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# Introduction

Science fiction shows the transformation into the posthuman as the horrific harbinger of the long twilight and decline of the human species. … science fiction expresses a technophobic fear of losing our human identity, our freedom, our emotions, our values, and our lives to machines. Like a virus, technology autonomously insinuates itself into human life and, to ensure its survival and dominance, malignantly manipulates the minds and behavior of humans (Dinello: 2005: 2)

This paper is centralized around Charlie Brooker’s science fictional *Black Mirror* (2011-), where the series, like much earlier and other science fiction, takes a long hard look at contemporary society and projects our current tendencies and involvement with technology into a rather dark depiction of a possible future. Within this framework, the series functions as the qualitative material of analysis in its representation of contemporary thoughts, theories and critiques of postmodernism, capitalism expansion, virtual reality and cybernetic advancement into society. It will be the object of this paper to clarify and discuss the underlying thoughts and concepts represented in *Black Mirror* in relation to the impact of technology on present-day human life.

*Black Mirror* offers a much needed critical counterpart on a society that has largely accepted and integrated newer technology as beneficial and helpful. Today, about 87% of Americans use the Internet, 99% with an income over 75,000 dollars, where 90% claim it has been a good thing for them and 76% claim it has been good for society (Fox & Raine, 2014). Furthermore, adult cell phone ownership has increased to 90% and smart phones to 58%, where 68% use their phone to connect to the Internet (Fox & Raine, 2014). Digital technology is viewed as increasingly fundamental to its users as 46% have claimed that the Internet would be *very hard* to give up. A close second is the cell phone with 44% and television is ranked third with 35% (Fox & Raine, 2014). This survey shows an increasingly dependence and trust to newer technologies such as the World Wide Web and cell phones, while television is losing some of its former stature. Nevertheless, the survey highlights an uncritical appeal of the technology and that mass audiences have accepted not only its usage, but also the essence of technology as an integral part of life.

As Scott Bukatman notes in his book *Terminal Identity* (1993) has technology become part of everyday life; even to such an extent that the lines between real and virtual has become blurred or altogether distinguished. Currently residing in the technological high-era where commodities like the mobile phone, computer and television – inanimate objects – have become intrinsic parts of contemporary human nature and identity, *Black Mirror* offers valid critique and thought provoking ideas of the how technology not only can be used, or misused, but also how it covertly affect our lives.

It has become increasingly difficult to separate the human from the technological, and this is true rhetorically and phenomenologically. Within the metaphors and fictions of postmodern discourse, much is at stake, as electronic technology seems to rise, unbidden, to pose a set of crucial ontological questions regarding the status and *power* of the human. (Bukatman, 1993: 2)

In the words of William Gibson, or rather his protagonist Case form *Neuromance*r (1984), have our mouths been filled with the aching taste of blue; perhaps the taste of the machine, the taste of technology (cited in Roberts, 2000: 180). Faith in technology and science is in *Black Mirror* not given the same opportunistic and positive attitude that resigns sovereign in contemporary society; but often addressed in science fiction. McCaffery (1991) states that science fiction has always been about the impact of technology; but technology itself has changed – times have changed and science is no longer safely “enshrined – and confined – in an ivory tower” (p. 346). He suggests, in relation to elaborating cyberpunk and current sci-fi, that “(…) in a world of bad faith, where the real and the true are superseded by simulacra and the hyperreal, perhaps the only hope is in representing that bad faith appropriately” (McCaffery, 1991: 193). What he suggests is that we have reached a saturation point in technology, and its ramifications on society, when negative, should not be averted, ignored or repressed but represented in equal terms as *Black Mirror* in large part strive to do. I will subsequently briefly elaborate upon the history of science fiction and important literary contributions to the genre along with the mindset of technology’s inclusion and its role in society throughout historical periods.

### Early Demeanor of Technology and Science

(…) defining science fiction often proves arduous for the reasons that its generic boundaries are fluid and that, as a result, scientific and technological motifs are frequently interwoven with themes and issues that are not overtly science-fictional (Cavallaro, 2000: 7).

The current attitude of science fiction is often of the critical and suspicious nature; a matter that not always transfer to field of science and technology. Dating back as far as the 17th century, the philosophical thought of Descartes was pro-technological as he described humans and the physical world in mechanical terms. He argued that:” (…) the mind or soul is distinct from the body, and that the mind is mankinds divine endowment” (Dinello, 2005: 22). Descartes’ philosophical thinking was also favored by Francis Bacon’s utopian work *New Atlantis* (1627), which embraced technological development and invested in the positive impact of technology and the faith of progress (ibid: 9). This positive reflection of humankind and its inventions would further what Jacques Ellul in his book, *The Technological Society,* notes as “the optimistic atmosphere of the eighteenth century ...created a climate favorable to the rise of technical applications” (Cited in Dinello, 2005: 9); the belief towards science, technology and progress was idealistic and hopeful.

Underpinning the rise of the machine was the ascent of science and the quasi-religious myth of progress. The seventeenth-century mechanistic philosophy of René Descartes and the empirical method of Francis Bacon combined to produce scientific rationale and methods that intertwined with religious, political, and utopian thinking (ibid: 9)

This positive attitude resulted in reinforcing scientists other researches that only good could come of their work. The potential “dark side” of industrial revolution and technology was first made visible to the public by the horrors of World War I, which in turn spawned many frightening anti-science visions (ibid: 10).

### The Beginning of Science Fiction

The deterioration of the positive reputation of technology did not fully materialize before the 20th century mechanized horrors of World War I; but origins of extensive technophobia can be found much earlier in the myths and folklore about artificial humans.

The fantasy of powerful machines that catered to humans and controlled an unruly natural world goes back to the origins of our culture. In ancient myth, Pygmalion carved in ivory the likeness of the goddess Aphrodite, then fell in love with the statue. The goddess—flattered by the facsimile—brought her to life as the ideal woman Galatea. Homer’s Iliad tells of the Greek god of technology, Hephaestus, who forges from bronze a gigantic metallic humanoid named Talos that ceaselessly patrols the shores of Crete, fighting off enemy ships with rocks. This is an early vision of a technological weapon (ibid: 37).

Dating back to 1818, Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*, arguably the best known pre-cursor of modern science fiction, raised critical awareness concerning technology and the possible hazardous and grim implications that the name of progress could also entail. The novel pointed at man-made machinery and presents a compelling anti-science exposition that today is still regarded as a quintessential parable of lurking peril created by technology and thoughtless scientists (ibid: 41). The novel’s timelessness and longevity is its focus both “on the question of what constitutes humanity in a world that both promises opportunities for the enhancement of human powers via science and dehumanizes people through technology” (Cavallaro, 2000: 2). Its classic nature also “(…) lies in its power to evoke primal fears and anxieties concerning childbirth, parenting, birth defects, human identity, and the limits of pursuing knowledge” (Dinello, 2005: 43).The monster in *Frankenstein,* a variation of the theme non-human, are used to voice fears and anxieties about the *others*; the deviation in society. However, “(…) the novel shows that true monstrosity does not lie with the creature’s repulsive appearance but with power structures and institutions capable of transforming an initially benevolent being into an evil-doer” (Cavallaro, 2002: 3).

Furthermore, *Frankenstein “*(…) provided the literary prototype of another science fiction icon—the mad scientist, a figure intimately connected with the creation of evil artificial humans” (Dinello, 2005: 40). The modern myth of the mad scientist, sadistic doctors and self-deluded researchers took shape over the course of the 19th century.

In a series of novels suggesting that the technological future might be a hell rather than a heaven. The Time Machine (1895), The Island of Dr. Moreau (1896), and When the Sleeper Awakes (1899) exerted a powerful influence on twentieth century dystopian science fiction. In The Time Machine Wells envisioned a posthuman evolution into two corrupted species: above ground, the Eloi—frail, docile, and dumb little creatures; and below ground, the Morlocks—ape-like, aggressive, and dumb beasts. Science has subjugated nature, but reliance on technology has decayed human vitality to such an extent that posthumans have become dependent, degenerate, or subservient—‘‘humanity upon the wane (Dinello, 2005: 43).

H.G. Wells, a dystopian writer turned utopian, and the author of the three before mentioned works is another important precursor to contemporary science fiction. Before he wrote about how the world would be run by benevolent superior techno-scientists, using technology to manufacture a perfect future, Wells wrote about how scientific experimentation on humans in the name of progress, and how humanity would not be empowered or enhanced by technology, but subjugated and subdued by it. Wells work, set in fantasy frame of reference, “articulated uncompromising ways deep-seated anxieties about cultural degeneration, the confusion of traditional boundaries, the potentially destructive consequences of technological progress and, above all, the erosion of Victorian certitudes in a declining imperial culture” (Cavallaro, 2000: 3).

### The Machine Age of Science Fiction

The mechanized devastation of World War I hastened the demise of techno-utopianism, making it look like a delusional pipe dream. Machines in the form of airplanes and tractors improved life, but as bombers and tanks they destroyed it. Chemicals could be designed to cure sickness or to create it. The Mechanical regulated man. “What the Machine Age brought, in all aspects of modern technological culture, was a new dominance of the machine that effectively *replaced* the human (Denillo, 2005: 49).

The Machine Age, labeled by J.P. Tolette, is the pre-computer, pre-nuclear period from World War I to the start of World War II. E.M. Forster’s *The Machine Stops* (1909) delivered the first all-out dystopian view of a techno-world, where humans are enslaved and highly dependent on an omnipotent machine. The machine has, in the words of the son Kuno, “(…) blurred every human relation and narrowed down love to a carnal act, it has paralyzed our bodies and our wills and now it compels us to worship it” (ibid: 49). The vast majority of humans in the short story have become so dependent on the machine that no aspect of their life can be imagined without it and when, in an apocalyptic description, the machine inevitably deteriorates and breaks down at the end, the humans are left concluding that they can do little to save themselves from their imminent downfall.

Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927) is another model example of the ‘Machine Age’s’ fascination with the liberation qualities of technology and the cost of such. In faithful conformity to Marxist classification of the dominated proletariat *Metropolis* describes a class society where human slaves – the working-class – live underground and run the dangerous machines, which enrich and sustain the ruling class elites that live in prosperity above ground. The revolution by the workers in the film is aided by a mechanical copy of Maria, a saint-like mother Teresa of the Industrial Age, who, in the capitalist interest to stranglehold the workers completely, has malfunctioned and inspired rebellion and destruction of the machines. In a craze, the workers revolt and leave the children behind to destroy their oppressors, not knowing that the machines they seek to destroy paradoxically also runs the city, and holds back the floodwaters from their underground homes. Believing that the workers have killed their own children in their rebellion, they turn to the machine Maria, unaware of her mechanistic interior, burning her alive. “The robot’s human face melts off, exposing the mechanical visage underneath and providing a powerful image of technological power mocking the human for being so easily seduced by its attractive packaging, its seemingly human features” (ibid: 51). In the films concluding moments, the workers have been outwitted and homogenized while status quo is maintained, and the corporate elite seem to have learned a lesson in Gramsci-Marxist thought of hegemony; namely “that worker obedience is best accomplished through the illusion of reconciliation and compromise” (ibid: 52). In *Metropolis*, the machine-controlled society is displayed as heaven for the wealthy corporate elite and a futuristic hell for others.

### New Wave Science Fiction

The loss of human identity and the alienation of self from both itself and the social bearings in which a sense of reality is secured are presented in the threatening shapes of increasingly dehumanized environments, machinic doubles and violent, psychotic fragmentation (Cavallaro, 2000: 6)

By the 1950s, science fiction became increasingly interested with the impact of technology on everyday lives and the fate of planet Earth. As Cavallaro notes: “A particularly important development was the New Wave, a phase associated with authors such Brian Aldiss and J.G. Ballard and with the British publication *New Worlds* (1946-70)” (ibid: 5).The focal point of New Wave was topics like urban overpopulation, environmental decay and the relationship between technology, sexuality, crime and drug addiction. It offers journeys into the inner rather than outer, while little difference is offered between the two. As such, the intermingling of reality with fantasy conveys that speculative fiction should not be seen as an escape from reality “but rather a means of sharpening people’s awareness of this reality by defamiliarizing it through fantasy” (ibid: 5).

New technology was not liberating, was not solving problems, but instead alienated the individual and led to a new sense of estrangement: future shock… There was a real sense that there were invisible forces at work, that the game of life was rigged – and that entropy, chaos and disaster would always win (Butler, 2012: 37).

Likewise was pessimism about the world expressed by this new wave of SF writers and they were in great part both anti-technological and anti-power focused, believing that not all problems could be solved; even through science. The assassination of President Kennedy – the man who promised to put a man on the moon – and the Apollo moon landings were seen as the coming age of SF and it should have displayed how far human capacity could be carried by new science and technology; and to some extend it did. But the motives for landing on the moon were not pure – there can be only one maiden voyage – and it showed the often underlying distrusting and cynical nature of humankind and its usage of technology (ibid: 37).

### Postmodern Science Fiction

Contemporary science fiction or reflections of the near-future have a critical aspersion towards technology. Like some of its predecessors are the present-day authors engaging in topics regarding questions of human values, identity and what makes mankind *human* in the face of new technological inventions. As Bukatman notes (1993) does ”(…) there exists the pervasive recognition that a new and decentered spatiality has arisen that exists parallel to, but outside of, the geographic topography of experiential reality” and that is “(…) whether Baudrillard calls it *telematic culture,* or science fiction writers call it the *Web, the Net, the Grid, the Matrix,* or, most pervasively, *cyberspace”* (p.105). Furthermore, as Cavallaro (2000) noted about the cyberpunk writers, which still holds true of the current authors of science fiction today, is that these “(…) writers and artists actually witnessed the birth and growth of technologies that earlier generations of science-fiction could only fantasize or speculate about (p. 19). Immersed in this digitized culture, it is perhaps not surprisingly that many fictional works of the 80s and 90s focus on how the world, both ontological and phenomenological, have been transformed by technological progress such as virtual reality and cyberspace.

Such technological systems and artifacts that people can interface with (physically and imaginatively) or that can recreate experiences and “realize” desires, illusions and memories have created vast new “areas” of sensory experience with their own spatial and temporal coordinates, their own personal and metaphysical dimensions. These new realms of experience – theorized by Guy Debord’s “Society of the Spectacle,” Baudrillard’s “precession of simulacra,” and Cook and Kroker’s “hyperreality,” and metaphorized perhaps most vividly by Gibson’s “cyberspace” – have become integrated so successfully into the daily textures of our lives that they often seem more “real” to us than the presumably more “substantial,” “natural” aspects. Indeed, the reproduced and simulated realities, whose objective forms serve as a disguise for their subjective content, have begun subtly to actually *displace* the “real,” rendering it superfluous (McCaffery, 1991: 6)

The film *Tron* (1982), one of two significant sci-fi films of 1982, tries to visualize this hyperreality in the form of the inside space of a computer; also referred to as cyberspace. The plot of *Tron* features a rebellious computer program designer by the name of Kevin Flynn who becomes trapped in cyberspace when the corporate Master Control Program uses new technology to transform his human form, literally bit by bit, into a digital embodiment that exists in this virtual universe. In cyberspace, Flynn, and other programs inadherent to comply with their human master, are forced to battle against each other in various forms of gladiatorial combat, all at the risk of destruction, or de-rezzing while searching for a way to overthrow the MCP (Wood & Smith, 2005: 203). As Dinello (2005) states was *Tron* “(…) the first movie to acknowledge the growing popularity of videogames and incorporate their aesthetic into production values. The cyberspace chases – with futuristic tanks and sleek, smooth ‘light cycle cars’ – occur within colorful, three dimensional lattices extending out into a black void” (p. 157). Thematically *Tron* is both a story of individual versus corporation and man versus machine. The former is symbolized by the workstations at ENCOM – the corporate entity – where the employers work in small office compartments that visually extend infinitely. The chambers where the MCP holds the non-confirmative and rebellious computer programs are displayed in a similar way; the corporation exhibit totalitarianism through panoptical powers – the corporation controls everything (Bukatman, 1993: 216). The blurring of machine and human also occurs on multiple levels. The protagonist Flynn is digitized and thrown into cyberspace, but more importantly are computer programs said to possess the same emotions and functions as people; highlighted by the conversation between Flynn and Tron (Wood & Smith, 2005: 203-204).

