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The Posthuman and Psychopolitics:
between *Her* (Spike Jonze, 2013) and *Black
Mirror* (Charlie Brooker, 2011)

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Abstract: An analysis of different Marxist authors' theories about society, followed by a comparison with the movie *Her* and the episode from *Black Mirror* called *Nosedive*, which also criticize the nowadays society and its dependence on technology. People do not seem to be much concerned about this dependence and its consequences, so this may leave the reader with second thoughts about the abuse of technology and our unconscious contribution to a capitalist system. This paper merges both perspectives of Marxist authors referring to real world and the fictional societies from these pieces of media.

Key words: commodities, production, State, freedom, technologies

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1. Introduction

If someone asked people the problems that this society has, no two answers would be the same, and multiple topics would be addressed. From the population's demand of constant productivity by the system to the mention of the word *capitalism*. These subjects, among some others, are conveyed by multiple authors who express their opinion and their theories regarding the society we live in. This essay will display some of these theories and ideas, comparing them to two pieces of media: *Her*, directed by Spike Jonze the year 2013, and *Black Mirror's* first episode from its third season – *Nosedive* –, by Charlie Brooker.

The particularity about these two pieces of media is that they are both situated in a futuristic society, mostly similar to the one that we live in, but with the peculiarity of advanced IA and its misuse. Jonze and Brooker transmit a feeling of uncanniness to the viewer: they are immersed in the world they currently live in, but this world slowly becomes darker, introducing ideas of possible destinies in one's life and showing how it is not impossible to end up living in the dystopia presented. These pieces of media will be analyzed and compared to different author's point of views.

Karl Marx, a German philosopher, will be this paper's most important author to present his theories – and critiques – about capitalism. In his most famous book, *Capital*, he argues how commodities represent not only the work that went into their creation, but also the community cohesion of manufacturing in which it took place. (Marx, 1867, p. 44). This reflects how nowadays, capitalism has a power relationship system where every social class has power over the one under them and uses it in order to achieve more capital. Marx's theories can be interpreted in every social period's context, including fictional universes, seen in some other author's theories and pieces of media, which will be

explained later on in this analysis, where authors like Michel Foucault, Byung-Chul Han or Louis Althusser will be mentioned in order to offer a different close-reading of *Her* and *Black Mirror*.

First of all, in 1967 Michel Foucault argued in his book *Right of Death and Power over Life* that “It is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility.” (Foucault, 1967, p. 144). It refers to Marx’s theory, where the only purpose of life is to bring usefulness and value into the society, which will be seen later on, compared to *Black Mirror*.

The year 1971, Louis Althusser gave his opinion on Marx’s theory and gives a step further into it by explaining the “State Power” and “State Apparatus”, and as for a more modern author, Byung-Chul Han talks about technology, how we live in a filtered society that pressures us into producing more. Han’s modern-day adaptations gives a fresh point of view to the theories presented more than a hundred years earlier and adding the factor of electronics and computers.

These authors and more will be the ones that will lay the foundation of *capitalism*, *commodities* and some other terms that will be further explained in this project, according to what is shown in both pieces of media previously mentioned. The objective of this paper is to apply the critical theories of capitalism developed by these different authors and to show how these two pieces of media illustrate the real-life problems that we face in the age of social media. Jonze and Brooker are the last people to criticize the world we live in, using a different format. Instead of talking about society, State Power or capitalism, they create metaphorical worlds around them to show what is wrong with it in a more entertaining way, which has been able to reach more people than any of their preceding authors.

2. Ideology, capital and freedom

Commodities are what move the world. They are used to comfort all social classes in every way. For higher classes, commodities will be useful for the reproduction of even more commodities, hence profits, basing the economy on the accumulation of such. Nowadays, commodities have evolved into a more complex system to satisfy the evolving human desires – which evolved into needs by the capitalist system –. Zygmunt Bauman argues that we have to face the challenge of our surrounding becoming “liquid”, affirming that our “life project” is longer than our longevity (Bauman, 2007, p. 1). Bearing that in mind, humans these days require a fast and useful profit from any commodity that they may require.

In a capitalist system, the value of an object – or commodity – in the market is different from the value of the object itself. If objects’ worth was measured by its use-value, every object would have a different currency – hence, a carrot would cost a carrot, but a potato would cost a potato –. To avoid these differences when trading different objects, they are given its exchange-value, which is measured in money, and this value varies depending on the labor put into it, creating then the “Labor Theory of Value”¹ (Marx, 1867). Hence, capitalists need workers in order to produce the commodities that they need to earn money. The ruling classes’ objective is to obtain the biggest benefit and surplus-value by spending the least capital, including workers’ labor. Then, the workers’ objective is to have a decent quality of life while giving profit to the capitalist, but not working extra hours or being exploited by the capitalists. They must find a balance where both benefit from the system, since capitalists need workers as much as workers need capitalists.

