
Dehumanization in Black Mirror

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Dehumanization in *Black Mirror*

Sous la direction de Mme Rebecca Romdhani

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Introduction

On December 4, 2011, “The National Anthem,” the first episode of the now worldwide series *Black Mirror*, aired for the first time on *Channel 4*. The episode garnered seven-day ratings of 2.07 million viewers and offered its audience a rather unconventional plot (BARB). The Prime Minister Michael Callow, played by Rory Kinnear, is blackmailed and forced to have sexual intercourse with a pig, live on worldwide television. To refuse these demands would result in the death of the kidnapped Princess Susannah (Lydia Wilson). This puzzling episode generated a variety of responses, from admiration to hostile complaints (*The Guardian* 2011). Critically speaking, “The National Anthem” was received positively with an A rating on *The A.V. Club* (Sims: 2018), 4.5 out of five stars in *The Telegraph* (Hogan: 2011), four out of five stars on *Cultbox* (Lewis: 2015), and 3.5 out of five stars on *GamesRadar+* (Edwards: 2011). The episode marked the beginning of *Black Mirror*’s success.

The mind behind this audacious idea is Charlie Brooker, an English television presenter, author, screenwriter, and producer. Brooker is best known for his satirical criticism of modern society and the media. In addition to *Black Mirror*, Charlie Brooker presented several television shows such as *Screenwipe*, *Gameswipe*, *Newswipe*, *Weekly Wipe*, and *10 O’Clock Live*. He wrote the horror drama series *Dead Set*, articles on social criticism for *The Guardian*, as well as writing for the comedy series *Brass Eye*, *The 11 O’Clock Show* and *Nathan Barley*. He is also one of the four creative directors of the production company *Zeppotron*.

A week after the release of the first episode, the second episode, “Fifteen Million Merits,” aired on *Channel 4*. It had a different setting and cast from the first episode, and it is unclear whether the plot is set in the present or in the future. This is how the series functions for every episode of its five-season run, released from 2011 to 2019. *Black Mirror* provides different plots and themes in every episode, but technology systematically features. The technological

devices that are featured in the show are usually advanced and futuristic, but not always. Some episodes contain common devices only, such as televisions or smartphones. Even though it might be tempting to believe that *Black Mirror* denounces technology, technology is actually used in the show as a lens through which society is observed.

Jackie Strause notes that “*Black Mirror* is known for delivering a gut punch with its twisted endings” (2016). Most episodes can indeed be shocking for the viewers, mostly because of how realistic they appear, even when they feature futuristic technology. The majority of *Black Mirror*'s episodes are set in a future that has advanced technologies, and, as already mentioned, the devices are generally more advanced than the ones that exist in real life, but the tendencies and behaviors observed in the series are typical of the digital era. Rather than being “prophetic,” as the series and its first episode in particular has been called by the writer and multimedia producer Michael Ahr (*Den of Geek*) (2018), *Black Mirror* raises awareness about our current society. Oihab Allal-Chérif suggests:

[T]he show depicts worrying current trends. Its creator, Charlie Brooker, surfs the technological news, cleverly incorporating it into terrifying scenarios. While these fantastic stories may seem exaggerated, technology, particularly digital technology, is increasingly used in crime, is responsible for multiple pathologies, and causes geopolitical conflict, the drift toward authoritarianism and social deterioration. *Black Mirror* prophecies that have come true are the subject of heated debate (2020).

Allal-Chérif provides examples to illustrate his statements. He explains:

The perverse behaviour presented in several episodes of *Black Mirror* can be observed on social networks. On May 15, a 16-year-old Malaysian teenager committed suicide after asking her Instagram followers if she should live or die, because 69% told her to end her life. Facebook has also been blamed for broadcasting live 17 minutes of the March 15 attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand in which 51 people died (Ibid).

The episodes that could be associated with Allal-Chérif's examples are, for instance, "Hated in the Nation (S3-E6)," in which public personalities are being chosen to be killed by anyone using the hashtag "#DeathTo," and "Nosedive (S3-E1)," in which people's social status and life conditions are defined by their popularity on an app. Allal-Chérif also compares "Nosedive (S3-E1)" to China's "social credit" system, "Playtest (S3-E2)" to the *Facebook Oculus Rift Headset*, and says that "Metalhead (S4-E5)" is "a direct reference to the company Boston Dynamics, which Google sold in 2017 to the Japanese group Softbank" (Ibid). "Playtest" shows a new type of videogames that allows its users to be totally immersed in another reality through the use of an implant in the back of the neck. The Facebook Oculus Rift Headset is a headset that can be used anywhere and that allows users to interact as digital avatars in virtual homes created through Facebook's VR system. As for "Metalhead," the principal character Bella (Maxine Peake) is hunted by robotic "dogs." They look extremely similar to the "BigDog" robot from Boston Dynamics, a quadruped robot used by the US army mostly to carry gear in order to assist soldiers.

Black Mirror not only shows a number of problematic tendencies in current society, but it also suggests that everyday people, including *Black Mirror*'s audience themselves, are to blame. This is precisely why the title is "Black Mirror," as a screen, like everyone's smartphone screen, computer or television, once switched off, becomes a black mirror. This black mirror gives every owner a reflection of themselves. This image also erases the common misconception that technology is the source of the problem. Instead it shows human characteristics that were already there in the first place. It however becomes problematic when technology develops faster than human beings.

Those tendencies have in common that they all lead to or are the result of dehumanization. In other words, dehumanization causes or is the result of the behaviors that will be explored in this dissertation. Dehumanization is featured in every single episode of *Black Mirror*, in one

form or another, from using people as guinea pigs to test videogames, modifying the human body and human perceptions, to enjoying watching people being humiliated and tortured. Dehumanization is a complex phenomenon and it can be subdivided into different types. The first section of this dissertation will consist in a clear theoretical presentation of dehumanization.

Dehumanization tends to be studied in relation to other phenomena, such as sexism and racism, but it is rarely presented as a phenomenon in itself. Social psychologists Sarah J. Gervais, Philippe Bernard, Olivier Klein and Jill Allen explain:

Psychologists have traditionally studied closely related phenomena, such as racial and ethnic conflict and violence (Allport 1954; Azzi 1998), categorization and stereotyping (Tajfel 1981), and gendered bodies (Henley 1977), but theory and research in the specific areas of objectification and dehumanization is of a relatively recent vintage (2013: 2).

Social psychologist Nick Haslam makes a similar observation, explaining that “[a]lthough it has been widely used in the social sciences and humanities, this concept has remained rather elusive. It has been applied in very diverse contexts and with very varied meanings” (2018: 61). Indeed, even though the concept is named and used in different situations, it is not defined and studied on its own. In order to resolve this, this dissertation will explore different theories on dehumanization. The notions of humanness, posthumanism, transhumanism, empathy and compassion will also be explored.

The second section of this dissertation will deal with the analysis of *Black Mirror*'s episodes. The analysis will mainly focus on dehumanization and the various ways in which it is realized. As the series contains 22 episodes that all address complex notions, the feasibility of presenting a detailed analysis of every single episode would become an arduous task and diverge from the objective of the dissertation. Therefore, a selection of apposite episodes has been made and grouped into three subsections. Each one represents a general pattern in the

series and contains two episodes that are representative of the pattern. The first group, “The love of the show,” deals with the episodes “White Bear” (S2-E2) and “The National Anthem” (S1-E1). In both episodes, dehumanization takes place in situations that reveal a twisted attraction for the (often violent and degrading) show. This attraction is often stronger than human decency and indicates some characters’ enjoyment of the dehumanization of other characters. The second group, “From 2D to 3D,” contains two episodes, “Hated in the Nation” (S3-E6) and “Nosedive.” (S3-E1) This section focuses on what happens when the online world materializes into real life. It also explores actual patterns, such as “Cancel Culture” and the unawareness and disregard around the consequences of actions taken on social media. The third group, “Dear Progress,” consists in the analysis of two episodes, “White Christmas” (S2-E4) and “Men Against Fire,” (S3-E5) in which dehumanization is justified by progress.

