Carbon* and the *Blade Runner* films are examples of cyberpunk, which is characterised by its depictions of a high-tech future within a noir setting (Butler 2000, pp. 9-14) each one offering representations of technology, the exploitation and misuse of which, within the social settings depicted, results in dystopian consequences.

Technology is more than a common theme in the narratives: whether it be the stack and sleeve technology in *Altered Carbon*, the bioengineering of replicants in *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*, or the various cookie technologies and VR experiences in *Black Mirror*, it stands as protagonist, driving the plot forwards and shaping the worlds depicted. Likewise, the criticism of society within the narratives is also directly linked to issues concerning technological development within capitalist social settings, substantiating the necessity for a Marxist interpretation. As expressed by Marx, "[…] only since the introduction of machinery has the workman fought against the instrument of labour itself, the material embodiment of capital" (Marx, 2013, p. 294): the use of technology within a society is inevitably linked to developments within production, and, as a consequence, to dynamics of class conflict.

Given this, it is extremely surprising that currently available studies of science-fiction do not, as of yet, offer a systematic analysis based on production, and the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism. The post-Fordist turn in production, characterised by flexible, specialised and increasingly immaterial forms of production, as highlighted by Barker, has translated into changes within society at large: socio-political relations, lifestyle, and everyday culture (Barker, 2004, entry 151). My thesis proposes to fill this gap in research by using Marxist theories focused on contemporary capitalism and, specifically, on post-Fordism in all its aspects (immaterial and flexible production, a focus on consumer choice and identity, and reliance on consumer data and information technology) so as to extract the films and series' reflections on our contemporary social setting.

Within current available studies, there is a wide range of interpretations of the films and series reliant on existential, moral, and ontological perspectives: the questions of what it means to be human or whether robots can feel emotions, and concerns with the ethicality of new forms of technology. The collection of essays *Black Mirror and Philosophy: Dark*

Reflections, for instance, sets out to answer an array of philosophical, ontological, and ethical questions, from 'are digital blocks ethical?' (Canca and Ilhe in Irwin and Johnson, 2020, pp. 71-79), and 'could heaven be a place on Earth' (Cook in Irwin and Johnson 2020, pp. 109-117) to 'should we use computers to help us find mates?' (Cleary and Pigliucci in Irwin and Johnson, 2020, pp. 168-176). The book *The Moral Uncanny in Black Mirror* also focuses on issues of morality: the authors Gibson and Carden, in fact, define the question of 'how should we live?' as pervasive within Brooker's anthology (2021).

The collection of essays *Blade Runner 2049 and Philosophy* focuses on questions concerning what is real and what can be considered human, examining, among other issues, the role of memory within the posthuman condition (O'Connor in Bunce and McCrossin, 2019, pp. 51-57) and the ethicality of genetic modification (Noll and Hubbard-Mattix in Bunce and McCrossin, 2019, pp. 77-83). Whilst such analyses contain a certain speculative value in the sparking of ethical, moral, and ontological debates, I believe they are neglecting the value contained in the use of these narratives as a lens to explore great issues specific to our own social and historical moment, such as rising exploitation, precarisation, alienation and growing economic disparity.

Research which doesn't fall under this existentialist or ontological framework tends to be focused on the films and series' depictions of power structures, such as Schopp's analysis of surveillance and social media as post-human prisons in *Black Mirror* (Schopp in McSweeney and Joy, 2019, pp. 57-67), or Petrovic's analysis of the use of mob punishment as an ideological state apparatus to consolidate power (Petrovic in McSweeney and Joy, 2019, pp. 69-81). These interpretations function on the theoretical understanding of society as shaped by relations of power, which I choose to reject in favour of a view of power as simply the frame which is constructed on the foundations of production.

Furthermore, in those instances where aspects of contemporary production have been explored in current studies, they either form a marginal part of the analysis, or do not provide an in depth and complete analysis. For instance, the ideological role of the gamification of work is analysed by Johnson, (Johnson in McSweeney and Joy, 2019, pp. 33-42), and issues surrounding precarisation and post-Fordist exploitation have been explored by Labad-Arias (2018), but these studies remain limited because they do not offer a comprehensive interpretation of post-Fordism as a totality.

I aim to create a wide-ranging analysis of how post-Fordism and the post-Fordist subject are reflected in the films and series, answering the following questions: how do the specific characteristics of production shape the composition and social psychology of the subject as reflected in the films and series? Within the narratives, what aspects of the characters' interactions with technology, understanding of the world, and personal relationships can be seen as a result of immaterial production and the reification of subjectivity? What role do antagonism and dissent play within the narratives, and can these elements be connected to notions of class conflict? How have new technologies transformed dissent, as reflected in the films and series? What do the narratives have to offer in terms of awareness of the limitations of contemporary capitalism and impulses for radical change?

Within contemporary society, the characteristic aspects of industrial capitalism (the reproduction of cheap, mass commodities for the consumer market, full employment, the welfare state, mass political parties and trade unions, as defined by Trott (2007, p. 203)) give way to new forms of production, and consequent changes within society. Interpretations of culture as a reflection of society thus benefit from a new focus on where and how narratives reflect this development.

Thus, through a materialist methodology, I will situate contemporary subjectivity using a cognitive map, to assess how the narratives portray existence within contemporary

capitalist society. My thesis will explore the reality of exploitation and conflict in the post-Fordist social factory and the utopian impulse for change. The protagonist of my thesis is the post-Fordist subject, reflected in the variety of characters and narratives offered by the works I analyses, which I view as representations of class struggle and relations of production. Within these opening pages I will clarify the reason why I chose these specific films and series, explain my personal conviction about the importance of such a project, and thirdly, elucidate my chosen theoretical framework and the reason for this choice. Finally, I will provide an overview of the structure of the thesis.

CHOICE OF MATERIAL.

As analysed in studies such as Csicsery-Ronay's 'Marxist Theory and Science-Fiction' (2003) and Bould and Miéville's *Red Planets: Marxism and Science-Fiction* (2009), Marxism and the genre of science-fiction have enjoyed a fruitful association: the images of utopian societies offered within futuristic narratives, by providing an opposition to capitalist exploitation, bear relevance to the Marxist vision of historical emancipation through revolution (Csicsery-Ronay, 2003, p. 113). The films and series I analyse are no exception to this, providing through their depictions of dystopian worlds a reflection of capitalism as a deeply flawed social system.

The films and series chosen for my analysis are examples of science-fiction narratives which have all enjoyed widespread recognition and popular success. *Black Mirror* was nominated for seventeen British Academy Awards, winning two, and nominated for fifteen Emmy Awards, winning nine. *Altered Carbon* was nominated at the 44th Saturn Awards for Best New Television Series. *Blade Runner 2049* won a Saturn Award for Best Science-

Fiction Film in 2018, as well as two Academy Awards for Best Cinematography and Best Visual Effects. The original *Blade Runner* film, on the other hand, is considered to be a major influence on cinematic depictions of future worlds (Alter 2014, p. 87). The popular and critical success enjoyed by these films and series can be attributed to the resonance of the metaphors contained in their depiction decayed worlds: they both seek to highlight issues of violence, inequality, and exploitation within our society. These depictions allow for the development within the imaginary of both the awareness of what needs to change within society and encourage the impulse towards the debate concerning alternatives to our current system.

The directors and cast have often voiced the intent to raise awareness around the social issues of our day. In an interview, for instance, *Black Mirror*'s director Charlie Brooker expressed the intention to unsettle the viewer through the depictions of the terrifying consequences of technological advances used applied for the wrong purposes: 'A lot of shows, most shows exist to reassure people, and I kind of wanted to do something […] that would actively unsettle people, 'cause I kind of felt that was missing' (Channel 4 Entertainment, 2014). According to actor Joel Kinnaman, who stars as protagonist Takeshi Kovacs in *Altered Carbon*, wealth disparity is one of the main issues represented in the film: '[The series] portrays an exaggeration of a lot of the problems that we see in society today. We see the growing income inequality, the richer capturing a larger amount of the wealth and the poor live in […] squalor and have much less power to affect their lives and … *Altered Carbon* is the extreme exaggeration of that' (The Knockturnal, 2018).

By placing these social issues within imaginary worlds, these narratives provide the 'representational meditation on radical difference', which Jameson pinpointed as constitutive of the Utopian form (and its opposite, dystopia (Jameson, 2005 p. xii)).

It is the social criticism contained within these works, and their ability to present a *eutopian*[1] impulse, which in Suvin's words is the significance of dystopia itself (Suvin, 2010, pp. 407-408). In short, I have chosen these four works for their popularity and resonance within popular culture, for the richness offered in variety of narratives, for their artistic adoption of dystopia to convey their commentary, and for their focus on important issues within contemporary society.

Black Mirror is an anthology composed of six series, each episode having a separate plot and different setting (though at times containing 'easter eggs', references to previous episodes). This format allows for a great variety of different narratives, thus making it incredibly rich in its offer of topics, messages, symbolisms.

Like a mirror, black screens reflect one's face, so as expressed by its title and opening image, of a cracked, dark screen resembling that of a mobile phone or computer screen when switched off, *Black Mirror*'s premise is to offer a dark reflection of our contemporary society, depicting our flaws, fears, and the possible ramifications of our future (Johnson, Marquez and Urueña in Irwin and Johnson, 2020, p. 3). The series has often been compared to *The Twilight Zone* (Serling, 1959-1964) a series which also weaves together issues concerning the use of technology and the future of society, offering a series of tales set within a dystopian future. Whilst science-fiction is known to base its narrative on a novum, a novelty or innovation, according to Suvin's definition (Suvin, 1979, p. 4) when it comes to *Black Mirror*, the worlds and technologies depicted are in many ways eerily resembling our own, a stylistic choice which makes the narratives relatable in the contemporary imaginary.

Altered Carbon is a cyberpunk series based on a novel by Richard K. Morgan (2001). Set in the year 2384, the events it depicts develop across centuries and move between Bay City, the future San Francisco, and the planet of Harlan's World. The series depicts a society

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[1] This is, according to Suvin, the radically better place to be striven for in the here and now (2010, p. 3).

in which science has been able to achieve immortality through the production of stack technology, by downloading consciousness (DHF) onto a microchip (the stack). The society depicted is plagued by social inequality, and the technology's benefits are only fully enjoyed by its elite, who are known as meths, from the biblical figure of Methuselah, due to their achievement of near immortality thanks to their wealth and power. The extreme inequality present within the depicted class system turns the utopian premise of this technology into a dystopia in which the rich are immortal and the poor are viewed by the rich as disposable.

The plot recounts the story of the envoy Takeshi Kovacs, part of a cast of legendary warriors who had taken part in a rebellion against the use of stack technology within the unequal social setting. When a prominent member of the meth elite, Lawrence Bancroft, is found dead in his study, after his reincarnation, he refuses to believe the police's assumption that he had attempted suicide, thus deciding to bring Kovacs back from the digitalised prison in which his consciousness was being stored as punishment for his having taken part in the envoy rebellion. Kovacs reluctantly accepts the meths' offer of employment, and his investigation will lead him to cross paths with new allies, in a journey of truth searching and fight for justice within the oppressed society of Bay City. The series' cyberpunk style implies a juxtaposition of social decay and technological advance, which allows for the exploration of social issues.

Also adapted from a novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* by Philip K. Dick (1968), the original *Blade Runner* is set on a dystopian future Earth in 2019 Los Angeles, and depicts a world in which bioengineered humanlike androids, called replicants, produced by tech-company Tyrell corporation, are exploited by humans for slave labour in off-world colonies. The replicants are created with a four-year lifespan in order to prevent them from developing any feelings, which might lead to a desire for freedom from exploitation. A special police unit, called blade runners, are tasked with 'retiring', or killing, any rogue

replicants that show signs of human-like feelings. When a group of replicants rebel against this limit and descend onto Earth in order to request an extension, the protagonist, Rick Deckard, a blade runner, is tasked with retiring them.

Set after the events of the original, the sequel, *Blade Runner 2049*, depicts a world in which new models of replicants, the Nexus 9, are created by a new corporation owned by Niander Wallace to be totally subservient. Some of these replicants were recruited as blade runners and tasked with hunting down another model, the Nexus 8, which had been built with natural lifespans but had rebelled against their exploitation. During one of his exploits, Nexus 8 blade runner K finds the remains of a female replicant, which is later discovered to have given birth to a child. The knowledge of the replicants' ability to reproduce is unwelcome by the system, as it would scientifically confirm parity between the human species and replicants, thus disintegrating the ideological premises for replicant exploitation.

PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT.

The motivation for this study is the satisfaction of a utopian urge well-expressed in Suvin's words, "We have no choice but to propose the most daring utopia, which is today, to begin with, not Earthly Paradise but the prevention of Hell on Earth" (2010, p. 259). Within the current historical moment, plagued by growing social and economic inequality, widespread military conflict, and impending ecological disaster, those who do not believe in the capitalist doctrine see the necessity of change, whilst those who believe that there is no alternative are left with cynical anti-utopianism. The aim of my analysis is to bring to the surface the narrative and imagery contained within these works as both an analysis of the present situation and an impulse for alternative futures. The genre of science fiction has been defined

by theorists such as Jameson as an invaluable utopian discourse within a time of ideological

closure in which the impulse of a utopian imagination has been strangled (2017, pp. 218-219).

The project of a cognitive mapping, introduced within literary theory by Jameson

(1988), is identified by the theorist as an essential precondition to the conception of any

alternative political project since it allows within social consciousness and imaginary for a

grasp of the social relations governing our existence, the stepping stone for the imagination of

a different social system, so to speak locating 'where we are' in society, in order to identify

'where we want to be', and my hope through this thesis is to extract from the works a

valuable contribution to the understanding of existence within post-Fordist capitalism,

through the analysis of its reflections within popular culture. As asserted by Jameson, it is

imperative to search for the seeds of a social consciousness particularly in our current reality,

in which individuals are increasingly detached from an understanding of the social relations at

work within society, in which there is a contradiction between 'the economic forms that

govern experience' and 'the immediate and limited experience of individuals' (1988, p. 349).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As I have mentioned above, my thesis aims to approach the series and films analysed from a

materialistic perspective. In this particular moment, production is undergoing a qualitative

change towards a predominantly post-Fordist (although this term has at times been criticised

for its western-centric position), increasingly immaterial production, appropriating aspects

such as intellect, creativity, and emotive and expressive potential; as a result, the seat of

subjectivity itself can be said to be involved within production. The post-Fordist immaterial

turn of production has been analysed by workerist and post-workerist (also known as *post-*

operaist) theory; prominent theorists within post-workerism are Franco Berardi, Carlo

Vercellone, Paolo Virno, Mario Tronti, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

This branch of theory is characterised by three tenets: a focus on the general intellect

as a productive force within capitalism, the analytical focus on the changing composition of

the working class, and the primacy of worker struggle within the development and dynamics

of productions. Whilst this current of Marxist theory has so far been overlooked within

science-fiction analysis, it can provide a crucial insight into how the appropriation of

intellectual, linguistic, communicative, and emotive human potential within post-Fordism and

its implications for subjectivity are reflected in the narratives.

One of the merits of post-workerist theory is its focus on changes within the evolution

capitalist production and the composition of the working class, the comprehension of which is

an indispensable step towards an understanding of capitalist relations in our times, and the

formation and organisation of dissent, as expressed by Negri (2014, p. 10). Focus on the

changes in production is the premise for the post-workerist conceptual reinterpretation of the

general intellect, evolved from its original meaning of the mainly technical knowledge

possessed by workers to a much more rounded and multifaceted understanding.

Particularly, Franco Berardi defines post-Fordist general intellect as 'the soul at work'

(2009a): much more than simply technical knowledge and expertise crystallised within the

machine, the soul as 'a web of attachments and tastes, attractions and inclinations' (2009a, p.

10) drives contemporary capitalist production. Berardi's theories are invaluable within an

interpretation of how subjectivity is affected by the process of production today, and can help

to uncover how, within science-fiction narratives, a wide range of human faculties is

represented as subjugated to the technologies depicted.

This understanding of the soul, which roots the metaphysical aspect of consciousness

to the materiality of a specific social setting, aims to contribute to studies on science fiction

by merging these two aspects, which are usually analysed in isolation: while books such as Broderick's *Consciousness and Science Fiction* (2018) have focused on the nature of the mind in works of science-fiction, and Bould and Miéville's *Red Planets* (2009) has focused instead on Marxist readings of the genre, I will apply theories which connect these two aspects by positing the exploitation of consciousness as a material concern.

Paolo Virno also analyses how the requirements of post-Fordist production create a set of characteristics that typify subjectivity within capitalism today: Virno defines these characteristics as the emotional tonalities among which are cynicism, opportunism, and curiosity (2004). The 'emotional situation' of the post-Fordist subject, as put by Virno, is intended not as a group of psychological traits, but rather as 'those modes of being and feeling so pervasive as to be common to the most diverse contexts of experience, both the time given over to work and that dedicated to what is called life' (1996, p. 22). I will apply this multifaceted analysis of the subjective traits implied within production and required by production to uncover the links between the characters within the narratives and the figure of the post-Fordist worker.

My analysis seeks to provide an examination of the antagonism within class relations as a subjective experience, as reflected in the characters. The post-workerist focus on antagonism and the emancipatory quality of intellect is particularly highlighted in the work of Mario Tronti, whose major work *Workers and Capital* (2019) focuses on the primacy of workers' struggle in shaping technology and the evolution of capital, and Carlo Vercellone, who identifies capital's reliance on intellect as a structural crisis within post-Fordist production, defining the knowledge-based economy characterising post-Fordism as *cognitive capitalism*, a term which emphasises the conflictual nature of the relation between knowledge and power in production. According to the theorist, post-Fordism enacts a formal

emancipation of the productive class from capital, constituting an obstacle to capitalist control of production (2005, pp. 2-3)

As well as workerism and post-workerism, I have utilised a variety of Marxist theories: for instance, Marcuse's definition of the happy consciousness as a rejection of the negative at play within commodity fetishism shapes my analysis of consumerism (1964, p. 227). Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the destructive potential of desire as production within capitalism (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983) informs my analysis of antagonism. Lacan's interpretation of jouissance as 'unlust' (Lacan, 1962, p. 112) and its relation to capital's depoliticization of dissent are present in my analysis of prefigurative politics. These theories, however, remain subject to the primacy of materialism. In this sense, I embrace Jameson understanding of Marxism not as a substitute to such theories, but as 'untranscendable horizon', a framework in which a pluralism of interpretative codes can operate (1981, p. x).

My thesis aims to explore the connections between capitalism as an ideological system and the meaning within contemporary forms of culture, with the aim of shedding light on issues such as exploitation, alienation, and inequality as emerging within cultural works, an objective Barker and Jane see as being central to cultural studies (2016, pp. 14-16). As suggested by Miéville, science fiction has not always been acknowledged in terms of its cultural significance and was only starting to gain academic attention in the 1970s (Bould and Miéville, 2009, p. 1). The tradition of cultural studies, however, has overcome distinctions between 'high culture' and 'inferior' or popular culture, and understands this distinction at best as simplistic, and at worst as linked to a classist perspective. As expressed by Milner, science fiction transcends and even deconstructs the high literature/popular culture binary in its privileging of content over form (2012, p. 22). Works of cultural studies such as Walton's (2012; 2008), as well as Storey's (2012) (2010), Barker and Jane's (2016), and Strinati's (2004) have provided an understanding of the value contained within analyses of popular

culture. Through my analysis I argue that the films and series are examples of popular culture which reflect elements of resistance to capitalism as an ideology.

STRUCTURE

I will structure my analysis into four main chapters, each one focused on a different aspect of the post-Fordist subjectivity: production, consumption, antagonism, and dissent. In the first chapter I will attempt to outline the characteristics of both post-Fordist production and the post-Fordist subject as emerging in the narratives and to identify personifications of the post-Fordist subject within the characters (both protagonists and secondary ones). I will analyse to what extent the narratives can offer reflections of the specific type of alienation deriving from post-Fordist immaterial production, which Berardi defined as a 'factory of unhappiness' (Berardi, 2009a, p. 90). Based on the post-workerist analysis of the socio-psychological make-up of the post-Fordist worker, I will determine to what extent the characters within the narratives can be viewed as personifying typically post-Fordist psychological traits. This chapter's overall objective is to determine how the films and series portray the subjective experience of life within our contemporary social setting and the links between subjectivity and capitalist production.

I will dedicate the second chapter to the aspect of commodification, tracing the evolution and character of commodity fetishism from a production in which commodity fetishism mainly implicated the possession of material objects, to a commodification which is defined by immaterial consumption (such as the fetishisation of experiences), and which blurs the boundaries between production and consumption. I will search for instances of fetishism within the narratives, analyse the characters' connection to (and instances of opposition to)

the commodity form, investigating to what extent the logic of fetishism has become a practise which overtakes all aspects of existence within post-Fordism.

The third chapter searches for depictions of antagonism within class relations as depicted in the films and series analysed, determining to what extent the hostility of characters within the narratives can be viewed as a reflection of class antagonism, and how the films and series might reflect on the contradictions of post-Fordist capitalism as a system based on the exploitation of intellect. The fourth chapter focuses on prefigurative politics, attempting to answer the difficult question of what might constitute effective dissent today as reflected in the narratives. I will analyse how different embodiments of opposition are reflected within the films' and series' characters and plot, in order to weigh in on the narrative's reflection on dissent within post-Fordism. Finally, in my conclusion I will make an assessment on the value of the works within a cognitive map of post-Fordist capitalism.

RESUMEN EN ESPAÑOL

INTRODUCCIÓN

Sin duda alguna, la ciencia-ficción es actualmente uno de los géneros predominantes en la cultura popular. Las raíces de su éxito se encuentran en gran parte en la conciencia de nuestro momento actual, en el que las certezas sobre el sistema social y económico capitalista se ponen más en duda cada día. El mismo Francis Fukuyama, que abordó la teoría del 'fin de la historia', en su libro *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) en su más reciente publicación *Liberalism and Its Discontents* afirma que la hegemonía neoliberal ya no puede darse por sentada (2022, p. viii). Esta nueva apertura a alternativas ideológicas da especial relevancia a la necesidad de un impulso utópico, como intento de trascender el actual paradigma capitalista. Según Fredric Jameson, la forma utópica característica de la ciencia-ficción "es en sí misma una meditación representacional sobre la diferencia radical" (2005, p. xii). Así pues, el análisis de este género debería centrarse en las reflexiones de las narraciones sobre lo que es nuestra sociedad y lo que, por otra parte, debería ser.

La disciplina de los estudios culturales tiene la función de analizar las reflexiones sociales de cambio que emergen en las narrativas, descubriendo nuevas formas de conciencia que surgen en las representaciones de mundos alternativos. Esta tesis se propone responder las preguntas: ¿qué reflexiones sobre las limitaciones de nuestro sistema actual, y qué posibilidades de una forma diferente de existencia, se pueden encontrar dentro de la ciencia-ficción? centrándose en una selección de películas y series de televisión populares de ciencia ficción: *Black Mirror*, *Altered Carbon*, *Blade Runner* y *Blade Runner 2049*.

Según las palabras de Marx, "[…] The human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" ("[...] la esencia

del hombre no es una abstracción inherente a cada individuo. En su realidad es el conjunto de las relaciones sociales" (Marx, 1998, p. 570 (traducción mía)). Siguiendo la convicción de Marx, en su núcleo, cualquier sociedad dada está conformada por el carácter y las relaciones de su producción. Metodológicamente, por lo tanto, adoptaré un enfoque materialista, si bien entendiendo la producción como factor en constante cambio, y centrándome en las transformaciones en la producción dentro del capitalismo contemporáneo.

Por lo que concierne los estudios disponibles sobre *Black Mirror*, *Altered Carbon*, *Blade Runner* y *Blade Runner 2049*, la mayoría de los análisis se centran en cuestiones existencialistas como la naturaleza de la conciencia humana y en cuestiones relativas a la ética dentro de la ciencia, abordando cuestiones como la ética de los bloques digitales (Canca y Ilhe en Irwin y Johnson, 2020, pp. 71-79), o 'cómo tendríamos que vivir' (Gibson y Carden, 2021). Sin embargo, desde una perspectiva materialista, la respuesta a esta pregunta no puede ser respondida completamente si no es a través de un análisis de que da la adecuada importancia a las relaciones de producción.

La producción contemporánea, definida como posfordismo, se aleja de la fábrica, hacia la producción de bienes inmateriales y la explotación del intelecto humano. En este sentido, si bien pretendo abordar las películas y series desde una perspectiva materialista, los aspectos en los que me centraré son inmateriales: analizaré cómo el proprio intelecto humano, o "el alma al trabajo", en palabras de Franco Berardi (2009a), explotado dentro de la producción capitalista, emerge dentro de las narrativas. Mi tesis trazará el perfil del sujeto posfordista: sus características, su composición emocional, su explotación y su carácter antagonista, tal y como se refleja en las narrativas analizadas.

Metodología y marco teórico

La subsunción posfordista del intelecto dentro de la producción propiamente dicha ha sido explorada por la rama teórica italiana del operaismo y el post-operaismo, que ha tenido el mérito de captar la evolución de la producción capitalista y sus repercusiones sociales al concentrarse en la figura del obrero, otorgando así al sujeto de la producción un nuevo e inestimable sentido de agencia. Los principios del post-operaismo se pueden resumir en: un enfoque en la naturaleza cambiante de la producción y la composición cambiante de la clase trabajadora, la comprensión del intelecto general como el impulso para el desarrollo capitalista y del carácter antagónico del intelecto de los trabajadores dentro de las relaciones capitalistas. Estos principios guiarán mi análisis.

Por ejemplo, en la interpretación de *Altered Carbon*, la conceptualización por Paolo Virno de las tonalidades emocionales del trabajador posfordista (2004, pp. 84-88) permite comprender cómo ciertas características, como el cinismo, la curiosidad y la inquietud, se originan dentro de la producción. Estas características en un análisis de los personajes se reflejan como vinculadas a los requerimientos de la producción. Dentro de mi análisis de *Blade Runner*, la comprensión post-operaista del antagonismo obrero como motor que impulsa el desarrollo capitalista permite comprender cómo los replicantes constituyen tanto la fuerza motriz detrás de la producción capitalista como, al mismo tiempo, un elemento antagónico dentro de ella.

ESTRUCTURA

La tesis se divide en cuatro capítulos, cada uno de los cuales aborda un aspecto diferente del posfordismo y del sujeto posfordista. Mi objetivo es, a través del análisis de los cuatro aspectos de la producción, el consumo, el antagonismo y el disenso. Cada uno de estos aspectos permite comprender mejor al sujeto explotado y su relación con su estado de explotación.

El enfoque en las características de la producción post-fordista, que es mi centro de atención en los primeros capítulos, permite comprender cómo ciertos aspectos de la subjetividad, los rasgos psicológicos, así como la *Weltanschauung* del sujeto, sus formas de sentir y estar en el mundo, guardan una relación directa con los requisitos de la fábrica posfordista. En este capítulo, me centraré en cómo la subsunción del "alma" como sede de la subjetividad por parte del capital se refleja en las imágenes y la narrativa de los requisitos, argumentando que los temas recurrentes de la conciencia duplicada y descargada en un microchip revelan una preocupación por la subsunción del intelecto por parte del capital.

En particular, los episodios de *Black Mirror*, 'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too' y 'White Christmas', reflejan un capital que explota el intelecto entendido también en un sentido más amplio de atracción, inclinación, afecto, según la definición de Berardi (2009a, p. 10). En el primero, la creatividad de la estrella del pop Ashley y su capacidad para interactuar con sus fans se mercantilizan a través de la producción de una muñeca de inteligencia artificial, mientras que, en el segundo, los gustos y preferencias de Greta se comercializan a través de la duplicación de su conciencia insertada en un electrodoméstico.

En un análisis de la producción también es esencial destacar cómo los requisitos de la producción producen ciertas características psicosociales que pueden encontrarse de forma generalizada en la sociedad. Así, en el capítulo dedicado a la producción se analiza el modo en que las "tonalidades emocionales" de Virno se reflejan en los personajes y se vinculan a la crítica del capitalismo en la narración. Analizaré la serie *Altered Carbon*, relacionando las características del cinismo, la curiosidad voraz, y el oportunismo (según la definición de Virno) (2004, pp. 84-88), propias del protagonista Takeshi Kovacs y otros personajes, para determinar cómo estas características presentes en las narrativas mantienen relevancia en comprensión del subjeto post-Fordista. Por último, ningún análisis de la producción posfordista estaría completo sin centrarse en la precariedad, definida por Berardi como "el corazón negro" (2009b, p. 148) de la producción posfordista. Analizaré cómo la precariedad emerge en las narrativas como una condición existencial que tiene sus raíces en la explotación capitalista.

El segundo capítulo se centra en el aspecto del consumismo y su relación con las cuestiones de autenticidad dentro de las narraciones. Como argumentaré, mientras que la mayoría de las interpretaciones se han centrado en la idea de autenticidad en su sentido ontológico, destacando, por ejemplo, las preocupaciones en torno al estatus de la relación romántica entre Joi (una pareja holográfica comercializada) y K (un replicante) en *Blade Runner 2049*, o la cuestión de vivir en realidades virtuales, como el paraíso de RV de San Junípero en *Black Mirror*. Un análisis con enfoque materialista permite comprender que estas preocupaciones no sólo se refieren a cuestiones simplemente ontológicas, sino a la forma en que los individuos se relacionan entre sí y con su entorno. El capítulo sobre el consumo se centra en los efectos negativos, la psicología y el papel biopolítico del consumismo dentro de la sociedad posfordista, tal y como se refleja en las películas y series.

Mi análisis presta especial atención a cómo la evolución de la producción posfordista ha provocado cambios tanto en el carácter del consumo como en el de la producción. En particular, con la llegada de la producción inmaterial, el consumidor está llamado a participar en el proceso de producción a través de la personalización. El papel activo del consumidor en la producción de mercancías está enmarcado por el capital como una mayor libertad dentro de la producción, pero surge dentro de la narrativa de *Blade Runner 2049* como fuente de alienación. Además de esto, la lógica del fetichismo de la mercancía se refleja en las narraciones como algo que afecta la forma en que los personajes se enfrentan a las relaciones y a la existencia misma. Dentro de mi análisis de 'San Junipero' equiparo la negación de ciertos aspectos no deseados de la realidad con el funcionamiento psicológico del consumismo, en el que para disfrutar de una mercancía el consumidor niega necesariamente aspectos como la explotación que hay detrás de la producción.

Mi análisis de 'Be Right Back' y 'Hang the DJ' destaca cómo, gracias a su enfoque en la definición de la identidad personal a través de la autoexpresión y la inclinación (como expresión de preferencias y gustos), el consumo en el posfordismo moldea al individuo de acuerdo con los principios ideológicos del neoliberalismo. Mientras que 'Be Right Back' refleja cómo el papel biopolítico recién adquirido de la mercancía relega al consumidor a una posición de pasividad, 'Hang the DJ' se centra en el aspecto regulador del consumismo, destacando su función ascética en las palabras de Stimilli (2017), a través de la cual el sujeto queda atrapado en un estado de renuncia ideológica a aspectos de la existencia fuera del consumo y de la empresa económica

Aunque el capitalismo emerge en las narrativas como beneficiándose de un fuerte control ideológico sobre el sujeto, otros aspectos que emergen de la narrativa lo describen como un sistema profundamente defectuoso y contradictorio. He dedicado el tercer capítulo al antagonismo, ya que creo que este es un aspecto es omnipresente en las representaciones del

capitalismo en las películas y series. El método materialista basado en las teorías del postobrerismo permite comprender cómo se refleja en la narración el antagonismo implícito en la producción capitalista. En particular, la concepción post-obrerista del control del intelecto como campo de batalla entre el capital y el trabajo permite interpretar a los replicantes de *Blade Runner*, descritos en la película como "más humanos que los humanos", como una representación del general intellect en su superioridad y de la lucha del trabajador explotado por la emancipación social e intelectual.

La apropiación del cerebro social por parte del capital, unida a la función desreguladora de un sistema que se beneficia de la destrucción de las fronteras, se revela en las narraciones como la condición previa para la creación de un sujeto antagonista. Esto emerge en mi análisis de *Altered Carbon*, en el que la tecnología de almacenamiento de la consciencia, que permite a la clase alta prolongar su vida. La eliminación de la muerte en este sistema capitalista constituye un arma de doble filo, puesto que, por un lado, consiente el enriquecimiento sin limitaciones de la élite, pero por otro permite la creación de una subjetividad sin límites corporales ni de tiempo, o espacio, un 'ángel exterminador' (según la definición del esquizofrénico de Deleuze y Guattari (1983, p. 35)) que empuja los límites del sistema capitalista. Dentro de un análisis del antagonismo subjetivado en *Altered Carbon*, el uso del concepto de "producción deseante" de Deleuze y Guattari (1983) complementa la teoría post-obrerista al señalar los excesos de Bay City como ejemplos de producción capitalista.

Tras definir al sujeto posfordista en términos de su relación con el capitalismo, dedico el capítulo final al tema de la disidencia y a las posibles direcciones para la concepción de alternativas políticas al capitalismo, tal y como se reflejan en las narrativas. Mi análisis se centrará en las políticas que se centran en la afirmación de una alternativa política frente a las políticas de sustracción (Pellizzoni 2021, p. 365), que en cambio se centran en la negación del

sistema como excusa necesaria para el cambio. Las caídas de la afirmación surgen en mi análisis de 'Fifteen Million Merits' en el que el protagonista afirma la autenticidad de una canción no mercantilizada frente a la inautenticidad de la industria musical, pero fracasa en su intento cuando el cantante es subsumido por el sistema. Por otro lado, ' The Entire History of You' refleja la sustracción, simbolizada por la decisión del protagonista de arrancar la tecnología del microchip que le mantenía en un estado de apego destructivo. La parte final del capítulo da cabida al concepto de agotamiento, que Berardi ve tanto como una inevitabilidad dentro de un sistema basado en la explotación de recursos limitados (tanto materiales como psíquicos) como un estado de conciencia que puede dar paso a un cambio consciente (2017).

CHAPTER 1. THE FACTORY OF UNHAPPINESS: POST-FORDISM, ESTRANGEMENT, 'BAD SENTIMENTS', AND PRECARIOUSNESS.

INTRODUCTION.

"I want to discuss the soul in a materialistic way. What the body can do, that is its soul, as Spinoza said" (2009a, p. 21). With these words, Berardi introduces the idea that the essence of human beings—typically understood as something metaphysical and opposed to Marxism's materialist tradition—must instead be recognized within our current historical and social context as a concrete element of production and a vital source of value for post-Fordist capital. Within an analysis of science fiction narratives, what does it mean to acknowledge the concept of 'the soul', the seat of subjectivity, as being implicated in the material conditions of our society today?

The aim of this chapter is to provide an assessment of how post-Fordist capital's subsumption of the human seat of inclination, attraction, and preference is reflected in the descriptions, imagery, and characters portrayed in the films and series analysed. In turn, this new focus implies an expansion of the notion of the general intellect from its original Marxist understanding of workers' technical knowledge crystallised within the machine (Pasquinelli, 2019, p. 48), to a whole array of aptitudes and capabilities connected to subjectivity and deeply implicated within processes of immaterial production.

I will analyse post-Fordist production and the post-Fordist subject as reflected in the narratives of two *Black Mirror* episodes, 'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too' (S5:E3) and 'White Christmas' (S3:E4) as well as in the series *Altered Carbon*. I will focus my analysis on three

different aspects: the first of these is how the cognitive character of production is represented within the narratives, and the variegated depictions of intellect emerging; the second of these is the characteristics and subjective make-up of the post-Fordist subject developing as a result of the requirements of production, as reflected in the characters; the third aspect is the representations of estrangement: the confrontation of consciousness with the alien character of capitalist interests (Berardi, 2009a, p. 23) and, finally, existential precarity as defined by Berardi (2009a, pp. 184-205; 2009b, pp. 30-55) as a generalised existential conditions typical of post-Fordism emerging in the narratives.

I will answer the following questions: what are the main traits of the post-Fordist subject as reflected within the films and series? What indication do the narratives offer of a link between these traits and post-Fordism as a system of production? What concerns do the plot, characters, and symbolisms express regarding our society and the social effects of post-Fordist production?

"OH HONEY, I'LL DO ANYTHING FOR YOU". INTELLECT AS CREATIVITY AND AFFECTIVE LABOUR IN 'RACHEL, JACK AND ASHLEY TOO'.

The *Black Mirror* episode 'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too' (S6:E3) follows Ashley O, a singer trapped by her manufactured popstar image. Ashley's guardian, aunt and manager Catherine has complete control over Ashley's public persona and music production, obstructing her creative freedom. Within the narrative, the singer symbolises an exploited creative intellect, whereas her manager personifies capitalist interest. Ashley O.'s consciousness has also been cloned to produce AI dolls which are marketed to her teenage fans as their very own Ashley O.; named Ashley Too, the AI doll is an exact copy of Ashley, with the addition of a limiter,

which curbs unwanted aspects of the popstar's personality. The episode's other main character, teenager Rachel Goggins, is gifted an Ashley Too doll by her father for her birthday, as she had requested, and develops an emotional attachment to the doll, which provides the friendship and support that Rachel feels is missing from her life.

When the 'real' Ashley decides to rebel to her aunt/management, her aunt resorts to lacing the popstar's food with drugs (which the singer had been forced to take as a tranquiliser but had secretly avoided and stashed to use against her aunt as proof of her maltreatment), putting her in a medical coma and allowing for her continued exploitation. Unbeknownst to the public and her fans, who believe Ashley's hospitalisation is due to a shellfish allergy, the singer is kept in a hospital bed, hooked up to a computer which directly extracts the music produced by her brain as a ploy to continue to make profit from her music. In order for Ashley to perform the songs extracted by the computer, her aunt later creates a hologram, named Ashley Eternal, and organises a virtual tour, whilst the popstar is unable to react. Nevertheless, Ashley's exploitation comes to an end when with the help of Rachel and her sister Jack, who liberate the doll by removing the limiter that had been applied to her consciousness, Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too are finally able to rescue 'real' Ashley.

'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too' provides a window into the post-Fordist exploitation of 'the soul': the themes of intellect as a source of value, and its automation through technology, are central to its narrative, emerging strongly from the plot, dialogue, and imagery. Within the narrative, cognitive production takes three different forms: sensory motor, creative, and emotive, each one associated to a specific form of immaterial production. In this sense, the episode reflects the evolution of intellect within the development of capitalist production, from technical know-how within the factory environment, to the multi-layered source of value that it has become today.

The exploited intellect is first introduced into the narrative not through the figure of Ashley, but rather through the image of a brain belonging to a mouse, which Rachel's father, Kevin, keeps in his lab for his experiments. Kevin, who works as a pest control technician/ inventor, is seen observing a scan of the mouse's brain on a computer screen in order to recreate the mouse's instinct as basis for the development of an innovative, cruelty free robotic mouse trap. Meanwhile, his teenage daughter Rachel is enjoying Ashley O's TV performance (S5:E3, 03:04'-03:18') in her bedroom. The inventor is attempting to appropriate the rodent's sensory motor abilities and its instinctual capacity to analyse its surroundings: through the examination of the creature's brain, Jack uses its ability to interact with its environment to reproduce the movements in his robot, the imitation of the brain's mechanism allowing him to create the perfect mousetrap, a device that temporarily stuns mice through small electric jolts.

The image of the brain put to use and fixed within a machine (in this case, the mousetrap), contained in this first narrative reference to productive intellect, bears relevance to Marx's original interpretation of the general intellect: "Nature builds no machines, […] They are organs of the human brain, created by the human hand; the power of knowledge, objectified." (Marx, 1973, p. 706). For Marx, machines are not simply the product of science, but constitute the materialisation of workers' collective analytical intelligence, skills and cooperation (Pasquinelli, 2019, p. 48). Likewise, in 'Rachel, Jack, and Ashley Too', the mouse's natural brain mechanisms, its responses, and communication with its surroundings are the premise for Kevin's creation of the robot, pointing to a reliance of capital on brainpower for the creation of technology.

The focus on the brain as the foundation of technological progress is accompanied by a narrative emphasis on the superiority of intellect, which is always one step ahead of the machine, as reflected in the moment of irony when Kevin fails in his attempt to imitate the

mouse's brain mechanisms: he gets the voltage wrong, killing the mouse instead of just stunning it (S5:E3, 33:17'-34:10'). Hence, within this first symbolic reference, the general intellect as a productive force emerges as sensory-motor, analytical knowledge, appropriated for its use value and, also, establishes intellect as the element that leads technological development.

The second quality of the general intellect that we are introduced to is spontaneous creativity, reflected in popstar Ashley O.'s song writing. Parallel to the previously observed mouse, whose sensory motor abilities are instinctive, Ashley's creativity is posited as inherent to Ashley's being. Dream activity emerges as the origin of the singer's music, when during a TV interview, she refers to the fact that she dreams up songs in her sleep; the fleetingness of the act of creation is reflected in her observation of the necessity to write the music down immediately after waking up and to keep a record of it before it disappears (S5:E3 03:40'-04:00'). The connection between creative production and dreams is reaffirmed when later in the plot Ashley is still found to be composing music whilst in a coma: the act of production revealed as innate, natural, and inevitable (S5:E3, 39:03'-39:20').

This narrative focus on the innateness of intellectual activity harks back to Marx's understanding of intellect as an intrinsic element within labour: the philosopher pinpointed the general intellect as reflected in 'the *spontaneous* and *unconscious* micro-decisions of workers' (italics added) (Pasquinelli, 2019, p. 54). Nevertheless, productive intellect as reflected in the figure of Ashley O. differs dramatically in its character from the traditional Marxist understanding of the mass worker. Whilst for Marx brainpower emerges from the collective and finds its objective in the production of an object, the creative intellect reflected in Ashley's songwriting is performative, in line with Virno's definition of virtuosity: it finds its fulfilment within itself and requires the presence of others only as audience (2004, p. 52).

Despite this radical difference in nature, both aspects of intellect bear relation to an intuitive part of the brain.

The instinctive and subconscious character of the creativity at the source of Ashley's music characterises her production as authentic, in contrast to the inauthenticity that typifies its appropriation by the industry, which alters the music to conform with the requirements of the market. When Ashley's aunt and manager Catherine, upon hearing her sing at the piano in her house, walks in and finds Ashley composing the music that she had just dreamt up, this distinction is highlighted in her words: "The lyrics are kind of a departure" (in contrast to the commodified style for which she is renown) as well as in Ashley's answer, "It's nothing, it's just a stream of consciousness type of thing" (S5E3 8:05'), entailing that the music marketed by the music industry always implies a distortion of the natural creative act.

According to Fumagalli, the post-Fordist shift from machinic production to the exploitation of 'living labour' means production under cognitive capitalism (or bio-cognitive capitalism, as defined by the theorist) implies a kind of primitive accumulation that appropriates aspects of existence previously deemed unproductive. Post-Fordism involves anthropogenetic production, with the individual's 'communication, relational, creative, and innovative skills' at its centre (2015, p. 231). The implication of creative subjectivity in the production process described by Fumagalli is reflected in the figure of Ashley and contrasts with the use of the mouse's brain for its analytical knowledge. The combination of these two qualities of intellect, juxtaposed in the initial scene of Rachel's father working in his lab and Rachel watching TV, works to both link the two instances of the brain at work, associating their productive power, and to highlight their difference in nature.

The third aspect of the general intellect depicted in 'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too' is affective attachment and emotional response, reflected in the marketing of Ashley Too, the AI doll created through the duplication and automation of the popstar's personality. As Ashley

advertises the doll on TV, it is made clear that Ashley Too is not just a robot but a conscious being: "She's got a personality- it's modelled right after my own" (S5:E3, 04:56'-05:00). Ashley's persona, for which she is loved by her fans, is what characterises her beyond her music production and performances, and fans have become familiar with a certain perception of Ashley's identity. Ashley is seen as a role model by her fans, who use her music as an escape from the drudgery of daily life, as seen when on the way home from school, Rachel blocks out the sound of her dad and sister's squabbling with Ashley's music (S5:E3, 02:17'-02:25').

Rachel, who has recently moved to a new neighbourhood and is struggling to adjust to her new school, where she has not yet made any friends, finds companionship in the doll. Ashley Too gives her make-up tips (S5:E3, 12:50'-12:52'), teaches her dance routines, encourages her to be more confident, and keeps her company (S5:E3, 16:41'-17:57'), her constant bubbly chatting contrasting with Rachel's sister's moodiness.

When Rachel mentions her mother's death, Ashley Too immediately tells her that when she needs to talk, she will be there for her (S5:E3, 11:40-11:43'). The value of Ashley Too lies in her presence in Rachel's life and in the companionship and support she provides; this is why Rachel iterates, "She's not a doll and she knows me better than you do!" (S5:E3, 27:44'-27:46') to Jack, who had hidden Ashley Too, preoccupied with the influence the AI doll was having on her sister. The marketing of Ashley Too appropriates and extracts value from the relationship that Ashley has with Rachel and her many fans. Ashley Too's functions of communicator and caregiver also reflects the characteristics of houseworkers, who Fuchs includes in his study of the subclasses of the multitude as producers of knowledge in the broad sense of communication, affects and domestic goods. As affirmed by Fuchs, in the real world these aspects are not produced exclusively in corporations in the form of goods, but also in everyday life, for instance through the consumption of media, which produces value

within the economic system (2011, np). Thus, the figure of the AI doll Ashley Too reflects a typically post-Fordist exploitation of communication and affective presence as source of value.

The type of labour provided by Ashley Too is immaterial and typifies cognitive capitalism's tendency to appropriate aspects such as "attentiveness, ability to address, care for and appeal to others" (Berardi, 2009a, p. 10), all aspects of which converge in the figure of the AI doll. Hence, the series' multiple depictions of the intellect convey an image of a capital which subsumes and automates not only the worker's know-how and technical expertise, but also a range of abilities directly related to human nature: the ability to care and form relationships, as well as artistic creativity. However, the imprisonment of Ashley by the dictates of her manager, culminating in her kidnapping, appear to be a warning against the fact that by subsuming intellect through the machine, capital appropriates the worker's intellectual ability, or to use Pasquinelli's words, capital turns the worker into its object (2019, p. 48). Through automation, the worker as individual loses propriety over intellect and the human ability to create and form relationships.

"ASHLEY, WAKE UP!" TECHNOLOGY AND THE ALIENATED INTELLECT IN 'RACHEL, JACK AND ASHLEY TOO'.

The narrative presents three main instances in which through technology Ashley O.'s consciousness is curtailed from her physical body: the first of these is the creation of the Ashley Too doll, through which Ashley O.'s consciousness is extracted and inserted within the AI doll, both commodifying and restricting the popstar's true personality. Subsequently, Ashley's mind/body separation is presented when, after being drugged by her manager, unconscious Ashley O. is attached to a software which directly extracts music from her brain. Finally, the third separation happens when her manager creates a holographic Ashley O., named Ashley Eternal, in order to continue profiting from the popstar's performances. Narratively, all these instances highlight a condition of inaccessibility of the body, which constitutes a typically post-Fordist form of alienation, defined by Berardi as 'de-realisation' (2009a, p. 109).

The theorist describes de-realisation as 'a feeling of anguish and frustration related to the inaccessible body of the other' (Berardi, 2009a, p. 109). Within the character of Ashley, de-realisation emerges as an incapacity to act on her exploitation due to her mind being detached from her body. In her doll form, the robotic body that contains Ashley's consciousness is depicted as an impediment, as expressed for instance in a few moments of comedy in the episode: first, when she screams at Rachel and Jack, "take the cable out of my ass! It's like a wire anchor in my butthole!" (S5:E3, 42:06'-42:09'), the wire being pointed out as a form of restraint and violence forced upon her, and later, when after failing to garner support from Rachel and her sister Jack she attempts to rescue the 'real' Ashley on her own by going to her house, but is impeded by her "stupid, stumpy arms!" (S5:E3, 46:38'-46:40').

The separation of the mind from the body enacted by technology also impedes Ashley's ability to communicate. When her mind and body are intact and connected, Ashley has the ability to articulate her unhappiness to her management and openly voices her desire to change the content of her music and even her image (S5:E3, 30:00'-30:09'). When in charge of her own body, Ashley furtively changes her make-up to something more in line with her taste prior to her exhibition (S5:E3, 19:47'-20:49'). The AI doll, by contrast, is programmed with a limiter, which eliminates all elements of rebelliousness, such as swearing or expressing opinions that contrast with her popstar image, that made her less marketable (S5:E3 42:00'-43:25'). In her AI doll version Ashley is manipulated to the extent that she can even be put to sleep and reawakened when needed with the orders, "Ashley, go to sleep" (S5:E3, 14:37'-14:40'), and "Ashley, wake up" (S5:E3, 10:45'-10:48').

When sisters Rachel and Jack accidentally remove her limiter, Ashley's free consciousness is revealed with the exclamation, "Hold on, I can think! Oh, man, I can actually use my mind again!" (S5:E3 42:00'-42-03). Technology, hence, acts as an impediment to Ashley's intention to rebel against her state of exploitation. Of course, this state of being also negatively affects the popstar's ability to communicate with her fans, who are not familiar with the more authentic aspects of her character and are also unaware of her subjugation when she is put in a coma by her aunt, believing the false news story that it was due to a shellfish allergy. The 'pathogenic separation between cognitive function and material sociality' typical of the post-Fordist subject (Berardi 2009a, p. 109) is embodied in Ashley's condition of powerlessness.

The physical impediment of the body, enacted by capital through technology, is epitomised in the unconscious Ashley, who lying in a bed becomes a passive supply of music for her management. In her state of physical impairment, Ashley becomes a submissive source of value: her music production is incorporated by the machine and modified according

to the preference of her aunt who, through the technology increases the 'positivity' that she had deemed lacking in the music (S5:E3, 45:00'-46:00'). The popstar is unable to express her disagreement except through the alarm button, to which her aunt merely answers with a dismissive, "oh, quit whining!" (S5:E3, 45:17'-45:29').

The restriction of Ashley's intellectual ability and impediment of her bodily capacity culminates in the popstar's substitution with Ashley Eternal, the holographic version of the popstar, with sensors worn by a dancer in order to make her movements 'fully controllable' (S5:E3, 59:02'-59:05').

The size of Ashley Eternal, whose scale is magnified to become gigantic, conveys the power of technology which has now gained full control over Ashley's mind and constitutes an overpowering presence. As analysed by Berardi, the separation of the automated brain from the body has the effect of reducing the individual's capacity for action, a condition typical of the post-Fordist subject which results in impotence, the inability to consciously conceive alternatives to the system (2019, p. 11): through separation from her brain, Ashley's bodily presence, which contained within it the ability to refuse her condition of exploitation, is eradicated, and the mind automated into submission to capital (represented by Ashley's management), resulting in the inability to act outside of its constraints. Emerging in both the figure of Ashley Too and of Ashley Eternal are capital's subsumption of Ashley's consciousness, and the post-Fordist technological imprisonment of the mind, which ends up subjugated for the extraction of value.

"How do you like your TOAST?" Intellect as inclination in 'White Christmas'.

The fourth episode of the second series of *Black Mirror* 'White Christmas' (S2:E4) portrays a future in which digital copies of human consciousness, or 'cookies', are produced and sold as virtual personal assistants. The episode is made up of three parts, each with a main plot; I will focus my analysis on the second of these as it is of particular interest within an examination of post-Fordist production as reflected in science-fiction. The segment portrays a fictional cookie technology and narrates the story of Greta, a career driven woman who undergoes surgery to have her consciousness duplicated, extracted, and inserted into an egg-shaped device in order to run a smarthouse technology. The cookie is put in charge of administrative tasks such as regulating the house temperature to her preference so that 'real' Greta does not have to put up with things in her house not being exactly to her taste. Greta's duplicated consciousness is trapped within the cookie, extracted from 'real' Greta's body and forced to submit to a life of slavery and imprisonment within the device.