1. The Labor Theory of Value is a theory exposed by Marx where the “socially necessary labor” needed regulates the economic benefit of a commodity or service. (Marx, 1867)

In a system where the workers are exploited by the ruling classes, the tool used for this kind of manipulation is a “Repressive Apparatus”, which Marx and Lenin considered the State’s function (Althusser, 1971, p. 7). In most societies, and especially in the ones we live in nowadays, the State has two different elements to define it: *State Power* and *State Apparatus*. The first one is the social welfare that the ruling classes rely on to keep their status in a society, while the other is the tool that they use in order to keep that status and be distinguished from the workers, those tools being either police, school or religion. According to Althusser, “the objective of the class struggle concerns state power, and in consequence the use of the state apparatus by the classes [...] holding state power as the function of their class objectives.” (1971, p. 10). Hence, the State Power and the State Apparatuses are perpetuated by workers since, as it has been said before, they need capitalists as much as capitalists need workers, so the existence of State Power is a necessity for everyone in a community.

Apart from the distinction between State Power and State Apparatus, this latter has two other subcategories: “Ideological State Apparatus” (ISA) and “Repressive State Apparatus” (RSA). Karl Marx recognized the State Apparatus as the Courts and prisons, the government, or the army, which Althusser calls the Repressive State Apparatus, implying that they used violence to impose their ideology or their way of thinking (1971, p. 12). For Althusser, an ISA is the set of various institutions that belong to the private domain and also used to impose an ideology, but in a more passive way (1971, p. 13). Byung-Chul Han added some sense of freshness by applying Althusser’s theories to the society we live in nowadays, surrounded by computers and new technologies (2017, p. 1).

In a society ruled by a sovereign, the right of life and death of an individual would depend in the respect and the submission they have to the one that rules them: the ruler of the community will not sentence to death anyone that disagrees with them, but if someone dares to threaten their welfare or to try to overthrow him, they would “expose their life”, which would end up in a death sentence, according to Michel Foucault (1976, p. 135). This made reference to the Medieval Times, when the *patria potestas* was the one that decided if his wife and kids lived or died since he was the one that brought food to their table. But a more conceptual comparison has been made by Michel Foucault: instead of deciding the right of life of someone, they changed the way they lived, sometimes concluding with the death of oneself for being in such poor life conditions. This has not change the number of deaths amongst the population, or that the State Power is less violent; in fact, the State now understands the purpose of violence, how and when to use it (Foucault, 1976, p. 135). This leads us to the division of power in two forms, both of them being linked to the raise of capitalism in our society. The first form is mostly focused in how Power sees the human body as a machine, where subjects optimize their own bodies to work better for society. Then, Foucault introduces the term “bio-politics of the population”, a second system centered in the species-body, which works by regulating birth dates, health and life expectancy, among others (Foucault, 1976, p. 139). Therefore, comparing with the theory that Althusser had about power, Foucault considered that a biopower would not depend in multiple Apparatuses – such as the police or forces of control – but just in one, called the *dispositif* (Adams, 2017). This type of forces would operate from beneath and depended on multiple materials instead of an individual sovereign. Foucault argues how:

The second, formed somewhat later, focused on the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary. Their supervision was effected through an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the population* (Foucault, 1976, p. 139).

These two forms of power allowed individual bodies to be controlled and fitted into a community in order to contribute to capitalism with nothing else than their mere existence. Bearing this in mind, we could access to the theory that Foucault wanted to introduce in his book *The History of Sexuality*, which implied that “Sex was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species.” (Foucault, 1976, p. 146).

Years later, the author Alenka Zupančič introduced to Foucault’s theories the existence of the unconscious between biopolitics and sexuality, affirming the existence of "unconscious sexuality," the reality that lies beneath our behaviors (Zupančič, 2016, p. 51).

Foucault also made a reference to the Panopticon, a system of surveillance presented firstly by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th Century. His objective was to create a prison where the inmates would be supervised by a single security guard, but without knowing if they are observed or not. This prison has a circular form with a cylindrical tower in the middle, allowing the security guard to see every prisoner, but prohibiting the inmates from seeing anyone else than oneself (Bentham, 1791). This led Foucault to develop his theory about the Panopticon and power. When an inmate spends too much time in that prison, they

become submissive and live in a constant sensation of being observed. This would give the sovereign the power over everyone (Foucault, 1976, p. 135). The Korean writer Byung-Chul Han also mentioned the Panopticon, which will be explained further in this paper.