Tron: If you ARE a user, then everything you've done has been according to a plan, r ight?

Kevin Flynn: Ha, ha, ha, you WISH! Well, you guys know what it's like. You just keep doing what it looks like you're supposed to be doing no matter how crazy it seems.

Tron: That's the way it is for programs, yes.

Kevin Flynn: I hate to disappoint you, pal, but that's the way it is for users, too.

Tron: Stranger and stranger... (ibid: 203-204)

Another 1982 film that takes up the subject of man versus machine – or android – is *Blade Runner*, a film based on Phillip K. Dick’s novel *Do Android Dream of Electric Sheep*? The film is set in futuristic Los Angeles present a near-future where replication of humans is now possible and they are manufactured as labor tools on off-earth colonies. The replicants, albeit more human than human, are staggered by a shortened life span of four years that renders them illegal on Earth, and a target for blade runners that must destroy, or ‘retire’ them. The film, in its neo-noir setting, focuses on a series of chases and close confrontations between Rick Deckard, the blade runner, who must retire a group of rampaging replicants. “As the movie settles into its inevitable struggle between the replicant and the Blade Runner, the plot careens toward an unexpected outcome: Perhaps Deckard himself is a replicant—the ultimate shadow identity” (Wood & Smith, 2005: 205). The film presents the idea of machines chasing machines in a world where most humans have lost their humanity, because memory and body – conventional constitutions of identity – have become mere subjects of commodfication.

The concept of humanity and the impending question of ‘what makes us human’ is what drive *Blade Runner*. An apparatus the blade runners have at their disposal is the Voight-Kampf test, which is designed to demonstrate levels of empathy, apparently the one emotion which is it believed androids cannot simulate. However, androids and their artificial intelligence can find ways to mimic empathy, and people that cannot empathize are not necessarily replicants as Deckard’s own inability to empathize with the replicants is often pointed out. The distinction between human and non-human is thus very hard to draw, as the ultimate human constitution – empathy – is continually problematized in epistemological fashion (Cavallaro, 2000: 13).

In extension to the question of empathy as the determining factor for humanity, *Blade Runner* shows that memories – in a posthuman world – not necessarily equals lived experiences or the possession of an individually unique past. Rachel, a replicant that has been implanted with the memories of another, does not know she is a replicant and takes the past memories as proof of her humanity. “The idea that memories may be simulated, revised and artificially implanted calls seriously into question the traditional western notion of mnemonic powers are a personal possession, that the pictures they conjure up are unique and that this uniqueness is the measure of our humanity” (ibid: 206). In essence, *Blade Runner* challenges the viewer to confront a world in which humans have been dwarfed and controlled by their own technology. A society where androids, a product of technological progress, and humans have blurred to the extent that none of the two can truly be considered human by our traditional standards (Wood & Smith; 2005: 206).

Another postmodern film that takes the concepts of virtual reality, simulacra and conventional perceptions of time and memory to its limits is *The Matrix (1999)*. The film is set in a dystopian future where humankind has been enslaved by machines and is now used as mere batteries for the sovereign machines continuous survival and dominance. All of humankind is stuck in a ‘matrix’ – a virtual reality shaped and controlled by the machines – created to subdue and lull humans into compliance in their digital prison (ibid: 207). Perceiving a neurophysiological and phenomenological experience indistinguishable to everyday material reality, the enslaved humans live out their lives unaware of the mental prison that is the matrix. As Dinello (2005) notes, “*The Matrix (1999)* expresses a fearful, anxious perspective on technology, its autonomous essence and its invisible, pervasive domination on our lives (p. 174). The matrix both highlights the notion of hyperreality by displaying very physical and violent confrontations among characters who are not ‘real’ people, but digital presentations of bodies lying on chairs hooked into the virtual reality (Cavallaro, 2000: 212). At the same time, the matrix and virtual reality, symbolizes present-day reality circa 1999 where we, like protagonist Thomas Anderson, are forced to work for our lives; and like him, we are in a sense slaves of the technological and capitalist information-system.

The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy. But when you’re inside, you look around, what do you see? Businessmen, teachers, lawyers, carpenters. The very minds of the people we are trying to save. But until we do, these are still a part of that system and that makes them our enemy. You have to understand, most of these people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inured, so hopelessly dependent on the system that they will fight to protect it (Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999)

We, the ‘unplugged’ people, are metaphorically described as being dependant on our current system; the system of multinational capitalism in the words of Jameson. We are not confined to a capsule drained for our electronic substance but “(…) we ignore how synthetic our existence has become as we increasingly spend time in artificial worlds of cyberspace. We seem to have lost control over our future. The system lulls us to sleep with images and gadgets produced by powerful corporations that saturate us with advertisements, engendering artificial needs and desires” (Dinello, 2005: 176). Like much other postmodern science fiction does *The Matrix* problematize the concept of reality by suggesting that our solid and material world may be nothing more than a technical illusion capable of mimicking human sensory (Cavallaro, 2000: 214). Confronted with this plausibility, the question whether or not all human experience can in fact be simulated by machines, rendering all human choices superfluous as they are already shaped by computer programs is asked time and time again. The underlying question of how an individual can act as if his or her choice matters remains partially unanswered (Wood & Smith, 2005: 208). As such, the film warns against surrendering to any sort of mechanical control as it could have dire implications for the status of humans.

Other works in similar fashion are *Videodrome (1983)* and *eXistenZ* *(1999)* that have refused to provide the solid security of a reality; virtual or material. They instead express a vision where fears of the increasing digitalization are highlighted and the cost is the diminishing of love, physical intimacy, social interaction and our self-awareness, as more and more of our life become mediated by computers and machines (Dinello, 2005: 179). Similarly does the much overlooked *Dark City (1998)* question to concept of conventional memory assessment, as we follow an alien race manipulate and swap the memories of a machine-built city in their search for an unexplained sickness.

### Thesis Question

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter has science fiction always been about the impact of technology, but like McCaffery notes has technology itself changed. Society and individuals have alike become increasingly interwoven with gadgets, cyberspace and the multitude of commodities constantly offered by a technologized culture. Charlie Brooker, in his usual satirical and black-comedy mindset, has taken up McCaffery’s request of “representing that bad faith appropriately”. The concept of technology and its impact on both individuals and society in the science fictional setting of *Black Mirror* is not “averted, ignored nor repressed”. Contemporary usage of new technologies such as social media, television and mobile phones where human interaction is increasingly mediated and identity traits are consumable lifestyles is to some extend exaggerated, pushed and projected to its limits in *Black Mirror;* not necessarily depicting where mankind is, but instead where we carelessly could be heading. Expanding on the above paragraphs, this project investigates the following thesis question:

How is technology in *Black Mirror* affecting both the environment and the characters in the technologized postmodern framework?

# Theory

The analysis of *Black Mirror* will depend on the theoretical framework of concepts like postmodernism, science fiction, virtual reality, cybernetics and identity; theories that were briefly mentioned in the introduction and the walkthrough of science fiction history. Fredric Jameson’s *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1991)* supplemented by books like *Terminal Identity (1993),* and *Storming the Reality Studio (1991)* will constitute the theory of postmodernism. The history and essence of science fiction will be elaborated by *Technophobia! (2005)* and *Science Fiction (2000*). Virtual reality and computerized simulations will partly be explained from an article written by Murray and Sixsmith (1999) about the corporeal body in virtual reality. Lastly, cybernetics and the concept of identity in a technologized society will be explained by various authors. The idea is that these different theories will complement each other in forming a unity that will be sufficient to analyze *Black Mirror* from an interesting and contemporary relevant standpoint.

The period of my primary texts are thus the postmodern age and the genre is confined to that of science fiction. Seeing as the thesis question relies on a question of “how”, the concepts of virtual reality and cybernetics are included as the former is a representation of the seemingly endless opportunities technology can offer, and the latter is a description of the human condition that these technological advancements can have on us. Lastly, identity is included as a way of describing the position of the subject, and self, in a continually fragmented postmodern world.

## Postmodernism

Capitalism, and the modern age, is a period in which, with the extinction of the sacred and the “spiritual,” the deep underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day; and it is clear that culture itself is one of those things whose fundamental materiality is now for us not merely evident but inescapable (Jameson, 1991: 67)

The postmodern have several functions in this paper. It is the product of the saturated movement of modernism; it is the product of a late capitalism; and lastly it is the culture that influences current cultural productions, the detailed functionality of these three categories will be chronologically discussed below. In good nature it is worth noticing, as Jameson has, that far from all cultural production today is “postmodern” in the broad sense. However, its elaboration is important for this paper’s analysis and therefore needs a comprehensive elaboration (Jameson, 1991: 6).

### Postmodernism as a Movement Away from Modernism

Modernism has established the terms for the emergence of a contemporary postmodern culture. A culture that draws much of its character from technological progress; an advancement that continually seems to be reshaping the world we inhabit, altering our culture and even modifying our very humanity (Dinello, 2005: 48). Postmodernism, as Jameson (1991) puts it, “no longer simply “quote”, as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate [science fiction or fantasy] in their very substance (p. 3). The creativity of modernism – its individual styles – cannot be matched; within modernism everything has already been invented. Modernism, both in terms of styles and use of discourses, has become saturated and it is now up to the postmodern artist to search for new ways to present the “unpresentable” (Edgar & Sedgwick, 2002: 118).

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without in or to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*. Hence the fact that work and text have the characters of an *event;* hence also, they always too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their *mise en oeuvre* always begins too soon. *Post modern* would be to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo)* (Appignanesi et. al, 1986: 5)

What this considerable quote demonstrates is the denial of “good form” – modernistic styles – according to aesthetic conventions and rules in relation to modernist discourses. Furthermore, the quote complicates the concept of history or past precisely because the concept is itself modified. It is no longer possible to look for what once was, as the “organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project (…) has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum” (McCaffery, 1991: 221). Our history and past, represented in the historical novel, can no longer represent the past; it is nothing but stereotypes and discourses about that past, literary conventions, represented in texts unavailable for contemporary usage; as Jameson (1991) puts it:

(…) the “prehistory” of a society bereft of all historicity, one whose own putative past is little more than a set of dusty spectacles. In faithful conformity to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as “referent” finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts (p.18)

The concept of poststructuralist linguistic theory, perhaps best represented by Jacques Derrida and his notion of “nothing left but texts”, should be understood in prolongation of theories that do not claim human history have not happened, but that our only link or passage to the knowledge of such history exists “only in text”. This theory further complicates the once-existing centered subject – that existed in the period of classical capitalism and the nuclear family – by suggesting that such a centered subject never originally existed, but was constituted by something like an ideological phantasm. The other thesis presented by Jameson (1991) is that such a centered subject has been dissolved in today’s world of organizational bureaucracy (p. 15). “(…) the decree to which the high-modernist conception of a unique style, along with the accompanying collective ideals of an artistic or political vanguard or avant-garde, themselves stand or fall along with that older notion (or experience) of the so-called centered subject” (ibid: 15). This implies that expression, feelings and emotions no longer has a self present to do the feeling; a society bereft of what Jameson dubs “the older anomie of the centered subject”, meaning that society provides little to no moral guidance. Jameson goes on to state that not all cultural products are altogether devoid of ‘substance’ or ‘feeling’, but rather that such products, and its accompanying feelings, are impersonal and tend to be dominated by “peculiar kind of euphoria”; perhaps best understood as its lack of interest and investment in the human, but instead in its own pleasing but insignificant hollowness (ibid: 16). The proposition is that of a postmodern society bereft of human values, of a centered subject to which emotion – the waning of affect – has disappeared and our “putative past” is reduced to a set of dusty spectacles, as Guy Debord so eloquently formulated it (McCaffery, 1991: 221).

“More interesting, and more problematical, are the ultimate attempts, through this new discourse, to lay siege either to our own present and immediate past or to a more distant history that escapes individual existential memory” (Jameson, 1991: 19). This provocative aspect of postmodernism raised by Jameson of how we will seek to “control” our present or immediate past in this postmodern world of texts is what science fiction – in its postmodern era – seeks to do. A cyberpunk and postmodern author, William Gibson, has already tried to embrace this efficacy of history and de-centered self, as he “(…) repeatedly problematizes time by interweaving past, present and future dimensions… ‘reality looks around itself’, as ‘each phase of value integrates into own apparatus the anterior apparatus as a phantom reference, a puppet or simulation reference’” (Cavallaro, 2000: 207-208).

Another often predominant and highly discussed topic, in distinguishing between modernism and postmodernism, is the diminishing of ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture that postmodernism has introduced. This feature is in general important, as modernism in large part depended on a distinction between high and low art, not only for its specificity but “(…) in part in the securing of a realm of authentic experience over against the surrounding environment of middle- and low-brow commercial culture” (Jameson, 1991: 63). Because this boundary is less important in relation to the larger part of the paper, I will adapt McCaffery’s notion, supplemented by other theorists, which is what “(…) is distinctive of postmodernism, then, is not the fact of ‘containment’ of high culture by mass culture, since that turns out to be universal of cultural history (…) but rather the technologically enhanced speed of the traffic in models between high and low strata of culture” (McCaffery, 1991: 311). Science fiction can be seen as a case in point, as the “’convergence’ or ‘cross-fertilization’ between recent science fiction and ‘serious’ or ‘mainstream’ postmodernist fiction” is often seen in contemporary sci-fi (ibid: 311). The cultural transition between low and high culture is thus more than a movement away from aesthetics and commercial culture in this paper, but a signifier of accelerated technological change and a universal de-centered subject (Bukatman, 1993: 7).

### Postmodernism as a Product of Late Capitalism

We have reached a point in history where the production of cultural commodities almost seems overwhelming and the consumption of these commodities occurs on a frequent daily basis. The pop art of Andy Warhol revolves around the concept of commodification; Campbell’s soup can or the bottles of Coca-Cola explicitly focus on the fetishism of commodities, or of a transition to late capital productions. “What has happened is that the aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally” (Jameson, 1991: 4) – human life, experience and emotion is transformed into products.

