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READING  
“BLACK  
MIRROR”

INSIGHTS INTO TECHNOLOGY  
AND THE POST-MEDIA CONDITION

[transcript] Media Studies

## From:

*German A. Duarte, Justin Michael Battin (eds.)*

### Reading »Black Mirror«

## Insights into Technology and the Post-Media Condition

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Very few contemporary television programs provoke spirited responses quite like the dystopian series *Black Mirror*. This provocative program, infamous for its myriad apocalyptic portrayals of humankind's relationship with an array of electronic and digital technologies, has proven quite adept at offering insightful commentary on a number of issues contemporary society is facing. This timely collection draws on innovative and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks to provide unique perspectives about how confrontations with such issues should be considered and understood through the contemporary post-media condition that drives technology use.

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## Imagining the Present Age

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German A. Duarte & Justin Michael Battin

Almost a decade has passed since Charlie Brooker's seminal televisual program, *Black Mirror*, began populating the social imaginary with plausible scenarios deriving from the current post-media condition. The name of the program, as noted by Doug Hill, directly references the variety of digital screens that have, in his words, "proliferated in our daily lives, and all that too often seem to dominate them" (2017, p. 35). Although a wide range of digital technologies, particularly those permitting the generation, storage, and processing of data, are indeed pervasive in the current age, the general public has embraced their presence, viewing them as necessary to address societal issues related to energy, security, communication, transportation, health care, education, and food production. In part through the visible stewardship of public figures like Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, and Jack Ma, these technologies have been widely adopted and integrated into everyday life, and thus rendered as ordinary (Williams, 2000 [1958]) and components of the everyday techno-scape (Appadurai, 1990).

It might be possible to understand the pervasiveness and taken-for-grantedness (Ling, 2012) of these new technologies as an analogous process. For Debray (1991), the development of technologies can be characterized by an unnoticeable character; human beings collectively accept these technological developments – mainly media technologies – as something natural since it is through these devices one perceives what is considered 'normal life' (1991, p. 202). Accompanying (and intertwined with) these technological developments is the radical cognitive transformation of everyday life, which likewise transpires seemingly without notice. For Heidegger (1977 [1962]), this transformation is best characterized by its technological character, *Das Gestell* (the framework/enframing). By organizing every form of human association and action (McLuhan 1994 [1964]), technologies and their corresponding

essence, *Das Gestell*, exert forces that determine the way the subject encounters the world, and consequently discloses a particular worldly orientation (*Weltanschauung*). In Heidegger's words, "the need to ask about technology is presumably dying out to the same extent that technology more definitely characterizes and regulates the appearance of the totality of the world and the position of man in it" (1977 [1972], p. 376).

Such an orientation renders the subject unable to recognize and, by consequence, to comprehend the influence technologies have on its everyday existence, and the contemporary subject is thus obliged to develop "spaces of estrangement" from which it is possible to observe and account for its alienated condition. One of the most influential ways to exert these forces of estrangement on the subject was identified in Science Fiction, a genre that places technological concerns at its epicenter and organizes its narrative form as a dialectic between forces of estrangement and cognition (Suvin, 1972). In accordance with the Science Fiction genre, Brooker's *Black Mirror* addresses the aforementioned concern in a rather vivid manner, seemingly to ignite a critical lens and awaken viewers to their contemporary condition. Indeed, the series is "(...) notable for the potency in which it blends the disruptive powers of affect with the cohering powers of critique" (Conley & Burroughs, 2019, p. 140). Readings akin to these have inspired some authors to suggest that the program bears resemblance to Rod Sterling's *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), another classic anthology series that similarly entwined Science Fiction and social critique with shock and unexpected narrative twists. A notable difference, however, concerns the two program's thematic foci. Although thematic overlaps exist between the two programs, *The Twilight Zone* draws significantly more from the existentialist tradition to address the impact on human authenticity and identity wrought by the advent of consumer society and technological acceleration of the mid-20th century. *Black Mirror*, as a sort of successor, continues this exploration, albeit with more interest in depicting the apprehension that accompanies the colonization of human consciousness by technology's pervasive reach in the 21st century. Indeed, as noted by Cirucci & Vacker, "if *The Twilight Zone* reflected the existential angst and Cold War fears of the baby boomer generation, *Black Mirror* expresses the philosophical angst and technological fears for millennials in the twenty-first century" (2018, p. ix).

