

Transhumanist effects of technology on conflicts in interaction in *Black Mirror*

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Bachelor's Thesis
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Autumn 2021

Abstract

In this thesis, I will examine transhumanist effects of technology on conflicts in the episode *The Entire History of You* of the sci-fi/horror-series *Black Mirror* (Brooker 2011–). I am also comparing the episode to its script. The material is analysed using the method of comparative close reading and the findings are reflected through the theory of transhumanism.

The effects of the piece of technology, memory-recording “Grain”, used in the episode are multi-faceted. The characters rely on the Grain constantly making new interpretations, personal alternate realities and seeking “the objective truth” at the cost of the worsening of their personal defects. In the story, seeking of the objective truth destroys the picture-perfect life of the main character as the new interpretations of past memories lead him into a destructive spiral while leaving the question if the objective truth of life is even a goal worth striving for. The transhumanist perspective is also present in the world of the episode: transhumanism is the status quo while those who refuse enhancements are ostracised in the society as the human nature is considered too unreliable to be trusted.

Tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkielmassa tutkitaan, minkälaisia transhumanistisia vaikutuksia teknologialla on hahmojen väliseen konfliktikäyttäytymiseen *Black Mirror* -sarjan jaksossa *The Entire History of You*. Lisäksi jaksoa verrataan sen alkuperäiseen käsikirjoitukseen. Analyysi suoritetaan käyttämällä vertailevan lähilukemisen menetelmää ja refleктоimalla löydöksiä Lilley'n (2013) transhumanistiseen teoriaan. Jakson keskiössä on muistoja tallentava laite, johon lähes jokainen hahmo tukeutuu.

Teknologinen ihmisen toiminnan parantelu saa hahmot luomaan muistoistaan jatkuvasti uusia tulkintoja ja ”vaihtoehtoisia todellisuksia”. Teknologiset parannukset mahdollistavat yksilön objektiivisen totuuden tavoittelun, vaikka totuus tulee tarinan hahmoille usein elämän kulissien romahtamisen kustannuksella. Jaksossa päähenkilön pakkomielle muistojen tulkitsemiseen johtaa tuhoisaan kierteeseen, joka herättää kysymyksen siitä, onko objektiivisen totuuden tavoittelu kivuliaiden totuuksien kohtaamisen arvoista. Tarinan maailma on myös olennaisesti transhumanistinen, jossa ihmisen luontaisten ominaisuuksien parantamista teknologisin keinoin pidetään merkinä luotettavuudesta ja yhteiskuntakeelpoisuudesta.

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1. Introduction

In this thesis, I will examine the transhumanist effects of technology on conflicts in interaction Charlie Brooker's television series *Black Mirror* (2011–). *Black Mirror* is an anthology series that mixes science and speculative fiction, and at times, utilises elements of psychological and dystopian horror. The show has been running since 2011 and as of now stands in five seasons (together 22 episodes), now also including one feature-length film, *Bandersnatch* (2018). Each episode depicts different possible scenarios revolving around technology in the past, present, and future, typically seasoned with dark satire, dystopian themes, or ugly realism. What is more, the show explores a variety of tones, typically relying on darker themes and philosophies that border on pessimism, while some episodes depict technological advancements in a more hopeful light. Rather than keeping the focus only on technology, human perspective plays a central role in the series. The series examines and plays with the relationship between human and technology, the weight it carries in everyday life and the possible ethical dilemmas the development may entail – however, typically exploring the grimmer outcomes.

Despite the modern subject matter, *Black Mirror* has not been the first piece of critical media bringing forward themes of criticising the modern technological society. The perceived predecessor of *Black Mirror*, *The Twilight Zone* (Serling 1959–1964), that started airing in 1959 amidst the Cold War paved the way for the show. The birth of *The Twilight Zone* was indeed a product of its era: vehement production of atomic bombs and the explosion of “space age” spurred on by the technological advancements, such as making space travel possible, inspired the creators. In many ways, *The Twilight Zone* reflected the anxieties of its time, ranging from nuclear war to journeys in the outer space. After the 60's landing on the moon, space was replaced by cyberspace as the next destination for human life. Five decades after *The Twilight Zone*, *Black Mirror* is representing critical media similarly to *The Twilight Zone* and exploring the fears and anxieties – when it comes to modern information society and mobile media, for instance – of millennials in the twenty-first century. (Cirucci & Vacker 2018, pp. 9–10) Some feel that describing the stories as allegories is not quite enough since the stories are close to reality (McSweeney & Joy 2019, p. 8). The creator of the show, Charlie Brooker has commented critical nature of the show:

If he [Serling] wrote about racism in a southern town, he had to fight the network over every line. But if he wrote about racism in a metaphorical, quasi-fictional world—suddenly he could say everything he wanted.” (2011, as cited in McSweeney & Joy 2019, p. 8)

Black Mirror explores digital age on a multitude of levels: how it complexifies social relationships and affects identity, how it leads to problems in perceiving differences between what is real and digital or how the digital quite simply transforms the way the world is perceived (McSweeney & Joy 2019, p. 4). However, *Black Mirror* does not provide clear-cut answers to the questions it poses: it merely encourages the audience to contemplate the moral issues and find interpretations of their own (p. 2).

Despite *Black Mirror* being an anthology, meaning that it consists of stand-alone episodes each telling their own story, some of the events and pieces of technology, for instance, can be interpreted as existing within the same universe and forming a somewhat chronological timeline. The hypothetical continuity is implied through hidden clues in the background – or “Easter eggs”, as they are usually referred to – such as pieces of news referring to certain events, characters or more or less developed versions of different pieces of technology that may already be familiar to the viewer through past episodes. The continuity itself does not play a major role, thus being worthy of a mere notation. However, continuity could be a way to depict an element of evolution of technology while adding explanations to the current state of things in the so-called universe of the show. According to McSweeney and Joy (p.10) the hidden clues and hints about the potential shared universe have become “one of the defining elements of the show”. In this thesis, however, I will narrow the subject material down to one of the episodes of the series, *The Entire History of You* (Armstrong & Welsh 2011) and its original script, while examining the differences among the two (Armstrong 2011). From now on, the episode will be referred to as EHY.