*The* feature of postmodernism was the challenge to the primacy of vision. Vision per se is unlikely to be challenged by a medium which relies so heavily upon it, but we can perhaps recognize one or two examples of challenges to the focus of vision which it has been suggested are characteristic of the ideology of television, namely that of the relay, direct, and direct to me. That these examples also seem to share certain features of what is regarded as postmodernism in the visual arts – that is, appropriation of imagery, the borrowing of the surfaces of historical styles, the breakdown of the lines between high art and mass culture – is, to say the least, intriguing (Appignanesi et. al, 1986: 52-53)

The world has undergone a significant restructuring as direct experience is replaced by mediated data-based simulations. The primacy of vision as a medium is perhaps best represented by television, or even more contemporary items such as computers, tablets or smart-phones, as commodities of post modernity and its image-system. The spectacle has become the ultimate commodity because it makes all other possible; advertisements generate conditions for consumption and hence the inevitable desire to consume those commodities. “The spectacle is infinitely self-generating; it stimulates the desire to consume (the only permissible participation in the social process), a desire continually displaced onto the next product and the next” (Bukatman, 1993: 37). But as Jameson notes (1991) “Such machines [television] are indeed machines of reproduction rather than of production, and they make very different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery of the futurist moment (p. 37). TV is thus the consumption machine of late capitalism equivalent to the production machines of the industrial age and functions as the essence of postmodern consumption in three major ways (McCaffery, 1991: 235).

(1). (…) it is the breakpoint where capital in its final and most advanced form as a spectral image begins to disappear into itself and becomes that which it always was: an empty and nihilistic sign-system of pure mediation and pure exchange which, having no energy of its own, adopts a scorched earth policy towards the missing social matter of society (ibid: 235)

TV functions as the anti-matter of society, separating and de-socializing its consumers in the process, sucking any living element of culture into its productions. Secondly (2), it is “(…) the serial unity of vicarious otherness which, Sartre predicted, would be the essential cultural text of society in radical decline” (ibid: 235-236). In its transformation of “older realities”, television images replicate the lives of others and allow us watch as voyeurs; but it does not simply replicate reality, it reinforces and intensifies it (Jameson, 1991: 46). The image-system of television and other visual commodities go inside and destroy consciousness; it functions as a gigantic and exteriorized nervous system, technologically amplifying our senses while playing processed forms of visual sensory experiences back to us (McCaffery, 1991: 236). Thirdly (3), “TV *functions as a consumption machine (most of all) because it is a life-style medium”*; lifestyle examples that are contextualized below.

The “superachievers” (…) upscale technocrats with a minimal social self and a maximal consumer self who define freedom within the limits of massorganizations… the “belongers”: the old class of middle North Americans who value, most of all in nostalgic form, the social qualities of friend and community… the “emulators” (…) bewildered and in the absence of their own sense of self-identity, hypersensitive to the big trend lines of contemporary culture as defined by media elites (ibid: 237)

TV thus functions in two dialectical ways. It is the manipulation of society by media elites, using the medium of spectacle to produce, and reproduce the universal commodity-exchange of image-systems. It is also the manipulation of media elites to conjure nine different life-styles, reference to Arnold Mitchell’s book, by baiting consumer with their own consumerist gullibility within the rationale of the economic imperative (ibid: 238). As Jameson (1991) has also noted, is it no longer the ideas of a ruling class that are dominant or hegemonic as it was in bourgeois society, instead “advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm” (p. 17). Baudrillard has also argued that hyperreality, TV being an example of such, serves definitive ideological purposes. “It is an illusion, yet its principal aim is to make us forget that this is the case. It constructs us as passive consumers of assorted false promises and manages to keep us in its thrall by making us forget that we are the world’s inmates rather than free agents” (Cavallaro, 2000: 212). It should be noted that Adorno and Horkheimer, as early as the 1950s, concluded similarly in their analysis of the American culture industry. Namely that the inevitably new that is offered, disguised of something slightly similar, always celebrates the deviation of the commodity, but never reveals the hollowness behind it all – which is always the economic imperative – and the commodities are always manifestations of the insipid; or what is worse, shameless conformist demeanors (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972: 35).

Television, in its emblematic form of an electronic image-system commodity, serves as the ideal model of the technological processed postmodern world and it is convenient that the culture of the simulacrum has entered into existence in a society where almost any exchange value has been generalized to the point where use value of commodities has vanished. “(…) a society of which Guy Debord has observed, in an extraordinary phrase, that in it “(…) the image has become the final form of commodity reification” (cited in Jameson, 1991: 18). TV remain at the breach between the decline of the now passé-age of sociology and the advance of a new postmodern world of mediated communication and relations. As such, “TV is at the borderline of a great paradigm-shift between the “death of society” (modernism with its representational logic) and the “triumph of an empty, signifying culture” (the “structural paradigm” of postmodernism)” (McCaffery, 1991: 231).

### Postmodernism as the Determiner of Cultural Productions

We live in a mass culture to which we do not simply submit. We take its images, its narratives, its formulations of desire, and measure them against our real experiences of a real world. At the same time we re-work and re-use them, in our convention and gossip, in our fantasies, in every aspect of our lives (Appignanesi et. al, 1986: 54)

What is argued by many theories, including in the quote one above, is that the postmodern world immerses us in a newfound way that changes our understanding of ontological ‘reality’ as we are presented with a new hyperreality. Modernism did begin to problematize the concept of the self, but was never really brought to fruition until postmodernism began to complicate the ontologies of worlds and its texts.

On some level, quantum mechanics represents an overturning, not just of Newtonian physics, but of Einsteinian spatiotemporality as well. Einstein is a paradigmatic modernist figure: principles of relativity were not predicated upon the denial of causality, but notions of absolute knowledge were disavowed because the position of the observer was relative to the thing observed… In the world of quantum physics, on the other hand, the observer fundamentally determines events. The universe is cast as a field of possibilities devoid of absolute causation (Bukatman, 1993: 173-174).

What Bukatman talks about is that the crisis of subjectivity is repositioned as an ontological (what does the world consists of) rather than as an epistemological (what can we know about the world). It is the replacement of the previous epistemological impulse that to some extend influenced the modernistic texts; texts organized around perception through shifting consciousness and unreliable narrators to show the relativity of knowledge. The influences in humanity, covered in the sub-chapter above, are so powerful and changing that the epistemological is replaced with an ontological imperative. “Knowledge is no longer emplaced as the structuring problematic; instead, Being is centered, as the status of the world and existence become defining issues. Postmodern fiction stages a dissolution of ontological boundaries, presenting a collision and shifting of worlds” (Bukatman, 1993: 162).

“New modes of experience have not yet fully arisen to ground and explain the subject within these new realities, although some postmodern textual practices represent remarkable attempts at such new mappings” (Bukatman, 1993: 164). The blurred interface between human and the spectacle, produced by new technology, is what constitutes these concerns and creates the possibility for a new ontological reality; resulting in the world losing some of its visibility, perceptibility and transparency. We are still on virgin territory, uncertain on the cultural and neurological implications of this causation.

(…) the proposition that meaning is not a one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified, between the materiality of language, between a word or a name, and its referent or concept. Meaning on the new view is generated by the movement from signifier to signifier. What we generally call the signified – the meaning or conceptual content of an utterance – is now rather to be seen as a meaning-effect, as that objective mirage of signification generated and projected by the relationship of signifiers among themselves (Jameson, 1991: 26)

In connection with Jameson’s statement of the relationship between signifier and signified has Baudrillard argued that in postmodern culture, commodities such as images and copies of our “putative past” – what he formulates the simulacra – does not merely imitate a pre-existing reality, but replaces reality altogether; simulation is thus our only access to any reality. Once we relied on signs to signify our reality, but signs no longer carry any parallel or correspondence to our physical ‘reality’. Instead, signs produce what he calls “hyperreality”, which is capable of creating a signifying culture, a never ending circle of copies and images – that has the capacity to engulf both bodies and minds because it neither looks nor feels unreal; if anything it feels more than real. A good stylistic example would be *Blade Runner’s* “more human than human” that was mentioned in the introduction. However, “In hyperreality, there is no reality behind the flux of codes that generate it. These codes, moreover, are not visible in themselves. We only see them in their simulated manifestations: clothes, furniture, weapons, popular icons and food, for example” (Cavallaro, 2000: 211). Hyperreality is thus both the product of our urge to replicate our consciousness and physical beings into images, words and symbols and at the same time it becomes this simulacrum of our culture that is supplanting us in our constant creation and re-creating of image-systems. A hyperreality that is “(…) literally taking over our physical space and our roles with admirable proficiency and without drawbacks of human error and waste, without the human emotions of love, anger, ambition and jealousy that jeopardize the efficiency and predictability of the capitalistic exchange (McCaffery, 1991: 15-16).

Summing up, postmodernism is a whole new culture of the image or simulacrum that speaks both with voices of repressed desire and anxiety about the uncharted waters of these new bewildering realities. Simultaneously are parallels made up by new terminal technologies that immerse the subject into virtual or new ontological realities that, at least in fiction, often promise and even produce a transcendence of the individual, but are also always a surrender of the individual (Bukatman, 1993: 329). Postmodernism is also the all-determining presence in newer productions as life becomes increasingly mediated back in form of simulated experiences by new and intriguing visual technologies.

## Science Fiction

A definition of science fiction will be seen as a way of ‘accepting’ certain aspects of the genre and demonstrating them as valuable in relation to the analytic part. This also means that certain aspects will be downplayed or not mentioned at all. However, the definition given and used of science fiction in this project is thus not absolute or representative of *all* science fiction, but accepted as a useful and needed premise of the genre by this paper.

Darko Suvin did in 1979 classify science fiction as “(…) a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (cited in Roberts, 2000: 7). The two main focuses of Suvin’s precise, yet open, definition of sci-fi are his notions of “estrangement” and “cognition”, which will be elaborated below, and his “imaginative framework”. He classifies SF as a cultural phenomenon that is exceptionally good at reflecting times of great cultural and technological change; which our present age is a good example. Science fiction thus has the possibility to open the minds of its readers into new ways of perception, new ways that challenge the status quo or the narrow minded.

Cognition, with its rational and logical implications, refers in Suvin’s terms to that aspect of SF that convinces us to try and understand, to fathom the foreign landscape of a science fiction work; the “imaginative framework” and SF novas that we are now subjects of. Estrangement, perhaps more commonly rendered as ‘alienation’, does in this context refer to that element of science fiction that we recognize as different, that which ‘estranges’ us from the well-known and mundane empirical reality we know. In Suvin’s assessment must any *good* sci-fi work include both cognition and estrangement. “If the SF text were entirely concerned with ‘estrangement’ then we would not be able to understand it; if it were entirely to do with ‘cognition’ then it would be scientific our documentary rather than science fiction” (ibid: 8). Science fiction thus needs to balance between a discourse of rational and logical implications, but it also has to present a framework alien to our own physical world. SF should be interested in things being different from the world we know, but not too far-fetched or illogical as this would make it merely escapist or irrelevant. The paramount aspect of sci-fi has to do with the proximity of the alienation from SF to our physical world. “(…) too removed and the SF text loses purchase, or becomes merely escapist; too close and it might as well be a conventional novel, it loses the force and penetration the novum can possess when it comes to providing newness of perspective” (ibid: 16).

This is to say that a piece of SF technology (…) provides a direct, material embodiment of alterity; and that it is exactly because our lives are already surrounded by so many instances of near-miraculous technology, by CD walkmans, by computer, by TV, or by mobile phones, that this novum speaks so directly to us. Technology is something with which we are simultaneously familiar and already estranged from; because we don’t really know how it works, or what the boffins are about to invent next (ibid: 147)

Many of the devices named above, also named a ‘novum’ or ‘novas’ in this context, are referred to as accepted novas in that they connect with a particular estranged version of our reality. We use these commodities and integrate them into our lives, but few of us understand or recognize (cognition) the potential implications that these alien (estranged) objects bring with them. The examples quoted above, expanded heavily since its conception, can be thrown in with classical examples of science fiction novas such as the spaceship – a ship that can do interstellar travel – or robots and clones, mechanical copies of us. The alterity is perhaps larger with a spaceship, but the idea of a more advanced form of shuttle transport is not illogical or irrational. The uses of such novas are also rationalized within the text itself and are what makes science fiction distinct from magic realism or pure fantasy (Roberts, 2005: 2)

These “direct and material embodiments” of estrangement functions as a kind of trigger; they alert us, the readers, that we cannot take things for granted, cannot assume that this work of fiction reproduces the world we inhabit. The embodiments urge the reader to reorient both expectations and assumptions; it is a door symbolizing through which we step into a different way of looking at things (Roberts, 2000: 20).

### Science Fiction as a Mode of Writing

Mixing equal measures of anger and bitter humor, technological know-how and formal inventiveness, postmodern SF should be seen as a breakthrough “realism” of our time. It is an art form that vividly represents the most salient features of our lives, as these are being transformed and redefined by technology. It also seems to empower us by providing a cognitive mapping that can help situate us in a brave new postmodern world that systematically distorts our sense of who we are, of what is “real” at all, of what is most valuable about human life (McCaffery, 1991: 16).

As was mentioned in the chapter of postmodernism did Jameson (1993) state that older cultural genres have ‘spread out and colonized reality itself’ and this is more true of SF than any other genre. McCaffery says that SF “represents the most salient features of our lives, as these are being transformed and redefined by technology”, a statement that goes along with the previously argued fusion of the future with the present in postmodernist SF. McCaffery’s notion of postmodern science fiction also transfers Suvin’s classification of science fiction, where cognition has been replaced by “cognitive mapping” and estrangement by “a brave new postmodern world”, into a classification of postmodern science fiction. Furthermore, Roberts (2000) has also argued that science fiction, in its postmodernist stage, rarely projects the reader into the future; instead it present stories about the present and about the past that has led to this present. As such, SF texts are often more attentive to the way the world has been in its exploration of age-old issues, and it symbolizes the way the world has been by showing what has changed; and what that change has brought. “(…) to put it another way, the chief mode of science fiction is not prophecy, but *nostalgia*” (p. 33).

As a mode of writing, the genre of SF has thrived on an epistemology that accepts a cause-and-effect logic as its narrative; new technology is developed and this affects our human nature in some way. Whether or not this effect is considered benevolent or malevolent is often, as mentioned in the introduction, a reflection of temporary socio-cultural attitudes. Science fiction allows for a startling encounter with an ever-changing world and reflects back on our experience of living in a world of constant cause-and-effect (ibid: 180). Science fiction, as a relatively modern phenomenon, is also predicated on a world-view that takes for granted that the future will be different from the present and that there exists an array of possible futures all with their links to temporal present. SF “(…) sees the norm of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to a *cognitive* view” (Malmgren, 1991: 4).

Equally appropriate, genre SF claim the realist novel as its closest narrative relative; both developed in an atmosphere of nineteenth-century scientific positivism and both rely to a great extent on the mimetic transparency of language as a “window” through which to provide views of a relatively uncomplicated human reality. When SF is enlisted by postmodernist fiction, however, it becomes integrated into an aesthetic and a worldview whose central tenets are an uncertainty and an indeterminacy which call into question the “casual interpretation of the universe” and the reliance on a “rhetoric of believability” which virtually define it as a generic entity (McCaffery, 1991: 204)

The notion of SF having “the realist novel as its closest narrative relative” was addressed previously in this chapter, where it was noted that if the SF work was too distant and too estranged from the ‘real’ world it was merely escapist. On the other hand, if it was not distant and estranged enough, the work might as well be a conventional work of realism. Not only does McCaffery problematize the rationale and rather straightforward simplicity of which the realistic notion is build upon, he also notes that when SF becomes postmodern, it becomes integrated into a worldview whose primary assumptions are those of the critical aspect; especially of a “relatively uncomplicated human reality”. Reality is in this sense, and has never been, a generic entity and the “casual interpretation of the universe” are especially questioned by the aesthetic of postmodernism. As argued earlier, reality is no longer only threatened by epistemological claims to the limit of knowledge and “what is real”, but also by virtual realities and simulations of human experiences capable of replacing our reality as it supersedes our physical world. The idea is thus that science fiction must remain symbolic and not entirely try to reproduce or mimic the physical world, like the conventional realist novel seeks to do. Instead SF adapts the realist mode of an accumulation of detail in a “brave new world” that is not too unlike, yet not too familiar to the world we know and live in, in order to show the cause-and-effect of scientific and technological ‘novas’ have on our lives (Roberts, 2000: 30).