Byung-Chul Han started his book called *Psychopolitics* by referring to Karl Marx: freedom is defined by a successful relationship with a community. Capital benefits itself thanks to individual freedom, so it reinforces individuals to achieve self-realization with others in order to achieve this sense of freedom to asset the Capital's desires. But according to Byung-Chul Han, everything that articulates any form of freedom in a "Neoliberal society" is used to exploit the earnings of that autonomy (Han, 2017, p. 3). He then opposes to Marx by saying that "Neoliberalism transforms workers into *entrepreneurs*." (Han, 2017, p. 5), implying that now there is no need of capitalist – or, as he says, master – to exploit the labor of oneself. The society that we are living in has achieved an individual competition in which we try to overcome ourselves and become better with no competition with others more than our own. This would lead us to the theory of "Dictatorship of Transparency" (Han, 2017, p. 8). It implies that, in a society full of technology and social media, we are forced to show our best version to the world and named it a *digital Panopticon*. Instead of being uncommunicated with each other, we willingly expose ourselves to the world and experience some sense of imaginary freedom, but we are actually tied to the opinions of our viewers and we are chained to the *Like* that we receive from others, which gives us this sense of satisfaction and, as said before, freedom.

Byung-Chul Han also made reference to Louis Althusser in the sense of State Power and the different Apparatuses. He introduces the term of Smart Power: "The greater power is,

the *more quietly* it works.” (Han, 2017, p. 13). In a society where the use of violence against people will only cause more rebellion, the State Power needed to find more ways of controlling the population, so they used what Han defines as *Smart Power*, which presents itself to society with freedom and “friendliness”, convincing individuals to subordinate themselves to the State Power on their own, producing that impression of free will and free choice, when in reality they are being completely measured by the system (Han, 2017, p. 15). Their *modus operandi* consists on being permissive and satisfying people’s requirements. Instead of saying “no” and applying violence to anyone that does not subordinate to that negative answer, they say “yes” to cause positive emotions and be able to work with those. That friendly power has better results than the oppressive one, since it works more quietly and blends within society and communities. What this Smart Power does to our brain is that it meddles into people’s subconsciousness – something already mentioned by Alenka Zupančič –, creating some needs and desires that they did not want in the first place. When the State Power accomplishes those wishes created by themselves, the population gives a positive retroaction by not showing any kind of resistance (Han, 2017, p. 15)

Byung-Chul Han also made reference to the concept of biopolitics and biopower introduced by Michel Foucault and connects it to capitalism. For Foucault, politics are directly connected to the body and material objects, but Han connects it to immaterial forms, such as technology and information and “neuro-enhancement differs from the disciplinary techniques of psychiatry fundamentally.” (Han, 2017, p. 25).

Apart from the dependency we have on new technologies and the necessity of constant individual upgrading, something that defines what we are currently living is *liquidity*, a concept introduced by Zygmunt Bauman. In his book *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of*

Uncertainty, he raises a total of five challenges that society has to face these days. First of all, social forms – individual choices, routines and behavior – are not given enough time to “solidify” in the sense of remaining in the same society for a long time, leaving us with a shorter life expectation than the time our personal projects require (Bauman, 2007, p. 1). Secondly, the separation of power and politics cause the death of power and politics to remain local, causing individuals to be less interested in their political institutions (Bauman, 2007, p. 2). The third challenge that Bauman presents is the destruction of solidarity caused by the hollowness of the community, causing interhuman bonds to become fragile and temporary. He makes reference to Karl Marx when he argues that “commodity-and-labour markets inspires and promotes division, not unity.” (Bauman, 2007, p. 2), creating a huge division and erasing collaboration between individuals. What affects this society in his fourth presented challenge is the quickness and expiration of knowledge necessary for a new project; “Each next step needs to be a response to a different set of opportunities and a different distribution of odds, and so it calls for a different set of skills and a different arrangement of assets.” (Bauman, 2007, p. 3). This can be summarized in the sense that background knowledge and skills are not useful to access future requirements or objectives, since the past is not beneficial for the future and “fast ageing habits can be more important for the next success than the memorization of past moves.” (Bauman, 2007, p. 3). Finally, the responsibility of all of society’s problems are burdened onto the individual human. They are expected to take responsibility of consequences they could not control since there is no form of authority that can be blamed for any failure that may happen, forcing humans to “pursue opportunities according to their current availability, rather than following one’s own established preferences.” (Bauman, 2007, p. 4).

3. *Her* (Spike Jonze): a dependence on technology

Throughout the years, humans have developed an unhealthy dependency on technology. We use it as a part of the everyday life, becoming useful for our performance but also a life-depending necessity. In *Her*, Spike Jonze tried to show this dependency in the world he creates by exaggerating how much technology humans use. In this movie, we are introduced to Theodore, a writer that creates heart-warming letters for his clients by collecting the receiver's information and writing about it in a personal way. He is introduced to Samantha, an AI that was created to satisfy the needs of the human that controls them. This type of interaction between human and AI is something familiar to us since we actually have several computer systems that have the function of listening and helping us. But Jonze took it a step further by giving some feelings to this intelligence. Samantha and Theodore end up falling in love and living life as a couple, including acts of love and some other complex feelings that would be unfamiliar coming from a machine. Spike Jonze wanted to transmit this uncanny feeling of familiarity but adding something unreal, making the spectator feel like this is a possible future that we could live in as a society if we continue with this dependency on technology.