Continuing Science Fiction's storied tradition of promoting critical perspectives (see Freedman, 2000), *Black Mirror* constructs a fertile terrain for



a social discussion on general concerns regarding these new technologies and their place in the construction of reality. As an anthology series utilizing an episodic format, *Black Mirror* inaugurated the second decade of the new millennium by generating a space of shared imaginary in which an intersubjective need to more intently domesticate and reign in digital technologies emerged, lest they become too pervasive and entrenched in everyday life, beyond the point of any human regulation. It constructs this terrain on a strong particularity, which can be highlighted by the fact that generally the series is perceived as a dystopic vision of a (very near) future. However, as Sculos (2017) suggests, the program is perhaps more reflective of the present day than of a theoretical future, as it regularly provides commentary on the intersection between technology and contemporary thematic concerns such as the abjection of the other (“Men Against Fire”), social media addiction (“Smithereens”), and digitally enabled mob mentality (“The National Anthem” and “Hated in the Nation”). Moreover, the program presents common scenarios such as using currency to bypass digital advertisements (“Fifteen Million Merits”) and malware-enabled hacking to commit digital blackmail (“Shut Up and Dance”). Additionally, the program features technologies that are already widely used, such as social media-based rating systems. These parallels between *Black Mirror* and the current reality have hardly gone unnoticed. For example, popular commercial publications such as *Wired* (Botsman, 2017; Kobie, 2019) have offered comparisons between “Nosedive” and China’s Social Credit System, and Littmann (2019) demonstrates how “The Waldo Moment” highlights the politics of disrespect and disengagement that are widespread in our contemporary world, and of which technology has indeed played a significant role in propagating. Above all, however, the program depicts a different media condition strongly influenced by the force of dematerialization and coding of every human action that our present digital technology exerts. This last phenomenon, understood as symptomatic of a post-media condition, is conjugated by the television series under different plausible scenarios and popular concepts of interest to a variety of social fields and academic disciplines. As an example, consider the transformation of both cultural and collective memory if the event is primarily – and almost exclusively – technologically experienced, stored, and recalled (“The Entire History of You” and “Crocodile”). Within this framework, it is certainly legitimate to question the transformation of experience in the world, particularly one where numerous forms of surveillance omnipresent and human experi-

ence are codified into data at the moment of their happening. What becomes of human perception under this condition and how does it influence the contemporary construction of reality, as “Men Against Fire” so astutely interrogates?

The series ardently deals with symptoms we are witnessing in our current socio-technological context and invites us to consider how the culmination of the process initialized by the identification of the Enlightenment – mainly the Enlightenment that sees its maximal expression in the Leibnizian computational project – could represent an unimaginable, extreme techno-authoritarianism that goes even beyond our current notions of biopolitics and hegemonic forces of the dispositive (See Foucault, 2004 and Agamben, 2006). Two of the factors that strengthen and ‘optimize’ new expressions of social control are without doubt both the process of miniaturization and the popularization of technological devices. The mass production of mobile media technologies and their corresponding content as digital forms invaded and dissolved the formerly well-defined relationship between the private and the public spheres. As a corresponding result, the mass presence of these technological components occupied and fully shaped the whole social space, as depicted in “Hated in the Nation.” This phenomenon represents a kind of leitmotif throughout the whole television series and serves as a conceptual gear for its plentiful depictions of techno-authoritarian scenarios. This could represent the framework through which the series analyses techno-authoritarianism as a force able to determine every form of value production within an economic system based on immaterial production (“Fifteen Million Merits”), the way this force determines every form of interaction and consumption with the object (“Playtest” and “Arkangel”), and every human-social relationship (“Hang The DJ”). Further, going beyond the invasion of the private sphere, and even beyond the traditional technological invasion of the body encapsulated in the figure of the cyborg, the series presents scenarios in which technological devices completely invade social spaces to the point of embracing all forms of human action. In fact, through the phenomenon of transhumanism, the series gives insights on a techno-authoritarian force embodied by a computational model able to determine people’s most intimate memories (“San Junipero”) while at the same time producing the center of the experience, that is to say, the body (“Be Right Back”).