## Virtual Reality

‘Virtual reality’, a phrase coined by the computer scientist, composer and visual artist Jaron Lanier in the late 1980s, refers to an environment in which reality is simulated through computers and in which the body can experience artificially generated data as though they were coming from the real world. People immersed in a virtual environment can actually experience the realistic feeling of inhabiting that world (Cavallaro, 2000: 27)

Virtual reality is a concept with close relations to science fiction and the near-future of contemporary society. It should be understood as spaces created, visualized and generated by computers in effort to simulate our physical world; perhaps best depicted in the already mentioned *Tron* as cyberspace,and *The Matrix* as a clear-cut simulation of a new phenomenological reality. A virtual reality narrative thus operates as an interface between human and a technologized culture, both revealing and providing continuity between the subject of human and machine (Bukatman, 1993: 194). A distrust of the synthetic images have a long history of wariness in fiction, but Cavallaro ensures us that this is not only because virtual reality sometimes “are hazy fragments hovering of nothingness”, instead it is because these are worlds that we ourselves have created and designed, rather than something given to us, like nature and the physical world – thus worlds that are perhaps better ‘suited’ and welcoming than our physical reality (Cavallaro, 2000: 102).

The criticism of virtual reality as a technology of especially social control can be traced back to *Brave New World (1932)* by Aldous Huxley, where ‘Feelies’ drug and genetically manufacture a population to simulate the sensations of actors projected unto a large screen; much reminiscent of television or the movie-theatre. Using VR technology, the ‘Feelies’ eradicate self-awareness of humans and redirect attention away from real-world problems by replacing their current world with an artificial one. The novel as such anticipate negative outcomes from virtual reality and a media satured culture – the society of the spectacle – in particular its pacifying and escapist nature (Dinello, 2005: 152).

As cyberspace provides a powerful alternative to the natural environment, the technology of ‘‘simstim’’—simulated stimulation—provides an alternative to living life, to feeling anything authentic. Like the devices of Strange Days and Brainstorm, simstim records and plays back human sensory experiences. Like the Feelies of Brave New World and the Perky Pat layouts of Three Stigmata, this transforms television into a virtual reality life. Corporate/governmental technology mediates and replaces the real world of experience and action. The population is addicted, pacified, submissive, and acquiescent (ibid: 160)

Bukatman (1993) has also noted the potential of addiction to VR as an escape mechanism from the daily pressures of life in the real world – a desire to ‘waste away’ in the virtual playgrounds, where the conformity of self-created space do not hold the same demands as the physical nature. The immersion in a computer-constructed space can be addictive, especially in a posthuman world where natural sensory perception and ‘real’ experience has been challenged so much (p. 200). Cyberpunk, a sci-fi genre that emerged in the mid 1980s with the terms of VR and cyberspace, “(…) wanted to liberate us from the dead meat of the body by exploring a cybernetic shift in perception: it blurred the distinction between human and machine, rejected the oppressive, corporate-controlled material world, and embraced the immaterial, informational world” (Dinello, 2005: 220)

Murray & Sixsmith (1999) have in their article *The Corporeal Body in Virtual Reality* explored the implications of subjects when immersed in virtual reality. The kind where the use of three-dimensional computer graphics generate artificial environments that afford real-time interaction and exploration, but also virtual environments where the sense of ‘absorption’ into VR is enhanced by the use of head-mounted displays (HMDs); “(…) these can present images and sounds, combined with haptic and vestibular displays, to create a perceptually encompassing computer environment” (p. 316).

For example, it is now possible to navigate around a virtual environment such as a computer-generated cityscape (see Shaw 1998), in which people can cycle on an exercise bike wearing HMDs depicting textually based images of Amsterdam. Tracking systems monitor the movement of a person's head, so that, as he or she physically turns, so does the point of view in the virtual environment. Most VR applications are dominated by HMDs, which are, therefore, primarily visual mediums (ibid: 317)

The concept of cycling in a virtual environment is ironically enough reminiscent of the episode *15 Million Merits*, where the character Bing spends most of his days pedaling through virtual landscapes. As such, much VR is visualized and likewise do we encounter the real-world from the height at which our eyes are located in our bodies. This emphasis on visual perception of the world is what builds, in prolongation to what was argued in the chapter of postmodernism, on the notion that knowledge and experience has become visual enterprise. ”The very fact that VR has developed in an occular-centric way might well be grounded in the fact that Western culture tends to emphasize vision above the other senses” (ibid: 321). The tradition of sight as the primary sense traces back to the replacement of knowledge as being passed to person from person by word of mouth, to the introduction and widespread teachings of literacy; making sight the constitutional way of gaining new understandings and knowledge (Wood & Smith, 2005: 8). Nonetheless, Murray & Sixsmith (1999) go on to argue that other senses, such as hearing and feeling, both compliment and help sight achieve its full potential, and thus necessary for the feeling of embodiment in virtual reality.

Therefore, VR does not need to remain characterized by a disembodied gaze-that is, a projection of ourselves into an optic panorama. Flexible sensors and exoskeletal devices (re)create the body (or its parts, such as the hand) in virtual environments. The fiber-optic flexion sensors of the familiar data glove, adapted to a fully instrumented body suit, enable the animation of a virtual body viewable via a HMD (Ellis 1995) (Murray & Sixsmith, 1999: 318)

The development of VR thus continues to evolve to new heights of psychological, sensorial and bodily immersion. Murray & Sixsmith (1999) even go as far as claiming that VR technologies are becoming all-embodying, and perhaps even re-embodying, changing what was earlier mentioned as the “ontological imperative”. VR have the capacity to create new phenomenological realities with its “new technologies of corporeality” (ibid: 318).

Dominant discourses around virtual reality, in acceptance with much science fiction, treat VR as a disembodying medium where the body is left behind a computer interface and the mind is projected into cyberspace. The body is hooked up in the real world, left behind and immobile, while the mind wanders in the virtual landscape of a new reality. Part of the sensorial composition thus remains in the physical world, while another is projected into a virtual one. “The corporeal body in the physical environment remains ever present to mind, while an electronic body image weakly echoes and competes with it. When only parts of the body are absorbed by VR technology” (ibid: 334) – thus, when the immersion into VR is not full, or ‘incomplete’ there will, according to Murray & Sixsmith, always exist a rift between the two ‘worlds’. As such, they argue that VR is the partial or full substitution of sensory information, and that the destitution of a physical reality is an integral part of a compelling VR experience. In other words, if the experience is lucid or transparent it is in their terms unsuccessful. It is therefore necessary to destabilize the experiential boundaries of a person’s body and its experiential constraints of a person’s physical presence in the real world. “All this is not to say that the mind is freed from the body, but that the experience of VR brings its embodiment with it. It does this through sensations that are linked almost inescapably to the virtual environment” (bid: 319).

Their conclusion is that the more it is possible to enter the whole ‘sensorium’ of virtual reality, the more it is possible to feel embodied within that VR. The importance of immersion, or a compelling experience, relies on the extent to which people can obscure the bodily boundaries and extend their own corporeality into the virtual environment. As such, when “(…) visual representations are included, both anthropomorphic and polymorphic virtual bodies engender feelings of embodiment. This may be largely due to the malleability of experiential body boundaries” (ibid: 336). What this means is that our understanding of phenomenological reality cannot be understood without a consideration of the cultural milieu where such experiences are originally embedded in. When we become immersed in VR, not just images our bodies are transported, but also our history and understanding of the world. We bring our everyday, our understandings of the real-world and social experiences into new virtual encounters; we use our current understandings of a self, a body, a reality and the world to navigate within the virtual realm (ibid: 320).

Virtual reality is a complex concept that, like many things in life, has potentially negative and positive usages. It has the potential to substitute reality as we know it whilst allowing ourselves to become swallowed up by it and become completely immersed in it; totalizing its encapsulation of our body and minds. It is also an escape-mechanism for people where the real-world is not tolerable, as Dinello notes (2005), ‘‘the physical world limits imagination. Virtual reality stimulates it. People can live in each other’s dreams which will visualize pure emotion and thought” (p. 151); it provides in his own words “the scientific stairway to an electronic escape” (ibid: 148). Virtual reality can be seen as a quest for realism, and the article by Murray & Sixsmith (1999) provided an insight into how the most compelling experience of reality is provided by simulations. And as Bukatman (1993) has argued: “Whether ‘cyberspace’ is real or not, our experience of electronic space is a ‘real’ experience. By distinguishing the constitution of being as an activity of interface, phenomenology suggests that the status of being is not an absolute condition, but on that changes relative to changes in the experience of the real” (p. 118). What he argues is that virtual reality, as long as it feels as real as the ‘physical reality’ to the perceiver of said virtual reality, should it be considered just as real.

## Identity

(…) science fiction embodies our fears of technological replication and reflects anxiety about ephemeral nature of human identity and the evil twin or mysterious doppelganger (Dinello, 2005: 212)

Technological advancements in science fiction often raise questions of human values and identity, what constitutes the essence of being human and the notion of what makes us human. Postmodernism and virtual reality, two concepts previously elaborated, have in contemporary society mainly fueled anxieties about the continuous fragmentation of human identity, but also ideas of liberations from physical restraints. Anxieties, because technology, in all its forms, has the possibility to dissolve, change or fragment “(…) million of years of evolution [that] our brains have been wired to provide us with an inner feeling of self, a feeling that each of us is a unique individual delimited by precise boundaries” (ibid: 216). A fear that our newly invented technology – technology meant to extend our physical limits and expand our senses in dreams of transcendence and immortality – seem to threaten what was meant to be preserved by destroying us as subjects altogether (Cavallaro, 2000: 206). In relation to this notion of identity – an identity that cannot be separated or enhanced by the cyber or the virtual – has neurologist Antonio Damasio argued in *The Feeling of What Happens* “(…) that complex interactions between brain and body are necessary for extended consciousness – that emotions, sensations, and our sense of identity, of self, cannot be separated” (cited in Dinello, 2005: 113). As Jameson (1991) has noted should the separation of mind and body not be seen as “(…) a liberation from anxiety but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling” (p. 15); the ‘liberation’ of the flesh – and its physical factors and weaknesses – not only becomes the end of a physical identity, but the end of a self altogether.

On the other hand have theorists argued that physical factors, such as culture, gender, lifestyle, cloth and age etc., can be discarded by virtual or cyber technology; ‘confines’ that currently only exist in the physical reality. It serves as the framework for ideas that conventional identity markers are no longer in place, opening the possibility for alternative constructions of identity (Thomas, 2007: 19). However, this idea is challenged by Bukatman (1993) who states little rarely changes, as long as the subject is left to master his own reconstruction, even in the confines of an electronic world.

The discourses of science fiction and philosophy have constructed a metaphorical subject redefined to permit its situation as a biological being within an electronic world. But this rarely occurs without a simultaneous retention of an older notion of the subject based on mastery rather than symbiosis, a subject that ultimately *retains* power through the “displacement” of cybernetic reconstruction. Within the fictions of terminal identity, the subject is brought to the limits of self-definition, but the metaphorical solutions to the problems posed by a postmodern existence often re-center subject power as an untested, unchanging, and eternal phenomenon (Bukatman, 1993: 301)

The dichotomy between virtual and physical subject, where the virtual is uninhibited and free and the physical is bound and hindered, is often suggested more utopian than realistic. The concept of a static identity, virtual or physical, is further problematized considering Hegel’s view that external factors in any social world will prevent the mind of a subject from being autonomous. “[A]n individual’s self-consciousness never exists in isolation... it always exists in relationship to an ‘other’ or ‘others’ who serve to validate their existence” (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006: 24). As such, identity, whether virtual or physical, should be treated as fluid, fragmentary and contingent on social factors; factors that differentiate both in terms of the spatial and temporal. Louis Althusser’s concept of interpellation is developed on the concept that different discourses and practices always attempt to ‘interpellate’, or hail us into place as social subjects of particular discourses. “Identities are thus only points of temporary attachments to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us” (ibid: 32) – meaning that the individual is always affected by social factors and discourses in his temporary identity; also in the case of a virtual or cyber-identity.

## Cybernetics

Cybernetics provides the pretext for the mechanized control of social life, of the body itself, and all of it through the delicate nets of nonmachine-derived mathematical formulae. Cybernetics represents the hardening and exteriorization of certain vital forms of knowledge, the crystallization of the Cartesian spirit into material objects and commodities. Cybernetics is already a paradox: simultaneously a sublime vision of human power over chance and a dreary augmentation of multinational capitalism’s mechanical process of expansion – so far characterized by almost uninterrupted positive feedback. Cybernetics is, thus, part philosophy, part necromancy, part ideology. (McCaffery, 1991: 186)

McCaffery’s paradoxical view of cybernetics is relevant because it highlights the duality of technological advancements so often depicted in science fiction. Cybernetics as a concept is developed by Norbert Wiener in *The Human Use of Human Beings* where he elaborates on the connection between human and machine, namely that both are subjects that rely on feedback. ‘‘Thus the nervous system and the automatic machine are fundamentally alike in that they are devices which make decisions on the basis of decisions they have made in the past ....This is the basis of at least part of the analogy between machines and living organisms’’ (cited in Dinello, 2005: 60). As such, cybernetics shows a resemblance between human and machine, and how people like systems have the possibility of change and advancement.

As “(…) a sublime vision of human power over chance” cybernetics categorizes humans as “(…) not stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves” (Dinello, 2005: 61). Self-regulation is thus essential to humans, other living beings and computers; feedback is the ‘learning processes” of machines and men. “By perfecting feedback and the means of rapid data manipulation, Wiener promulgated an understanding of life as being, essentially, the processing of information. ‘‘To live effectively is to live with adequate information”’ (ibid: 61).

As “(…) a dreary augmentation of multinational capitalism’s mechanical process of expansion”, cybernetics represents a system where feedback does not result in any sort of saturation, but only the creation of further needs. The issue of “(…) whether technology should be allowed to do all that it can do, especially when its powers extend to the crafts and skills which give purpose to people’s lives” was raised by Theodore Roszak and it pinpoints the concept of an eternal circle of production and consumption of commodities as the image-system of exchange has the possibility of feedback and incorporation (ibid: 10). Cybernetics does in this manner touch upon aspects of human life; it can be seen as a concept with theoretical and practical applications for systems, corporate and human alike.

# Analysis

The following chapters constitute the analytic part of the project. The starting point is classifying *Black Mirror* within the genre of science fiction, as elaborated in the theoretical chapter, and discussing its technology and scientific rationale. Subsequently will commodities and commoditiy fetish – in a postmodern consumer culture – be elaborated. In prolongation to the previous subject will the power structures of the culture industry, and its pacifying and conformist nature, become the item on the agenda. The concept of virtual reality will additionally be clarified, both in its embodying and disembodying forms, and if it has the possibility of substituting physical reality in post-human fashion. The concept of the postmodern individual, and its identity constitution, will also be discussed. Lastly, the notion of cybernetics and its relation to this paper’s previous analytical parts will shortly be commented upon, especially in relation to the analogy between machine and man as systems of feedback.