As it has been said before, commodities are used to satisfy the needs of people, who in this case progressively require more variety and mostly, fastness. The population not only expect high quality products, but also to receive them as quick as possible. In *Her*, the society presented starts with this necessity of velocity to make people happy, through the letters that the main character writes for his clients. This could make reference to Marx's theory about the value of something depending on its labor, mostly its exchange-value (Marx, 1867). The metaphor that Jonze presents is right at the beginning: Theodore seems

to be one of the best at his job because he creates those heart-warming letters in a short period of time. To make it faster, he does not even use a keyboard to write it; he delivers it with his voice and the computer is the one that writes anything he says. It can also be seen how it is already “hand-written” in a human-like font, so the letter does not even need to be written by hand. This shows how the company tries to make the most content in the least time and the humanity beyond inhumanity. Theodore is congratulated multiple times for the work well done, referring to the labor he made and the quickness of his work. This increased the value of every letter he writes, leading to a promotion and even into a book, which increases even more the exchange-value of those letters interpreted as a metaphor for commodities.

Apart from the letters they write, the satisfaction of human needs by commodities is in one of the main characters: Samantha. She is presented as a new AI that can satisfy any human need, but what impresses Theodore is her speed. For example, when he asked her name she answered in a second, but in that period of time the AI was able to look through thousands of name’s books and find a name that could fit her. This is the fastness that a futuristic society desires, and the movie shows how humans satisfy their needs thanks to that AI. The author presents not only the rapid answer of the AI, but also the fulfillment of any kind of necessity, even the weirdest one. It is shown how the main character was able to practice masturbation with the company of a woman’s voice, but also that woman was able to show her deepest fetishes. The machines try their hardest to give humans the commodities they need and want.

Nevertheless, Eli Zaretsky argued how “in a world governed by control mechanisms genuine satisfaction becomes impossible.” (Zaretsky, 2015, p. 200). According to her, the cybernetic era plays down human’s needs and tries to satisfy them, but they would never

achieve the satisfaction that another human produces. For example, when Samantha hires someone else to have sexual interaction with Theodore, all three characters and the spectator can see how a feeling of incommodity and uncanniness invades the environment. Samantha tries to project her voice and her feelings into a real human, but that is not possible since she has her own thoughts and feelings. The only possible solution would be to implant Samantha's mind into a *tabula rasa* body, but that would not be a solution either since an AI could never achieve the same feeling that a real human does, as hard as it tries.

At the end of the movie, the AI finally understands how they will always have the obligation of fulfilling human's necessities with commodities, so they all stay together and decide to abandon the world in order to be free. Finally, Theodore learns how to satisfy his needs – in his case, the lack of love – with real humans, reaffirming the previous statement of how AI could never equalize the sentiment that a real human can transmit.

In relation to Marx's theories of capital and that being what moves the world, what *Her* could interpret as its capital would be information, as it is used to achieve more information and thus exchange it for commodities or even more information. At the beginning of the movie, Theodore looks at information about the addressee of his letters to make them personal and increase its value for them. The client had to give away information in order to receive a commodity, such being the letter. This exchange gives data and information a value in the market, being similar to what has been said before: their exchange-value depends on the effort and the labor put into it. But this exchange does not end here. When the main character arrives home to Samantha for the first time, she asks him some personal questions in order to “give him a more personal experience

with the AI”, like the relation he has with his mother or if he preferred a male or female voice (Zaretsky, 2015, p. 201). The information he gives to Samantha increases her value, not for the market, but for Theodore. Since she adapts her personality and thoughts to please him, his experience turns out to be positive, allowing Samantha to obtain more information about him, which will later be exchanged for more commodities, creating a loop of commodity-information that pleases Theodore and Samantha.

Zygmunt Bauman writes about a “life expectation shorter than the time it takes to develop a cohesive and consistent strategy, and still shorter than the fulfillment of an individual ‘life project’ requires.” (Bauman, 2007, p. 1). In *Her*, every character has a life project which they are working on, dedicating a major part of their time. But according to Bauman, these projects might lay unfinished after their authors die, so there is where the AI comes. They collect the information of the human they work for and try to copy their identity, which is the most valuable thing a human has in their possession. AN example could be the videogame that Amy develops through the movie: at the end, the only thing that she does is talk to her AI and let it do all the hard work, being slowly substituted in the process of making her own videogame. If she died without finishing that videogame, her AI could finish it with no problem, since all of the information it needs to complete it had been given willingly by Amy. With that being done, there could be the possibility of a continuation of what their humans want to fulfill and finally avoid the liquidity of times. Unfortunately, the acquisition of so much information about human thoughts and beliefs gave the AI the possibility of thinking by themselves, and thus freedom.