Director Carl Tibbets observes that 'White Christmas' depicts a 'removal of self' (Brooker and Jones, 2018, p. 117), understood as a detachment of the mind from the body enacted through technology, depicted in the scene in which the chip containing Greta's consciousness is removed from under her skin through surgery, near the brain where it had been inserted in order to soak up information about the 'real' Greta. The mind's detachment from its bodily presence has become a constant feature of contemporary life brought about by the constant presence of computers and mobile phones.

Within available studies, the episode's focus on the subjective split has sparked some interesting moral questions about the nature of consciousness and whether ethics should apply to cookies (Canca and Ihle in Irwin and Johnson, 2020, p. 72). However, a materialist examination can provide invaluable insight into what the episode has to say about mind/body separation within the framework of capitalism, and, more specifically within the current economic system, based upon the exploitation of the individual's cognitive abilities enacted by capital through post-Fordist production.

The terminology used to define Greta's consciousness, cookie, is taken from real-life, and its use reinforces the idea of the mind as source of value. Within technology the term cookie refers to a measure of information concerning individuals' history and consumption patterns, which is stored by computers through the internet; however, the word is also synonymous with a food item intended for consumption, implying that society has become accustomed to a semantics that views information as a commodity.

'White Christmas' portrays a scenario in which the notion of the cookie as a fragment of information extracted from the individual is expanded, depicting a technology that through cloning absorbs an individual's consciousness, not just in part, but in its entirety. Thus, the soul in its totality becomes a commodity, exploited by capital for its value production. In this sense, the term chosen works as 'an imaginative extension of current linguistic practise', according to Csicsery-Ronay's definition of fictive neosemes (2008, p. 19), and by doing so serves to highlight the post-Fordist commodification of consciousness.

The idea of the individual as a site of production is reinforced by the visual symbolism of the white, egg-shaped gadget into which Greta's consciousness is stored: the egg is a symbol which is traditionally associated to birth and creation, and within the episode, it is established as locus of value production. But whilst 'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too' depicts instances of exploited creativity and affection, the narrative of 'White Christmas' introduces a

new, quintessentially post-Fordist aspect of immaterial production: personal taste and preference.

Within the narrative of 'White Christmas' the individual's specificity, its one-of -a-kindness, becomes a valued commodity in the shape of a smart home app. The general intellect is hence linked to a particular expertise, constituted by the activation within production of individual preference and inclination: the cookie is a prized good, not just because it can function appliances in a generic way, but because it can do this to Greta's exact preference, as a duplicate of her owner, the cookie is aware of her preferences in a way that no other assistant would be. 'Fussiness' is transformed from a not particularly likeable trait in a person, as reflected when Greta hesitates before telling the nurse that the toast she prepared is 'not quite how she likes it', anticipating the nurse's irritation, (S2:E4, 29:30'-29:39') into a valuable asset and a highly marketable commodity.

Through the capturing of individual taste and preference, the cookie transforms these fragments of mental activity into value for capital: the cookie technology depicted thus exemplifies Berardi's notion of 'the soul' as desiring energy and libidinal investment captured within the virtual network of capital (Berardi, 2009a, p. 24). In the case of Greta, hence, capital no longer requires physical labour; it does not even require knowledge or ideas in the traditional sense: the individual's discernment, as a reaction to their surroundings, is enough to generate value within production.

Whilst training the cookie, which in the episode is represented as a virtual miniature double of Greta, later provided with a simulated body to appease her state of shock, Trent encourages her to think about how she likes toast, commenting, "this is your job now" (S2:E4, 34:57'-35:02'); the cookie version of Greta is required by the company that produced her, which represents capital in the series, to contemplate her personal taste, in the same way as internet users are asked through the acceptance of cookies to hand over information about

their likes, dislikes and opinions, a phenomenon which has been dubbed 'like economy' for its ability to generate income through social media user reactions (Gerlitz and Helmond in Faucher, 2018, p. 32).

The depiction of a cookie technology that absorbs individual taste is also reminiscent of post-Fordist market products, such as Alexa, a virtual assistant that uses the web to learn the user's habits and preferences to customise products; hence the episode explores aspects within the social phenomenon of commodification of taste, which are extremely relevant to the realities of subjective existence in contemporary capitalism. The cookie is a depiction of the same market principles that dictate the production of actually existing technology, albeit intensified in the episode, with capital appropriating consciousness as its direct source of value in its entirety, as opposed to subsuming elements of it.

The type of production typified by the cookie technology, which bases its commercial value on individual preference, could be defined as 'just-so' production (a play on Taylorist just-in-time production), a type of manufacture which posits the individual's specific taste as a commodity, offering products tailor-made to fit the likes and wants of the customer. The nature of desiring energy as commodity is immaterial, as symbolised in the series by the cookie's disembodiment, emphasised in Trent's words, "Where are your fingers? Your arms? Your face?" (S2:E4, 32:20′-32:25'), then again by his reply when Greta asks which button she should press in order to make the toast, "It doesn't matter; you already know you're making toast. The buttons are symbolic mostly anyway" (S2:E4, 35:00'-35:03'). The intellect works separately from its social corporality, removed from physical actions.

In terms of ideology, at the basis of this type of capitalist cognitive production is a narcissistic, individualistic drive that forms the basis of subjectivity, through which the individual's desire and sense of self have been totally subsumed by capital, as described by Berardi (2009a, p. 96). As reflected in the character of Greta, taste and attachment are fully

invested in a kind of narcissistic self-enterprise, expressed in her obsessive preoccupation with work as conveyed in the hospital scene, when before the operation she agonises over the news of heavy snowfall, worried that it is going to 'wreck her portfolio', and comments to the nurse about her 'constant admin' (S2:E4, 29:00'-29:03'). Greta also seems to be fanatical about efficiency: for instance, she feels the need to be in control of details that may appear trivial, such as having a perfectly clear email inbox, and worries about the age of her anaesthetist. Greta's drive as an individual is in line with capitalist values of efficiency and competition.

The submission of her consciousness to the cognitive market through the technology is a consequence of her individual desire already being invested in capitalist ideology. Analogously to the modern worker, it is Greta's being, or to use Berardi's terminology, her 'soul at work' (2009a), which corrupted by capitalist ideology eagerly submits her consciousness to the process of automation.

"WHERE IS THE REAL ME?". TECHNOLOGY AND THE ALIENATED INTELLECT IN 'WHITE CHRISTMAS'.

The distressing moment of Greta's out-of-body experience- her duplicated consciousness being separated from her self and her confusion at the sight of her own corporality- opposing her as an outsider is generally brought up in order to raise the issue of a hypothetical artificial consciousness and its suffering and abuse at the hands of technology (Gamez and Johnson in Irwin and Johnson, 2020); however, an interpretation of this scene as an allegory of estrangement (as a result of capital's appropriation of consciousness) is extremely valuable towards an understanding of the post-Fordist subject. In this sense, the trauma experienced by

Greta is representative of the moment of realisation that the most distinctly human aspects of herself have been appropriated and confront her as an inimical force, causing her to become a stranger to her very existence.

Within the narrative of the episode, alienated consciousness plays a central role, and the separation of the mind from the body is depicted as a traumatic event, which emerges from the cookie's surgical extraction from the body. The scene of the extraction is played out as an internal monologue, and at the moment of the split is viewed from the cookie's perspective, who, having lost awareness and knowledge of its circumstances, is heard panicking, "Oh my God! Where am I? I don't know what's happening to me!" (S2:E4, 30:29'-30:38').

Separation of the mind from the body in 'White Christmas' is an act that implies trauma, once again bearing a connection to Berardi's interpretation of alienation, or estrangement, within cognitive capitalism (2009a, p. 109). Analogously to Ashley's case, in the character of Greta the separation of her mind from her body emerges in her complete incapability of acting upon her state of exploitation: Greta is imprisoned within the cookie, which appears in the shape of a bare room, four virtual walls which separate her from the material world (in this case, an account made even darker by the fact that the story does not include a happy ending, considering that in contrast to Ashley, Greta does not get rescued).

The powerlessness typifying Greta's condition emerges when Matt Trent, the assistant in charge of 'informing' her on the reality of her forthwith state of enslavement, invites her to try and blow in his face in order for her to understand her new virtual existence and state of impotence, an action which she is of course incapable of due to the holographic nature of her new body (S2:E4, 32:20'-32:25'). When Greta refuses to submit and screams, Trent simply turns down the cookie's volume, silencing her (S2:E4, 36:04'-36:08'). But the hopelessness of Greta's situation is also rooted in ideological beliefs, which interfere with the individual's

view of reality: the 'real' Greta, in fact, views the cookie as a mere object, and by exploiting

the technology reifies her own consciousness, which through its extraction becomes

objectified. Because of this, the impossibility of physical action is accompanied by 'real'

Greta's complete lack of awareness of the state of trauma that the cookie is experiencing.

Cookie technology is presented and sold in the guise of a technological advancement

and opportunity in exchange for the functionality of freeing up of her time. Greta is

unsuspecting of the fact that this comes at the cost of the enslavement of her consciousness.

The state of alienation depicted is a result of a subjectivity whose 'desiring energy is trapped

in the trick of self-enterprise' (Berardi 2009a, p. 24). In its state of subjugation, Greta's

consciousness is perpetually on call as a home appliance: this incessant disposal of the mind

at the hands of capital, which within the capitalist ideology is viewed as efficiency, is what

ideologically chains the worker to a state of exploitation at every moment of the day.

Describing modern labour, Berardi affirms, "Strictly speaking, the workers no longer exist.

Their time exists, their time is there, permanently available to connect […]" (2011, p. 129), a

state of disintegration which, as will be analysed later in the chapter, is at the root of

subjective precariousness as an existential condition.

Whilst the worker is increasingly exploited by capital, this exploitation is often not

understood as such. The worker's servitude hence becomes the hidden by-product of

technology's promise of efficiency, as reflected in Greta, who chooses to automate her own

consciousness, conveyed in Trent's answer, "Well, actually you did this to you", to the

cookie's cry of, "Why are you doing this to me?" (S2:E4, 32:43'-32:45'). By objectifying and

automating her consciousness, Greta estranges herself from it. Her lack of awareness can be

interpreted as an instance of false consciousness linked to the mind-body separation

characteristic of cognitive work, echoed in the plot by Joe (a character in the episode who

appears to be working with Trent, but in reality is himself a cookie, unaware of being

manipulated by Trent in order to get the confession of a crime he had committed), who when discussing Trent's job comments, "That's slavery!" (S1:E4, 41:06'-41:09') but is also imprisoned and yet unaware of his own state of captivity.

Hence, emerging from the narrative of 'White Christmas' is also an emphasis on the ideological effects of the technological subsumption of the mind, which emerge as an irreversible plunging of the individual into a state of false consciousness. Reflected in this symbolisation of an imprisoned consciousness is Berardi's understanding of the mutation of human consciousness at the hands of the machine: the theorist's pessimistic view is that the post-Fordist technological absorption of language and social relations has enacted an irreversible mutation of the human mind, resulting in a kind of 'palsy' of consciousness: the inability to think or act in opposition to the system (2019, pp. 43-44).

The estrangement and subsumption of individual consciousness by capital depletes existence, which is emptied of any meaning outside of the capitalist tenets of accumulation and efficiency. This is visually conveyed in the dominance of the colour white both in Greta's house and within the virtual room where the cookie is imprisoned, which conveys the starkness of the cookie's surroundings and reality. Berardi's comment on the impoverishment of existence under capitalism, brought about by a focus on accumulation and the weakening of social structures, experience, and enjoyment, 'The more time we spend acquiring means for consumption, the less time we have to enjoy the world available to us' (Berardi, 2009a, pp. 82), emerges reflected in the image of Greta's spacious white house and the cookie's white room: both are modern and functional but appear bare and empty with no sign of colour or anything that might indicate enjoyment or a presence of vitality outside of work in Greta's life.

The emptiness of this virtual room eventually breaks Greta's will: when she refuses her status as slave, Trent merely gives her a taste of a life of refusal of slavery by isolating her

in the empty room for what she perceives to be a week (since Trent is able to control and accelerate her perception of time), and is driven insane by the inactivity and the emptiness of existence, exasperated by boredom (S2:E4, 36:35'-36:45'). As put by Berardi, "No desire, no vitality seems to exist anymore outside the economic enterprise, outside of productive labour and business" (Berardi 2009a, p .96): the lack of alternative derived from the elimination of bodily and social presence appears to have left the individual with no alternative to its alienated existence. This is reflected in the scene in which a defeated and mentally exhausted Greta is shown controlling the technology's console, turning up the alarm volume and preparing Greta's schedule for the day, with a bleak, vacant expression in her eyes, having been forced into submission by the lack of alternative, the impossibility of any different and meaningful form of existence (S2:E4, 39:26-'39:50').

POST-FORDIST PRODUCTION IN *BLACK MIRROR*

Greta's interrogation, "Where am I? What's happening to me?" (S2:E4, 32:43'-32':45') is an echo of the same alienation faced the post-Fordist immaterial worker, who like Greta and Ashley has been separated from the body's materiality, their intellect and consciousness subsumed by capital. The two *Black Mirror* episodes depict a system of production which appropriates human faculties for the purpose of value production, implying an existence characterised by alienation. In this sense, the series expresses a warning about the damaging effects of technologies, which within a system whose primary purpose is the attainment of profit result in the imprisonment and exploitation of consciousness. What's more, the narratives present a concern with the individual's ability to grasp and act upon its exploitation due to the effects of the mind/body separation enacted by technology, which in the narratives

separates human consciousness from its potentiality, raising concerns regarding the individual's detachment from material social existence.

The materiality of the body is eradicated by post-Fordist technology (Berardi 2019, pp. 106-107), as reflected in the creation of Ashley Too and the automation of Ashley's brain in the case of 'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too', and the imprisonment of Greta's consciousness in the cookie in 'White Christmas', two instances which portray the separation of human consciousness and its subsumption by capital. The narratives of Ashley and Greta's estranged consciousness can be seen as symbolic of the fragmentation of intellect under cognitive capitalism, a fragmentation which results in the individual's inability to react to its conditions.

'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too' and 'White Christmas' offer an image of individuality as seat of affective and libidinal forces, in line with post-workerist theory: Berardi's notion of the soul at work (2009a, p. 10); Virno's notion of virtuosity as an element of post-Fordist intellectual production (2004, p. 52); and Fumagalli's definition of bio-cognitive production as communicational, relational, creative and innovative (2015, p. 23). Whilst this proves the necessity for the notion of the general intellect in contemporary capitalism to be rethought and expanded, it also harks to Marx and Engels's intuition in *The Communist Manifesto* that capitalism has 'resolved personal worth into exchange value' (Marx and Engels, 1992, p. 5), hence highlighting that Marx's core conception of alienation as rooted in the reification of social and human relations under capitalism still contains an element of truth.

My analysis has so far concentrated on how the sense of estrangement experienced by the characters in the series analysed emerges as an effect of immaterial production and the post-Fordist recourse to immaterial labour within production, thus substantiating the importance of a materialist analysis. The narratives analysed shine a light into the character and implications of alienation within contemporary social consciousness under capitalist production. If estrangement is the condition of the post-Fordist subject, the subsequent

question is: who is the post-Fordist subject? What emerges within the narratives regarding its social and psychological features? These are questions that post-workerist theory has sought to answer within Marxist theory.

Paolo Virno, in his essay *A Grammar of the Multitude*, has focused on the 'emotional situation' of the post-Fordist worker, a term which the theorist uses to refer to ways of being, feeling and experiencing the world common to post-Fordist subjects (2004, p. 40). Within the next part of this chapter, applying Virno's theories on the emotional tonalities of the multitude, a term used by Virno to indicate an updated version of subjectivity which might update the traditional notion of the proletariat, I will investigate the emotional characteristics of the post-Fordist subject as emerges in the series *Altered Carbon*.

"ENVOYS TAKE WHAT IS OFFERED": CURIOSITY, INTUITION, AND THE GENERAL INTELLECT IN *ALTERED CARBON*.

Within post-workerist theory, a groundbreaking analysis of the post-Fordist subject's psychology is provided by Paolo Virno's *A Grammar of the Multitude*, in which the theorist describes the attribute of curiosity and emotional tonalities of cynicism and opportunism as hallmarks of the multitude as post-Fordist subjectivity. These traits are not to be understood as strictly speaking psychological tendencies, but in line with Virno's own understanding as the pervasive forms of experiencing and being in the world, as the Da-sein of the subject. Virno's description of the cynicism, opportunism and voracious curiosity deriving from the post-Fordist social setting emerges in the narrative of *Altered Carbon,* both in descriptions of the protagonist Takeshi Kovacs and within secondary characters (2004, pp. 73-93).

Through a blend of the narrative conventions of cyberpunk (a type of science fiction that depicts dystopian futures, juxtaposing degradation with scientific advancement, which in *Altered Carbon* is used to portray the inequalities originating within a technologically advanced but unequal and oppressive capitalist system) together with elements of neo-noir (which, within the narrative, allows for the main character's journey of exploration and the search for truth and justice), *Altered Carbon's* narrative presents a seamless rendering of the characteristics defined by Virno, placing the traits of curiosity, cynicism and opportunism within a capitalist social setting (the meth class system ruling Bay City) which reflects the characteristics of post-Fordism (2004, pp. 73-93).

In the following section, after positioning protagonist Kovacs' intuition as a reflection of the general intellect within capitalist relations, I will pinpoint Virno's understanding of how the emotional tonalities of curiosity, cynicism, and opportunism, have become the very heart of existence within post-Fordist capitalism, as reflected in the cyberpunk series. The series protagonist Takeshi Kovacs, a "mercenary, turned envoy, turned mercenary again" (S1:E1, 40:10'-40:13') lends himself to the analysis of curiosity, as a voracity towards the new which is caused by the mediatisation of life and the merging of labour and free time (Virno, 2004, p. 91), along with cynicism and opportunism, two sentiments ensuing from the awareness of the inequalities of capitalism and from the ever-changing circumstances that the post-Fordist subject is faced with. Within the plot Kovacs' intellectual capacities are framed as the brainpower put to work by capital, and his person as the fixed capital "in whose brain resides the knowledge accumulated" (Fumagalli, 2015, p. 233).

"IN THIS WORLD, THE ONLY REAL CHOICE IS BETWEEN BEING THE PURCHASER OR THE PURCHASED**": INTELLECT AS A COMMODITY IN *A**LTERED** C**ARBON**.***

Altered Carbon's plot narrates the events surrounding the mysterious death of Laurence Bancroft, a wealthy member of the meths, an elite whose power and influence rules over the Settled Worlds (a group of habitable planets that have been colonised by Earth, governed by the United Nations). Bancroft is found, in very typical circumstances when it comes to murder mysteries, dead in his study, as a result of a gunshot to the head. After his re-sleeving (reincarnation made possible by the needle casting of his consciousness onto a virtual cloud), suspicious of the circumstances of his death, and firm in the belief that he is not the type to commit suicide, Bancroft requests for envoy Takeshi Kovacs to be re-awakened from storage in order to solve the mystery of what appeared to be a suicide, but which he himself believes to have been cold-blooded murder.

Envoys are a group of legendary fighters (of which Kovacs is believed to be the last remaining), who had taken part in a historical uprising against the reigning protectorate under the leadership of Quellcrist Falconer. These soldiers are renown not only for their military skills but also for their superior intuition, on account of which Bancroft decides to employ Kovacs as a private investigator. Within the plot, Kovacs' envoy intuition plays a pivotal role, and whilst it is framed within the narrative as the intelligence typical of the noir detective, it also allows for intellect (and its employment by capital) as a narrative element to take centre stage within the story, thus turning the series into a poignant depiction of post-Fordist production.

Within the noir tradition, Kovacs' shrewdness can be posited in line with the figure of the traditional sleuth. As described by Philippa Gates in her study, the detective figure is traditionally distinguished by intelligence, observation, and deduction, used as weapons against crime (2006, p. 5). The plot's enclosing of Kovacs' brainpower within an act of exchange, however, provides scope for a Marxist reading, which considers the envoy's role within the social setting, and helps assess the series' message of condemnation of the inequalities typifying capitalist society.

The commodification of Kovacs' intellect is enacted through his reincarnation: following his reawakening in Bay City, after being taken off ice (a state in which the consciousness is put 'on standby' without a body, hence inactive) Kovacs is escorted to Bancroft's mansion. Here, the meth negotiates a deal to secure the envoy's services, with an offer which includes a 50 million salary, any sleeve he wishes to own, and a pardon for his crimes (his taking part in the envoy uprising, which was considered a terrorist organisation) in return for his service as private detective.

From the outset, the framing of intellect within this capitalist relation gives rise to questions concerning its implications of exploitation: this is reflected in Kovacs' outraged response to Bancroft's offer, expressed in the assertion "some things cannot be bought" (S1:E1, 27:48'-27:51'), positing a link between commodification and unfreedom, and questioning the ethicality of the transaction.

Hence, the theme of estrangement, which as I have analysed is present in the narrative of 'White Christmas' and 'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too', also emerges in *Altered Carbon*, expressed in Kovacs grudging acceptance of the case (a result of the visualisation of his ex-lover and uprising leader Falconer, who urges him to use his role to make a difference) (53:21'-55:12') and his sense of estrangement from his surroundings, expressed in the words, "This isn't my world" (S1:E1, 42:30'-42:35'), in conversation with detective Ortega (the Bay

City Police officer who had picked him up from the re-sleeving facility, and eventually becomes his side-kick).

As a result of Bancroft's offer, Kovacs' existence itself becomes tied to his status as a commodity: unless he solves Bancroft's murder, he will be put back 'on ice' (an option which the envoy initially takes into consideration, given his hatred for meths and what they stand for, but then discards, deciding to take on the case).

The envoy's commodification is consolidated within the narrative upon his arrival at Suntouch house (Bancroft's mansion) by means of the scopic gaze of both Miriam and Laurence, through which Kovacs is instated as an object of desire. From the police officer's words "You are now property of Lawrence Bancroft" at the prison, to detective Ortega's comment, referring to him as Bancroft's "pet terrorist" (S1:E1, 23:30'-24:02'), or when Bancroft presents him as his 'something unique', as a novelty to flaunt to his guests at a banquet (S1:E3, 36:81'), Kovacs' commodified status is frequently reaffirmed and highlighted throughout his presence in the Bancroft mansion.

On the other hand, Bancroft's own existence and safety are also depicted as dependent on the investigative ability of the envoy; the very fact that Bancroft is reliant on Kovacs to solve his murder creates a link between the safekeeping of the meth's own existence, and Kovacs' intellect, in the shape of his ability as an investigator. At a banquet organised by Bancroft with the intention of gathering suspects, the comment of an aristocratic guest to Kovacs "Whoever murdered him must be found and punished or we're all in danger" (S1:E3, 28:05'-28:07') reveals that the suspected murder is perceived by the elite as a real threat to their hegemony. Hence, there is a sense that through his investigative work Kovacs is hired to preserve not just Bancroft's life, but also the meths' safety, making him a prerequisite for the elites´ self-preservation. Reflected in this dynamic is a reliance of the meths on the envoy's

brainpower which conjures the image of today's capital, characterised by its dependence on intellect.

Virno establishes as the distinguishing characteristic of post-Fordism the fact that worker's know-how, which within the factory was appropriated 'on the sly' is now explicitly requested by capital (2004, p. 62); it is precisely this request, the interpellation of intellect, which the negotiation between Kovacs and Bancroft embodies.

Reflected in *Altered Carbon* is a capitalist class, which whilst preoccupied with the marketing of the human body in its materiality, is also aware that the stack in which consciousness and intellect reside is the ultimate ground for its power struggle. The meths' preoccupation with the dominance of consciousness reflects a society that whilst based on material bioproduction views the soul in its immateriality as the terrain for absolute dominance. Notably, whilst the production of bodies, or sleeves, is the market on which the society is based, the stack, or soul, remains the most sought-after possession for a meth, expressed through Laurence Bancroft's horrific compulsion to real death (terminating the consciousness of) unknowing sex workers, through the Iridium Package, offered by the Head in the Clouds establishment to meths (S1:E9, 31:00'-34:42').

As argued by Kwasu David Tembo, whilst sleeve murder (which some meths committed in brothels by paying for a new sleeve that they saw as reparation for the 'damage') entails the destruction of a body, which is replaceable, the destruction of the stack is for meths a way to achieve total stack-sleeve domination (in Kobus and Muniowski 2020, p. 37). Hence, supremacy for meths is obtained through the assertion of power over consciousness. The meth proclivity for stack domination, together with the reliance on Kovacs's investigative skills to preserve the safety of meths, reflects a society which, analogously to contemporary capitalism, relies heavily on bio-production and the exploitation of life.

"A SUICIDAL IDIOT WHO NEVER GIVES UP": THE GENERAL INTELLECT AND CURIOSITY AS THE HUMAN PROCLIVITY TO LEARN.

Within the framework of a Marxist interpretation focused on post-Fordist production, Kovacs' envoy intuition at work for the meth elite can be interpreted as a symbolism for the general intellect. This interpretation is particularly substantiated by the emergence within descriptions of his intuition not as a select ability, but as the prototype of a natural propensity of all human beings to utilise their perception. In fact, whilst at first sight envoy intuition is referred to as a faculty confined to the warrior cast, upon closer investigation, in contrast to this is the emergence of many instances within the dialogue which act to demystify it, defining it instead as a raw human ability. When Kovacs first meets Laurence Bancroft's wife Miriam, who enquires as to whether envoys can read people's minds, Kovacs denies this rumour, "Envoys don't read minds" (S1:E1, 25:18'-26:21).

The demystification of envoy intuition is reinforced in Kovacs' comment, "People talk about envoy intuition like it's magic. It's not. It's a pull at the back of the mind. A scratch inside your skull that won't go away. It's the details" (S1:E8, 37:19'-37:24'). The book trilogy on which the series is based presents a similar view of intuition as an innate process of abstraction and association of data as reflected in the description, "It wasn't a connection as such, but envoy intuition doesn't work that way. It just goes on piling up the data until you start to see the shape of something in the mass" (Morgan, 2005, p. 271). According to these descriptions, far from being a supernatural ability, envoy intuition simply consists of a heightened sense of curiosity, which when acted upon by the envoys, taps into vast reserves of knowledge. In this sense, the intuition described constitutes an intellectual impulse to

understand and interpret the social environment as a free activity that makes up man's species being (Marx, 1959, pp. 31-32). But envoy intuition as a narrative element reflects not only the general intellect as a productive force, but also the trait of curiosity as a general characteristic of existence within post-Fordism.

Curiosity as an element that drives the intellect is contained in the comparison of envoy intuition as "a scratch behind your skull that won't go away" (S1:E8, 37:19'-37:24'), which evokes a spontaneous yearning for knowledge. From a theoretical perspective, Virno pinpoints curiosity as a general requirement of life within post-Fordist society, engrained in the subject as an effect of mediatised culture. This is because media commands an active participation on part of the viewer in its spectacles, summoning the spectator to decide 'anew each time what to watch, what deserves to come to the foreground and what should remain in the background'. Crucially, moreover, faced with an extensive variety of media spectacles, the viewer is asked 'to become familiar with the unexpected and the surprising, to become accustomed to the lack of established habits' (2004, p. 93).

Within the framework of post-Fordist society, this particular way of experiencing reality, whilst originating within the consumption of media and the sphere of free time, seeps from the specificity of this domain into life and existence as a whole.

The inclination to learn within post-Fordism becomes characteristic of life and bio-production itself, due to the merging within post-Fordist capitalism of free time and labour. Given the extension of working time beyond traditional structure of the working day (aided by the extensive use of information technology that makes the worker constantly available and connected to work) and due to trends within production such as the gamification of work and the rise of the prosumer (in which the consumer of usually virtual commodities takes active part in the production of content) that blur the boundaries between work and 'play', those activities which traditionally were reserved to the sphere of free time are now

appropriated by the sphere of production. The absent-minded curiosity once typical of idle

time too moves into the realm of work and production, giving way to a state of agitation,

mobility, and fickleness which once only typified free time (when the mind, in absence of

intent, is allowed to roam free) as defining characteristics of work activity too.

In post-Fordism, work and leisure are often indistinguishable, creating a subjectivity in

a constant state of agitation, characterised by an insatiable and voyeuristic craving for

experience and knowledge (Virno, 2004, p. 91) previously typical of free time. Thus, constant

exposure to images and data gives way to a subjectivity accustomed to absorbing a wide

variety of information without a specific purpose or need. The same call to becoming familiar

with the unfamiliar, typical of post-Fordist existence, is precisely what characterises life in the

world of *Altered Carbon*, in which individuals are constantly uprooted from the reality of one

bodily existence to another due to reincarnation, finding its epitome in Kovacs, who was

forced to be transferred between planets and even centuries. The envoy training, which

Kovacs undergoes when he joins Falconer's resistance, can also be viewed as the application

of curiosity through interpretation and reaction to one's surroundings, the development of

mental and sensory perception, through the familiarisation with new environments such as

various VR constructs.

As expressed by Virno, curiosity within post-Fordism equates to a 'greed of sight,

longing to witness unusual and even horrible spectacles, a voyeuristic craving of experience

(Virno, 2004, p. 91-92). Undeniably, this characteristic prurience is reflected in the world of

Altered Carbon, in which snippets of memories and experiences of particular individuals, like

the childhood memories of a king, or a socialite losing her virginity, become prized

commodities, hacked by dippers in order to make money from them on the black market

(S1:E2, 09:00'-09:20'). Drawing a parallel with today's society, the commodification of

curiosity towards new experiences is the main drive; for instance, behind the gaming market

through which users are able to live an extremely wide range of experiences, from stealing cars in Grand Theft Auto (Rockstar North, 2013) to waging war in World of Warcraft (Blizzard Entertainment, 2004).

Curiosity as a distinctively post-Fordist characteristic emerges in *Altered Carbon* as the main drive behind Kovacs' intuition—a focus on details and recourse to memory which is both curious—and analytical, and crucially shaped by the system that Kovacs has to navigate. It is the envoy's stubborn inquisitiveness that motivates his acceptance of the Bancroft case in spite of his hatred of the meths and the ideology they represent. The envoy's words "when everyone lies, telling the truth isn't just rebellion, it's an act of revolution" convey the urge to discover, an impulse described sarcastically by Ava Elliot (part of Kovacs' team of allies) in her description of the envoy as a 'suicidal idiot who never gives up' (S1:E9, 37:30'-37:34').

Embodied within the figure of Kovacs, curiosity emerges as a combination of revolutionary intent and voyeurism, at times driven by an objective (such as his investigations, commissioned by Bancroft), and other times seemingly gratuitous (particularly his questioning of the death of Mary Lou Henchy, which was not commissioned but which Kovacs decides to investigate out of a desire to know the truth).

As affirmed by Virno, curiosity as a post-Fordist trait is unavoidable (since it has social roots) as much as it is ambivalent (Virno 2004, pp. 90-91). In *Altered Carbon* curiosity emerges as a double-edged knife within the system, which whilst shaped within the requirements of the system production can nevertheless act externally and independently to it. This emerges from Kovacs' antagonism towards meths, as well as from the case of Lizzie Elliot, the daughter of Vernon (Kovacs' back-up and right-hand man in his fight against meths). Lizzie, who had been exploited as a sex worker in the Jack it Off establishment where Bancroft was a customer, finds out that she is pregnant with Bancroft's child and decides to

confront him, but is tortured by Miriam when she is met by her at Suntouch house, resulting in a state of cognitive trauma.

Nevertheless, through her rehabilitation (enacted by Poe, a VR hotel), Lizzie achieves a heightened intuition remarkably similar in nature to envoy intuition described as a craving for information, which she uses to fight meths, "I go out on the Array sometimes by myself. Just look and listen and find things out". When Poe, the AI in charge of her rehabilitation, remarks: "You spy on people?", her response is: "I collate data", suggesting a desire for information that is intrusive in its intent (S1:E9, 02:59'-03:07'), which can also be equated to post-Fordist curiosity. Rehabilitation enabled Lizzie to achieve the awareness of her oppression and to fight back, revealing the qualities prompted by production as existing in excess of the system (an aspect which I will further explore in my analysis of antagonism, in the fourth chapter).

Envoy intuition, hence, offers an image of intellect as a curiosity appropriated by the elite, but when emancipated, this curiosity drives the search for truth at the basis of the individual's liberation. The instances of the characters' use or description of intuition reflect the image of a human capacity to analyse, abstract, and correlate information obtained from various situations, times, and settings. Intuition as reflected in *Altered Carbon* embodies general intellect characterised by curiosity, a '*voyeur's* craving for experience, for knowledge' (Virno, 2004, p. 92), a type of sensory knowledge which observes and evaluates phenomena. Depictions of general intellect/intuition emerge from *Altered Carbon*'s emerge from as appropriated and commodified by capital, causing subjective estrangement, but which within the narrative are manipulated in the fight for emancipation.

"ARE YOU A BELIEVER?" THE CYNICISM OF GENERAL INTELLECT

The second typically post-Fordist characteristic reflected in the character of Kovacs is cynicism, as a recognition of capital's shortcomings, which is paradoxically exploited and productive within the system. According to Virno, whilst curiosity is rooted in the mediatisation of culture and the positing of the subject as an active viewer, cynicism is a 'bad sentiment' which within post-Fordism finds its origin in the crisis of the principle of equivalence (the belief that two commodities within an exchange, such as a worker's labour and wages, are always equal in value) (Virno, 2004, pp. 87-88).

More than ever, according to Virno, the primacy of intellect within production exposes the reality that money, which is supposed to represent the commensurability of labour, of products, of subjects, is a misconception of the capitalist system. The disintegration of the principle of equivalence, in a system which increasingly exploits the individual's time for the extraction of surplus value, an exploitation made more noticeable by the remuneration of fragments of work instead of prolonged availability, results in workers' increased awareness of manipulation of the contrived nature of the law of value and of the rules regulating the economy and social life (Virno, 2004, pp. 87-88). The post-Fordist subject might be forced to play by the rules of capital but is well aware of their artificiality and does not believe in them.

Cynicism as a post-Fordist condition is also a required element due to the instability of the job market. The crisis in the Fordist model of employment has given way to a subjectivity that learns to survive within a changeable and unstable existence, and the adoption of a fixed belief system is counterproductive to the navigating of chronic instability, constituting an obstacle to the dynamism required by the market. In order for the post-Fordist subject to be

'efficient' within the system, they should be ideologically open to a variety of beliefs, rather than defined by a single one. As put by Conley, a dose of cynicism is not so much a side-effect of post-Fordist capital, but rather one of its requirements: the post-Fordist worker, in fact, is asked to believe in nothing, but to be available to believe in anything (Conley, 2008, p. 4), and a cynical individual is a prized asset to immaterial capital.

Cynicism emerges strongly in the character of Kovacs, but only within the confines of Bay City's capitalist setting does it acquire a typically post-Fordist character. From the outset, Kovacs as a character is defined by an air of scornful scepticism towards the world he is catapulted into as a result of his re-sleeving. Kovacs directs his contempt towards meth Laurence Bancroft, as well as towards the police authorities and detective Ortega, showing apathy towards her in a conversation when she picks him up from the prison facilities where he has just been re-sleeved and drives him to the Bancroft mansion. When the detective questions Kovacs' violent precedents, implied by his role as a mercenary, questioning him on how he decides who he will kill, Kovacs cynically remarks, "Anything can set me off. Interstellar dictatorship, genocide, people that talk too much" (S1:E1, 19:50'-20:23').

This sarcastic tone, which Kovacs maintains throughout the series, falls in line with the traditional traits of the noir detective, characterised by a temperament of pessimism and distrust. According to Chavez, the subtle mood of cynicism, pessimism and darkness are the element that distinguishes noir more than any material components (Chavez, 2011, p. 2). Within an analysis of *Altered Carbon*'s social depiction, however, the cynicism of the detective is fundamentally shaped by the capitalist relations characterising the social setting of Bay City. Kovacs' cynicism within the context of a post-Fordist setting can only be understood in contrast to the distinct forms of cynicism displayed to the various phases of his existence: this is because within Bay City Kovacs' already existing (anti-capitalist) cynicism is appropriated and put to work, in typical post-Fordist fashion.

The three types of cynicism emerging in Kovacs' stages of existence are cynicism as nihilism (constituted by a complete loss of belief, which characterises the narrative phase of Kovacs' departure from the protectorate's armed forces), cynicism as a revolutionary state of disbelief in capitalism (corresponding to the guiding ideology of the envoy rebellion, which Kovacs espoused), and finally, a typically post-Fordist cynicism which is employed by Laurence Bancroft, within the setting of Bay City. This distinction also allows for an understanding of the complexity of Kovacs as a character, who underneath the outer layer of scepticism on occasion expresses a set of values and explains the contrast between his aloofness and the instances of demonstrated empathy towards various people; for instance when he rescues detective Ortega's life, as well as his interest in solving the sleeve murder Mary Lou connected to the Bancroft case out of an apparent sense of justice.

The first phase in Kovacs' existence—his joining of CTAC (Colonial Tactical Assault Corps, a division of the protectorate´s military) and subsequent rebellion—is characterised by cynicism as disillusionment and loss of belief. Kovacs had joined CTAC as an orphan after a violent outburst on part of his father, who had murdered his wife and Kovacs' mother, an act which led Kovacs to commit patricide in self-defence, in order to stop his father from also murdering his sister Reileen in one of his violent outbursts. The betrayal of CTAC leads Kovacs to abandon their ranks after finding out that officer Jaeger, who had promised to provide for his sister Reileen, had instead sold her to the Yakuza.

After recognising his sister during an operation against the Yakuza (S1:E7, 11:21'-11:44´), he decides to abandon CTAC, by whom he had been betrayed, and absconds together with Reileen. Kovacs is isolated by his nihilistic rejection of the system to which he had belonged, left in an ideological vacuum symbolised by the wilderness of the jungle in which he and his sister take refuge (S1:E7, 15:30'-19:09').

At this point in the narrative, Kovacs' cynicism equates to complete absence of a belief system. When Kovacs meets Falconer, the leader of the envoys, who had ambushed him with the intent of convincing him to join their rebellion, he expresses a disillusionment with regards to ideologies in his words to Falconer. "[The enemy of my enemy] is just one more person who might knife me in my sleep" (S1:E7, 21:02'-21:05'). Nevertheless, when Kovacs joins the envoy rebellion, this changes. The cynicism as nihilism is replaced by the adoption of the Quellist belief system (which consists of the philosophy of the leader Falconer, who had created the resistance movement) based on the refusal of the protectorate's ideology.

Quellists, ideologically, are against the protectorate's beliefs (the protectorate was a colonial system which gave birth to the meths' class system, by initially allowing the commercialisation of stack technology, an analogy for capitalism in its initial, colonial phase): they reject materialism, choosing to live a simple life in connection with nature, deciding to build their home under the songspire tree (a tree which holds a connection to ancient civilizations) in the wild; they do not own possessions and are against the accumulation of wealth which meth values endorsed.

The Quellist ideology is cynical in a way that resembles the term's classical understanding, represented by the Greek cynics, who embraced poverty as a path to freedom and happiness. The maxim attributed to Diogenes "If poverty is not with you as a foundation, neither will virtue be, and poverty will drive away the worst evils" (Sayre, 1948, p. 15) is reflected in Falconer's warning about a "new class of people so wealthy and powerful they answer to no one and cannot die" (S1:E7, 32:12'-32:22'), a prediction by the envoy leader that would materialise in the establishment of the meth elite. Hence, upon joining the Quellist revolution, Kovacs cynicism, which had previously constituted a nihilistic disillusionment,

becomes politicised against the class system constituted by meths through the adoption of the Quellist ideology.

The envoy revolt adopt cynicism as an anti-capitalist ideology, but cynicism is not merely reflected in the Quellist philosophy, it also encompasses their military struggle and tactics. Strategically, the cynicism of envoys is also reflected in their ability to grasp and manipulate VR constructs (the virtual realms in which the protectorate armed forces conducted psychological torture): once undergone training, envoys are able to see through the simulated nature of these constructs and use this awareness in order to beat them, achieving the ability to "ride any skin, anywhere in the Galaxy" (S1:E7, 25:39′-25:42'). Envoys also learnt the limitations of guns and were taught to channel their intellect as their ultimate weapon. Dynamism and cynicism are interconnected qualities in an envoy warriors who lived and fought between constructs and bodies, able to "drop into any sleeve onto any planet and be combat ready in minutes". (S1:E1, 29:56') Envoy cynicism, hence, is both ideological and strategic: through their training, envoys achieved an omniscient view over reality and an awareness of its transience.

The final category of cynicism occurs within Bay City, in which Kovacs' ideological disbelief in capitalism is deprived of its antagonistic potential and put to work within the system. At this stage Kovacs' cynicism can be accurately defined as post-Fordist, as it is employed by capital the minute Bancroft instructs Kovacs to put aside his ideological disapproval of the meth class system and to work for him as an investigator. The realm of the capitalist meth society reveals a truly post-Fordist propensity to put cynicism to work. 'Cynics recognize, in the particular context in which they operate, both the preeminent role played by certain *cognitive premises* as the simultaneous absence of real *equivalence*'(Virno, 2004, p. 88). Just like Kovacs, the post-Fordist worker is required to suspend their disbelief in the rules of capitalism (such as the principle of equivalence, and the pretence that a worker's wage is

equal to the value of their labour) in order to partake in the job market and to 'play by the rules of the game' notwithstanding the awareness of their fallacy.

The unfortunate side effect of Kovacs' acceptance of employment and the acceptance of the exploitation of his (detective) cynicism, however, results in its political disempowerment. Uprooted from the envoy cause, the cynicism and dynamism characteristic of Kovacs is emptied of its revolutionary potential and reduced to a mere instrument at the hands of the system. The exploitative element is reflected in Kovacs' resentful attitude when, during his investigations, he rebels against the meth's domineering tone, stating, "You wanted me to work for you. I'm working for you. You want my respect? That's a little harder to come by" (S1:E2 11:48'-11:50'), a quip which, however, comes across as hollow and does not truly challenge Bancroft's power.

Kovacs' cynicism, which within the envoy rebellion had possessed revolutionary potential in Bay City, becomes his selling point, the defining characteristic of his role within the system, reshaped by the economic system as a commodity, and rendered powerless in the new context of a power structure which thrives on cynicism. In this sense, the dynamics reflected in the appropriation of Kovacs' acumen and cynicism is a pattern which epitomises contemporary society, in which the subject is on the one hand constituted as a cynical being but additionally and crucially on the other hand exploits this very cynicism within production for the deepening of the project of capitalism's inward turn (Conley, 2008, p. 4).

Bay City is a world in which the powerful feed off cynicism. Within this secular society, absence of belief entails incorporation within the production system, as demonstrated by the fact that the only social group who escape integration, through the insertion of stack technology, are neo-Catholics, who in line with their religion refuse the insertion of the stack, even at the cost not being able to re-sleeve and testify to a murder. Subsumption within the capitalist system represented by meth society is only possible in the absence of belief. The

meth class ideology constitutes the capitulation of religious faith as a form of belief to the cynicism of capital. Mr. Leung, Reileen's (in this case constituting capitalist power, as a titan of industry) right hand man and contract killer who represents capital's hired gun, his catchphrase before murdering being "Are you a believer?", a darkly ironic reminder that his victim's refusal to submit to capital's absence of belief is his motive for murdering them. Mr Leung himself is zealously ideological, having found in meths his gods and in power a new religion; however, his zealousness itself is in service to capital and exploited by Reileen.

The final post-Fordist characteristic which Kovacs embodies is opportunism as a post-Fordist emotional tonality. In particular opportunism emerges in Kovacs' interactions with the people he meets, with whom he establishes connections, which at least on a surface level, are based purely on their utility to help is investigation (the AI hotel Poe, for instance, provides Kovacs with a safe place to stay and offers his technology for use in his investigations, and Vernon Elliot, an ex-marine medic, provides military assistance in exchange for the rehabilitation of his daughter Lizzie). Kovacs' opportunistic use of his acquaintances is instilled by his envoy training, as reflected in Falconer's words, "Find ways to inspire loyalty in a few capable locals, even if many of them will ultimately be expendable" (S1:E7, 28:00'-28:05'), which reflect both the centrality of human connection, and at the same time their replaceability.

The dialogue frequently highlights the opportunistic character of Kovacs's relationships. When Vernon exclaims, "You don't care about Lizzie", Kovacs answers, "Don't take this personally, but, I don't care about anyone" (S1:E3, 08:20'-08:24'). The opportunistic character of the relationship is later reiterated when Vernon complains about Poe's rehabilitation methods, to which Kovacs responds, "I told you before, we're not friends. I don't owe you a goddamn thing". The same cold treatment is reserved for Poe, when he presents himself as his partner, esteemed colleague, to which Kovacs replies with an

unambiguous "no" and "still no", introducing him instead as the hotel (S1:E3, 09:20'-09:23').

Virno identifies opportunism as also embedded in chronic instability of post-Fordism, 'Opportunists are those who confront a flow of ever-changeable possibilities, making themselves available to the greater number of these, yielding to the nearest one, and then quickly swerving from one to another' (Virno, 2004, p. 86).

"A PULL AT THE BACK OF THE MIND, A SCRATCH INSIDE YOUR SKULL". ENVOY INTUITION AS THE GENERAL INTELLECT.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of *Altered Carbon*'s narrative is its depiction of intuition as an organic faculty of the human mind. Whilst the first descriptions of envoy intuition appearing within the narrative describe it as a skill unique to envoys, several elements of the dialogue and plot serve to demystify this conception and to instead posit it as the latent potential of all individuals. The general intellect is depicted in *Altered Carbon* as a diffused ability to accumulate and abstract data, intuition, attention to detail, and recourse to memory. The driving stimulus behind intuition as a symbolisation of intellect emerges as a socially constructed curiosity—the individual's compulsion to understand its environment and to learn truths—a compulsion which is productive within the system, but which also carries the potential to threaten it. Emerging in the characters of *Altered Carbon*, particularly in its protagonist Takesi Kovacs, is a scepticism which clearly reflects a post-Fordist spirit in its distrust of the rules and values regulating the world around him, a cynicism which nevertheless acquires a productivity within meth society.

The series makes interesting reflections on how capital as a mode of production based on adaptability and ever/changing circumstances creates a subject who confronts the world

through cynicism and opportunism. In this sense, the narrative provides a reflection of the post-Fordist intersection of production with 'the fundamental aspects of individuation and subjectivity in an unprecedented way' (Read, 2016, p. 202). The characters in the series, particularly the protagonist Takeshi Kovacs, reveal an emotional presence, a Da-sein, which reflects the post-Fordist subjectivity: voyeuristically curious, cynical and opportunistic. In late capitalism, these characteristics are born out of the need to survive within a precarious and changeable social existence, creating the necessity to believe in both nothing and everything, and to be open to the opportunities presented by a precarious social setting.

Whilst curiosity, cynicism, and opportunism constitute the psychological characteristics of post-Fordist existence, no analysis of subjectivity within contemporary capitalism would be complete without accounting for precarity. Tsianos and Papadopoulos posit precarity as the new arrangement of exploitation of living labour (2004, p. 3), and an awareness of the precarity implied by capitalist production is certainly present in the materials analysed, reflected in the vulnerability of many of the characters rooted in production but experienced at an existential level. In his book *Precarious Rhapsody: Semiocapitalism and the pathologies of the Post-Alpha generation*, Berardi analyses precarisation as a process of subjective dissolution. In the next part of this chapter, I will apply Berardi's theory of precarity as the fragmentation of the subject to an analysis of *Altered Carbon*, a series which vividly depicts precarity as a subjective condition. I will link this existential precarity, in line with Lorey's understanding of precarisation as a condition normalised and typified within the post-Fordist existence (Lorey, 2015, p. 12).

ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR: THE FRAGMENTED SUBJECT IN *ALTERED CARBON*.

Theorist Isabell Lorey asserts, 'If we fail to understand precarisation, then we understand neither the politics nor the economy of the present' (Lorey, 2015, p. 8). Just as precariousness is pivotal to an understanding of today's socio-economic setting, it is also a central characteristic of the post-Fordist subject. In order to achieve the qualities of flexibility and specialisation that characterise contemporary production, capital no longer employs workers as agents of production, instead utilising fragments of their time. As a consequence of capital's fragmentation of the work process, the dissection of his/her lifetime into 'exploitable units of the present' (Tsianos and Papadopoulos, 2004), the worker as a whole physical and conscious entity ends up dissolved (Berardi, 2009b, p. 32); this development within production gives way to an instability and vulnerability, which whilst existential in character, originates from the production process.

For the first time within the advancement of capital, precariousness is not a state that exists exclusively inside of employment relations, but rather within the act of production itself. As Marx and Engels expressed, within capitalism "all that is solid melts into air" (Marx and Engels, 1992, p. 6): the system's constant need for expansion entails that in the quest for profit modes of production rapidly transform, overthrowing the established social relations and structures. From a historical and materialistic point of view, precarity is the natural, inevitable by-product of the development of capital. This is reflected in the narrative of *Altered Carbon*, which posits the commodification of existence as a developmental stage of accumulation, and as the source of the instability suffered by grounders (the lower class, who live on the ground level of Bay City).

The series depicts a capital, which, embodied by the meths' exploitation of stack technology in the final stage of its development, turns inward to the very soul of individuals in order to make profit from that which has so far escaped its reach: biological life. This incorporation of bios within production entailed by stack technology gives way to a mind/body split that causes the dissolution of the subject. The exploitation depicted in *Altered Carbon*, thus reflects the post-Fordist fractalisation of the worker and conveys the disintegration of the subject as the black heart of post-Fordist capitalism, no longer a marginal phenomenon, but now a constitutive characteristic of production. As a result of capital's employment of 'the soul' within its labour process, and fragmentation implied by the process of production, precariousness today is a condition that exists between the existential and material sphere: it affects the human spirit, is enacted through production, and therefore is material in character.

As reflected in *Altered Carbon*, precariousness no longer exists solely at the margins of society but affects everyone at the moment of engagement within the act of production. The commodification of stack technology, which allows for the unrestricted extension, accumulation, and exploitation of life by the elite, constitutes a final stage of capitalist expansion, the deregulation of life itself. Interpretations of stack and sleeve technology such as the one provided by Fernández Menicucci (2021) have focused on the topic of transhumanism and posthumanism, positing the stack as a liberation from the constraints of the body. From the perspective of a Marxist reading, stack technology symbolises the elimination of the body and natural lifespan as premise for the system's exploitation of life and consciousness. Thus, within my interpretation I will posit immortality as the symbolisation of neoliberal deregulation applied to the commodification of life.

PRECARIOUSNESS AS A MATERIAL CONDITION.

The first encounter with precarity and its link to capitalist relations emerges in the series' opening episode when the protagonist, envoy Takeshi Kovacs, who has just been brought back to life in the re-sleeving facility of Alcatraz prison in Bay City, witnesses the trauma implied by reincarnation experienced by a little girl who has also just been re-sleeved. As Kovacs exits the re-sleeving centre located in Alcatraz prison, he turns his attention to two parents who have just been reunited with their newly reincarnated daughter. To the couple's shock, the child has been re-sleeved into the body of a much older woman and is physically unrecognisable from her previous self. The little girl has also been deprived of her childhood years, and the aging body in which she has been re-sleeved will allow her to live for fewer years when compared to the longer life that she would have naturally enjoyed.

When the parents protest, reminding the guard that their daughter, having been the victim of a hit and run car accident, has the right to a suitable replacement, they are told that she will be given whichever body is on offer in the inventory, and that if they are not happy with it they should pay for an upgrade, or put their daughter back 'on ice' (the state of temporary death reserved to unsleeved stacks). Detective Ortega (the police officer who has come to the centre to escort the envoy to the Bancroft residence) explains to a disapproving Kovacs that the best sleeves are reserved for the market and leased for profit, whilst the worst ones are handed out by the government to victims of crime (S1:E1, 16:37'-17:39').