## Classifying *Black Mirror* as Science Fiction

If technology is a drug—and it does feel like a drug—then what, precisely, are the side-effects? (Boren, 2015: 18)

*Black Mirror’s* environment anticipates a culture influenced and altered by technology as its science fictional novas transform the lives of its characters**.** The idea that new, or not yet invented, technologies have the power to change and alter culture is seen in much, if not all, of the theoretical framework. Science fiction is a product of this concept and *Black Mirror* does in its full potential present some of the possible negative effects that the association with new technology can result in; and *Black Mirror* mainly examine the potential negative effects of new digital technologies can impart on our lives. The “black mirror” of the title is a reference to screens on cell phones, televisions and computers etc., when they are turned off. As such, the series is not meant as a fair representation of technology in general as it clearly chooses to depict the possible negative outcomes. Instead, it is an exploration of what people can possible do with new technology, or what technology could possibly entail if mindlessly used (Boren, 2015: 18). Some of the topics explored in the series are technology’s negative effects on relationships, the culture industry’s stranglehold on consumers with technology, and how public perception is constantly enabled by social media networks amongst others.

Defining *Black Mirror* as science fiction, and what specifically makes it science fiction, is an integral part of this paper as it to some extend the inclusion of these new devices that display the negative changes of the characters lives. As mentioned in the theoretical framework is science fiction “(…) an art form that vividly represents the most salient features of our lives, as these are being transformed and redefined by technology” McCaffery, 1991: 16)*.* Additionally does science fiction thrive on a cause-and-effect logic as its narrative; meaning that something, or someone, causes an alteration and this modification invokes a change in some way (Roberts, 2000: 180). In displaying its estrangement to contemporary society, *Black Mirror’s* logic of cognition is rather clever. In major part its novas are highly similar to current ones, yet tweaked enough to show an advancement or alterity aspect within the technology. Items such as Google Glasses are changed into a memory grain, in which all visual and auditory material is stored and available for re-vision throughout one’s entire life. Slightly modified optical implants are also introduced in another episode. This technological novum allows for the “blocking” and muting of other people in real life, making them nothing more than a grey silhouette unavailable for any contact whatsoever. It also allows for a voyeuristic ‘point-of-view’, where other people can simply watch through the eyes of another; dubbed an eye-link. An android with physical ingenuity and the mental identity of one’s social media life is another novum introduced, and is not too distanced from our current obsession with clones and human-size dolls. The originality of the novas in *Black Mirror* is that despite their possible negative effects, they look like modified versions of current popular technology and attractive enough to possess. Even though the devices end up causing everyone a great deal of emotional pain, it is understandable why we would want them. The optical implants, for example, allows for every lived experience to be recalled, one can send and receive messages and use facial recognition to identify people; it is almost impossible not to wish for the same novas as the characters own, even as we see them (mis)used in horrific ways (Wortham, 2015).

Many of the novas mentioned above are what was established in the theory section as “accepted novas” as they connect with a particular estranged version of our world. Instead of rationalizing the novas within the ‘text universe’, *Black Mirror* alters pre-existing technology such as the smart-phone, Google glasses, Ipads, life-size dolls and virtual avatars, and show how these “estranged” commodities have become integrated into peoples’ lives. Yet, few of the characters understand or recognize the potential implications this integration entails before it is too late. That we are constantly building systems and producing new commodities have repercussions that we do not yet comprehend, and it is exposing us to dangers we will not understand before it is too late to do anything about it (Dzieza, 2014a). Yet, the alterity of these novas are comprehensively weak in *Black Mirror*, showing that the proximity of alienation is different, but not so different that all the knowledge and understanding of how our current world functions can be completely discarded. The ‘scientific’ aspect of the novas are rationalized in their very nature of verisimilitude; meaning that their existence is not here according to contemporary scientific orthodoxy, but in turn resembles advanced present-day gadgets. The novas function as forms of advanced material embodiments of contemporary technology that triggers the estrangement of the fictional framework (Roberts, 2000: 30).

The framework shown in *Black Mirror*, contrary to much Hollywood science fiction as mentioned in the introduction, does not imagine a world too alien and too removed from contemporary society or simply use technology as a dazzling component to enhance the storyline. Only *15 Million Merits* show a rather dystopian underground society that has been radically transformed. But despite its alien framework, its transformation still displays a reminiscent “society of the spectacle”, where our current ‘addiction’ to TV and computers are transformed into a world where people literally work, live and die by the light of the screen. The “imaginative framework” of the anthology is not rendered unrecognizable, as in *Blade Runner, the Matrix, Star Wars* etc., where technology has transformed the world in its totality and display the horror of dystopia and the wonder of technology as new gadgetry (Wortham, 2015). *Black Mirror* does more than simply lash out and criticize technology for all human misery and transformation. It deals with a mindset that no matter what new technology or device we might possess, our dilemma and usage of such remains human; a deviation from much other popular science fiction – as mentioned in the introduction – that technology will probably not enslave us, but it will change our lives in unimaginable ways (Wortham, 2015). In terms of cognition it does not take much to fathom the foreign landscape in *Black Mirror,* because in its majority it almost resembles contemporary society, or trends in society exaggerated. We recognize the differentiation, but also the well-known and mundane aspects. The technological progress is not far-fetched, making the novas introduced both rational and logical – their proximity of alienation is no too removed – but different enough to symbolize something unlike our own complacent reality.

The cleverness of *Black Mirror* is that it shows our love and fascination with technology, its novas and devices, but also the tormenting implications it can bring with it; technology is used for a lot of appalling things, but the bottom line is never simply that technology is bad (Dzieza, 2014a). It shows that technology is neither benevolent nor malevolent, but can be used either way. The viewers have the possibility of tuning out; turning off their TV, stop tweeting, remove their grain and optical implants; yet rarely anyone ever chooses to do so. The technology might entail unsettling events, have tormenting ramifications and disconnect user from their physical reality, but it is not enough to persuade us to change our current behavior. *Black Mirror* manages to show caution about the role of technology without lessening its importance and uniqueness; its many potential good aspects. The show is therefore not preaching or condescending but “(…) understands that even as we swear off tweeting and promise to stop Googling our exes, our phones are still the last things we see before falling asleep and the first things we reach for when we awaken” (Wortham, 2015).

In its symbolization of a highly digitized culture and a technologized society, it is not a narrative means to a different end, and as such its stories are not predicated on a world-view that submit that the future will be much different from the present. Instead it *presents* us with a “cognitive mapping” of the plausible, and perhaps existing, issues that technological progress has induced. The premise is slight-to-bigger exaggerations of contemporary tendencies, but the series submit to a realistic internal logic of scientific and human conditions; as with much good science fiction. The alterity of the novas are by no extend massive and the conditions they create for the characters, in its technological postmodern world, are prosaic issues of ambition, jealousy, grief and fear re-positioned by new forces. *Black Mirror* thus abides by a symbolic criteria, in the way that it symbolizes the way life has been, by showing what technological novas has changed about life (Roberts, 2000: 33). It shows that technology has a way of fading into the background, making it covertly hidden, as it slowly but gradually influence our way of life. Taking us a step beyond escapist entertainment, *Black Mirror* imagines the problematic consequences brought about by new technologies and the ethical, political and existential questions they raise (Dinello, 2005: 5).

## Commodity Fetishism and Contemporary Consumer Culture

Technological novas such as tablets, computers, mobile and smart-phones, television and optical implants play an important symbolic role in the anthology as they highlight contemporary society’s reliance and addiction to technology and its simulated sensory commodities. In its exaggerated state-of-being *Black Mirror* shows contemporary society’s obsession with the role of spectator and its vicarious mindset where direct experiences and relations are restructured and consumed as manufactured data-based simulations. In short, it shows television’s, and other technological commodities, intrusion on society and the reduction of its citizens to televised audiences and consumers of artificiality.

## Postmodern *Black Mirror* as the Society of the Spectacle

As a symbolic treatment of television’s total imposition of society, *Black Mirror* presents a society that in large functions as a ‘TV audience’ more than anything else. McCaffery (1991) noted in the theory section that a TV audience a special type of community; even an anticomminuty or a social antimatter – (…) “electronically composed, rhetorically constituted, an electronic mall which privileges the psychological position of a voyeur (a society of the disembodied eye) and the cultural position of us as tourists in the society of the spectacle” (p. 233). Furthermore, “(…) TV functions by substituting the negative totality of the audience with its pseudo-meditations by electronic images for genuine sociality, and the possibility of authentic human solidarities” (ibid: 232). The society does in many of the episodes symbolize characters voided of human solidarities enabled by technology. The PM’s marriage is left in ruins after his acceptance to ‘perform’ on live television and his surrender to the spectacle. Bing’s rebellion is catalyzed by his culture’s hollowness and utter submission to processed, mediated and unauthentic data-based experiences sold back as commodities. Liam’s marriage is destroyed as recorded imagery haunts his memory of his wife’s adultery and enables his continuous obsession. Even before his death, Ash is disconnected from his wife Martha by his use of social media, and when Ash’s corporeal body is reconstructed as an android after his death, its artificial identity brings no new reconciliation or affect to his wife due to social media’s ersatz. Victoria’s ‘trial’ and punishment does in full privilege “the psychological position of a voyeur” or a disembodied eye, as the audience consumes the experience of a frightened and bewildered individual. The broad acceptance of a Waldo’s incorporation into poiitics highlights a culture that accepts and applauds entertainment and the commodifications and ‘consumption’ of public figures. Matthew is blocked and robbed of his wife’s relationship as she discovers his involvement in illegal services and the culture depicted is increasingly technologized and distanced.

*Black Mirror* does in large part symbolize a restructured culture that sometimes replace direct experiences in its totality, and sometimes juxtaposes them alongside simulated manifestations. It further problematizes technology by suggesting that connecting to such technologies in turn disconnects its users from people around them and their immediate environment (Boren, 2015: 16). “Some maintain that the substitution of an abstract mode of interpersonal integration for face-to-face communication and intimacy represents the peak of a process of depersonalization fostered by capitalism since its inception. These critics blame technology-saturated environments for alienating the individual…” (Cavallaro, 2000: 29). The technology-saturated environments show that people become distanced and absorbed by the technologies they use. Ash, Bing and Liam all suffer some sort of discontinuity from their immediate environment as the conventional face-to-face has been substituted by social media and images. Bing is constantly confronted by simulated images of intimate relations he does not have, the community he does not share and the unmediated experiences from which he remains separate. Liam’s ‘photographic’ memory becomes an instant substitute and a surrogate memory for his ‘authentic’ memories. Ash, in the beginning of the episode, is shown as partly secluded from his wife due to his constant connection to social media. When transferred, his artificial technological ‘copy’ offers little redemption to his widow (Bukatman, 1993: 47). The majority of experiences become “(…) an empty and nihilistic sign-system of pure mediation and pure exchange which, having no energy of its own, adopts a scorched earth policy towards the missing social matter of society” (McCaffery, 1991: 235). Meaning that the replications of our consciousness and physical beings (images, machine replicants etc.) is not offering any of the value its consumers seeks, but instead creates pathetic parodies of the essences it seeks to create or preserve. Technology then, which is meant to extend our senses and agency, or support hopes of immortality – as in the case of Ash – instead destroy us as subjects we thought ourselves to be, or wanted to preserve (Cavallaro, 2000: 206)

*15 Million Merits* in its technological processed postmodern world of hyperreality represent society as an electronic image-system where society is manipulated by media elites in an endless circle of consumerism. The society in *15 Million Merits* could easily be considered *the* peak of a technology-saturated environment, where each worker has their own “workstation” and is reduced to an anonymous cell in a homogenized system. Bing highlights the “triumph of an empty, signifying culture” of the simulacrum where any exchange value has been generalized to the point where use value of commodities has vanished; a society where “the image has become the final form of commodity reification” (Jameson, 1991: 18). The simulated, processed and mediated – simulacra – has superseded and taken over reality. In this hyperreality, there is no reality behind the signifiers or codes that generate it. These codes, moreover, are not visible in themselves. “We only see them in their simulated manifestations: clothes, furniture, weapons, popular icons and food, for example” (Cavallaro, 2000: 211).

In *The Entire History of You*, Liam’s personal experiences and knowledge becomes the subject of another image-system as memories becomes stored and transformed into a commodity by means of ‘grains’ installed in one’s head. “Memories are thus divorced from lived experience and enclosed in the lifeless space of the *archive*… Humanist history deterritorializes memory as remembering and reterritorializes it as archive” (Cavallaro, 2000: 207). Liam’s constant access to images of his memories literalizes him as a postmodern subject bombarded with information that keeps him in the immediate past and disconnects him from the far past and his current spatial and temporal environment (Dinello, 2005: 264).

*Be Right Back* shows the invasion of commodities in it most private and ‘real’ form. The recently widowed Martha orders a synthetic replica of her late husband Ash whose identity of android-Ash is constituted of his digital self from different social media sites. The placement of ‘robot-Ash’ in the attic at the end symbolizes how the robot, and the social media information that his identity is constructed through, is nothing more than a glorified picture of his former self (Boren, 2015: 20). The episode shows how “(…) incarnations of the body perfect and disturbing reminders of the synthetic nature of all identities, as images of the ideal body become more and more industrial and streamlined, identity is increasingly conceived as an effect of mass-production” (Cavallaro, 2000: 105).

*White Bear* show a society’s increasing fascination with simulated and processed experiences, as ‘justice’ and punishment are transformed into a spectacle for audiences. Paying viewers follow the unfolding actions through their phones after an institution has erased a murderer’s memories leaving her disoriented and affected by amnesia. The episode mocks our wanting voyeuristic thirst for ‘real-life’ simulations repackaged as entertainment (Monahan, 2013).

*The Waldo Moment* depicts how a blue simulated CGI-bear, voiced by comedian Jamie, tries to show how current politicians – our past times guarantors of democratic complexion – have been reduced to figures that attempt to construct an identity which bears little resemblance to real space, real time, real activity (Bukatman, 1993: 34). It also shows how political debate is often turned into mindless entertainment for the masses as Waldo’s un-engaging political slogans and jokes at the end become products of worldwide consumption.

*White Christmas* portrays a society where every citizen have installed optical implants, like in *The Entire History of You*, that allow for re-vision, zooming, and blocking of other characters, amongst other visual options. In this imaginative framework, the role of voyeur is totalized as it has become possibly to vicariously ‘eye-link’ with other people, allowing for a direct visual connection to other people’s optical implants on computer screens. The episode blurs the interface between human and the spectacle in its presentation of a society where images no longer need to be processed or produced, but ‘interceded’ images become accessible through new mediated technological novas.

The anthology depicts a culture that has undergone a substantial restructuring, as direct experience is replaced by a circulation of endless data-based simulations (Bukatman, 1993: 34). A culture whose masses does not simply submit to these commodities of data-based simulations, but take them – and their images, desires and narratives – and measure them against their own reality and yearnings in a surrender to its underlying artificiality and hollowness.

## Cultural Productions of Postmodernism

I want to avoid the implication that technology is in any way the "ultimately determining instance" either of our present-day social life or of our cultural production (Jameosn, 1991: 17)

What Jameson notes is plausible, but the majority of the commodities produced and ‘consumed’ in the postmodern framework of *Black Mirror* are to some extend ‘artificial’ and void of the affect its users seeks. However, as Jameson (1991) also notes, “(…) it would be inaccurate to suggest that all affect, all feeling or emotion, all subjectivity, has vanished from the newer image” (p. 10); in this instance most of it has, or just the essential part. Earlier mentioned is *15 Million Merits* and its overtly simulated culture, where commodities – except for food and toothpaste – remain entirely ersatz. But *The Entire History of You*, *White Christmas, White Bear* and *Be Right Back* also present artificial commodities that are “waned of affect”. As such, the culture in which the characters live is both media- and technology-saturated, rationally one can suggest that the commodities produced will be influenced by such saturation and create products that inhabit some of the ‘qualities’ that such media and technology embody.