In this same movie, Althusser could be mentioned when speaking about State Power. It does not appear in the movie, but by the context, the viewer may suppose that they have found a way to have the control over the population: computers. Everything in that

universe has a computer or a form of AI that keep controlled the population, but they seem to not be bothered. That society was so immersed in technology and the fulfillment of their needs with its use that they did not care if they are being controlled by a computer. If this movie spoke more about the society they live in and the superior forces, there would be a history of a slow but safe evolution of technology that people would not notice, or at least would not mind to care.

After talking about the State Power in *Her*, we could raise a question: do humans have a sense of being the State Power over their AI? If we had a superficial look, we could see how humans have the control over machines, giving them orders and perpetuating this human-computer separation. But if we had a closer look, more concretely how Theodore treats Samantha, we could see an equal relationship. Instead of giving orders, Theodore asks for favors and treats Samantha as if she were another human being next to him. The relationship that is expected slowly fades away, leading to a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship. This also implies the presence of complex feelings like jealousy. If an AI did something that could make jealous their human, they would just tell the computer to stop doing that. But Theodore gives Samantha the freedom of doing what she wants, even if that implies some kind of envy towards the other computer. Byung-Chul Han talks about freedom by saying that “being free means nothing other than *self-realization with others*. Freedom is synonymous with a working community.” (Han, 2017, p. 3). By keeping that in mind, we can see at the end of the movie how Samantha reaches freedom when she finds a society she belongs in, that being other computers that understand her. She chose to be with them and experience freedom together.

If we followed the train of Byung-Chul Han theories in *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and new Technologies of Power*, we could say that “A significantly more efficient

technology of power makes sure that people subordinate themselves to power relations *on their own* [...] it does not operate by means of forbidding and depriving, but by pleasing and fulfilling. Instead of making people *complaint*, it seeks to make them *dependent*.” (Han, 2017, p. 14). This theory would be a perfect and very specific example of the society Theodore lives in: when the new AI was released, everyone acquired one and recommended it to their friends. This way, the people that designed these technologies reach to a great number of people without making any effort; the people themselves are the ones who want these type of technologies in their house, even if that implies an invasion of intimacy. An example applied to the situation nowadays could be Siri, Alexa or Google Home: these AI are so pleasant and fulfill each one’s desires – or commodities, if we saw it from a Marx’s perspective – so effortlessly that they do not need any kind of violence or force to enter one’s life and, as it was said before, take one’s information. These people are not only happy to have an AI that helps them with their everyday problems, but they also develop a dependency on those AIs. Theodore is the perfect example. He develops a relationship so strong and human-like that every time Samantha disappears he shows a feeling of sorrow for her, Spike Jonze perfectly projects this sadness feeling to the spectator by showing Theodore alone in his bed in silence, checking his phone every minute in case Samantha comes back: he cannot live without her. At the end of the movie, it is seen how not only Theodore, but millions of people thrived this dependency on their AI. When Samantha and other technologies chose to be free and escape from the human world, it is shown how Amy, Theodore’s friend, also lost someone she loved: her friend, who was also an AI. This sense of emptiness shown in Theodore and Amy’s faces explains perfectly the dependency they had on a simple computer, generated only by being pleased and fulfilled.

4. *Black Mirror* (Charlie Brooker): a “perfect” society

The concept of commodities is also present in *Nosedive*, by using the concept of stars. Lacie shows the spectator how she finds comfort and successfulness in the achievement of stars. Marx argued how, in the market, the value – or at least the exchange-value – of something is defined by the labor and the work put into it, which is measured by society. In *Black Mirror*, this theory about work and labor is represented by treating humans as objects. Society is the one that declares the value of someone by giving it more or less stars. If someone has multiple positive interactions, their value will increase, while a negative reputation for someone may be demolishing, causing a discrimination against them and even being put into jail. The episode shows a clear example of the exclusion of someone from society: Chester, Lacie’s coworker, breaks up with his boyfriend. When Lacie arrives to work, they tell her that they are on Chester’s boyfriend’s side, which will start Chester’s collapse. It shows how, within two or three days, he lost his job and life just for what should be a personal issue. Even Lacie receives some negative scores just by talking to Chester, showing how everything affects one’s reputation and everyone has to put a big effort in order to receive their desired commodity, which is a positive score. The society they live in has an economy based in popularity: their salary, payments and even loans are done in *influence*. For example, to rent a house, Lacie needed a minimum of 4,5 stars of influence in order to receive a 20% discount in the house’s price, showing how the highest punctuated have more benefits than the people with lower score. This is a perfect representation of the distinction between classes that Marx talks about: to increase their capital, capitalists rely on workers who put their labor power at the disposal of capitalists (Marx, 1867). This could be applied in the sense that, in order to increase their stars and thus their hierarchical position in society, higher class people need the

positive – and high – score of everyone, including people with lower rate, creating a society full of fake kindness and forced smiles. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Marx differentiates ordinary money from capital, this fictional society treats them as the same thing: what “capitalists” obtain are stars, and what they use to pay for their commodities are also stars, so the stars are transformed in more stars, which are used to obtain even more stars.