Through the observation of dehumanization in the different episodes, this dissertation will attempt to demonstrate that *Black Mirror* is rather a denunciation of human tendencies rather than technology. Furthermore, because it opposes highly developed technology to poor human interactions, the series creates a stark contrast that can be read as a bitter irony.

The Love of the Show, selected episodes, plot synopses

White Bear:

“White Bear” offers the audience an innovative concept of entertainment: a “justice park.” The plot follows Victoria Skillane (Lenora Crichlow), who wakes up in an unknown room where a television screen shows a flickering sign. She does not recognize the place and runs outside, looking for help. She is soon faced with a crowd of people who deliberately ignore all of her questions and supplications while following and recording her with their smartphones. From that point, Victoria endures different terrible treatments, such as being pursued by a man with

a rifle or threatened with torture, still watched and recorded by the crowd. She meets Jem (Tuppence Middleton), who tells her that the flickering sign that was shown in Victoria's room has been displayed on every screen and has turned the crowd into robot-like onlookers, and that the people not affected, such as herself and Victoria, are being hunted. After a horrible day trying to escape all sorts of violence, Victoria ends up on a stage, where she finally discovers the truth. The young woman is convicted of having recorded her boyfriend, whereas he was killing a little girl, after kidnapping her. It is then revealed that she is in a justice park, called "White Bear," in reference to the little girl's teddy bear. The woman is then publicly humiliated, surrounded by a euphoric crowd, insulting and throwing objects at her. This is what Victoria's daily life will look like for a long time, as her memories are erased every night by a technological device, forcing her to relive the same events over and over.

The National Anthem:

"The National Anthem" depicts the prime Minister Michael Callow (Rory Kinnear) being blackmailed and enforced to have sexual intercourse with a pig in order to save the life of the beloved Princess Susannah (Lydia Wilson). The news about the prime Minister's blackmailing features on every connected screen in no time, with absolutely zero regard for the man's privacy. The whole country stops, and a large number of people are very excited and impatient to watch the scene. Michael Callow, after many attempts to escape his terrible fate finally has no choice but to comply. No one misses the show, but even the most excited people end up disgusted. It is later revealed that, while everyone was busy watching the sexual intercourse, no one realized that the Princess had actually been released before Callow's humiliation. At the end of the episode, the man responsible for the blackmailing hangs himself after seeing his demands performed on live television.

From 2D to 3D, selected episodes, plot synopses

Hated in the Nation:

The plot of “Hated in the Nation” follows Karin Parke (Kelly Macdonald), London Detective Chief Inspector, and Trainee Detective Constable Blue Coulson (Faye Marsay) in their investigation into the suicide of the journalist Jo Powers (Elizabeth Berrington). Before killing herself, Power wrote a column that derided a disability rights activist, which caused her to become the target of a hashtag #DeathTo on Twitter. The next day another target of the hashtag, a rapper named Tusk (Charles Babalola) who made fun of a child fan, is found dead. Parke and Coulson find out that these two victims were killed by an autonomous drone insect (ADI), developed by the company Granular and originally used to make up for bee extinction. The investigators understand the gravity of the hashtag and try to protect the next victim, Clara Meades (Holli Dempsey), who ends up killed as well. It is then revealed that the ADIs are actually used by the government in order to keep a watch on citizens, and that an ex-Granular employee hacked the system to use the ADIs to kill the victims of the hashtag. The culprit explained the reason for his behavior in a manifesto. Years before, he found the dead body of his beloved colleague after she killed herself because of online hate. At the end of the episode, he is getting revenge by having all of the 387 036 people who used the hashtag killed by the ADIs.

Nosedive:

“Nosedive” shows a society ruled by an app on which each person is ranked on a scale of one to five stars. The ranking defines every one’s socioeconomic status. People who are highly ranked have access to more privileges, such as healthcare, job opportunities, housing possibilities and so on. The rankings depend on daily social interactions and online posts. The

app users wear contacts that allow them to immediately see everyone's ranking. The main character, Lacie Pound (Bryce Dallas Howard), is determined to raise her ranking. Her old friend Naomi (Alice Eve), who is highly ranked (4.8), invites her to her wedding, which is an incredible opportunity for Lacie. A series of mishaps however change the course of the big day, and lead Lacie to a very low ranking. Her flight is canceled and her low status does not allow her to take another one. After causing a scene, she is sentenced with an even lower ranking, which is why she can only rent an old car that cannot be recharged. She ends up hitchhiking with Susan (Cherry Jones), who has an extremely low ranking. The latter happens to barely care about her situation since her husband was refused cancer care because his ranking was considered too low. Lacie finally makes it to the wedding, even though Naomi does not want her there anymore because of her low ranking. She still manages to sneak in the reception and interrupts it to make an emotional and chaotic speech. She ends up grabbing a knife and threatening to behead Mr. Rags, the doll that symbolizes her friendship with Naomi. Lacie ends up arrested and put in a jail. The final scene shows Lacie and another inmate (Sope Dirisu) screaming insults at each other in what seems like a moment of pure joy and freedom, now that they can speak without it impacting their rankings.

Dear Progress, selected episodes, plot synopses

White Christmas:

“White Christmas” aired in December 2014 as a Christmas special. It was the last episode before the series moved to Netflix. Joe Potter (Rafe Spall) has lived for five years in a cabin with Matt Trent (Jon Hamm), and has never been talkative. On a snowy Christmas night, Matt asks Joe about himself. To encourage him to talk, he tells him about the online seduction system that he used to run. The system used the technology of the “Z-Eyes,” an implant that allows

people to communicate, to see through other people's eyes, to "block" them and so on. Matt used it to help men seduce women. One of his clients, Harry (Rasmus Hardiker), ended up killed by the woman he seduced after a huge misunderstanding. Then, Matt tells Joe about his job which consisted in "setting up" house assistants. These were digital clones of people, fully sentient and conscious, used for realizing tasks such as programming the alarm clock or making coffee. Matt's stories, as well as other wisely chosen words, leads Joe to finally open up. Joe explains how and why he ended up killing his ex-fiancée's father as well as letting her daughter freeze to death after finding out that the child he thought to be his daughter was actually born of his ex's betrayal. Back to the present time, it is revealed to the audience that Joe was actually a clone, and that Matt's job was to get Joe's clone confession of his crime, in order to convict the real Joe. An officer then sets Joe's clone to experience time at 1,000 years per minute, which will make him suffer forever.

Men Against Fire:

"Men Against Fire" is probably the darkest episode of the series. The army soldiers of the episode have a precise mission: eradicate all "roaches," horrible zombie-looking creatures. The plot focuses on Stripe (Malachi Kirby), one of the soldiers who, because of a technology developed by the roaches, becomes aware that those creatures actually are completely normal-looking human beings. They however have a "bad" genetic baggage (diabetes, bad vision, poor immune system...) and they are hunted in order to completely eradicate these issues in the future. Knowing that information, Stripe refuses to kill anymore. His rebellious behavior gives him two options: having his memory wiped off and starting all over again, or getting locked in a sort of asylum cell while watching himself killing two people on a loop. Stripe chooses the first option.