Despite the variance between the episodes in terms of story and content, the negative affordances of technology dominate (Singh, 2014). Like *The Twi-*

*light Zone*, the temporal proximity of the dystopian scenarios depicted in *Black Mirror* – those that could legitimately transpire in our present or not to distant reality – might be the precise feature that allowed the program to obtain such a presence in mainstream media, and consequently its ascension into the *Zeitgeist*. As noted by Chen, the techno-paranoia of the show seems to provide catharsis; “the concept of catharsis is one that wholly applies to the show’s rapt audience. This desire to purge emotions, to experience the very horrors that we believe, in the recesses of our mind, *could* occur is what makes each episode of the show so alluring and somehow subsequently relieving” (2019). The series serves as a cathartic experience by means of the phenomenon of estrangement, which is generated by this precise narrative form. Further, as already noted, this television series seems to offer us the experience of a virtual present time, a present time that is directly derived from our daily lives and that seems to be the only existing temporal notion in our technological context. As suggested by Gillo Dorfles, in our digital technological context it seems that there is no longer space for the Bergsonian duration (*durée*), and consequently, unable to conceive an interval, the subject in our technological context seems to dwell a continuous present digital and hypertextual time bereft of future time (Dorfles, 2008). Nevertheless, the virtual present time generated in the series, which serves as a cathartic experience for the viewer (*viewer* in the case of *Bandersnatch*), is, maybe for its own cathartic nature, popularly perceived as a near future. This is a dystopian near future (Johnson, Márquez & Urueña 2020) which is no more than the present we live in, and that in its turn was constructed by the imaginary that Science Fiction developed during the second half of the last century. As remarked by James Ballard in an interview conducted in the late 90s,

I feel myself that science fiction is now probably dead. It is a mid-20th-century movement and it is finished. I think it won. It achieved a great victory. It created the greatest popular literature of the 20th century. The science fiction imagery that we see in the cinema, on television, in advertising and so on, it’s the most powerful imagery that the 20th century has produced. You could say that science fiction died because it succeeded (2019, p. 40).

Ballard’s words are not only a strong statement that elucidates that, in our (former) mass media society, reality was the simple product of narratives that gave shape to the social imaginary, but these words also describe the

way Science Fiction familiarized people with a perpetual and unique present time, as it constructed the social imagery on the assumption that in the technological context, in accordance with the thesis proposed in Heidegger's "The Age of the World Picture" (1977), the future is just a determined path that seems to erase any minority report. Unable to change the future, the subject of the post-media condition can only, from its eternal present, transform the perception of the past, a digital flexible past that forgets the fixity of history – granted by the materiality of the archive – and acquires the changeable nature of the digital immaterial object and the nature of memory.

To start the collection, German A. Duarte analyzes the way in which Science Fiction became a fertile terrain for philosophical reasoning as well as the way in which this genre became a popular space for the development of concepts able to populate the whole social imaginary by suturing a millenarian rupture in western philosophy. This chapter inquires about the notion of the concept, on the difference between the notions of *virtual* and *possible*, and on the way concepts – understood as complex and multidimensional images, – populate the social imaginary via Science Fiction narratives. By analyzing Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) as a foundational oeuvre, this chapter identifies Science Fiction as a clear symptom of an oncoming technological condition, one in which the irruption of electric technology began to exert a force of the externalization of being. Following this framework, this chapter analyses *Black Mirror* as a remarkable attempt to recover the inaugural spirit of the genre by mapping a series of various current social phenomena that features a post-media condition through an episodic format. It is to say, a human condition determined by the end of technologies as a simple prosthesis of humankind.