In this thesis, I will examine the ways the different pieces of technology portrayed in episode EHY affect interaction, more particularly in dealing with conflicts. The goal of this thesis is to examine the different ways technology plays an integral part in different conflicts in interaction and in what ways does the use of such technology manifest in interaction. Furthermore, I will be reflecting the findings through the theory of transhumanism, more specifically Lilley’s transhumanist debate (2013), and discussing whether the society of the story represents is a transhumanist one.

The method used in analysing the subject material will be comparative close reading. I will be examining the meanings of the text, both the series episode and its script, through close reading and comparing and discussing the differences between the two while relating the findings mainly to the transhumanist debate.

The importance of asking the question of effects of technology on humans and how it is displayed through fiction is topical to the current society. Even though the contents of this thesis will be discussed relying on a work of speculative fiction made up of mostly absurd and inflated what if-scenarios, the weight of the themes does not diminish. The current world at an increasing pace relies on technology and its advance. Examining how different media portrays the somewhat symbiotic and ubiquitous relationship of human and technology can be telling of the possible anxieties and questions that people have regarding the direction societies are heading. Furthermore, exploring the topic through imaginary speculative scenarios may promote healthy and realistic discussion about societal development when it comes to future technologies and to which extent it affects the everyday life while considering the possible ways future may unfold and, perhaps, encourage remaining mindful of the inevitable ethical factors along the way.

2. Research materials

In this section I will elaborate on the research material of this thesis. The primary research material I have narrowed down to one episode, *The Entire History of You* (Armstrong & Welsh 2011). Alongside the episode, I will be examining its original script and making comparisons between the two. I have chosen the specific episode based on its way to handle interaction and conflict as the episode focuses on inter-personal communications. The story displays personal relationships yet also elevates the discussion to a more grand-scale, societal level. In the following subsection I will be elaborating on the storyline of EHY.

EHY is the final episode of the first season of *Black Mirror*. The episode tells a story of a man, Liam Foxwell, who lives in a society in which presumably most of the people have a small piece of technology, “the Grain” implanted behind their ear. It connects to their sight and hearing making it possible to record memories and with the help of a small hand-held device, re-watch them. His increasing fixation with replaying and analysing the past causes Liam to become convinced that his wife, Ffion, is having an affair with her old friend, Jonas. His doubts drive him into paranoia and assaulting Ffion’s possible love interest and forcing Ffion to playback her memories to prove her innocence. Liam discovers his wife’s infidelity, causing Ffion to leave him on his own devices. At the end of the episode, Liam, tormented by the memories of his wife and decides to remove the Grain by gauging the device out of his head, while the screen cuts to black.

Another piece of research material will be the written script of EHY. Armstrong’s text is the final shooting script for the episode. The episode diverts slightly from the script which makes reflecting the two against each other worthwhile.

3. Theory & methodology

In this section I will present the theoretical framework that I will be reflecting on in the analysis and provide the chosen methodology. First, I will elaborate on previous research done on the series *Black Mirror*, then present the transhumanist debate, and lastly elaborate on the methodology.

3.1 Previous research on *Black Mirror*

Previous research of academic standard on *Black Mirror* is scarce and tends to focus on contemplating themes and philosophical questions the show presents from different perspectives. Previous notable academic research of specifically *Black Mirror* included in this thesis consists of two edited books: *Black Mirror and Critical Media Theory* (eds. Cirucci & Vacker 2018) and *Through the Black Mirror: Constructing the Side Effects of the Digital Age* (eds. McSweeney & Joy 2019). Both works consist of analyses of the episodes in the form of essays that have been written by various researchers from the academic field. The texts analyse *Black Mirror* as a phenomenon on either on the basis of separate episodes or reflecting themes from the show to different concepts or phenomenon such as gender, race, or other sociological factors.

Black Mirror and Critical Media Theory examines the show from the angle of critical media theory. The work explores the show as a piece of critical media, which in this context refers to serving the function of criticising and examining the philosophical complexities of the modern world. The second piece of literature focusing on *Black Mirror*, *Through the Black Mirror: Constructing Side Effects of the Digital Age*, sets it in a wider, societal context, discussing its relations to the modern society and perceiving the show as a product of the anxieties of its era. However, both works share a similar focus of viewing *Black Mirror* as a larger phenomenon than the show itself.

3.2. The transhumanist perspective

I will be reflecting on the findings of the analysis through the theory of transhumanism. I will base my transhumanist perspective on Lilley's (2013) debate *Transhumanism and Society: The Social Debate over Human Enhancement*. In its essence, "the transhumanist debate" revolves around

discussion on human enhancement and takes place between transhumanists and conservationists: the transhumanist side of the debate views transforming human body and mind in terms of technical advancements as transcendence whereas the conservationists warn of transgression. (pp. 3–4) The term itself, transhumanism, refers to its end-means. The Latin prefix, “trans”, means “crossing over”, as in something serving as a “bridge for humanity’s passage”; in this context, that something refers to technological advancements. The discussion surrounding the topic is a cross-section of multiple sectors of life: it is social but also in many ways political. (p. 4)

Furthermore, examining *Black Mirror* through Lilley’s transhumanist lens is fitting: the show explores fictional future technologies and the effect they have on societies. The premise of *Black Mirror* in itself is not unique as writers of science fiction tend to present speculative scenarios of future technologies. Imaginary and more exaggerated technologies do not carry a similar capability of promoting dangerous ideologies or social movements since they are less likely to be applicable to real life. (p. 4) However, several technologies from the universe of the show already share features with reality and the current state of modern technology, such as facial recognition or bodily augmentations, or could be speculated being more or less reality in the near future. Thus, it can be discussed whether the technologies in the show realised in real life could potentially promote dangerous ideologies since they already share parallels with reality.