As emerges from this scene, the assimilation of stack technology within a system based on profit results in the destabilisation of human life; the market emerges as an invisible but monstrous entity that appropriates from individuals that which should be rightfully theirs.

Compared to the child's brutal death, caused by the hit-and-run, the market appears to be even harsher, more destabilising in its allocation of the child's 'leftover' sleeve. This is because the assignment of the new sleeve, compared to the car accident, emerges as completely arbitrary, a perversion of the natural and equal allocation of vulnerability.

As stated by Judith Butler, vulnerability towards others is, after all, an immanent aspect of existence and cannot be willed away without ceasing to be human (2004, p. xiv). Likewise, as reflected in the scene, the little girl's death emerges as a dictation of fate, therefore in a sense unavoidable, an inescapable contingency of life. By contrast, the child's deprivation of a dignified life at the hands of the system emerges as unreasonably violent and iniquitous. The most tragic aspect of the child's circumstances is not the accident itself, but her reincarnation; the process of re-sleeving presents the child with a new biological life, but by the same hand dissolves all elements of stability in her existence: her identity, recognisability, and ability to enjoy life are dispossessed by the market, which claims them for itself in the name of profit.

The stack is presented in the scene as allowing the market to appropriate that which nature has assigned to human beings: the body, physical appearance, an underlying sense of self, and recognisability. As a consequence, identity becomes volatile and precarised. The appropriation of life at the hands of capitalist production, hence, is depicted as the real source of vulnerability and instability for grounders, a parasitical force, which by way of its hunger for value, appropriates all that is worthwhile in life.

Likewise, the accumulation of life entails that those in power, through their wealth, are able to monopolise security and shelter, thus transforming it from its natural state of contingency (being exposed to danger may previously have been understood as mere chance) to an arbitrary distribution of safety and protection as privileges of an elite. In the following scene, Kovacs confronts meth Laurens Bancroft, who has requested for him to be resuscitated

in order to solve the mystery of his death. Kovacs' encounter with Bancroft emphasises the discrepancy in the distribution of precarity within the society depicted, by highlighting the safety of meth existence. As the meth recounts the circumstances of his death, he explains that although his stack had been destroyed by a particle blaster weapon, and as a result his stack had been real-deathed (death with no chance of reincarnation due to the complete destruction of the consciousness contained within the stack), this did not result in his decease, since he owns a full-spectrum DHF remote storage that backs up his DHF (digital consciousness) every 48 hours, with military grade security, keeping it safe in case of assault.

This calibre of security is a prerogative of the wealthy as expressed in Kovacs' answer to Bancroft, when asked if he had ever heard of this type of technology before, "Yeah. Just never met anyone filthy rich enough to afford it" (S1:E1, 31:31'-32:17'). The precarity of grounder existence is hence demarcated, to use Lorey's definition, as a category of order, which within the hierarchy of social structures unevenly distributes access to security, welfare, and stability (2015, p. 12). The elite owes its very existence to stack technology, their name itself (deriving from the biblical Methuselah, who lived 969 years) implying the accumulation of life and its connection to their power.

Within *Altered Carbon*, however, whilst vulnerability is implemented in line with the power structures depicted, the development of the system of production and its incorporation of life and reincarnation through stack technology is posited as the element steering these power dynamics. Indeed, stack technology in a nutshell constitutes the production of safety contained in the attainment of immortality as an antidote to death. As emerges from the case of the little girl incarnated in an old body, among many other cases, the meth system is also a system which produces instability, vulnerability, and precarity, thus reflects Lorey's understanding of post-Fordism as a system which now governs through insecurity, and in

which government is no longer legitimised through the promise of security, and in which precarity is increasingly normalised as an experience (Lorey, 2015, p. 12).

Thanks to their ability to accrue sleeves, thus both expanding and securing their lifespan, the meths dominate grounders. The commodification of life allows for its accumulation, creating the divide between the elite, who live for centuries, and the lower class, who benefit at best from a couple of lifetimes. Following Marsden's understanding of the correlation between mechanisms of power and production (2021, p. 135), whilst the meth elite's relegation of the lower classes to a state of precarity is the 'how', the market's expansion leading to the incorporation of life is the 'why'. These initial scenes within the series, hence, present an understanding of precarity as a destabilisation of life linked to its commodification.

The meth elite's accumulation of wealth, stemming from an economic system characterised by demand for growth, is at the root of the appropriation of grounders' life, which through commodification is rendered insecure and unstable. Whilst the narrative reflects precarity as a condition of disparity, it traces the source of this disparity not primarily within the structures of power, but rather within the evolution of capitalism and the appropriation of life within production.

"AND THE DAYS OF METHUSELAH WERE 969 YEARS": IMMORTALITY AS THE DEREGULATION OF LIFE.

The third episode in *Altered Carbon* opens with Takeshi Kovacs' reflections on stack technology and its effects, "Humanity has spread to the stars. We set out like ancient seafarers to explore the limitless ocean of space. But no matter how far we venture into the unknown, the worst monsters are those we bring with us" (S1:E3, 0:32'-00:58'). These words conjure up an impulse for progress and expansion (along with its devastating effects) that reveals the objective of immortality to be something other than the safeguarding of life: the likening of human beings to a seafarer pinpoints the purpose of existence as progress and advancement. Within this imagery, death is seen as an impediment, a boundary; hence, from this perspective, the function of stack technology is not so much the safeguarding of life, but rather the removal of death as an obstacle to development. Later in the series, this perspective is confirmed when Quellcrist Falconer (leader of the Uprising, a resistance warrior group that Kovacs had joined), confesses to Kovacs that she was in fact the inventor of stacks. Disillusioned with her own invention, she expresses that the real intention behind the stack had been the widening of opportunities for space travel:

> I wanted to be an explorer. See other worlds with my own eyes, but…one life wasn't enough time to see the stars, so…I found a way to transfer the human consciousness between bodies and, in that creation, soar. Suddenly, anyone could travel distances beyond imagination faster than light, and no one would ever be limited by one lifetime ever again. […]" (S1:E7, 43:48'-44:20').

The envoy leader's initial intent is expressed as a humanistic desire for development in the shape of experience and knowledge, attainable through space travel.

Falconer's primary objective is later appropriated and distorted in the context of meths' society, for which immortality constitutes the elimination of death as limit to the

amassing of wealth. The meths in fact use their endless lifespan as an opportunity to accumulate material possessions, status, and authority, as made clear for instance by Miriam Bancroft, when Kovacs notices a songspire tree (a plant native to his planet of Harlan's World) in the hallway of the Bancroft mansion. When Kovacs comments "This must have cost a fortune to ship here" Miriam responds "Several fortunes actually. And a few lifetimes" (S1:E1, 24:17': 24:35'), highlighting how even a fortune in monetary terms would not have been enough to attain the tree.

The meths' obsessive compulsion to amass fortunes, as well as their dislike of limits being applied to their greed, is frequently referred to within the narrative: for instance, when Miriam Bancroft, in response to Kovacs' rejection of her sexual advances, comments: "Enough? It's an interesting word. I'm not sure I'm familiar with it" (49:29'-49:29'). During the party organised by Bancroft in order to gather the suspects for his murder, Kovacs' sidekick Vernon Elliot (who was at the party disguised as a waiter at Kovacs' request, in order to provide backup), comments on how the meths 'drink like fish' (S1:E3,28:55'), a remark which again highlights their greed and disregard for restrictions.

The elimination of death as foundation for meth greed and accumulation is most poignantly symbolised by the carcass of a tiger at Bancroft's party's banquet which the meths are eating into (S1:E3, 24:53'-24:58'). The tiger, as a wild predator, is a symbolic representation of natural death, a reflection of the precariousness that is immanent, organic to human life. The slaughtered tiger lying on the banquet table, hence, represents the natural vulnerability implied by death, which has been eliminated by stack technology. However, the meths feasting on the tiger symbolises the conquering of death as a release from the limits to their own greed, and impulse to accumulate and consume, which through the stack's attainment of immortality has become an even greater threat to the stability of grounder existence.

The expansion of meth wealth and power implied by stack technology itself originates a new, systemic form of precarity: the commodification of grounders (the lower class individuals whose life is considered expendable by the meth elite), also depicted within the same dinner party in which the entertainment is comprised by a wife and husband being paid to fight each other until death, having been promised money and a new sleeve in recompense for the partner who dies (S1:E3, 22:56'-23:55'). Within the narrative, the elimination of death is the necessary steppingstone to the absorption of life within the logic of capital: freed from death, life becomes ensnared within the market, its human, anthropological, ethical, and spiritual value being replaced by pure exchange value.

As expressed by the envoys' leader Falconer and the regretful inventor of stack technology, within the context of a class system immortality allows for the elimination of limits to greed: "I thought I was freeing the human spirit, but I was building the roads for Rome. Eternal life for those who can afford it means eternal control over those who can't" (S1:E7, 44:37'-44:54'). The stack's promise of freedom constitutes the deception that allows the meths and the neoliberal law of the 'economic jungle' to take over (Berardi, 2009a, p. 186),thus the tenets of accumulation, profit at all costs, and competition become the sole rules governing existence. In her analysis of posthumanism and transhumanism, Fernandez Menicucci argues that whilst presenting a transhumanist society which transcends the mind-body humanism, *Altered Carbon* struggles to represent non-human bodies as anything but 'tools' or 'things' (2021, p. 97). This insistence on the representation of bodies as objectified is no accident but rather is to be attributed to the narrative focus on the devastating effects of capitalist accumulation and exploitation.

Just like the stack in *Altered Carbon* is sold on the promise of freedom from death, so deregulation is presented by neoliberalism as the promise of freedom from governmental constraints. Through the removal of any rule that might protect the individual from the

ruthless dynamics of economic competition, capitalism enacts a precarisation of the individual, who is at the mercy of the laws of the market. *Altered Carbon* depicts a system in which the elimination of natural death, whilst presented as freedom, in reality enacts the subjugation of humanity to the capitalist logic. Stack technology, at its very core, is an expression of neoliberalism: by presenting immortality as an opportunity to live life to its fullest, the society depicted enacts the precarisation of the individual. Paradoxically, *Altered Carbon* reflects an image of immortality not as a solution, but rather as the very cause of precariousness.

PRECARIOUSNESS AS THE BLACK HEART OF POST-FORDIST PRODUCTION.

The commodification of life in *Altered Carbon* is enacted through the subject's fragmentation. The society depicted feeds off chunks of consciousness, thoughts, and affection for the attainment of profit. The fragmentation of consciousness as a precondition for its commodification emerges, for instance, in the underground economy built around snippets of memories "Moments from a king's childhood, a socialite losing her virginity …black market value is huge for a slice of those memories" (S1:E2, 9:02'-9:11').

Experiences and recollection are separated from the individual to whom they belong, and through this disconnection acquire value within the market. This fragmentation of the self is most visibly symbolised in the patchwork man, protagonist of the childhood stories Kovacs and his sister Reileen would tell each other: this mythical creature is made up of sewn together children's body parts. The patchwork man is the embodiment of the meth society, which disintegrates the individuals in order to lay claim to them and exploit them. The same fragmentation of the person at the basis of the patchwork man myth can be most saliently

found in the stack technology's separation of mind and body, at the basis of meth's

exploitation of the sex workers in bio cabins who are beaten to death. Within meth society,

the individual's fragmentation, in which precarisation is rooted, goes hand in hand with the

market's promise of flexibility, in typical post-Fordist fashion. Nowhere is this more obvious

than in the bio-cabins, exploitative brothels set out as booths which offer a variety of services

based on the requirements and spending abilities of customers.

The flexible specialisation characteristic of a post-Fordist approach to production is

reflected in the bio-cabin Kovacs visits through the character of sex worker Anemone: the

establishment offers services adapted to budget and preference, as reflected in Anemone's

summoning, "Do you want to see me? I'm right here, baby. Just a few credits", then, after this

first step, further bids, "Now, do you want to touch me?" (S1:E2, 37:05'-37:33') requiring

additional credits. Anemone's 'multi-layered' is enacted through the compartmentalisation of

herself into a variety of commodified versions of herself on offer. The series' depictions of

commodified, fragmented, and mutable subjectivity reflect an image of commodification that

is typically post-Fordist in character and convey the manner in which capital dismantles the

subject as a fixed entity. In the bio-cabin's image of horrifying exploitation and degradation,

Altered Carbon reflects a precariousness which, as typical within post-Fordism, constitutes

not merely instability within labour relations but also implies the very dissolution of the

worker as an active productive agent (Berardi, 2009b, p. 32), revealing the fragmentation of

subjectivity as byproduct of its offer of flexibility.

As stated by Tsianos and Papadopoulos, the embodied experience of precarity is

expressed within the subject in the following characteristics: vulnerability (a), hyperactivity

(b), simultaneity (c), recombination (d), post-sexuality (e), fluid intimacies (f), restlessness

(g), unsettledness (h), affective exhaustion (i), cunning (j) (2004, p. 4). The series' narrative

reflects all of these facets of post-Fordist subjectivity, linking them to the mind-body fissure

enacted by the stack. Vulnerability (a) is reflected, for instance, in the character of Anemone, who reveals to Kovacs that some meth clients tend to beat their sleeves to death, an act which is deemed acceptable since the client buys a new sleeve to 'replace' the one he kills (S1:E2, 39:25'-39:53'). Anemone ends up murdered as a result of her helping the envoy with his investigations, her body dismembered, for the parts to be resold for profit, in one final act of fragmentation.

Vulnerability is also implied by the precariousness of Kovacs' existence: the envoy is threatened with being executed, for instance, when Bancroft informs him that he will be put on ice (temporary death) if he fails to find the murderer promptly or before his assassination is attempted again (S1:E2, 11:28'), and, again, threatens to kill the envoy if the case is mentioned to anyone outside of the family (S1:E8, 41:46'). Hyperactivity (b), restlessness (g) and unsettledness (h) are embodied in the character of Detective Ortega, who appears to constantly be rushing from one place to the next, and never switches off from work, displaying an unhealthy attachment to her professional life, to the point of interrupting a meal with her mother in order to follow Kovacs when her tracking device informs her of his location (S1:E2, 35:12'-35:39'). Whilst Ortega comes across as a character who refuses to acknowledge her exhaustion as a subjective trait, this acceptance itself contains revolutionary potential, as I will analyse in the final chapter, in which I will pinpoint subjective exhaustion as the precondition to her liberation from the alienating effects of the system in which she exists.

Unsettledness also emerges from the experience of re-sleeving itself, which in the case of Kovacs entails moving from one planet (Harlan's world) to another (Earth), and by sleeve sickness, the side effect of waking up in a different body. Simultaneity (c) is symbolised in Kovacs' decision to clone his DHF (consciousness) and to double sleeve, thus enabling him to both enter the Head in the Clouds establishment to fight his sister Reileen, and to be outside

of it in order to survive. The envoy's cynicism and intuition reflect the post-Fordist subject's cunning (j), his initial reticence to take on the case, and decision to go back into storage "This isn't my world." (S1:E1, 41:31')) together with his refusal to form attachments or relationships, maintaining a distance from the people he meets "Don't take this personally but…I don't care about anyone" (S1:E3, 08:48'), emerge as affective exhaustion (j). Finally, post-sexuality (e) is symbolised in the VR sex experiences offered by the Prick Up and The Raven, and fluid intimacies (f) are reflected in the complicated relationship between Ortega and Kovacs, who is resleeved in Ortega's partner Elias Ryker's body.

The series' visuals also contribute to creating symbolic representations of embodied vulnerability through the natural elements, particularly through water, which within the narrative embodies on the one hand motion and transformation, and on the other hand, destabilisation, and vulnerability. The vulnerability implied by water is reflected, for instance, in the first episode's opening scene, which shows Kovacs' sleeve floating in a clear liquid substance, later shown to be the amniotic fluid in which sleeves are preserved. In this scene, Kovacs' unconscious body (prior to re-sleeving) is depicted underwater, as if drowning (S1:E1, 2:05'); an element of restraint is added by the umbilical cord, which resembles a rope constraining the envoy, suggesting a state of exposure and restraint.

The destabilisation and vulnerability of Kovacs existence are again highlighted through the symbolism of water when, after being introduced to Bancroft and informed about the circumstances behind his re-sleeving, back on the ground, Kovacs reflects on his situation, sitting on a ledge overlooking the sea, where he visualises his sister, Reileen, who comments "all that water, it's just like home", in reference to their home planet, to which Kovacs replies "give or take 80 light years", highlighting the distance from their current location (S1:E1, 35:01'-35:07').

Together with the visual symbol of the water, the dialogue highlights the destabilisation and unpredictability of the envoy's existence, reflected in his constant sleeve changes and the fluctuations of his existence, which even displace him from his native planet of Harlan's world to Earth. The relationships Kovacs forms also are characterised by instability, with a pattern of losing his loved ones as reflected in Falconer's words: "This is what you do, love. Stride across the centuries, and death follows, churning in your wake" (S1:E6, 7:02'-7:06'). Finally, the symbolic act of throwing the notebook written by his mentor Quellcrist Falconer, which Bancroft had handed to him into the water once again highlights the volatility of his existence. The notebook, suspended mid-air, disappears just like Kovacs' lost relationships with Falconer, Reileen, his envoy comrades, and the rebellion that he had fought for (S1:E1, 36:07').

The precarity of existence within post-Fordism is linked to the dissolution of the subject through production, and the separation of consciousness from the body. The body, whilst playing an important role within the market, is emptied of both subjectivity and meaning; as put by Berardi, it 'lays flabbily at the borders of the game field' (2009a, p. 192). In this sense, the sleeves kept by the Bancroft family in their vault, enclosed in glass incubators, permanently subjected to electric stimulation in order to prevent them from losing muscle tone, stored at their disposal, and utilised at will (08:06'-08:22'), perfectly symbolise the precarised workers within the immaterial factory. Capitalist production, in its post-Fordist phase, is precarious at its core, and thrives on the fragmentation of the worker, which in Berardi's words, constitutes the 'black heart' of production (2011, p. 91).

"GOD ONLY GAVE YOU ONE BODY": THE NEO-CATHOLIC MOVEMENT AND THE REHABILITATION OF DEATH.

Just as within the narrative immortality and reincarnation are synonymous with precarisation, so mortality and death represent an espousal of the natural lifecycle as a form of stability against the fragmentation of the individual brought about by stack technology. The advocacy of a return to natural death is embodied by the neo-Catholics, a religious community who believe that reincarnation leads to the damnation of the soul, and hence refuse to be re-sleeved. Due to their religious conviction, Neo-Catholics choose to have their stack inscribed with a coding which indicates their religion and blocks their reincarnation.

Framed within the narrative's social commentary, this religious group plays an important role as opposition to the logic of capital, firmly rejecting the possibility of re-sleeving even in case of murder, to testify against their murderer. Detective Ortega, whilst being born into a neo-Catholic family, decides to renounce her coding.

Death as an element in contrast with precarisation is also represented in the Día de los Muertos celebration (E:3 and E:4), through its connotations with tradition ("I adore All Hallows' Eve. The history, the tradition […]". Within this festival, the amalgamation of various cultural celebrations and the reference to a connection between human beings ("the holidays are about people, families, flesh and blood connecting […]") (S1:E4, 03:21'-03:40'), reclaim the individual as a whole, as a unit within the social spheres of family and tradition. The new trend of renting out bodies during the celebration in order to revive loved ones for a day, is viewed as a transgression of the natural life and death cycle, which is sacred to neo-Catholics, and when Ortega (who is a less traditionalist member of her family) decides to

reawaken her grandma (abuela) from the dead for the day, she is met with disapproval from other family members, her uncle, for instance, warning the children at the table that "I know abuela sounds happy and funny, but remember, God only gave you one body." (S1:E4, 20:55'). The uncle's affirmation emerges as a yearning for the unity of consciousness and body that will provide stability to existence.

Hence, whilst the neo-Catholic opposition to re-sleeving in the plot is explained by spiritual and ethical motivations, within an interpretation focused on immortality as 'de-regulation' of life, it acquires the role of opposition to the logic of neoliberalism embodied in the meth principle of accumulation, a desire to reinstate that limit which had been eliminated through stack technology.

Whilst within meth ideology, life is an enterprise and death an unwelcome limit to its expansion, for the neo-Catholic faith death is just as sacred as life, both constituting a space of spirituality in which neither science nor profit should interfere. The series' approach to the neo-Catholic rejection of immortality is nevertheless complex, and also denotes an awareness of the irrevocability of the mutation that stack technology has brought about, reflected in Ortega's response to her mother's protests, "Mamá, ya. Relájate y disfrútala" (S1:E4, 17:52'), and Alazne's sarcastic self-definition as an old-fashioned, out-of-touch woman (S1:E2, 33:28'-33:43'). Reflected in these references is an awareness that the morphogenesis (Berardi, 2009a, p. 212), enacted by capital through technology is not easily reversible.

Ortega, who has renounced the neo-Catholic faith, even defining the stack as a miracle for eliminating the inevitability of death, is a reflection of the volatile existence entailed by stack technology: her flat became cluttered with boxes after she had moved into her flat with her partner Elias Ryker, who had, however, been framed for the murder of Mary Lou Henchy (which he had been investigating), condemned and put on ice, leaving Ortega alone. The unemptied boxes are a visual reflection of the instability and precariousness of Ortega's life.

Even Ortega's love life reflects precarisation at the hands of the system: as Tsianos and Papadopoulos state, two of the embodied experiences of precarity within post-Fordism are recombination and fluid intimacies (2004, p. 4), both reflected in her romantic involvement with Kovacs, who is wearing Ryker's sleeve (and through it acquires some of Ryker's personal traits, such as his smoking habit), chosen for him by Bancroft in an attempt to exasperate the detective.

Nevertheless, Ortega's acceptance of the instability of her existence is reflected when, in response to Alazne's reproaches about the untidiness of her flat and the insecurity in her life, Ortega's answers are: "I'm busy, that's all" and, "I like it like this" (S1:E2, 32:55'-33:17'). Ortega's approach to her situation reflects an ambivalent understanding of precarity, in line with Hogg and Simonsen, as a negative and dangerous phenomenon, but also as a state that holds potential for transformation (2020, p. 26).

"THIS ISN'T MY WORLD". CONCLUSIONS ON THE POST-FORDIST SUBJECT.

In his contribution to a study on radical thought, a book chapter entitled 'The Ambivalence of Disenchantment', Virno emphasizes the urgency of examining the emotional situation of the contemporary subject, which should not be dismissed as a light-hearted matter, but rather acknowledged as central in relation to concrete issues such as the relations of production and forms of life, acquiescence, and conflict (1996, p. 1) In other words, the analysis of the soul at work is fundamental to a wider understanding not just of the post-Fordist subject but also of the current historical moment, the development of capitalism as a socio-economic system, the discontent being generated within this setting, and consequent possibilities for dissent. This very awareness forms the basis of my research, which looks to gain insight from the series

regarding some of the most pressing issues of this historical moment as reflected in popular narratives.

The analysis of *Altered Carbon* and *Black Mirror* reveals that distrust towards technology is interconnected with a distrust of the system in which we live, whether consciously or subconsciously. The narratives are a powerful expression of what it means to exist within the current phase of capitalism and present evident links between technological production in its various forms (creativity, affects, inclinations) and alienation as an existential condition, depicted as a state of being having originated in capitalism's appropriation of human consciousness through technology. The traits which are typical of the post-Fordist subject—cynicism, opportunism, restlessness, and curiosity—which 'colour' the subject also emerge as the result of the system of production and the instability of post-Fordist existence. This points towards the fact that production today not only causes alienation, by appropriating core facets of humanity for the production of value, but also shapes the individual, who is affected by capital's requirements of flexibility and adaptability.

At the start of this chapter, I proposed to analyse the links between contemporary subjectivity and rising forms of immaterial production. Emerging in the two series is a society in which value is abstracted from human intellect, intended not merely as know-how and technical knowledge, but as a variety of capabilities and attitudes: creativity, affection, preference, intuition, as well as knowledge proper. Arising from the series analysed and echoed throughout the plots, images, symbolisms is the awareness that the contemporary subject has been imprisoned within a veritable factory of unhappiness, a system of production that engulfs humanity and churns out alienation and instability. Both *Black Mirror* and *Altered Carbon* are a window into immaterial production in its various guises: from creativity and the ability to form relationships in the case of Ashley Too, to personal preference or 'fussiness' in the case of Greta in 'White Christmas', or to intuition and analytical intelligence

in the case of Kovacs in *Altered Carbon*, every facet of human nature is churned out as a commodity for the purpose of creating value within post-Fordism.

The result of post-Fordism's exploitation of the soul, as starkly emerges from the narratives, is estrangement: the subsumption by capital of life and all that is inherently human enacts a separation from the authenticity of the self as species being. Alienation from the self as species being, hence, emerges strongly within the series analysed; the narratives also seem to corroborate Berardi's definition of estrangement as the distinctive post-Fordist form of alienation: the subject is confronted with the imposed and alien interests of capital, resulting in a feeling of unease, disorientation and disaffection. Hence, the subject is not so much separated from an external object produced but rather absorbed into a system which is foreign to him/her.

The mind-body separation enacted by automation renders the individual incapable of reacting or even gaining awareness of this state of alienation. Berardi's concept of de-realisation, the powerlessness towards alienation as a result of the machine's subsumption of consciousness and the resulting split from the body, is reflected in the series' narratives, for instance in the robotic incarnation of Ashley's inability to move independently, and in Greta's inability to escape the cookie into which she has been imprisoned. The machine, thus, both enacts the subject's alienation and complicates the possibility of insurgence; this awareness will be key to the final chapter in my thesis, dedicated to the analysis of the possibility of the construction of alternative forms of subjectivity.

Both *Altered Carbon* and *Black Mirror* present vivid symbolisations of the general intellect, whilst also revealing the various forms in which it is deployed by capital today. *Altered Carbon*'s depiction of envoy intuition constitutes a poetic symbolisation of intellect, which paradoxically is depicted at once as a mystical ability but also as organically human. Whilst certain images, for instance that of the holographic Ashley Eternal whose size appears

to tower over the real Ashley, point to the inimical power of technology when appropriated by capital, other images instead point to intellect's subversive power against capital in the hands of the worker, as in the case of envoy intuition, which is used as a tool for fighting the meth elite. Emerging, hence, is the recognition of intellect as an element both essential to capital's survival and also capable of its downfall.

This emerging awareness also brings about questions concerning to what degree labour can be viewed as an antagonistic element within today's social setting (questions which I attempt to answer in the third chapter of this thesis). When it comes to defining the common characteristics of the post-Fordist subject as a result of the exploitative, changeable, and precarious nature of the production system which subsumes the individual, this latter emerges as cynical and opportunist (Virno, 2004) two psychological traits which are a direct result of labour relations, the instability of existence and capitalist exploitation. A voracious appetite for information and knowledge is also characteristic of contemporary subjectivity, reflected in *Altered Carbon*'s character depictions; the search for knowledge and truth is in fact one of the driving motors of the series' plot, reflected for instance in the murder mysteries that both Kovacs and detective Ortega investigate, and in Lizzie's curiosity and habit of spying and collating data.

The traits of opportunism, cynicism and curiosity are not depicted as positive or negative characteristics, but simply as a product of the characters' condition of existence, and, whilst they are utilised by capital (represented by Bancroft and his need to solve the mystery of his death), they also become tools used in order to achieve justice and liberation. The characteristics of cynicism and opportunism emerge as directly linked to a system of production which not only subsumes consciousness but also fragments labour time and dissolves the subject.

Precarity emerges from *Altered Carbon* as an existential condition linked to the
fracturing and recombining of space and time, as well as the destabilising of consciousness,
which is moved from body to body. It is not the absence of work relations but rather the
instability of work relations themselves that create the precarity of the post-Fordist subject.
Just like alienation, precarity is depicted as a condition which is created at the intersection
between the soul and production, hence both material and existential. Perhaps the biggest
revelation emerging from the series is that within an analysis of today's society, any
assessment of subjectivity needs to be rooted in materialism, given the active role of
production in shaping subjectivity. The post-Fordist individual exists at the intersection
between materiality and existentialism: just as a materialist study which does not focus on the
emergence of 'the soul at work' neglects the changes brought about by immaterial production,
so too a purely existential understanding of the subject fails to grasp the issues proper to
existence within capitalism today.

In conclusion, post-Fordism as a system of production, the 'factory of unhappiness,' as
reflected in *Black Mirror* and *Altered Carbon,* produces the subject as the source of intellect,
inclination, and emotional connectivity, and as a commodity. The subject, captured within this
system, is affected by a sense of malaise which has come to typify modern existence, a
malaise which is reflected in the series analysed. The series analysed reflect the message that
the sense of estrangement and existential precariousness that characterise the soul at work can
only be ended by the individual's release from the technological chains of capital.

This analysis of estrangement contained within the thesis' first chapter brings about
the need for an analysis of the role and meaning of authenticity within society today. As
stated by Byron, the issue of the possibility of an authentic human nature is a precondition for
an understanding of alienation under capitalism because if, as some theorists argue, there is no
enduring human nature, it would be impossible to posit or envisage a separation from it

through labour (2016, p. 390). In other words, if production entails alienation as 'separation' what is it that human beings are being separated from? Within an analysis of post-Fordism, the issue of authenticity is further complicated by the fact that authenticity has been 'hijacked' by capital through commodification.

As affirmed by Murtola and Fleming, "The concept of authenticity appears to have shifted from a problem of the humanist revolutionary left to one that is now at home in glossy corporate training manuals, team-building exercises of investment firms and advertising agencies" (2011, p. 2). The fundamental nexus between the concept of estrangement and that of authentic human nature brings about the need for an analysis of the films and series' reflections of authenticity within human nature and existence under capitalism, particularly considering the prevalence of questions concerning what's real within the materials analysed. Thus, my second chapter will be dedicated to an analysis of the relationship between authenticity and the consumer society within *Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner 2049*, and *Black Mirror*.

CHAPTER 2. "WE 'RE ALL JUST LOOKING OUT FOR SOMETHING REAL": INAUTHENTICITY AND THE POST-FORDIST 'DRUGSTORE' OF EXISTENCE.

INTRODUCTION.

Science fiction frequently confronts the viewer with questions of what is real or authentically human, and the films and series analysed in this chapter, *Blade Runner* 2049 and the *Black Mirror* anthology, are no exception to this tendency. As observed by Robin Bunce (in Bunce and McCrossin, 2019, p. xiii), Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner* questions many of the assumptions which inform the traditional distinctions between human and non-human; Denis Villeneuve's sequel delves even deeper into concerns about authenticity. The word 'real' is ubiquitous in the movie, emerging more than fifty times in the script, each time from a different perspective: authenticity in the case of Joshi when she says "we're all just looking out for something real"; genuineness in the case of K, when he defines his memories as 'not real'; naturally human as opposed to synthetic, in the case of Joi, when she defines K as 'a real boy'; physical, as opposed to virtual, in the case of Mariette, who asks K "You don't like *real* girls?", and meaningfulness, when K says to Joi that she is real for him (Bunce and McCrossin, 2019, p. xiii- xiv).

Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* anthology, whilst set in a world that appears much closer to our own reality in terms of technology, likewise reflects similar concerns with the authentic. In the episode 'Be Right Back', for instance, the protagonist, Martha, accuses the AI android version of her deceased partner Ash, which she had bought in order to help deal

with her loneliness, of being nothing but 'a performance of stuff' (S2:E1, 45:25-45:30'), a fake version of him. The episode 'San Junipero' depicts an alluring yet unreal virtual reality, into which protagonists Yorkie and Kelly upload themselves in order to lead a carefree existence. After choosing to permanently transfer to the VR town, Yorkie exclaims: "[It]looks so real! It feels so real!" (S3:E4, 49:30'-49:45') whilst Kelly rejects the idea of living in a virtual paradise that is sham, since it endorses a superficial, inauthentic existence, "You want to spend forever somewhere nothing matters? …Go ahead. But I'm out" (S3:E4, 53:41'-53:45).

This chapter pinpoints the source of the preoccupation with the (in)authentic reflected in the films and series within the phenomenon of commodification. Whilst traditional Marxist theory has tended to focus on production, with the advent of consumer society some theorists focused their analysis of capitalism on the alienating effects of consumption. For example, in *One Dimensional Man* Herbert Marcuse analysed the way advanced industrial society integrates individuals through the imposition of consumption as a false need (1964, p. 5). Whilst Baudrillard is not primarily considered a Marxist theorist, the French theorist's works which are more influenced by Marxism reflect a strong interest in consumerism, as pointed out by Lane (2009, pp. 64-65).

In *The Consumer Society*, Baudrillard defines the very structure of market society as imbued with alienation resulting from the total commodification of existence (1998, p. 190). Within my analysis of the materials, the question I will pose is, in what way can the experience and perception of inauthenticity be linked to the characters' confrontation with the ideology of consumerism and its effects within their existence? My approach is based on an understanding of subjectivity as shaped by its socio-economic setting, and accordingly, I will focus on the qualitative shift in the practice and ideology of consumption resulting from the effects of changes in production from industrial society to post-Fordist and immaterial

production, highlighted and analysed by recent research, particularly autonomist theorist Franco Berardi (2009a).

In terms of consumption, the shift to post-Fordism has implied an increase in the commodification of experience: as consumers of immaterial goods, we are no longer merely sold cups of coffee, food, or other commodities but rather 'coffee experiences', 'dining experiences', and various forms of 'shopping experiences', grasping elements of existence which had so far strictly speaking eluded the reach of capital (Murtola, 2014, p. 835); this change in the nature of consumption corresponds to what Jeffrey Nealon defines as capital's 'intensive' expansion, a type of consumption epitomised by the Las Vegas experience, in which individuals consume experiences, immaterial goods which intensify, bend, and retool subjectivity (2012, p. 59).

Within the films and series analysed, the post-Fordist consumption of experience, life and relationships is reflected in the frequent depictions within the narratives of manufactured realms of existence, such as the virtual beach resort in 'San Junipero', the commodified love story between K and Joi in *Blade Runner 2049*, and the 'improved' AI version of Ash in 'Be Right Back'. The objects of consumption within the narratives are not material possessions but rather facets of existence itself, realms of implied perfection and happiness. Hence, an analysis of the consumer subject as emerging in the films and series should use as its starting point an awareness of the radically different nature of contemporary consumerism, and its acquired biopolitical role. Consumption within post-Fordism implies a subject who takes active part in the creation of the commodity, an aspect which ostensibly allows more autonomy within consumption, as for instance maintained by Toffler (1980, np).

Modern consumption has in fact given rise to the figure of the prosumer, characterised by an active role in the production of consumer goods, bringing into question conceptions of the consumer as a passive subject, the idea of consumption as an imposition, and even

whether it is still possible to talk about alienation within post-Fordist capitalism. A secondary aim of this chapter is, hence, to ascertain whether greater involvement within production results in greater emancipation for the consumer.

Whilst the prosumer theory implies that, in contrast with previous forms of consumption, today's consumer is an agent of progress (Comor, 2010, p. 311), Marxist theory has equated the implication of the consumer within production not with liberation, but rather with further subjection to the domination of capital: a consumption that subsumes the mind, language, and creativity (Berardi, 2009a, p. 22) results in further subjugation to the capitalist ideology. Consumerism within post-Fordist society expands to comprise existence in its entirety, producing a consumer consciousness which reifies experiences and relationships.

The narratives depict a subjectivity which has become much more deeply imbued in the consumer psychology as a result of new developments within technology. Capital's call to self-expression through consumption implies a continuous exercise of the self (Stimilli, 2017, p. 124), which works to shape the individual biopolitically. Capitalism is thus able to completely incorporate the subject within the consumer capitalist ideology, transforming the individual into *homo consumericus* (Saad, 2007, p. 276). The centrality of an inclination-based consumption and its effectiveness at integrating the subject within capitalist ideology are reflected in the *Black Mirror* episode 'Hang the DJ', which depicts a VR dating system in which the characters are told who to date based on their personal preferences. Hence the final aim of this chapter is to determine how far and in what ways neoliberalism has brought about a further integration of the individual's consciousness, as reflected in the narratives.

'Joi goes anywhere you want': alienation and the 'fantastic' prosumer in *Blade Runner 2049*.

The science fiction movie *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) is set thirty years after events in the original *Blade Runner* (1982), and depicts a dystopian capitalist society plagued by pollution and scarcity. The world depicted relies on the exploitation of replicants (a type of bioengineered android) for colonial exploits and for labour. Subsequently to the violent rebellion of the Nexus 6 model of replicants against their condition of exploitation, resulting in their outlawing and persecution, the manufacturing giant The Wallace Corporation, restores the replicant industry, producing a new model Nexus-9, genetically designed to be totally subservient. The film's main character, K (short for his serial number KD6-3.7) is a Nexus-9 replicant employed by the LAPD (LA Police Department) to hunt and retire the rebellious Nexus-6 replicants.

Whilst the main plot is centred around K's discovery of the remains of a pregnant female replicant and the search for her replicant child, an important adjacent story line is constituted by the love story between K and his holographic girlfriend, Joi, and their struggle with the alienating effects of Joi's technological nature. Produced by The Wallace Corporation (the same manufacturing company which also produced K), Joi was sold to K as a technology that fulfils his need for companionship. Joi is initially confined within the home, since she is contained by a console and cannot distance herself from it, until K buys an emanator, which allows her to go anywhere K takes her, as a present for them.

When K is searched for by the LAPD police force due to his insubordination, Joi decides to follow him, even though this entails an enormous risk, given that in order to follow

him she has to destroy her console, which stores information of her and K's whereabouts thus endangering them. Upon Joi's request, K transfers her to the emanator he had gifted her. Eventually, Joi is killed by Luv (a replicant sent by Niander Wallace to fight K) who smashes the emanator in an attempt to emotionally break K. A devastated K is later seen observing a billboard advertising Joi, in which the technology speaks to him, using similar expressions as 'his own' Joi once had, thus raising questions about the authenticity of their relationship. Narratively, the love story is characterised by the contrast between the humanity entailed by Joi's sacrifice of her existence for K, and other narrative elements which appear to point to an artificial aspect in Joi's behaviour.

The love story between Joi and K is of interest because of Joi's nature as commodified technology, not only because it reflects a relationship which is mediated by the commodity form, but also because when considered in its commodity form it is characterised by a typically post-Fordist creative participation on part of the consumer. Joi is, in fact, a customisable technology: purchased as a live-in domestic partner, a large part of her value lies in her ability to respond to K's wants and needs and to add 'content' in the form of interactions and experiences. In this sense, the relationship constitutes a narrative representation of the post-Fordist phenomenon of the prosumer as defined by Toffler (1980), a type of consumption which incorporates elements of production within the product sold through the consumer's partaking in the product's creation, in contrast with previous production which understood consumption as a passive practice.

Within contemporary production, it is increasingly common to involve the consumer in the creation of commodities, a practice which within contemporary production can be observed in a wide variety of contexts, from the curation of playlists on streaming platforms such as Netflix and Spotify to the selling of furniture which can be assembled by the customer in a variety of ways. Within *Blade Runner 2049* not only does Joi and K's romantic

relationship emerges as commodified through capital's tendency to subsume the human affective propensity, but also, within the narrative is constituted as a prosumer commodity, with the two characters taking active part in its development/production.

My focus on the issue of consumerism means that within my analysis questions concerning the (in)authenticity of Joi or the couple's feelings will not dwell on the ontological aspect of whether the two characters can be reputed to be 'real' in the sense of human, but rather will be confronted from a purely Marxist perspective, focused on the alienating character imposed by commodification onto their relationship.

This perspective provides a different and new outlook compared to more ontologically leaning studies such as Lay's. Lay's analysis of Joi and her relationship with K is devoted to the issue of artificiality and how our conventional distinction between digital entities and personhood can easily be refuted (Lay, in Bunce and McCrossin, 2019, pp. 11-18), arguing that whilst most people might instantly dismiss the possibility of a genuine relationship between Joi and K on the basis of her technological status, many of the prerogatives that we hold onto as exclusively human, such as agency, sentience, and self-consciousness, can upon closer examination, be observed within Joi (Lay, in Bunce and McCrossin, 2019, p. 11).

For the purpose of my analysis, I will sidestep the issue of the possibility of agency in artificial intelligence and consider both Joi and K as sentient beings on a par with humans (albeit technologically produced rather than born) grappling with the alienating effects of reification on their relationship. From this perspective, instances within the narrative which denote an artificial side to Joi (such as when K walks past a screen advertising the sale of Joi, during which she calls K Joe, the nickname which he had believed was personal to their relationship) will be understood as a reference to the impact of commodity fetishism on the relationship, whereas instances which highlight her human side (such as her expressed desire to be a 'real girl', and in her quest for authenticity within the relationship with K, even at the

cost of death) will be interpreted as a quest for emancipation from a state of reification at the hands of capital.

In many respects, Joi constitutes the archetype of a post-Fordist commodity. Designed by the Wallace Corporation as a holographic domestic companion, Joi functions to provide affective care (an aspect which, as analysed in the previous chapter, within the analysis of the *Black Mirror* episode 'Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too' is appropriated within post-Fordist production).

Being an AI, Joi is extremely receptive to K's wants and needs: this becomes clear when K, having arrived home, sits at the table, and without need for conversation she looks at him and comments: "Was a day, hm?" (18:23'-18:25'), demonstrating remarkable emotional intelligence and responsiveness, which add value to Joi as a commodity. Joi is highly customisable, as evidenced by her instant changes of outfit during their conversation (18:43'-18:45'); not only does she change her appearance to suit K's preferences, but she also changes her personality and interests, as indicated by her comment after she suggests that K read to her in order to encourage K, but when he responds unenthusiastically, she answers "I don't wanna read either" (18:40'-18:42'). Joi's adaptability, tailored aspect, and personality rank her as the quintessential post-Fordist commodity.

The rise of the internet and Web 2.0 has brought about an increase in prosumer products, which combines the two processes of consumption and production (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010, pp. 13-14) and in this respect too Joi epitomises the contemporary commodity: whilst some aspects of Joi (for instance, her settings, which include aspects of her appearance such as height and eye colour, as well as her spoken language, probably offering a selection of possible choices), are dictated by her manufacturing, the details of her interactions with K, such as their conversations, are added 'content' within the relationship, which the two characters create.

In this sense, both K and Joi (when considered to be sentient beings) are both consumers of the relationship as a product, but also producers of the 'content' in the form of emotions, attachment, and interactions, which are added to Joi's basic hardware, hence customising and adding substance to the commodity; this is expressed within details in the plot such as K's decision to pick a random day as their anniversary date as a pretext to gift her the emanator as a present (19:07'-19:10'), an example of additional emotive detail added to the manufacturing.

"Let's just say, it's our anniversary" "Is it?" "No but let's just say it is." The prosumer subject and the illusion of freedom.

As analysed in the previous paragraphs, within an analysis of Joi and K's relationship as mediated by commodification, the couple's role in adding 'content' to their relationship emerges as an example of prosumer commodification. In *The Third Wave* (1980) Toffler proclaims this type of consumption as highly emancipatory, defining the prosumer as no less than an agent of revolution; the theorist expressed that the amalgamation of the processes of production and consumption and the more active role taken by the consumer would result in increasing demands in participation within decision making both within industry and society at large (Toffler, 1980, np). This optimistic view of the radical character of the prosumer, however, has been disputed: as argued by Comor, for instance, Toffler's idea of revolution through consumption is one which fails to escape an ideologically capitalist conceptualisation of freedom, which is limited to a view of the individual as consumer and producer, defined by the right to property and viewed as a bundle of appetites (2010, p. 311). Greater freedom

within consumption, in other words, does not necessarily equate to greater societal freedom or emancipation.

The love story between Joi and K places within its narrative both the promise of emancipation through consumption (contained in Toffler's theory) and the assertion of the illusory nature of this promise in line with Comor's criticism. A powerful criticism of the commodity form emerges from the depictions of Joi's commodified nature as a source of alienation. Within the plot, the two characters can be viewed as attempting to assuage their sense of estrangement by taking an active role in the formation of their commodified relationship. In this sense, they can be viewed as attempting to achieve freedom through consumption. However, the narrative reflects the impossibility of finding freedom within the confines of commodification.

The character of Joi in particular emerges as inhibited by her state of commodification, and this state of unfreedom is visually conveyed in particular through her spatiality. The restriction of Joi's movement emerges as connected to her commodification in the description of Joi offered by the advertising speakers K walks past on his way home after work: "Joi goes anywhere you want" (15:25'-15:27'). Mechanically speaking, Joi is unable to go anywhere she wants because she is linked to a console, located on the wall in the flat. Nevertheless, as highlighted by the catchphrase, her confinement is linked to her commodification as much as it is due to technical difficulties: Joi's purpose as commodity is confined to the desires of her partner. During the conversation she has with K, on his return home, the idea of Joi's constraint and its alienating effects are reinforced in her comment to K as he returns home from work, "I'm getting cabin fever" (16:53'-17:00'), in reference to her inability to leave the home.

The plot contains an attempt on the part of K to ease Joi's restrictions: reflected when he gifts her an emanator (a gadget which allows for Joi to be transmitted outside of the home

when transported by K) with the pretext of it being their anniversary. Thanks to the emanator, Joi gains a greater range of movement through the ability to follow K wherever he goes. This attempt by K to attain greater freedom, notably, is enacted through further commodification and emerges as a failed attempt at emancipation. After syncing Joi to her new emanator, K asks her where she would like to go first; immediately after, the camera cuts to the rooftop of the apartment building in which they live, indicating that Joi's first choice of location to enjoy her newfound freedom is unexceptionally the top floor of their block.

This modest choice can be interpreted as Joi's feeling that she is content with just the view from the terrace; however, a variety of elements within the scene merge to create the sensation that behind Joi's choice is a sense of acceptance that the emanator has not greatly changed the restricted condition of her existence. As she walks outside , she is met with the sight of an enormous advertising screen, reaffirming the element of consumption as pervasive in her existence. When she expresses her love to K, he immediately answers that she doesn't need to say that, expressing his rebuttal of her status as a commodity, but at the same time serving as a reminder of it. Finally, when K receives a phone call from his boss, Joi is put on hold in the act of kissing him, her immobilisation a reflection of the very spatial freedom that the emanator constituted a promise of.

Joi's presence is dependent on K as her owner, since in order for Joi to even be present within the home, she needs to be switched on by K. Hence, the freedom to move outside of the flat represents not much more than a sweetener for Joi. Within the narrative, K's gifting of the emanator functions as an attempt of emancipation through commodification that ultimately results in failure.

In Lukács's theory of reification (1967, np), the 'phantom objectivity' produced by the commodity, which overlays and represses the human quality of relationships, making them less than human (the term human here is being used not in the biological sense but to denote

authenticity), offers an apt description of K and Joi's romantic relationship. According to Lukács's analysis of capitalist relations within modern society, the separation of the object produced by the worker entails the dissolution of 'natural' social and human relations, which are replaced by rationalised, reified relations (1967, np). The human aspect of K and Joi's commodified love story is repressed by a system structured through capitalist relations, and the superimposition of the objectified experience onto the underlying 'real' relationship. If we peel away the veneer of the commodity, what remains is the reality of exploitation through which the commodity is produced, as aptly symbolised by the picture-perfect meal that Joi superimposes onto the more basic (but 'real') meal that K had cooked for himself (18:00'-18:03').

In this sense, the couple's attempts at emancipation fail because they inevitably crash against the reality of Joi's exploitation. Joy's status as possession/commodity renders her unfree, and her relationship with K at least in part inauthentic, since it is denied free development. When she convinces K to destroy her console, the manufactured device which stores her information, in a final act of liberation, Joi is able to find freedom through the destruction of the commodity form (represented the console).

Hence, a Marxist viewpoint focused on commodification reveals a sense of inauthenticity connected not merely to the characters' technological nature: irrespective of the characters' ability to produce feelings in the same way that human beings would, the fact that their relationship has been manufactured as a commodity, and that K is forced to consider Joi only within this realm means that the commercial and utilitarian value attached to it overshadow its human value, and the surface of equality within the relationship obscures the exploitation that Joi is a product of. The relationship remains under the shadow of its market value, its 'human' aspect repressed by its reification. The characters of K and Joi, hence, emerge as restricted and alienated by their role of prosumers.

Marx describes four main types of alienation: from one's Labour (what I do), from the Product of one's Labour (what I make), from other Labourers (who I relate with) and from oneself (who I am) (Faucher, 2018, p. 64). These aspects of alienation are reflected in Joi and K's relationship, linked to the commodified nature of their relationship. The characters are alienated from what they do: since Joi's actions and behaviours are predetermined by her manufacturer, the relationship is not allowed to develop freely, but rather is relegated to the conditions of Joi's manufacturing, the only instances of limited choice being contained within the act of consumption; the roles that the two characters play out are a result of the function assigned to Joi by the programming.

Spatially, the relationship is constricted to the flat, out of which Joi is not able to move, and later dependent on the emanator that K bought from Joi's manufacturers. They are alienated from the relationship that they build: the relationship's status of commodity reifies all emotional and sentimental value that Joi and K assign to it, emptying it of its 'human' species being, as echoed by Mariette's comment "I've been inside you. Not so much in there as you think" (01:31:58'-01:32:10'). They are alienated from their relation to each other, which is rendered inauthentic by technology, giving way to K doubting the legitimacy of Joi's expressions of emotional attachment and love. Finally, they are alienated from who they are, as their attempts at performing the roles of girlfriend and boyfriend are instead relegated to the status of a commodity/producer with commodity/consumer in the case of Joi, and consumer/producer of commodity in the case of K.

Equally, emerging from the narrative is a marked struggle on part of the two characters to emancipate themselves from their state of alienation. Within the narrative, the two characters engage in a quest for authenticity, which surfaces within the dynamics between the two characters and, in K's determination to treat the relationship as more than a commodity.

This is evident in his interactions with Joi when, for instance, he offers her a drink when he gets home from work, though he knows that as virtual she is unable to drink and ends up drinking both (17:10'-17:36'). Through the act of offering the drink, K is regarding Joi as a person rather than a commodity. His decision to buy Joi the emanator as an anniversary present, an event which he decides arbitrarily to celebrate and assign to that day, reflects an attempt to impose a sentimental value to the relationship that will obscure its utilitarian nature of commodity. Even K's question of "where do you want to go first?" (20:07'-20:09') after gifting her the emanator, which may seem a strange question considering Joi was manufactured to go wherever he, as the owner, would want, indicates a desire to provoke authentic reactions and choices in Joi, as opposed to those dictated by manufacturing.

K views and treats his relationship with Joi as real and tries to encourage autonomy in Joi's behaviour; testing the limits imposed by her condition of product, he rejects any efforts to please him that he might doubt are genuine. By so doing, K seeks to reappropriate the relationship from its reified state of object/commodity to a more 'human' one, freeing it from the parameters of its production. Whilst freedom within a capitalist mentality is associated with consumption, for K, freedom comes from the choice to not consume.

Certain behaviours in Joi's interactions with K also appear to indicate a desire to escape the commodified nature of the relationship. When K returns home from his job, he finds Joi intent on cooking an elaborate dinner, lighting Ks cigarette, and behaving like a devoted housewife. Whilst this stereotypical playing out of traditional gender relations appears to be dictated by manufacturing, there is also an element in Joi's efforts to impersonate the traditional housewife that is non-compliant to K's requests for her not to 'fuss'. The conversation between the two can be seen to indicate that K doesn't necessarily want to be 'pleased' or to fulfil the role of the traditional husband, as emerges from his

dissuasive responses to her cooking efforts, "don't fuss!" (17:17'-17:20'), to Joi offering to read his favourite book, "you hate that book!" (18:45'-18:47') and to Joi's comment "I'm so happy when I'm with you!" ("You don't have to say that") (22:30-22:40').