1. Dehumanization, theoretical framework

In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, dehumanization is defined as: “to deprive of human character or attributes.” These “human character or attributes” are not explained. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* has no entry for the noun “dehumanization,” but it defines the verb “to dehumanize” with these words: “to deprive (someone or something) of human qualities, personality, or dignity: such as -a: to subject (someone, such as a prisoner) to inhuman or degrading conditions or treatment ; -b: to address or portray (someone) in a way that obscures or demeans that person's humanity or individuality ; c: to remove or reduce human involvement or interaction in (something, such as a process or place).” This definition focuses more on the different actions through which dehumanization can be realized, as well as suggesting that it can be a mental process, through which people are considered (“portrayed”) as not human, or less than human. Once again, the locution “human qualities” is provided without any mention of what they consist of. The *Cambridge Dictionary* does not have a definition for “dehumanization” either, nevertheless, similar to the *Merriam-Webster* one, it does define “to dehumanize:” “to remove from a person the special human qualities of independent thought, feeling for other people, etc.” Here, the “human qualities” are explained a little bit, but the list of examples is still narrow. Therefore, in order to introduce the notion of dehumanization in an adequate way, this dissertation will first focus on describing the “human qualities” or “human attributes,” which will be called “humanness.”

1.1 Preliminary notions

1.1.1 Humanness

As a start it seems necessary to clarify what is meant by “being human.” Nick Haslam, Professor of Psychology at the University of Melbourne and expert in Social Psychology, studied the notions of dehumanization (which he spells “dehumanisation”) and humanness and published his theories in a selection of articles. In the one titled “Attributing and Denying Humanness to Others,” he explains that “[one] would argue that a theory of dehumanisation needs an account of what is being denied to people when they are dehumanised, a quality that must correspond to humanness in some sense.” (2008: 61) While being human might be considered inherent to the human understanding, *Black Mirror*, as well as other science-fiction works such as *Terminator*, *Machines Like Me*, *Blade Runner* and many other ones, blurs the lines between human and non-human, between what is real and what is not, mostly through the presence of artificial lives and instances of posthumanism.

In fields like psychology, neurosciences, biology or emotions sciences, the concept of humanness is traditionally represented in a contrastive way, by opposing human beings to animals. Humanness was then equal to the differences observed between human beings and animals. The main difference has been identified as the capability of human beings to feel “secondary emotions.” Stéphanie Demoulin, Professor of Social Psychology at the University of Louvain, explored the emotions linked to humanness noting that “some emotions are presumably experienced uniquely by human beings while others can or could also be experienced by animals, or at least by highly evolved primates” (2004: 72). These emotions are called secondary emotions, in opposition to primary emotions (also called basic emotions). Primary emotions are felt by human beings and animals. Various models and classifications of

primary emotions have been published. By way of example, here are a few of them: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, interest and possibly contempt in Carroll E. Izard's model. Play, panic, grief, fear, rage, seeking, lust and care in Jaak Panksepp and Douglas Watt (2011). Robert W. Levenson considers enjoyment, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, and possibly interest, love and relief to be primary emotions (2011), while for Paul Ekman and Daniel Cordaro, happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust, contempt and surprise are basic emotions (2011).

Secondary emotions are evoked by Haslam, who explains that “nostalgia, admiration, embarrassment, and remorse— are unique to humans, and represent refined and socialized affective states” (2008: 57). Christian Becker-Asano and Ipke Wachsmuth mentions hope, relief disappointment, satisfaction, and fears-confirmed¹ as secondary emotions examples. As for Ruth Gaunt, Jean-Philippe Leyens and Stéphanie Demoulin, they consider hope, admiration, sympathy, passion, humiliation, embarrassment, guilt and repentance to be secondary emotions (2002).

It seems however reductive to equal humanness to secondary emotions. Primary emotions, since they are felt by human beings, need to be in the equation. Also, “being human” implies more aspects than emotions only. The method itself chosen to identify humanness, that is, comparing human beings to animals and extract the differences, is reductive as well. A more holistic vision of humanness would be more accurate. This is what Haslam argues, explaining that “this definition is also limited in several respects”. He also suggests a comparison between human beings with other entities instead of with animals only, when he explains that this vision of humanness “implies that only the contrast between humans and nonhuman animals is germane to the definition of humanness, although other contrasts—with machines, objects, or supernatural beings, for example—might also be relevant (2008: 58). To define humanness through a comparison between human beings and machines would indeed be interesting,

¹ fears-confirmed is elicited when being “displeased about the confirmation of the prospect of an undesirable event” (Ortony et al. 1988 mentioned in Becker-Asano et al. 2009)

especially in the analysis of *Black Mirror* since several episodes of the series feature objects that possess a human mind as well as human beings who have their bodies enhanced by technology. In his article “Attributing and denying humanness to others,” Haslam, after exploring and introducing a great number of existing references on the subject, proposes an alternative vision of humanness by dividing the concept into two major categories: “human nature” and “human uniqueness.” He then explains the relations between the two of them, before observing the relations they maintain with animal attributes:

Thematically, uniquely human attributes might seem to implicate culture, social learning, and higher cognition, whereas human nature implicates what is natural, innate, and affective. Our understanding of the two senses of humanness is schematically presented in Figure 1. Uniquely human attributes are those that are not shared with animals (i.e., the striped region), and human nature attributes are central to the human category, incorporating some attributes that are held in common with animals (2008: p.59).

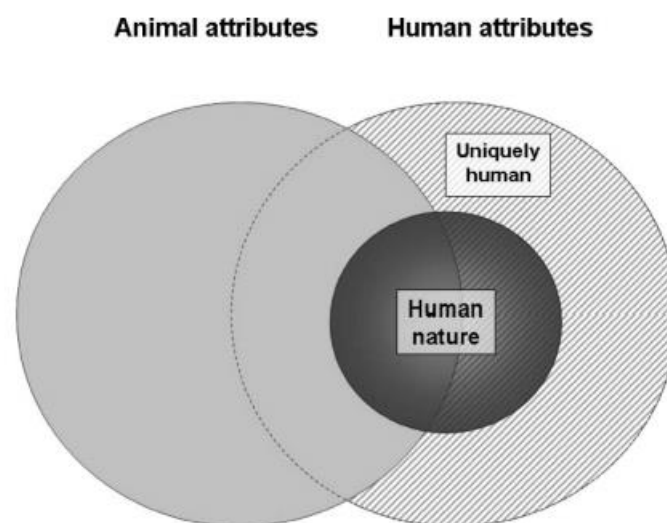


Figure 1. Schematic representation of uniquely human and human nature attributes.

It is interesting to note that the “human attributes” diagram is an open one, that is, other attributes (not defined, not discovered, or simply unmentioned) could fit in it, such as the material/biological aspect of humanness that will be dealt with later.

Haslam also provides a set of features that belong to human uniqueness: “Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness factors, emphasizing themes of civility (‘polite’), refinement (‘broad-minded’), rationality (‘analytical’), and language (‘talkative’)” (2008: 59).

The same was done for human nature: “Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Openness, with primary themes of openness (‘curious’, ‘imaginative’), warmth (‘friendly’), emotionality (‘emotional’), and desire and vivacity (‘passionate’)” (2008: 59). The various case studies provided by Haslam highlight a recurrent tendency: emotions are considered absolutely central to human nature.

It is however important to point out a difference in the emotions mentioned: some are considered part of human nature and others are considered to belong to human uniqueness. Haslam elucidates:

Refined and socialized emotions such as nostalgia and humiliation were judged to be uniquely human, as were values of “a spiritual life” and “being wealthy”, whereas emotions and values judged to exemplify human nature—love, fear, and happiness; and “freedom”, “enjoying life”, and “seeking pleasure”—were more warm, vital, and open” (2008: p.59).

The distinction between the emotions that belong to “human nature” and those of “human uniqueness” is close to the distinction between “primary emotions” or “basic emotions” and “secondary emotions,” but not identical.

Haslam insists on the fact that humanness is culture-related, explaining that “[t]here is some suggestion that the concept of ‘human nature’ may be in large measure Anglo-American, without a straightforward translation in some other languages” (2008: p.82). The French

equivalent, “la nature humaine,” refers to more or less the set of features that makes a human being human, although it is often used, in literary contexts in particular, to talk about more negative aspects of human beings. As Haslam explains, it is important to keep in mind that “[t]here is as yet little evidence that the proposed senses of humanness are recognized and relevant across cultures, and it is very plausible that understandings of what it is to be human are not universal” (2008: 82).