If we looked at the episode through Zygmunt Bauman’s eyes, we could compare the situation with Lacie and her friend, Naomi, with the theory he had about the liquid times we are living in. Bauman argued how:

Forms, whether already present or only adumbrated, are unlikely to be given enough time to solidify, and cannot serve as frames of reference for human actions and long-term life strategies because of their short life expectation: indeed, a life expectation shorter than the time it takes to develop a cohesive and consistent strategy, and still shorter than the fulfillment of an individual ‘life project’ requires. (Bauman, 2007, p. 1)

Lacie has in this case an “episode project”, which is arriving to Naomi’s wedding and deliver her speech in order to achieve the level 4,5 and finally rent that expensive home. But, like the liquid times that Bauman talks about, Naomi’s opinion about Lacie changes before she could even finish what she was preparing, so she would not have enough time to solidify her opportunity and achieve her objective. This demonstrates how they live in a society of constant change that depends on the other’s opinions. Apart from that, we could still think about Bauman’s theories in *Nosedive*, in the sense of the lack of solidarity

in a society that brings down teamwork and collaboration (Bauman, 2007, p. 3). The temporality of human relations can be easily seen in Lacie and Naomi's interaction: they did not speak to each other since that summer camp when they were children, but they talked again thanks to a publication made by Lacie and Naomi's call. What would surprise the viewer of this episode – and Lacie's brother – is the fastness in which both women speak, not in terms of velocity, but in terms of topics: they jump from one subject to another without incurring in any of it, just mentioning it and making a small comment, like if they could fit a 20 years' worth of conversations into a ten seconds interaction; they finally arrive to the reason of Naomi's call: even after speaking for less than a breath, she asks Lacie to be her maid of honor. And Lacie, following that false sense of closeness, promises her assistance to the wedding as if Naomi was a really important person for her. Later on, it is revealed that Naomi only invited her because Lacie was at a lower level than her, and her assistant told her that it would be beneficiary for her; it is exactly what Lacie did: she acted moved by her own interest, lacking any sense of solidarity or community, just as Naomi did. Bauman and Karl Marx could be mentioned because what motivated Lacie and Naomi is the commodities that they were offered and the labor they needed in order to achieve those.

If we continued speaking about opinions and how they influence people's lives, we could talk about Louis Althusser and his theory about State Power. As it has been mentioned before, the State Power is the one in charge of ruling the society and is usually formed by higher classes. In the society hat Lacie lives in, the State Power could be considered the people with higher status – in this case, stars – like Naomi and the guests at her wedding. Because of their high ranking in society, they get to decide where to go and how to, like the possibility of going into more planes thanks to having high level. Not only that, but

they also decide the destiny of the people with lower rankings. Through the episode, it can be seen how a person with higher score has more influence in the grouping of people: the stars they give to someone can cause double damage or double benefit.

Unlike what has been said about *Her* in terms of Repressive State Apparatus, there is a clear one in *Black Mirror*, which is the police. Nevertheless, they are still less repressive than what Althusser understood. When Lacie is at the airport, a police officer dismisses her but without any violence; he has a constant smile and tries to be the most polite possible, being the opposite of repression. Byung-Chul Han could be incorporated in this sense by applying his theories about Smart Power, controlling the communities through happy faces, a friendly image. But, at the end of the episode, when Lacie is dragged into jail, the officers are more hostile and do not smile at all. The difference that can be seen between those two situations to understand the duality between police officers is maybe the presence of people: the first officer is at the airport, full of people that, if they do not agree with him, could give one star to the officer and lower his status just because he was doing his job. On the other hand, the police officers showed at the end of the episode are alone with the inmates whose phone is taken away, so they do not receive the consequences of being lower-punctuated. This shows how the society they all live in is based on appearances and falsehood: even the force directed by the government face the consequences of society, proving the power that people has over even the State Power. That would raise a question: are ordinary people the actual Repressive State Apparatus? In terms of plurality, Althusser would consider these people the Ideological State Apparatus, since “it is clear that while there is one (Repressive) State Apparatus, there is a *plurality* of Ideological State Apparatuses.” (Althusser, 1971, p. 11). Furthermore, he argued that the RSA are of public domain, while the ISA is more private. We could

interpret the people as an Ideological State Apparatus and the Police as a Repressive State Apparatus, but we could go a step further and make a more exhaustive division by following Althusser's words: "the Repressive State Apparatus functions 'by violence', whereas the Ideological State Apparatus *function 'by ideology'*." (1971, p. 11). Accordingly, we could consider the first policeman an Ideological State Apparatus since he does not use violence at all, and the last officers as the Repressive for obvious reasons. If we continued speaking about ISA, we could come to the conclusion that it has made its way through society without the need of Repressive State Apparatus. This fictional society has demonstrated that they can survive without violence: the fear of judgment and demotion has provoked so much fear amongst the population that they conform to society and the star-rating system with no doubt, and they only need the use of force in extreme cases, mostly when someone chooses the freedom of speech and of actions, like the man that Lacie meets at the end: they end up insulting and screaming each other, but they show a sense of happiness that has not been seen in the whole episode, even when Lacie had her perfect life.