### The Commodification of Memories

Like much other science fiction is *The Entire History of You* concerned with the status and commodification of memory, which seems to produce an ersatz in humanity. In this episode, memory – our past lived experiences – is transformed into a visual ‘re-do’ for users of ‘grains’ to consume; a product of reproduction.

The episode depicts the possible risks of having such memories stored in an electronic device instead of one’s brain. Women, named Helen, tells everyone at the dinner table how she was mugged and robbed of her non-encrypted grain some twelve months ago. In her own words, it was probably ordered by some Chinese millionaire pervert, like a mental rape. Helen is stolen of her memories but she remembers little of the assault, suggesting that the human brain has the Freudian ability to suppress unpleasant memories, unlike the grain, which in post-human fashion mercilessly disregard emotions attached to the memory and record bad and good things alike. The episode even clandestinely suggests that the grain may induce more complications than benefits and our cognitive abilities cannot comprehend the kind of information overload that the grain produces. As Helen says, she is “just happier now” (Brooker, 2011c: 14:00-14:01). Likewise does Liam, in his most obsessive state, showcase the possibility of becoming addicted and reliant to the product; as is the danger of every consumable (Bukatman, 1993: 248). *The Entire History of You* is one of the many episodes that make it clear that technological editing of the body is not something that can be unproblematically embraced (Cavallaro, 2000: 77).

The narrative also embraces the notion that digging into the past may unveil hidden truths and “(…) rejects orthodox notions of archeology as a recovery of the past and stresses instead images of irreparable devastation (ibid: 209). We might discover something new, something hidden, and something normally inaccessible to us – should we accept the Freudian hypothesis – but the episode propose the idea that there perhaps was a reason we had repressed the memory, or that it was unavailable in the first place. Liam’s decision to cut out his brain implant at the end also symbolizes the realization that the benefits of the grain are not worth its costs. Overlooking society’s implication that almost everyone is a ‘linguistic expert’ capable of interpreting every facial, lexical and oral expression used, Liam’s grain does provide concrete visual evidence, first of Fiona’s interest in Jonas at the dinner party and later of her adultery. But instead of rewarding him the images bring him nothing but pain and solitude. His obsession over past actions – continuously catalyzed and the grain – haunts his present and makes him unable to forgive Fiona (Boren, 2015: 19).

Only at the end, after Fiona and Liam have split up, is Liam able to remember a faithful and loving Fiona and their newborn baby. In dark ironical manner, after their separation the grain keeps causing Liam agony, as it enables him to live in a perpetual past when Fiona still loved him. His obsession is displayed as we see Liam sitting alone in the living room watching re-do after re-do of Fiona as she smiles lovingly at him; a few of possible thousands segments of Fiona are showed ‘watched’ 345, 625 and 124 times respectively, demonstrating his obsession (Brooker, 2011c: 45:38:45:55). Likewise is his solitude symbolized by juxtaposing the image of a smiling Fiona with their newborn baby on a sunny day, to a ‘re-do’ of Liam lying alone in an empty bed on a rainy present-day (Brooker, 2011c: 43:26-44:16). The episode ends by showing that the grain, or optical implants, do provide the ability to have a ‘reliable’ memory of the past, which can be useful in certain cases – surveillance, upholding law and order etc. – but constant access to such memories not only allow, but lead people to live in an inaccessible history of past actions, instead of living in the present and immediate environment.

In alignment to what was elaborated in the theory section and earlier in this segment, the visual memories of Fiona – the image of her – is empty of feeling and subjectivity. Meaning not that the images of her do not make Liam feel, but instead that it conveys no ‘real’ feeling of her, or her subjectivity, implying that her image is incapable of substituting her corporeal self. The electronic image of Fiona – its electronic body and personality – is nothing but a weak echo of her physical self and Liam’s ‘authentic’ memory of her, which remains ever present to his mind while immersed in the technology (Murray & Sixsmith, 1999: 334). In the end, Liam uses the technology as an escape mechanism from reality, but his last action of cutting out the grain symbolizes a personal realization. The electronic image of Fiona will forever compete with the ‘real’ Fiona and Liam’s ‘authentic’ memory of her in an eternal losing battle.

### The Commodification of Memory v. 2.0

*White Christmas* is another episode that is interested in how memories can become commodified in the visual age of postmodernity. The company Matthew works for, named smart-telligence, implants a chip inside people’s brains that then collect data and code, in order to know and map down a person’s preferences, desires and anything in between; a copy of memories, as Matt puts it (Brooker, 2014: 32:19-32:22). The simulated brain – which is full of code – is removed and stored inside a widget they call a “cookie” where the simulated copy’s job is to control the real character’s household and chores. Matthew’s job consists of explaining this process, and overwhelming transition to the digital clones while subsequently forcing them into acceptance of their newfound confinement- He has to break the pre-existing human willpower so the copies will comply with a life of bondage for their real self. As he himself notes, “is a lot to process, even from inside a processor” (ibid: 33:36-33:39). Once the digital person realizes that she is helplessly trapped within a computer simulation, and completely dependent on her organic ‘original’ existing in the world outside the computer, she is sincerely upset at her enslavement (Dinello, 2005: 21-22). Seeing as the copies are commodities and have a service to provide, their compliance is an integral part of them being a product. In other words, “The clones are of no use to anybody if they just snap” (ibid: 38:05-38:07). At first, the digital copy’s fear “(…) is that of proletanariannization, of slipping down the ladder, of losing a comfort and a set of privileges which we tend increasingly to think of in spatial terms” (Jameson, 1991: 286). The work she is forced into doing is below her original status as a privileged human being and raises the question of whether or not she should be considered a human being or simply another commodity.

The digital copies are reminiscent of other science fiction films, like *Blade Runner*, where such artificial copies and clones are turned into a workforce that has to labor the productions current humanity no longer see fit to do; where memory serves as an important component in the process of commodification. Another interesting and more covert feature of this particular product is its continual need for renewal and re-purchasing. The simulated brain-copies seem only to imply a static personality, for which the memory recordings can never anticipate any sort of change, both in behavior and personal preferences. The digital copy is only able of retracing a person’s life up to a certain point and never further than said point. If, or perhaps more accurate when, the commodity becomes outdated, it needs to be purchased again in a never ending circle of consumerism that increasingly classifies the postmodern era (Bukatman, 1993: 249). The idea of one’s own preferences and memories as a commodity is not surprisingly hard to conceive. It is in fact fairly similar to ‘online’ history, product preferences and past purchases made into valuable patterns of information for companies to acquire. Intangible fixtures, information and data have always been tools of power, and in the postmodern world they have also become tools of consumption.

*White Bear* is another episode that looks at the how and whys of memory, the way it defines who we are and how easily memory is a subject of revision in a postmodern world (Cavallaro, 2000: 204). In the episode, Victoria’s criminal punishment is put on display in the name of public satisfaction and profit. The concept of memory – and its editing – is the focal point, as her memory is swiped and erased at the end of each day. Unlike the before mentioned episodes, *White Bear* is not interested in the possession of memories as a commodity, but rather the lack of memories and lack of understanding it entails, as a re-production of a commodities. Victoria’s confusion and bewildered state ensures that she needs not to simulate emotions and feelings, which is normally the case in most acting productions; her reactions are actually authentic human emotions. The viewers know the surroundings of the event are artificial, but as long as Victoria expresses *real* fear, *real* anxiety and *real* pain the production – and consumption – remains an authentic and exhilarating experience.

In all three cases, memory, and the technological novas that allow for their revision, transformation and editing is the predominant component in a continual artificial commodification of human life and experience.

### The Commodification of the Human Body

*Be Right Back* is another episode that attempts to show the hollowness and artificiality of the commodities contemporary society produce as they seem the most real. After Ash dies, his wife Martha, after discovering her pregnancy and giving in to a friend’s bothering, orders a voice-simulation of Ash – compiled of all his activity on social media and The Worldwide Web – and later a robotic copy of him that supply his electronically constituted personality with a material body. At first, Martha is both relieved and satisfied with the new android-Ash, but she soon realizes that the simulated personality and corporeal body of android-Ash is flawed. Flawed not in the traditional sense, but he is “(…) without drawback of human error and waste, without the human emotions of love, anger, ambition and jealousy (…) without, in short, the messy unruly passions which also make the brief movement from conception to death so exhilarating and so frightening. And so human” (McCaffery, 1991: 15-16). Signs and copies – android-Ash being one – “(…) no longer bear any resemblance or correspondence to the so-called real world. In fact, they produce their own *hyperreality*: an order of representation capable of engulfing our bodies and minds because it neither looks nor feels unreal but, if anything, *more* than real” (Cavallaro, 2000: 211). Android-Ash looks real, feels real and his body is perfect; he is Ash “on a good day”. Yet, humans are not perfect. We lash out, we misunderstand and we need sleep and food. We are not always ruled by reason; calm enough to process our answers and actions before replying. In a display of android-Ash’s fundamental artificiality, and his lack of human flaws, we see Martha yelling and hitting him, while she shouts and urges him to hit her or become infuriated with her. All the while she is juxtaposing android-Ash and ‘real’ Ash, as she simultaneously asks and answers the question if ‘real’ Ash would ever have hit her. “I don’t know, maybe you would have. But *you* wouldn’t’, would *you*? *You* wouldn’t” (Brooker, 2013a: 41:42-41:45). The italicized *you* refer to android-Ash and she vents the idea that she seeks confirmation to an answer she already knows. Most of all she just wants an instinctive response; a human response.

While still alive, Ash recalls how his mother used to move photos of deceased family members up to the attic. The last scene of the episode display Ash on the attic, symbolizing how android-Ash – and the social media that produced his personality – is nothing more than a glorified picture. This new technological novum is – like the postmodern image similar to it – waned of affect, feeling and ‘substance’ (Boren, 2015: 20). The coupling of biological and artificial entities does in this instance serve to organize and fulfill the desires of someone, to become a commodity that can achieve and serve a specific purpose and place; but no organization is ever conclusive (Cavallaro, 2000: 81). Martha’s original needs for consolation and comfort, once satisfied, are replaced by comparisons of ‘real life’ Ash and the new android-Ash, where android-Ash’s reason and good judgment, his synthetic and artificial foundation will always ensure his failure to provide human company.

This previous feature also raises questions of identity and personality. “The distinction between human and android produces an ontology grounding in morality and not biology”, because the corporeality of the android body – constituted from the image – creates an artificial history and a frame of reference that deceives its electronic origins (Bukatman, 1993: 248). The idea that memories may be simulated, revised, artificially transferred or installed, propose a serious revision of this traditional western notion of memory as a personal possession and constituting instance of humanity and identity (Cavallaro, 2000: 206). The symbolization of Ash’s simulated personality as ‘incomplete’ even seems to suggest that the synthetic identity, constituted by ‘online’ activity, does not resemble a ‘real’ identity in its totality. Some of his personality characteristics, like humor, have been transferred, but his more covert and rare characteristics, or instinctual traits, like love, anger and hate have not. In this instance, the mechanical and technological are not able to reproduce the working of our perceptual apparatus completely as the commodity remains partly impersonal and inhuman. Android-Ash, despite his superior exterior is not considered a means of enchantment, but become a means of disenchantment to human experience, emotion and essence (Schroeder, 1994: 525).

In the post-human environment of *Black Mirror is* the best-case-scenario that commodities only offer a brief and hollow joy, short-lived as the consumers’ desires and wishes are projected onto a new product in an eternal circle of consumerism. In the worst-case-scenario, the modifications of memories and human bodies abandon any affect and use-value these once provided. Instead they become juxtaposed against their authentic counterparts revealing their artificial, hollow and incomplete essence.

## Commodities as Forms of Social Control

In the society of the spectacle, all images are advertisements for the status quo. The commodity is replaced by its own representation, and the fulfillment of need is replaced by a pseudo-satisfaction of desire. A citizenry alienated by the industrial-capitalist mode of production is granted an illusion of belonging and participation; the fragmentation of the productive and social realms is replaced by the *appearance* of coherence and wholeness (Bukatman, 1993: 37)

The ‘production master’ of the society of the spectacle is the culture industry. They produce and reproduce the manifestations of images, sounds and experiences we so eagerly consume, while their main purpose is to maintain the status quo. The culture industry’s main purpose is make the masses believe that the world is in the order that the industry suggests it is, as it deceives its citizens of the satisfaction it pretends to supply. The culture industry’s main effect is anti-enlightenment; it is used as a means of mass deception to suppress the consciousness. And the products the industry produce may be ‘new’, but they are not innovative; they are not also commodities, they are *only* commodities with capitalistic profit motifs. The juxtaposition of a mass culture and a culture industry has to be distinguished according to Adorno, as the categorization “mass culture” implies a demand starting from the masses – but in reality, it is a demand built from ‘the top’, from the culture industry. It is to say, not a culture of the masses, but a culture imposed on the masses in cover of its self-legitimizing nature; it is in short not a culture *for* the masses or *by* the masses while power remains confined to institutions (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972: 38-39). And in postmodern societies have new technologies “(…) of the mass media have been crucial to the maintenance of instrumental reason as a form of rational (and hence natural, invisible, and neutral) domination” (Bukatman, 1993: 38).

In *The Waldo Moment* Jack Napier, the producer and owner of the CGI-bear, voices this notion: “You know everyone is pissed with the status quo, and Waldo gives that a voice” (Brooker, 2013c: 27:49-27:53). Waldo’s ‘revolutionary’ acts illuminates a serious and relevant issue, but his rhetoric is, as Monroe points out, un-engaging and offers no valid counter argument. “It’s easy what he does. He mocks, and when he can’t think of an authentic joke, which is actually quite often, he just swears“ (Brooker, 2013c: 22:44-22:52). As Monroe states, “He has nothing to offer and he has nothing to say” (Brooker, 2013c: 23:06-23:09). Waldo’s identity is another empty signifier of a hollow image and his presence serves as entertainment for the masses. It illustrates the use of cyber politics and how “(…) Foucaldian notions of the use of language and linguistic-tech by the ruling class in Feudal and Industrial societies to control children, the uneducated and powerless individuals” (McCaffery, 1991: 258). As Monroe points out, “You laugh, you’re laughing at someone who won’t engage, who is scared to engage” (Brooker, 2013c: 21:46-21.51). Despite Jameson’s (1993) notion that new forms of the postmodern, Waldo being an example of such, has the potential to disrupt older forms of political dominance and inequity, nothing besides the surface of things really changes in *Black Mirror* (cited in Bukatman, 1993: 109). Regardless of its arbitrary appearance, entertainment is a tool of social control; amusement implies conformity with the system, an escapist act of surrendering to the industry. At the end, Monroe gets elected while the image and message of Waldo is incorporated into the culture industry, illuminating the impossibility for resistance and shattering the illusion of alternatives; the status quo is still in place – nothing has changed (Boren, 2015: 23).