1.1.2 Humanness: the material/biological dimension

Humanness, in this dissertation, will be considered in Haslam’s terms: a combination of human nature and of human uniqueness. However, an additional aspect will be added to the equation, a third dimension to humanness, namely the material, or biological one. In order to be considered human, one should possess a human body. This might seem obvious, which may be the reason why it is never mentioned in the articles analyzed. Yet, it is necessary for the analysis of humanness and dehumanization in *Black Mirror*. Indeed, *Black Mirror* blurs the line between human and non-human precisely because it shows examples of human minds that exist without a human body. These entities often possess human nature and human uniqueness. They however would probably not be considered human by the masses, precisely because they do not possess the third dimension of humanness. This dimension corresponds to the biological reality of human beings: the body and its conditions and limitations as well as the perceptions of reality framed by the body (the senses, illness, aging, death...). The terms “human body” here capture all of the states in which a human body can naturally be, that is, with or without an illness, with or without a handicap, with or without any alteration made by medicine or surgery, etc.

1.2 Dehumanization: theoretical models

As explained before, research on dehumanization, in psychology in particular, does not usually study the phenomenon on its own. Literature on dehumanization as an isolated concept, with a clear definition or detailed model, is hard to find. In order to fill that void, some researchers have proposed theories of dehumanization, two of which will be featured here. One was realized by psychologists Sarah J. Gervais, Philippe Bernard, Olivier Klein and Jill Allen, and the other one has been elaborated by Haslam.

Gervais, Bernard, Klein and Allen's article starts with a short definition of objectification and dehumanization: "[objectification and dehumanization] are phenomena in which people are seen in ways that are fundamentally inaccurate; seeing people as objects, as animals, or not as people" (2013: 1). Dehumanization can take many forms and occur in a variety of situations. The examples proposed by Gervais, Bernard, Klein and Allen are the way in which African Americans are represented as apes, the way fashion models are compared to beer bottles and how people with disabilities are likened to parasites (2013: 4). Gervais, Bernard, Klein and Allen also mention the notion of "human attributes" and provide a short list of those: "Morality, self-control, or emotions are attributed to some, but not others, those people who are denied such attributes are said to be dehumanized, despite the fact that they may still be more human than animals or objects" (2013: 4). Gervais, Bernard, Klein and Allen also explain that dehumanization always involves a disregard for reality (2013: 1).

The model of dehumanization provided by Haslam naturally contains two major types of dehumanization, in relation to the two aspects of humanness. He argues that "[i]t is a simple logical step to propose that dehumanisation represents the denial of humanness to people, and that because there are two distinct senses of humanness, there may well be two corresponding forms of dehumanisation" (2008: 61-62). The act of denying human uniqueness is "animalistic

dehumanization” and the act of denying human nature is called “mechanistic dehumanization.” Gervais et al., who mention Haslam’s model of humanness to in their article on dehumanization, provide examples for both types of dehumanization:

People engage in animalistic dehumanization, denying others human uniqueness attributes (e.g., civility, refinement, moral sensibility, rationality, and maturity). When denied human uniqueness, people are regarded as amoral, irrational, childlike, and unable to control themselves. People also engage in mechanistic dehumanization and deny others human nature attributes (e.g., emotional responsiveness, interpersonal warmth, cognitive openness, agency, and depth). When denied human nature, people are regarded as inert, cold, rigid, passive, fungible, and lacking depth (2013: 5).

To summarize, the concept of dehumanization(s) in Haslam’s works is contained in this sentence: “We might expect that groups stereotyped as low in human nature will be likened to robots, those viewed as low in human uniqueness will be likened to animals, and those viewed as low in both will be likened to either kind of nonhuman entity, or to objects (cf. Harris & Fiske, 2006)” (2008: 79-80).

The models of Haslam et al. and Gervais et al. do not include the material, biological dimension of humanness. In order to write an accurate analysis of dehumanization in *Black Mirror*, this dimension is required. For that reason, an original model of dehumanization will be proposed in the following subsection. This model was elaborated in relation to the theories presented in this section as well being largely inspired by the various cases of dehumanization in the episodes of *Black Mirror*.

1.3 Three-dimensional model of dehumanization

The different models and definitions of the concept discussed before do not include the material and biological reality of humanness. They do not divide dehumanization into subtypes

linked to the context either. For these reasons, a new model of dehumanization will be suggested here.

This model contains a vision of dehumanization that subdivides it into three types: active dehumanization, reflective dehumanization, and concrete dehumanization. The first type corresponds to the most shared and typical understanding of the notion, i.e. dehumanization as a perception of others as non-human or less than human and the action that this perception of others leads to. It encloses every instance of dehumanization described by the authors mentioned before. Reflective dehumanization is a phenomenon that goes hand in hand with active dehumanization, similar to a mirror effect. A dehumanizer, by dehumanizing others, acts in a way that implies a lack of human attributes, mostly a lack of emotionality, empathy and/or compassion. Because of that, the dehumanizer is dehumanized by its own behavior. The last type concerns the alterations of the human body, human perceptions, and human conditions through the use of technology. The three types always interfere together and the model often works as a cycle. Each type of dehumanization is likely to generate one of the other ones. There is no primary, or fundamental type of dehumanization. Each of them can occur in the first place, and each of them can generate both of the other ones.

Active dehumanization:

This type of dehumanization is observed in situations in which a person perceives and/or treats another person as if they were not human, or less than human. In *Black Mirror*, active dehumanization is often represented through the enjoyment of other people's suffering or humiliation. It can also be illustrated by the lack of consideration for people's feelings and privacy. This form of dehumanization involves both Haslam's animalistic dehumanization and mechanistic dehumanization. It must however be specified that the adjective "active" accounts for the idea that this type of dehumanization is an action (mental or concrete) that associates an

agent, the dehumanizer, with an object, the person dehumanized. The process does not occur consciously and voluntarily. In some cases, the dehumanizer might not realize the inadequacy of their actions because they fail to recognize the humanness of their victim.

Reflective dehumanization:

This type of dehumanization is particularly relevant in this dissertation because it embodies the idea of the mirror effect suggested in the series. The title itself evokes the idea. Reflective dehumanization often appears as the consequence of active dehumanization, but not necessarily. It is the dehumanizer's dehumanization, caused by their own dehumanizing behavior. In other words, the dehumanizer, by acting in a way that shows a lack of "humanness," becomes dehumanized themselves. The human attribute that is often lacking in the dehumanizer's actions is emotionality, known to be a key part of human nature according to Haslam's works (2008). The dehumanizer, in some cases, can also lack human uniqueness. This happens when the dehumanizer fails to recognize the humanness of their victim. Haslam mentions something close to the notion of reflective dehumanization, using the word "inhumanity" in that sentence: "Perceiving others as less than human, likening them to beasts or unfeeling objects, and treating them with inhumanity are common occurrences in times of war, genocide, and ethnic conflict" (2008: 56). Reflective dehumanization can thus be caused by active dehumanization, but it can also cause it. Once a dehumanizer is reflectively dehumanized, either by lacking emotionality or the ability to recognize one's humanness, they are very likely to dehumanize other people. A person can also become dehumanized after dehumanizing another person, as a way of self-defense, in order to make their own behavior tolerable emotionally, to become able to repeat that behavior for instance.