In the second chapter, Mazurek offers a (post)apocalyptic interpretation of two *Black Mirror* episodes, "Fifteen Million Merits" and "Metalhead," wherein the notion of the apocalypse is approached not so much in terms of its destructive potential, but as a powerful metaphor of paradigmatic transformation. Drawing from Jacques Derrida's discussion of the apocalyptic tone detectable across philosophical discourses, as well as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's view of the evolution of the natural environment into the industrial one, Mazurek identifies in both episodes a number of disappearing binaries hitherto considered formative for the development of western consciousness. These include oppositions such as nature-culture, nature-man, masculine-feminine, organic-technological, and conscious-unconscious.

This dismantling is further supported by the theories of Samuel Butler and René Descartes whose views concerning the (im)possibility of machine consciousness are also reflected in the show. Following the conviction of apocalypse's transformative rather than destructive power, the chapter concludes by offering a socio-philosophical reflection on the post-apocalyptic character of contemporary post-media western society.

In the third chapter of the volume, Joseph Macey and Brian McCauley analyze the episode "Playtest" with particular attention warranted to the ways in which digital games embody contemporary socio-economic realities of western life. While "Playtest" has been described as an episode that lacks a specific moral lesson or social commentary – indeed Charlie Brooker, the series creator, referred to it as simply "a romp ... good fun" (Hibberd, 2018) – it remains a cultural product which offers commentary on contemporary socio-cultural realities, both inviting and provoking discussion amongst fans, critics, and even academics. Central to their interpretation of this episode is the gamification of society and the wider cultural logic of Baumann's theory of liquid modernity. The episode functions as an allegory for liquid modernity, and one which can be further contextualized through the consideration of life in an increasingly gamified world. Furthermore, given the obvious significance of games in "Playtest," they examine the evolving role of video games in facilitating and promoting contemporary practices related to the economic, social, and cultural value systems of liquid modernity.

Continuing with the subject of games, Robbie Fordyce and Tom H. Apperley consider the series' interactive film, *Bandersnatch*, as an experimental hybrid of streaming video and digital game. Like all works in the *Black Mirror* series, it revolves its story around a commentary about everyday life. In their reading of this hybrid game, they argue that *Bandersnatch* is a mystery game in the sense that the combination of complexity and repetition of the various story paths presents a different exploration of *Black Mirror's* science fiction world while still emphasizing the refrain of the danger of technology. From this, they observe that the social commentary provided by *Bandersnatch* focuses on the boredom of platformed entertainment. They derive this position from the way that its simple interface for play is functionally identical to the interface for browsing film choices on Netflix, and thus *Bandersnatch* comments on the mystery of possible choices amongst the shows we could choose to watch and the prospect of being bored to death by contemporary entertainment media.

In Chapter Five, Mauricio Molina-Delgado and Bértold Salas-Murillo propose that several *Black Mirror* episodes deal with one of the most problematic themes when studying the philosophy of the mind and cognitive sciences: *qualia*, i.e., the subjective qualities of experiences, *experimented on through technology*. The authors argue that most episodes occur in potential worlds wherein natural laws are compatible with the main thesis of functionalism. This viewpoint in philosophy of mind interprets mental states not as physical or non-physical functions, but rather as internal operations that mediate between the inputs and outputs of a system. Many of the arguments and counterarguments of functionalism have been proposed through thought experiments. Due to their fictional yet plausible nature, *Black Mirror* episodes play a similar role to these experiments: they propose imaginary situations in which the truthfulness of a specific thesis is verified or put into perspective. Episodes such as “White Christmas,” “Playtest,” “San Junipero,” “USS Callister,” “Crocodile,” “Black Museum,” and “Striking Vipers” contemplate the role of digital technology in reflections about *qualia* or problematizations of the relationship between mind and body, consciousness and brain. The authors assert that, in the *Black Mirror* universe, the self can be considered a disembodied concept. Some episodes take a position concerning this neuroscientific problem, while others imagine possibilities which defy contemporary science. In several episodes, the digitalization of sensations, feelings, or consciousness is enabled by a series of devices corresponding to interfaces that allow the input and output of information, as proposed by functionalism. Finally, the way the authors conceive of ethical issues in organic and non-organic beings face a contemporaneous problematic since *qualia* can be artificially generated.