When it comes to the prevalence of technologies in both reality and in the fictional world of *Black Mirror*, every sector from nation to military have interest in technological applications. The high prevalence and high establishment of advanced technologies in the public eye tips the scales in the favour of transcendence and transformation. (pp. 4–5) However, it is important to note regardless of the side of the transhumanist debate that the debate is not merely over “good or evil” technologies – as in either technology or the society being the problem – but sociotechnical ensembles. It is important to note that each artifact is part of the social world: they are affected by social, economic, and political decisions. (pp. 5–6)

Furthermore, the transhumanist debate stretches out to a myriad of different areas but, regarding specifically technologies that are considered to raise more concerns than hope, the opposing sides of the debate discuss many concerns and whether they are worth it to achieve the benefits. Technologies enabling social surveillance, nuclear technologies, neuropharmacology, or genetic engineering among others are typically the type advancements raising philosophical questions. (pp. 5–6) What is more, another point for discussion of ethics is the combination of consumer society and science:

commercialised transtechnologies provide access to the commercialisation of the body and mind and in turn force individuals to risk the side-effects for success. (pp. 7–8) From a more conservative perspective, transhumanism is also brought forward through the familiar Western progress. However, too extreme changes would be more likely to face more objection (p. 12).

When it comes to the discussion of whether transhumanism is transcendence or transgression, the opposing arguments boil down to the binary opposites of preserving and changing. Transhumanists view human nature as something changeable and malleable whereas the conservative side calls for preservation. The change could also be more in a descriptive sense: human would remain as a human yet realises new possibilities for human nature. (pp. 13–14) Conservationists also have a dismissive stand towards continuous transcendence and every new stage of progress being better than the last: with *transgression* conservationists refer to the progress leading to a point of no return (p. 18). However, it could be argued that the attitudes are more leaning towards the fact that societies are heading towards a transhumanist future. For example, enhancement technologies are sanctioned under medicine and reactions towards enhancement technologies often follow the route of “initial condemnation, followed by ambivalence, questioning and limited use, followed in turn by a change in public perceptions, advocacy and widespread acceptance.” (p. 71)

When will the transhumanist debate end and find closure? The transhumanist debate is more akin to an open-ended question:

The transhumanity debate at this point in time is a contest over values, ideas, and imagined futures. Intellectuals and specialists are the main contestants. Their arguments will be relevant in later stages of the transhumanity debate, however, everything else about the contest will change. I don't see any easy way out of the transhumanity debate. It will close only after a time when populations are exposed to transsociotechnical ensembles. (Lilley 2013, p. 77)

However, it is worth mentioning the writer's bias. The writer, Lilley, is a sociologist and examines technology from a sociological perspective, basing his analysis on concepts from Science and Technology Studies (STS) which looks into how society, culture and politics affect scientific research and vice versa, and social movement literature which examines the formation of social movements (Lilley 2013, p. 3). In Lilley's text, the concept of transhumanism and transhumanists is also sometimes presented as “the other” and characterised, for instance, as “a dangerous ideology” (p. 12) although the writer justifies the terms in use. Lilley's bias, however, echoes the point of view in *Black Mirror*, as the series focuses on the dark side of technology.

3.3. Comparative close reading

In this section, I will elaborate on the methodological approach and the framework I will use to support my analysis. I will approach the subject matter using the method of comparative close reading. Brummet (2019, p. 4) defines the act of close reading as “mindful, disciplined reading of an object with a view to deeper understanding its meanings”: discipline in close reading refers to the structure provided by techniques, theories and methods that help making findings more efficiently. Close reading can consist of different techniques but can also be done intuitively. In the process of close reading, I will reflect on the subject material through transhumanist theory. The comparative element of the method steps in with comparison between the episode EHY and its script. The findings of close reading will be reflected against each other and discussed.

In its core, close reading is looking closely into texts and reading them closely to find meaningful messages that serve a purpose, for instance, of influencing others (Brummet 2019, p. 4). Texts – such as words, images, or actions – suggest different contents, such as thoughts, feelings, and associations (p. 6). A reading of text is essentially an attempt to understand the meanings built by texts and find such meanings that are socially shared. Findings should be plausible and defensible meaning that claims of the meanings can be supported by evidence. (p. 7) After a reading, the reader moves to a more careful kind of reading, close reading, during which the meanings start to become clearer. During the process of close reading, the reader becomes a critic: a critic critiques meanings based on close reading. Critics offer their insights and knowledge into the object critiqued. Critiquing can offer a way to understand a certain text and open up hidden dimensions of meaning. (pp. 12–13) The purpose of a close reading critic can be summed up in the following quote: “I argue that the close-reading critic reveals meanings that are shared but not universally and also meanings that are known but not articulated.” (Brummet 2019, p. 15–16)

However, it is worth noting that each reader has their own bias. Readers from different contexts can find differing meanings from texts depending on, for instance, their cultural contexts, beliefs, or opinions. Thus, close reading is *an attempt* at discerning meanings in texts.

4. Analysis

In this section, I will provide the analysis of EHY and its script. The analysis will be divided into the analysis of four different scenes while comparing the chosen scenes to the script of the episode.

4.1. The opening scene

In the analysis, I will be looking into scenes of EHY, the final episode of the first season of *Black Mirror*. I will apply the method of close reading, reflecting on the scenes through the original script of the episode and analysing how the two differ from one another.

The opening scene of EHY (Armstrong & Welsh 2011, 00:20–02:18) starts with Liam who works as a lawyer attending a work-related appraisal with his superiors. It becomes fairly obvious that the appraisals are held for every employee: the appraisal is a meeting in which the employee's performance is assessed based on the contents of their Grain, or in other words, looking into the employee's memories and looking for proof of their performance or any suspicious behaviour. However, the procedure is never explicitly elaborated and only alluded to.