Concrete dehumanization:

This type of dehumanization is linked to the material, biological dimension of humanness. Any instance of modification of the human body is an instance of concrete dehumanization. It is the same for any modification of human conditions and perceptions. In the series, concrete dehumanization is often realized with implants that modify the characters' vision of reality. The episodes that copy and/or load a human mind into a non-human entity also enter this category, as well as episodes that recreate a human mind through collected data. This type of dehumanization is linked to the notion of progress. Concrete dehumanization also shares feature with posthumanism and transhumanism, notions that which will be explored in the following section. The third type of dehumanization often interferes with the two other types of dehumanization. *Black Mirror*'s episodes indeed show that people who have been concretely dehumanized are more likely to become victims or perpetrators of active dehumanization. These three types of dehumanization all blur the lines between reality and fiction, as well as between human and non-human. They also all generate a disregard for reality.

1.4: Related notions

1.4.1 Posthumanism and transhumanism

The third type of dehumanization, concrete dehumanization, concerns the modification of the human body and/or human conditions and perceptions. This kind of alteration can be linked as posthumanism and/or transhumanism. In her thesis "Science Fiction, Artificial Life and Posthumanism," Marijke Westhoek explores the notion of posthumanism as well as the purpose and meaning of science-fiction in general. She describes science-fiction as "a way for the

writers to express their fears of where technology and humanity might be heading” (2011: 3). Her words apply to the ideas behind *Black Mirror*, and some these fears are linked to the consequences of the modification of the human body and conditions made possible by technology. Westhoek, still about the meaning of science-fiction, also evokes the notions of empathy and “humanity and what it means to be human” (Ibid). Indeed, since science-fiction proposes alterations of human conditions, the very question of humanness cannot be avoided. Posthumanism suggests a state that goes beyond humans.

In order to give a definition of posthumanism, Westhoek quotes Nader Elhefnawy: “‘posthumanism’ [is] the idea that human beings will in the future acquire such command over nature that they can alter the most fundamental conditions of human existence (birth, death, the limits of space, time and economics as we know them, etc.)” (qtd 2011: 5). This description of posthumanism is reminiscent of several episodes of *Black Mirror*. Westhoek also quotes N. Katherine Hailes, author of “How we became Posthuman.” Hailes develops:

[T]he posthuman view configures the human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals (qtd 1999: 3).

This idea seems to be extremely close to the notion of concrete dehumanization mentioned earlier. The main difference with “concrete dehumanization” is that posthumanism always suggests progress, while “concrete dehumanization” does not.

The notion of transhumanism is more or less equal to posthumanism. Jenny Huberman, in her book “Transhumanism: From Ancestors to Avatars,” explains that “[t]ranshumanists argue that science and technology will enable us to overcome our biological limitations, both mental and physical, and create a radically enhanced posthuman species and society” (2021: 1). The notion of concrete dehumanization in *Black Mirror* has a lot in common with the notion of

transhumanism, and can be associated with it in many ways. The series however shows its audience that this kind of human modification is likely to bring negative consequences rather than creating an enhanced species.

1.4.2 Empathy and compassion

Empathy and compassion are often confused or understood as equal. Because a lack of empathy and/or compassion is often the root of a dehumanizing behavior, both notions will be defined.

Elizabeth Galetz defines the meaning and relationships between the two concepts in her article “The empathy-compassion matrix: Using a comparison concept analysis to identify care components.” She argues that empathy can be defined as a skill and notes that there are two types of empathy, affective empathy, which refers to “the sensations and feelings we get in response to others’ emotions”, and cognitive empathy, which is “the ability to identify and understand other people’s emotions” (2019: 449). She adds that people are not equal in terms of empathy and that “higher emotional sensitivity and awareness leads to higher levels of empathy” (2019: 451). Furthermore, she stipulates that empathy requires some “antecedents,” namely, in order to be capable of empathy, one must have other cognitive skills. Those abilities are conscience, perceiving others in need, expressiveness, emotional intelligence and self-awareness (Galetz 2019: 449).

Galetz defines compassion and distinguishes it from empathy, clarifying that “[w]hile empathy is a present-based, spontaneous response to an experience with another person or group of persons, compassion should be considered an innate, attitudinal state. It is a relational concept, which usually precedes interaction” (2019: 451). She also notes that “recognizing the humanity of the other person” is required in order to feel compassion, which shows the strong link between compassion and dehumanization (2019: 450). Empathy is thus a prerequisite for

compassion. In addition, a lack of empathy is likely to lead to dehumanization. However, dehumanization can still occur in the presence of empathy, in which case compassion is lacking.

Galetz also explains that compassion requires antecedents as well, which are suffering or threat of suffering, illness or risk of illness, vulnerability and empathy (2019: 451). Compassion is always linked to a negative situation or state of the person for whom compassion is felt.

Empathy and compassion are two different concepts, but they are linked. The relation between the two can be defined as temporal and/or causal. Indeed, as explained before, empathy precedes compassion. Or in Galetz' words, "compassion develops from empathy" (2019: 453). Is it however important to note that the presence of empathy does not guarantee compassion. At the end of her article, Galetz summarizes the links and differences between empathy and compassion:

In the most basic sense, empathy is the ability to feel similar emotions by putting oneself in another person's place or situation. Compassion is an emotional connection in spite of not being able (or wanting) to put oneself in another person's place. Compassion is more external, more active with regard to doing something to change the situation. [...] Contrasting, empathy is more passive. While it focuses on the other person and their current situation, nothing is done" (2019: 453).

In summary, empathy is the capability to see oneself in someone else's situation, while compassion implies that the other person is in an unpleasant situation plus the desire to help that other person.

2. Analysis of *Black Mirror*'s episodes

2.1 The Love of the Show

This section, “The Love of the Show,” deals with the analysis of the episodes “White Bear” and “The National Anthem.” These two episodes feature instances of dehumanization in which the person dehumanized is used as an object of entertainment. The treatment of Victoria Skillane in “White Bear” and of Michael Callow in “The National Anthem” are turned into shows to an audience that cannot help but watch. These episodes reveal an unhealthy attraction for the show that is representative of the masses in the digital era. The section starts with “White Bear” because the notion of spectacle is the most obvious in this episode. “The National Anthem” is subtler and focuses more on the importance and consequences of technology. This logic will be the same in the following sections, as the last episodes analyzed show the most devastating consequences of technology.

2.1.1 White Bear

The second episode of *Black Mirror*'s second season revolves around the daily physical and psychological torture of the character Victoria Skillane, who is an accomplice in the murder of a child. At the “White Bear Justice Park,” the park’s audience plays a role in Victoria’s sentence. The episode explores the role of revenge in the penal system, the desire for the humiliation and torture of criminals and the problems of mediated publicity. *Black Mirror*'s audience is invited to reflect on the justice system and whether or not humiliation and violence can ever be justified.

Victoria had recorded the torture and murder of the little girl that her fiancé kidnapped. She is, in return, recorded while being tortured in order to inflict on her what she did. Teresa Sorolla-Romero, José Antonio Palao-Errando and Javier Marzal-Felici, in their article titled “Unreliable Narrators for Troubled Times: The Menacing ‘Digitalisation of Subjectivity’ in Black Mirror,” explain how “[t]he premise of “White Bear” also raises the question of [...] whether the application of the popular maxim ‘an eye for an eye’ might be turned into a vehicle of enjoyment for others who can watch it all as a spectacle that pushes the punishment to outrageous extremes” (2021). Victoria’s sentence is indeed turned into a spectacle and it is more than extreme. Even though Victoria is inflicted the same type of torture that was inflicted to her victim, her sentence does not correspond to the maxim “an eye for an eye” since the woman is punished every day of her life for only one crime.