As argued by Lay, this interaction implies an instruction for Joi to only care for him if she wants to, and not merely to be in line with her programming; hence, if Joi was truly fabricated and programmed to do whatever K asked for, her caring for him would be a deviation from the programming (in Bunce and McCrossin 2019, p. 13). Although it can be argued that Joi's behaviour is programmed to be pleasing, her persistence at K's negative reactions, paired with her repeatedly expressing that she wants to be 'real' does not seem to constitute the mechanical reaction intended by her manufacturers.

These deviations from the programming, which signal a degree of rebellion against her status as a commodity, are in stark contrast with the dynamics depicted in the 1983 *Blade Runner*, in which the protagonist, blade runner Rick Deckard, falls in love with Rachael, a replicant who, implanted with fake memories, believes she is human.

The character of Rachael comes across as fearful and passive, particularly in the moments after finding out that she is a replicant. The scene, in which Rachael timidly protests against Deckard's assertion that she is not human, is followed by a love scene in which Rachael succumbs to Deckard's quite violent advances. As expressed by actress Sean Young, the love scene required this aggressive character, since it implies Rachael being 'instructed' on matters of love (Special Videos, 2020, 05:38'-07:30') and by extension, on being human. Rachael's reaction can be interpreted as a passive acceptance of her being manufactured, in contrast with the character of Joi, who appears to fight against it by not following commands. Joi's hiring of Mariette, onto which Joi synchronises herself in order to spend the night with K like a 'real' girl (1:26:00'-1:30:29'), also represents an attempt to reverse her role as

commodity, though, once again, the attempt is enacted through commodification (by using, thus objectifying, Mariette).

Whilst none of these acts ultimately achieve liberation or autonomy for the couple, within the dynamics between the two characters there is certainly a struggle for emancipation, paired with elements of empathy (among which Joi's decision to risk her life in order to follow K) which emerge as independent from Joi's manufactured make up. The supportiveness displayed by the two characters gives the sense this is the most 'human' relationship in the film (Shanahan in Bunce and McCrossin, 2019, p. 4), displaying feelings of compassion and mutual support. Joi's sacrifice of destroying her projector in order to protect K (as it contained her memories which might have put K at risk), and K's protectiveness in his initial refusal, means that ultimately, through empathy the couple are able to affirm their relationship over the impositions of technology, though this results in Joi's death, as her emanator is destroyed by Luv.

"DO YOU DREAM ABOUT BEING INTERLINKED?" COMMODIFIED RELATIONSHIPS AS A FORM OF CONTROL.

As well as being at the root of the alienation felt by Joi and K, the commodification of relationships and the encouragement of a more active role within consumption reflected within the technologised relationship serves to ideologically incorporate them within the exploitative social system. The society depicted in *Blade Runner 2049* is one which uses a certain degree of human interaction in order to further integrate individuals in a system which, ultimately, alienates them. The production of AI partners is notably absent the original *Blade Runner*'s narrative, indicating that technological innovation as depicted in the movie attempts

to subsume those aspects which had previously escaped its hold, in an attempt to discipline its workforce.

The first *Blade Runner* reflects a capitalism prevalently preoccupied with the compliance of the body within production, a submission which is achieved through the prohibition of personal connections. Deckard's body, his ability to hunt and retire replicants, is of interest to the system, whilst his ability to form friendships and fall in love is disregarded. In this sense, the society depicted in the original movie reflects a similar context to the Fordist social environment, in which pleasure and communication were obstructed by capital, but in which workers found room for socialisation in subversive working communities (Berardi, 2009a, p. 84). Deckard appears to have no meaningful relationships in his life, until he meets Rachael, with whom he is forced to escape; this focus on the body allows for a degree of ideological deviance which ultimately allows Deckard to rebel to the system, by fleeing together with Rachael. *Blade Runner 2049*, by contrast, depicts a world in which capital permits, regulates, and manufactures relationships, reflecting a capitalism that subsumes the soul. The subsumption of the individual's consciousness is achieved thanks to technology's ability through commodity fetishism to manipulate relationships.

Joi and K's relationship is legitimated by the same system which manufactures it; the provision of company in order to satisfy the need for companionship is both a way to assuage the replicant's dissatisfaction with his existence, and at the same time works to regulate his interactions and personal connections. Tus, it is no surprise that K as a character has lost all the rebelliousness that had characterised Deckard in the original film: The Wallace Corporation has learnt the functionality of language and affection when produced by capital. Deckard and K represent the difference, expressed by Berardi, between the enslaved body (but free mind) of the assembly-line worker, and the submission of the soul proper of the post-Fordist worker (Berardi, 2009a, p. 115).The selling of AI partners thus functions as a

hegemonic form of control, since relationships are only permitted as a commodity, through the act of exchange and consumption and within the limits of manufacturers.

Whilst the system encourages relationships within the realm of commodification, it is clear that the Wallace economic dominion does not tolerate autonomous feelings of attachment. K is not authorized to develop any feelings of love or empathy towards another being, whether real or technological: in the Baseline Test (a routine test designed to detect 'human' responses within replicants) he is interrogated, "Do you long for having your heart interlinked?" to which he responds, as expected from him, with the word "interlinked", mechanically repeated with enough promptness to confirm that he is not thinking or 'deviating from the script' (14:37'-14:39'). The word interlinked within the question and answer seems to refer to two completely different matters. In the question, designed to provoke a reaction and bring any prohibited underlying feelings to the surface, the reference to the possibility of having "your heart interlinked", the interlinked refers to the connection to a person or being, whereas in K's response the "interlinked" relates to the system and is in essence a pledge of allegiance to it.

The contrast between the two different connotations highlights how being 'interlinked' to the system and being "interlinked" to another being are mutually exclusive. We can therefore determine that, within the system, K's relation to Joi as a commodity is encouraged and normalised, whereas feelings of affection for her are discouraged.

In conclusion, Joi and K's inability to experience an authentic relationship is not just determined by her nature as AI, which may lead us to question her ability to experience romantic attraction but, crucially by her status as a commodity. The characters display estrangement from their relationship resulting from their role as consumers and producers of the relationship; ensuing from the alienation experienced, Joi and K display an instinctively

human need for companionship, which emerges in the narrative as an element in conflict with the commodification.

The term prosumer (Toffler, 1980, np), has been used to denote the opportunity for increased creative freedom within consumption in the era of Web 2.0 and predicted the possibility of a social revolution as a result of increased consumer power. Nonetheless, since a prosumer relation still presupposes the exchange of commodities as an arbitrating power, implying the replication of exploitative relations of production, it arguably does not consist in a radical alternative to capitalism, and could even be interpreted as an apogee of the latter in its increased tying of all creative power to the commodity relation (Comor, 2011, p. 311). This awareness, as emerges in the analysis, is reflected within the plot.

The ability to produce within consumption is not experienced as freedom by the two characters, who end up rejecting the tenets of "Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham" (Marx, 2013, p. 119); in other words, freedom only within the limits defined by capitalism, in their search for authenticity. An awareness of the commodified nature of the K/Joi relationship enriches the more existential questions of what is 'real', usually centred on the human/machine binary and focused on the possibility of a non-human consciousness. Although it may seem that the productive aspect within consumption grants the consumer freedom, ultimately Joi and K become aware that the freedom and authenticity that they desire is not achieved through the acquisition of commodities, but rather through their destruction.

For Joi and K, freedom comes from the choice to not consume: this is reflected in their attempts to impose a human value onto the commodity form, like the emanator which becomes a special gift, culminating in the destruction of the hardware which stores Joi's memories, the ultimate act of defiance marked by Joi's death as the result of her decision to finally be 'real'. Their relationship, the ultimate immaterial commodity, is redeemed in this act of sacrifice, freeing it from its reified status. The Joi/K love story offers insight into how

reification takes over the human aspect of relationships, and in this sense can reflect how technologised relationships, such as social media interactions within a capitalist society reduce the individual to a convenience, an object of consumption, with the sole purpose of producing social capital, resulting in subjective alienation. It is also a reflection on how contemporary capital utilises the amount of created freedom within productive consumption to further subjugate the individual to the logic of capital.

CONSUMPTION, UNFREEDOM AND THE HAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS IN 'SAN JUNIPERO' AND 'BE RIGHT BACK'.

Like *Blade Runner 2049*, The *Black Mirror* episodes 'Be Right Back' and 'San Junipero' also explore the issue of authenticity within the framework of commodified relationships, as well as, more at large, reflecting on the psychological implications of consumerism as an ideology. 'San Junipero' narrates the story of two women who meet at a VR paradise beach resort into which individuals plug in order to live a life of fun and hedonism. 'Be Right Back' explores the protagonist Martha's attempts to deal with the loss of her partner Ash through the obtainment of an AI replica, created with the information contained in his social media publications, photos, and videos; however, Martha soon realises that the android, who looks and acts like Ash (her partner) 'on a good day', can never be more than a replica. Both episodes depict worlds in which technology acts to create an existence free of negativity and a sense that the reality created by this technology, being inauthentic, has negative repercussions on the subject: the characters end up feeling trapped by the inauthenticity ensuing. 'San Junipero' and 'Be Right Back', analyse from different perspectives how technology affects the individual's connection to reality.

The episodes present a common theme of repression of the negative and the formation of what Marcuse defined as the 'happy consciousness', which impedes the free evolution of the subject, reflecting a link between consumer ideology and a certain view of life that distances the individual from an authentic existence, and depicts a humanity detached from its true nature. This detachment can be understood as an act of 'forgetting' implied within commodity fetishism: the same selective ignorance towards aspects of the commodity (which within material production, would obscure the conditions of production) when applied to relationships and existence, leads to the rejection of certain unwanted aspects.

In his article "Commodity fetishism and repression. Reflections on Marx, Freud, and the Psychology of Consumer Capitalism", Michael Billig argues that the Marxist notion of commodity fetishism more than ever before is necessary for an understanding of the contemporary subject from a psychological perspective (1999, p. 313); but whilst Marx, who lived well before the apex of consumer society, focused his analysis on the fetishism implied within production, Billig states that fetishism today also dominates consumerism, which implies an act of social forgetting (1999, p. 313).

Existence as a consumer involves selective focus on the perceived qualities of a commodity and presumed ignorance towards certain unpleasant aspects of the commodity, such as the conditions of its production. Today, however, fetishism affects not just the way we see the material products that we buy, but the way we confront existence itself: since within post-Fordist production, as established in the first chapter, is based on the production of subjectivity, the way the individual views himself/herself and is viewed by others, as well as daily existence, become an object of fetishism. The 'happy consciousness', defined by Billig as the pushing out of those realities that would 'spoil the consuming party' (1999, p. 321), has become a characteristic which affects not just the consumer subject's interaction with commodities, but also interactions with society at large and fellow individuals.

"SAN JUNIPERO'S A PARTY TOWN, ALL UP FOR GRABS". COMMODIFICATION AND SOCIAL FORGETTING.

'San Junipero,' the fourth episode of the third series of *Black Mirror*, is named after the virtual town that it depicts. This seaside resort is a VR simulation into which individuals can choose to upload their consciousness, either part-time, as a visitor, or permanently, opting to 'pass over' after death, as a virtual afterlife. Against the backdrop of the paradise of San Junipero, the episode narrates the events which lead the protagonists Yorkie and Kelly to meet and fall in love. As the episode unfolds, the two women reveal each other's backstory and the trauma left behind in their real lives. Both are confronted with the choice of whether to spend eternity in San Junipero together, renouncing death and their earthly existence. 'San Junipero' is seen as an exception within the *Black Mirror* series, since it stands out as the only episode with a happy ending, its two protagonists romantically reunited for eternity, compared to previous episodes that are characterised by bleak endings and a markedly pessimistic take on the possible effects of technology (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp, 2018, p. 188).

The issue of authenticity is central within the narrative and emerges in the question of whether a realm of existence devoid of negativity is desirable or compatible with human nature. The choice of the closing track, Belinda Carlisle's 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' (Carlisle, 1987), would seem to indicate that in San Junipero Yorkie and Kelly have found their paradise on Earth, but from a Marxist perspective, the happy ending is more than a little problematic, considering that San Junipero, in intent and purpose, is a commodity: created by high tech company TCKR systems, it is a manufactured existence based on self-indulgence and fun which, nevertheless, in its hedonistic pursuit of freedom, allows the development of a

romantic relationship that in real life would have been impeded (Yorkie's parents did not accept the fact that she was attracted to women, and Kelly had married a man and also kept her own attraction to women secret).

At first glance, it may seem that the commodified existence offered by San Junipero allows Kelly and Yorkie to find fulfilment and that, where Marx might expect alienation, Kelly and Yorkie find love and happiness, hardly providing grounds for a critique of the commodity or consumerism. It is, nevertheless, worth investigating a little further as all may not be as perfect as it seems in San Junipero. Reservations about the appeal of this heaven on earth are echoed by both producer Annabel Jones ("Whilst there is a positive upbeat ending, it's not exactly a happy ever after" (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp 2018, p. 190)) and director Owen Harris ("I never read the story as being quite as positive as it ended up feeling. In fact, I'm probably […] more reticent about spending eternity in a place like San Junipero" (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp 2018, p. 190)) according to whom the ending was never intended to be as positive as it is generally interpreted. There is a sense that this virtual paradise might hide some bleaker undertones.

Whilst San Junipero appears as a utopia, at first sight its sheltered existence seems to entail the disconnection from the sense of meaning in life as expressed by main character Kelly, when Yorkie proposes that both should end their 'real' lives and plug into San Junipero permanently, "You wanna spend forever somewhere nothing matters?" (S4:E3, 53':40'-53-45'). This detachment from elements that constitute a well-rounded existence is connected to the logic of consumerism. The commodified existence of San Junipero entails such disconnection: as a site of ideology, existence within the town rests on the rejection of certain aspects of human existence and the disavowal of those experiences that embody the negation of the enjoyment principle underlying a consumerist way of life; it demands separation from the negativity of these aspects in the pursuit of hedonism, and this detachment results in the

estrangement of individual relations. What is initially seen as a heaven on earth, upon closer inspection is constituted of an outer layer of 'metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties' (Marx 2013, p. 46), which hide a kernel of alienation.

"DID YOU THINK TO ASK? DID IT OCCUR TO YOU, TO ASK?". THE COMMODITY AS NEGATION.

In addition to the opportunity to cheat death, San Junipero offers individuals an ideal existence in a dazzling paradise. The virtual program, created by tech company TKR Systems, to which individuals upload their consciousness leaving their real lives behind, follows the paradigm of Baudrillard's drugstore: just like the drugstore (an instance of commercial complex), it is a space that encloses and shapes the entirety of existence in terms of the consumer logic (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 29). Within this space, by performatively consuming, the individual is reborn, identified as consumer: in the same way, those who enter San Junipero are re-defined by the town and are restored to a younger self, acquiring a new identity.

The two main characters Yorkie and Kelly, both elderly and ill in real life (as revealed, Yorkie is paraplegic as the result of a car accident that she suffered in her twenties, Kelly is dying of a tumour), emerge as their younger and healthier selves in the resort. In its constitution as a space of ideology, San Junipero is an apt depiction of the formation of the consumer subject. The VR resort is a nostalgia therapy program and as such is set in the past, prevalently in 1987 (though Kelly also spends time in the 1990s briefly): through the choice of this decade, evoked as an ideal moment in time, the episode combines an element of nostalgia to the narrative. Director Owen Harris recounts choosing the setting for its

connection to a certain type of 80s movie characterised by its positive mood, defined by the director as 'genre of eternal optimism' (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp 2018, p. 177). Every detail, from the fashion to the carefully curated playlist, is evocative of the decade of faith in the free market, in which "self-interested capitalism went utterly mad, led by the greed is good principle" (Nealon, 2012, p. 17).

The result is the image of a place and time which in the eyes of its visitors and inhabitants is carefree and idyllic in an ideologically consumeristic way. Reflected in the bar scenes and the behaviour of San Juniperians is the commitment to enjoyment as a way of life: individuals spend their time dancing to hit records, consuming drinks, or playing arcade games. As Yorkie first arrives in San Junipero, the view is made up of streets full of shop window displays, bright TV screens, noisy bars, and people driving around in flashy cars wearing trendy clothes (S3:E4, 1:01'-1:48'). Life in San Junipero is meant to be enjoyed, and enjoyment is connected to consumption. This impulse to enjoy, when in the virtual town takes over and defines existence itself.

The element of reminiscence has an important role in shaping the ontology of San Junipero: as an emotive yearning for the past, it implies a process of selectiveness within the individual's outlook, whereby a certain period is idealised, remembered for certain aspects deemed positive, whilst other, less appealing ones, are forgotten. Within San Junipero, the less attractive aspects of existence are notably absent: working life, responsibilities, suffering, and illness are non-existent, and this results in a one-dimensionality reflected in individual's identity, hinted at by Kelly's comment to Yorkie about people's clothes ("look around, people try so hard to look how they think they should look. They probably saw it in some movie" (S3:E4, 6:24'-6:27')).

The discriminatory version of the past (the fun and optimistic versus the less appealing aspects of life) and of personal identity (the young and healthy self, versus the aging and ill

self), linked to the element of nostalgia as a yearning for the past and built on the denial of less appealing aspects of life, effectively reduces existence and the individual's identity to a one-dimensionality. The dynamic of selective denial is amplified within the consumeristic aspect. The injunction to enjoy so typical of consumer existence is intensively at play in San Junipero and there is a fundamental element of negation, which entails the elimination of anything that negates the enjoyment of a commodified existence: Yorkie, for instance, appears reticent when entering San Junipero for the first time, but she is quite insistently invited to drink and dance by Kelly (S3:E4, 5:27'-6:00').

There is a marked tension between the two elements of enjoyment and its negation, conveyed in the scene at Tucker's bar through the soundtrack: the song "C'est la vie" (Neville, R., 1986), which plays as Yorkie enters the bar, portrays working life ("Got a job/that's ok/ but they've got me working night and day […]") (S3:E4, 1:50'-2:46'). The song's focus on the dissatisfaction with working life is constituted as a counter pole to the crowds excitedly dancing in the club, drowned out by their energy and excitement. The tension between these two elements of 'positive' enjoyment and the 'negative' working conditions expressed in the song, blends into the totalising enjoyment of the virtual life of San Junipero, subsuming the negative element. The euphoria of consumption is counterposed to the alienation of labour and affirms itself through the obfuscation of these elements, in a manner described by Marcuse as implicit in the act of consumption, whereby "the tension between appearance and reality melts away and both merge in one rather pleasant feeling" (1964, p. 227).

The absence of the negative dominates San Junipero; as analysed by Gould, the conception of a free existence according to Adam Smith, often thought of as one of the forefathers of capitalist economic theory, is found in the absence of exertion, thus defined by rejection, in contrast to the Marxist notion of freedom which is instead existence is grounded

in the activity of free production (Gould, 1978, p. 104); San Junipero's ideological stance functions according to this typically capitalistic view of existence. However, the episode seems to warn about the consequences of this illusion of freedom based on negation: most permanent San Juniperians end up in the Quagmire, a debauched bar, in search for something 'real'; this something real can be interpreted as the' negative' that San Junipero has rejected, resulting in the alienation of individuals who, in Kelly's words, are "trying anything just to feel something" (S3:E4, 53:26'-53:29'): The negation of toil only on the surface promises freedom, whilst in reality constitutes alienation from an authentic life.

The dynamic of subsumption of the negative is typical of the act of consumption and fully integrated within contemporary consumer life with ramifications within the social psyche: within consumption, certain aspects of the commodity (such as the terrible working conditions of the workers who produce it), are always pushed away from consciousness (Billig, 1999, p. 231). In the case of 'San Junipero', the commodity being consumed is existence and identity itself, the aspects that are rejected by the individual are unpleasant elements of its identity. In his philosophical analysis of the episode, James Cook argues pinpoints immortality, the breaking down of the human life cycle, (which the characters achieve through permanently uploading to San Junipero), originates a crisis in human values: elements such as friendship, love and justice only retain value within a mortal life; hence, within the eternity of San Junipero, they lose meaning (in Irwin and Johnson, 2020, p. 115). This interpretation arguably underestimates the role of commodification in 'flattening' relationships and reducing them to mere utility. The crisis in the values of love and friendship depicted in the episode can mainly be traced to the consumer dynamic of rejection of the negative.

THE HAPPY CONSCIOUSNESS AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

According to Michael Billig, a form of social repression or psychological 'collective forgetfulness' stems from the act of consumption and from commodity fetishism, which in Marxist terms consists in the denial of certain aspects of the object of consumption (1999, p. 231). Viewing consumerism as an essential part of contemporary social identity within capitalism, Billig focuses on the psychological effects of consumption and its entailed fetishism, as reflected in social patterns. There are aspects behind most commodities that if considered would become obstacles to the enjoyment of it; for instance, no-one likes to think about the conditions of workers in sweatshops when buying designer clothes.

The connection with the conditions of production is rejected by the consumer in favour of other aspects such as a personal association with the label and the sense of identity provided by the commodity, a psychologically inbuilt repression that Billig defines as 'the happy consciousness' (1999, p. 10). Whilst we are often aware of the conditions of exploitation behind the production of commodities or the effects of mass production on the environment, we engage in an act of forgetting which is aided by the constant outpouring of commodities and enjoyment.

In San Junipero, which as a space constitutes a self-enclosed sphere of happy consciousness, this fetishism is witnessed as applied to human relationships, which within the setting of a human existence viewed as commodity end up being subjected to the same logic of repression. In line with this interpretation of the episode, there is a parallel to be drawn between the obfuscation of the reality behind the production of a commodity (for instance, sweatshop production) by the consumer, the obfuscation of certain unappealing aspects of

existence (alienated working conditions, illness, trauma, etc.) within San Junipero, and the obfuscation of certain aspects of the individual. Kelly and Yorkie show signs of rejecting certain aspects of the individuals with whom they form relationships at various points in the plot, engaging in an act of 'social forgetfulness' brought about by happy consciousness.

The two women meet within a sphere that is removed from their life experience, from their background, and from the people in their real-life. This translates into a very superficial understanding of each other's individuality and perspective, as reflected when Yorkie decides to pass over to San Junipero permanently, and tries to impose the same choice on Kelly not considering that Kelly feels a sense of attachment towards the elements of real-life that she would be leaving behind. As expressed by Kelly ("Did you think to ask? Did it occur to you to ask?") (S3:E4, 50:00'-54:00'), Yorkie's hollow view of Kelly prevents her from even considering that Kelly's point of view might be different to hers.

On her part, Kelly displays signs of 'forgetfulness' when she initially rejects any sense of obligation towards Yorkie on the premise that the relationship was meant to 'be fun,' as reiterated when after her disappearance Yorkie finds her hiding in a different decade and confronts her about it. Yorkie's remark ("You don't know who I am! You don't know what this means!"), (referring to her real-life condition of paraplegia, which meant that she had never been able to experience a relationship before, a reality which Kelly was unaware of, but had she known, might have acted less unkindly towards her (S3E4 30:30'-31:00')). This exchange highlights the extremely limited perspective that the two women have of each other's real lives.

Whilst Kelly is typically characterised as a free-spirited individual, her opposition to the commitment of a relationship with Yorkie cannot entirely be explained through this aspect of her personality since her approach towards real-life relationships paints a different picture. In contrast to the 'lightness' of San Junipero Kelly's relationship with her deceased husband

is characterised by the 'weight' of sacrifice and suffering. As described in Kelly's words when Yorkie tries to convince her to pass over: "Forty-nine years. I was with [Richard] for 49 years. You can't begin to imagine, can't know. The bond, the commitment, the boredom, the yearning, the laughter, the love of it, the fucking love! You just cannot know!" (S3:E4, 50:00'-54:00').

There is a marked difference between Kelly's view of what a relationship signifies within the framework of San Junipero as opposed to real-life. Kelly's words imply that San Junipero does not provide the elements of commitment, boredom and sacrifice that make up authentic life. Thus, her avoidance of relationships within the virtual reality is a result of the latter's ideological grounding. The sacrifice and commitment in Kelly's real-life function as a negative pole, which, whilst unpleasant and painful nevertheless provides dimension and grounding to her real-life existence.

Within a Marcusian interpretation these aspects can be understood as negative thinking' (Kellner, 1991, in Marcuse, 1964, p. xvi): when considering existence as progression the negative is a force dialectically required for the full development of society and the individual. When in his analysis of *San Junipero* Cook compares the multiplicity of experiences available to Kelly and Yorkie in the town which will never hold as much importance as the sacrifices and the 'reality and responsibility of raising a child' (in Irwin and Johnson, 2020, p. 114) the key is to see this consideration in the framework of Marcuse's dialectical framework of positive and negative thought.

From this point of view, the danger of consumer ideology is the elimination of the imperfections, the difficulties that make existence authentic. In a world that refuses negativity relationships are condemned to being meaningless: even sacrifices and altruistic gestures become impossible: for instance, when Yorkie rushes to Kelly's aid when, after the argument,

she crashes her car (S3:E4, 54:27'-55:30'), there is a realisation that her act of altruism means nothing in a world in which people cannot die or suffer injury.

It is hence the very nature of existence within San Junipero that impedes the forming of meaningful relationships. This link between the ideological structure of the town and its consequence on the relationship needs to be understood within the framework of Marx's theory of alienation. According to Marx, estrangement from the species being necessarily brings about alienation from fellow human beings (Marx, 1959, p. 32). By this logic, within San Junipero, the existential alienation resulting from the rejection of negativity, precludes the realisation of authentic human relationships, by impeding certain elements that are essential to the structure of an authentic relationship. When Kelly refuses to pass over, her reasoning reflects this view of San Junipero as alienated through its rejection.

In this sense the two characters embody the two opposing Smithian and Marxist view of existence: Kelly views fulfilment in life as the result of the human connection implied by acts of altruism and empathy; Yorkie in contrast views the avoidance of the negative as the primary purpose of life. The commodification entailed by San Junipero means detachment from the species being and from fellow individuals. Though for Yorkie and Kelly this detachment is initially a refuge from the difficulties of their life, in the end, it results in alienation.

"LET ME COME VISIT!" ALTRUISM AS NEGATIVE THINKING.

"All things considered, I guess I'm ready for it." These are the unexpected words with which

Kelly expresses her change of mind, and her intention to definitively upload to San Junipero,

an act which she had previously adamantly refused. What was it that Kelly had considered?

What led to her decision to join Yorkie? One explanation could be the structural change

undergone by the relationship during the course of the episode. Yorkie and Kelly's

relationship experiences a process of incorporation of the negative which sees the relationship

shift from commodified and one-dimensional to authentic and inclusive. Gradually, the two

characters integrate elements of their real-life into the relationship, with certain events leading

up to the final that contribute to this shift in the quality of the relationship. The first of these is

Kelly's decision to visit Yorkie in real life. If San Junipero can be described as a collective

forgetting, then this act is a remembering: all the elements of Yorkie and Kelly's life

experience that had been eliminated by San Junipero are acknowledged through their meeting

at the hospital.

Kelly's visit constitutes a radically subversive act within the narrative. In *One*

Dimensional Man, Marcuse talks about the negative element as that which cannot be

assimilated within positive thought, which dominates in capitalism as the principle of

noncontradiction. According to Marcuse, the power of the negative lies in its ability to define

the irrationality of the established ideology (1964, p. 225-227). By choosing to accept the

vulnerability of Yorkie's life, and by sharing her own vulnerability in telling Yorkie about her

terminal illness ("I'm dying. Whatever you are can't scare me" (S3:E4, 38:00'-38:10')), Kelly

engages in an act of negative thinking and carries this element into the relationship. This

gesture transforms the structure of the relationship from a space of one-dimensionality, defined by its rational understanding of existence as the absence of pain, to an ontologically inclusive entity whose very existence contrasts San Junipero's dogmatic enjoyment principle. The sober moment of the hospital visit stands in stark contrast with her previous definitions of the relationships as fun.

Secondly, Kelly's visit to the medical centre to see Yorkie results in a moment of altruism in which she offers to marry her, after finding out that she had decided to marry Greg, a nurse at the medical centre, in order to obtain permission from him to pass over permanently through euthanasia. Kelly's act of altruism is productive since it generates a new depth to the relationship, which through this gesture acquires a new authenticity. Notably, this act of empathy is only possible within the real world since it is only there that suffering occurs: as noted earlier, by rejecting suffering, San Junipero makes altruism futile. To engage in an act of empathy, it is necessary for Kelly to visit the 'real,' suffering, paralysed Yorkie. This reflects a view of human nature as rooted in acts of altruism in line with Marx's theory of man's species being. In the Manuscripts, Marx sees human beings as socially rooted. As a social being, man is defined by the collective utility of his activity (Steiner, 1997, p. 12): altruism, acting for the benefit of others, is not just crucial for the development of society, but also of the individual's self-realisation.

Finally, there is the moment of the virtual car crash, in which, after a heated discussion about Yorkie's pressuring of Kelly to pass over to San Junipero with her permanently, Kelly loses control of the car and crashes it. This event has a dual symbolism. One the one hand, it can be interpreted as an act of anger by which Kelly demonstrates the futility of actions in a world where death itself becomes impossible. On the other hand, it can also be viewed as a way for Kelly of living Yorkie's own traumatic accident, which happened in real life, also as a result of Yorkie's argument with her parents. Through the act of crashing her car, Kelly is

able to relive Yorkie's trauma and to symbolically bring this experience, and her empathy towards it, into San Junipero ad into their relationship. Only after these acts, which imply the assimilation of the negative into the relationship, Kelly asserts that she is ready for "the rest of it." The final scenes show Kelly and Yorkie driving off into the sunset and dancing together in Tucker's bar.

The world of San Junipero certainly offers many advantages: Yorkie regains the ability to walk, and in many ways regains freedom. Whilst her parents had been unaccepting of her sexual identity, in San Junipero she is able to form a relationship free from these judgments. As director Charlie Brooker states, *Black Mirror* was not meant to be a fully-fledged condemnation of technology, but rather a warning about some ways in which technology is used (Shepherd, 2019, no page).

The virtual existence did make the love story possible, but the altruism and commitment, without which an authentic relationship would not be possible, belong to real-life Kelly and Yorkie. San Junipero is a world ideologically structured around enjoyment, and the rejection of those elements of existence which 'negate' enjoyment. The elimination of these elements, however, leads to the estrangement of individuals from both their species being, that which makes them human, and, therefore, from other individuals. Existing in San Junipero means relating to fellow human beings on a superficial, utilitarian, and hedonistic level and rejecting crucial aspects of their experience.

Rather than a condemnation of technology, 'San Junipero' is better interpreted as a warning against the pursuit of hedonism based on the negation of certain elements of life; in this light, the episode seems more focused on the negative effects of commodified existence, of which the world of San Junipero offers a vivid portrayal. As depicted in the episode, the ideology of consumerism separates the individual from aspects of the human essence: illness, trauma, and old age in San Junipero are seen as the negative dialectical pole that makes life

whole and authentic. It is only within the context of this positive-negative dialectic that relationships can fully develop through acts of altruism and empathy, which in the episode are represented by Kelly's visit to real-life, ill Yorkie and subsequent marriage proposal which allows Yorkie to pass over, and her car crash, through which Kelly relives Yorkie's trauma. Kelly and Yorkie are able to construct a well-rounded relationship only through meeting outside the commodified existence of San Junipero.

As put by Marcuse, "in the last analysis, […] the question of what are true and false needs must be answered by the individuals themselves, only when free to give their own answer" (1964, p. 6). As Kelly realises, only after sharing acts of empathy and altruism is it truly possible for her and Yorkie to build something authentic. The positive conclusion of the love story results from the rediscovering of the negative as a subversive force of contradiction: the 'undesirable' that is initially repressed by Yorkie and Kelly in the name of consumer logic returns as a negative dialectic pole and, through altruism and shared experience, shapes the relationship to form an authentic human connection.

This interpretation of dynamics in the plot stems from Marcuse's theory of the negative as a force of destruction as opposed to a one-dimensional society dominated by positive thinking (1964, p. 225). This interpretation of 'San Junipero' is also based on the interconnection between the alienation from species-being, originating from a commodified existence, and alienation from man to man, presented in the *Manuscripts* (Marx, 1959, p. 32). By understanding the repressed negativity (which is constituted by the suffering and trauma in the protagonists' personal life) as a part of the human experience that is alienated, this latter can be related to Marx's notion of human essence, the 'human aspect' implied by Marx in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, which according to Marx is inextricably linked to estrangement from man to man (1959, p. 32). To conclude, expressed in 'San Junipero' is a

belief that technological production, has the potential to bring happiness when freed from the restraints and negations of a commodified existence.

TECHNOLOGY AND POISONING OF THE SOUL IN 'BE RIGHT BACK'.

'Be Right Back', the first episode in the second *Black Mirror* series, recounts the story of Martha, whose boyfriend Ash is killed in a car accident. As she struggles with her feelings of grief, Martha finds out that a new technology has been developed which allows her to communicate with an AI imitating the deceased Ash. After an initial reluctance, Martha decides to try the technology and becomes increasingly addicted to it. When she accidentally drops her mobile phone, which contains the AI, Martha is talked into upgrading to an android replacement of Ash utilising the same AI technology. However, her discomfort and struggle to accept the android as a replacement, due to the absence of the negative traits in 'real' Ash's personality, result in Martha's decision to do away with the android, first by instructing it to jump of a cliff (an attempt which fails when the android begs for his life) then by keeping him locked in her attic.

Just like 'San Junipero', 'Be Right Back' presents a concern with a certain fetishisation of life and relationships, which disavows the negative, resulting in the characters' alienation from a more authentic existence. 'Be Right Back' also brings a new narrative component to the table: a concern with the intrusive character of consumption today, which infringes on the individual's 'right to not consume'. This emerges in Martha's struggle to find a private space in which to experience and express her grief.

The intrusiveness of the AI technology depicted reflects a typical condition of the post-Fordist subject according to Berardi, who In *The Soul at Work,* defines the post-Fordist

subjectivity as the 'poisoned soul.' According to the theorist, the 'poison' to which the individual is subjected is constituted by the debilitating, uninterrupted 'semiotic flows' (words, concepts, signs, and symbols), which constantly demand the subject's attention, interpretation, decoding and response (2009a, pp. 106,107). The intensity of these semiotic flows, which seep into every physical space and every moment of the day, means that the post-Fordist individual's consciousness is denied a private sphere that will allow for a development of consciousness outside of capitalism's influence, through which to interpret reality, thus condemned to a state of schizophrenia, the over-inclusion with the capitalist logic (Berardi, 2009a, p. 180).

Capital's appropriation of knowledge, language and meaning implies a complete ideological subsumption of human consciousness. The speed at which language operates through the technological apparatus constitutes an impediment to the elaboration and critical interpretation, rendering the individual overwhelmed by the constant mobilisation of attention. As stated by Owen Harris, 'Be Right Back' was created at a time marked by a feeling of unsettledness due to the increasing expansion of technology in everyday life (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp, 2018, p. 66), a preoccupation which is reflected in the overarching theme, in which technology, in the shape of an AI recreation of protagonist Martha's deceased partner Ash, interferes with her grieving process. The narrative emphasizes the pathological aspect of the individual's attachment to the realm of commodified technology, reflecting the image of a capital which, having shifted from the mechanical to the digital, has expanded from a limited to a viral dimension, with devastating effects on the socio-cultural and psychological landscape (Berardi, 2009a, p. 153).

The episode opens with protagonist Martha and her partner Ash's relocation to an old farmhouse inherited by Ash from his mother, and the house itself constitutes a key element within the narrative, embodying a space of quiet and withdrawal in contrast with the 'noise'

of the city, as well as a space unmediated by technology. Narratively the element of quiet associated to the house is built through the contrast with the strong presence of technology elsewhere, for instance, in the scene previous to their arrival to the house, when Ash is sitting in the rental van waiting for Martha, is characterised by an overload of communication output: the mini screen giving news about political affairs and biotechnological advances, Ash scrolling on his phone through his social media feed (S2:E1, 0:33'-0:40').

This excess of information flows contrasts with the complete lack of screens in the old farmhouse. Along with the farmhouse, the element of silence is also echoed by the demeanour of the couple, who are depicted as they subduedly unload their boxes into the house displaying no sign of excitement towards the move, exchanging silent looks from across different rooms (S2:E1, 02:43'-02:58').

Martha and Ash's home is also characterised by its imperfection: when Martha and Ash move into it, it is untidy and run-down, and Martha is later shown intent on re-painting the walls and changing carpets (S2:E1, 10:36'-10:48'). The highlighting of the oldness and run down aspect of the house works to create a connotation between it and the flawed existence of the characters, of which the narrative presents many examples: the bad weather and downpour as the couple stop at a petrol station (S2:E1, 00:26'-00:45'); the plainness of their dinner, a canned soup that Martha warms up (S2:E1, 03:30-03:34'). Imperfection is presented in the relationship and in Ash himself, who displays a few character quirks and habits that seem to annoy Martha; for instance, his distractedness and lack of attentiveness (at the petrol station, he is so distracted by his phone that he leaves Martha standing outside the car with two boiling cups of coffee in her hands) (S2:E1, 00:48'-01:00'); and, finally, his unpredictability: in the car, to Martha's disbelief and annoyance, Ash expresses his liking of the pop group The Bee Gees even though Martha had never seen him listen to them (S2:E1, 01:55'-02:31').

Whilst the 'noise' constituted by technology and the 'quiet' constituted by the private realm of the house are initially introduced as two separate elements, within the narrative the former element gradually intrudes into the latter, threatening the privacy of the characters' existence. Technology's invasion of the house as realm of privacy begins with smaller instances, such as when Ash, having forgotten his phone in the glovebox of the hire van, immediately rushes out to retrieve it (S2:E1, 03:15'-03:18'), or when Martha receives a last-minute work email for an urgent project, forcing her to stay at home while Ash returns the van (S2:E1, 06:00'-06:35'). These small incidents foreshadow the subsequent invasion and destabilization of Martha's grieving process when, after Ash's death as a result of a car crash, she is targeted with promotion emails recommending books for grieving (S2:E1, 11:30'-11:32'), as well as signed up against her will, by her friend Sara, to the AI messaging system recreating Ash (S2:E1, 11:48'-11:50'). The combination of these instances of intrusion depicts a capital which, through the activation of semiotic flows, seeps into the individual's private sphere, reflecting a preoccupation with the loss of the right to 'not watch.'

As maintained by Berardi, the right to privacy, which within contemporary society is constantly infringed by capital, is to be understood in its full meaning: not just the right to not be watched, with which it tends to be associated, but also the right not to watch what we would rather not watch and not to hear what we would rather not hear, a right which, within contemporary society is constantly infringed by the diffused presence of screens (2009a, pp. 107, 108).

The consumer psychology, like in 'San Junipero', emerges as an approach to existence that rejects negativity. The elements deemed 'negative' within the plot are elements regarded as undesirable, but within the dynamics of the narrative these acquire the role of dialectical opposite to capitalist consciousness as defined by Billig (1999, p. 313).

The consumer psychology emerges when, after entering their new home, Ash notices a photograph of him as a young child and decides to publish it, thinking that people might find it funny. When Martha describes the picture as sweet, Ash's answer ('trust me, that day wasn't 'sweet'') (S2:E1, 04:10'-04:16') and his description of the story behind the picture (taken on the first family outing after his brother's death, during which 'no-one was saying anything'), a sombre moment in which Ash was trying to cheer his mother up by giving her a 'fake smile', sets the two opposing poles of the social media platform onto which Ash is posting the photo as realm of the positive, and, real life as the realm of imperfection (a contrast which bears relation to the perfection characterising the VR paradise of San Junipero in contrast to real life, as analysed in the previous section).

In the era of Web 2.0, social media has exceedingly become a sphere of consumer consciousness: with its rejection of discontent and affirmation of the 'likeable', offers a reflection what Marcuse referred to as the closing of the universe of discourse, characterised by one-dimensionality, the 'systematic promotion of positive thinking and doing, […] the concerted attack on transcendent, critical notions' (1964, p. 85). This scene recreates the closing of discourse enacted by technology, and the consumer psychology at work, with its fetishistic identification of the self with a manufactured reality, based on the 'forgetting' of certain elements. The narrative also highlights the pathological aspect of Ash's attachment to this realm of consumer consciousness: the compulsive character of Ash's mobile phone habit, reflected in Ash's inability to fully be in the present within his relationship due to his constant distraction, is evidenced when Martha's friend Sara describes Ash as a 'heavy user' when, during his funeral service, she suggests that Martha try the AI technology replicating him (S2:E1, 10:05'-10:08').

The pathological attachment to technology attributed to Ash by Sara is displayed by herself too, when, during her exchange with Martha, she reflects on the circumstance of Ash's

death: 'It's not real, is it? At Mark's wake I sat there thinking it's not real. The people didn't look real, their voices weren't real' (S2:E1, 09:28'-09:43'). Taken at face value, her comment appears to be throwaway, the 'unreal' being a metaphor for the shock that the loss of a loved one brings about; nevertheless, Sarah's words, particularly being voiced just before suggesting an AI replacement for Ash, work as a psychological and emotional reversal of the real/unreal opposition, by which the realm of happy consciousness, a manufactured consciousness which rejects the negative, is posited as real, whilst elements constitutive of reality, by way of their negative character, are viewed as abnormal.

Commodified technology is hence depicted as enacting a distortion of reality, distancing the individual from an authentic confrontation with existence. This pathological reversal constitutes the over-inclusion that Berardi views as the dominant modality of navigation within post-Fordism, in which the subject is affected by a schizophrenic inability to distinguish between the symbolic and the literal, in a digital universe which blurs the distinction between the metaphor and the thing (Berardi, 2009a, pp. 181,182). The refusal of the negative becomes schizophrenic, as reflected in the characters' overidentification with the commodified realm of existence, and their inability to separate desirability from reality.

The pathological character of the rejection of the negative enacted by commodified technology is highlighted numerous times within the dialogue and plot: the background anecdote of Ash's mother's reaction to his brother and father's deaths, after which she had immediately hidden all photos of them, in order to avoid feelings of grief, depicts the same pathological rejection of grief later displayed by Martha. When Martha, worried that Ash is still not back from returning the van to the rental, her phones her sister, she immediately dissuades Martha from imagining the worst possible outcome, even though the van company had informed Martha that the van had not been returned and Ash hadn't answered his phone for hours (S2:E1, 08:28'-08:50'). Finally, when Martha receives the email from AI Ash to

which Sara had subscribed, she refers to the AI messaging as 'sick!' in response to Sara's description of it as 'clever' (S2:E1, 11:58'-12:57').

The happy consciousness in its pathological form is personified in the AI Ash, to which Martha is eventually persuaded to sign up to, giving way to the character's increased departure from reality, marked by her words to the Ash bot: 'I think I'm going mad' (S2:E1, 08:52'-08:55'), which alienates her from the human relationship with her sister, from which Martha becomes increasingly distanced as she becomes more and more obsessively attached to the AI.

As expressed by Martha, the android is like Ash 'on a good day;' the imperfections which characterised the real Ash are absent in the android version. As the embodiment of a manufactured perfection based on rejection, Ash can be understood as the consumer consciousness personified: dynamics of rejection and elimination are constantly at play in his genetically engineered make-up, as emerges in the details within the plot such as the nutrient gel in which he is stored when delivered to Martha's house to stop him from 'drying out' is edible, non-toxic and smells like marshmallow. His skin is perfectly smooth since it has no pores or lines.

As a quintessentially contemporary commodity, whilst rejecting elements of the negative, Ash also lays claims to authenticity: through visual texture mapping, he is still able to keep the appearance of 'real' skin. Whilst AI Ash doesn't need to eat, he can nevertheless swallow and chew, in order to appear more realistic. The android is hence able to offer a marketed version of authenticity, which doesn't so much respond to the way Ash 'really' was, but to the way Ash 'ideally' should be, or should have been: in Martha's words, him on a good day (S2:E1, 30:55'-30:57').

As analysed by Cederström, having merged the promise of authenticity with the biopolitical goal of self-creation, capital has been able to use the idea of authenticity to its

own ends, as an instrument of subordination (Murtola and Fleming, 2011, p. 27). In other words, whilst the idea of authenticity is a driving element within contemporary capitalist production and consumption, the idea of authenticity put forward by capital is itself artificial; AI Ash emerges within the narrative as the incarnation of marketed 'ideal' authenticity.

Whilst AI Ash's promise of authenticity acts a 'Trojan horse'(Murtola and Fleming, 2011, p. 27) by trapping Martha into the idea of an authentic, but 'better than the real', idealised image of Ash, as emerging in the plot, the absence of those very imperfections which in the android are eliminated gives way to a residual sense of estrangement. This emerges in the plot through Martha's disappointment and increasingly frustrated reactions towards Ash, for instance, when Ash does not recognise her sister who had just visited, she abruptly remarks 'That was my sister. You know her' (S2:E1, 38:50'-38:54'); later she complains about his failure to breathe, but when Ash starts breathing, frustrated, she remarks that she can tell that the breathing is fake, and asks him to sleep downstairs. When Ash complies, she angrily states that the real Ash would have argued. These outbursts culminate in a desperate Martha angrily shouts: 'Get out! You're not enough of him. You're nothing' (S2:E1, 40:00'-41:27').

Despite her unhappiness, however, Martha seems unable to give up the android. The episode's conclusion, in which, after a failed attempt to force the android to jump off a cliff (during which, after commenting how real Ash would have pleaded, the android follows suit and implores Martha to spare him (S2:E1, 44:23'-46:09')), Martha ends up keeping the android locked up in an attic at home, allowing her daughter to 'visit' at weekends. Bradley Richards interprets Martha's inability to part ways with the android as uncertainty: Martha is unsure whether the android and Ash are the same person or whether he is even a person. This interpretation, however, clashes with Martha's own accusatory words to AI Ash: "You're just

a performance of stuff that he performed without thinking and it's not enough" (S2:E1, 45:21'-45:27'). On the contrary, Martha seems very aware of the android's inauthenticity.

"DID YOU JUST LOOK THAT UP?". THE VELOCITY OF THE INFOSPHERE AND THE CONQUERING OF THE SUBJECT

As a post-Fordist commodity, Ash presents a characteristic pinpointed by Berardi as the root of capital's hold on the subject: acceleration. The characteristic which, perhaps more than anything else, defines the AI in all its forms, is the remarkable speed at which it updates and responds to Martha's interactions. This is evident from the very start off, when the AI is still in its primitive form, stored on Martha's phone. As Martha converses with the AI during a country walk, she recounts an anecdote, defining Ash's reaction to her being stung by a sea anemone as him 'throwing a jeb' (an expression meaning that he had become over-excited and anxious); the AI, failing to understand the expression, asks: 'What's threwerjeb?', but, once explained the meaning, immediately assimilates the language, actively using it ('Oh, ok, so I threw a jeb'), it in order to replicate the speech proper of 'real' Ash and the banter shared with Martha (S2:E1, 19:48'-19:57').

Through the velocity and intuitiveness of his responses, Ash is able to 'win over' Martha, who rapidly evolves from the stance of distrust initially displayed to complete reliance on the AI. Later, when Martha mentions Ash's lack of enthusiasm towards panoramic views and nature, this aspect is again immediately assimilated by the AI, who immediately comments 'Yeah, mainly just green, isn't it?' in response to the view, which Martha, upon the AI's request, shows through the camera (S2:E1, 20:50': 21:00'). These instances reflect the remarkable speed at which AI Ash is able to update in order to suit requirements.

Crucially, however, AI Ash does not just update according to Martha's wishes, he pre-empts them: the first instance of pre-emptive action emerges when, after Martha describes the cliff she and Ash used to visit as a lovers' leap, in which couples used to jump to their death, the AI obtains information claiming that that in reality all of those who jumped off had done it alone, anticipating Martha's desire for the information. This tendency towards the preventive action allows the AI to take on a more active role within the relationship, as displayed when, after Martha accidentally drops her phone and, believing she might have damaged the AI panics: within the scene, AI Ash takes on the role of active subject, by calming her down, then suggesting the less 'fragile' version of himself, an AI android, described as 'experimental and not cheap'.

Poignantly, whilst reassuring Martha, the AI jokes that she is 'throwing a jeb' due to her exaggerated reaction, demonstrating once again the ability to assimilate information, meaning and affective elements, utilising them for persuasive purposes (S2:E1, 23:13'-24:39'). After this exchange, Martha is, immediately persuaded by the AI to order the android version of himself, proving his persuasive power. AI Ash's pairing of its perceptiveness and adaptability to an acceleration in response results, on one hand, in an increasing activeness in his own behaviour, on the other hand, increasing passiveness in Martha's reactions. The android seems to react to Martha's wishes before she has even been able to formulate them herself, epitomizing contemporary capitalism's ability to exceed the human ability to respond. Increasingly within the dynamics of the relationship, the AI takes on the role of subject, always appearing one step ahead of Martha.

After Martha orders the android, which is delivered to her house in packaging, she shows complete reliance on the AI, who even instructs her on what to do, as Martha appears to be very unsure and unfamiliar with the instructions. The AI's new leading role in the

relationship is exemplified when he hurries Martha to start the downloading process after she stops a few instants to observe the android prior to its activation.

According to Berardi, through the unleashing and proliferation of signs demanding interpretation, decoding and responses, capitalism mobilises the individual's attention (2009a, p. 107): this constant demand for attention and response can particularly be observed within technology, with devices such as Alexa, as well as subscription services such as Spotify and Netflix, which constantly require the expression of wants and preferences on part of the consumer. This summoning of the consumer's attention results in an inversion of the relationship between consumer and commodity, with the active party, the consumer, becoming a passive, seduced object (Berardi, 2009a, p. 178).

This role inversion and consequent passivity of Martha through consumption is the distinguishing feature of her relationship with the AI, as indicated by the many instances in which AI Ash leads the dynamics: for instance, as the android, after having left the blank android to develop in the bathtub, walks towards the stairs to see it, and remains dumb-struck and unable to react, a dynamic which soon becomes the norm within their interactions (S2:E1, 29:14'-29:54'). As Martha sits down on the sofa, keeping her distance, for instance, android Ash calls her to sit closer; soon after, he offers to cook dinner (S2:E1, 30:00'-30:19') (an offer which contrasts with the opening scene, in which Ash was idly sitting, and Martha was preparing a meal); these detail within the narrative work to reinforce the increasingly active role of the AI, and Martha's increasing submission.

The dynamic between Martha and the AI embodies this inversion of roles: whilst in her relationship with real Ash, Martha emerges in the scenes as the more active person, in most scenes her business contrasting with Ash's inactiveness (when she is loading and paying for fuel while Ash is waiting in the car, or unpacking and preparing dinner while Ash is sitting on the sofa), her role as 'active' partner appears to be completely reversed once real Ash is

substituted by the AI, in which she is relegated to a position of passivity, and goes from being decisive and dynamic to being fearful and unable to act independently.

Taking into consideration the 'subjectification' of AI Ash as a commodity who summons Martha, thus relegating her to passive object within the relationship, allows us to better understand Martha's inability to go forward with her decision to get rid of Ash, by requesting that he jump off the lovers' leap (a cliff which, as recounted by Ash, was known for being the place that many doomed lovers jumped to their death from). The velocity of Ash's reaction once again renders her unable to act: when Martha comments that Ash would have been scared and pleaded for his life, the android, assuming the information, as a result, immediately starts pleading (S2:E1, 45:42'-45:55'), leaving Martha once again incapable of reacting and going through with her order. Thus, Martha's final attempt at gaining autonomy from the AI fails due to the AI's velocity of reaction.

Martha's formulation and communication of a subversive desire, constituted by her dissatisfaction with the inauthenticity of Ash, results in its immediate recapturing and assimilation by the android. Martha's going back on her decision and, instead, to keep Ash locked up in her attic is an expression of her disorientation and incapability of realising or acting upon her situation. This pessimistic conclusion of the episode reflects a complete submission of the subject to the commodity and consumer logic.

ASCETICISM AND THE CONSUMER SUBJECT IN 'HANG THE DJ'.