In the sixth chapter, Justin Michael Battin analyzes the episode “Fifteen Million Merits” through a Heideggerian rendering of place and place-making practices. He suggests, in alignment with other texts in the Science Fiction genre, that the episode is duly concerned with presenting the virtues and hazards facilitated by a technology-as-power worldview; however, it is more fundamentally interested in elucidating what an ontological view of one’s self (i.e. a self considered topologically) can reveal. While the short history of the genre consists of texts presenting dystopian visions of the world, they often conclude with an optimistic outlook. In contrast to these texts, the tale of “Fifteen Million Merits” eschews optimism by mirroring contemporary society’s ubiquitous post-pessimistic malaise. He proposes that while

such a condition endures and critical reflection seems destined for failure, as both the inhabitants of the episode's world and contemporary society seem to have accepted their fates in the current state of affairs, the notion of place and the role of the self as a catalyst for its founding seems to faintly endure. He concludes by proposing that through place and place-making practices, human beings, understood as *Dasein*, are capable of rediscovering and sustaining their ontological role as dwellers, interpreted by Heidegger as cultivators and preservers of existentially meaningful worlds.

The next chapter, written by Hatice Övgü Tüzün, considers the program's dystopian depictions of the world with emphasis on how technologies are transforming their makers and human relationships. The focus of the chapter, "Nosedive," is an episode that imagines a world in which the current climate of social media obsession escalates until all of society is engulfed by the pressure to maintain high ratings. "Nosedive" depicts an engineered society based on popularity, in which people desperately try to ascend the social hierarchy with fake kindness and carefully curated social media profiles. The episode also depicts an extremely 'mediated reality,' one primarily shaped by digital technology/social media and ruled by 'mediated desires,' often expressed through voyeurism and determined emotions. Within this framework, the author argues that "Nosedive" offers a memorable illustration of what Stjepan Mestrovic calls a "postemotional society" (1997, p. 38) wherein emotion has been "transformed into a quasi-intellectual phenomenon that makes it suitable for manipulation by self and others."

Continuing with "Nosedive," Santiago Giraldo-Luque, Ricardo Carniel Bugs, and Santiago Tejedor suggest that the episode raises three issues of interest for the fields of sociology and communication. Firstly, the episode represents the fictionalized and caricatured world of a reality that is real and current, but, in accordance with an "enframed" view of the world, goes mostly unrecognized by the users/viewers of the platform. Secondly, it describes the construction and self-reproduction of systemic power, which is fully sophisticated and functional, and is fed by the users/viewers themselves through the use of their devices and the emotional control exerted by the dynamics of social validation. Finally, the episode encourages viewers to reflect on the use of social networks not as spaces for conversation, meetings, or communication, but as stages for a passive, one-way exchange of automatic "likes" for emotional self-complacency. The episode, in the authors' view, prompts an urgent call for interdisciplinary action, specifically to raise

awareness towards the fading prominence of communication, the power of screen-based platforms, and the need for a collaborative approach to media literacy and education.

Dealing with another expression of social control, the ninth chapter of this collection, written by Andrea Facchetti, presents an analysis on how “The Entire History of You” addresses and represents issues related to surveillance. This chapter focuses on the episode’s ability to produce a fracture in the narrative framework by which discourses and visual imageries are nowadays formulated, represented, and enjoyed around the theme of surveillance. It argues that the critical potentialities of this episode lie in the ability to produce a new image of surveillance devices and of subjectivization. Specifically, this chapter draws a clear schema of contemporary surveillance, which is argued as being articulated into three main issues: the hedonistic matrix that characterizes our relationship with surveillance today, the fluid and mobile network of surveillance wherein elements can be reconfigured to occupy different positions and roles, and its normative character and the action of normalization operating in the society of control.