Paul Petrovic, in his essay titled “Ideological State Apparatuses, Perversions of Courtly Love, and Curatorial Violence in ‘White Bear,’” explains that the episode tackles “the slow decline surrounding how the public conceives of justice” (2019). The word “decline” might not be accurate, since this is certainly not a new tendency. Public executions, for example, illustrate the crowd’s desire for revenge and have been happening for the longest time. “White Bear” however does feature a penal system that takes the public opinion into account. It is made obvious in the scene in which Victoria’s identity is revealed, as images of a news report on the woman and her fiancé’s crime are shown on a large screen. The newsman explains that “by hanging himself in his cell, many believe Iain Rannoch (Victoria’s boyfriend) evaded justice. The public mood is now focused on ensuring his accomplice can't do the same” (30’40”). This particular scene shows the importance of public opinion in the penal system of the episode. In a way, this example also illustrates that revenge is entirely confused with the general representation of the notion of justice, namely blind and impartial justice.

The episode is unsettling because of the way in which it elicits compassion from the episode's viewers by not revealing Victoria's crime at first. The way in which the woman is filmed is also partly responsible for that compassion. The episode starts with a close-up shot on Victoria: she wakes up in a dark room that she obviously does not recognize. The camera focuses on her face, which looks tired, and Victoria sighs in pain. Her head visibly hurts. As she slowly wakes up and becomes aware of her surroundings, incomprehension and fear grow on her face. The camera angle intensifies the woman's emotions. She then goes downstairs and while she looks at pictures in the room, she seems to recognize the little girl she and her fiancé kidnapped and killed. At this point, Victoria's crime is not revealed. She has a flashback of her playing with the little girl, which suggests that she might be her daughter. She decides to carry the photo with her. She later expresses her concern for who she thinks her daughter is to the other characters, with sentences like "She could be anywhere" (11'05"). During the first part of the episode, Victoria has numerous flashbacks that cause her pain. Some of those picture Victoria, her fiancé and the little girl as a happy family. As Donovan Conley and Benjamin Burroughs notes, "[t]he episode begins by inviting the audience to sympathise with a scared protagonist as she evades being killed and tortured [...]" (2019). The first version of the woman given to the episode's viewers is that of a worried, helpless mother.

The fact that Victoria is surrounded by people who do not care about her distress at all provokes, in addition to compassion for Victoria, anger or even disgust for the other characters. Victoria's fear is always shown in her facial expressions. When she cries for help, the crowd records her and does nothing to help her. Furthermore, no one answers the woman's questions. Not a single character shows compassion, not even those who seem to be her allies, namely Jem and Damien. The first part of the episode indeed pictures those characters as Victoria's allies. Jem and Damien pretend to be two of the few people that were not affected by a signal that turns people into some sort of mindless zombies. Later in the episode, it is revealed that they

are just playing a role. However, even when they pretend to be Victoria's allies, those characters act very coldly toward her. For instance, when a hooded man follows Victoria with a rifle, she hides in a store with Jem and Damien. Seeing Victoria express fear makes Damien lose his temper, as he shouts at her: "Shut up I'm trying to think !" (5'). Further on, Jem acts in a similar way: "Look. You have to hold it together or you'll get us both killed" (11'05"). These reactions show the characters' lack of compassion, and already suggest that Jem and Damien might not be Victoria's real allies.

After the revelation scene, the episode's viewers may realize that their compassion was misdirected. As Sorolla-Romero, Palao-Errando and Marzal explain, it is difficult to affirm whether or not Victoria should be considered guilty since she does not remember her crime, as it is arduous to decide "the extent to which someone whose memories have been erased can be considered guilty of her crimes" (2021). Petrovic also raises that question: "'White Bear' poses the ethical question of whether society is right to punish an individual who has no memory of the crime" (2019). For the audience of the White Bear Justice Park, the answer is clear, Victoria is guilty and deserves to be punished. While answers to those questions might differ from one *Black Mirror*'s viewer to another, it is very likely that the scene in which Victoria is carried to her room rouses more compassion for the woman, even though the episode already revealed her crime. The scene starts with a close-up of Victoria's face. Then, the camera gradually zooms out to show the whole scene. The first seconds of the scene are shown through a phone screen. The act of recording is soon followed by a series of other violent ones. Victoria sobs quietly. She looks absolutely exhausted and does not even try to fight back anymore. Her face shows how scared, sad and tired she is. As the camera zooms out, the glass walls of the vehicle in which she sits are revealed. Insults shouted at her can be heard. Victoria is then carried to her room, while a euphoric crowd insults and throws objects at her. This violent scene might

represent how the public's implication in private justice cases has terrible consequences, especially on the culprit's mental health.

While the episode elicits compassion for Victoria through the vulnerable way in which she is represented, it also rouses anger and disgust for the park's crowd. In the scene just described, the camera focuses on the crowd's faces several times. They either look angry and vindictive or euphoric and passionately enthusiastic. They also are given the possibility to buy sponges, full of a red liquid that looks like blood, in order to throw them at the woman, which they gladly do. This staging seems appealing, especially as the sponges symbolize the action of cleaning something. It seems like an invitation to clean up the crimes Victoria has committed, or even to wash away her soul of sins. However, the fact that the sponges are filled with blood and not water, once again condemns Victoria and offers her no possibility of redemption; the young woman is therefore condemned to bathe in blood for life. In other scenes, the members of the crowd are shown with their children, despite the extreme violence of the "shows." The park's audience seems to be denounced by the episode. This is also what Petrovic argues, explaining that "Booker stages the episode so as to critique the societal impulse toward mob violence" (2019). While Victoria is the official criminal, she is represented as the crowd's victim in "White Bear."

Landi Raubenheimer also argues that the members of the park's audience are denounced, but in a different way. In her article entitled "Black mirrors and zombies: the antinomy of distance in participatory spectatorship of smart phones," she introduces a concept that she calls "zombification." Mentioning the works of numerous authors, such as Ingrid Richardson, Nanna Verhoeff or Mark B. N. Hansen, Raubenheimer observes the shift in spectatorship (the relationship between a viewer and the content watched) from older media such as cinema to newer technologies, such as smartphones. She elucidates:

Richardson (2010:1-15) has written about the manners in which previous formulations of spectatorship are changing with new technologies of looking. She calls for new theories to interpret how the body and the screen interact, arguing that older 'regimes', such as that of the cinema do not apply to how users interact with mobile screens, such as smart phones. Much of her writing focuses on how mobile media enable the body to become part of the viewing experience (2018).

Indeed, digital technologies and smartphones in particular imply the use of the body, breaking the distance between the body and the screen, the screen now becoming an extension of the human arm. Raubenheimer explains that "[t]he symbolic and physical distance of the cinema dispositive is shattered when one can hold the screen oneself, watch a film text in any geographical location on one's phone, and have control over when to pause and play the text" (2018). While these parameters should increase the agency of the users, giving them total control over the content that they are watching, it is the opposite that seems to happen in reality. Many smartphone users seem to feel a compulsive need to record reality, from everyday life to events such as concerts, as if reality was not real if it was not recorded. These tendencies lead to blurring the lines between what is real and what is not real, and they put the users into a constant spectator role. Raubenheimer observes this phenomenon and links it to Kevin Hart's notion of "hyperreality" (Hart: 2004 in Raubenheimer: 2018). Hyperreality is a postmodern concept related to the way in which images compete with reality. It also implies that images and experiences are considered equally real. Raubenheimer explains that "this seeming act of agency also implies [...] the notion of the experience of reality as hyperreality and thus as a visual text has been taken to the extreme" (2018). It is likely to believe that the crowd of "White Bear" might not be fully aware of the reality of the scene they are watching or even of the humanness of Victoria. In a society in which millions of violent videos are shared online on a daily basis, Victoria's treatment appears as just another instance of it.