The power of the industry’s commodities is also effectively depicted in *15 Million Merits*. The culture industry – the media elite who control the production of culture – manipulates and controls the consumers through cultural products. Bing, for example, can either refuse to work for the system or skip advertisements, but he cannot do both (Boren, 2015: 21). All there is left, as a means of escaping the culture industry, is compliance with the system and its different programming. Amusement and entertainment is thus a means to help citizens cope with reality and the insipid labor process (ibid: 17). As such, the citizens are interpellated as active consumers and gullible spenders who all need and wishes for the industry’s next new big thing. Bing illuminates this scenario at the end, but by then he has himself been incorporated into the industry and is now nothing more than a commodity himself. “15,000 new wardrobe options launched last week alone. It effectively translates as 15,000 new ways to kill time in your cell before you explore an afterlife which does not exist anyway. With any luck, it will take your mind off those saddle sores eh” (Brooker, 2011b: 58.19-58.36). People are depicted with a minimal social self and a maximal consumer self who remain highly susceptible to the trends of contemporary consumer culture, as defined by media elites (McCaffery, 1991: 237). As Bukatman (1993) has noted is the desire to become a cyborg, eternal life, is a connection to ‘maintain’ the new “eternal cycle” of consumerism and production circulation; shopping as an activity has in itself become a major form of entertainment (p. 288). *White Christmas,* in its most inhuman perspective, even depicts a society in which digital clones of our cognitive behavior are reduced to commodities.

The multitude of channel options in *15 Million Merits* also tries to serve as a similar presentation of ‘freedom’ for the subject to choose and position oneself within the culture, while the constant flow of images, sounds and narratives apparently demonstrate a cultural supply and promise. But, the range of choice is illusory and the viewer remains in passive state of mind before the spectacle. “(…) the act of viewing amounts to an act of surrender. Television functions to maintain order; it provides the state with the unprecedented ability to interpellate many of its citizens into the proper sociopolitical positions with unprecedented simultaneity and constancy” (Bukatman, 1993: 39). The culture deceives its citizens of the satisfaction it pretends to supply without any need for overt coercion. The different options of channels and interfaces given to the user, merely present the illusion of choice. In reality, all content is preprogrammed and people can only express themselves through submitting and buying virtual miscellaneous for their ‘dopple’; needs created and fulfilled by the industry (Boren, 2005: 21). ”All we know is fake fodder and buying shit. That’s how we speak to each other, how we express ourselves is buying shit. What, I have a dream? The peak of our dreams is a new app for our dopple, it does not exist! It is not even there. We buy shit that is not even there!” (Brooker, 2011b: 53.08-53.19). What Bing rightfully illuminates in his momentarily rebellion is that his consciousness is guided and fulfilled by the same ‘master’; the culture industry. His dream is not freedom, control or power, it is to win Hot Shot or buy new accessories for his virtual ‘dopple’. The population is constructed and interpellated as passive consumers of various false promises while it keeps its citizenry in place by making them forget that they are “(…) the world’s inmates rather than free agents” (Cavallaro, 2000: 212). As Bukatman (1993) has noticed is TV, by virtue of its mere presence, a social control in itself (p. 39). In *15 Million Merits* is the production of image-systems, fake-fodder as Bing labels it, a multitude of ‘lifestyles’ from which people are continuously offered something new – but only slightly altered – and exciting to crave. The culture industry is seen as hegemonic and in-escapable. One is bound to conform while resistance and authentic experience attempt to be incorporated into the system; symbolized by Bing’s glass shard and the thumb in Abi’s mouth being sold as commodities (Boren, 2015: 22). Entertainment is thus used for social control as it covertly creates and fulfills the desires of people; but in reality it does nothing more than maintain the already existing power structures.

The citizenry is again and again “granted an illusion of belonging and participation” to a mass culture in the anthology. In *The National Anthem,* we are constantly shown opinion polls of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ in connection to whether or not the PM must comply with the commands for the ransom, while imposing citizens discussing the topic unto the princess’ suffering, while discussing whether or not they would tune into the broadcast. Another example of how the televised culture is used to incorporate people into its production apparatus can be seen as the audience is featured during a “UKN report” as it is shown that the video of Princess Susannah has gotten 18,6 million views on YouTube and gets 10,000 tweets per minute on Twitter; making it a tremendously heated and profitable topic (Brooker, 2011a: 13.43). In *15 Million Merits*, the ‘TV audience’ that is their society are deluded to think they are included in the decision making on Hot Shots as the advertisements of Hot Shots claim to empower viewers: “You decide the victors, you control their fates, you make the call – on Hot Shots” (Boren, 2015: 21). But in reality, the virtual crowd does not function autonomously, it responds to the judges’ incitements and prompts. “Hot Shot appears to connect and empower users, but instead confines them within institutional power” (ibid: 21). Likewise are citizens in *The Waldo Moment* dragged into participating of creating the image of Waldo, “Mum with the pushchair – drag her into it” (Brooker, 2013c: 11:48-11:49). *White Bear* also show how the spectators are confined within institutional power, as a sign at the end reads: “Under no circumstance, may any person enter the grounds without first checking into the visitor centre” (Brooker, 2013b: 37:56-37:59). White Bear Justice Park produces the show, they decide its direction, and they encourage and incite the viewing crowds. Near the end Baxter yells, “but most importantly, what I need from you is to shout and scream and let that bitch know that youse are out here” (Brooker, 2013b: 32:38-32:44). The population is constantly included into the “production” of commodities, but it is always on the terms of the producers – the media elite – as a form of “natural, invisible and neutral” domination. The subject is always willingly participating in its own consumption while the existing power structures remain hidden to the majority of subjects. “There is, after all, no need to force the citizenry to do what they are already doing quite willingly” (Bukatman, 1993: 38).

Marx – before the thesis of a culture industry or a society of the spectacle emerged – pointed to how much power and vitality things have when they become part of the exchange of commodities. How people start aspiring commodities, and how in return the things acquire a power of people; what Marx described as commodity fetishism is evident in the anthology (Roberts, 2000: 150). As such, Bukatman’s critique of the society of the spectacle, and Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of the culture industry, echoes this commodity fetishism or power structure of commodities – a power structure that classifies every new product as something hollow, arbitrary or shameless conformist – that mainly has the function of maintaining status quo and the economic imperative of the world (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972: 35). The notion that “the fulfillment of need is replaced by a pseudo-satisfaction of desire” is elaborated upon by Bauman’s postmodern notion of a consumer society, where the previous industrialist mindset of production has been replaced by a society where the consumers actively seek the seduction and consumption of products. To increase consumers spending power, they must constantly be kept in check and motion, constantly searching and offered new temptations as their current ones is made more and more unsatisfactory by every passing second (Bauman, 1999: 82-83). And as Bukatman (1993) has noted is the spectacle infinitely self-generating. “(…) it stimulates the desire to consume (the only permissible participation in the social process), a desire continually displaced onto the next product and the next” (p. 37).

The anthology depict how the characters are constantly confronted with commodities that provide little to no value for them. Commodities are mass produced and generalized to the point where “use value” of the commodities has vanished; they are mainly nothing more than pleasing images of a short-lived satisfaction. At best, the commodities afford a momentarily placebo effect to its consumers that consign and destroy the ‘real’ product and desire. Bing is accepted by the judges and his peers on Hot Shots as a mainstream product and part of their solidarity. However, at the end he is simply relocated, still confined to a cell – albeit a better and bigger one – still alone, and forced into continual exclusion and solitude from human relations. Liam’s visual memories of Fiona may temporarily give him some gratification – first as evidence of her adultery and later as a reminder of his loss once she is gone – but throughout the episode the images provide nothing of real value to him; even the speculating about his office meeting is pointless. The same is true of android-Ash in the case of Martha’s dilemma. The presence of android-Ash do in fact provide some joy to Martha for a short time, but the simulation of her deceased husband, and his artificial and ‘flawed’ personality instead become an indication of and reminder of his synthetic nature and the dichotomy between human and machine; the personal relationship she no longer enjoy. Victoria’s cruel punishment is nothing more than a spectacle, another product, for *paying* customers to watch and consume. Waldo’s integration into politics stems from his popularity on television and later his popularity on YouTube and other social media. Despite his anti-political, or political, stance and possibility of change, Waldo’s main purpose is to attract viewers and sell ‘Waldo-merchandise’; he becomes integrated into preexisting mass media structures in order to boost their ratings and power (Boren, 2015: 17). None of the characters seek these commodities – Martha may be the exception, but her desire is not fulfilled either – yet they are supplied and pushed upon them in an attempt to maintain the status quo and make a profit; the simulated voice of android-Ash even informs Martha of his material body’s substantial cost. Instead, what Bing – along with some of his fellow citizens – really wants is a community, a sense of solidarity and love. Liam only seeks encouragement, support and a reassurance of Fiona’s continual love for him. What Martha perhaps needs most of all, besides comfort and support, is time to mend her ‘broken heart’. Victoria, in her inhuman and horrified situation, is in dire need of empathetic spectators and not voyeuristic consumers. Jamie, who is at first unwilling to ‘corrupt’ the political scene, is forced into compliment in fear of replacement, but seems more interested in love and human affiliation from his opposing female candidate.

Concluding, Jameson (1991) notes, “(…) this whole global, yet American postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination through the world (Jameson, 1991: 5). The culture industry is thus the nexus of commodity, addiction and control, which values consumerism, compliment and non-resistance as imperative for functioning. Not abiding by these values more often than not have grim results for the characters.

## Virtual Reality in the Postmodern Society

The often associated postmodern and science-fictional concept of virtual reality is also explored in the anthology. Both in its totality of mind and bodily immersion, but also in its lesser intrusive – and often visual – altering editions**.** In the majority of its depictions, the virtual reality technology does little to replace the ontological reality of its inhabitants, but focuses instead on intensifying and augmenting the pre-existing reality with a simulating one. Instead of substituting reality, virtual features of sensory experiences are offered and mediated through technology.

### Virtual Reality as a New World

Departing from the episode that depicts virtual reality in its entirety, *White Christmas* illustrate a scenario where a mind simulation will possess the identical personality and memories of the scanned organic person. When first entering this digital space, the copy is confused and reluctant of her newfound confinement, unable to comprehend her displacement and disconnection from her corporeal body. Matthew comments that he can give her a new body, because this sometimes helps. Seeing as her ‘brain’ – albeit a simulated one – is constituted around her physical self, the proposal of attaching a physical body to her simulation renders the succession into virtual space more favorable. The attachment of a simulated anthropomorphic body in virtual space would increase the effectiveness of immersion and transfer to a digital world, as more sensory experiences would come into play (Murray & Sixsmith, 1999: 336). “(…) instead, Being is centered, as the status of the world and existence becomes defining issues. Postmodern fiction stages a dissolution of ontological boundaries, presenting a collision and shifting of worlds” (ibid: 162). Her immersion in this new digital realm – a virtual reality – makes her experience of inhabiting that world realistic (Cavallaro, 2000: 27). Her experiences of electronic space is a “real” experience, but only in so far we accept the premise that “(…) the status of being is not an absolute condition, but one that changes relative to changes in the experience of the real” (Bukatman, 1993: 118). Her crisis of subjectivity is then repositioned as an ontological crisis, rather than an epistemological, as the virtual place create a new phenomenological reality for her (Bukatman, 1993: 175)

This question of an ontological crisis is discussed in another virtual reality, by Jon and Matthew. Explaining his profession, Jon abrupt Matthew’s narrative by saying, “That’s slavery. She thought she was real, it is barbaric”, to which Matthew reply, “It wasn’t’ really real, so it wasn’t really barbaric” (Brooker, 2014: 41:23-41:33). The two discuss whether or not we should accept the ontological imperative and the idea of virtual reality being capable of create a new phenomenological reality; because the subjects submerged consider it real. If we accept this premise, the VR technology displayed in *White Christmas* is at the same time all-embodying and re-embodying as the virtual technology offers a real feeling of corporeality and inhabiting (Murray & Sixsmith, 1999: 318). Considering that the testimony, or perhaps rather confession, delivered by Jon’s digital copy is treated as a confession of his ‘real’ self also implies that the text sees the virtual reality, along with its digital replicates, not entirely as products of artificiality, but as an extension of a *real* cognitive personality; even if the copies in some cases are unaware of their ersatz nature. The copy of Jon even thinks he killed his father-in-law and his ‘illegitimate’ daughter. In this case, the computer, and its electronic possibilities, is narrated as a prosthetic extension and as a space to enter, “(…) as a technological intrusion into human genetic structures, and finally as a replacement for the human in a posthuman world” (Bukatman, 1993: 259). However, it is only partially ‘replaceable’ as the virtual realm remains contingent on physical reality.

In its imitation of a pre-existing reality, cyberspace is both un-ambiguous and perplexing to its subjects after their electronic reconstruction. In simulated-Greta’s instance, it maps out space in ways she cannot quite recognize or comprehend. Suddenly, she no longer needs sleep and food, but her simulated cognitive capacities remain intact. Faced with what Bukatman (1993) labels as a “precarious discontinuity of the personality”, Greta stubbornly tries to find her “essence of being” and her need of stimulating activities (p. 281). Noting that her understanding of the world stems from her inhabitance in the physical world, it is not illogical that she would transfers that understanding to the electronic realm and seeks recognition of her current world from such criteria. Her understanding of the ‘real’ world and social experiences are transported with her into the new virtual encounters, as is her current understandings of a self, reality and how to navigate around in the world (Murray & Sixsmith, 1999: 320). In the case of simulated-Jon, cyberspace is not perplexing and even so *real*, authentic and recognizable that he remains unaware of his artificial existence throughout his displacement. To him, the virtual is mapped out as something intuitively and instinctively recognizable and depicted as a re-embodying existence; cyberspace engulfs both the body and mind of the subjects as it supersedes the physical reality (Cavallaro, 2000: 150).

The illustration of virtual reality, in *White Christmas,* is portrayed as a powerful entity capable of absorbing minds and convincingly simulates the feeling of embodiment, into a new reality whose immersion is complete. In its demonstration of ontological changes, it additionally raises question of the epistemological nature; like previous science fiction has done. Questions of how, and when are raised, especially in relation to when a simulation of a person is considered real. The episode itself blurs its presented lines between real and ersatz – or at least present sadistic bureaucrats – as the confession of simulated-Jon is treated with validity, while simulated self remains invalid and is left to temporal torture. It further problematizes the distinction between real and virtual as it shows that simulation-Jon possess the ability of personal and emotional growth. His real counterpart, in solitary confinement for his crime – unwilling and unprepared to confess – but the temporal modifications to simulated-Jon’s reality have left him burdened with guilt and in search of catharsis. In its totality, the episode blurs the interface between human and a technologized culture, where the latter provides a continuum between subject and machine (Bukatman, 1993: 194). With continual persuasiveness, virtual technology in the episode “(…) effaces the borders between conscious and unconscious, physical and phenomenal realities, subject and object, individual and group, reality and simulacrum, life and death, body and subject” (ibid: 296).

### Virtual Reality as an Escape Mechanism

The characters of the anthology also use virtual reality as a means of escape from reality and its problems; what Dinello (2005) in the theory section classified as a “scientific stairway to an electronic escape” (p. 148). For good measure it should be noted that the virtual realities in all other episodes are not as embodying and ‘complete’ as the one shown in *White Christmas*. For example, Bing – and his fellow citizens – immerse into the virtual reality of the visual experiences that is presented before him. Liam submerges into himself and his virtual world of recorded memories; and Martha simulate her husband and his corporeal body using advanced VR technology. In Martha’s case, her immersion is not into a space or a virtual realm per se, but instead the ‘transfer’ of a virtual reality into a physical reality; this is not what would normally be classified as VR, but the presentation of mechanical ‘intrusion’ into our human world is both interesting and a different take on the idea of a post-human world.