In Chapter 10, Ward also proposes that the issue of surveillance is a major theme in *Black Mirror* (which reflects contemporary social concerns around developments like data mining and increasingly sophisticated recognition technology), and one of the most novel ways in which it is addressed is in the episode “Crocodile.” The episode was shot entirely in Iceland, during a period in which Reykjavik faced its heaviest snowfall in 70 years. The icy, mountainous backdrop jars with the British accents of the episode’s characters, evoking the sense of rootlessness and disruption often familiar to *Black Mirror*’s dystopian imaginings of the near future. More than this, though, the setting clearly elicits the aesthetics of Nordic Noir, perhaps most notably referencing the transnational hybridity apparent in productions like *Lilyhammer* and *Fortitude*. In this chapter, Ward examines the ways in which “Crocodile” draws upon the conventions of Nordic Noir, not only in the foregrounding of the evocative landscape (an eminent factor in the episode’s landscape from the moment the central characters take advantage of the isolation to cover up the initial crime), but also in exploring the familiar themes and concerns of the genre. While Nordic Noir’s realist aesthetic perhaps jars with *Black Mirror*’s more surreal critique of a future not yet realized, this is another aspect of seemingly incongruent juxtaposition which renders the motif so powerful. The basis of this chapter’s analysis is founded on the untenable



tension between nature and technology, corporate outsourcing and public responsibility, and isolation and surveillance highlighted in the episode and grounded in the aesthetic.

The following chapter, by Artur de Matos Alves, explores the extremest form of a subject's surveillance and control through an analysis of "Men Against Fire," the fifth episode of the third season. In this episode, set in a post-apocalyptic time, a team of soldiers is sent to exterminate "roaches," ostensibly a mutant species of humans. After a mission, a soldier begins experiencing disruptions in his performance-enhancing neural implants (MASS device). The implants are revealed to be not enhancers, but rather perception-altering devices that make soldiers perceive a group of humans as monsters, therefore rendering the soldier more amenable to committing genocide. In this chapter, "Men Against Fire" is the point of departure for a reflection on media, propaganda, and ideology. Through Zizek's concept of hallucination as ideology, as well as Mark Fisher's concept of "verminization" as a rhetorical device in the justification of war, this chapter analyses the role of media and technology in accelerating the uptake of the ideological structuring of the social and political reality. The argument focuses on the use of the technological implant as a stand-in for a sociotechnical dispositive. Moreover, de Matos Alves argues that the figure of the MASS offers insights on the effects of media and the way contemporary media could represent tools for spreading and consolidating ideological representations of the Other.

In Chapter 12, the volume proposes an analysis on the way this television series sheds light on the fact that human beings and technology are intrinsically entangled and mutually constituted. As pointed out by Anna Caterina Dalmasso in her chapter, "Technicity and the Utopian Limits of the Body," technicity shall be thought of not as something that is merely added onto the natural core of embodied life, but as the very structure of the relationship between human beings and the environment. Thus, through "The Entire History of You," "Striking Vipers," and "San Junipero" this chapter analyzes the way digital prostheses contribute to informing and reconfiguring our bodily and embodied engagement with the world. This chapter also suggests an inquiry into the experience of inhabiting an avatar as acting like a prosthetic virtual body and analyzes the fantasies of disembodiment raised by the prospects of singularity and consciousness uploading as questioned by "San Junipero," in particular.

Alfredo Rizza continues the theme of communicative interactions between human and machine, albeit by considering the aesthetic and spiritual aspects of losing and reconnecting with loved ones. In particular, his chapter focuses on the episode “Be Right Back” and establishes, through the lens of Luigi Zoja’s theory of the ‘death of the neighbour’ (2019), a comparison between that *Black Mirror* episode and *Solaris* (1972) by Andrei Tarkovsky. Through this comparison, the technology imagined in “Be Right Back” allows for the analysis of contemporary social media as phatic systems. As noted by Rizza, “Be Right Back” imagines that the technological reproduction of a deceased person works surprisingly well in linguistic-communicative terms, but only to the point when the deceased is actually reproduced in a material body, a ‘body’ whose behaviors show characteristics that recall certain kinds of textuality. The episode reveals that the bodily reproduction of the deceased does not show fundamental human features such as free will, rationality, or compassion.