The first view of Liam is his reflection on the surface of a dark glass table right at the beginning of the first scene. The dark reflection could be a nod to the name of the series, *Black Mirror*. The visual detail could also serve as an element of foreshadowing. The visual connotation to “a black mirror” – a surface of a technological device – could possibly hint the grim turn of events later in the episode or highlight the ubiquitous nature of technological applications in the lives of the characters. The most salient objects in the field of view are primarily the protagonist Liam and secondarily the interviewers: the surroundings are almost sterile and muted, giving off an inconspicuous yet futuristic feeling.

The interviewer covertly implies to the function of reviewing their subject's memories:

-- I just want you to know that this isn't a witch hunt for the deadwood okay. It's much more of a... [breathes in] treasure hunt for the gold. Shit sinks, but also cream floats. (EHY, 00:33)

The interviewer, who in the original script (Armstrong 2011) is referred to as Max, is downplaying the potential implications of invasion of privacy and that they would purposefully be looking for dubious material to which the phrase “witch hunt for the deadwood” refers. However, it is obvious to

the viewer that Max is trying to convince Liam: he draws breath before finishing the sentence and points at him smiling when talking about the positive evidence that would supposedly emerge from Liam's memories. Max sugar-coats the procedure. His actions could be interpreted as quite the opposite than what he is trying to insinuate: claiming not to judge on the basis of possible problematic memories is essentially redundant – the literal purpose of the procedure is to assess Liam's performance based on them. Liam's slightly hesitant yet overly obliging posture represents his conflicting status.

In the next sequence of actions, it becomes evident that the group of lawyers interviewing him are asking for Liam to partake in cases in which recorded memories are used retrospectively to take legal action in parenting cases. Liam asks surprised if the firm is okay with it ethically and morally. Interviewers' reactions – long pause and look of obviousness as if they would be caught off guard by Liam's questions – could be interpreted as accepting their practises wholeheartedly whereas Liam feels conflicted and out of place. Liam responds with exaggerated compliance while the camera angle shifts to view his profile and hesitant body language: the angle conveys averting gaze which could be a way to transmit feelings of conflict and dishonesty.

Next, the group is talking about doing “a re-do” on Liam as the interviewer wants to make sure that there would not be anything alarming in Liam's memories:

--But I have to ask you this, they aren't gonna hit anything to freak us out, are they? They're not, there's no major deletions this quarter? – No, no. Everything's well within... parameters. (EHY, 01:38)

The word choice “quarter” is part of business register and sets a corporate tone to the discussion: the lexicon in use neutralises and conceals the possibly negative connotations tied to the subject matter. In a similar sanitised manner, the choice of words “parameters” refers to the permitted number of deletions in one's memories that would not raise suspicions: in this context it is also used as a tool of supervision since it would pressure the employer to avoid any suspicious action. Liam's look, however, tells the quite opposite: his hesitant smile does not reach his eyes and the angle shifts quickly back to his side profile. His nervous posture conveys the feeling that he his performance may not have been up to the standard or something in his private life would be too revealing. Liam's long silence and look of defeat while trying to maintain a professional appearance tell that he is convinced of his failure.

However, comparing the footage to the original script makes it clear that a lot has been cut off – analysing the script is more telling of Liam’s personal insecurities and the current state of the world. What is more, the details in the script raise the discussion from the level of the Grain to the observation that the protagonist’s personal characteristics play into the story as well and the piece of technology may not be the sole reason for the protagonist’s problems. Suddenly, the interpretation of factors affecting the character’s life is not black and white but a whole spectrum.

In the script Liam has been depicted as observant personality with a keen eye for details but also as someone who places a lot of weight on the expectations that others have of him, painting him as somewhat insecure.

Max puts his beer down next to him. Unopened. Liam clocks this. He has to take another chug on his now it’s open, but it looks very much like he’s going to be the only one drinking. He drinks a bit too much in his desire to be casual. Coughs. (Armstrong 2011, p. 2)

He clearly pays a lot of attention to the way he comes across to others while seeking for approval, which the lines “it looks very much like he’s going to be the only one drinking” and “he drinks a bit too much in his desire to be casual” suggests. His inner monologue about drinking mentioned in the script could also be a telling clue about Liam’s personal challenges, such as alleged alcohol abuse that becomes more obvious towards the end of the episode.

Furthermore, other clues of Liam’s tendency to fixate on things are visible in the script. When he is asked to play re-dos of his memories the script mentions that one re-do has been played thirteen times (Armstrong 2011, p. 3) which would suggest him fixating on his memories or trying to replay them in order make new interpretations of his past experiences. Interestingly, after the first scene Liam sits in a cab and rewinds the meeting. However, the expression of the interviewer Max after saying that he looks forward to meeting Liam again is slightly different in the re-do than it was a moment ago in the appraisals: his expression seems more synthetic and the pauses in his speech more pronounced. (EHY, 03:13) It is difficult to discern whether Liam only interprets the re-do as different or whether it is actually true or just a fabrication of his mind: the difference reflects Liam’s anxieties.

What is more, the script offers more insight to Liam’s life regarding his relationship with work. According to the script, he has earlier been asked to “take a step up” (Armstrong 2011, p. 2), as in take up a case and finish it in a way that would benefit the law firm, but his performance ends up being lacklustre. Thus, Liam suggests that he could take “next step up” and the firm offers him to

take up retrospective parenting cases that are also mentioned in the actual scene of the episode. Both in the scene and script, he finds himself feeling conflicted regarding the task. Interestingly, without explicitly discussing it the group of lawyers seems to unanimously accept the bearings of the task, as if it would be entirely new territory to them (Armstrong 2011, p. 6). Their reactions could also imply that the Grain is a new invention and that perhaps the ethical groundwork for rightful use has not been laid yet.