'Hang the DJ', episode four of the fourth series of *Black Mirror*, is set in a dystopian world in which a system matches individuals to their perfect partner through technology, by assigning a series of relationships, each with a time limit, set up in order to gain data and determine compatibility for successful matching with the final partner. All aspects of the dating experience, even their most minute behavioural details are regulated by the system, into which the character's existence is completely incorporated, as indicated within the narrative by the absence of a family, friends, or a job in the characters' existence.

The two protagonists, named Frank and Amy, make a connection after being matched by the system for a duration of only 12 hours. The system, nevertheless, proves itself intent on keeping them apart, pairing both Frank and Amy with a variety of incompatible matches, so the couple eventually decides to rebel, by climbing the walls of the confined space in which they exist. Their rebellion leads to the exposure of the twist in the plot, revealing that Amy and Frank are, in reality, not human beings but cookies, put to work by the system in order to find a partner for their human counterparts, their act of rebellion being a function of the system, a proof of love based on the assessment of the compatibility of their human equivalents.

The outer issue raised by the episode is that of the desirability of pre-determination within relationships. Whilst the dating system depicted resembles many modern dating apps, Brooker was specifically inspired by Spotify (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp, 2018, p. 272), in his depiction of the technology, which, just like the popular music app, offers 'playlists' to its users. Interpretations of the episode have centred on the question of freedom within a

society in which individual choice is often consigned to technology. Cleary and Pigliucci pose the question 'Should We Use Computers to Help Us Find Mates?' applying stoicism and existentialism to weigh in on the appeal of a pre-determined love life (in Irwin and Johnson, 2020, pp. 168-176). Aidan Power's approach, on the other hand, from the perspective of postmodern theory, pinpoints the pre-establishment of relationships as representative of the homologation of culture under late capitalism, at the root of the individual's subordination to neoliberal ideology (in McSweeney and Joy, 2019, pp. 231-244). According to this interpretation, the couple's rebellion to the system, which ultimately is revealed to be an act of conformity, is a typical example of late capitalism's assimilation of dissent.

Like Power, I also aim to ground my interpretation of the episode in an analysis of capitalism. However, I will focus on the role of post-Fordist production in the ideological formation of subjectivity, and its ramifications within neoliberal ideology. My objective is to underpin the character's subordination to consumer ideology as the result of subjective subsumption within the capitalist system of production. Specifically, I will analyse the link between the individual's subsumption within production and asceticism, a practice which Stimilli underpins within consumer ideology (2017, p. 123). Stimilli understands the practice of consumerism within the neoliberalism as a form of asceticism based on the renunciation of aspects of existence outside of economic enterprise (2017, p. xii).

I will apply Stimilli's notion of asceticism, pinpointing how the assimilation of the subject within a system of production focused on individual preference and inclination functions as a steppingstone for the economisation of the subject and of relationships. Within the episode, the characters' existence, and the way they relate to fellow individuals, is caught in the principles of neoliberalism, built on the view of human potentiality and life which, in Stimilli's words, take on the semblance of an investment (2017, p. 8). Relationships, according to this logic, are considered solely in view of future yields, in their 'economic'

aspect. The characters are called to renounce all non-economic pleasures, structuring existence through self-enterprise and extreme self-discipline. Based the renunciative nature of the system depicted, I am applying Elettra Stimilli's understanding of consumerism as a modern-day discipline of asceticism called into play in the act of enjoyment (2017, p. xii).

The integration of the characters within the market logic of neoliberalism is reflected in the episode as the consequence of the activation of the individual's desiring energy within the production system. The episode also provides a reflection on what Berardi defines as psychic side-effects of neoliberalism: panic (2009a, p. 100), and impotence (2019, p. 9). These socio-psychological syndromes result from the perception of the irrationality of the system, the unpredictable and arbitrary nature of the market. I will analyse on how these cognitive conditions, typical of the post-Fordist subject, are reflected in the characters of 'Hang the DJ'.

"EVIDENTLY, I'M A PASTA GIRL". CONSUMPTION AS BIOPOLITICS

In contrast to most *Black Mirror* episodes, 'Hang the DJ' has largely been interpreted as an optimistic episode, due to its ending: the main characters, Amy and Frank, decide the enforced dating system in which they exist (and the system that they rebel against by climbing the walls, which enclosed them within it, thus seemingly finding freedom (S4:E4, 48:04'). However, in the end, the couple are revealed to be cookies, vanishing into thin air along with the additional 1000 versions of themselves (998 of them logged as 'rebellions' (S4:E4, 49:55')).The camera closes in on the real Amy and Frank, who, after checking their app's feedback of 99.8% compatibility, glance at each other from across a crowded bar with the Smith's 'Panic' playing in the background, its lyrics 'burn down the disco, hang the blessed

DJ' appearing to express a message of rebellion (S4:E4, 50:00'). Producer Annabel Jones confirms the optimism of the conclusion, expressing that the episode is "that hen's tooth of *Black Mirror*'s –a happy one" (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp, 2018, p. 272).

Nevertheless, as suggested in Aidan Power's interpretation, when considering that Amy and Frank (both in their human version and in the cookie version) lead a restricted existence, in a world that is simulated (in the case of cookie Amy and Frank), or, in any case, unfree, foreclosing their existence through the domination of soulless hi-tech corporations (in the case of the human counterparts) (in McSweeney and Joy, 2019, p. 234), the conclusion seems to entail a certain pessimism linked to the characters' state of unfreedom .

Power (in McSweeney and Joy, 2019, pp. 231-234) views the system depicted as a reflection of the "depthless, eternal present" which characterises capitalism in the postmodern era. According to the theorist, Amy and Frank's unfreedom, their status as simulations, forced to play out their interactions as one of a thousand copies of themselves, is to be understood as a result of the homologation characterising existence within the capitalist culture industry, which assimilates individuals within in a system made of signs and appearances; within a commodified existence, language is emptied of its meaning, and, consequently, rebellion is always nullified through its commodification.

The system depicted in 'Hang the DJ', however, depicts a very specific type of commodified existence, one based on cognitive production; this type of production, implicates the intellect, as "a web of attachment and tastes, attractions and inclinations" (Berardi, 2009a, p. 10) as primary source of value. Capital's control over the subject, as reflected in the episode, is inscribed in the very fabric of the commodified mind. For this reason, an interpretation of 'Hang the DJ' benefits from the conceptual tools of post-workerist theory, which finds the roots of alienation within productive relations. Within the act of

production, according to post-workerism, capital dispossesses human potentiality

(Christiaens, 2021, p. 162).

The subsumption of the subject within the ideological field emerges in the episode

through the system's appeal to personal preference. As put by Berardi: "Our desiring energy

is trapped in the trick of self-enterprise, our libidinal investments are regulated according to

economic rules […]" (Berardi, 2009a, p. 24). Apps such as Spotify, which typify post-Fordist

production, are characterised by their appeal to taste as primary source of value, in a type of

production that is not only just-in-time, but also, 'just-so', providing a commodity that

responds to specific individual preferences.

Within the episode, the dating system is premised on the delivery of an ultimate

compatible other (S4:E4, 10:50'), 'ultimate match,' 'best in show' (S4:E4, 18:35'), the idea of

the perfect romantic partner who is tailor-made to fit personal taste. The characters in the

episode both define themselves and interact with the world around them largely through

inclination, by liking or disliking. The centrality of personal taste to the narrative is

highlighted in the dialogue, which is interspersed with references to the characters' taste, their

interactions with their surroundings and with others underpinned by their inclination towards

them: for instance, when Frank peers through the door to check whether he likes the hotel

room (S4:E4, 05:56'), or when Amy comments "I like that lamp" (S4:E4, 06:00') after

entering the room. Another example of the affirmation of taste as defining element within the

narrative is when Nicola (Frank's second partner) comments "so you're the sort of person that

makes jokes" (S4:E4, 13:16') to highlight her dislike of comedy and, by consequence, their

incompatibility.

Just as the reality produced by the system is created to meet the characters' preference

(the restaurant, the hotel, the chosen partners are handpicked according to their preference),

the characters, as consumers, are also themselves shaped by the reality that they live in.

Production within post-Fordism defines subjectivity, becomes biopolitical, as defined by Berardi (2009a, pp. 189-190). This reality emerges within the dialogue when the couple decide to order their food: they soon realise that the menu is pre-selected for them, as two waiters swiftly approach the table and serve them their dishes. Realising the choice of food had been made for her, Amy comments: "Well, evidently, I'm a pasta girl," to which Frank replies: "Yeah, I'm a, uh, fishcake" (S4:E4, 2:40'). These comments work as an analogy for the post-Fordist relation between inclination, consumption, and identity. The focus of desire, the object of consumption/preference, acts to define the subject: this is first implied in Amy's comment, then emphasized in Frank's humorous response.

In Frank's reply, however, the commodity goes further, and supersedes the individual: the object of consumption has completely overtaken subjectivity, so that Frank, by his own definition, is not a fishcake person, but a fishcake. Emerging in Frank's comment is the complete biopolitical subsumption of the subject within post-Fordist production. Whilst Power's interpretation of the episode from the point of view of postmodernism is able to accurately depict the subjugation of the characters from an ideological point of view, an interpretation that applies post-operaist theory can locate the root of the individual's subjugation in immaterial production itself.

Late capitalist production increasingly takes on the role of creating the subject. This is demonstrated by the popularity of subscription boxes, in which consumers pay for box deliveries whose content is curated by the provider rather than selected by the consumer (Andonova, Anaza and Bennett, 2021, p. 638). This type of commodity promises to take away the anxiety of choice in an overwhelming array of consumer products, the anxiety expressed in Frank's words (referring to dating before the system): "option paralysis, so many choices you end up not knowing which one you want" (S4:E4, 8:03').

As understood by Baudrillard, consumerism offers the promise of becoming oneself more than oneself, the subject at its core finding identity only through consumption (1998, pp. 87-88). 'Hang the DJ' reflects this state of dependence through the reliance of the characters on the electronic coach, which directs them on how to act, who to date and how much time to spend with their partners. One of the consequences of subjective subsumption reflected in the narrative within the productive process is dependency, reflected in the characters' inability to make autonomous decisions. This is evident in the opening scene when Frank asks the coach to be directed on where to go (S4:E4, 0:42').

Hence, the subject's assimilation within the system has roots within cognitive production which, by subsuming the individual's inclination, takes on a biopolitical role. In turn, this incorporates the individual within the neoliberal ideological field. Its desiring energy subsumed within the system, the subject is called upon to create its identity, and placed within the capitalist network of forces and relations, the neoliberal dispositif as defined by Christiaens (2021, p. 163).

Within the episode, the subsumption of the characters within the logic of neoliberalism results in the transformation of human potentiality in investment, the rationality proper of homo oeconomicus, managing the body according to the principles of the market (Christiaens, 2021, p. 162): time and emotional energy become a currency for the investment of the self, and relationships, in turn, become a form of enterprise, since all encounters entail the investment of emotional energy and time, the relationships assigned by the system valued in view of higher yields. The utilitarian nature of these relationships is reflected in the coach's descriptions: "even your reaction to a brief encounter provides the system with valuable information" (S4:E4, 10:30'); "the system gains insight as each participant progresses through numerous relationships" (S4:E4, 10:50').

The relationships have no immediate value except for the high returns of the future (the data which they provide being a precondition to their final matching emerge as emotional enterprises), providing no immediate benefit but understood as an investment towards the future. Consequently, rather than constituting an act of enjoyment as such, these represent an act of delayed gratification in view of future reward. This is highlighted by the pairing of Amy and Frank with their successive partners, Nicola and Lenny. Within the dialogue, the characters' exchanges reflect a utilitarian view of relationships which precludes the element of enjoyment, for instance when Nicola suggests: "Come on, let's get it over with. Checking the expiry" immediately as Frank sits at the table (S4:E4, 12:25'). In the case of Lenny, who proposes that he and Amy have sex straight away for an 'early overview of compatibility' (S4:E4, 14:49'), enjoyment becomes a forced act of utility.

Amy and Frank also take part in the dating by viewing it as a type of investment for their future; the utilitarian nature of the system, however, seems to cause alienation, acting as an impediment because of the limitations imposed. The enjoyment that characterises consumption as reflected in 'Hang the DJ', hence, is a highly regulated act, because of its role in shaping subjectivity: consumption is not uninhibited but exists only qua investment of human potentiality; the main example of this is the timing of Frank and Amy's relationship itself, which acts as a limit to the time that they spend together. During their first date, the enjoyment of spending time together is immediately delimited when they check the timer, only to realise that they only have twelve hours of assigned time (S4:E4, 03:37').

Capital enacts the expropriation of human potentiality, which is precluded within the ideology of neoliberalism: as put by Christiaens, the subject is compelled to reject all non-economic joys of life in favour of one's responsibilities towards the market (2021, p. 169). The regulation and limitation of enjoyment is hinted at numerous times within the episode, through reminders of the system's rules. When, during their date, Frank wants to try some of

Amy's food, there is a suggestion that the system might not allow it (S4:E4, 2:48'); notably, when Amy meets her second date and wants confirmation of his identity before he approaches the table, she is denied the information (S4:E4, 11:28'), whereas before meeting Frank, she was shown a picture of him in advance (S4:E4, 01:31'). The inconsistency of the coach's decision appears to be a glitch in the script but, as an element of the narrative, works to highlight the system's regulation of desire by setting a rule in place to 'curb' Amy's enthusiasm when she gets excited about the date's good looks.

As put by Christiaens, failure or refusal to act according to the laws that govern human capital will be judged by the market (Christiaens, 2021, p. 162); in 'Hang the DJ' this awareness is echoed by the coach's warning: "failure to comply with the system may result in banishment" (S4:E4, 40:12'). The characters are asked to obey the system in managing themselves diligently through the string of suggested partners, and failure to do so bears the consequence of elimination.

"EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR A REASON". SELF-DISCIPLINE, ENJOYMENT AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF CONSUMPTION-BASED ASCETICISM.

The subsumption of the individual within production, is hence the basis of the boundaries that the system imposes on Amy and Frank. The manufacturing of subjectivity is reflected in the episode as a constant process, consolidated through the call to self-discipline. This is reflected in the plot by the sacrificial nature of the dating, by which Frank and Amy are expected to put aside their own wishes for the purpose of being paired with the system's assigned match. Relationships within the system, whilst presented as efficient and desirable in the utilitarian sense, result in unhappiness and dissatisfaction. Frank is paired with Nicola, who appears to

be very critical of him and generally holds quite a negative attitude during their time together. Amy also becomes increasingly impatient towards her partner Lenny, whose habit of gasping exaggeratedly she finds annoying (S4:E4, 22:37'). At the end of his time with Nicola, Frank remarks sarcastically to the digital coach: "well, I learned what it's like to cohabit with someone I despise" (S4:E4, 26:18'). As well as reflecting Frank's resentment, his comment also highlights the futility of his time spent with Nicola.

From the moment when the two first meet, it is obvious that they are badly suited and dislike each other, hence the system's decision to assign an entire year to the relationship is met with astonishment by the couple. During the relationship, Frank even requests permission to walk away, which is denied by the digital coach, who insists that he remain in the relationship for its full duration of one year (S4:E3, 17:23').

There is an element of irrationality exposed at the core of the system within the narrative. The regulatory function of the system overtakes its utilitarian purpose, revealing that what really matters is the disciplinary aspect, and its function of directing the characters' existence. In this sense, the system's functioning is an instance of what Stimilli defines as the 'purposiveness without a purpose'(2017, p. 152) characteristic of today's capitalism: consumption's ultimate objective lies not in the accumulation of commodities, but in its own implementation (Stimilli, 2017, p. viii). Emerging from the sternness of the system is its core of power and control that goes beyond its utilitarian purpose. Whilst the primary purpose of the system is purported to be a happy ending, its rationality reveals itself to have no final purpose other than the disciplining of its subjects.

The disciplinary aspect is symbolically reflected in the frequent scenes in which Amy and Frank take part in structured sport activities such as running (S4:E4, 10:41'), swimming (S4:E4, 43:31'), playing squash (S4:E4, 41:36'); these are sports work as a perfect symbolism for the act of ascetic consumption, in that they don't produce an end result (such as winning

or losing, as, for instance, a team sport would), but find realisation within themselves. These structured, constant activities symbolise the element of discipline within the system. Asceticism, (from the Greek askēo, to 'exercise' or to 'train') is a spiritual practice which involves extreme self-discipline and the renunciation of physical or psychological desire (Britannica, 2024).

Within the episode, the dichotomy of enjoyment and austerity is embodied in the sex scenes, in which the two couples Amy/Lenny and Frank/Nicola represent the opposing elements: the enjoyment reflected in the sex between Amy and Lenny in contrasted with Frank and Nicola, who emphatically leave no room for enjoyment, with Nicola forcefully directing Frank and expressing her discontent (S4:E4, 15:24'). The two opposing scenes run parallel to the two faces of consumption as reflected in the episode, which constitutes simultaneously an act of enjoyment, and as a self-discipline. Whilst the relationships constitute an act of consumption, they are also an imposed act which works to regulate and mechanise desire. Consumption within 'Hang the DJ' is an ascetic practice inasmuch as it entails strict self-discipline, renunciation of human potentiality: the possibilities contained within existence are not open to personal choice but precluded by the system (Christiaens, 2021, p. 162); individuals are limited by the direction of the system in their choice of partner, renouncing their free will for the higher purpose of finding their match.

In its depiction on ascetic practise, 'Hang the DJ' highlights a key quality within today's consumer culture. The popularity of detox programs, the decluttering trend associated with Marie Kondo are examples of both an ostentatious ritual of self-sacrifice and the elimination of excess through consumption, in a form of consumption that intertwines with religious practice, constituting both an act of self-realisation and of social formation (Logan, 2017, pp. 600-603). The same elements are reflected in the system depicted in the episode, in

which the self-realisation enacted through preference-based consumption interlaces with the renunciation implied by the element of self-discipline.

The element of inclination is paired to the component of elimination, forming a dynamic which subsumes subjectivity from the very moment of its production. "Enjoyment, rather than being repressed or deferred, is now the sole mode of economic praxis but it is also an effected mode of political control that is one and the same with the government of the living" (Stimilli, 2017, p. 8). Consumer society, hence, contains an element of discipline and renunciation (the renunciation of existence in its bare form, outside of consumption), and post-Fordist production places this self-discipline at the heart of its production. Self-discipline and enjoyment are the two opposing poles amongst which the modern subject is created, a subject who consumes to form its identity, and renounces existence outside of consumption, as reflected in the narrative of 'Hang The DJ'.

"OK, SERIOUSLY, WHAT ARE WE MEANT TO DO?" THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE POST-FORDIST SUBJECT.

In *The Soul at Work*, Berardi pinpoints panic as the pathology which typifies the post-Fordist era (Berardi, 2009a, p. 100). The theorist explains the syndrome in relation to the socio-economic context that we live in, pinpointing it as the psychological result of a subject overwhelmed by an ever-expanding infosphere, within a system in which survival depends on competitiveness. Whilst the subsumption of the subject into the ideological field of neoliberalism means that all failure is attributed to the individual, neoliberalism is a system which, though expecting full compliance, is extremely capricious: as put by Christiaens, by memorising the Ten Commandments, a catholic knows all they have to know in order to lead

a pious life; when it comes to the market, instead, investment is subject to changeability and the return of human capital is subject to market uncertainty (Christiaens, 2021, p. 171).

It is not by accident that the song chosen for the closing scene is the Smiths' 'Panic,' as this sentiment predominantly emerges within the characters, who are required to live in line with a set of rules that appear to be arbitrary and unpredictable. The outcome of this, psychologically, emerges in the narrative as a simmering anxiety, which finds its peak when Frank, after he breaks the agreement that he had made with Amy not to check the expiry date finds that the system starts drastically reducing their allocated time, quickly lowering it from 5 years to a mere 20 hours. Frank, pleading with the system, anxiously asks for the reason behind the system's drastic shortening of their time together, and is told that it is due to his 'one sided observation', however, when Frank asks for the logic behind the rule, he is met with a vague answer: 'everything happens for a reason' (S4:E4, 34:26'-34:30').

This apparently arbitrary decision is made worse by the fact that it comes without warning, as before checking the expiry date, Frank had also asked the coach: "are you not going to talk me out of it?", looking for an instruction or advice, only to be met with the answer: "Do you want me to talk you out of it?" (S4:E4, 34:46'-34:50') by the coach.

It appears, hence, that the characters are playing a game the rules of which are often not revealed or explained. Throughout the episode Amy and Frank display uncertainty towards the regulations of the system; anxiety, for instance, is reflected in Frank's nervous demeanour when he meets Amy (clumsily dropping a fork and making awkward jokes (S4:E4, 1:34'-1:40')); when Frank asks Amy to try some of her food, and Amy questions if they are allowed to (S4:E4, 02:50'-02:55'). Later, unsure about how to behave according to the system's rules, both ask the coach whether they are supposed to have sex but are not given a straightforward answer (S4:E4, 06:48'-06:53').

Uncertainty is reflected in the scene in which Amy and Frank hypothesize about the system, Amy suggesting that there might not really be any logic to the matching, and that it might be just a pretence, and Frank hypothesising that they could be stuck in a simulation (which turns out to be a prediction of the plot twist) (S4:E4, 30:02'-30:10'): these conspiracies reflect the anxiety of following the whims of a system that they do not understand. The characters' reaction to the system's unpredictability reflects the same anxiety felt by the neoliberal subject, resulting from an ideology which "makes economic agents responsible for a future they cannot adequately foresee" (Christiaens, 2021, p. 172). Just like a producer who cannot foresee the future exchange value of his product, Frank and Amy are called upon to make decisions of which the consequences are unclear. As pinpointed by Stimilli, the combination of asceticism and uncertainty towards the 'rules of the game' can be linked to many of the ailments of contemporary society: anorexia, bulimia, addiction all of which constitute coping mechanisms for anxiety (Stimilli, 2017, p. 1).

The feeling of uncertainty at the root of the characters' anxiety is accompanied by powerlessness, the inability to change their situation. Berardi defines the post-Fordist era as ´the age of impotence', a term which he differentiates from powerlessness (Berardi, 2019, pp. 7-9): whereas powerlessness indicates a lack of power within action, impotence, instead, defines an individuality reduced to inaction, unable to even react to its circumstances. According to Berardi, post-Fordism, with its subsumption of the possibilities inscribed in social life and the individual, has irreversibly dismantled the ability to make decisions, plummeting democracy into irreversible crisis.

Amy and Frank embody this feeling of impotence in their complete dependency on the system, which has foreclosed all decisional power, from the food they choose to eat, to the hotel they stay in, to the person they spend their life with. When it defines subjectivity a system based on consumption, as reflected in 'Hang The DJ', limits personal freedom. Whilst

consumerism is generally equated with freedom to choose, in 'Hang the DJ' it is attributed to the exact opposite, implying the absorption of the subject into an ideological system, so that language and life itself are encompassed by it. The fact that Frank and Amy admit to the fact that they cannot remember where they were before entering the system reflects the depth of their ideological immersion and inability to see beyond the system (S4:E4, 45:30'-45:35').

The impossibility to conceive of an existence outside of the ideological apparatus makes freedom almost impossible to visualise for Amy and Frank; the same can be said for the neoliberal subject, for whom 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism' (Fisher, 2009, p. 1). The ideological subsumption of the subject and subsequent neutralisation of the possibility of an alternative consciousness is matched by a condition, mentioned above, and defined by Berardi as 'impotence', a kind of immobilisation of consciousness which leads to the inability to act at the heart of modern subjectivity; the melting of the Arctic ice, the state of economic competition and military aggression are all examples of irreversibility within the system, which give way to a sense of impotence (Berardi, 2019, p. 43). When it comes to the role of post-Fordism, at the very heart of this feeling of impotence is the irreversibility of the enslavement of immaterial labour within a production which has absorbed cognition, language and decision making. Effectiveness of political volition and freedom (Berardi, 2019, p. 43) is curtailed by the act of production.

It is the subsumption of language and cognition at the level of production, as also pinpointed by Christiaens, which enacts the dispossession of human potentiality, making dissent impossible (Christiaens, 2021, p. 173). The dispossession of potentiality and consequent feeling of impotence are reflected in the final scene when, after Amy and Frank have performed the ultimate act of rebellion, by climbing the walls which enclose the system, it is implied that the rebellion was not only foreseen, but worked as a function of the system from which they were trying to escape. In this sense, the ending of 'Hang the DJ' should be

perceived as a dystopian one because of the sudden realisation that no amount of rebelling will free Frank and Amy, as their entire being is appropriated by the system.

'Hang the DJ' offers a depiction of post-Fordist production and its active role in the formation of subjectivity: the characters are defined by the act of consumption, which shapes personal taste and subsumes the intellect. Within the system, the manifestation of inclination acquires a biopolitical function, producing Amy and Frank as subjects, and placing them inside the ideological network of neoliberalism. Hence, within the episode, the subject's tie to ideology originates from production and the centrality of inclination to it. Consumer ideology, as depicted, reflects the two elements of enjoyment and restriction, and through within the opposition of these two poles, the characters are created according to the neoliberal call to self-entrepreneurship, managing their human potentiality, existence, time, and emotions as an investment in view of future yields. Through a consumption focused on self-discipline, the subject becomes invested in the logic of neoliberalism. The episode's conclusion, which reveals the two protagonists to be cookies, underlines the futility of opposition.

The episode is hence a reflection of the capacity of post-Fordist capital to subsume individual's consciousness, offering a depiction of alienation rooted in the post-Fordist mode of production. Within the psyche of the characters, the instability of the neoliberal system with its unpredictability and volatility in terms of subjective choice and outcome causes symptomatic panic, which Berardi pinpoints as a syndrome of post-Fordist subjectivity. This is reflected in the narrative through the inconsistency and arbitrariness of the system's regulations, which the characters follow with extreme discipline, but without an underlying logic or understanding. This creates a deep-seated insecurity which reflects post-Fordist subjectivity in today's unstable socio-economic environment. 'Hang the DJ' places the alienation and anxiety felt by its character firmly within the productive system of which they are part.

As put by Berardi, the conversation on ideology and biopower today needs to "shift the focus of theoretical attention towards the automatisms of mental reactivity, language and imagination, and therefore towards the new forms of alienation and precariousness of mental work occurring on the Net" (Berardi, 2009a, p. 22). The analysis of 'Hang the DJ' confirms this view: within the episode, technological the subject, technological production and ideology are inextricably linked, depicting a subjectivity which is also production, and an ideology which is rooted within the individual as commodity.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to substantiate the link between the theme of (in)authenticity present within *Blade Runner 2049* and the *Black Mirror* series and the ideology of consumerism, with the proposed objective to fill a gap in present research, which has so far lacked an analysis which accounts for the materialist analysis of the film and series focused on contemporary post-Fordism.

The value of such analysis lies in the uncovering the changes in patterns of consumption today, and the effects of these changes on the subject. Consumerism within post-Fordism, as emerges from my analysis, is characterised by a surface of increased freedom, but a core of greater subjugation: greater creative liberty, as typified by the prosumer phenomenon (Toffler, 1980, np), whilst offering an illusory feeling of emancipation, works as a double-edged sword, by further subsuming creative energy and consciousness to the ideology of consumerism and capital. In what way does capital subjugate individuals through commodification? As emerges from the film and series, capital utilises the commodification of existence and human relationships, through the medium of technology, to regulate society,

as reflected in *Blade Runner 2049*, in which the relationship between K and Joi is regulated by capital and constrained by the limits of commodification.

The film, in this sense, constitutes a powerful warning against the dangers of the reification of relationships through commodified technology (a risk associated, for instance, to social media interactions). Commodification is reflected not just as a sociological condition, but also as a psychological tendency to the ideological view of existence, as reflected in 'San Junipero', in which the homonymous virtual beach resort enacts a rejection of the negative elements which contrast consumer consciousness. With the recent prominence of research and investment in the formation and design of immersive virtual spaces such as the metaverse, simulated worlds which present the user with an improved version of reality, 'San Junipero' constitutes an invaluable insight into the peril of such virtual realms of escapism in the setting of a consumer capitalist social setting.

As reflected from the series and film, the change from industrial to post-Fordist production has brought about radical changes within the character, implications, and effects of consumer ideology. Consumerism emerges as intensive in its hold on the subject, and new forms of immaterial commodity have attained a biopolitical role, not only shaping the subject, but relegating this latter to a position of passivity and submissiveness. In 'Be Right Back', whilst alienated by the inauthenticity of her relationship with AI Ash, Martha, is unable to walk away from it; the episode reflects on how the call to self-express and articulate preferences so typical of the consumer's interactions with post-Fordist commodities allows the commodity to 'gain the upper hand' on the consumer, relegating this latter to the position of object, further uncovering the reality of subjugation and passivity laying under the surface of consumer creativity and free expression.

The AI Ash is able to (re)capture Martha's desire in such a way that the traditional role of consumer, as active subject, and commodity, as passive object, is overturned, resulting in

Martha's inability to react to her state of estrangement. The illusory nature of consumer

freedom re-emerges in 'Hang The DJ', in which the protagonists Frank and Amy take part in

a dating system which decides on the perfect match, take over decisional power and freedom,

whilst at the same time forcing the characters to go through a series of trial relationships

before being assigned their long-term match. The episode constitutes an invitation to reflect

upon the unfreedom implied by the self-disciplinary nature of consumption, by which the

individual is called upon to define itself through consumption. The episode also reflects on

the pathological conditions of panic and impotence (Berardi 2009a and 2019) emerging from

today's subjectivity, indicating that the concept of alienation within contemporary society

needs to give way to more complex analyses which consider the psychological consequences

of capital's subjective subsumption.

Inauthenticity is implied within contemporary consumer society in many ways: within

the reification of social relationships, the imposition of false needs, and in the inducement of a

world view which curtails all elements considered to be in opposition to the consumer logic.

As pointed out by Murtola, When analysing the relationship between consumerism and

authenticity, a perhaps surprising realisation is that the claim to authenticity today is upheld

by capital and the act of consumption itself, with its appeal to self-expression and user

participation; popularity of new-age spiritualism, airport lounge philosophy, self-help

movements and work-life balance programmes is linked to an injunction to be authentically

oneself, which nevertheless, is structured around a lack, based on the notion of an ideal self

which oppresses the subject and paradoxically results in subjective estrangement (Murtola

and Fleming, 2011, pp. 2-4).

The characters within the films and series come to terms with the illusory nature

authenticity when confined within the tenets of consumer ideology. The VR resort of San

Junipero promises an existence free from societal restrictions, in which Yorkie and Kelly are

allowed to live their relationship and, in some respects, be truer to themselves. The true nature of the virtual paradise, however, reveals itself to be restrictive, since it is based on the rejection of elements of sacrifice and suffering (constituted by Kelly's marriage and loss of her daughter, as well as Yorkie's car accident) that the narrative associates with an authentic human experience. In 'Be Right Back', reflects an image of commodified existence also characterised by the rejection of the negative, which are constituted by the imperfection within the protagonists' existence. As emerges in the narrative, imagery, and dialogues, the post-Fordist sense of estrangement is linked to a sense of inauthenticity which detaches the individual from an authentic existence.

Whilst philosophical questions concerning what constitutes an authentic existence remain open to debate, the certainty emerging from *Blade Runner 2049* and *Black Mirror* is that the increased commodification of existence entails an increased sense of inauthenticity.

CHAPTER 3. 'FIERY THE ANGELS FELL.' ANTAGONISM, LIVING LABOUR, AND

EXPLOITATION IN *BLADE RUNNER*, *BLADE RUNNER 2029*, AND *ALTERED CARBON*.

INTRODUCTION.

In one of the most emblematic scenes of the 1984 *Blade Runner*, replicant Roy Batty (played

by Rutger Hauer), having descended onto earth with the intention to reclaim a longer lifespan

than the one awarded to him by his manufacturer, confronts eye designer Hannibal Chew in

his laboratory. Announcing his arrival to the scientist, he quotes some lines from William

Blake's poem *America: A Prophecy*: "fiery the angels fell; deep thunder rolled around their

shores; burning with the fires of Orc", words which constitute a poetic reference to the

replicant rebellion. Within the lines, however the film script misquotes a single word, the term

'fell', which replaces the original 'rose' in the poem (Blake, 2017, p. 29). Within the context

of the replicant uprising, hence, the poem was altered to represent the angels to have fallen,

rather than risen.

What might the narrative intention behind this choice of words be ? I choose to start

my analysis of antagonism within *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* by posing this

question. The at first sight insignificant word substitution within the verse carries a substantial

symbolic significance, since it functions to symbolically highlight a narrative choice to

highlight the superiority of replicants, linked to their antagonistic role.

According to McLachlan's existentialist analysis of the film, the descension of

replicants down to planet Earth is explained purely in spatial terms (since they have journeyed

from off-World to Earth), but narratively contrasts with the fact that, by killing Eldon Tyrell,

Batty 'murders God' (McLachlan in Bunce and McCrossin, 2019, p. 163) a higher being within the established hierarchy. According to this interpretation, the replicant rebellion reflects a typically human anguish concerning the nature of their being, and a desire to transcend the purpose assigned to them by their creator (in Bunce and McCrossin, 2019, pp. 163-169). Whilst we might feel some 'sympathy for the devil,' for McLachlan the rebellious replicants are doomed, 'bound to lose', in their plea to free themselves from their predestined role (in Bunce and McCrossin, 2019, p. 163), whilst the tyrannical god-like creators Tyrell and Wallace both constitute a kind of superior creator figure.

From a Marxist perspective, the problem with this existentialist outlook is that it downplays the replicants' crucial superiority as force of production: the Tyrell and Wallace corporations are in charge of replicants, but only thanks to them have accrued their empire of wealth. The understanding of replicants as inferior beings is also at odds with the superior strength and intelligence, highlighted in the narrative, right from the opening titles: 'the Nexus 6 Replicants were superior in strength and agility, and at least equal in intelligence, to the genetic engineers'. An interpretation of Batty's famous verses should arguably begin from an understanding of replicants as a force of production not inferior but exceeding their maker.

As Marx and Engels stated in *The Communist Manifesto*, 'what the bourgeoisie […] produces, above all, are its own gravediggers' (1992, p. 16). As a system based on inequality and exploitation, capitalism inevitably brings about the conditions for its own crisis. The deep-rooted antagonism characterising capitalist relations is reflected in the Nexus 6 replicants who descend to Earth and, in their quest for freedom, end up killing Tyrell. As expressed by Modonesi, antagonism understood as a 'qualitative, substantial element of worker subjectivity' is a concept which, within theory, was fully expanded on by the current of workerism, which focused on the subversive potential of the worker figure (Modonesi, 2014, p. 45). Italian workerism combined the analysis of the composition of the new worker

and mutations within the working class (Modonesi, 2014, p. 46) to a methodological inversion, named 'Copernican revolution', which implies an understanding of capital as developing in response to workers' struggles, thus placing worker antagonism as a motor for change (Modonesi, 2014, p. 47).

Theorist Antonio Negri, for instance, argues that developments within production and the economy, including the 1971 decoupling of the dollar from the gold standard, which, by destabilising the market, functioned as a weakening of the state and trade unions, can only be understood as attempts by capital to recuperate its structures of control and to neutralise the threat contained within workers' antagonism (Hardt in Murphy and Mustapha, 2005, pp. 11-12). In their seminal book *Empire*, Hardt and Negri maintain this same understanding of capital as the reactive element within class relations: 'the power of the proletariat imposes limits on capital and not only determines the crisis but also dictates the terms and nature of the transformation. *The proletariat actually invents the social and productive form that capital will be forced to adopt in the future*' (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 268).

The strategic theoretical choice to focus on workers' struggle, is a hallmark of post-workerist theory and also powerfully emerges in the writings of Mario Tronti, who, in his 'A New Type of Political Experiment: Lenin in England', declared that Marxist theory had been guilty of seeing workers as subordinated to capitalist development and not the opposite: '[Now] we have to turn the problem on its head, change orientation, and start again from first principles, which means focusing on the struggle of the working class' (Tronti, 2019, p. 65).

Workerist theory confers the worker a leading role within production, and for this reason, when applied within the framework of within a Marxist interpretation of culture, allows for new and interesting analyses of narrative depictions of class struggle. Within the narrative *Blade Runner*, a post-workerist influenced reading highlights the replicants as self-sufficient figures of antagonism. My analysis will also focus on how the films reflect on

capital's shift from material production to immaterial production, a shift understood by theorist Vercellone as the main source of contradiction within capital today, due to the resulting acquisition of intellectual power by labour (Vercellone, 2007, p. 27).

According to the theorist, the increasing reliance on knowledge, defined within economy as knowledge-based economy, is more appropriately named as cognitive capitalism, a term which reflects the contradiction at the heart of this type of production: whilst the term 'cognitive' refers to the new intellectual character of labour, 'capitalism' refers to the persistence of the driving role of profit and centrality of wage relations. As highlighted by the theorist, within this new type of production capitalism acquires an increasingly parasitic role in relation to the autonomy of social labour, which in turn leads to increased antagonism within labour relations (Vercellone, 2004, pp. 417-419). In short, capital's increasing reliance on the intellectual autonomy of labour is a weakness at the heart of contemporary production.

The process of constitution of the antagonistic subject, however, as reflected in the science-fiction narratives analysed, cannot merely be confined within the power relations of production proper: this is because as maintained by Berardi in his endorsement of Deleuze and Guattari (though tempered by his awareness of pathologically debilitating effects of desiring production, which ultimately forces the subject into a subaltern position) , capitalism today is a system which taps into desire as a force of creation (Berardi 2009a, p. 177-180). Within the series *Altered Carbon*, antagonism is also constituted ontologically, with capitalist production giving way to a subject whose psychosocial make-up exists in antagonism against capital. Within the series, the capitalist system depicted is reliant on the destruction of limits to monetary accumulation: the society portrayed is based on the attainment of immortality and on the market created around the commodification of bodies. The economic system, hence, relies on the disintegration of death as boundary to financial expansion, and on the destruction of social mores that run counter to excesses of the system.

Within the series, the envoy is created as an antagonistic figure in-and-against the system. In its destructive tendencies which originate from his ontological make up as subject of the system, the figure of the envoy reflects Deleuze and Guattari's definition of the schizophrenic as 'exterminating angel' of capitalism, (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 35). To the system in which he is reawakened after 250 years of virtual prison, Kovacs, part of a group of warriors known as envoys, is considered a terrorist and a criminal, having taken part in the envoy uprising against the ruling protectorate centuries before. During a shoot-off against CTAC (the government's armed forces) in the series' opening scene, the voice of Quellcrist Falconer, the envoy rebellion leader echoes with the words "you are the killer and the destroyer" (S1:E1, 8:06'-8:07'), defining his mission within the system as one of annihilation.

Both the films and series are stylistically defined as works of cyberpunk, a subgenre of science fiction characterised by its depictions of dystopian futures, in which technology has advanced, but society is plagued by material and moral degradation. The genre was famously defined by Fredric Jameson as a supreme expression of late capitalism (Jameson, 1991, p. 419). Nevertheless, assessments of cyberpunk's role in the critique of capitalism have often been negative: cyberpunk literature has, in fact, been judged as lacking critical distance, being guilty of conservativism, and discursive complicity with the values of capitalism, and even deemed an overhyped spectacle (O' Connell in McFarlane et al., 2020, pp. 283-284). An analysis of the envoy and the replicants as antagonistic figures is of use in a revaluation of cyberpunk's role from the perspective of Marxist critique: by delving into the characters' hostile relations towards the capitalist systems in which they exist, it is possible to uncover the contradictions defining the systems and the underlying critique contained in the films and series.

Thus, my analysis revises harsh interpretations of cyberpunk as a betrayal of the wider genre of science-fiction's utopian and subversive modernism (O'Connell in McFarlane et al., 2020, p. 282) and offers new perspectives in contrast with the negative analysis of replicants as lacking concrete revolutionary potential, such as Heffernan's, who views replicants as influenced by bourgeois patriarchal codes and false consciousness (2000, pp. 148-161). The antagonistic role of the envoy and the replicant is framed within the narrative through the initial identification of the characters as villains, which, nevertheless, with the unfolding of the plot gives way to a rethinking of conventional ideas of what constitutes a villain.

The concept of antagonism is one of the central pillars of Marxist theory, traditionally embodied in the proletariat (although theorists Hardt, Negri and Virno have argued for a replacement of outdated and restrictive concepts of the working class with the concept of the multitude as element of opposition against capitalism) (Hardt and Negri, 2004; Virno, 2004), the class which, through its exploitation, is created in opposition to capital. In which case, what can these figures reveal about the nature of antagonism, understood as a contradiction or struggle within capital today? What are the preconditions to the formation of antagonism and in what way does it reflect the specific characteristics of contemporary capitalism? My analysis aims to provide the links between the replicant, the envoy, and the post-Fordist subject, uncovering the causes, characteristics, and nature of antagonism, as depicted in the films and series.

Within Marxist theory, as pointed out by Modonesi, the analytical perspective on antagonism has remained fixed in its original 'exterior' understanding of a conflict, contradiction, and opposition endemic to the structure of capitalism (Modonesi, 2014, p. 37). The analysis of antagonism as an internalised, subjective rather than objective experience has largely remained unexplored. Arguably, whilst the systemic aspect is crucial to theoretical analysis, it is also necessary to analyse the role of antagonism in shaping the individual, since

overlooking these more subjective aspects risks denying class struggle a sense of agency (Modonesi, 2014, p. 43). Within *Altered Carbon* and *Blade Runner*, the focus on subjectivised antagonism allows for a more in depth understanding of the figures of the envoy and the replicant.

As expressed in Quellcrist Falconer's exhortation to Kovacs, during his fight against CTAC (the system's military) 'make it personal!' (S1:E1, 07:56'-8:00'): criticism towards capitalism within the narrative is viewed from the perspective of the main characters, as an internalised experience of opposition. My analysis aims to maintain a subjective understanding of antagonism as the precondition for the analysis of the envoy and replicant as self-defined figures, created within the system, but self-sufficient in their struggle. The objective is hence to 'recognise, identify and name the process of construction of subjectivities in conflict' (Modonesi, 2014, p. 66) within the narratives. This focus provides insight into questions concerning the impact of conflict on consciousness, the constitution of the subject conforming to antagonistic consciousness, and the nature of the process of political subjectivation, issues raised by Modonesi in his analysis (Modonesi, 2014, pp. 38-39).

'SUPERIOR IN STRENGTH AND AGILITY, AND AT LEAST EQUAL IN INTELLIGENCE': THE REPLICANT AS ANTAGONISTIC ELEMENT IN *BLADE RUNNER* AND *BLADE RUNNER 2049*.

Both *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2029* make the critique of capitalism a central element to their narrative. As expressed by Flisfeder, from the perspective of their different historical contexts, the dystopian worlds depicted in both films speak to fears concerning the social effects of the capitalist system. Whilst the 1982 original reflects the fears surrounding the emergence of neoliberalism with its dismantling of welfare and deregulation, the sequel focuses on the awareness of dystopian aspects present within our current social reality and the disillusionment with the devastating social and ecological effects of a now deep-rooted and resilient neoliberalism (Flisfeder in McFarlane et al., 2020, p. 144).

One of the most central aspects and main contribution of the films' critique of capitalism is its depiction of the antagonistic relationship between capital, represented by the Tyrell and Wallace corporations and exploited labour, represented by the replicants. The element of antagonism is first introduced from the outset in the opening sequences of both *Blade Runner* (1983) and *Blade Runner 2049*, both of which recount through introductory captions the background events leading the replicants' revolt. Within these scenes, the antagonism of replicants is immediately linked to a perception of excess, constituted by the advanced engineering of the replicants, which gifts them superiority over human beings and, specifically, their genetic engineers.: 'Early in the 21st Century, THE TYRELL CORPORATION advanced Robot evolution into the NEXUS phase- a being virtually identical to a human- known as a Replicant. The NEXUS 6 Replicants were superior in

strength and agility, and at least equal in intelligence, to the genetic engineers who created them. […] (02:22'-02:42').

The descriptive sequence posits not only that replicants are superior to human beings, but also, crucially, that this superiority is not accidental, but required by the very system that produces them: this is highlighted by the description of the replicants' strength and intelligence as both making them 'ideal slave labour', and at the same time at the root of 'a series of violent rebellions'. With regards to power dynamics, it is clear from the outset that Tyrell's and Wallace's reliance on Nexus 6 production, whilst allowing for technological advance and colonial expansion, has also consigned them to a position of weakness. the following recounting of events confirms the threat posed by this disadvantage, by introducing the Nexus 6 rebellion: 'After a bloody mutiny by a NEXUS 6 combat team in an Off-world colony, Replicants were declared illegal on earth-under penalty of death. Special police squads-BLADE RUNNER UNITS-had orders to shoot to kill, upon detection, any trespassing *Replicant* […]' (02:43'-02:56').

Both Tyrell Corporation and Niander Wallace, who buys out the company after Tyrell's bankruptcy, find themselves caught in a conflict of interest between, on one hand, the requirement of advance in replicant production, which allows for economic and colonial expansion to different planets, and, on the other, the resulting physical and intellectual subordination to the results of these advances.

An element of unpredictability emerges in the narrative, linked to the replicants' tendency to develop emotionally and intellectually in ways that pose a threat to the system: as expressed by Bryant (LAPD captain and Deckard's boss, who requests that he hunt down the rogue replicants), 'the designers reckoned that after a few years, they would develop their own emotional responses' (15:41'-15:50'). The Nexus 6 replicants advance emotionally in a direction that is unintended and unwanted by the system.

Whilst their characteristic strength and intelligence are part of the engineering, at the moment in which they surpass the maker's own skills, they become unpredictable, both difficult to determine (as indicated by their definition as 'at least' equal, which denotes uncertainty), and impossible to control. Replicants constitute a threat to the system due to their dynamism, their constant growth and development. The paradox contained in the dichotomy between the desirable and the undesirable aspects emerges numerous times within the replicants' description, from Zora's characterisation as both 'beauty' and the 'beast' (BR, 15:19'-15:28') and in Roy Batty's 'optimal self-sufficiency', which leads him to rebel (BR, 15:05'-15:15').

The great contradiction of Tyrell's reliance on the vitality of replicants, the prodigious physical and intellectual capacities which also constitute a threat to the system's domination, reflect a weakness which, according to Vercellone, is brought about by capital's increasing reliance on the know-how of workers: within the process of production, knowledge equates to power; capital's current phase, defined by Vercellone as the phase of general intellect, characterised by a subsumption of workers' intellect in the process of production, results in the intellectual upper-hand of labour, as possessor of living knowledge, over the dead knowledge of capital (Vercellone, 2007, p. 29).

Tyrell's reliance on the human aspect of replicants, in effect, presents an image of capital's attempt to expropriate the living element of labour (intellectual and affective abilities) and the resulting conflict. The dynamic of antagonism between Tyrell as manufacturer, and Nexus 6 replicants, understood as a productive class whose constant development has to be contained and regulated, reflects the dispute between capital and labour as possessor of living knowledge, and the struggle over the control of intellectual powers of production defined as a constant feature within capitalist development, contained within the dialectic of conflict and innovation (Vercellone, 2007, pp. 16-17).

Hence, the introduction of background events serves to tie the development of the capitalist system depicted to a labour characterised as living, dynamic and in constant growth. The binary of development-antagonism embodied in the relationship between Tyrell and the replicants plays an important role in the narrative as it constitutes labour, in this case represented by the replicants, as a productive force which, in its dynamism, exists always one step ahead of capital.

'MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN'. THE REPLICANT AS POST-FORDIST WORKER AND THE HUMAN AS EXPLOITED COMMONS.

The 'more human than human' characteristic is a key element to any analysis which posits replicants as an exploited workforce: the characteristic humanity of replicants can be understood as a symbolisation of capital's appropriation of human intellect and inclinations. In this sense, the *Blade Runner* films reflect society's move from a Fordist material production which enslaves the body, based on the workers subordination to the machine within the factory, to a post-Fordist production, which instead enslaves the mind and consciousness, deriving value not from material production but from the products of the workers' mind and consciousness.

Theorists Hardt and Negri understand post-Fordist society as being so radically different from preceding production that it necessitates a review of the archetypal understanding of the proletariat, a concept which the theorists replace with 'the multitude' (an expanded network constituted as living alternative within capital) (Hardt and Negri, 2004, pp.99-226). The multitude is defined by the authors as composed of the diverse figures of production created by globalised capitalism and pinpoint how the separation on the economic aspect from other social aspects breaks down, since it is precisely those aspects of the person

normally considered to exist outside of the economic sphere which create the value appropriated by capital. Post-Fordism is, according to the theorists, based on the appropriation of the commons: human aspects such as the propensity to communicate and form relationships, which once escaped appropriation by capitalist production, today are expropriated within in the act of production (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. xv).

Ridley Scott's replacement of the term 'android' (which implies a human-like but nevertheless robotic being), used in the novel on which the film is based, with the term 'replicant', (which instead posits the beings as 'replica', thus less distinguishable from human beings, and more authentically human) (Bunce and McCrossin 2019, p. 52), serves to highlight the humanity of replicants. Whilst this humanity has most often been framed from an ontological perspective, when considering the society depicted as a capitalist system, it should be noted that its production exploits the replicants' human element as commons, thus positing them as an instance of living labour and exploited intellect. By linking an individuation of the human aspect as means of production, it becomes possible to link the previously analysed element of excess to the human, living character of labour, hence understanding the contradictions emerging within the capitalist systems depicted in the films as a symbolisation of the antagonistic nature of labour today.

Compared to other forms of labour, modern forms of labour, based on immaterial aspects such as intellectual activity, cooperation, and collaboration maintains a creative autonomy which is in conflict with the formal subsumption enacted by capital (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 54). *Blade Runner* reflects the autonomy and emancipatory nature of labour through its depiction of replicants' desire for freedom and life, as well as positing this instinct as the fulcrum of antagonistic relations. Likewise, the elements of antagonism, excess, and living labour emerge as key to understanding opposition as reflected in *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*.

The significant role of knowledge and of creative intellect within today's system of production, which I have explored in the first chapter, emerges in *Blade Runner*, is a trait which works as a double-edged sword within the system depicted. For instance, a pleasure model, Pris has been gifted with the ability to charm the human beings she interacts with, an ability which she uses to her advantage when she befriends the genetic designer J.F. Sebastian with the objective of convincing him to take her and Roy Batty to Tyrell's headquarters, in order to request a lifespan extension. The astuteness with which she is characterised allows her to manipulate and gain superiority over her own genetic engineer, as emerges when Pris shows her intellectual superiority by throwing a boiling egg at Sebastian, who catches it, burning his hands, in an act which works both as a manifestation of Pris's intelligence and denoting her rebellious potential.

Recurrently within the narrative, the characteristics required by the system end up working against it, by gaining a purpose and value within the replicants rebellion. For instance, Roy Batty's 'optimal self-sufficiency' implies a level of autonomy which constitutes a precondition for emancipation: a replicant who is self-sufficient is more likely to view him/herself as independent from the system, and hence rebel against the condition of slavery. This reflects Hardt and Negri's view of the multitude as agent of revolution; Whilst the theorists' view arguably underestimates the function of biopolitical production in subsuming the worker, thus eradicating the space for dissent (Berardi, 2009a, pp. 154-155), within an interpretation of *Blade Runner*, their pinpointing of capital's granting of creative autonomy as a steppingstone for worker emancipation is reflected in the replicants' fight for liberation. Hence, *Blade Runner* establishes the general intellect which resides in labour as the driving force of capital and at the root of antagonism.

Based on their role in shaping capitalist production, it is possible, hence, to draw a parallel between the figure of the replicant and immaterial workers. Replicants can be placed

within the time frame of a production system which, in an attempt to appropriate general intellect and its fruits, finds itself handing intellectual power to the worker, relegating itself to being the weaker player in the struggle over the means of production. Tyrell's intention was to create androids designed to "copy human beings in everything except emotions". Replicants as an exploited class are created with human features which were superior to their own makers, according to the requirements of the market. The same characteristics which make them valuable as commodities, as labour-force, at the same time constitute an excess at the source of their insubordination. As antagonistic figures, replicants break free from the capitalistic, value driven structures, threatening the very system that created them, and demand freedom.