Raubenheimer observes how similar the park's audience in "White Bear" is to a group of zombies. She writes: "Spectators in WB resemble zombies [...], who aimlessly stumble onwards, automatically reacting to stimuli, and unable to consider their actions" (2018). She adds: "When considering WB, it is immediately noticeable that viewers in the show [...] are unaware of their own behavior as strange, as if it is the most natural thing in the world to observe a woman being hunted down. [...] They are immersed in the experience of the world as an image text through their physical attachment to their phones" (2018). While the people who came to watch the show, called "onlookers" by the character Jem, do not seem to show any self-consciousness or strong emotion in the first part of the episode, this changes right after Victoria finds out her real identity. Acting like zombies is their role in the park, as it is revealed by the end of the episode. The last scenes divulge the preparations that take place before Victoria wakes up every day. Among these, one shows that the members of the park's audience are asked to act as if they had been mesmerized by a signal. It is their role to act as if they did not feel anything. After the revelation scene, their behavior changes.

Their zombie role, however, potentially has a metaphorical meaning that is linked to the effect of mindlessly consuming images on smartphones. Jem's explanation of the phenomenon seems to go in that way. She explains to Victoria: "Like almost everybody became onlookers. Started watching, filming stuff like spectators who don't give a shit about what happens" (12'06"). The scene in which Victoria is on a stage is significant because it shows the transition from the zombies to vindictive human beings. At first, the crowd's faces are not visible because of the light coming from the back of the room. Only their phones with the flash on are visible, which can be representative of the anonymous, faceless masses behind smartphones screens. Then, their faces are revealed along with their emotions. They smile and applaud. Their faces show that they enjoy Victoria's torture. While Raubenheimer's notion of "zombification" is only partially relevant to "White Bear," her idea that watching something violent is an act of

violence corresponds to “White Bear” as well as several other episodes of *Black Mirror*. Raubenheimer states the series “seems to address the inherent danger and violence in looking mindlessly. In WB, participation is depicted as indiscriminate mass consumption [...]” (2018). This notion is also particularly relevant to “The National Anthem,” which will be analyzed later.

Black Mirror proposes a variety of instances of concrete dehumanization. It goes from simple implants to the possibility of duplicating a human mind and thus allowing human life without a human body. Concrete dehumanization often involves advanced technologies in the series, which can make it look less representative of real life in comparison to the other types of dehumanization. However, in real life, smartphones and social media platforms modify the human perception of reality. It also modifies the body to some extent, as it often acts as the extension of the users’ arms. Smartphones create a physical barrier between human beings and the world around them. Indeed, as Raubenheimer explains, in order to record something, “one has to intermittently withdraw from the event one is viewing, regarding it as potential text rather than ‘reality’” (2018). The screen acts as a shield, a shield that filters, modifies, and enhances reality. It is not that different from the implants and contacts in many *Black Mirror*’s episodes. Smartphones turn people into zombies like figures. In other words, people are dehumanized by their use of smartphones.

While the story of Victoria is fictive, it reflects a series of behavior patterns that can be observed in current societies. Turning violence into a spectacle is probably the most significant one. The creation of a public justice park is reminiscent of public executions, which gather large crowds of euphoric people. These are now generally considered backwards and barbaric in the West, even though the internet contains an incredible amount of videos featuring real violence watched by many people in the West. A fascination with violence is not something from the past.

Victoria's story is also reminiscent of the horror and hate that the English have felt towards child killers, such as the Moors murderers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, and their desire for revenge. Brady and Hindley killed five children aged between 10 and 17 between July 1963 and October 1965. At least four of their victims were also sexually assaulted. Hindley was called "the most evil woman in Britain" by the press. There was a large amount of media coverage for their crimes (*BBC News 2002, The New York Times 2017*). The Soham murderer, Ian Kevin Huntley, killed two ten-year-old girls and disposed of their bodies in an irrigation ditch. Tabloid newspapers regularly publish articles about him (*Entertainment Daily 2020, The Sun 2021*). Another relevant murder was that of James Bulger, who was two years old when he was abducted, tortured and killed by two ten-year-old boys. It was particularly unsettling because the abduction was broadcasted to the nation. Just like in "White Bear," this shows a fascination for violence, a craving for recording, watching and sharing it.

The crowd's interest in tragedies actually makes the events quite lucrative. "White Bear Justice Park" might indeed be more about money and entertainment than it is about justice. Petrovic writes: "Given the unsettling impression of the public pleasure in persecuting Victoria intercut throughout the denouement and end credits, 'White Bear' wields disapprobation against a penal system that derives economic gain from a for-profit institutional prison" (2019). He adds that "the park's enterprise of having visitors purchase, and thus monetize, torture as entertainment reveals a bold critique of ritual violence and how state industries prosper through the advertising, and capitalizing aims, of punishments" (2019). The monetization of crime and justice addressed in the episode is indeed reminiscent of similar acts in real life. Similar to the creation of the "White Bear Justice Park," many TV dramas, movies or documentaries are made about criminals. For instance, one was made about Fred and Rosemary West, who tortured and raped at least 11 young women and girls. One was also made about James Bulger, titled *The Victim*. Murder stories and violence in general are used as material for entertainment. The scene

in which Victoria is on an actual stage draws attention to the dramatization of crime and justice. Furthermore, Aliya Jones observes that “those going to visit the park seem akin to visitors of something like Disney World in the sense that they regard Victoria’s struggle as an opportunity for entertainment. The implications of this punishment don’t appear to phase the masses who play an active role in it” (2017). It seems indeed that the public’s motivation to come to the justice park is one of entertainment rather than a sense of justice, and this may be the most extreme way in which Victoria is dehumanized in the episode. In the park’s visitors’ eyes, Victoria is not a human being anymore.

The role played by the park visitors represents the masses. They are glued to their phones, totally insensitive to the violence displayed before their eyes. This looks oddly similar to an actual crowd of people gathered around a fight, phones in hand. A group of zombified individuals, anesthetized by their beloved smartphones and the repetition of violent images it provides them. This is similar to the way in which people leave hateful comments on social media, unaware, or simply not minding the consequences of their actions. Petrovic cites James Brasslet and Alex Sutton, and in particular the fact that they do not think that “Brooker is merely recording technology’s estranging effects” (2019). He then quotes Brasslet and Sutton’s argument that Brooker “is urging viewers to deconstruct that illusory division between audience and the media, as well as that between politics and everything else. On this view, it can be argued that the person who watches Charlie Brooker is performatively inscribed as both the recipient and the instigator of the satire” (2019). Certainly, in “White Bear,” and in *Black Mirror* in general, there is no division separating perpetrators and victims, private and public. The modern world, ruled by technology, is rather depicted as a system in which every participant has some responsibility. The episode seems to represent its own audience through the park’s crowd, and this crowd is made of victims and perpetrators at the same time. Victims of their technology and perpetrator of the violence they impose to every Victoria.

In “White Bear,” the smartphone screen acts as an actual barrier. For the user, it acts as a protection, as it allows them to attack a person without any risk. For the person appearing on the screen, the screen has a dehumanizing effect. The person seen on the screen appears less real, less human. They become similar to a fictional character, which in turn makes them easy targets for dehumanization. This type of phenomena will be referred to as “the screen barrier” in this dissertation. The impact of the screen barrier can be observed with public personalities and celebrities, often treated as if they were not real people. Several episodes of *Black Mirror* show how little empathy and compassion is given to this category of people. In “White Bear,” the screen barrier is represented by the crowd, who do not look directly at Victoria, but at the image of Victoria on their screens. Looking at the woman through a smartphone screen instead of directly looking at her is an instance of dehumanization.

Victoria is thus easily dehumanized because of the screen barrier, but it is not the only reason. “White Bear” shows how easy and enjoyable it can be for a group of people to dehumanize a person when they think that they have a good reason to do so. Victoria is the victim of active dehumanization in the form of humiliation, psychological torture and insults coming from every character in the episode. Turning the woman’s daily punishment into a show has little to do with justice anymore. Victoria’s crime is more of a pretext that allows people to let out their anger and frustration, and to end up being as cruel, if not more so, as the criminal herself. Petrovic states: “Yet, because White Bear Justice Park patrons take pleasure in their torture of Victoria, Brooker's episode once again collapses the gap between Victoria's crime and the public's own entertainment.” (2019). In the end, it would seem that the line between crime and justice is becoming increasingly blurred and, on top of that, it is becoming more difficult to determine what is right about Victoria's punishment.