4.2. Dinner party

The scene (EHY, 09:08–4:02) starts with Liam taking part in a dinner party with his wife, Ffion, and her friends. The discussion is drawn into watching re-dos and the topic of the newest member of the group, Hallam, not having a Grain arises (11:38). The discovery evokes a variety of reactions. The person who introduced Hallam to the group, Lucy, looks like she was caught off guard: she looks as if she had forgotten to mention others this minor detail about her friend and is now bracing herself for outrage. She touches her face and neck nervously: her reaction makes it seem that Hallam look like a part of some minority that is considered a social taboo. Suddenly Hallam becomes the most salient figure of the room – everyone’s gaze is either fixed on her or shifting from others to her to read each other’s expressions. Liam asks whether her going “Grain-less” is a political stance. Against the group’s expectations – that her not having the Grain would be a political or social thing – her Grain was gouged and stolen. Hallam explains that after a few days of not having the Grain she liked it and never saw the need for another one. Silence falls over the table – another member of the party, Colleen, looks at her defensively and almost looks insulted by Hallam’s words. Liam lowers his gaze to avoid the discussion and seems almost embarrassed. Liam’s look also insinuates that he has perhaps thought of it as well and does not feel comfortable with his thoughts. Jonas tries to alleviate the awkward atmosphere with seemingly more “liberal” views regarding the Grain while Colleen expresses clear disdain for the choice:

It’s cool, it’s cool, I mean because more people – I mean it’s a big thing right now, right? Like, going Grainless? – [Colleen] I believe it’s huge with hookers. I mean, no offence! (EHY, 12:46)

Lucy, however, expresses the choice being interesting – a stance that could be interpreted as taking a cautious neutral stance – while another person, Paul, considers Grain-free life “a brave choice” (EHY, 13:17). His expression is also warm and somewhat proud. The word “brave” gives off the impression

that the choice in the reality of the characters is in many ways political. In typical rhetoric the word “brave” is usually used when, for example, talking about minorities who decide live in the way they want despite the opposition of the majority. A clear political divide between the people who are for and against the Grain is present in the moment.

However, Colleen seems to be unable to cover her dislike towards the choice of refusing the Grain. She seems to hold herself from saying anything hurtful only to say that she would not be able to lead a life without the Grain. While Paul is trying to steer the conversation elsewhere by showing old re-dos, Lucy mentions Colleen working in Grain development. Colleen continues by explaining that memories are not trustworthy, half of the organic memories are completely redundant, and anyone could plant false memories with simple leading questions (EHY, 13:40) – the explanation gives grounds to her pro-Grain views. Hallam simply replies that she is happier now (EHY, 14:00): to Hallam the emotional satisfaction overrides the Colleen’s arguments based on logic.

However, the script reveals the cut content from the exchange between Colleen and Hallam – in the original script she tries to convince Hallam that the Grain is indeed an upgrade to the organic human memory. She explains that the human memory is finicky and is not trustworthy enough to rely on, thus requires upgrading:

That’s the Ebbinghaus curve. [...] It’s the rate at which you forget things if you’re off-grain. – [Hallam] The important stuff I’ll remember. – You know half the organic memories you have are junk? Just not trustworthy. – [Hallam] When it comes to little things. – And big ones. With half the population you can imprint false memories just by asking leading questions in therapy. [...] No back up, no help with the lost keys, no chance to re-live the day you met your husband, no proof if you’re mugged, none of that... (Armstrong 2011, pp. 23–25)

She cites a scientific theory as the basis of her standpoint. It seems that she emphasises the importance of real and objectively true memories: for example, the line “proof if you’re mugged” refers to the fact that the technological advancements have made only recorded memories tangible evidence and most likely required in order to seek justice. What is more, it is as if she views the natural features of a human that is “off-grain” as defects – the Grain essentially works as a plaster to fix the naturally finicky and fallible nature of the human mind.

According to the script, Colleen may also think that the human as itself is not a trustworthy construction, is fragile and must be enhanced by tools, such as the Grain.

But you don't even know if that's true. In the pre-Grain days: these researchers interviewed housewives right after their weddings and again after they'd been married after ten years. Graded their happiness each time, actually put a number to it. And guess what they found? After ten years they believed they were happier than they'd been at the start, as if their happiness had grown, but it hadn't. They'd just forgotten how happy they'd really been at the start. Their own memories lied to make them feel better about their shitty marriages. Organic memory's a trap, a sort of self-deception engine. With a grain you've got the truth. (Armstrong 2011, pp. 25–26)

She uses the expression “pre-Grain days” which highlights the shift between the two time periods, time before the Grain and the present, as if it would have marked a significant point in history. She also refers to the organic human memory as “a trap” and “a self-deception engine”. Her expressions paint the organic attributes as something that should be left behind and that humans should ascend from: it is something unstable, deceptive, and defective. According to her viewpoint, using the Grain is essential to live closer to the truth, and that the truth would be more important to strive for than Hallam's argument of simply feeling happier as she is (Armstrong 2011, p. 25): truth is seen as more important than spontaneous emotions.

4.3. Liam confronts Ffion

In this scene (EHY, 18:04–21:47) Liam and Ffion have arrived home from the dinner party. Both are sitting in the living room quietly: earlier Liam noticed some tension between Ffion and Jonas which obviously bothers him. The pair is seated separately, Ffion on the couch and Liam in a chair. One empty chair is placed between the two which highlights the physical but also the emotional distance between the pair. The empty seat could also refer to the different factors coming between their relationship: Liam feeling jealousy, and his position being threatened by Jonas' presence or his compulsive habit of analysing his or other's actions which is enabled by the Grain. Additionally, most times there is something placed between the two for the duration of the scene. Both of their postures are closed and facing away from each other, which plays into the tense atmosphere of their exchange. However, when Liam starts to ask details about Jonas his gestures seem almost assertive, such as crossing his legs – his character is perhaps feeling insecure yet trying to cover it up. What Liam is saying is also growing more provocative and confrontational each time he tries to get Ffion to admit whether Ffion and Jonas have had mutual past.