REPLICANTS AS SURPLUS.

'I want more life, father': with this demand Roy Batty, leader of the rebellious Nexus 6 group, confronts Tyrell, his creator. Death, in the form of a four-year lifespan, has been imposed on the Nexus 6 in order to prevent the development of feelings. Their life-force and creativity being reduced to the value and purpose of labour-power (as commodity), their intelligence being subsumed to the domination of Franco Berardi defines as capitalism's thanato-politics, the politics of death (Berardi, 2009a, p. 188). In his analysis of immaterial labour, the theorist describes this as the submission of intelligent life to the dead object, thus the domination of the dead over the living. In this sense, the replicant's four-year expiry date works as a symbolisation of capital's subjugation and limitation of living labour, a subjugation based on the assignment of an arbitrary limit, which the Nexus 6 replicants refuse to conform to.

Within the narrative, capital's refusal to acknowledge or concede to the emancipation of replicants as labour force results in its crisis and defeat. When Tyrell denies the possibility

of an extension of his lifespan, the realisation that his creator was unable or unwilling to recognise his value as a living being and concede to prolong his lifespan results in an act of defiant rebellion: Roy Batty murders him by crushing his head through his eyes, the same eyes that had refused to see him as anything more than a machine.

Replicants emerge within production as subjects whose desire for life and experience exist in excess of the limits imposed by capital, a contradiction within the system which ultimately leads to its crisis. The acknowledgement of this excess has been overlooked by the postmodern reading of the film fail to acknowledge excess as a key constituent within the figure of the replicant. In *Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner*, Giovanna Bruno argues for a postmodernist reading of *Blade Runner*: according to the author, Roy Batty's killing of Tyrell, is an Oedipal crime through which he refuses symbolic castration. Bruno argues that replicants represent the Jamesonian schizophrenic subject, who, lacking the symbolic order that is provided by language and history are "condemned to a life composed only of a present tense; they have neither past nor memory" (Bruno, 1987, p. 70).

Bruno's argument, however, is undermined by replicants' evident awareness of their own history and sense of agency, at the source of their planned rebellion. If replicants, as affirmed by Bruno, were deprived of a past and memory, arguably, this would result not in rebellion, but in a state of existential confusion and, as a result, immobility, and passiveness. This understanding clashes with the replicants' quest for an extension of their life, which would allow for the recognition of their life experience and for their perpetuation into the future, demonstrating both agency and a clear direction in their revolutionary objectives.

Furthermore, within the narrative, several elements point to a surplus past, rather than to a lack. Batty's famous tears in the rain monologue, the final words pronounced by the replicant whilst fighting against Deckard just before his 'expiry', reflect a surplus of knowledge and life: "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off

the shoulder of Orion. I watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser gate. All those moments will be lost in time…like tears…in rain […]" (BR 1:46:05-1:06:59'). Batty's existence does not appear to be devoid of a past; on the contrary, it is abounding in experience. The value of this experience, however, is stifled and misunderstood within a social system that relegates him to the status of a commodity, of a means to the production of monetary value.

Batty's estrangement derives from the fact that the fullness and multifariousness of life experience is irreducible to the value that it has been given to him by Tyrell, and to the four-year time limit imposed by his manufacturer. If, hence, Batty is to be understood as a schizophrenic subject, it should be by way of Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the schizophrenic, a figure who 'deliberately seeks out the very limit of capital' (1983, p. 35), interpreting Batty's 'patricide', not so much as a refusal of symbolic castration and the Oedipal power structure, but as a breaking down of capital's boundaries. In this sense, the schizophrenic is neither pathological ('A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst's couch') (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 2) nor relegated to a life of perpetual present, as asserted by Bruno, but instead, should be understood as an antagonistic figure struggling for liberation which, as affirmed by Deleuze and Guattari, is produced by capital and against capital (1983, p. 245). Knowledge power constitutes the relentless contradiction within capital, as its attempt to economise on labour in the quest for increased accumulation, inevitably ends up with the emancipation of labour.

'Those aren't your memories' Subsumption and control.

As analysed, the figure of the replicant, which within the narrative of *Blade Runner* can be identified as exploited class within relations of production, constitutes an antagonistic kernel within the system depicted, due to capital's reliance on certain characteristics (strength, intelligence, adaptability, and creativity, all reflected as linked to a human element) which, whilst necessary within production, are also the preconditions for the replicants' desire for liberation. Reflected in manufacturers Tyrell and Wallace's constant attempts to quell replicants' rebellious tendencies through changes in genetic manufacturing, is capital's biopolitical post-Fordist effort to shape individuals' consciousness. In order to contrast the replicants' revolutionary potential, Tyrell corporation and its successor, The Wallace Corporation, attempt to seize the control lost after the Nexus 6 rebellion through the assimilation of all spontaneous experience and emotions under its system.

This response is reflected in the creation of the experimental Nexus 7 model, implanted with memories, of which the character of Rachael (Tyrell's assistant) is a specimen, as well as the reproduction of Nexus 9 models in *Blade Runner 2049* by Tyrell's successor Wallace, who display much greater obedience; examples of these are Wallace's assistant and preferred replicant, Luv, and K, blade runner and protagonist of the film, who, at least initially, displays unquestioning obedience to the system, are examples. Emerging in Tyrell's and Wallace's efforts to tame the rebellious consciousness of replicants is an image of capital which endeavours through technological advances to curb workers' struggles. Within theory, this dynamic reflects Tronti's understanding of 'the laws of movement of workers' labour', a movement which, according to the theorist, is at the basis of capital's

innovation, technical leaps, and social transformation (Tronti, 2010, p. 187). It is capital who is forced to evolve in order to survive the antagonistic movements of labour.

The manufacturing of memories is the strategic innovation deployed for controlling replicants as first reflected in Tyrell's creation of Rachael (1982 *Blade Runner*), who, at the Tyrell's headquarters undergoes the Voight-Kampff test (created to identify replicants), on Tyrell's insistence. Rachael was implanted with the memories of Tyrell's niece with the purpose of 'cushioning' emotions and making her reactions easier to control, nevertheless she is unaware of this until she is made to take the test and becomes suspicious.

Within the narrative this can be distinguished as the establishment of capital's biopolitical role, which Berardi views as a response to the waves of workers' mobilisation, as evident within an analysis of the 'Red Biennium' upsurge in Italy and the crisis in capital-labour relations following 1968; both Berardi and Tronti pinpoint the advent of post-Fordism, and its reshaping of subjectivity through new technologies as a response to the danger constituted by workers' antagonism (Berardi, 2009a, pp. 16,17) (Tronti, 2010, p. 189). Compared to *Blade Runner, Blade Runner 2049* reflects a more marked attempt at manufacturing obedience in replicants typical of the post-Fordist phase. This is reflected time and time again in the submissive behaviour of the Nexus 9 replicants, as reflected in K's nickname of 'constant K', and his response after initially questioning his superior (lieutenant Joshi)'s decision to hunt and kill the replicant child: after his initial objection, K answers to Joshi's reaction ('Are you telling me no?') with the meek response 'I wasn't aware there was an option, madam' (BR 2049, 27:57'-28:02'). As well as through the manufacturing of memories, within the narrative, attempts at shaping consciousness are constituted by the technological manufacturing of relationships, as analysed in chapter 1: Joi, the holographic girlfriend of K, for instance, is produced by The Wallace Corporation.

The exercising of affective, cognitive, and linguistic activation is a new development within capital which serves to model psychic space, hence as a technique of control, as affirmed by Berardi (Berardi, 2009a, p. 17). Production within post-Fordism takes on a semiotic character, and through language ideologically controls the subject: capital's semiotic shaping of the subject emerges in Wallace's strategic naming of his replicant assistant, Luv. Whilst the case of Joi, K's holographic partner, the chosen name plays on the noun 'joy', thus embodying capital's commodification of happiness, the name Luv works as a play on the word 'love', denoting capital's biopolitical appropriation of desire and manufacturing of obedience; this is reflected in Luv's submissive conduct, as she takes on the role of enforcer for Wallace and is obsessed by carrying out his orders, to the point of killing both humans (lieutenant Joshi, K's boss, when she refused to tell K's location) and fellow replicants (Rachael's copy offered to and refused by Deckard, K).

Luv's complete submission to Wallace is also reflected in her replication of Wallace's actions: when she mortally wounds K, then kisses his lips in the same way as Wallace had done with an unwanted replicant. Her purpose reflects subservience, and her final words to K are "I am the best one", the replicant with the strongest allegiance to her maker (02:23:00'-02:23:24'). Through the appropriation of her name, Niander Wallace further entrenches her identity under his control. Nexus 9 replicants are manufactured to be unquestionably obedient: K is put through a baseline test in which he is required to answer some prompts automatically. The old-fashioned Voight-Kampff test has been replaced in *Blade Runner 2049* by the coarser Baseline test, in which reaction time is the key: too much time taken to respond to the prompts, indicating the possibility of autonomous thinking, would mean failure of the test. In his analysis of the Baseline test, Neill defines the test as indicative of a requirement for the replicants to operate purely on a symbolic level, by requiring them to recite the words of the poem without deviation, even when out of context. As highlighted in the analysis, the

Nexus 9 replicants in *Blade Runner 2049* show an unprecedented awareness of their status as

replicants, and, crucially, its acceptance (2021, p. 5).

From a Marxist perspective, the dominance of the symbolic plane typifying the

Baseline test is indicative of the post-Fordist ideological subsumption of the subject. This test

is characterised by its use of poetry, implementing an imaginative, artistic and expressive

element absent in its precursor. Crucially, this element of pathos is coupled with absolute

control, reflecting a form of capital which has invested an element of symbolic,

communicative and affective involvement within production, by the same token it tightens its

grip on the subject's conscious ability to react. The strict control of creativity, emotions,

knowledge are under the monopoly of The Wallace Corporation, in order to achieve total

subservience.

Reflected in *Blade Runner 2049* is capital's subsumption of the individual psyche; as

affirmed by Berardi, in order to inject its own principles and beliefs, capitalism must control

the psyche, the desires, hopes, fears and the imagination of individuals (Berardi and Goddard,

2007, p. 78). As analysed by Flisfeder, the character of K offers a depiction of the post-

Fordist subject resigned to his slavery: K's very awareness of his exploitation works to create

an 'ironic distance', disavowing his compliance to the system (McFarlane et al., 2020, p.

145).The narrative within *Blade Runner* presents an awareness of capital's 'modeling of the

soul' (Berardi, 2009a, p. 198) and an increased sway over the subject, but also, on the other

hand, the seeming inevitability of defeat for a system based on the exploitation of sentient

beings.

Tyrell's intention of gaining greater control ultimately fails when Rachael, upon

discovering that she is a replicant, escapes with Deckard. The original film concludes with

these two characters removing themselves from the system. The capitulation of Tyrell is

reflected in the symbolic premonition contained in Rachael's recounting of her implanted

memories to Deckard, her recollection of a spider that gives birth and then is eaten by its offspring seems a poignant symbolism for Tyrell's own destiny, who is eventually defeated by the replicants that he has created (BR, 33:41'-33:58'). In the backdrop of an ending which in many ways can be interpreted as negative (since all members of the Nexus 6 rebellion are killed), the defeat of Tyrell and the subsequent bankruptcy of the corporation, predicted by Rachael's memory, seems to constitute a damning prophecy. The message emerging message reveals that Tyrell's economic empire, as a system reliant on the driving role of knowledge, is precarious by its very nature.

When considering that Rachael, as noted by Redmond in his analysis of class representations in *Blade Runner*, is given Tyrell's niece's memories, and can thus be understood as Tyrell's replicant daughter, and 'born of elite' (2005, p. 177), the dream appears to reflect the capitalist class's own awareness of its weakness. In conclusion, obedience within replicants does not come naturally, but has to be manufactured through the semiotic appropriation of desire, which enables control and ownership.

'That baby meant we are more than just slaves, we are our own masters': these are the words of Freysa, leader of the dissident group which, having witnessed the birth of Deckard and Rachael's child, had started a replicant freedom movement. Sorensen's interpretation of this 'miracle of birth' views it as bare life, the life of replicants, who have been excluded by the system due to their being other, transcending the system's distinction between the human and non-human binary (Sorensen 2021, pp. 126-144). From a materialist perspective, the construction of the narrative around the replicant child's birth can quite literally be understood as the image of living labour, and the replicant ability to (pro)create, which ultimately results in emancipation. Labour in *Blade Runner2049*, constituted by replicants, is depicted as resiliently and obstinately living, and the capability of affirming independence comes through creative power and is ultimately unbound by capital. Capital's knowledge,

personified in Niander Wallace, is constituted as static, 'dead', and unsuccessful in its constant attempts to limit the living knowledge of labour.

The symbolisation of the creative power of labour, visually represented by the child, is perhaps not coincidentally reinforced by the choice of Rachael (whose very name has biblical connotations to the mother of Joseph and progenitor of the tribes of Israel) as the mother of the child. The race to find Rachael and Deckard's daughter, the first replicant that was born, not made, is the battle to obtain control over productive power. Once replicants discover their ability to create life, Niander Wallace has lost the battle, since the former constitute themselves as 'living knowledge', and the latter as 'dead knowledge' (borrowing Vercellone's definitions of the general intellect, Vercellone, 2007, p. 33). The tension between the reliance on replicant creative ability and the need to constrain it is evident in the modifications made to the various Nexus models, each one being an attempt to recreate a replicant that will more readily be subsumed by the system, which is more obedient and that will not rebel. As Tronti proclaims in *Workers and Capital*, the focus of any examination of capitalism needs to be on the working class as it is this latter, through its very development and antagonism to capital, that shapes and forces capital into constant change. "When we ask ourselves why the secret of capitalism can be grasped only from the working-class point of view, the only possible response is that the working class is the secret of capitalism" (Tronti, 2019, p. 234); this perspective, defined as the Copernican turn of workerism, allows for an interpretation which confers labour a crucial sense of agency by subverting the capital-centric view of class dynamics.

Replicants are the personification of capital relations developed. It is through the figures of the Nexus models, through the manufacturing of their traits, that we get an insight into the internal contradictions of the system: as put by Tronti: "Exploitation is born, historically, from capital's need to escape from its de facto subordination to the class of

worker-producers. It is in this very specific sense that capitalist exploitation in turn provokes working-class insubordination" (Tronti, 2019, p. 246).

In the final scenes of the film, as Deckard walks into the office to be reunited with his daughter, K, in his final moments of life, lies in the snow, reconnected with nature. The natural environment is a constant presence in the film: Rachael's remains were buried under the shadow of a towering tree, where K finds them after noticing a flower on the ground. Joi, K's holographic girlfriend, when gifted a transmitter as an anniversary present, immediately goes onto the rooftop terrace to experience rain. This consistent connection with the environment can be interpreted as a reference to the naturalness and innateness of the creative act. The sequel's ending, which concludes with the reuniting of Deckard with his daughter, seems to suggest that, ultimately, capital may be unable to indefinitely limit the creative potential of labour.

This positive ending is, however, counteracted by its depictions of a subjectivity, symbolised by K, whose awareness of its servitude only serves to further tie it to capital (McFarlane et al., 2020, p. 145). Whilst *Blade Runner 2049* does not depict the end of the reign of the corporations (as a symbol of capitalism) as unequivocal or preordained, it does, arguably, contradict the idea that cyberpunk cannot be critical in a Marxist sense (McFarlane et al., 2020, p. 284). Both *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*, in fact, build their narrative on the contradictions of capital and the development of antagonism within the relations of production. The system depicted, based on the exploitation of the replicant workforce, as thus far analysed, emerges as a flawed system: it sows the seeds of its own demise by affirming the general intellect of replicants as principle productive force, building its system on the reliance on the very creative power at the basis of the replicants' antagonism.

The creative abilities and intellect of the replicants, introduced within their manufacturing by Tyrell, and relied on for off-world pursuits and for economic expansion

both by Tyrell and by his successor Wallace, prove irreducible to the corporations' will and are at the source of the Nexus 6 rebellion and refusal to submit to their condition as slaves. In the words of the Nexus 8 Sapper Morton: "You're happy scraping the shit, because you have never seen a miracle". Once replicants as a force are affirmed through their knowledge and creative power, symbolised in *Blade runner* in their intellectual abilities, and *in Blade Runner 2049* in their ability to reproduce, replicants gain independence and establish their freedom.

The liberation of replicants is facilitated by the fact that the replicants' enslavement is formal, not real, echoing Vercellone's understanding of the phase of general intellect and the new forms of antagonism and crisis originating from labour's acquisition of living knowledge (Vercellone, 2007); the chains of capital are externally prescribed, while the productive knowledge that they are entrusted with creates the conditions for independence. Reflected in both *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049* is a profound awareness of the limits of capitalism as a system; whilst the films do not outwardly end in a replacement of the dominant capitalist system, they nevertheless highlight antagonism as the contradiction within capital which inevitably leads to its demise.

ANTAGONISM IN *ALTERED CARBON*

As in *Blade Runner*, antagonism also emerges as a byproduct of the exploitation within capitalist relations; however, the narrative also delves into its ontological aspect, linked to production. The series also presents the image of a collectivity formed in-and-against the system the byproduct of stack technology's mind-body separation enacted by the meths. Networks as a narrative element play a central role in *Altered Carbon* and emerge as an antagonistic force created in-and-against the system. *Altered Carbon* depicts a system reliant

on the destruction of institutions, conventions, and beliefs which gives way to internal and unwittingly creates a subjectivity able to challenge its status quo. The main character, Takeshi Kovacs, as well as some secondary characters embody Deleuze and Guattari's schizophrenic subject (1983, p. 35), in their appropriation and use of the system's logic to its own destruction. Within its characters and narrative *Altered Carbon* offers an interesting depiction of how the antagonistic subject is shaped by post-Fordist production.

Kovacs' antagonism is determined in the realm of Bay City by the exploitative nature of his relationship with Laurence Bancroft as a member of the meth elite, however, as I will analyse, it is not confined to it. As examined in the first chapter, Kovacs's hiring by Bancroft emerges as the exploitation of intellect at the hands of a capitalist system, and this exploitation is reflected in the strained relationship between the envoy, (as exploited intellect), and Laurence Bancroft, marked by a hostility reflected in the dialogues between the two characters. Interactions between the Kovacs and Bancroft emerge as tense and imposed by circumstances, as reflected when Bancroft introduces himself to Kovacs, he describes his admiration towards his envoy's abilities as 'grudging', (due to his disagreement with Kovac's past as a convicted terrorist who had fought against the establishment and ideologically against the meth elite of which he was part) (S1:E1, 26:53'-26-58').

Kovacs' attitude towards Bancroft is likewise marked by contempt: when the meth reprimands Kovacs for directing his suspicion towards himself during investigations, the envoy's answer is: "You wanted me to work for you. I'm working for you. You want my respect? That's a little harder to come by" (S1:E2, 11:51'-12:00'). The relationship between the two emerges from the beginning as strained and marked by simmering antagonism.

Despite Bancroft's efforts to ingratiate Kovacs with frequent references to 'us' in attempts of association, such as his reference to them being sole survivors of the uprising era ("There are very few of us now who saw first-hand what the envoys could do") or his

reference to Falconers' diary as " a tie to our shared past") (S1:E1, 26:45'-27:40'), the emerging impression is a clear divide and radical opposition between the meths as exploiters and Kovacs's moral beliefs. The hostile statements (such as "Let me be painfully clear. Some things can't be bought" (S1:E1, 27:48'-28:00'), and "I don't want your money or your pardon" (S1:E1, 28:09'-28:13'), expressing his initial refusal to take up Bancroft's offer of employment and the benefits presented), articulate an ethical and political opposition to the meths' value system.

As previously mentioned, Kovacs' antagonistic role goes far beyond the confines of his exploitation by Bancroft, finding its roots in his past as an envoy as part of the Quellist uprising. Lead by Quellcrist Falconer, envoys had fought in an uprising against the United Nations Interstellar protectorate, the colonial system spanning the settled worlds thanks to which the meth elite had established itself as the ruling class. The origin of the Quellist rebellion within the series' plot is a reaction to the system's appropriation of the stack as technological advancement exploited by the elite: Falconer, the leader of the envoy uprising, had invented stack technology but, realising that it would result in an upper class rich enough to afford immortality and the consolidation of the elite's absolute power, she subsequently gathered the envoys in order to fight against the distribution of this technology. Kovacs' role within the envoys thus establishes his antagonism on wider terms, granting the construction of his character a level of independence from the realm of Bay City.

The term 'envoy' itself implies that Kovacs has in some way been sent out as messenger or representative, thus placing his reawakening in Bay City not just as required by the system, but as the fulfilment of a mission, thus further politicising his figure, by portraying his opposition to the meths as a mission of antagonism towards the system. Kovacs, uses his role of detective, hired to be at the service of the meths, for revolutionary ends, by exercising it towards the uncovering of the exploitation and inequality promoted by

meths. The envoy's ethical opposition to meths, as well as a sense of purpose contained

within this opposition, are often referenced in the dialogue. One example of reference to

opposition as the envoy's purpose is when, in his monologue in the series' fifth episode, he

affirms: "when everyone lies, telling the truth isn't just rebellion. It's an act of revolution"

(S1:E5, 00:20'-00:45'), combining the elements of truth (reflected in his role of detective) and

rebellion (reflected in his past as an envoy). Another is Falconer's exhortation to

revolutionary action: : "[…] do what you were born to do. What I trained you to do. Make

things change" (S1:E1, 54:16'-45:23'), which posits antagonism as the envoy's primary

existential purpose.

Within the narrative this revolutionary role implies a departure of Kovacs as a

character from the traditions associated to his role as sleuth. Whilst traditionally, in fact, the

role of noir detective aligns its sympathies with the law and the with the system upholding it

(Gates, 2006, p. 5), Kovacs instead uses it in opposition to the system, bringing into play his

brains, observation, and deduction, utilised as weapons against the inequality and corruption

within the system. In this sense, the criticism of the murder mystery contained within the noir

element as detracting from the series' ability to make social commentary (Evangelista, 2018)

is arguably overlooking the strategic narrative role of Kovacs' investigations: thanks to the

focus on Kovacs' detective skills, as element on which the elite (represented by Laurence

Bancroft) relies, the plot frames its depiction of capital's appropriation of the social brain, a

trait which has been considered central to capitalist production in the post-Fordist era

(Vercellone, 2007, pp. 13-14).

Building on this understanding of the detective role as instance of general intellect put

to work by capital, the strained relationship between Kovacs and Bancroft can be understood

as a reflection of the conflictive nature of knowledge/power relations under capitalism,

whereas the utilisation of his role of detective in order to fulfil a mission places Kovacs as an

active agent further subjectivising him within the struggle against capital, in line with Modonesi's definition of the moment of autonomic exteriority (Modonesi, 2014, p. 65). His antagonism is constructed simultaneously inside the system, within the exploitative nature of his hire, and outside of the system, situated within the revolutionary nature of his role as envoy, and the ethical opposition it entails.

"OH, THIS IS SOME EPIC SHIT." "THEN I'LL TAKE IT ALL." DESIRE AS PRODUCTION AND DESIRE AS ANTAGONISTIC DRIVE.

In his study of the composition of the contemporary worker, Berardi remarks on the mutual influence of two branches of theory: Italian compositionist workerism (or operaismo) and French desiring theory. The first of these is a branch of political theory whose focus is the analysis of the composition and evolution of the working class, whereas the second, primarily represented by Deleuze and Guattari, in opposition to the Freudian understanding of the unconscious, view desiring production as equivalent to social production, thus pinpointing desire as driving force behind society and subjective formation. According to Berardi, the categories of schizoanalysis introduced by desiring theory provide a necessary component to the compositionist analysis of the worker, in that they explain the process of formation of the social imaginary (Berardi, 2009a, p. 123).

Berardi thus highlights the importance of including within the analysis of the post-Fordist subject elements which may not be considered traditionally materialist, but nevertheless, in the words of Shleusener, combine 'a Marxist understanding of modes of production and their material conditions with a social ontology' (Schleusener, 2021, p. 523).

Within an analysis of *Altered Carbon*, an interpretation of social ontology should begin from the analysis of the dark underbelly of Bay City as locus of desiring production.

When Kovacs refuses Bancroft's offer of a re-sleeving and pardon in exchange for his services, the meth advises Kovacs to take some time: "You should take the day Mr. Kovacs. Go into the city. Remember what it is to feel alive" (S1:E1, 34:18'-34:25'). As revealed in the scenes that follow, which depict the district of Licktown explored by Kovacs, a chaotic mix of people, sounds and bright lights, existence within Bay City implies an activation of the subject's desire: the district exudes an air of hedonism, due to the many strip clubs, brothels, and offer of violent spectacles. The city's main source of monetary profit is the feeding of appetites, often sexual. The series' main antagonist, Reileen (Kovacs' sister), becomes a rich 'titan of industry, dealing with 'the many weaknesses of the flesh' providing for the illegal sexual fetishes of meths.

Thus, quite literally Bay City reflects a capitalist society in which 'social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 38). In line with the capitalist logic, desiring-production in Bay City implies an element of excess, as reflected in the meths' excessiveness, their compulsion to acquire additional wealth and extravagant possessions, as expressed by the hyperbolic language expressed by VR broadcasts advertisements of a sex cabin, 'One is good, but two? Even better' and the Fightdrome, inviting him to view 'the strongest, most brutal combat sleeves'.

The neoliberal maxim of 'greed is good', defined by Nealon as the essence of neoliberalism is driven by desire in the context of Bay City; the city is built on the intensification of sex, violence, and the extreme heightening of the senses, from which it attains value and preserves social relations. The world depicted in *Altered Carbon* is representing a capital which commodifies and marketizes experience, defined by the theorist as the empire of intensities (Nealon, 2012, p. 50). Nealon pinpoints Las Vegas as the epitome

of the current nature of capital, a capital which turns inwards; from the perspective of finance and capital accumulation, this means greater reliance on the stock market and the production of capital from capital itself (M-M'), and the consumption of material goods is replaced by experiences and 'intensities': 'the thrills of winning, the aches of losing, the awe of the spectacle, wedding and divorces' (Nealon, 2012, p. 54). In Bay City these intensities emerge in the violent stage fights offered by the 'Panama Rose Fightdrome', as well as in the illegal sexual fetishes such as Iridium Experience, offered to meths.

Even minor narrative details highlight the central role and prevalence of desire within Bay City. Elements within the plot and dialogue, for instance, highlight the element of desire whilst also obscuring the object of desire, which consequently appears to be a mere pretext in function to desire itself. The meths' desiring 'appetites' emerge as an uncontainable force which various objects of desire merely feed. This dynamic is reflected, for instance when Isaac is sent to pick up Kovacs from Alcatraz prison and is arrested for drink driving, having been tempted into having a drink and driving under the influence (S1:E1, 23:10'-23:39') and act which emerges as the expression of his need for a destructive excess.As Miriam Bancroft walks Kovacs to Laurence's study, her seduction of Kovacs is another depiction of desire which upstages its object: whilst Miriam's interest in Kovacs can be viewed as typical of the alluring femme fatale, in line with the noir style, the abrupt gratuity of the act also works towards the impression that, as a meth, desire 'precedes', or gives way to, her attraction for Kovacs rather than the opposite. In both cases, hence, the object of desire takes on a diminished role, almost appearing as a pretext, leaving the act of desiring itself to take centre stage within the narrative.

This narrative positioning of the object as secondary to desire reflects Deleuze and Guattari's theory that 'desire is not bolstered by needs, but rather the contrary; needs are

derived from desire: they are counterproducts within the real that desire produces' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 27). Hence, the capitalist system depicted within *Altered Carbon* is one built on the release of desiring production as foundation for the accumulation of wealth. Deleuze and Guattari's theories, as Pasquinelli asserts, much like the current of Italian workerism, constitutes a philosophical attempt to expand the technical composition of labour from the factory to society at large (Pasquinelli, 2015, p. 56), thus enabling an understanding of the exploited, antagonistic subject of a capitalism within the social reality of post-Fordism. The antagonistic figure which emerges in the figure of the envoy draws from the very desiring energy released by the system to push against it.

Within an analysis of antagonism in *Altered Carbon*, it is essential to recognise how this element of desiring production, and the excess characterising of it, are appropriated and turned against the system. Kovacs, who finds himself at the very heart of this system based on desiring-production, does not reject the excesses of the system, but embraces them, as reflected when he is approached by a peddler who offers him drugs; his response to the peddler's offer of drugs: 'I'll take them all' denotes an espousal of the desiring flows of Bay City (S1:E1, 36:33'-37:00'). Within Kovacs' mission, the desire fuelling Bay City also sees its mirror reflection as emerges in the appropriation the elements at the basis of desiring production.

The narrative presents many examples of the appropriation of elements which within the system are constitutive of production for antagonistic purposes. The drug reaper, for instance, initially introduced within the narrative when offered by the peddler, is later reutilised by Kovacs to evade the security systems of Head in The Clouds, the headquarters in which his fight against his sister Reileen (discovered to have become a corrupt and evil meth) takes place. The black-market weapons that within the system feed into the widespread

violence characterising Bay City (also displayed in the Fightdrome live spectacles), is appropriated by Kovacs when, together with his sidekick Vernon Elliot, he acquires illegal weapons from an undercover arms dealer, to be used as self-defence at Bancroft's dinner party (S1:E3, 13:24'-15:46'). Kovacs' opposition to the system appropriates the very elements which within it produce value in its fight.

CONTRADICTIONS OF A SYSTEM BUILT ON DESIRE.

Bay City's reliance on desiring-production emerges within the narrative as giving way to its own contradictions: whilst on the one hand, desire propels economic accumulation, enabling the formation of empires from wealth, and shaping social relations, on the other hand, it contains a marked destructive potential, reflected in the disintegration of boundaries, rules and morals. The contradictions of this system built on desire are personified in the character of Laurence Bancroft: the meth, as described by Reileen, is characterised by 'an archaic streak' (S1:E9, 48:43'-49:45') the attachment to vestiges of moral codes, expressing an attachment to traditional family values. On contrast to this, as is later found out, Bancroft visits establishments in which he beats sex workers, sometimes to death.

When the meth finds out that Kovacs has been seduced by his wife Miriam, he displays a jealousy which, as pointed out by Kovacs, runs counter to his habit of visiting bio-cabins, reflecting an exterior attachment to marital fidelity as a rule, which hides a deeper compulsion to break those very rules in order to satisfy his cravings. The contradictory character of Bancroft's behaviour, whilst being constituted as a personal trait in the plot, is, upon closer analysis, representative of the duality of destructiveness and restrictiveness which according to Deleuze and Guattari typify capitalism as a system built on desiring production.

Bancroft's susceptibility to incontrollable violence causes him to murder a sex worker at Head in The Clouds as a result of a flood of adrenaline result in a building up of rage, which Bancroft releases by smashing the sex worker's stack, thus breaking his self-imposed rule of never real-deathing (permanently killing) anyone, a limit which the meth took pride in, as expressed in his conversation with Kovacs (S1:E3, 26:00'-26:06'). The contrast between Bancroft's predilection for violence which often results in sleeve death, and his resoluteness never to kill, embody the contradictory nature of desiring production. As a meth, whilst Bancroft owes his wealth to the excesses of desiring production and has achieved a position of power within the degradation and corruption of Bay City, on the other hand, he is a vulnerable prey to those same desires which have built his empire.

Bay City at wide reflects the same contradiction between, on one hand, the reliance on the freeing of productive desire, and on the other, the attempt to recover boundaries, in the form of rules. This is reflected in many narrative elements denoting the city's moral decay: for instance, the police force's corruption (the chief of Bay City Police Department, captain Tanaka, takes bribes from Reileen in order to cover up and share information), or in the horror of Kovacs' realisation at Bancroft's party that a married couple are employed to fight against each other to the death

In contrast with the violence and unethicality of the couple's assignment, the system's regulatory function emerges when detective Ortega requests a fighting licence as permit for organic damage (the damaging of a sleeve), implying that the dangers of use of violence for entertainment purposes are somewhat curbed through regulation. Emerging from this scene is thus, on the one hand the full destructive power of capital, which, through stack technology and the complete commodification of life, even pits husband and wife against each other in pursuit of monetary profit, and on the other, the system's attempt to apply a regulatory function, constituted by the licensing. Nevertheless, the regulatory function emerges as weak

within the scene: whilst the need for a licence appears to restrict the potential for violence, it soon becomes clear that they are an ineffective curb: the couple admit to having young children at home, and after every fight come back in a different body, unrecognisable to their own children. The symbolisation of the ineffectiveness of the system's regulations is rendered through the image of the husband's ring, which he has jammed the ring on upon his wife's insistence, since it is too small for the fingers of the body that he has been resleeved in. This insistence feels like a hollow pretence of normality (S1:E3, 23:08'-23:43').

This instance also reflects how the flows unleashed by capital, whilst disrupting the social codes within society (in this case the marriage, which is completely overturned by the superimposition of a value system, forcing the couple to become violent towards each other for economic purposes) nonetheless needs a certain coding function in order to keep the destructive flows of desire within its boundaries. As put by Deleuze and Guattari, whilst relying on the release of schizophrenic movement, capital is only able to function through the inhibition of these flows (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 246). Within the narrative of *Altered Carbon*, desire intended as production emerges as a thorn in the side of the system, or, to put it in Deleuze and Guattari's words: the exterior limit of capitalism itself' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 246).

As put by Buchanan, capitalism, in contrast to all other systems, is characterised by the absence of a particular code or social organisation as historical presupposition (Buchanan and Thoburn, 2008, p. 145). The constant need for monetary accumulation, in fact, relies on the destruction of what Deleuze and Guattari define as 'codes', the reproduction of traditions and rules. The moral decadence emerging from the depictions of Bay City works as a representation of the destructive tendencies of a capital which feeds on desiring-production. Within *Altered Carbon*, the attempt to reinstate a structure within society through rules and limits, which nevertheless remain an empty façade.

The decoding tendency characterising capital constitutes a weakness at its very heart: as expressed by Deleuze and Guattari, 'the more the capitalist machine deterritorializes, decoding and axiomatizing flows in order to extract surplus value from them, the more its ancillary apparatuses, such as government bureaucracies and the forces of law and order, do their utmost to reterritorialize […] (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, pp. 34-35). Within *Altered Carbon*, the freeing of desire is counteracted by attempts to impose limits to its destructive potential.

At play within the narrative is the dynamic of freedom and restraint as two opposing forces which nevertheless work together to maintain order within the system. The elements of freedom and restraint, central within the narrative, are introduced to the viewer from the very beginning in the opening score, through the image of the uroboros, a mythical serpent which, in ancient Egyptian mythology, symbolises an endless cycle of life, death and rebirth, eternal renewal.

The uroboros is depicted as it wraps around the body of a woman, who sheds a mask, which peels off her face. The mask can be viewed as a representation of personal identity, which in *Altered Carbon*, has acquires fluidity and freedom through stack technology with its separation of consciousness from the body: through the stack, the soul is liberated not only from the temporal limit of a lifetime, but also from the fixed identity implied by the sleeve, since it is able to acquire a new guise; the woman removing the mask appears to remove and leave behind an identity like a layer of old skin. Whilst the riddance of the mask appears to indicate an act of liberation, an impression validated by the wings which the woman reveals, the ouroboros which wraps around the woman, emerges as an opposing element of constraint.

Since the creature symbolises eternity, a representation accentuated by the fact that, by devouring its tail, it takes the shape of the sideways eight which symbolises infinity, it can be understood as representing immortality; nevertheless, immortality is an element that, within

the society depicted, restrains rather than liberates, and the binding act of the snake appears to indicate that the freedom implied by the unmasking conceals its own chains. From the outset, hence, the imagery presented establishes freedom and restraint, or, in Deleuze and Guattari's words, coding and decoding, as crucial elements within the narrative. Capitalism 'constantly counteracts, constantly inhibits this inherent tendency whilst allowing it free reign; it constantly seeks to avoid reaching its limit while simultaneously tending towards that limit' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 34): the ouroboros embodies the system's compulsion to reach its limits, and at the same time its attempts (reflected in the binding action) its attempt to rein in the destructive potential of liberation.

'THE SLEEVE IS A TOOL'. ANTAGONISTIC REAPPROPRIATION.

On the backdrop of the understanding of the contradictory nature of meth society, the envoy should be understood as a revolutionary figure whom the system unwittingly creates in-and-and-against the system, but who also harnesses those traits and abilities which are shaped by the system in order to push its boundaries. In this sense, Kovacs can be associated to Deleuze and Guattari's definition of the schizophrenic, seeking out the limits of the system, embodying 'its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel' (1983, p. 35). According to the theorists, the schizophrenic is a subject who 'migrating here, there, and everywhere as best he can, […] plunges further into the realm of deterritorialization […] (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 35). Reflected in the character of Kovacs, the deterritorialisation implied by his transfer to a remote and unfamiliar planet wearing a stranger's body on Bancroft's order, acquires an antagonistic role in the fight against meths.

In his fight against the system, Kovacs reappropriates those characteristics and abilities which are shaped by the system itself. Among these characteristics are the elements

of cynicism and adaptability. As analysed in the first chapter, these traits understood as pervasive forms of experience and interactions with the world which are ambivalent in character, constituting a double-edged sword within the system.

Cynicism as absence of belief, whilst laying out the preconditions for the meths' accumulation of wealth (by neutralising belief systems which might contrast the acceptance of stack technology), is turned against the system when personified in the envoy, a figure who pushes cynicism to its full logical conclusion, thus rejecting, alongside the credences and superstitions of the past, ideological belief in the logic of and accumulation embodied in the meths. The act of reincarnation itself requires a degree of cynicism as disbelief in the sacredness of the body as seat of the soul. This cynicism, shared by meths and envoys alike, is reappropriated through the Quellist principle expressed by Falconer, 'Your body is not who you are. You shed it like a snake sheds its skin' (S1:E1, 06:10'-06:25')

Reincarnation, which is used by the meths for the accumulation of wealth and power, is adopted by envoys in their fight against the inequality of the system. The envoy's special ability to escape VR constructs (used by the system for torture), and thanks to a deep-seated trained awareness of their being a simulation in line with this analysis, represents another instance of cynicism as disbelief, deployed in the envoy's fight against meths.

Cynicism as an understanding of the limits of subjectivity and the materiality of the body, as a mindful awareness, allows envoys to needlecast within seconds and be ready for combat, using their body as a weapon against the system, thus emancipating themselves from it. In this sense, both meths and Quellists fully accept the deterritorialisation of subjectivity.

Nevertheless, a crucial difference between them is that where the meth system deterritorialises, it also subsequently re-territorialises; meth society frees subjectivity by detaching it from the permanence of one particular body and one lifetime, only to reinscribe it within a capitalist system, by applying a monetary value to the body and subjecting it to the

laws of the market. Quellist philosophy, instead, takes deterritorialisation to its end point, the disintegration of capital's limit: 'The sleeve is a tool. It does not control me. I control it'; whilst these words posit the body as a utility in the same way as meth society does, the Quellists' taking control of the body implies a level of autonomy that liberates the envoy from the system's power structures.

The lack of certainty created by the meths' social system finds its antagonistic reflection in the envoy's adaptability. The dystopian social setting of Bay City is typified, as characteristic of the cyberpunk style, by both hi-tech and low-life. Depictions of the city include widespread criminality and violence. Within an analysis focused on the narrative's reflections on post-Fordism, this characterisation conveys a social setting in which the instability caused by meth exploitation has created a lack of faith in certainties and 'places of refuge' As pointed out by Virno, the post-Fordist subjectivity is characterised and united by the common condition of 'not feeling at home', a condition which is itself connected to the sentiment of anguish (Virno, 2004, p. 34).

The elements which Virno defines as 'special places', religious communities, the branch of a political party, a clan of sports fans, or the workplace, according to the theorist, no longer hold the ability to provide a construct, a sense of orientation within the world; thus, anguish, defined as a condition of generalised fear, becomes a generalised way of life, connected to the indefinite character of existence (Virno, 2004, pp. 31-40). Whilst the condition of 'not feeling at home', as awareness of the unexpectedness and instability of existence, characterises society as a whole within Bay City, the figure of the envoy appropriates this aspect, turning uncertainty into a weapon in his/her fight against the system. Falconer's command to 'shed' the body like a snake sheds its skin constitutes a mandate to take control of the instability and temporary nature of the sleeve for emancipation.

Likewise, the element of heightened intuition for which envoys are renown, which within the plot ties Kovacs to the system, contains an emancipatory function which constitutes a threat to the system. On account of his envoy intuition, Kovacs is commissioned to solve the mystery of his death. However, Kovacs' investigation leads him to question the power dynamics and exploitation within the system and to uncover the truth that Bancroft was a murderer, which he himself did not wish to know.

Intuition allows Kovacs to solve the mystery of Mary-Lou Henchy's death, tying it to the Bancroft case and to Reileen's illegal activity, uncovering the hidden power structures within the system, thus defeating it. The creation of coalitions emerges as sceptical and utilitarian, since, as Falconer reminds the envoy, 'many of them will ultimately be expendable' (S1:E7, 27:55'-28:05'). The utilitarian nature of these alliances can also be attributed to the cynical nature of envoys, which, as analysed, is itself the reappropriation a requirement of meth society, utilised against it. More widely, it can be understood as the envoy tendency to appropriate elements of the system for its own use.

Hence, the envoy is a radical figure who uses what the system provides in order to build its revolution. The tools available to the envoy are precisely those characteristics which are biopolitically forged by a system which feeds off creativity, cynicism, and opportunism. Symbolically, Kovacs' invitation to the Bancroft mansion, at the very heart of the system, can be understood as a symbolisation of capital's tendency create its own subject of antagonism. As resumed by Lotringer, 'Immaterial workers are mobile and detached, adaptable, curious, opportunistic, and cynical, also towards institutions'. This definition views the composition of the post-Fordist worker as inextricably linked to an element of antagonism: the creativity and adaptability required by capital inevitably imply an element of scepticism towards the system. The envoy, created by the system and against it, thus reflects the antagonistic post-Fordist subject.

ANTAGONISM AND THE CYBORG SUBJECTIVITY

The analysis of antagonism within *Altered Carbon* also requires to be framed within the man/machine duality since this element plays a key role within the formation of the characters' identity. Fernández Menicucci pinpoints how the narrative of *Altered Carbon* aims to transcend essentialist dualisms, disintegrating distinctions of gender, race and age. Within a Marxist interpretation, the transcending of these dualisms emerges as a political act which allows both for the emancipation of the exploited subject, and for the development of connections between subjects which have the potential to form a collectivity in antagonism to capital.

The creation of an antagonistic subjectivity from the rejection of the human-machine binary, is particularly evident in the character of Lizzie Elliot. The character is an embodiment within the narrative of emancipation from the system's exploitation, since, after having been persecuted by the meth elite, is rehabilitated and empowered through the appropriation of her transhuman character, playing a crucial role in the final battle against the meths. Lizzie had been forced, due to her poverty, to work in the Jack it Off establishment in which Bancroft was a regular customer. When she finds out that she is pregnant with Laurence Bancroft's baby, she visits the Bancroft residence in order to inform him. However, Lizzie is met by Miriam Bancroft, who, viewing her as a rival, violently assaults her, causing her to miscarry. In order to conceal this act of violence, Miriam requests for Lizzie to be tortured in VR, causing her to go insane and enter a trauma loop, thus unable to speak. Lizzie is found by Kovacs during his investigations, and entrusted to the AI hotel Poe, who, through AI therapy, is able to rehabilitate her.

As pointed out by Köksal and Baykan, virtual reality acquires both positive and dystopian tones, used to torture individuals (as in the case of the Psychasec torture clinic, run by Reileen) but also to rehabilitate (in Kobus and Muniowski, 2020, p. 63). Lizzie is tortured in VR, but she is also rehabilitated through it. For Lizzie, VR rehabilitation implies an embracing of her cyborg nature, not entirely human or entirely machine, in Köksal and Baykan's words, existing 'beyond the centrality of the liberal humanist subject' (in Kobus and Muniowski, 2020, p. 57). Donna Haraway describes the cyborg subjectivity as a type of subject which rejects the boundaries, particularly those separating the human from the animal, and the animal from the machine. According to Haraway, this type of subjectivity is a result of the 20th century's scientific advances: evolution has blurred the lines between human and animal; machines have blurred the lines between natural and artificial, microelectronics and the invisibility of cyborgs have blurred the lines of physicality.

For Haraway, cyborg subjectivity contains innate antagonistic potential: it is blasphemous, inasmuch as it contains an ironic faith which rejects a moral majority, whilst at the same time insisting on the need for community (Haraway, 1991, np), a figure which, hence, combines an ideological disbelief in the system and a propensity for connection which forms the presupposition for the formation of a collective antagonism. Stack technology is reflected within the narrative as providing the basis for the creation of a cyborg ontology, a social existence which, by rejecting the human and machine dualism (Haraway, 1991, np), moves beyond social divisions and dynamics of dominance, whilst at the same time creating a connection between individuals.

The antagonistic nature of Lizzie's intuition is revealed as the inevitable outcome of her oppression, as expressed in the scene in which Poe, the AI hotel in charge of her psychological rehabilitation, expresses concern regarding its effects on Lizzie. Lizzie responds to Poe by pointing out the inevitability of her retaliation ('I worry if I've shown you

the right path' 'It was the only path' (S1:E9, 02:58'-03:36')), words which make reference to the inevitability of her rebellion. The embracing of cyborg subjectivity for Lizzie, hence, goes hand in hand with emancipation: her espousal of the inorganic as integral part of her existence is symbolised by her choice to reincarnate, once needlecast to Head in The Clouds, into a synthetic sleeve. The choice of re-sleeving in a synthetic sleeve is not coincidental, and in the series' finale Lizzie is said to have decided to keep her synth, since it wasn't real, and she didn't know if she was either.

Finally, rhizomatic relations are introduced into the narrative through the character of Lizzie as an ability proper of the cyborg subjectivity. The ability emerges in Lizzie's description as an innate ability to build connections: 'I collate data. It makes a web inside my head. Spiders can spin webs that cover whole trees. But they have a signal line, a single thread they touch, and they know what's happening anywhere in their web' (S1:E9, 03:04'-03:10'). As defined by Deleuze and Guattari 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other and must be'. The image of the spider web denotes both the functioning of intellect and the structural aspect of data collection which, freed from materiality, is gathered, and used to serve an emancipatory purpose, and symbolising the collaborative aspect of a subjectivity which, free from the materiality of the body, acquires a newfound empathy and collaboration as reflected when, after her rehabilitation, Lizzie is able to recognise her mother, Ava Elliot even when sleeved in a male body, when in contrast her father, Vernon, had not been able to.

Separation of the mind from the materiality of the body, which within the system provides space for value accumulation, also allows for a subjectivity which, unbound by the contingency of material existence, is able to emancipate itself from the ideological structures of capital. The depiction of a situation in which entities in collaboration are able to intercept an enemy reflects how the characters in the plot also create an alliance and combat the system through heightened communication.

The emancipatory nature of this action is reflected in her words to the guard, whom she kills in an act of self-defence: 'can be anything you want me to be', words which within the system (when uttered by the exploited sex workers) entail subjection to the power structures, but reiterated by Lizzie, acquire new meaning, the ability of the subject to acquire a fluid, revolutionary agency. Lizzie's sleeve death and entering VR torture place her in a realm of immateriality which eventually lead to her emancipation. Her consciousness no longer tied to the materiality of the body, Lizzie acquires the ability to upload onto Head in The Clouds (the establishment owned by Reileen, in which Reileen holds Kovacs and her parents (Kovacs' helpers), taking control of a synthetic body and rescuing her parents after killing some of Reileen's collaborators.

Empowerment for Lizzie goes hand in hand with her becoming immaterial, thus contradicting the negative judgment of transcendence within cyberpunk as complicit with capitalist ideology (McFarlane et al., 2020, p. 284). Whilst virtual spaces and transcendence from the material are ruled by capitalist forces, the antagonist figures in *Altered Carbon* appropriate these spaces for the purposes of liberation.

"I didn't work for her. It was more like an autonomous collective". The envoy rebellion as a multitude.

As analysed, the subjective aspects characterising the envoy as antagonistic figure take root within the system's reliance of certain characteristics for its subsistence. Stack technology's disintegration of the subject-body dualism also creates the premises for the connections created by the envoy figure, alliances which bring forward the rebellion against the class system. Stack technology applied within meth society, in fact, gives rise to a new structuring

of subjectivity, following a rhizomatic structure which, appropriated by the envoys, allows for the constitution of a revolutionary assembling.

The rhizome as defined by Deleuze and Guattari, typified by tuberous plants and bulbs, is a ramified formation characterised by horizontal connections, opposed to formations which rely on hierarchy and fixed order, such as tree roots (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 8). Whilst the society depicted in *Altered Carbon* relies on hierarchical power relations, it encourages the formation of identity according to a rhizomatic structure, which inherently rejects fixed orders. Within the narrative, the rhizomatic structure of stack technology production is appropriated by the envoy rebellion, which adopts this type of assemblage for the constitution of its alliances.

As described by Deleuze and Guattari, following the rhizomatic structure, an assemblage is an 'increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes its nature as it expands its connections' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 8). Through stack technology, the fixed mind/soul-body binary is replaced by a subjectivity in constant expansion, which acquires an array of variations and forms. For instance, meths possess multiple copies of their sleeves, which they use in order to needlecast to different places, as well as for the purpose of reincarnation. When Kovacs attends Bancroft's dinner party in order to identify potential suspects among the guests, he discovers that Naomi, Bancroft's twelfth daughter, is using her mother (Miriam)'s sleeve in order to 'take them for a spin' (S1:E3, 31:00'-31:33').

Naomi's usage of her mother's sleeve implies an 'assemblage' of two distinct aspects of identity (Miriam's sleeve, or body, and Naomi's stack, or consciousness), which merge together to create a hybrid. Whilst in theory the sleeve used by Naomi is understood and treated as a consumable, an object emptied of meaning, the reality depicted is not as straightforward, since, as highlighted by Köksal and Baykan, bodies also emerge in the

narrative as containing a component of selfhood (for instance, Kovacs' 'inherits' a nicotine

addiction from his sleeve), and thus are not inconsequential to the constitution of the subject

(Köksal and Baykan in Kobus and Muniowski, 2020, pp. 59-65). Considering, then, that the

sleeve contains within it a facet of subjectivity, the act of re-sleeving into someone else's

body constitutes a kind of merging of subjectivities.

Frequently within the plot characters wear a sleeve which belongs to someone else:

Kovacs, for instance, re-sleeves in Ryker (detective Ortega's romantic partner, a police

detective who had been framed and indefinitely put to ice), and Ortega's grandmother is re-

sleeved into a convicted criminal's body by the detective in order to revive for the Día de Los

Muertos celebrations. Other times, particularly in the case of Reileen (the series' main

antagonist, revealed to be a powerful titan of industry), characters use acquired sleeves in

order to appear as a different person. Reileen, for instance uses her sleeves in accordance with

different functions, in order to bribe (in the guise of Clarissa Severin, an antique's dealer who

convinces Bancroft to resleeved her brother Kovacs according to her will) to manipulate

people (in the guise of a child, which she uses to distract Ortega during a fight) or to hold

business meetings (in the guise of Hemingway, her alter ego, who corrupts the police forces

in Bay City and hires criminals).

The numerous cases of re-sleeving and cross-sleeving convey that subjectivity within

Bay City deeply negates the fixed mind-body binary, and instead functions according to a

principle of multiplication, merging, and expansion.