After Rizza’s introduction to the technological reproduction of a human being, Chapter 14, authored by Georgios Tsagdis, explores the ramifications of potentially digitizing consciousness, thereby preserving memory and subjectivity on the distinctive technological ground which enables and facilitates the utopia named San Junipero, the title of the fourth episode of the third season. This chapter re-signifies the Freudian analysis of the reality principle – which establishes an economy of desire and pleasure in the face of death – through Baudrillard’s exposition of the articulation of the historical contingency that we call reality. It aims, therefore, to examine the significance of the place and function of death in our understanding and experience of the familiar reality of our human destiny, vis-à-vis a reality that promises to be without death, if not without pain and suffering. Accordingly, this chapter adopts the Platonic project of philosophy as a ‘study of death’ – as exigent in the post-simulated world as at the dawn of occidental thought.

In Chapter 15, Gabriela Galati explores the transhumanist optimism of mind uploading into a digital simulation, which the episode “San Junipero” openly presents as a virtual paradise. The episode’s two subjects, having left their obsolete and transitory flesh behind, have their minds (consciousnesses? souls?) stored in a computer in an immense server room wherein they are finally able to live a liberated, flawless life. Subjectivity being located in the mind is a typical transhumanist perspective, a perspective which the final scenes of “San Junipero” seem to endorse. This chapter uses the con-

cepts of complex subjectivities and the technological unconscious to show how the disembodiment illustrated by the episode is not only impossible, but above all undesirable: in a post-biological landscape an uploaded individual would cease to be a subject. Tracing the conceptualization of a technological unconscious through its genealogy from Sigmund Freud (1925; 1930) to Antonio Caronia (2006), among others, the concept suggests that a stratus exists in technology and the processes by which we interact with it that is not accessible to human thought, but that is nonetheless symbolically structured. This chapter therefore proposes that the technological unconscious is not meant to be analyzed as though it belonged to a subject, as it focuses on the apparatuses' autonomous actions and thus offers a key to uncovering certain collective symbolic clues.

One of the critically important issues facing mankind is climate change, and the media plays a critical role in the presentation and delivery of information to an audience. Gabor Sarlos closes the volume by proposing that dystopian portrayals produced in a contemporary context either implicitly or explicitly account for the effects of climate change. In the *Black Mirror* universe, never is this claim made clearer than in "Hated in the Nation." This episode depicts the human, technologically, and politically dominated view of nature, which is portrayed as wholly manipulatable and even replaceable with artificial systems. As one of the most pressing issues of the contemporary world, Sarlos suggests that the episode can be approached from four prominent angles, which provides not only the possibility for a focused analysis, but also permits placing the story into a wider context of interdisciplinary interpretation. Given that the impact of climate change can be widely felt across numerous arenas of contemporary life, approaching the issue, in addition to the thematic concerns *Black Mirror* addresses more broadly, requires a nuanced approach of interdisciplinarity.

Inspired by Brooker's seminal television series and the proposed notion that Science Fiction is a privileged genre for critical analysis, this volume therefore aims to address the aforementioned concerns of the post-media condition, particularly by drawing on innovative and interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks. As evidenced by the ascension of *Black Mirror* into the realm of pop culture and its anointment as a textual artifact worth exploring (see Johnson, 2020; Cirucci and Vacker, 2018), it is clear that the themes *Black Mirror* explores, as well as the contexts in which they have been presented, have resonated with viewers and academics alike. Indeed, very few con-

temporary television programs provoke spirited responses quite like *Black Mirror*. This timely collection therefore seeks to capitalize both on the show's enduring popularity as well as its topical relevance by presenting chapters that explore themes applicable to contemporary society.

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