When Ffion admits having a brief relationship with Jonas in the past (EHY, 18:33) Liam starts referring to Jonas in a derogatory manner and then wonders if Ffion is not embarrassed by dating the man:

Are you embarrassed by that? Because it's embarrassing. [chuckle] I'm sort but, Christ, are you not embarrassed? (EHY, 19:14)

Liam has already painted a certain mental image of Jonas due to his jealousy – in his mind, Ffion should feel embarrassed for falling for such a “pompous” man. Liam also points out an inconsistency in Ffion's story about the two lovers dating for only a week and it suddenly being a month (19:22): this time Liam shows a re-do of Liam and Ffion's first night together during which Ffion claims her and Jonas' relationship ended after a week. What is more, Liam states that in his mind it used to be a nice night (20:25) – his analysis has resulted in something that was happy in the moment becoming a something negative when repeatedly examined in retrospect. However, it comes clear that Liam does have previous history of jealous traits, which suggests that the Grain is not the only culprit playing into his problems:

You're getting obsessed. [...] We had all this with Dan, I don't want you going like that again. (EHY, 26:28)

In comparison, when referring to the episode to the script Liam's obsessive tendencies are more pronounced when talking about his attitude towards a person named Dan – Dan is presumably either Ffion's past partner or friend. Ffion also pulls up a count of Liam mentioning Dan 2075 different instances from her memories to show him the extent of his fixations (Armstrong 2011, p. 36).

Lastly, when Ffion is exasperated and asks Liam to get a grip, Liam insults Ffion in return (EHY, 20:50). At first, Ffion is upset standing behind the transparent television screen and then proceeds to re-play a shortened version (a re-do) of Liam's insulting words on it to show that she is upset. Possibility to create edits of memories provides possibilities to fabricate reality: looking at an edited version what has happened can stand in contrast with actual events. Modified truth can thus be used to gain a desired goal. Furthermore, Ffion is standing behind the screen: again, the visual arrangement highlights the distance between the two and that the two are perhaps looking each other only indirectly, and this time, through a screen. One could be also led to believe that this is the way the two see other: as a fabrication of their re-dos. In this instance, the re-dos are also being used as a

communicational tool against someone since evidence is being immediately pulled from one's memories. After Ffion leaves the room, Liam is alone.

4.4. The final scene

The final scene (EHY, 43:29–47:29) of the episode takes place sometime after Liam confronting Ffion about her relationship with Jonas and finding out about Ffion's infidelity. The scene starts by viewing Liam and Ffion's house but quickly moves to Liam's point of view (EHY, 43:29): Liam exchanges a kiss with Ffion and moves to interact with his child who is positioned in the crib. The shot is rewound a couple of times and then shifts into a view of Liam laying on the bed with his eyes milky while he is doing re-dos of his memories (44:10). The colours of the shot are muted and cold – the warm light of many earlier shots is gone. The focus is on his eyes: he is desperately looking at his memories of his family. He stops for a while and a full view of the room reveals that Ffion and his child are both gone, and Liam lies alone on the dishevelled bed. Silence of the scene is heavy and the room almost empty apart from the bed, which highlights the melancholic atmosphere and Liam's loneliness.

He wanders to the kitchen while looking at a playback of his memories and looks at Ffion sitting in the kitchen only then coming back to reality (EHY, 44:40). Liam's memories stand in stark contrast with the reality: memories are filled with warm light and tones whereas the reality is painted in cold and neutral colours accompanied by stark light. The house is a mess and Liam's has been clearly drinking heavily. The shift in atmosphere between the reality and memories is also marked with foreboding background music that starts getting a more sinister tone from the piano. He goes through more memories filled with Ffion's smile making Liam look more distraught by the moment (45:29). Liam also acknowledges the small implant behind his ear, the Grain (45:58). Finally, he is viewing a memory of the two doing their morning routines in the bathroom: the shot shifts to Liam (in reality) staring into the mirror with milky eyes looking ghastly and shocked (46:18). Liam turns off the re-dos and after a while turns to look the razor blade and nail clippers on the table edge – the viewer is left questioning whether he is going to take his own life. Instead, he however, he goes for the Grain (46:44). The dripping blood against sink contrasts the cold environment: the organic nature of it is in stark juxtaposition with the sterile-looking surfaces (46:59). He gouges out the chip while the memories of Ffion flash before his eyes. Liam pulls out the device and the screen turns to black (47:29). The abrupt darkness could represent concrete or metaphorical blindness: the removal of the

device has either physically damaged his sight, or the device simply stops recording and Liam has willingly “blinded” himself from the constant retrospective examining of his memories: “the truth” has been too painful to see or the end-goal he would have been willing to seek.

The script also indicates that Liam’s has in fact been over-analysing many aspects of his life, such as his work performance, which is further evidence of his insecure nature. After Ffion has left him, Liam receives a message from his interviewer, Max, saying that he would be a good fit for the new retrospective parenting unit: the only requirement is a re-do of the past six months (Armstrong 2011, p. 64). However, at this point it is clear that evidence will be damning – it will be no use of doing the re-do since Liam already knows that the contents of the Grain will reveal him committing illegal actions. It also well may be that the contents of Liam’s Grain before the appraisals were not even that bad: the nightmare that Liam has now brought upon himself through his escalated obsession with the past memories has perhaps been for naught, ironically highlighting the nightmarish nature of his outcome. Then again, perhaps fighting against the Grain was the right thing to do for Liam all along, as he was not fully comfortable with the Grain from the get-go.

5. Discussion

In this section, I will be reflecting on the results of the analysis through the transhumanist perspective and discussing in which ways the perspective can be applied to the analysis of the episode and its script. When examining the ramifications that the use of technology has on the characters and their interaction within the context of EHY, some important points emerge. Examining the analysis of the episode and the script from transhumanistic perspective raises the question of which, technology or human nature, is the root of conflict, what the dichotomy between conservationism and liberalism in the context of transhumanism looks like in the episode, and whether the technological advancements in the story could be considered either transcendence or transgression. I will also acknowledge the comparisons to the original script of the episode and discuss the ways the script handles the subject matter differently to the filmed episode.