Naomi's use of Miriam Bancroft's sleeve, in particular, as an important role in the

refutation of linear relations and hierarchical structures since it constitutes a symbolic

negation of the Oedipal nucleus. As put by Deleuze and Guattari, the schizophrenic subject no

longer believes in the tripartite formula of 'daddy-mommy-me' (Deleuze and Guattari 1983,

p. 23). In this sense, Naomi's acquisition of her mother's identity lead by a 'de-Oedipalised'

desire. Naomi's explanation of the reason behind her re-sleeving is "Why wouldn't I want to take'em for a spin? I have fun, okay? And friends like Curtis have even more fun" (S1:E3, 31:00'-31:33'). Thus, the meth use of sleeves emerges as reliant on desire not in the Freudian sense (as the search for that which is missing), but as an affirmative, productive force.

Following this understanding, Naomi's act, defined in her words as 'having fun', is nothing but an expression of that desire which propels and feeds the society as a whole, destroying the structures that pose limits to its expansion. Through her acquisition of her mother's sleeve, Naomi negates and demolishes the logic and structural hierarchy of the Oedipal family triad reconstituting subjectivity according to an ever-expansive set of lateral connections, following a ramified, rhizomatic structure.

The formation of identity as a rhizomatic structure is appropriated by envoys for the purposes of rebellion, for which it acquires an antagonistic and emancipatory function. Quellist training, in fact, uses the principles of lateral connections and expansion proper of stack and sleeve technology, applying it to the structuring of relations between envoys as a revolutionary grouping. A crucial aspect of Quellist training is the centrality it attributes to connections between the envoys, which follow the principal of unity within difference, as a revolutionary ensemble made of distinct individuals.

Whilst the background of most envoys (other than Kovacs, Reileen and Falconer) remains unexplored within the plot, the central issue of unity through difference is awarded an important space within the narrative, particularly in the relationship between De Soto, a member of the uprising, and Kovacs. De Soto at times expresses his distrust towards Kovacs due to his past as CTAC agent, but when the two become tangled in a fight, Falconer reprimands them: 'The true strength of the wolf isn't fangs, speed, and skill. It's the pack.' (S1:E7, 27:47'-28:00') From an ontological perspective, the Quellist propensity to achieve

emancipation through the establishment of human connections results from the elimination of I/another binary.

This lateral understanding of human relations is viewed by Deleuze and Guattari as central to the schizophrenic subject, for whom 'the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever'(Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 2).This blurring of the boundaries of identity, which finds its roots in stack technology, is a natural evolution of the process of separation of the mind and consciousness from the materiality of the body, which creates a subjectivity with an extended understanding of the self. In the hands of the envoys, the subject, which stack technology has moulded to become expansive, manifold and elastic, is used to break the boundaries between individuals in order to create connections to form a revolutionary force for change.

Connection as intended by Quellists is built on a rhizomatic relationship. Just like meth society, the envoys reject those connection which are rooted in hierarchy and fixed order. The visual symbolisation of the structure of the envoy rebellion are the roots of the songspire tree, which covering the envoy refuge, Stronghold. Like the branches of the tree, the connections that the envoys build expand and grow horizontally, without a defined order. The symbolic relation between the tree and the sense of connection advocated by Falconer is highlighted when Kovacs and Reileen, after having been captured by the envoy, first enter the envoy's refuge. When Reileen is informed by Kovacs that he has accepted to live with the envoys, at first disappointed, she then states: 'From now on, we stick together. Family, no matter what'. Kovacs's echoing of the words 'Family… no matter what' as he catches sight of the songspire tree, as well as the community of the envoys (S1:E7, 24:04'25:16').

Later in the series, this disagreement between the two siblings' conception of family re-emerges: when Kovacs finds out that Reileen had betrayed the envoys and killed Falconer, causing the defeat of the uprising, Kovacs exclaims: 'Quell and the Envoys were our family.

How could you kill our family?' to which Reileen replies 'They were just soldiers. You and I, We're family.' (S1:E8, 01:13'-01:40') The envoy community emerges as the reflection of a refusal of the hierarchical family, offering a different type of connection, one which grows and expands indefinitely, with no apparent hierarchy (whilst Falconer operates as the leader, the group is characterised as egalitarian in the depiction of daily life, through details such as meal times, when, including the leader, they all gather around the same table, or when upon arriving to the envoy hideout Kovacs observes Falconer interacting with children and community members).

The model of the rhizome is central to Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy as a network of connection with no apparent order. The envoys' objective of fighting against immortality and the class system espoused by the protectorate is embodied in the group's rhizomatic structure. Hence, the awareness of the limits of the body and materiality, as well as the cynicism and opportunism which, within the system, serve a productive purpose, are grasped by the Quellist movement, and used as weapons in the fight against the system.

The Envoy's mission to 'build a pack', to enter alliances with locals from other planets onto which they needlecast, itself can be seen as rooted in the globalised society of *Altered Carbon*, a world in which different cultures communicate and live side by side. The meth class system is rooted in colonial history, with the United Nations protectorate, based on planet Earth, having colonised the solar system, including Kovacs' home planet of Harlan's World.

Bay City is depicted as a multicultural society, in which people are in such close contact with a variety of different languages that they appear to understand each other even when they do not share the same mother-tongue, as is the case for Ortega's mother and colleague/family friend Abboud, who have conversation by mixing Spanish and Arabic, or in the case of Kovacs and his CTAC superior Jaeger, who mix Japanese and German. The

openness and connectedness characterising Bay City can be viewed as the result of its colonial roots. Conversely, the envoy rebellion displays the same characteristics, but in their antagonistic aspect, working against the system. In this sense, the envoy rebellion can be related to Hardt and Negri's understanding of the *multitude*, a living alternative that grows inside Empire, characterised by new circuits of cooperation and collaboration (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. xiii).

The propensity for alliances is reflected in Kovacs during his time in Bay City, where he creates connection with various individuals to fight against Reileen (revealed to be behind Bancroft's suicide, having driven him to murder a sex worker at her high-end brothel, Head in The Clouds, thus resulting in his suicide). Though Kovacs initially plans to fight Reileen alone, so as to avoid anyone getting hurt, Elliot, Ava, and Mickey choose to back him: "You gave me my daughter back, and my wife" (Elliot); "You helped my daughter and my husband when no one else would" (Ava); "This fight is not just yours anymore" (Elliot) (S1:E9, 22:18'-23:30'). Thanks to Poe's AI skills and Elliot's cover, Kovacs is able to enter the Head in the Clouds establishment. Thanks to the combined skills of all individuals in the team Reileen is in the end defeated.

This alliance between various individuals can be seen as a reflection of Hardt and Negri's notion of the multitude. The multitude is defined as a revolutionary collective made of singularities, 'an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference), but on what it has in common' (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 100).

Falconer's project of a powerful alliance in which individuality does not divide but becomes the strength, is echoed in Kovac's own allegiance to the various characters he meets in Bay City. This starts to surface in his relationship with detective Ortega, who is investigating the disappearance of Marylou Henchy. Ortega and Takeshi form a partnership

born out of their shared experience of suffering which is exemplified in the scene where she is healing his wound, and he asks her the origin of the scars on his sleeve, which had previously belonged to Ryker, her partner. The wound and scars as symbol of suffering emerge as the common ground on which their relationship begins to flourish.

CONCLUSION

As works of cyberpunk, *Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner 2049*, and *Altered Carbon* reflect powerful images of antagonism within capitalism which dispute the accusations of cyberpunk's lack of critical distance mentioned in O'Connell's study (O' Connell in McFarlane et.al 2020, pp. 223-224). On the contrary, the figures of the replicant and of the envoy, allow antagonism to take centre-stage within the narrative. The construction of these characters as figures in opposition to capital is cleverly constructed through the positioning of these antagonistic figures as antiheroes, in a space between terrorist/liberator and rebel/freedom fighter binaries, and, thanks to this narrative choice, they provide a political and social commentary by which the viewer may be brought to question accepted truths and ideological beliefs such as the exploitation of certain social groups, objectification, and the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunity within society.

Replicant Roy Batty's famous quote, 'fiery the angels fell', as noted in the introduction, denotes a level of superiority within the replicants, who descend upon Earth to seek freedom. As emerges from the analysis of the replicant as embodiment of human intellect put to work by capital, it is capital's reliance on their human aspect which, as unwanted consequence, allows for their emancipation as possessor of creative and intellectual power within relations of production. Just like the post-Fordist worker, who no longer relies

on capital's regulatory function within production, and thus understands his/her tie to capital as purely formal, and in contrast with his/her creative autonomy, so the replicants, having been created as 'more human than human' see their slavery and the limits imposed by the system as an unnecessary condition. The understanding of replicants' humanity, and ability to develop emotions and empathy, as an instance of immaterial labour, which by way of its 'living' nature imposes itself above 'dead' capital, is key to a theoretical and critical grounding of replicant antagonism and superiority within an analysis of post-Fordist society.

Both the films and series through their narratives depict an image of capitalism as plagued by inconsistencies, thus in some way reflect Lotringer's view that: "capitalism itself is revolutionary because it keeps fomenting inequality and provoking unrest' (Lotringer in Virno, 2004, p. 18). The capitalist systems emerge in the narratives as giving way to their own antagonism, due to their increased reliance on a human aspect which functions as an excess which contains a certain destructive potential. Through the figure of the replicant, the *Blade Runner* films reflect an image of a system increasingly reliant on the intellectual and creative abilities of the exploited classes, but at the same time threatened by the increased emancipation. The themes of exploitation and restriction emerging in the figures of the envoy and the replicant, bring the contradictions of capitalism to the centre of the films and series narrative, placing these figures as representative of the exploited classes, symbols of the antagonism latent within capitalist/worker relations.

Antagonism within the films and series emerges as a contradiction which the system itself creates: whilst the rebellious replicants in *Blade Runner* are on the surface depicted as fallen angels, as expressed in Roy Batty's eminent reinterpretation of Milton ("Fiery the angels fell"), thus as an anomaly, and their rebellion a departure from their function, upon closer analysis it becomes clear that the rebelliousness of replicants derives from the same emancipatory functions which form the basis of wealth production within the system

depicted: the superiority to their producers allows replicants to function as highly efficient slaves, but also inevitably causes them to realise and rebel to their servitude.

Within *Altered Carbon*, the contradictions of capitalism are once again present, whilst explored from a more ontological perspective. The inconsistency of the neoliberal system depicted emerges through the premise of an understanding of desire as a form of social production. Monetary accumulation, in fact, relies on the liberation of desires, which in turn implies the destruction of social mores, ethics and codes.

The destruction of the most fundamental certainties within society (the sense of identity which resides in the body, the ineluctability of life and death) whilst allowing for the excesses of meths, and hence the subsistence of their social and economic system, ultimately creates a subjectivity emancipated from the alienating structures of the class system. As a figure of antagonism, the envoy is built on the demolition of the I/other, life/death, real/virtual distinctions which form the basis of the meths' economic empire. The system depicted, made possible through stack technology and the resulting separation of mind from body, disintegrates the fixed binaries of mind-body, life-death, human-machine; in so doing, it creates the envoy as revolutionary subjectivity. The makeup of envoys as liberatory figures is characterised by abilities and skills which, created by the system, are appropriated for the purpose of emancipation: their intuition and ability to escape constructs, their skill at creating alliances is a result of the elimination of capital's boundaries.

As emerges from my analysis, the antagonism emerging in the figures of the envoy and the replicant reflects the specific traits of post-Fordist subjectivity, marked by those characteristics that capital biopolitically constructs within the subject. As analysed, whilst required by capital for its production, these traits acquire a new function within the antagonistic subjectivity: for instance, both the replicant and the envoy reflect the 'emotional tonalities' (as defined by Virno); the cynicism and opportunism defined by Virno as

requirements of the post-Fordist workforce (Virno, 2004, p. 40) are displayed in opposition to the system as reflected for instance in Kovacs' scepticism towards meths, which compels him to utilise his role of detective to uncover meth corruption.

The dissolution of the mind/body dualism is also appropriated for antagonistic purposes by the envoy: whilst stack technology and the separation of consciousness from corporality are commodified and utilised by meths for the accumulation of wealth and power, Kovacs, together with secondary characters in the plot, draws on it to establish connections with fellow beings in the fight against the system.

The adaptability displayed in the envoy's ability to quickly acclimate to different sleeves, and his extreme awareness of the artificiality of virtual constructs are two more examples of how the post-Fordist cynicism and adaptability typical of the post-Fordist subject acquire antagonistic and revolutionary connotations within the character. Whilst in the first chapter I have pinpointed the emotional tonalities of cynicism and opportunism as preconditions for capitalist production, it is essential to note how these features also characterised the subject as antagonist. In his role of sleuth, Kovacs's own cynical stance is both an attribute required of his role and the thorn in the side of the meth class.

The *Blade Runner* films and *Altered Carbon* reflect the workerist perspective according to which antagonism can only be understood through the analysis of the exploited classes. As highlighted by my analyses, *Altered Carbon*, *Blade Runner*, and *Blade Runner 2049* present a dynamic which gives centrality to antagonism within the subject of capitalism and the worker. This perspective is based on an understanding of the worker not simply as a passive receptacle of the capitalist superstructure, but as a sovereign subject: in Modonesi's words 'autonomy is forged in antagonism' (Modonesi, 2014, p. 39).

In conclusion, the films and series depicted reflect Marx and Engels famous affirmation in *The Communist Manifesto*: 'capitalism is a system which produces, above all,

its own grave-diggers'. This is not to be understood, as pointed out by Eagleton, as a deterministic statement (Eagleton, 2011, p. 47), since antagonism within a system does not equate with the inevitability of defeat for capitalism. Rather, Marx and Engels' words imply that as a system, capitalism inevitably births an element contradiction and antagonism, which may form the basis for opposition.

In this sense, *Blade Runner*, *Blade Runner 2049*, and *Altered Carbon* constitute not depictions of an inevitable revolution, but signs of a symptomatic antagonism, as contradiction and opposition, within our current system's intensified subjective exploitation. If dissent is to be formed, how can it be constituted and where might it originate from? The next and final chapter of the thesis sets out to answer this question through an analysis of the three *Black Mirror* episodes 'Fifteen Million Merits', 'The Entire History of You', and 'Nosedive'.

CHAPTER 4. AFFIRMATION, SUBTRACTION, AND THE POLITICS OF EXHAUSTION IN
'FIFTEEN MILLION MERITS', 'THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF YOU' AND 'NOSEDIVE'.

INTRODUCTION.

In his account on the creation of the *Black Mirror* episode 'Nosedive' (S3:E1), co-writer
Mike Schur describes the ending of the episode as marked by optimism towards the future, in
reference to the episode's ending, which depicts the emancipation of protagonist Lacie Pound.
As the result of a public meltdown Lacie ends up imprisoned and stripped of the rating
technology (a type of social media which regulates the society depicted) that ties her to the
oppressive effects of the device, allowing her to experience a new, unexpected freedom. The
episode's ending suggests the possibility of liberation from the destructive aspects of modern
technology, and advances the idea that, as put by the writer, 'we might all be able to reset-if,
admittedly, someone kind of forces us to' (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp, 2018, p. 143),
thus introducing within its narrative the idea of 'unplugging' from the ideological precepts at
work within technology. The authentic, 'human' aspect revealed within Lacie, who, once
freed from the rating system's requirements, revels in her newfound ability to be brutally
honest also seems to point to the possibility of a new form of life outside of the ideological
layout of the society depicted.

The positive focus on liberation characterising 'Nosedive' contrasts with the dystopian
ending of another *Black Mirror* episode, 'Fifteen Million Merits' (S1:E2), in which the
protagonist Bing's opposition to the oppressive system in which he exists, (a hyper-
mediatised, commodified society in which the exploited class dream of fame), and his

struggle for emancipation result in further subjugation within the system, when, after voicing his opposition through a protesting speech, he is signed up by the talent show and transmitted on TV as entertainment, reducing him to the status of a product.

Whilst Bing's failure to take on the system and Lacy's unexpected obtainment of freedom diverge in outcome, both characters can be viewed as embodying dissent, since both, in albeit from different perspectives and by different means, challenge the system in which they exist. The idea of a subjective 'reset', the renunciation of society's current ideology for the possibility of a new form of life is also present in the episode 'The Entire History of You', in which the protagonist Liam resolves his battle with the alienating effects of a technology that commodifies memories by subtracting himself from it.

These three narratives can be understood as explorations into the possibility of alternatives to the capitalist ideology, of possibilities of 'being other' contained within contemporary subjectivity, reflecting what defined by Berardi as *futurability*, the multiplicity of possible futures contained within our current social and historical moment. As affirmed by the theorist, 'becoming other is already inscribed in the present' (Berardi, 2019, p. 13). The pursuit of change inevitably needs to start from the prospects of today's life form, its essence and social consciousness, since present subjectivity bears within itself the possibility of change; this, as argued by Berardi, does not amount to a deterministic interpretation of the future, but rather, to a materialistic awareness of the immanence of possibilities for the future; inscription rather than prescription (Berardi, 2019, p. 13).

Within my analysis, hence, the objective is to discern within the characters signs of a possibility of 'becoming other', of finding new possibilities for existence within the struggle for liberation. What can *Black Mirror*, a series which reflects on contemporary society's relationship with technology, reveal to us about the prospect of emancipation today? In the previous chapters I have examined how reflected in the films and series analysed is the post-

Fordist appropriation of what Berardi defines as the 'soul': 'the vital breath that converts biological matter into an animated body'; human affective, cognitive, and linguistic abilities, which within contemporary capitalism have become the centre of production.

As also illustrated in previous chapters, this intrusion of production into the sphere of the human psyche and intellect entails an appropriation of reactivity, the subject's ability to act on its condition of alienation. As highlighted by Berardi, like money, language and intellect are immaterial, but not metaphoric: they hold the ability to move, displace, multiply, destroy (Berardi, 2009a, p. 22). Capital has, in this sense, through the reification of the soul, estranged the individual from his/her very ability to act, thus neutralising dissent. The debilitation of opposition emerges from the narratives that have been analysed, which depict subjectivities detached from their bodily capacity to act, plagued by the psychopathologies of depression and panic induced by the overwhelming rhythms of work, and demands of post-Fordist capital (Berardi 2009a, pp. 100-101).

This powerlessness to act, as analysed, emerges in "Rachel, Jack, and Ashley Too", in the figure of the Ashley Too doll, whose ability to rebel against her conditions of exploitation have been suppressed by a limiter applied to her consciousness, which represses unwanted aspects of her personality. Popstar Ashley, from which the Ashley Too doll had been duplicated, reduced to a state of coma but still exploited by her aunt and manager, through a computer which seizes the music composed by her brain, contributes to the emerging image of a pathogenic separation of the mind from the body. The analysis of 'Hang the DJ' in the second chapter has highlighted the sense of impotence felt by the characters, who through the ideology of ascetic consumption are absorbed within the neoliberal ideology and precluded from the choice to not partake: Amy and Frank, who find themselves forced to follow the rules of the dating system, unable to even recall an existence outside of it, represent the post-

Fordist sense of impotence which, as expressed by Berardi, is inscribed within contemporary subjectivity (Berardi, 2019, p. 9).

Within my analysis I will also focus on how the two episodes reflect the strengths and weaknesses of affirmative action versus subtractive action. These two practices form the two opposing sides of prefigurative politics, a type of politics which aims at changing society through direct, unmediated action. Best described through the maxim 'be the change you want to see' (Swain, 2019, p. 47), prefigurative politics establishes its political project through the act of being, means and ends becoming indistinguishable.

Within prefigurative politics, the two acts of affirmation and subtraction work dialectically, with subtraction entailing the rejection of and disengagement from the system opposed, and affirmation entailing the envisaging, the demanding, and the aim to bring about change (Pellizzoni, 2021, p. 236); within a prefigurative political act, subtraction precedes affirmation, creating a space within society and the individual to affirm and establish an alternative. However, as argued by Pellizzoni, both theory and political action have at times been at fault of overstating the affirmative aspect, which, taken as self-sufficient, is inadequate when countering capital's ever-increasing ability to influence and promote behaviours (Pellizzoni, 2021, p. 364).

In *Black Mirror*, the aspect of affirmation as praxis is reflected in 'Fifteen Million Merits' in the main character Bing, who espouses the realm of the aesthetic as a liberating force (Marcuse, 1955, p. 172-196), whereas the aspect of subtraction as praxis is reflected in 'The Entire History of You', in the character of Liam, who through the extraction of the grain device enacts a withdrawal from the system, creating a shift in the libidinal investment that kept him attached to the grain. I will go on to analyse and contrast the politics of affirmation and subtraction as reflected in the episodes, in order to gain an understanding of the series' implications with regards to these two types of approach.

As a second step, I will analyse the realm of possibility within current subjectivity as reflected in *Black Mirror*. I will focus on the episode 'Nosedive', and its reflections on the possibility of finding a revolutionary way of existence born out of the acceptance of the impossibility of unlimited growth, and an abandonment of mobilisation, desire, and activism, in favour of a 'wu wei' form of life, rooted in social and psychic exhaustion, thus understanding revolution not as an energetic process but as an act of withdrawal born out of exhaustion.

'FIFTEEN MILLION MERITS': THE AESTHETIC PRINCIPLE AS POLITICS OF AFFIRMATION.

The *Black Mirror* episode 'Fifteen Million Merits' is a depiction of the entertainment industry and its influence on social consciousness, offering the portrayal of a society in which the non-stop transmission of entertainment works as a smokescreen for inequality and for workers' state of subjugation. The society depicted is divided into classes, with an upper class of pop stars and entertainers, a middle class of workers who peddle stationary bikes for a living, and a lower class of cleaners. Most individuals pedal in the hope of achieving upward mobility through winning the talent show but, likewise, can end up dismissed and re-employed as cleaners if they put too much weight on, becoming less productive on the bike.

Hence, whilst the surface appearance of the society is one of meritocracy, this façade contrasts with the awareness that, for the vast majority, success is an unattainable prospect. The awareness of the deceit in the system's promise of success, and the hollowness of consumer values are at the root of protagonist Bing Madsen's dissatisfaction towards his existence within the system. When Bing meets Abi, a new employee at his workstation, and hears her singing during a break from work (S1:E2, 13:00-13:35'), he becomes infatuated

with her song, which, in his eyes, diverges from the homologated pop he is used to hearing. He convinces Abi to sign up for the talent show 'Hot Shot' (S1:E2, 19:56'-23:00'), by using the merits (the currency used within the society) that had been left to him after his brother's death. In a cruel twist, when Abi performs before the judges, she is offered not a singing contract, but a slot on the porn channel 'Wraith Babes', and is convinced to sell out in exchange for fame.

Enraged at what the system has done to Abi, Bing plots his revenge. As part of his plan for retaliation, he saves a further fifteen million merits, the amount required to buy the entry ticket and take part in the show; he then hides a shard of glass in his trousers (S1:E2, 47:19'-47:24') which he uses on stage to threaten suicide if not allowed to speak. (S1:E2, 51:03'-51:20'). In front of an astonished audience, holding the shard of glass to his throat, Bing improvises a speech in which he articulates the alienation and emptiness felt within the commodified world, in which everything authentic and beautiful is destroyed through objectification.

In another unexpected turn of events, however, the 'Hot Shot' judges enthusiastically endorse the speech due to the 'short supply of authenticity' in the market and offer Bing a slot on a streaming programme (S1:E2, 54:41'-56:36´), in which to replicate his speech, a deal which Bing is persuaded to accept. The final scene shows Bing, in his new luxurious apartment, having escaped his menial existence by selling out his beliefs and becoming part of the culture industry he once hated (S1:E2, 1:00:14'-1:00:35'). This unexpected turn of events raises questions as to why, after such a passionate outburst, Bing would choose to give into the system, turning his back on his ethics in exchange for the privilege of a more comfortable room with better views.

Bing's transformation from opponent of the system to cog in the capitalist machine is the outcome of his misunderstanding of the ideological structure that regulates the society in

which he lives, a society which is built on the exploitation of the drive to enjoy, which, crucially, can be extant within the idea of dissent against capital, just as it is present in the act of consumption. The protagonist's intention to bring about a revolution through the affirmation of the realm of the aesthetic (embodied in the character of Abi), capable of generating an enjoyment exterior to commodification, crashes against the system's ability to repackage this enjoyment as its own by turning it into a source of value. In order to understand how capital defeats Bing's attempts towards change, it is essential to consider the fact that capitalism is a system driven by valorised enjoyment (Vighi, 2010, p. 13).

Whilst at first sight, Bing's world appears to be one in which enjoyment is inhibited, a more in-depth analysis leads to the realisation that, firstly, the ideological strength of the system he is fighting against, on the contrary, sustains itself through the promotion of stand-in enjoyment produced by the consumption of media, and, secondly, that the entertainment industry possesses the ability to turn anything, even dissent, into one of its commodities, as affirmed by Marcuse (1964, p. 5). The system's skill at repackaging the libidinal drives which fuel dissent (Vighi, 2010, p. 17), sweeps up Bing's attempts to affirm an alternative that will achieve systemic change.

The episode's visual depiction of the workplace, which also functions as living space for the workers, a gym-like enclosed area with stationary bikes which generate power, reflects a contrast between an element of alienation, contained in the bleakness of the living space and working conditions, and an element of artificial gratification provided by the entertainment industry. Within the workplace, the austerity of the employees' existence is reflected visually in the starkness of the workstations, empty except for the rows of bikes, which are set in a way which prevents group interactions (S1:E2, 02:44'-03:26'). The food provided in the vending machines is unappetising and artificial, the dining area is also bare, apart from a few

tables and chairs (S1:E2,05:12'- 06:05'). All workers wear the same grey tracksuits, which are in line with the lack of colour within both their surroundings and daily life.

The starkness of the workers' reality, however, is countered by the brightness of the large screens surrounding all rooms, which transmit a variety of entertainment. The structured, mechanical, austere characterisation of the workers' existence contains certain elements of the performance principle as described by Marcuse (1955). According to Marcuse, this ideological principle regulates advanced capitalist society, which, having already reached the level of material wealth necessary in order to provide the means of subsistence for its population, nevertheless is still dependent on production in order to ensure its perpetuation; hence, the population's productivity is achieved through the delay of satisfaction, restraint, and securitisation (Marcuse, 1955, p. 12). Within the setting of the world depicted, enjoyment, removed from the daily lives of workers, is concentrated within the entertainment industry's promise of the future possibility of fulfilment.

"I HAVE A DREAM, A SONG TO SING": EXPLOITATION, GAMIFICATION, AND THE DREAM OF SUCCESS.

The screens work as a fulcrum of libidinal investment, providing a deferred, indirect enjoyment, as emerges when, speaking to the workers as audience popstar Selma describes the beauty of the outside world: "I love looking over outside. It's so beautiful sometimes I just wish that everyone could see it" (S1:E2, 12:34'-12:42'). The beauty which Selma refers to is out of reach for the mass of workers, who have no real contact with the outdoors, exhibited with the intent of keeping them hooked on the promise of a chance at a better standard of life. The ideological connotations of the American dream resonate in the song playing in the

opening scenes, as Bing gets ready and makes his way to the workstation in the morning: "I have a dream, a fantasy, to help me through reality/And my destination makes it worth the while/Pushing through the darkness, still another mile" (Andersson and Ulvaeus 1979) (S1:E2, 02:24'-03:02').

The song summarizes the ideology which shapes the employees' existence, positing the dreamlike nature of success as the ultimate objective, which, whilst appearing as unattainable to most individuals, nevertheless provides their existence with meaning, justifying the exploitation of their daily life, which is understood as a sacrifice necessary to sustain the dream. Hence, emerging from the narrative is an element of delayed satisfaction contained in the promise of fame, which reflects Marcuse's definition of capitalist society as governed by the performance principle (Marcuse, 1955, p. 35), an element which serves the purpose of justifying the lower class's subjugation to capital .

In contrast to the element of restraint, certain components within the setting also point to an excess of enjoyment: for instance, the TV show 'Botherguts', in which the presenter humiliates individuals who are considered overweight. The show's cruel treatment of the participants generates a sadistic gratification, as reflected in the behaviour of Bing's colleague, who bursts into fits of laughter as he watches (S1:E2, 04:45'-04:59'), and later takes pleasure in the harassment of a cleaner, guilty of having walked behind him as he was viewing a porn show (S1:E2, 06:46'-07:01').

The gamification of work (explored by Johnson (in McSweeney and Joy, 2019, pp. 33-42)) also points to the encouragement of a certain enjoyment, which keeps the workers committed to production. Videogames function to disguise work as play, as does the assignment of an avatar, named dopple, to each worker, for which they can purchase hairstyles and clothes in exchange for merits (S1:E2, 11:53'-12:26'). The identification of workers with their dopples and the investment in TV shows and games, channels the workers'

drive to enjoy in a way that fits within the ideology of consumerism and its principle of production. Thus, the episode's narrative contains elements that point to a Fordist organisation of existence (focus on production, mechanical and controlled structure), together with elements of post-Fordism (the promotion of work as fun, the melding of individual and technology through avatars).

The character of Bing, who rejects the consumer ideology, undertakes a journey of revolt which brings him from an approach based on refusal to one of affirmation. Bing's rejection of consumer values is made clear from the outset through silence and lack of interaction with his surroundings, which express cynicism towards consumer values and the illusions purported by the culture industry. His initial stance is distinguished by small acts of refusal and an active choice to desist from consuming. For instance, when cycling, whilst most fellow workers entertain themselves with the various shows and videogames on offer, he chooses instead the plain animated cycling track for his screen (S1:E2, 03:55´-03:59'), and also skips the streaming the 'Hot Shot' (S1:E2, 08:53'-9:00') and 'Wraith Babes' adverts (S1:E2, 9:43'-10:01'), an act for which he incurs a charge. Bing's infatuation with Abi, which occurs after he overhears her singing, coincides with an abandonment of this stance of refusal for one of affirmation. The encounter constitutes a departure from his initial apathy, an investment of his desire, which immediately establishes itself as a conflicting force against the system.

The antagonistic potential of Abi's song emerges when, after hearing the song, alone in his cell, Bing starts humming it to himself (S1:E2, 16:42'-17:05'). As becomes clear when the screens begin to transmit images of Hot Shot contestants, whose loud singing drowns out Bing's own voice, this moment symbolises Bing's endorsement of the song against the system. Bing's muting of the screen in order to carry on singing represents the symbolic espousal of Abi's song in opposition to the consumer ideology embodied by Hot Shot's

commodified pop. This initial symbolic endorsement is soon followed by concrete political action: when Bing meets Abi during a break from work, he offers to gift her with the money necessary to take part in Hot Shot and to sing in front of the judges (S1:E2, 19:56'-23:00').

The first signals of Bing's change in stance, from indolent to active, become apparent when he starts to verbally express his disagreement with the ideology of consumerism and the vacuousness of the society, he lives in: "the most natural thing in there's probably grown in a Petri dish" (S1:E2, 18:04'-18:16'); this articulation of discontent, however, lacks deliberation: it is, in fact, only the reiteration of a comment made to him previously by a colleague (S1:E2, 05:50'-05:56'). The lack of clarity and consideration within Bing's feelings of opposition are an early projection of the lack of planning that will later lead to his downfall.

The song is presented as an expression of free creativity opposed to the homologation of the music in the talent show, chosen by Brooker for its earnestness, beauty, and poignancy, which contrast with the 'dystopian hell' of 'Hot Shot's' commodified acts (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp, 2018, p. 42). The revolutionary potential contained in the song is a by-product of the realm of the aesthetic, to which the song belongs. According to Marcuse, art embodies the "return of the repressed" (Marcuse, 1955, p. 144): since it is shaped by imagination, it possesses the ability to tap into, and liberate, the unconscious drive towards pleasure in opposition to the performance principle and the ideology of consumerism. Within the episode's narrative, Bing's espousal of Abi's song arises precisely from its perceived ability to resurface a realm that is exterior to the logic of commodification: in Bing's eyes, Abi's singing is nothing less than a revolutionary act, which, by affirming itself, negates the ideology behind the culture industry.

Three elements, contained within the song, work to undermine the logic of capitalism: creativity, memory, and Eros. The first of these, creativity, is echoed in Abi's habit of making origamis, which end up disposed of by the cleaners as 'detritus' (S1:E2,16:06'-16:15'). Abi's

creativity is viewed within the system as a surplus which is rejected and disposed of given its non-utilitarian nature. This very surplus is understood by Bing as free from the tenets of consumer ideology and the primacy of monetary value, echoing Marcuse's understanding of art as liberation (1955, p. 144). The absence of a quantifiable worth which, causes free creativity to be rejected by consumer values is, instead, welcomed by Bing, who equates it to authenticity, free from the realm of "fake fodder and buying shit".

The second element, memory, is contained within the origin of the song, which is defined by Abi as a hand-me-down, sung by her mother and, before that, by her grandmother (S1:E2, 19:36-19:56'), hence containing a connection to Abi's past. Both the main characters, within the narrative, are depicted as alienated from their roots: Bing's brother has died, and Abi has been sent to a different workplace to her sister's. By creating a link to the past and tradition, Abi's song symbolically resurfaces those elements which were suppressed in the sphere of their existence as workers. The message within the lyrics ("oh but anyone who knows what love is will understand" (Newman and Seely, 1964)) also appeals to a commonality among human beings: the understanding of love, as common sentiment, is the element which overcomes their alienation. Hence, the song's galvanizing potential originates within the past and expands to encompass and connect all human beings. The song's link to tradition also conveys an 'organic' nature which contrasts with the manufactured nature of the 'Hot Shot' hits.

The final element connected to the song is Eros, which within the narrative takes on the semblance of a sentimental love, in opposition to rationality. When Bing compliments Abi on her singing voice and song, he defends the emotional character of his compliment: "You think I'm being cheesy. Right, I am being cheesy, but it was beautiful so, you know? Reality is cheesy sometimes. Not often, admittedly, but now…yeah" (S1:E2, 19:12'-19:30'). Through these words, Bing affirms 'cheesiness', or, sentimentality, as non-conforming emotion that

works antagonistically towards the rationality of the social order, establishing a 'fight for Eros' as 'political fight' (Marcuse, 1955, p. xxv). Bing views the affirmation of sentimentality as a force for change that is able to break through the barriers of commodification to awaken the consciousness of the masses.

The protagonist's political strategy mirrors Marcuse's understanding of the Aesthetic dimension, which creates change through "the pure manifestation of its being-there, its existence" (1955, p. 178) allowing for the liberation from the domination of reason. The 'order of sensuousness', the domain of the arts, stands against 'the order of reason', the rationality at the basis of society's ideological foundation.

"I HAVEN'T GOT A SPEECH! I DIDN'T PLAN WORDS". THE SETBACK OF AFFIRMATIVE POLITICS.

Bing's espousal aesthetic expression as antagonistic element constitutes an act of affirmative politics, whereby emancipation stems from the unbridled expression of vital forces (Pellizzoni, 2021, p. 365). The protagonist's downfall lies in his mistaken assumption of the self-sufficient nature of affirmation, which ultimately leads to his failure to plan any further than the affirmative act itself (Abi's performance): for instance, there is no mention within Bing's plan, of his intentions or expectations. Bing's unconcerned attitude leads to his dismissal of Abi's concerns with failure ("You wouldn't [fail], and I wouldn't care anyway" (S1:E2, 22:27'-22:33')). As a result, when Abi arrives onto the stage, she is totally unprepared for the judges' reaction to her performance. Once handed a Cuppliance drink (a drug meant to induce obedience S1:E3, 29:37'-29:40')), Abi becomes confused by the drink's effects and

the judges' intimations, and when offered a role on judge Wraith's porn channel, in a state of shock, accepts it given the perceived lack of alternative.

Ironically, after Abi's capitulation, Bing's desire for retaliation appears to turn his behaviour into that of a fervent supporter of the system, cycling for long hours and surviving off leftover food in order to save the money for yet another golden ticket for the show, (S1:E2,44:33'- 46:58'), just like the aspiring 'Hot Shot' contestants. Bing's intent, expressed in his speech before the Hot Shot judges and symbolised in his odd dance preceding it, constitutes an affirmation of his anger, exasperation, and alienation within the system; whilst this intent is in opposition to the system, its actuation only serves to strengthen the system. Visually, the scene of the performance (S1:E2, 50:24'-51:26') reflects a visceral anger, the unrehearsed assertion of which Bing relies on; the disjointed nature of his movements also reflects an impulsiveness of this act of affirmation. When, after Bing threatens suicide if not listened to, judge Hope asks Bing what he has to say and whether he has prepared a speech, to which he answers: "I haven't got a speech! I didn't plan words. I didn't even try to. I…I just knew I had to get here to stand here, and I knew I wanted you to listen" (S1:E2, 51:59'-52:16').

These words reflect an intention which is fulfilled within mere affirmation of his anger, an act which is synechdotal (Franks, 2008, p. 118) in viewing in its mere being as part of a larger vision of political change. The system's response to Bing's affirmation is, once again, assimilation within its logic and system of production. Bing's speech, instead of breaking or moving the audience and the judges is enthusiastically touted as "the most heartfelt thing I've seen on this stage since Hot Shot began!" (S1:E2, 54:39'-54:50') and incorporated within the entertainment channels. The judges marketise Bing's 'authenticity' which he believes is 'in woefully short supply'. Despite Bing's initial protests at his outburst being dubbed as 'stuff' (S1:E2, 55:28'-55:30'), he soon submits to their requests, and doesn't

even dispute when his suicide threat being defiantly dubbed as a 'neat gimmick' (S1:E2, 56:05'-26:10').

This conclusion of events points, at best, to Bing's resignation to that fact that anything he might say would not change things, and, at worst, that he ultimately is convinced by the judges that his opposition really is nothing more than a gimmick, leading to the acceptance of an opening on TV. The monetisation of Bing's dissent is not accident, and does not happen despite its revolutionary potential, but because of it.

As put by Pellizzoni, consumer ideology thrives on the commodification of dissent, because "human and non-human energies are made subservient to capital valorisation without harnessing them, and precisely for that" (Pellizzoni, 2021, p. 370); the failure in Bing's politics of affirmation lies in his underestimation of marketisation as subsuming force. Precisely through the allowance Bing's dissent (in its commodified form), the entertainment industry is able to disempower it; hence, by being authorized to speak against the system, Bing becomes separated from his very ability to resist to it. For this reason, Bing's attempt at revolutionary action through the politics of affirmation proved to be a failed strategy.

Whilst Bing viewed Abi's song as vehicle for systemic change, those very elements which he believed would break through the ideological wall of consumer culture end up subsumed. The creativity and authenticity of the song, the truth of Bing's own sense of alienation and anger, when presented to the judges, became fodder for the entertainment industry. Whilst Byron and Brake affirm that we needn't see Bing as a failure of resistance, but as a sign that resistance is still possible (in Irwin and Johnson, 2020, p. 27), the episode offers a lesson in the weakness of affirmative politics when understood as self-sufficient, which emerges in the narrative as a doomed project, hence pointing to the necessity alternative strategies.

'THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF YOU': SUBTRACTION AS EMANCIPATION.

The 'Entire History of You' depicts a society in which people's memories are recorded and stored on a device, the grain, inserted under the skin, behind the ear. Recordings of individual's sensory experiences, referred to as redos, can either be viewed privately, cast onto the cornea, or shared publicly, by connecting the grain to a TV screen. The episode narrates the protagonist Liam's struggle with his compulsive attachment to the device and the destructive effects of the technology. Liam walks into a dinner party after work and notices his wife Ffion/Fi talking to Jonas, one of the guests at the party (S1:E3, 05:52'-06:09'). Their closeness leads him to become suspicious of the nature of their relationship, and when, after confronting his wife, he finds out that Ffion, for a brief period, has been romantically involved with Jonas, his jealousy initiates a downward spiral which spells crisis for the relationship.

Liam's ensuing realisation of the corrosive effects of the grain leads to his final decision to gouge the grain out from behind his ear, an act which causes him to lose his eyesight. Previous analyses of the episode have centred on the issue of the desirability of absolute knowledge (Balke and Engelen in Irwin and Johnson, 2020) and the relationship between visuality and power (Jenkins in McSweeney and Joy, 2019). Within an analysis of post-Fordist capital, however, the episode also offers a reflection on the role of libidinal energies in a system of production that integrates human consciousness (Berardi, 2009a, p. 9), and on the understanding of subtraction as steppingstone towards liberation from capital's ideological hold on the subject (Pellizzoni, 2021, p. 336), as portrayed in Liam's final decision to extract the grain.

The episode's visuals, as expressed by production designer Joel Collins, are designed to include an element of organicity, with most shots including a texture of stone, wood, or metal (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp, 2018, p. 50).Whilst the main intention behind this stylistic choice on part of the producer was to balance the surrealness of the plot with a more realistic background, within the narrative, the combination of natural elements with the grain device effectively collapses the boundaries between nature and technology, creating a visual framework for the main theme within the episode, the reification of memory.

The device depicted in the episode, named Willow Grain, combines components of technology and nature; the term grain refers to the device's miniature size, but also, importantly, carries a correlation to the natural world, expressed in the slogan transmitted inside the taxi which Liam takes on his way to the airport after his work meeting "live, breathe, smell. Full spectrum memory. You could get a Willow grain upgrade for less than the price of a daily cup of coffee, and three decades of backup for free […] because memory is for living") (S1:E3, 02:29-02:58'). The advert associates the grain to the natural functions of breathing and seeing, establishing technology's penetration of nature, life, and human consciousness. In the same breath, the grain technology overshadows nature: the promise of "full-spectrum memory" posits the grain as an enhancement of life which, crucially, exceeds the experience of organic life.

The advert's closing affirmation ("memory is for living") is an injunction to enjoy the grain which subverts the relation between the device and life, overturning the grain's initial purpose as utility, by, vice-versa, positing life as a mere function of the grain. The final words of the advert can easily be reordered, obtaining the phrase 'living [or life] is for [reified, enjoyed] memory' a maxim which expresses the ideological character of the society depicted, in its dependence on the grain. The enjoyment of reified memories turns into the fulcrum of life.

Ensuing from the process of reification is the individual's complete loss of control over the use and outcome of their memories: the past in its digitalised form becomes irrational, unmanageable, and unrestrained. Its unpredictability emerges during Liam's work appraisal, during which his manager expresses the company's plans to make profit from 'retrospective parenting cases' (Liam works for a law firm), in which individuals who lack confidence may sue their parents for insufficient attention (S1:E3, 00:45'-01:00'). The profitability of the recorded recollections, exploited by the law firm, means that the past could suddenly come back to haunt individuals, and their own memories used against them for someone else's financial gains.

The uncontrollability of memory is again reflected in Liam's discovery of Fi's affair, an event which, due to its digital, tangible presence, cannot be forgotten or left in the past, as Liam points out whilst arguing with Fi ("It was years ago!" "Not for him" (S1:E3, 29:36'-29:46')), referring to Jonas' bragging about his going through recordings of past relationships. Within Marx's understanding of commodity fetishism, once entered the market and separated from the worker, commodities acquire a mysterious, alien character (2013, pp. 46,-47), positing them 'outside the will, foresight, and action' of the worker (Böhm and Batta, 2010, p. 349); as a commodity, the grain's ability to recollect, acquires the antagonistic component in the characters' existence, resulting from its fetishisation.

Hence, the grain, whilst depicted as an enhancement of life, emerges as hostile and destructive in its ability to alienate individuals. One of the consequences of the commodification of memory is its substitution of real relationships between humans. Emerging within the narrative is the substitution of authentic human activities, as the enjoyment derived from these, with the fetishization of the grain feed: this substitution emerges constantly within the plot, at the dinner party, in which recordings of the 'Fraser

Road days' (the group's recollections of past parties) have replaced meaningful interaction (S1:E3, 13:30'-13:57').

This obscuring of the present with the digitalised past re-emerges later in Jonas' confession of preferring the excitement of grain memories of one-night stands to his own, 'real' partner (S1:E3, 11:14'-11:25'); once again, the grain replaces 'real' interaction between Liam and Fi, who choose to watch re-dos of themselves from the past during sex (S1:E3, 22:44'). The effects of the grain are, on one hand, the individual's alienation from human interaction, and, on the other hand, the substitution of these real relations with the enjoyment and consumption of digitalised memories, which become the fulcrum of social interactions.

Jenkins defines the overpowering presence of the grain as a case of Narcissus Narcosis, when people become more invested in experience mediated by new media than in the real world (in McSweeney and Joy, 2019, p. 45). A Marxist view of society, however, grounds this phenomenon in the real relations of production, focusing on how capitalism manufactures and draws profit from fetishisation and desire, tying the subjects to its production through weaving it into 'libidinal economy' (Böhm and Batta, 2010, p. 349).Through the grain technology, the system of production itself has taken over the production of enjoyment and desire, which emerge within the narrative as the glue that fuses individual consciousness to the grain; the root of the individual's attachment is firmly grounded within the system of production, which has subsumed the experience of life within its very production.

The grain, hence, is a form of production which is post-Fordist in character, a type of production which "takes the mind, language and creativity as its primary tools for the production of value (Berardi, 2009a, p. 21). Whilst, on one hand, the analysis of capitalism as a system that seizes the production of language, thought, and meaning (defined by Berardi as semiocapitalism (Berardi, 2009a, p. 22)), from a materialist perspective, gets to the source of

subjective attachment to capital, on the other hand, through Lacanian theory, through which I will analyse the narrative, complements a materialist analysis with its psychoanalytical understanding of capitalist subjectivity, accounting for the drives which subconsciously bind the 'sensuous, active and desiring subject' (Böhm and Batta, 2010, p. 349) to capital.

Within 'The Entire History of You', the inescapable character of the individual's attachment to the grain benefits from an understanding that the category of enjoyment, defined by Lacan as *jouissance*, "has to do, simultaneously, with capitalism and anti-capitalism" (Vighi, 2010, p. 17). As a result, when it comes to envisaging effective strategies for dissent, it is necessary to account for the awareness that action needs to be undertaken at the level of unconscious drives, or else faces subsumption by the system. This is clearly reflected in the episode's plot, in which the protagonist Liam, at first hell-bent on destroying his reality in order to test the limits of capital, inevitably fails to break free from his own attachment, up until the moment when he resolves to turn his battle inwards, realising that liberation can only be achieved through self-directed action.

"NOW, I'VE GOT THAT SHITTY CARPET FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE!" DISSENT AS IDEOLOGICAL ATTACHMENT.

Subjective attachment to the grain emerges in the episode as a compulsion which comprises, but goes beyond, pleasure. In his seminar "Anxiety", Lacan introduces one possible of interpretation of the notion of *jouissance* as a drive which crosses the barrier of the pleasure principle, defining it as a 'lack of satisfaction', 'displeasure', 'unlust' (Lacan, 1962, p. 125). Within the episode, enjoyment is not to be understood in its conventional sense, but, in line with this interpretation, a backhanded enjoyment, which is, more often than not, experienced

as unpleasant. Liam's attachment to the grain emerges precisely as a libido which provides no (conventional) pleasure, a compulsion which finds expression through his constant attempts to test the hollowness of his own existence and the replaying of details which feed his anxieties and confirm his fears.

Liam's obsessive attachment to the contradictions and inconsistencies within his reality is not unusual; on the contrary, obsessive attachment to the flaws of reality, is a constituent function of the grain, as reflected in the behaviour of Jeff (one of the guests) who obsesses over details of his holiday hotel (a frayed carpet), which appear to have spoilt his memories of the holiday ("Now, I've got that shitty carpet for the rest of my life!"). Jeff's grievances reflect the unpleasant nature of *jouissance*, whilst also establishing its perceived inevitability, reflected in Jeff's response when reminded by Jonas that he does not have to focus on the negative details ("Oh thanks Jonas! Now fuck off!") (S1:E3, 04:32'-04:51'), a response which reveals both the inevitability of his focusing on these negative details and his inability to look beyond them.

Lacan also defines *jouissance* as a libidinal drive identified with the lack at the heart of a symbolic system (Lacan, 1962, p. 174). The obsession with the details that point to the inconsistencies and void within consumer ideology gives way to a warped drive to enjoyment, which serves the purpose of providing meaning and purpose to existence. However, Jeff's (and Liam's) identification with the inconsistency of the system is not a threat to the grain technology, but, on the contrary, serves to further captivate them, as proven, for instance, by Jeff's inability to look away from the memory of the frayed carpet.

Within 'The Entire History of You', Liam's opposition to the system is an example of the illusory nature of an opposition to the system still saturated with surplus *jouissance*, which inhibits the otherness within dissent (Vighi, 2010, p. 45), and binds the subject firmly within the ideological hold of capital. During the first stage of the narration, Liam's journey towards

liberation is caught in the misguided attempts to lay bare the inconsistencies of the system. Liam's investment in the hidden truth within his relationship, in the contradiction between the surface of appearance and that which remains hidden, is most clearly expressed when, after finding out about his wife's infidelity, he claims: "It's like I've had a bad tooth for years and I'm just finally getting my tongue in there and I'm digging out all the rotten shit" (S1:E3, 38:59'-39:10'); this very determination, whilst wrapped up in revolutionary intention, at its core keeps him attached to the constant reliance on grain memories.

The same dynamic of attachment to flaws which grounds Liam even further within the system, is reflected when Ffion accepts the face value of his boss' words ("We really hope to look forward to seeing you again") as a positive outcome, whereas Liam immediately points out the discrepancy in his boss' words ("Hopes to look forward. It's phoney" (S1:E3, 14:11'-14:25')). Liam's cynicism is the element that brings him to obsessively rewind the conversation, resulting further dependency on the grain. The determination to uncover these inconsistencies of the system is behind Liam's implementation of destructive behaviours, expressed through an 'irresponsible' enjoyment of the grain, working against the tendency to indulge in the enjoyment of the grain in a controlled way.

This emerges in Liam's affirmation of his dislike of Jonas due to the fact that, during the dinner, he had discouraged the group of friends from publicly viewing Liam's failed appraisal, in an attempt to halt an ill-concealed plan to derive enjoyment from Liam's failure. Whilst Jonas' purpose was to avoid embarrassment, Liam expresses resentment towards is attempts to suppress the real nature of their intention (S1:E3, 14:58'-15:28'). Liam's outburst at Jonas' house, where he threatens Jonas with a broken vodka bottle and forces him to publicly display and delete all his memories of Fi (S1:E3, 35:15'-35:20'), derives from the same desire to uncover the hidden truth of Jonas' affair with Fi.

Whilst Jenkins puts Liam's outbursts of jealousy down to 'giddy feelings of omnipotence' caused by the grains gift of omniscience (in McSweeney and Joy, 2019, p. 46), the protagonist's intent is, arguably, far from a shallow desire to affirm his position of power: as expressed by Brooker, it is, rather, Liam's weakness and insecurity which are at the root of his destructive behaviour (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp, 2018, p. 56). Liam's commitment to the sabotaging of his own relationship (since he had always suspected his wife's infidelity) reflects not a will to power, but, on the contrary, a desperate need to get to the root of his sense of alienation by subverting the surface of the illusion, even at the cost of losing everything.

The moment of truth for Liam coincides with the unfolding of his worst nightmare, the moment in which he asks to view Fi's grain feed of her cheating a moment from which there is no going back (S1:E3, 40:49'-43:27') (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp, 2018, p. 56). This emotional climax brings about the full realisation of the destructive potential of the grain. However, even this powerful realisation does not spell the end of Liam's dependence on the grain. Emerging from Liam's inability to move on after the couple's break-up, his wandering in the house, rewinding and watching re-dos of Ffion and their child even after the breakup, reveals the full extent of his libidinal attachment.

"AFTER I WAS GOUGED, I DIDN'T HAVE ONE FOR A FEW DAYS AND THEN JUST KIND OF LIKED IT". THE SUBVERSIVE POTENTIAL OF SUBTRACTION.

Contrasting with Liam's attachment is the character of Hallam, one of the guests at the dinner party, who reveals that she has renounced her grain after it was gouged (forcibly removed) by a stranger, in order to be sold on the black market. Hallam explains that, after experiencing life without the grain, the serenity and sense of freedom experienced convinced her to go grainless. Hallam cites the most likely reason for the theft of her grain to be its trading on the black market: as she recounts the events leading up to her renunciation of the grain, she points out that it was probably "stolen to order, as far as they could tell, probably to some millionaire Chinese perv" (S1:E3, 12:24'-12:35'). This anecdote is instrumental in revealing the dual function of the grain, which, on one hand, is enjoyed as a commodity, but on the other hand, by contrast, transforms the individual into a commodity to be enjoyed.