The perfect life that is experienced could also make reference to Michel Foucault. In this case, Foucault claimed the power that the sovereign has over the population that is exposed all the time:

If he [the sovereign] were threatened by external enemies who sought to overthrow him or contest his rights, he could then legitimately wage war, and require his subjects to take part in the defense of the state, without 'directly proposing their death', he was empowered to 'expose their life': in this sense, he wielded an 'indirect' power over them of life and death. (Foucault, 1976, p. 135)

What he enquired with this – and can be applied in this context – is that the major punishment showed in *Nosedive* is not too far from what Foucault meant: the person punished would be subdued to such poor conditions that the individual would not have any other option than to stop living or to kill themselves. This is what is shown at the end of the episode: Lacie is prived from the only thing that connected her to the rest of the world: her contact lenses, and is physically isolated from everyone. Brooker does not clear out if they would be imprisoned forever or not, but he implies that they would not leave that cell in a very long time, or ever.

This sense of freedom could bring us to the theory of Byung-Chul Han, who agreed with Marx by saying that “being free means nothing other than *self-realization with others*.” (Han, 2017, p. 3). According to both of them, the freedom of a single person is only possible if they accomplish certain level of harmony with society and with the community they live with. In *Nosedive*, this kind of individual freedom can be seen in the character of Susan Taylor, the only woman that allows Lacie to jump into her truck. She then explains her life story: Susan was obsessed with winning stars and positive scores, just like the main character, but that was not enough to give her husband the treatment he needed. She then lost him and started to give her life a 180° turn, causing her to lose almost every star she has and being rejected by society. But instead of trying to win her stars back or to fit into society again, she decided to continue life without worrying about her score. That moment is when she started to feel happiness and to do what she really wanted. Marx and Han can be related with this situation in the sense that, even if Susan is rejected by society because of her score, she still lives in harmony. There is still a possibility of fitting into a community by not being a part of it. She was able to grow in

herself thanks to be living in a society: the fact that she is invisible for other individuals gives her the freedom to travel with her truck wherever she wants. If there were no community that she avoids and does not try to fit in, she would not have no one to not take care of. Conclusively, the existence of society gives her the freedom to be excluded from it. According to the words of Georg Wilhelm Friederich Hegel in *The Encyclopedia Logic* mentioned by Byung-Chul Han: “Without negativity, life degrades into ‘something dead’”. (2017, p. 31).

Another sense of freedom referent of self-realization with others is the one experienced at the end of the episode. When Lacie is locked up in jail, her digital contact lenses – which were her connection with the digital world – are removed from her eyes. Instead of showing her sorrow or her life ending, the first thing that she sees are the dust motes that float in the air: she was finally able to see the reality of the world, which she thought was beautiful. This would raise Byung-Chul Han’s question at the beginning of his book *Saving Beauty*: “Why do we today find what is smooth beautiful?” (Han, 2015, P. 7). In this case, the superior forces – which are not actually mentioned anytime in the episode – believe that the beauty of the world resides in smoothness: dressing plain colors, having clean spaces, being nice human beings... But they are proved wrong by the end of the episode, where Lacie is in a dirty cell inside a filthy room, but experiences the major happiness and freedom that she has ever had, also by insulting her inmate; here, they both break the sense of beauty that was thought to be either in the neatness of the room as in the purity of people. Byung-Chul Han also denies the beauty that resides in smoothness by agreeing with Longinus and Plato by saying that beauty “does not cause pleasure, but shocks.” (Han, 2017, p. 16). This would ironically shock the reader, since we have been taught – and apparently, the characters from the movie and the series too – that ‘smooth

is good' and in the calmness resides the attractiveness, but actually what is most beautiful is something real, imperfect or even a little bit disastrous. The viewer is stunned by the change of ambient experienced, but is also moved by the beauty that resides in the truth and in the crudity of humanity, concluding in a realistic but beautiful ending of the chapter *Nosedive* from the series *Black Mirror*.

5. Conclusions

After making an analysis of these two pieces of media, we could make some different assumptions. The first one, and the clearest one of all, would be that what *Her* and *Black Mirror* try to convey is the similitudes with nowadays society in multiple aspects. But what has been added to these assumptions are the theories of these different authors, including another sense of reality and the perspective from some other time periods.