Firstly, the presence of the juxtaposition between potentially harmful technology and the human nature is perhaps the most prevalent element throughout *The Entire History of You*. Throughout the analysis it becomes clear that the protagonist's struggle culminates in the clash between his morals, qualities and the device, the Grain, enabling and bringing out his negative qualities, such as insecurity and jealous tendencies, to gain a stronger hold of him. The Grain also acts as a restraint and a device of surveillance which could lead to more grandiose outbursts. According to Fukuyama, it has been observed through history that social control mechanisms typically face objection by the "unruly human nature": Fukuyama states that the human tendency to avert social engineering in the long run is something deeply rooted and instinctive (as cited in Lilley 2013, p. 23), which could also be interpreted being applicable to the protagonist's case.

Indeed, the Grain acts as an enhancement to the human memory and provides the opportunity to constantly revisit one's past: in EHY Liam is stuck in analysing his memories. The character's tendency to constantly make new interpretations of recorded memories could, according to a psychoanalytical approach, be a way to analyse other's outward expressions such as gestures or facial expressions to mirror an image of oneself or, in other words, trying to gain an understanding of how one appears from other's perspective (Scolari 2018, pp. 397–398). One could argue that the Grain merely acts as a neutral bridge to enable the need to analyse oneself as a reflection and as distinct from others. According to Eagleton (as cited in Scolari 2018, p. 398), the unconscious desires to reach a gratifying reality is typically directed towards the other, yet is also sometimes received from the

other as well: one desires what others unconsciously desire for them which is often generated by getting caught up in linguistic, sexual and social relations.

What is more, the Grain provides a significant change of roles in social dynamics within the society of the story. On the one hand, with the possibility to have an instant access to the past, the characters' roles are suddenly transformed into the roles of both actors and spectators: it helps the characters to avoid anxiety caused by the uncertainty of the future. Thus, the characters also gain more control of their actions which could either accelerate or majorly hinder their progress. (Opaza & Faure 2018, p. 459) On the other hand, when it comes to certainty, should Colleen's claims of recorded memories being more trustworthy than organic ones, for instance, be likely taken with a grain of salt? The sense that the individual is going to make of the images will change depending on the moment of watching; the characters also have a possibility to utilise tools such as zooming or lip-reading to gain new perspectives of the memories (p. 472), which ultimately affects the interpretation. By examining memories, they may see what happened on the surface level yet may never understand the context (Jenkins 2019, p. 51). It is not out of question either that the interpretations could also be tied to emotions of the moment as for instance the script indicates: Liam's personal feelings and insecurities potentially caused him to view his interview in a negative light while the case may have been quite the opposite. In other words, interpretations remain subjective and dependent on the context: recorded images of memories may be considered objective and tangible evidence – *trustworthy*, as the character Colleen puts it – yet are just as vulnerable to misinterpretations as organic memories would be to fickle of the mind. New interpretations create alternate realities, and in Liam's case, acting the role of his personal cell. From a transhumanist angle, the piece of augmentation does not benefit Liam and his wellbeing: it cages him inside his progressively more negative interpretations of experienced events – and ultimately creates a false view of the world.

As observed in the analysis, Liam's struggles with dwelling in the past leading up the voluntary gauging of the device could be the cause of being introduced to a new medium and becoming more invested in the mediated experience rather than the reality. The absorption of the new medium as a part of everyday culture often leads to *numbness* – term coined by Marshall McLuhan – referring to that the long-term consequences are not actively acknowledged anymore. (Jenkins 2019, p. 45). For instance, numbness to some extent is present in the real modern life through the emergence digital media. Right now, it is ubiquitous to the point of it becoming invisible and the separation between offline and online is nearly non-existent: at this point, digital media has been woven into the very fabric of society and culture. (Jansson, Lövheim, Paasonen & Sumiala 2013, p. 26) For Liam,

however, the process him becoming numb to the Grain does not seem linear: throughout the scenes analysed he seems to have conflicting feelings and going through his past experiences seems to cause more distress rather than being a casual everyday function. To him the Grain is not yet invisible and is constantly uncomfortable (p. 45) – to him the Grain is not a natural extension.

[...] The Grain does not make us more or less human; humanity is not “perfected” through the introduction of new communication technologies. Rather, “old troubles” catch up with us. (Jenkins 2019, pp. 46–47)

Another distracting factor alongside with the lack of the enhancement becoming a natural part of Liam’s physique is the phenomenon of “continuous partial attention” which could lead to potential miscues due to lack of engagement – since re-dos can always be done later on, the importance of focusing the first time around decreases (p. 47).

A real-life example, Steve Mann, is an advocate for technological human enhancements, thus a transhumanist. He wears pieces of technology or enhancements and has spoken about his experiences as a “cyborg”:

As a cyborg, I live in two worlds, and the perpetual challenge is to bridge those worlds. In conversation, I often appear distracted...I am drawn to the whirling interior of cyberspace, which moves and morphs and changes much faster than physical space. When I am wearing WearComp in my day-to-day social interactions in public, people often complain of a loss of eye contact with me. (Mann 2001, as cited in Jenkins 2019, p. 47)

The mediated experience seems to be prone to resulting in misunderstandings and lost meanings. With the increased importance of relying on past imagery – as it is the case with Liam – due to the lack of attention in the moment it becomes increasingly harder not to fixate on the past.