As put by Vighi, as subjects, we are not only compelled to enjoy capital, but we also want capital to keep enjoying itself through us (2010, p. 17). Emerging from the story is the awareness that, whilst the characters may be under the impression that they are 'playing' with the grain, in reality, under the surface, the grain itself is 'playing' with, using individual's memories, which generate millions on the black market. Capital feeds off digitalised memory and experience both through the supply of material value generated, and through the surplus of libidinal investment which functions as sustenance to its ideological domination. Thus, by virtue of her going grainless, Hallam cuts her ties to the grain on two grounds: the halting of her enjoyment of the grain, and the halting of the grain's enjoyment of herself. The subversive

potential of this act of renunciation emerges in the reactions of the other guests at the table, whose reactions range from shock to outrage.

Whilst Liam, instantly drawn in by Hallam's comment, asks if the experience had been painful (to which Hallam answers that it had been 'total agony') (S1:E3 11:51'-11:55'), Colleen, a guest who works at grain development, sarcastically comments: "I believe it's huge with hookers. I mean, no offence!" (S1:E3, 12:54'-13:03'). The feeling of shame projected onto Hallam by Coleen plays a key role in positing Hallam's refusal as a radical act of opposition in defiance of the capitalist logic. In the society depicted, a radical act is constituted not by excess, but by renunciation, since the logic of permissiveness, in which no degree of excess in the enjoyment of the grain can cause scandal, has negated the possibility of subversion, except through an act of radical refusal.

Hallam's repudiation contains an 'remainder' which is capable of disturbing the subject's immersion in their socio-symbolic order (Vighi, 2010, p. 88); her affirmation that "after I was gouged I didn't have one for a few days and then just kind of liked it" reveals a liberated enjoyment, born out of refusal that suddenly opens up a playing field for libidinal investment outside of the grain's reach, a rebellion built upon the actualisation of the 'fantasmatic kernel' (Žižek, 2005, p. 181), the symptom of the fundamental inconsistency of the system. This liberation of enjoyment from the grips of the grain is immediately highlighted when Jonas requests to touch the scar caused by the gouging, and comments: "it feels quite nice" (S1:E3, 12:00'-12:19'), a comment which suddenly shifts the fulcrum of enjoyment from the grain to the scar as absence of a grain.

Hallam's dissociation from the grain is achieved through her decision to desist from its enjoyment, a choice which is referenced to multiple times within the conversation (the first, when at the dinner table Jonas questions whether the others also use their feed for sexual enjoyment, to which Hallam replies, 'not me' (S1:E3, 11:32'-11:34'), and, a second time,

when, after having been mocked by Colleen and compared to a hooker (who tended to also go grainless) she comments "Well, I'm pretty boring, one man at a time" (S1:E3, 13:01'-13:04'), an affirmation which expresses distancing from the act of enjoyment. These two interactions point to two qualities characterising the act of subtraction according to lacanian theory, the first, pain/trauma, and the second, shame, both of which are entailed in the act of liberation (Vighi, 2010, p. 5, p. 88).

The scar also serves as a symbol of the traumatic nature of liberation. The gouging of the grain, described by Hallam as being extremely painful, is an act which entails the extraction of something which is quite literally under the skin, a constituent part of the self; the grain is located within the individual body and contains the individual's consciousness, the very core of identity. The gouging, hence, symbolises liberation through pain and through the renunciation of one's subjectivity and identity. The extraction of the grain entails the high chance of loss of eyesight, the complete removal from the socio-symbolic order and from existence as it was previously understood.

Whilst Hallam somehow escapes blindness, Liam's own final decision to extract his grain comes at the cost of blindness, as reflected when the screen blacks out immediately after the removal (S1:E3, 47:23'-47:32'). Liam's gesture, an act of self-directed violence, marks his removal from the commodified existence created through the grain. Whilst the end resolution of the episode comes across as dark, within an analysis of dissent within capitalism, it offers a depiction of subtraction to capital as an opportunity for subjective liberation. In both 'Fifteen Million Merits' and 'The Entire History of You', the characters embody a certain idea of change, the possibility of building a new society "from the shell of the old" (Swain, 2019, p. 48).

The opposition enacted by both protagonists is shaped at the level of being, choosing to personify the revolution, as opposed to engaging in an outwardly political fight. In the case

of Bing, this is reflected in the espousal of the aesthetic (incarnated in the character of Abi) as an affirmative force of revolution. When it comes to Bing's strategy of dissent, the two problems encountered, which end up sabotaging his revolutionary attempts, are lack of strategy and failure to understand the co-opting abilities of capital. The protagonist's attempt to destroy the logic of consumerism through the mere affirmation of a more authentic alternative to the homologated acts in the talent show ends up subsumed by the system, turned into yet another commodity. Subsequently, Bing's attempts to assert his discontent through the affirmative act of his speech is again absorbed and turned into a TV show to be consumed by the audiences, once again losing its revolutionary potential.

The awareness emerging from 'Fifteen Million Merits' is the necessity to map the element of enjoyment within the understanding of Post-Fordist capital, and within the cognitive mapping of the post-Fordist subject, in order to avoid being "always duped, especially when we believe we are not" (Vighi, 2010, p. 97). Failing this fundamental step, dissent inevitably is turned by the 'antibodies' of into commodity, another source of value within its machine. 'The Entire History of You' presents subtraction as an alternative in the fight against commodification. At the end of a tortuous and anguished process which leads him to destroy his reality in an attempt to lay bare the inconsistencies of capital, the protagonist Liam comes to the realisation that an act of symbolic suicide is the only possible way to defeat his unconscious attachment to the system. Through the extraction of the grain Liam is finally able to deliver himself from the system, demonstrating that, in order to escape the grip of commodification, the subject must be willing to disappear.

The narratives of 'Fifteen Million Merits' and 'The Entire History Of You', hence, bring into question the effectiveness of a politics of dissent based on the affirmation of a perceived alternative neglecting the importance of subtraction, the subject's withdrawal from the ideological hold of capitalism.

EXHAUSTION, INOPERATIVITY AND SUBTRACTION IN 'NOSEDIVE'.

'Nosedive', the opening episode of the third series of *Black Mirror*, is set in a world in which all social interactions are filtered by a mobile phone technology which rates individuals by popularity. The technology bears resemblance to a variety of already existing social media and is constituted by a virtual platform onto which individuals upload their daily life updates, pictures, and comments, as well as a rating function through which interactions can be awarded stars, and a lens technology which allows the visualisation of individuals' score, digitally as they are being approached.

The society is economically stratified, with an upper class of highly rated people (four point five stars and above), a lower-middle class of individuals rated four stars and above, and those who rank three or lower, who constitute a lower class. In order to gain access to healthcare, housing or to the workplace a certain number of stars are required; services available within this capitalistic society are also layered, with certain benefits being reserved to those with a higher rating. The society is ideologically sustained by an aspiration to social mobility, personified in the protagonist Lacie; the attainment of economic success, however, is reliant on successful social networking and navigating the social conventions of the rating system.

As indicated by the title, the episode's plot recounts the protagonist's sudden fall from grace, or nosedive, when, in view of her rental contract expiring, she sets her hopes on a luxurious home in the exclusive neighbourhood of Pelican Cove. Although the cost of the apartment is not within Lacie's economic means, when the estate agent informs her that with

a minimum rating of 4.5, she will qualify for a sizeable discount, Lacie decides to attempt obtaining this score.

Encouraged by a social media advisor to exploit her high-four friendships in order to give her score a short-term boost, Lacie decides to court the attention of her old friend Naomi by posting a picture of Mr. Rags, a toy that the two of them had made together during their childhood. The unexpected result of Lacie's publishing of Mr. Rags is that Naomi not only responds by awarding her stars, but also resumes contact with her after years of estrangement, announcing her engagement and asking Lacie to be her maid of honour (an act later discovered to be purely self-serving, since her old friendship with Lacie, a 'mid-range' individual, would be viewed as 'vintage' and 'genuine' by the guests, who would then likely upvote Naomi at the wedding, allowing her to raise her already high rating).

Viewing this as an opportunity to achieve a high enough score to obtain her dream home, Lacie immediately accepts; however, all her efforts are offset by a series of misfortunes: the begin with, Lacie accidentally spills coffee over a woman who immediately downvotes her, is awarded one star by an annoyed taxi driver who found her phone conversation grating, thus bringing her average down. To make things worse, when Lacie arrives at the airport, she is told her flight has been cancelled, and is refused an alternative flight by the assistant due to her now lower score. This prompts an outburst that costs Lacie dear, since it causes the assistant to call security, who docks her a total of two points due to her disruptive behaviour, bringing her down to 3.1. Lacie continues on her journey towards the wedding, but more obstacles are present on the way: the old-fashioned electric car that she has rented in order to make the journey (the only one available to her due to her low score) runs out of battery mid-journey, and when Lacie stops at a charging station, she finds out that the charger does not fit modern charging stations.

Noticing Lacie's drastically lowered score, Naomi tells her to stay away from the wedding. Ignoring her order Lacie breaks into the celebration, delivering a raging speech in denunciation of the inauthenticity of Naomi's friendship. This causes the shocked guests to vote her down, dropping her score to zero, as well as her arrest and the confiscation of her phone and lens technology. Lacie's imprisonment gives way to redemption for the protagonist when, freed from the oppressive norms of the system, she is finally able to see reality unfiltered by the technology.

What strikes the most about Lacie's liberation is that it materialises by accident. In contrast with the character of Bing in 'Fifteen Million Merits' (S1:E2) whose character and position within the narrative are entirely defined by his opposition to the system he lives in, Lacie fully embraces the ideological principles of the rating technology, and dreams of obtaining success as defined by those principles. It is precisely the determination of her attempts to follow the social norms implied by the system that, due to their ultimate incompatibility with her capabilities, end up paving the way for her liberation. For this reason, 'Nosedive' provides a unique and fascinating insight into the possibility of subjective liberation within post-Fordist capital.

Lacie's journey from aspiring social climber to reject encapsulates Berardi's definition of an 'implosive theory of subversion, based on depression and exhaustion' (2011, p. 138) her liberation offering the picture of the possibility beginning of something new from the ashes of an old system. Whilst the specifics of what this new form of life might be is not revealed, it nevertheless offer a glimpse of an alternative to capitalism which avoids the pitfalls of a politics purely based on affirmation. Aside from its condemnation of some of the negative ethical and epistemological implications of social media (explored by Urueña and Melikyan (in Irwin and Johnson 2020, pp. 83-91)), and its reflection of how power structures use the self-regulating aspect of social media to discipline bodies (analysed by Redmond (in

McSweeney and Joy, 2019, pp. 111-123)), 'Nosedive' is also a symbolic snapshot of the typically post-Fordist condition of exhaustion, as understood by Berardi (2017, pp. 155-157) and posits it as the starting point of Lacie's redemption, thus raising important insights into the preconditions through which a the post-Fordist subtraction might be instigated.

"IMPRESS THOSE UPSCALE FOLKS, YOU'LL GAIN VELOCITY ON YOUR ARC". ENERGY AND OPERATIVITY IN POST-FORDIST CAPITALISM.

The opening scene in 'Nosedive' (S3:E1, 00:40'-01:44'), which depicts Lacie during a morning run, introduces the ideological attachment to the rating technology characteristic of the society depicted. The concept of energy is introduced within this scene as a subtextual element, reflected in Lacy's engagement in physical activity. The expenditure of energy implied symbolically represents activation within the rating system, both in a practical sense (through her physical activity, Lacie is attempting to adhere to the ruling beauty standards) and in a symbolic sense (the image of physical activity is symbolically connected to Lacie's participation within the ranking system).

A secondary interpretative key within the scene is use in its Agambian meaning, or operativity (Agamben, 2014, p. 68), denoting the biopolitical role of Lacie's use of the rating technology. Narrative elements within the first few scenes work to create within the viewer a realisation that the use of the rating technology has a formative effect on the user's appearance, behaviour, and identity. An indication of the technology's role in shaping identity is, for instance, when Lacie stops to take a picture whilst stretching, which she then publishes on the virtual platform. Through its framing and positing within the rating system the act of stretching implies pure performativity, an act which, emptied of any purpose other than

positing Lacie in line with the ideological requirements of the system. The following scene, in which, after her run, Lacie practises her laugh in front of the mirror, once again conveys how the technology shapes even the most personal aspects of Lacie's individuality.

As defined by Agamben, when understood in its Greek origin, use (which derives from the ancient Greek *chrestai*), entails a process which affects not just the object, but also the subject (2014, p. 68). Within the episode's initial scenes, thus, Lacie's correlation with the ideological rating system is hence defined in terms of the transformative nature of its use, and the activation of energy implied by it.

The practice of sports and outdoor activities is a widespread narrative element in 'Nosedive' and appears to be almost indispensable when trying to achieve popularity and success through the technology. Many of the images that appear on Lacie's mobile phone screen are users' display of their flexibility and level of fitness through pictures of handstands or various other sports activities. The use of exercise such as yoga and stretching which denote flexibility bears connotations to the flexibility required from the post-Fordist worker as described by Lorey (2015, p. 13), and also works as a display of social and symbolic capital (as intended by Bourdieu (in Buchanan et al., 1993, p. 15)), as reflected in Naomi's feed, her social success and popularity is reflected in displays photos of her doing yoga, and horseback riding, which Lacie looks at with admiration (S3:E1, 06:50'-07:07'). Her partner, also high ranking within the app, is shown posing on the app during a game of golf, and comments on surfing practise (S3:E1, 10:57'-11:18').

The link between hard work, success and popularity, and physical activity is a thread which runs throughout the episode, surfacing for instance when Lacie, who is on the way to Naomi's wedding receives a videocall from Naomi in which her friend oddly carries out a conversation whilst performing perfectly framed yoga poses, exhibiting her athleticism (S3:E1, 26:43'- 27:04'). Just like their mental energy, individual's physical energy is being

mobilised by the ideological system at work within the rating system; through the activation of energy, the use of the system affects the user.

'BATERIE VYBITÁ': ENERGY IS NOT INFINITE.

The pairing of physical and mental energy, which itself within the narrative serves to give prominence to the notion of energy itself, is symbolically linked to a more general understanding of energy as a resource and, crucially, its finiteness. In addition to the image of energy as bodily movement, and nervous energy applied to technology, there is a third understanding of energy as a limited natural physical resource.

Berardi outlines the awareness of the limitations of physical resources as a crucial realisation at the root of a new public discourse. The theorist refers to the publication of *Limits to Growth*, a study published after the 1973 oil crisis brought about by the war of Yom Kippur, marked by a new awareness of scarcity and the finiteness of the Earth's resources. This study was further supplemented in 2008 by another, which understands the limits to capitalist accumulation as no longer purely physical and space-like, but time-like: the concept of exhaustion can and should be applied to the fields of biology and mental energy; as put by Berardi, within post-Fordism "the essential limit to growth is the mental impossibility to extend time (cybertime) to a certain point" (Berardi, 2011, pp. 134,135).

The concept of physical, mental and time-like exhaustion is ubiquitous within the narrative of 'Nosedive' and constitutes the episode's most prescient and striking message; in this sense, the symbolic references to energy as subtextual element, through their reference to the capitalist ideological activation (in service to the accumulation of ratings and the

endeavour of social and economic success) serve the purpose of setting the scene for the narrative exploration of exhaustion as result of the system's demand and inactivity.

The limits of neuropsychic or mental energy are first introduced within the narrative through intermittent references and reminders of those symptomatic elements within Lacie's personality and behaviours that do not fit with the rating system's standards. When she stops at a café before work, the aspirational perfection implied by the careful placement of the cup of coffee and aesthetically pleasing bite she takes of the complementary cookie, referenced to by a friend's comment ('I love the little bite!'), is betrayed by Lacie's grimace, revealing the bitterness of the coffee, whilst taking a sip (S3:E1, 04:21'-05:12'). In terms of the physical limits of energy, in the scenes where she is jogging, the lack of athleticism conveyed by her slowness of pace and the background sound of her panting (S3:E1, 1:08'-01:15'), accentuate the fact that, although Lacie makes a habit of running in the morning, despite her efforts she is not able to fully fit in with the idea of athleticism propounded by the technology's social media platform.

Both the physical limitations and the mental limitations emerging within Lacie's efforts serve to highlight the impossibility of meeting the system's demands. The level of discipline required by a system which demands an ascetic participation (as defined by Stimilli (2017, p. 8)), the reduction of one's being to pure investment (in this case, the adoption of behaviour that will obtain recognition in the form of stars, which can be accumulated in order to attain success), a theme which 'Nosedive' shares with 'Hang the DJ', explored in chapter two as typical of post-Fordist consumer society, is accompanied in this case by a focus on Lacie's inability to keep up with the demands of society. The purpose of the humanlike imperfection of Lacie's character, referred to by actress Bryce Dallas Howard ('I let myself eat what I wanted, when I wanted, to get to the point where I didn`t really look like...an 'actress') serves to highlight the impossibility of the system's expectations. The '15 per cent

fear' and '25 per cent depression' surfacing from her laugh are the symptoms of a psychic crisis looming from this inability to keep up (Brooker and Jones with Arnopp, 2018, p. 136).

An element of time-like limit presents itself within the narrative when, at her viewing of the Pelican Cove apartment, she is told that the apartment will probably be taken very fast (as reflected in the words of the letting agent: 'I gotta say, these places are going like "that" (S3:E1, 9:40'-9:43')) and is faced with the realisation that she will not be able to afford it unless her popularity rating undergoes a sharp and rapid rise, from a 4.3 to a 4.5 (which, as informed by Lacie's social media analyst, on average takes eighteen months, an amount of time which she is not able to wait (S3:E1, 12:35'-12:43')). Lacie's rush to achieve the required score leads her to accept Naomi's unexpected wedding invite and request for her to be the maid of honour, even though they have not kept in touch, and the nature of Naomi's friendship had in the past revealed itself to be selfish and inauthentic.

Lacie's acceptance of the challenge, a race against time for a higher rating, constitutes within the narrative the system's request which Lacie enthusiastically accepts, but which she proves unable to meet. The inevitable failure of is anticipated by her brother Ryan's words when, after an argument, as Lacie sets off on her journey to Naomi's wedding, he asks: 'Your Pelican Cove deposit, is it refundable? Like, what if this doesn't work?' (S3:E1, 24:45'-24:47'). The events of Lacie's demand by the system to achieve more (a higher rating) in less time, her acceptance of this demand, and the looming anticipation of her failure perfectly embody the awareness that ' in semiocapitalist reality hyperreality, the brain is the market. And the brain is not limitless, the brain cannot expand and accelerate indefinitely' (Berardi, 2011, p. 136). From this point onwards, symbolism within the narrative begins to increasingly highlight Lacie's exhaustion.

From Bryce Dallas Howard's acting, which highlights Lacie's mental struggle, for instance after Naomi's videocall, sighs and looks visibly anxious, to symbolisms such as

Lacie's desperate search for her charger, which her brother had borrowed and misplaced, she angrily shouts: 'I said don't borrow this!' (S3:E1, 24:31'-24:41'). This minor event, which introduces the possibility and risk of energy depletion within the narrative, also foreshadows the main obstacle Lacie faces on her disastrous journey to the wedding: the running out of her car's battery (S3:E1, 34:15'). Having been docked two points as a punitive measure for reacting to the flight assistant's unwillingness to help her find an alternative flight (her flight had been cancelled), Lacie is forced to rent a car and drive to the wedding. Due to her lowered score, however, the only car available is an old-fashioned electric cruiser model. The name 'cruiser' in this case, bears connotations with the act of cruising, which denotes a constant and slow movement with the purpose of travelling efficiently and sustainably over a large distance, the opposite of Lacie's intention, which was to get to the wedding location as soon as possible, in time for the rehearsal dinner.

Lacie's newly lowered score also slows her down at the car rental office, since she cannot opt for the express lane reserved to those rated 4.0 or higher. Even the car's audio instructions slow Lacie down, since they are in Czech and make it difficult for her to understand directions. Most centrally to the plot, Lacie's efforts towards speeding up the journey are again countered when the car's battery runs out during the journey and when, after stopping at a charging station, she realises that the charger that came with the car is such an old model that it will not fit the station.

These symbolisms work to highlight the opposition between the natural limits of time and the mind against capital's relentless productive requirements, which allows for a reading of Lacie's disasters not simply as chance or bad luck, but as symptoms of a natural crisis entailed by the unlimited demands of the system meeting the limited resources within human consciousness and within the limits of time. In this sense, Lacie as a character is symbolic of the contemporary post-Fordist subject, a subject whose attention and imagination are

saturated by the proliferation of simulacra (Berardi, 2011, p. 136) (as reflected by the complete permeation of Lacie's existence by the technology), and a subject who is required to defy the natural limits of time, which cannot be extended beyond a certain point, as highlighted by Lacie's nosedive.

Whilst existing analyses of the episode has been centred on the functioning and the negative effects of the technology depicted (a social media app through which individuals rate their interactions with others, ratings on which people's social and economic standing depends) with Redmond focusing on how the episode reflects on the quantified self and the biopolitics of identity construction within social media, and Urueña and Melikyan (in Irwin and Johnson, 2020) analysing the issue of mob rule and self-presentation through 'the mask', arguably, within an analysis of the episode's reflections on contemporary society, perhaps one of the most significant narrative threads is the prominence of the themes of energy, limits and exhaustion as themes, concepts which are being brought to society's attention due to issues such as economic recession, scarcity of resources like water and oil, and declining growth.

'MAYBE YOU JUST DON'T REMEMBER, YOU KNOW, YOU'RE JUST TOO OLD TO GET IT'. WU WEI EXISTENCE AS A REVOLUTION.

In his contribution to a 2017 study about the concept of energy within culture entitled *Fueling Culture*: *101 Words for Energy and Environment*, Berardi affirms the incompatibility of the capitalist ideology, marked by the inability to think outside of the logic of expansion, with our socio-historical moment, marked by decline in growth and the looming possibility of exhaustion. Modernism has embedded within consciousness the cult of energolatria, which identifies energy, youth and action with the future and attempts to stave off or deny exhaustion, aging, and contemplation. A new form of consciousness, according to the theorist,

should disentangle the idea of the future from its pretence of infinite growth, and embrace exhaustion, 'not as a failure, but as a new condition of pleasure and comprehension' (2017, p. 157).

The character of Susan, a truck driver who offers Lacie a lift when, unable to recharge her car, she resorts to hitchhiking, personifies within the episode's narrative a typically post-Fordist disillusionment towards this cult of energy, reflecting a consciousness marked by the espousal and political activation of exhaustion against the system. Contained within Susan's experience, the story of her transformation from enjoying a status of '4.6', and being an enthusiastic participant in the rating system, to an outsider, rated 1.4 (S3:E1, 37:52'- 43:23'), is a conscious and political espousal of exhaustion against the system, and a counter ideological substitution of energolatria for the adoption of wu wei living (slow living), defined by Berardi as withdrawal, frugality, and the abandonment of activity (2011, p. 138).

When Susan's husband had become terminally ill with cancer, Susan had wrongly believed that her popularity would provide her with leverage towards obtaining medical treatment, but, as she recounts, the exclusive treatment that could have cured him was instead offered to someone with a marginally higher rating of 4.4 compared to her husband's 4.3). Susan's efforts to achieve a high rating and her battle to save her husband, mirroring Lacie's own efforts to succeed within the system ("God, you remind me of me" (S3:E1, 39:45'-39:50')), are constituted in her dialogue as the activation of subjective energy as work within the system: 'Used to live for it. All the work I put in…' (S3:E1, 40:03'-40:06') 'I did everything I could to get him there' (S3:E1, 40:48'-40:53') and allows for an understanding of Susan's story an embodied instance of post-Fordist exhaustion, which so far within the narrative has been conveyed only through the symbolism of electronic power exhaustion (as discussed, the main symbolism being Lacie's car battery running out).

This time, however, the exhaustion of energy is not just depicted as a threat or danger (as was the case, for instance, of Lacy's car battery, as impediment to her attainment of success); it is instead revealed in terms of revolutionary power: the disillusionment at her inability to help her husband at a crucial time constitutes a turning point for Susan, who decides to stop partaking in the behavioural precepts of the system, refusing to engage in the nicety and insincerity implied by the quest for high rating, thus effectively enacting her subtraction from the system, and enacting her emancipation.

Within Susan's subjectivity, the work implied by the use of the rating system is undone, overturned and, in its place, inactivity emerges; within the dialogue, this is reflected in Susan's refusal of Lacie's offer to recite her speech for her to hear, a refusal which surprises Lacie due to its frankness (S3:E1, 38:58'-39:00'). The inactivity implied by Susan's 'not doing', her inactivity within the system, can be understood as in instance of inoperativity, a term used by philosopher Agamben to define 'an operation that deactivates and renders works (of economy, of religion, of language, etc.) inoperative (Agamben, 2014, p. 69): an 'undoing' of work which holds destructive potential.

Through her inactivity Susan reveals the possibility of another way of life, another form of being, thus opening up the space for an alternative form of consciousness. Within the narrative, the full potential of Susan's inoperativity is reflected within the dialogue through the overturning of the meaning of concepts such as 'effort' and 'normal', which acquire a new meaning, liberated from the tenets of the system. This is reflected when Susan jokes, "Checking my feed for danger signs?" (Lacie, concerned about Susan's 1.4 rating, had been scrolling through the platform in search for her personal information). To Lacie's reply that she seems 'normal', Susan replies "Thank you. It took some effort" (S3:E1, 38:19'-38:50').

This affirmation enacts two conceptual reversals of the technology's ideological tenets: the first is the overturning of the system's idea of normality (someone who fits in with

the parameters of the rating system) with a new concept of normal, defined by the renunciation of the obsessive search for approval. Secondly, the idea of 'effort', which up to now has been associated with activity within the system, the networking and behavioural patterns applied within the quest for success, is replaced by an effort towards the deposition of activity: Susan is in fact referring to the conscious effort it took for her to renounce the usage of the technology. In the figure of Susan, hence, for the first time the psychic exhaustion brought about by the system results in the conscious decision to 'stop using' to become inoperative. This, in turn, brings to Susan's liberation, an occurrence which Susan describes as comparable to "taking off a pair of tight shoes" (S3:E1, 41:47':41:50).

Susan's description of events also highlights the threat her subtraction constitutes within the system, as reflected in the shocked reaction of Susan's friends: "It is incredible how fast you slip off the ladder when you start doing that. It turned out a lot of my friends didn't care for honesty. Treated me like I'd taken a shit at their breakfast table". By detracting herself from the use of the system's behavioural tactics, Susan lays bare the possibility of its implosion. The network Susan had created through her participation in the rating system implodes when her friends, disgruntled by her sudden honesty, isolate her (S3:E1, 41:15'-41:38'). Susan's testimony serves within the narrative to highlight the value of inactivity as a form of opposition, an awareness which finds its counterpart within political theory in the theories of radical passivity.

Within the character of Susan, the element of inoperativity as path to subjective liberation is conceptually linked to a state of subjective exhaustion. Susan also embodies old-age within the narrative as liberation from the empty promise of future. Within the episode's characters Susan is the oldest, and this is visually highlighted by her greying hair, which contrast with the perfectly styled hair of all other characters in the episode, with very few exceptions. During their car conversation, when she suggests that Lacie follow her example

and renounce the rating technology, Lacie dismisses the idea based on her future hopes: "I can't just kick off my shoes and walk the earth or whatever. […] (S3:E1, 41:52'-41:59'). Look, you had something with your life, real things, good things, and you lost it all, and I'm sorry. So, now you've got nothing left to lose. But I don't even have the something worth losing, not yet, you know, I mean I'm still fighting for that" (S3:E1, 42: 03'-42:20').

Within the plot dynamics, Susan's old-age is connected to cynicism towards the system, in contrast to Lacie's blind faith in the system and ambition; but, at a closer look, Susan's cynicism is revealed to be a foresight towards a new form of revolutionary consciousness: in contrast to Lacie's ambitions of success within the ruling system, contained within the future, in fact, Susan looks further, to the post-future (as defined by Berardi (2011, p. 164)), a realm of time freed from modernity's false promise of fulfilment, incorporating the hope of a new form of existence based on renunciation and slow living. Lacie's flippant comment: "Look, maybe you don't remember, you know, you're just too old to get it", intended to highlight how Susan is out of touch with how the world within the social setting worked, in reality highlights that it is in fact Lacie who is missing the vital realisation that the rating system is unable to provide the sense of fulfilment which she is looking for.

Thus, within the character of Susan, the element of old-age is posited as a source of revolutionary potential in its ability to look beyond the idea of future, and in its willingness to embrace inoperativity, personifying Berardi's critique of energetic juvenilism (Berardi 2017, p. 157).

In her truck, Susan keeps two bottles: a blue bottle containing coffee and a red one containing whiskey. This symbolism, which nods to the red pill and blue pill featuring in *The Matrix* (Wachowski and Wachowski, 1999), is an interesting reinterpretation: the colour blue, which within the matrix denotes the choice to remain in the comfortable but illusory reality, in 'Nosedive' contains caffeine, a stimulating drink which creates alertness and has often been

viewed as symbiotic to the capitalist work ethic; the red bottle (a colour which in *The Matrix* signifies freedom from the illusions of the system) contains an alcoholic substance which instead both lowers inhibitions and slows down the brain's reaction. When Susan drops Lacie off and they part ways, she leaves the red bottle containing the whiskey in Lacie's suitcase; in this sense, whilst the coffee embodies capitalism's all-consuming exploitation of energy, the whisky symbolises the release contained in subjective deceleration. The fact that after the exchange Lacie falls asleep in the back seat of the lorry also hints at Lacie's final espousal of the politics of exhaustion.

The radicality of the character of Susan is contrasted within the narrative with Ryan, Lacie's brother a character who, whilst also defined by his opposition to the system, remains operative within it. Ryan is introduced into the plot much earlier than Susan and provides the narrative with a voice of criticism towards the system: indolent and disinterested in upward mobility, is always pictured at home. In his first scene Ryan is shown playing VR videogames and his dialogues with Lacie hint at the fact that he is a habitual gamer and has a circle of gamer friends. Whilst Ryan is very vocal about his disagreement with the superficiality and inauthenticity implied by the system, he is nevertheless tied to the system and uses it to his advantage, as emerges when he tells Lacie that he will not be left without a home when the lease expires since his friend (S3:E1, 02:43'-02:45'), who is moving out, has offered him his flat.

Ryan's rating is not very high, but enough to get by and within society, but in contrast to Susan, whose decision to stop operating within the system paves the way liberation, Ryan's use of the rating technology to his advantage means he remains caught within the system unable to act upon his disagreement, as highlighted when Ryan criticises Lacie's decision to go to Naomi's wedding (given the inauthenticity of the friendship), and Lacie calls out his

hypocrisy, pointing out that whilst Ryan does not try as hard as Lacie, he still gets points from his gamer network (S3:E1, 23:56'-23:59').

Whilst the tradition of political reflection has historically been rooted in which he identification (and affirmation) of a radical subjectivity functioned as the fundamental element of politics (and of political opposition) (Agamben, 2014, p. 70), and, as a consequence of this, opposition has generally been understood as energetic mobilisation (Berardi 2011, p. 135), within a system that holds biopolitical power over subjectivity, the instances of change enacted through energetic mobilisation do not affect the sphere of social consciousness: as put by Berardi, " Change happens in the sphere of politics, not in daily life- and the relationship between politics and daily life has become so tenuous, so weak, that sometimes I think that, whatever happens in politics, life will not change" (Berardi 2011, p. 13). This brings about the need for a revaluation of the concept of politics as action, and the possibility that more effective than the counterposing of action (as operativity within the system) with action (as operativity 'in opposition), might be the counterposing of action/operativity with inaction/inoperativity.

SUBTRACTION AND REVOLUTION IN LACIE'S WEDDING SPEECH.

In the episode's concluding scene, Lacie achieves her objective of arriving to the wedding venue after obtaining a lift from a crowd of science-fiction fans on the way to a convention, then borrowing a quad bike for the final leg of the journey. In the meantime, however, Naomi has become aware of Lacie's plummeted score and has retracted her invitation to the wedding due to the fact that the guests at the wedding would probably react negatively to her presence. This, together with the fact that access to the venue is denied to anyone with a rating below

3.8, definitively places Lacie as an outsider within the system. Once at the venue, Lacie trespasses into the complex and succeeds in her intent of presenting her wedding speech, albeit a heavily modified version of what she had prepared.

The wedding speech is a political act, which calls out the inauthenticity and unfairness of the rating system; it also coincides with Lacie's confrontation with Naomi and her ensuing meltdown. The speech is composed of what might initially appear as a peculiar mix of sentimental attachment, admiration, condemnation, and anger: throughout the course of the speech, which is about five minutes long, Lacie jokes, hysterically laughs, swears, cries and shouts; she begins the speech by counting herself among Naomi's oldest friends and uttering her admiration for her, only to call out her friendship as self-interested and comparing Naomi to a succubus (S3:E1, 55:40'-55:45') and calling her husband a jack hole (S3:E1, 55:30'-55:32'). Within the plot, this mish mash of contrasting emotions and intent is explained as symptomatic of Lacie's mental breakdown and delicate emotional state due to the plummeting of her social status.

Within an analysis of the political role of her speech, it is possible to attribute a specific intent and role to both Lacie's condemnation, as laying bare the inconsistencies of the system, and her expressions of attachment to the system, which can be understood as Lacie's reiteration of her own belonging to the system, a condition necessary to the destitutive act. As affirmed by Agamben, "the destitution of the-being-in-work of the work (of its energeia) cannot be carried out by another work, but only by a potentiality that remains as such and shows itself as such"(Agamben, 2014, p. 73).

It is in within framework that Lacie's reaffirmations of love and admiration towards Naomi should be understood: through her belonging to the system, Lacie is able to blow up its influence from within, constituting, in Agamben's words, the form of life that is constitutively

destituent; this term was used by Agamben to indicate the ability to destabilise a power by deactivating it, without the need to establish a new identity (Agamben, 2014, p. 72).

Given capitalism's tendency through biopolitics to incorporate external threats, the 'deposition' of capital can only be enacted by a subject internal to it, who can expose and put themselves into question together with the system. For Lacie to effectively contrast the system, the only possible way is from the inside. The aspects of Lacie's appearance and person that do not fit in with the technology's standards also achieve a new emancipatory role within the speech. Lacie's references to her larger than the ideal standard body goes from 'being not', not thin, not athletic, to 'as not' (or hōs mē, a term used by Agamben to indicate the revolutionary potential of not-being, when strategically used as a way to deactivate a power system (Agamben, 2014, p. 70)) a conscious, emancipated negativity which deposes the rating technology's regulation.

The key to the destitution of the law in this passage consists not in the destruction of the law, but through its deactivation, which can only be achieved by living 'as not', a concept which Agamben identifies in Paul's understanding of Christianity's relationship to the law ("those having wives may be as not having, and those weeping as not weeping, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not possessing, and those using the world as not using it up […]"). This strategic use of being as not encapsulates the strategic intention of Lacie's wedding speech, which, from its original intent of earning her points and popularity within the system, becomes a weapon to be used against the system. As Lacie arrives at the wedding venue, she notices a sign that warns a minimum 3.8 rating is required for entry; as a result, Lacie makes for the back end of the venue, where she is able to enter the building unseen.

Symbolically, the visual of the warning sign outside the wedding venue posits Lacie within a realm of non-being, now dropped to a score of 1.1, within a congregation of 'high

fours'. The negation implied by Lacie 'not being' points within the narrative to a certain remainder which constitutes itself, an element of human imperfection. The ending reflects a view which is perhaps less nihilistic than Liam's subtraction in 'The Entire History of You', offering an affirmative element which is nonetheless inextricable from the subtractive element. Whilst due to the extraction of the grain Liam ends up blind, Lacie can instead see. The extraction of the lenses which allow inclusion within the rating system allows Lacie to see a world without filters, more imperfect and, crucially more authentic; the flawed nature of reality is represented by the specks of dust floating in the air that Lacy catches sight on and is moved to tears by. Based on this authenticity, which is itself inseparable from the negation, the aspect of 'not being', the possibility of a human interaction based on emancipation is contained in the exchange between Lacie and a man locked into the cell next to her. In contrast with all of Lacie's previous interactions, which were characterised by inauthenticity, the conversation in these final scenes is instead characterised by brutal honesty, consisting in the exchange of a series of insults.

This ending seems to point to the possibility of a subtraction which is in itself inseparable from the affirmation of an alternative form of life, validating the possibility that, as put by Pellizzoni, 'subtraction is itself assertion' (Pellizzoni, 2021, p. 366). The insults which Lacie and her newfound ally exchange consist in profanation, in Agamben's sense of 'returning (something) to the free use of men' (2007, p. 73). Lacie's use of speech, her expressiveness, up to this moment had always been at the service of the rating system: feelings of frustration, anger, disagreement had not been expressed, but stifled, and her interactions with others characterised by a calculated kindness. Through the expression of their dislike for each other, hence, the two characters are reclaiming the ability to use language outside of the use it is assigned within the system.

"BLUE THERMOS IS COFFEE, RED'S WHISKEY, HELP YOURSELF": CONCLUSION.

The dystopian character of *Black Mirror* conveys a certain pessimism when it comes to its reflections on the prospect of subjective emancipation from the negative effects of technology. The series depicts individual liberation from the subliminal hold of technology as a difficult and often traumatic process. This can be viewed as the manifestation of the contemporary awareness that through technology capital has enacted a derealisation, a separation of the mind from the capabilities of the body. this entails, firstly, viewing liberation not as an absolute necessity but as a possibility (Berardi, 2019, p. 9). As emerges in the episodes 'Fifteen Million Merits' (S1:E2), 'The Entire History of You' (S1:E3), and 'Nosedive' (S3:E1), emancipation from the alienating effects of technology is in no way certain, however, certain aspects within the post-Fordist subjectivity might allow an opening into capital's 'extinction of the possible'.

The episodes analysed, in this sense, embody a viewpoint on 'what not to do', what to do', and 'where to look for change', thus reflecting a certain perspective with regards to societal change. The character of Bing in 'Fifteen Million Merits' embodies the pitfalls of affirmative action, the championing of political alternatives which, when not rooted in an attempt to tackle the mechanisms through which capitalism embeds itself within the subject's psyche, inevitably leads to failure. The character of Liam, instead, is able through his realisation that, within capitalism, the subject is "always duped, especially when we believe we are not" (Vighi, 2010, p. 97), and that only through an inevitably traumatic act of subtraction (his gouging of the grain) is it possible to find liberation. The character of Lacie

reflects what the cultural implications of subtraction to capital might entail, pointing to a new form of existence embodied within the maxim: 'only slowness is fast' (Berardi, 2011, p. 165).

These episodes can be understood as fragments of 'futurability', defined by Berardi as inscriptions of possible futures immanent within present subjectivity (2019, p. 13). Understanding the failure of Bing's enthusiastic but amateurish rebellion against the reification enacted by mediatised capitalism, Liam's traumatic extracting of the grain as only possible remedy for his attachment, and Lacie's espousal of her being 'not' in order to attain freedom, allows us to understand the immanence of the future whilst avoiding the pitfalls of determinism.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction, I set out the central aim of this thesis as an investigation of the post-Fordist subject as reflected in a selection of popular science-fiction films and series, focusing on its links to post-Fordist production within the narratives. I proposed to analyse the aspects of technology and immaterial production, commodification, antagonism, and dissent, in an attempt to form a well-rounded analysis which could be placed within a wider cognitive mapping of existence within contemporary capitalism. The uniqueness of my analysis lies in its materialist approach and in its focus on how contemporary production is reflected in the works, in contrast with previous research, which in most part has focused on philosophical, ontological, and ethical questions, or, within Marxist theory-based analysis, has focused on the issue of Foucauldian power. My approach has allowed a new insight into the strong connections between existence, subjectivity and production reflected in the narratives, revealing depictions of how the systems portrayed which exploits the soul as a 'web of attractions, inclinations and taste'. My conclusions are as follows.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, SCI-FI'S GENERAL INTELLECT.

As emerges from my analysis, the frequent depictions of cookies, artificial intelligence and bioengineered androids extant in the science-fiction narratives presented, and their exploitation within the narratives, do not simply denote a concern with the issue of ontologically defining human nature, which is predominantly explored within existing

research, but, rather, express a deep concern with the current capitalist exploitation of human cognitive abilities, which within my analysis I have pinpointed as the general intellect or 'the soul at work' (Berardi, 2009a). In this sense, any questions that might be posited regarding the definition of a human essence within the narratives, whether ontological or ethical, remain idealisations which side-step the lens of social relations.

In Marx's words, '[But] the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations' (Marx, 1998, p. 570): any analysis that stops at an existentialist interpretations centred on questions of ethicality (Canca and Ilhe in Irwin and Johnson, 2020), or philosophy and the possibility of an AI consciousness (Gamez and Johnson in Irwin and Johnson, 2020) are missing out on crucial reflections concerning our social and historical moment. According to my materialist interpretation based on post-workerist theory, the plots' frequent depiction of characters being trapped or held captive through technology are to be understood not as a questioning of human ethicality towards machines, but as a subliminal but deep-seated worry that the very core of humanity has been engulfed and alienated by capitalist exploitation.

In the first chapter, I focused on of post-Fordism as 'the factory of unhappiness', a type of production which, due to its exploitation of 'the soul' (in Berardi's words' (Berardi, 2009a)) causes malaise and alienation in greater measure than past systems of production, which stopped at physical exploitation. The narratives trace the subject's captivity or unfreedom to production and marketing requirements, thus linking the state of subjugation to capitalism, which enacts it through the technology. My analysis of the *Black Mirror* episodes 'Rachel Jack and Ashley Too' and 'White Christmas' has pinpointed instances of post-Fordist capital's appropriation of the general intellect.

Emerging from my analysis, however, is an intellect which goes beyond the classical notion of technical expertise and knowledge, reflecting a wide range of faculties: Ashley's

ability to create songs and interact with her fans becomes a source of value for capital (personified in the antagonistic character of her aunt and manager), crystalised in the Ashley Too doll, created through the cloning of Ashley's consciousness, to which a limiter is applied in order to avoid rebelliousness; within White Christmas, Greta's personal preferences, such as the way she prefers toast, are marketed and objectified through the cookie technology, which is a copy of her consciousness, once again trapped and exploited through technology, via the cookie household appliance. As I have described, these instances of cloned consciousness respond to capital's exploitation of the communicative, affective, creative, and intellectual seat of humanity.

The narratives analysed reflect the breadth and variety in which the soul is exploited within contemporary capitalism. Whilst within my analysis, I have focused on a few example, there is infinite scope for the analysis of how many other series and films depict the exploitation of the soul. One other series that I feel would benefit from further analysis is *Electric Dreams*, an anthology based on Philip K. Dick's literary works which is also focused on technology and explores dystopian themes.

SCIENCE-FICTION NARRATIVE AS A PORTRAIT OF THE POST-FORDIST SUBJECT.

The materialist method based on post-workerist theory has allowed me to pinpoint the subjective composition the post-Fordist subject (or, as defined by Virno, emotional tonalities), directly linked to production, which has so far been absent from available interpretations, thus offering new insights into the series' and films' characters, which in turn can help understand subjectivity today as reflected in the narratives. For instance, the cynicism, opportunism, and distinct type of voracious curiosity characterising *Altered Carbon*'s protagonist, Takeshi

Kovacs, acquire a much deeper understanding through my analysis, which points to how these traits are by no means coincidental, or purely conventions of the genre, but constitute representations of the post-Fordist interactions with the world.

The opportunism, flexibility, and adaptability of replicants, point to a connection between the requirements of production and that which Virno defines as the emotional situation of the post-Fordist subject (2004). I understand these symbolisations to be not a conscious representation of the post-Fordist subject, but the inevitable emergence within popular narrative of the contemporary *weltanschauung*, which is inextricably tied to production: many individuals who are forced to partake in a system offering instability, precarity and everchanging circumstances will see themselves reflected in Kovacs and other characters analysed; Whilst the characters that I have pinpointed as exemplifying these traits (particularly, in *Altered Carbon*, detective Takeshi Kovacs, as a cynical sleuth on a mission to find the truth and vindicate the death of Mary Lou Henchy, personifies the cynicism, opportunism, flexibility, restlessness and curiosity which, according to Virno, characterise the post-Fordist subject), there is scope to further the analysis and find more representations of the 'emotional tonalities' of contemporary subjectivity in other narratives.

COMMODIFICATION AS A CONCRETE SOURCE OF INAUTHENTICITY.

Whilst as a theme, this has long characterised science fiction, my analysis has uncovered, beneath the surface questioning of authenticity as an ontological condition, a concern with inauthenticity a quality of individualism and the reification of existence tied to neoliberalism and consumerism. This is particularly true within the films and series depictions of relationships, which are often depicted as fighting against or grappling with a sense of

inauthenticity; within my analysis I have linked this awareness to the post-Fordist commodification of experience, which within the narratives is reflected in the use of technology to create VR realities, as well as in the creation of holographic, AI and android companions that meet the human need for companionship. In common, these depictions present a preoccupation with the loss of a certain quality within existence, that might be understood as imperfection or negativity. For instance, the utopia in 'San Junipero' constitutes a warning against the commodification (somewhere where 'nothing matters'), or an awareness and unease of the detachment from negativity and, thus, reality, often depicted as pathological.

This implies that an analysis of contemporary science-fiction benefits from a close analysis of how the evolution of the commodity form in post-Fordism are reflected in the narratives, allowing us to understand (in)authenticity not simply as an ontological question, but as a social issue. Considering the predicted advance of VR in the future in all areas of life, questions surrounding the ethicality of VR are directly tied to the ideology and social structures implementing it. The value of my analysis lies in its connection between the depiction of VR realms (as in 'San Junipero') and uses of technology to fulfil the characters' need for human connections and relationships (as in the case of the holographic Joi in *Blade Runner 2049*, the Ash replica in 'Be Right Back', and the dating app in 'Hang the DJ'), present in the narratives to the contemporary expansion of commodity fetishism, which emerges from the narratives as encompassing existence in its entirety.

THE PERSISTENCE OF ANTAGONISM.

The application of post-workerist theory has allowed me to present reflections of the characters as antagonistic figure in and against capital. This has particularly emerged in my analysis of the replicant in the *Blade Runner* films, a figure which within post-modernist readings has been robbed of its revolutionary character. Post-modernist readings have in fact tended to depict the replicant as a figure lacking history reflecting the 'human nothingness' of postmodernism. In this sense, my analysis rehabilitates the character, understanding it, in line with the workerist Copernican revolution (by which the worker's intellect is understood to be the source of capital's development), as rich personifications of the post-Fordist subject as possessor of intellect, thus capable of emancipation. This interpretation allows for an understanding of both the characterisations of replicants as 'more human than human', interpreting this 'excess' of humanity as the Achille's heel of the system, which both relies on it, given its role within production, and fears it, given its liberating potential.

By applying Deleuze and Guattari's theory of desire as production, within the framework pf post-Fordism and its reliance on intellect, the figure of the envoy in *Altered Carbon* has also been revealed as a reflection of together with the envoy, as antagonist, pinpointing these figures as symbolisations of the system's reliance on an antagonistic intellect. The concept of limits, those applied by capitalism, and the envoy and replicant's rejection of these limits, is an important narrative element which reinforces the post-Fordist understanding of the envoy and replicants as vivid and dynamic representations of an intellect which does not abide by the limits imposed by capital. This understanding of the antagonistic

post-Fordist subjectivity brings new relevance to interpretations of the replicant and the envoy, which acquire a heroic status in the fight against an exploitative system.

These interpretations offer a rehabilitation of the notion of antagonism and class conflict, a notion which Jameson described as unfairly discredited by postmodernism (1988, pp. 353-354), pointing to an antagonism that constitutes the inevitable result of a system based on exploitation and presents vivid representation of what antagonism might look like today. Within my analysis, I have paired the post-workerist analysis of intellect as the centre of value production with schizoanalysis allows for an understanding of antagonism as rooted in production but also ontologically definable as the end result of the neoliberal's reliance on desire as a productive (and destructive) force.

These depictions and the degree of emancipatory capability of the general intellect within a system of production that is fully reliant on it, nevertheless, need to be weighed in against contemporary capitalism's increasing ability to circumvent dissent by biopolitically manufacturing compliance. Whilst certain representations, such as the envoy rebellion in *Altered Carbon*, bear relevance to Virno's and Hardt and Negri's concept of the *multitude* as a force in and against capital, these representations tend to be vaguely defined in terms of composition (when it comes to the composition of the envoys, the narrative does not appear to give much depth to the individual members). This is partly due to the fact that the definition of the multitude, particularly within Hardt and Negri's interpretation, is vague in terms of its composition (as also affirmed by Fuchs (2011)). I suggest further research should focus on defining the composition of the *multitude* and researching its symbolisations in other works of science-fiction.

THE RE-SET BUTTON. EXHAUSTION AS REVOLUTIONARY ACTION.

As explained in the introduction my stimulus for this thesis has been the need to find a utopian impulse: the potential seeds for an alternative form of consciousness, and an alternative form of existence within the films and series. Within the fourth chapter, I have pinpointed instances of successful and unsuccessful dissent reflected within the narratives, finding on the one hand a disillusionment with classic political action as the affirmation of an alternative, and, on the other hand, some interesting depictions of subtraction point to this as a viable politics of dissent.

I have identified an instance of affirmative action within the episode 'Fifteen Million Merits', in which the protagonist Bing espouses Abi's song as an expression of authenticity and creativity against the system that churns commodified pop acts. My focus on capital's ability to subsume dissent, rooted in the post-workerist understanding of how post-Fordist production integrates consciousness, language and meaning, has allowed me to offer a more measured verdict on Bing's resistance, compared to interpretations such as Byron and Blake's (in Irwin and Johnson, 2020, p. 27) that see value in his attempt despite its failure. Bing's failure to initiate effective change reflects the fundamental disillusionment characterising contemporary consciousness with the affirmation of political alternatives.

Emerging from narratives such as 'The Entire History of You', in which protagonist Liam, whilst fully aware of the destructiveness of the grain (a technology which reifies memories) is, despite his best attempts, unable to break free from its influence. Liam emerges as an example of how subjectivity today is overpowered by a production that appropriates the mind, language, and creativity, which turns dissent into a form of unconscious attachment.

Liam's realisation of his unconscious attachment has functioned within my analysis as the missing link between Bing's failed attempt at revolution in 'Fifteen Million Merits', and Lacie's 'accidental' liberation in 'Nosedive'. If subtraction is revealed in the narratives as a stepping stone to liberation, exhaustion is reflected as the likely site from which liberation might occur.

MY RESEARCH WITHIN A WIDER COGNITIVE MAP.

My analysis has provided a contribution to a cognitive mapping of contemporary subjectivity in several ways: by recognising the post-Fordist subject as reflected within the narratives and identifying those emotional traits and characteristics that personify them; by revealing the antagonism implicit within capitalist production as an essential element of the science fiction narratives analysed; by recognising within the narratives representations of exploitation and estrangement, attempts at emancipation and the possibility of a new consciousness emerging, this latter responding to impulse which gives the narrative their utopian value. I do, however, believe my research should not be understood as completed, but as part of a much wider scope of analysis. My hope is that it will stimulate more materialist contributions to the analysis of science-fiction, which will form part of a new tendency.

There is a vast number of ways in which a materialist method can be applied within the analysis of science-fiction, a few of which are: in-depth analysis of the concept of the multitude, its composition, and various reflections within science-fiction; the analysis of the role of debt and indebtedness; the analysis of the role of women and feminised work within post-Fordism. My plan for future research is to focus on some of these areas, in order to further the analysis of post-Fordism within science-fiction.

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