However, in all instances the desire is that of escape, of substituting a pre-existing environment with the opportunity of an alternative ‘reality’ without complications and responsibilities of ‘the real world’ (Bukatman, 1993: 200). The virtual reality of *15 Million Merits* is a means of escaping the daily pressures of the prosaic simplicity of their life and labor. The technology – television in its virtual enhancing form – offers a simulated stimulation and an alternative to living life. Similar to *Brave New World,* the culture industry mediates and replaces the real world of experience and action, rendering the population addicted, pacified, submissive and passive (Dinello, 2005: 160). In *The Entire History of You* Liam use the virtual reality as an instrument of withdrawal from the unbearable nature of physical reality. As a space where his dreams and desires can be visualized and partially stimulated; if nothing else. Again, like the ‘feelies’ mentioned in the theory section, the attention and awareness of current real-world sociological, political, moral and ethical problems are non-existent in the virtual world. At the very minimum, cares are neglected by redirecting attention and transferring perception in a less concerning virtual reality; it becomes an apparatus of pacifying and escapist nature (ibid: 152).

Virtual reality’s possibility of total or complete embodiment, as depicted in *White Christmas,* is not predominant in these two examples. Instead, the mind is projected into cyberspace while the corporeal body – immobile and ever-present to the mind – is left behind before the electronic interface, ensuring that the engagement with such virtual reality remains disembodying and an ‘incomplete’ experience, unable to substitute and create a new phenomenal reality for its subjects. In Murray and Sixsmith’s (1999) terms is it the lucidity and transparency of the experience that creates and maintain the rift between the two ‘worlds’ (p. 334). The acceptance of this hypothesis could also explain why Bing and Liam are unsatisfied with their virtual ‘experiences’. The visual sensory is never complete or ‘whole’ in both instances, because it simply remains a visual – and thus a partial – sensory immersion. Bing’s earlier mentioned rebellion and Liam’s decision to cut out his grain both symbolize the ‘failure’ of the immersion. The limitations of their physical reality cannot be wholly substituted by a limited, unreal and incomplete virtual one as long as the sensory experience only remain partial (Dinello, 2005: 151).

Developed from the primacy of vision, the vast majority of virtual realities in *Black Mirror* remain a visual enterprise. The ‘immersion’ into television remains optical, the memories produced by the ‘grain’ gives the user the ability to relive the visual imagery – and voices when they are recorded – so the emphasis on optical sensory seems prioritized. However, it is also this limited experience that leaves the user disembodied and disconnected from their physical self.

Virtual reality in its most successful form – as presented in *White Christmas –* almost renders the physical reality obsolete. It depicts the possibility of entering a complete sensorial experience aided by a feeling of total embodiment in spaces visualized and generated by computers in its endeavoring of simulating our physical reality. It depicts a world where borders between a simulated reality and physical reality have become frighteningly dissolved, yet still dependent on the physical reality. Once ‘transported’, subjects have the possibility for growth and progress, but creation and birth – and sustainment of the machines that produce VR – still rely on physical reality. Virtual reality, if unsuccessful, echoes and competes with the physical reality because its immersion and feeling of embodiment – it authenticity – is incomplete, leaving its subjects dissatisfied and hollow; the feeling of another phenomenological reality is inadequate and the borders between the worlds still visible.

## The Identity of the Postmodern Individual

Within the technologized framework of *Black Mirror are characters* – and conventional Western human values – re-positioned within virtual realities where they become fragmented and dissolved. In the current postmodern capitalistic ‘mode-of-production’ subjects are constantly interpellated as active consumers in search of a temporary expression of identity, or technologically constituted as a pseudo-identity of mass production.

Previously elaborated was how technological expansion was used by capitalist corporations – dubbed the culture industry in this paper – to facilitate a control over markets, consumer desires, and manufactures non-existing needs (Dinello, 2005: 273). Characters are constantly interpellated as passive consumers of assorted promises with individual needs and desires that in turn can be satisfied by collectively mass produced commodities. Henry Ford’s saying that the costumer can choose freely any color he wants, as long as it is black resonate with a certain accuracy and validity the illusion of choice and individuality. Borders between subject and object, individual and group have been effaced in favor of mass marketing and consumption that values conformity above all (Bukatman, 1993: 296). *15 Million Merits* and *The Waldo Moment* depict this scenario, while *White Christmas, The Entire History of You* and *Be Right Back* show how the human body, identity and memories – in form of personal experiences – have also become mass-production commodities and part of the eternal cycle of consumerism (Cavallaro, 2000: 108). In turn, these items are of no real value to its consumers. They are products of anti-matter, de-socialization and social fragmentation that play processed experiences back to characters in a lackluster effort to control and manipulate subjects. In the name of ‘efficiency’, the structure and succession of capitalistic motives require the suppression of human spontaneity and obedience for corporate profit (McCaffery, 1991: 236).

The possible liberating qualities are also explored within the science-fictional structure of the anthology. When transported into a virtual reality – as depicted in *White Christmas* – the characters understanding of reality, identity and a sense of self, remain contingent on their experiences in the physical world. It shows that as long as the cognitive reconstruction of our minds into cyberspace entails one’s mastery of the physical world, little will change; the subject remain as an untested, unchanging, and eternal phenomenon (Bukatman, 1993: 301). Greta’s virtual simulation requires a corporeal body and space to even remotely comprehend her new predicament, her simulation needs a body and face that can feel and breathe. But afforded this, she still cannot understand her inability to sleep, eat and ‘function’ as a subject. The transfer to cyberspace has also robbed the ‘new’ subject of its validity; the human essence of the digital ‘subject’ is no more in the eyes of others. Like earlier science-fiction has cloning, copying and simulating of individuals rendered them invalid and inhuman. Disposable copies ready for consumption, servicing and deletion. The potential benefit of existence in cyberspace is the transformation from discontinuous beings to continuous beings as death by temporal termination no longer seems possible. However, in this continuity the state of immortality is contingent on the physical ‘masters’ and the human incentive to exist; a form of stimulation. In a world where temporality should present no restrictions, it instead becomes the *only* concern as it is the only thing the “terminal subjects” constantly experience. In *Black Mirror’s* version of cyberspace, virtual playground or virtual reality – whatever it is named – have humans, human life and human identity little value and is not an unrestricted place of amusement and escape. Cyberspace is subject to human control and as long as human subjects remain transferred and not constituted – or created – within cyberspace, changes are not to be expected. In the specific case of *White Christmas* are subjects interpellated as criminals or as servants who function as commodities.

With its fragmentation and commodification of memory, the anthology also problematizes conventional constructions of identities in two ways. Memory, as a tool of knowledge and the determining factor in ‘shaping’ people is challenged, as it becomes possible to simulate, transfer and copy such memories. Simulated-Jon’s ability to empathize with Greta’s barbaric treatment emphasizes this notion as Matthew to his own surprise notes. “Most people would say, she is not real she is only made of code. Fuck her. But you’re empathetic, you care about people (Brooker, 2014: 41:50-42:00). Empathy, along with other cognitive identical traits, can be simulated and copied with technology and is no longer confined to a single individual or his identity (Bukatman, 1993: 248). In the case of *White Christmas*, the simulation is displayed as almost identical to the ‘original’, whereas in *Be Right Back* the copy of Ash is not identical to the ‘real’ Ash. The reconstruction of Android-Ash is constituted by his public behavior, his ‘public identity’ that is constituted by social media. The differentiation between the ‘pseudo-identity’ of android-Ash and the ‘genuine-identity’ of sim-Greta and sim-Jon exist in their construction. The copy of sim-Greta and sim-Jon is composed of their most inner self and thoughts, whereas android-Ash’ identity is compiled from his ‘online-identity’ and interaction on social media, which is labeled as superficial and incomplete. The pseudo-identity of android-Ash illuminates the hollowness of social media and portrays it as incapable of producing meaningful and whole representations of people (Boren, 2015: 20).

In the posthuman world of *Black Mirror* people – and their temporary identify constructions – are consumers susceptible to lifestyles a means of expressing ‘individuality’ in a world of streamlined and mass-produced identities (Cavallaro, 2000: 105). Personal memories, preferences, identity and copies of the human body have likewise been incorporated into the production and sold back in the name of progress and economic imperative. The cost of this process is however a fragmentation, termination and subversion of human values like solidarity, intimacy and socialization (Dinello, 2005: 273). Bing remains isolated and in solitude by the highly technologized and commodity addicted culture he is reluctantly part off. Liam’s photographic memories become temporary substitutes – the scene where Liam and Fiona have passionate sex, but turns out to be a memory is a powerful image – and means of a non-progressive and non-developing relationship. Martha’s loss of Ash is in itself a loss of intimacy and solidarity, but the pseudo-identity of android-Ash keeps her in a perpetual state of such a loss. And perhaps most compelling is the blocking of Jon by his wife and later the exclusion and banishment of Matthew from the entirety of his physical world in a powerful display of overt social fragmentation.

## Cybernetic Understanding of Characters and Capitalism

Concerned with the study of society as a system of capitalistic exchange and people as part of its systematic nature, a cybernetic understanding of the culture industry, receiving and processing information in its of social control, has already been discussed. Similarly has it been discussed how actions, generated by technological change, has reflected and altered the systematic functionalities of our society. This chapter will shortly aggregate previous discussed notions of such and discuss them in relation to the cybernetic theoretical chapter.

It was noted that cybernetics was two things. First, “(…) a sublime vision of human power over chance”, and secondly as “(…) a dreary augmentation of multinational capitalism’s mechanical process of expansion” (McCaffery, 1991: 186). Departing from the former, the idea that humans are beings of feedback is powerfully depicted and the already mentioned *White Christmas* and *The Entire History of You,* where a cybernetic acceptance and understanding of personality, desires, opinions, memory and knowledge make up the mind as electrochemically structured within the brain’s cells (Dinello, 2005: 22-23). The human mind consists of patterns of information, patterns that can be extracted, copied, simulated and stored into digital databases. Humans are depicted as beings capable of receiving, storing and processing information so as to use it for control learning. But the social systems of life rarely offer relevant or perceptible feedback to the characters in *Black Mirror,* which results in no change of actions from the feedback acquired. Bing is not able to properly comprehend his situation on Hot Shots before it is too late and his ‘fate’ is already sealed. Liam’s feedback from his photographic memories offers him little help to reach his overall desired goal. Martha’s actions keep moving her from action to sensing to comparison, but not towards her desired goal of ‘resurrecting’ her husband; only from one undesirable action to the next. Both the technology the characters use, and *how* they use it covertly blend together and they notice its impact less and less before it eventually becomes apparent; and too late. Technology in itself requires a cybernetic understanding in order to understand to how it relates and affect our lives. Human shortcomings are often amplified by technology in *Black Mirror* and not a mechanism of self-regulation; and the learning process is a costly one (Gordon, 2014). Even in the cases of self-regulation, subjects are left with little moral guidance – the society is bereft of anomie in Jameson’s terms – and the limit between usage and over-usage is never clearly drawn. Wiener’s quote that “(…) to live effectively is to live with adequate information” (Dinello, 2005: 61) highlights the possibility of a post-humanity living in a world without drawbacks of human error and waste more than anything else. Subjects are capable of learning, developing and processing information. However, the anthology first insinuates that humans are incapable of such a machine-like efficiency, and secondly that there is more to life than to “live effectively”.

Cybernetics as the “augmentation of multinational capitalism’s mechanical process of expansion” has already been discussed in prolongation in previous analytical chapters, where the culture industry as ‘the society of the spectacle’ – the production image-system of the postmodern culture – have manufactured and fulfilled desires based on constant ‘feedback’ and information. The incorporation of Bing’s glass shard and Waldo’s political image are prime examples of such. It symbolize that corporations – multinational capitalism – like humans have the possibility of learning and evolving as they incorporate resistance into commodities. In the world of consumption and production, feedback does not result in saturation, but only the formation of additional needs and desires. In other words, if personality, desires, opinions, memory and knowledge are cybernetic patterns of information, then there always exists the possibility of commodification, furthering the eternal circle of consumerism that has replaced ‘being’ or ‘living’.

Likewise is technology and science in *Black Mirror* allowed its maximal ‘potential’ of expansion as the progressive is labeled valuable and positive; even if it has dreary consequences for human life. In *White Christmas,* Greta is told that she can eat before an operation – a product of modern science – where Matthew in the same footsteps rationalize the blocking of him from his wife – via optical implants – merely as the “the price of progress” (Dzeiza, 2014a). *The Entire History of You* also covertly depicts a society that has fortified surveillance and governmental expansion in the name of progress and security. Liam willingly allow airport security to recall his personal memories and affairs for the last couple of days to ensure nothing ‘out-of-the-ordinary’, nothing to obscure or non-conformist has recently taken place. Mechanized control of social life is used as in forms of surveillance and control, where borders between private and public has been effaced in the name of security. In the case of “capitalism’s mechanical process of expansion” is cybernetics a pretext for the desired goal of capitalistic growth with the continual surrender of individuality, socialization and freedom. By examining life and changing it into a system of exchanges, the processes of expansion hope to make such exchanges more efficient and effective, and less human.

# Conclusion

The purpose of the present and concluding chapter is to produce a concrete answer to the thesis question, and then account for the sub-conclusions reached throughout the analysis, in order to answer the thesis question of the project in a more extensive manner. The thesis question is the following:

How is technology in *Black Mirror* affecting both the environment and the characters in the technologized postmodern framework?

The technology in *Black Mirror* generate the conditions and continual augmentation of a consumer culture, where characters in increasing fashion become subjects, and commodifications, of mediated and simulated experiences, of mass-produced identities that promise individuality, and part of a society that organize de-socialization and cultural degeneration in the name of capitalism and technological progress.

The postmodern framework of the anthology presents a culture that favors the vicarious position of a voyeur. Emotions, memories, identities, preferences and even the human body have all become commodified by technological novas in a continual search to satisfy the need of authentic experiences in a culture that produces little but artificiality. The different protagonists often fall victim to the social fragmentation and ersatz nature of either their culture or the novas they posses, which in turn catalyzes their need for change, or highlights their complete entrapment. As such, Technology plays two different parts in constituting the framework of *Black Mirror*.

Technology, as a means of postmodern capitalistic expansion, serves as the continuum of a postmodern consumer culture where media elites manufacture, advertise and satisfy the needs it has itself created. It is technological because computers, television, phones and other visual technology, have enabled the possibility of a culture that is in increasingly convincing fashion capable of simulating and mediating sensory experience in form of commodities. However, these commodities are waned of affect and cause social fragmentation, addiction, loss of identity and authentic human relations, because the commodities in turn have no energy of their own.

Technology, in form of contemporary altered novas, serves in the science fictional framework to express a fearful and anxious perspective of technological use in the hands of humanity. Its invisible and pervasive essence – albeit neutral on its own – covertly fades into the background as characters are often unaware of its domination on their lives; unable to comprehend the continual feedback supplemented to them. Technology is not depicted as an evil or autonomous essence with a hidden agenda, instead it is a new bewildered force that can have dehumanizing side-effects oblivious to its users; prosaic human problems are re-placed in a new technological structure. Technology has many positive effects, but science fiction and *Black Mirror* urges us to also become aware of its potential negative effects.

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