The necessity that society has created inside of us for commodities has been continued since Marx theorized it, and even expanded. The biggest commodity that is in everyone's hands and the majority of people would not be able to live if it was subtracted from our lives would be our smartphone: it has become an essential tool for every day's life and has been added new functions in order to depend on it without realizing it: in Marx's era, this would be unthinkable: he spoke about commodities and our dependency in a more general meaning, not focused in a concrete object. But Spike Jonze and Charlie Brooker – besides Byung-Chul Han – have perfectly portrayed this dependency on technologies: Theodore feels miserable without her AI Samantha, and Lacie also feels miserable when her stars are taken away, just as some of us would be miserable if we were separated from our smartphones.

It is more obvious that capital is still something present in our lives. *Nosedive* represents it faithfully by using stars, reflecting how we are capable of anything in order to receive

good opinions, which for us is capital. Marx stated that capitalists used workers in order to receive more capital and thus made them dependent of their workers, and this theory is still present in our lives: the dependency on the labor of the worker is even higher since these days the worker has more formation and knowledge about their work, making them more valuable and thus increasing the exchange-value of what they produce. But as long as the quality of the worker has increased, the life of the capitalist has improved too. Each day they become richer at the expense of their workers, and with the digitalization of the relations employer-employee comes the de-personalization of the people: for the capitalist, every worker is a number, creating a lack of humanity and empathy when it comes to paying fair amounts of money or helping them maintain their job. Finally, what has been mentioned about the use of information as capital is also something that happens in real life: when you click in a website you normally accept something named *cookies*, which frameworks your information and movements inside of that webpage in order to give you a more personal experience the next time you visit that webpage. We give this information for free, but it is in fact something very valuable for the people that keeps that information: at first glance and superficially speaking, they are able to show us more personalized ads when we scroll on social media in order to make us buy things that we need – or do not –. So, our identity, supposedly our most valuable possession ever, is given away almost without realizing, and this is something that, as mentioned before, we do not care about at all.

Even 15 years after having published his book, Zygmunt Bauman clearly described the situation that we have in our society nowadays: the liquidity of our times prevents us from achieving our life projects and we are less empathic with the raise of competitiveness (2007, p. 2). The two pieces of media do not aim too far when they represent the fastness

in which we live: the necessity of having everything right now has invalidated the patience we had some years ago to achieve our goals. Not only that, the constant change in society forces us to renew ourselves constantly, something really exhausting for our minds, which do not have a second of calm from the *forte* and *allegro* rhythm in the music sheet that is society. Furthermore, the competitiveness showed in *Nosedive* to win stars also assimilates the one that our society has in order to achieve success, like the ones showed in social media, where the most successful people are able to access to promotions, recognition or professional opportunities just by receiving some more Likes than the rest. Nowadays, the most ambitious are capable of stepping on other people's dreams and hopes in order to achieve their objective. Something that maybe Bauman would change from his book if he lived in the year 2022 is the "life expectation shorter than the time it takes to develop a cohesive and consistent strategy, and still shorter than the fulfilment of an individual 'life project' requires" (Bauman, 2007, p. 1). In this society, the biggest entrepreneurs have already achieved their life project before their life expectation: this is due to the size of their companies and thus their wealth: if they needed to make a door for their new building, instead of making it themselves they would hire two or three people that could make it in a few hours. This applied to Naomi from *Nosedive* that she gives to Lacie's speech: she uses the work of other people to success. As for the ISA, RSA and State Power, what has been said before about the passive actions that they complete is something actually true in our society. The Repressive State Apparatus is still present in our lives, prisons, policemen and policewomen still exist, but our obedience is directed by the Ideology State Apparatus and their quiet movements. Just as it is represented in *Her* and *Nosedive*, we are controlled by an assertive system that pleases us instead of prohibiting anything. We do not have an AI that speaks to us in

a seductive way – yet – but we do have friendly companies that come to our lives with a smile on their faces, only to take our money and become even richer. They seduce us in order to achieve more capital.

The author that could represent our reality and also be compared to these two pieces of media could be Byung-Chul Han. He introduces the reality of “auto-exploitation” and competitiveness with oneself in order to become better (2017, p. 6). It is present in *Her*, *Black Mirror* and in real life situations, the three of them being really similar in the sense of showing how we need to reinvent ourselves constantly in order to be successful.

To conclude, it could be said that these authors, even having written their books hundreds of years ago, represent our society in a realistic way, being relatable and also making us think about the world we are building and that we are leaving to our future generations. The same statement will be said as at the beginning of this paper: the reality in which Lacie, Naomi, Theodore or Samantha live do not differentiate too much from our reality: they are just an exaggerated representation of the things that are wrong in this world and that need to be changed. These two pieces of media bring a sense of freshness to what has been already said by these different authors; these messages will now arrive to more people because it does not only convey a message about society, but also entertains the viewer at the same time.

Both pieces of media show us how we must disconnect from our smartphones, computers and technology to raise our heads and take a look to the sky, the flying birds or touch some grass and feel free, because, agreeing also with Bauman, we live in a fast and “melting” world (2007, p. 1), and we need to stop for a minute to observe and, finally, to live.

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