When it comes to the transhumanist debate in EHY, representations of transhumanists and conservationists are present. For instance, during the dinner party it becomes clear that the character Hallam leads a Grain-free life. Within the frames of the transhumanist debate, it would be intuitive to label her as a conservationist: conservationists value the conservation of human nature and institutions and opposes the transhumanist side of the debate (Lilley 2013, p. 2). However, the reactions comparable to revealing an unexpected political view from the fellow party members – awkwardness, Colleen’s objection, and Paul’s supportive comments – reveal a society in which the Grain is the ruling norm. Hallam diverges from the norm by refusing the Grain, which is equivalent

to taking a more liberal and progressive stance towards the issue, simultaneously functioning as a breeding ground for a new kind of neo-liberalism within the society of the story. The averting of social engineering, as mentioned earlier, could also be true on Hallam's part. The Grain has become indispensable as a result of the process of *mediatisation*, or in other words, the increase in material and cultural dependency these technologies, which, for instance, the increasing mobility and multifunctionality promotes. Disconnection from the digital tools is at odds with the social norm due to them being tightly integrated in everyday life and interaction. (Jansson et al. 2013, p. 27)

However, the transhumanist side of the debate is represented by the majority – from some it is intentional and from others subconscious. As observed in the analysis, characters apart from Liam do not overtly express signs of discomfort with regards to using the Grain. The most outwardly “transhumanist” character is Colleen who openly rejects the organic state of the human memory and calls for its enhancement. For her, the Grain is an individual's personal enhancement for seeking the objective truth. Transhumanists consider the conservationists' cause – regulation and monitoring of enhancement technologies – wrongful as it would result in loss of personal autonomy (Lilley 2013, p. 10). Despite that she only mentions the personal use of the device, the loss of personal freedom of will has already diminished as the device is already in use as a surveillance tool when it comes to the social and legal aspects. The society of the episode also favours a more transhumanist stance: the deep integration of the advanced technology on social and political levels has already made the world favourably aligned for a transhumanist future which transhumanists also ultimately strive for (p. 4). It is futile to claim that the Grain is only a personal enhancement: personal use, as in the memories of the individual, are exploited on a societal scale, forming a basis for all functioning within society.

Has the society in EHY and its characters based on the analysed scenes either transcended or transgressed? In the context of the transhumanist debate (Huxley 1957, as cited in Lilley 2013, p. 14), transcendence is associated as the end goal of transhumanism and that through transcending new possibilities are realised for the human nature. Conversely, transgression is the conservationists' argument for the “point of no return” in the progression of innovations and enhancements and the point of which they predict being an irretrievable loss for humanity (p. 18). Whether the society in EHY has either transcended or transgressed is a matter of debate. Regarding technical aspects, the analysis indicates that the society has conformed to the technical advancements by, for instance, applying the Grain as a mandatory part of work life to help assess performance more accurately while giving the individual heavier incentive to meet the demands. In social interaction and personal life the effects of the Grain manifest in the form of seeking truths in replayed memories: the individuals

may gain more control over their lives since a slip of a mind is out of the equation while conflicts may emerge from wanting to gain control over other's images (Scolari 2018, p. 473). Sometimes, images of memories appear to be used as a weapon against others in conflicts as a new form of interacting, such as during the dispute between Liam and Ffion.

Transhumanist technologies also seem to completely alter perception of others. Others are mainly viewed through re-dos, mainly becoming fabrications of true selves. In Liam's case his end-result is a trail of destruction as his fixation with past events grows worse: his internal conflict bleeds from professional, societal environments to personal his life in the form of fixating on the behaviour of his spouse. The synthetic nature of his interpretations of the past events spreads to apply everything behind his personal closed doors.

Blatantly dismissive claims of attributing Liam's breakdown to technology should perhaps not be made. It is worth acknowledging that the digitalisation of everyday life simultaneously blurs the line yet reminds that identity, agency, and power cannot be attached to the individual or the machine alone – they are an ensemble of interactions within an abundance of different actors (Jansson et al. 2013, p. 26). Despite a plethora of factors are affecting Liam's sorrowful fate, the tone of the series, however, already carries a negative bias towards unknown technologies as the series explores outcomes the downsides of futuristic imaginary technologies.

However, accuracy and truth have been achieved at the expense of privacy and emotional wellbeing. EHY essentially provides snapshot of a world where a human bodily function, developing memories, is not your own anymore but commodified. The Grain blurs the line between the rights to one own and other people's memories (Jenkins 2019, p. 51). The existence of the memory-recording technology is claimed to provide personal autonomy over one's life: instead, it not only strips away the autonomy of the individual in the eyes of society but also renders it possible to strip away other individual's rights to privacy: Ffion is vulnerable to Liam's relentless attempts investigate her memories and to protect herself from Liam's jealous behaviour (p. 53). It can be claimed that the human ability to forget or knowingly protect others from hurtful memories and not even provide the temptation to pry the information from other's memories can sometimes uphold peace between individuals. The analysis indicates that extracting the ability to forget experiences may not be an enhancement – the ability serves an important function and is essential to meaningful life. A question can be posed: which outweighs the other, painful truth or blissful ignorance?

6. Conclusion

In this section, I will elaborate of the conclusion of this thesis. The goal of this thesis was to examine the effect of technology on conflicts in interactional ensembles in *Black Mirror's* episode *Entire History of You* and its original script, reflecting on the discussion through the theory of transhumanist debate and discussing the world of *Black Mirror* in transhumanist light. Methodological framework was provided by comparative close reading that I used to extract meanings behind the scenes and script.

Regarding the succession of the goals of this thesis, the analysis provided a plethora of answers regarding the question on effect of technology on interaction and specifically conflicts. The effects of technology, more specifically the fictional Grain, are multi-faceted. With the help of the technologies, characters create their own interpretations, or their personal alternate realities, from past experiences and rely on them in interactive situations. The piece of technology may function as an accelerator or enabler for personal defects. Ultimately, the environment and characters in EHY are using the Grain to seek “the truth”, an objectively accurate view of the world, which is accepted in interpersonal and societal interactions. In Liam’s case, the truth destroys his current life and leaves a question whether an objective truth is the ultimate goal worthy of striving for. Discussing the findings also displays the evident presence of transhumanist and conservationist collisions in the reality of the story: the transhumanist perspective is the dominating view while conservationists are oppressed and frowned upon.

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