The audience and staff of “White Bear Justice Park” embody reflective dehumanization, as they act without compassion for the woman. Moreover, as Petrovic notes, they “[Baxter]

suppresses the mob's potential for empathy, since such an impulse would likely unravel the park's very project. In other words, Victoria and the mob are both victims, but in different ways (2019). The idea that park's visitors are victims was already evoked earlier. Here however, Petrovic argues that the person responsible for the suppression of the crowd's empathy is Baxter, the owner of the park. Baxter has indeed a lot to do with this phenomenon, as he encourages violence among the crowd and often reminds them of Victoria's crime. He is however not the only one to blame. The whole staff of the justice park and the use of the smartphone as a barrier between the crowd and Victoria are important to mention. Reflective dehumanization is so intense in this episode that Victoria appears to be the most human character. A scene particularly emphasizes this. When Victoria is brought back to her room and forced to watch the video she shot of the little girl, while her memory is wiped by a device that causes her a lot of physical pain, Victoria implores Baxter: "Kill me. Please just kill me.", to which he answers "That's what you always say" (35'15"). In that precise moment, Baxter seems way more cruel than the criminal.

Although "White Bear" shows the story of a criminal, the episode denounces all of the people who take advantage of her situation by monetizing Victoria's sentence or by enjoying watching her being humiliated and tortured as if it was a show.

2.1.2 The National Anthem

"The National Anthem" is the first episode of *Black Mirror*. The first minutes of the episode already give some hints about the importance of technology and media in the whole series. Along with that, the episode tackles a variety of issues related to the digital era. Among those are the way in which the public interest towards politics fluctuates when some kind of drama is involved, the compulsive need of watching and the viewers' awareness of their actions and their consequences (which resonates with Raubenheimer's notion of zombification), the

unhealthy attraction for the show, the immediacy of media and social media as well as the typical dehumanization of public personalities.

Frances Pheasant-Kelly points out the importance of technology in the episode in her essay “The National Anthem, Terrorism and Digital Media,” while describing the very first scene:

The episode opens with the Prime Minister being awoken to the buzzing sound of a mobile phone, and then a ringing landline, immediately initiating its media-focused scene. The opening scene is entirely blue-toned, suggesting an unreal or surreal element and is followed by a scene in which a computer screen foregrounds the frame, featuring a video of the kidnap victim, Princess Susanna (Lydia Wilson), crying and obviously in captivity. In the background, a rear view shot reveals the Prime Minister watching the same video relayed to a larger monitor, the computer screen and monitor positioned so that both are visible in the frame, and indicating the interconnectedness of media (a significant theme in the plot) (2019).

Indeed, the first minutes of “The National Anthem” reveal a tense atmosphere that will only get worse as the episode goes on. When Michael Callow answers the phone, he and his wife seem worried. The audience has access to his answers only: “Why don’t you just tell me what happened?”, “And what is it? I’ll be right down” (0’52”). This very first scene sets the tone for the episode, as it does for the rest of the series.

The second scene shows the video of princess Susannah recorded by her kidnapper on two different screens. Callow and four members of his team are watching. A few details already indicate that the Prime Minister is alone in his trouble. He is the only one that sits and he is still in his pajamas, while the other characters all stand up and wear elegant suits. This indicates how powerless and lonely Callow is and will be in the whole episode. The people in the room already know the content of the video, as they stop the video precisely before Princess Susannah explains what Callow is required to do. Callow asks impatiently what the kidnappers want, but

no one answers his questions. Instead, one of the people explains that they are convinced that the video is genuine. After the demand is revealed, that is a sexual intercourse between the Prime Minister and a pig, the whole on live television, the camera focuses on Callow's face. At first, it shows confusion. After a long silence, the camera shows the whole room. Nobody talks. It then focuses on Callow's face again. He still looks very confused and says: "Why are you doing this? This is a joke? Right?" His last bit of hope completely disappears when a man tells him, with a very cold and detached tone, "It's real" (5'08"). Callow's face changes and he now looks disgusted and slightly angry. After categorically refusing the demand, he looks at every person in the room one by one, as if expecting a reaction. They all look at the floor, impassive. Once again, Callow is alone.

What seems to be a private problem that only concerns the people in the room is soon revealed to be known by a lot of people. Later in that conversation, the Prime Minister learns that already sixty thousand people have seen the video, despite the fact that it has been taken down Youtube only nine minutes after being posted. That was enough time for the video to be downloaded, duplicated, and posted again. It is also trending on Twitter. This scene will be followed by many scenes of the news and of people watching and reacting to Callow's blackmailing. With all of these, "The National Anthem" highlights the frightening immediacy of current media and social media. As soon as some drama is perceived, it can be recorded and posted online, with no time to think. Pheasant-Kelly observes the phenomenon, explaining that "[a] further implication of the digital era occurs in the pace of events which unfold within a few hours of the timeline of a single day and are accelerated by a combination of traditional and digital media." (2019) She also notes Callow's lack of power, which was discussed before: "Both the newsroom and the Prime Minister's aides are able to observe events in real time, but are powerless to intervene [...], thereby emphasizing the immediacy of, but also the lack of any real control afforded by digital technology" (2019).

Oihab Allal-Chérif states that “*Black Mirror* invites us to think about how technology can harm society and transform our behavior.” (2019) A similar argument is provided by Conley and Burroughs, who call this type of behavior “the tragedy of the viewing commons” (2019). Before the digital era, one had to voluntarily go and buy a newspaper to have access to that kind of information. To watch the television news, one had to turn their television on at a certain time. Nowadays, with smartphones and other types of technology, one has access to a piece of information like this one at any time, and share it as much as one wants. It goes so fast that the people reading and sharing the news might not realize that their behavior is harmful.

The way people react to Prime Minister Michael Callow’s blackmailing evokes a public tendency towards politics: it seems that the majority of people only become interested in the political world when it involves drama. Many scenes show people being excited about the Prime Minister’s blackmailing. A scene shows a woman even saying that seeing him having the sexual intercourse would be hilarious. Andrea M. Alesci writes that “we don’t want to dive into politics, we usually want to stay miles away of politics’ stuff (unless when we need to complain). We only pay attention when politics becomes Showtime.” He adds that “‘The National Anthem’ shows ‘people’s disaffection for politics and the unhealthy attraction for the show” (2017). By referring to people in the episode with the pronoun “we,” Alesci suggests that this crowd is representative of the majority of people in real life. Just like in “White Bear,” *Black Mirror* seems to bring awareness to its audience’s own behavior once again. This reiteratively implies that there is no clear boundary between victims and perpetrators. *Black Mirror* shows the world what technology has made of it.

Another similarity with “White Bear” is that the degree of the episode’s public interest is directly correlated to the degree of violence and humiliation involved in the show that they are given. In the case of “The National Anthem,” Pheasant-Kelly calls the dramatization of Callow’s blackmailing a “cultural humiliation” (2019). While these opinions seem to suggest

that every character of “The National Anthem”’s crowd is interested and excited by the Prime Minister’s situation, there is actually a variety of reactions among them. The first people interviewed by the media say that this is disgusting. A woman says that no one should accept such a humiliation. The public opinion, collected with online polls in the episode, is that Michael Callow should not accept the request. The public mood however shifts after Susannah’s kidnapper sends what is believed to be one of her fingers. The polls grow from twenty-eight percent of the public thinking Callow should comply to eighty-six percent.

In “White Bear,” the dehumanization of Victoria is justified by her crime. In “The National Anthem,” the voyeurism of the masses is justified by the worry for Princess Susannah’s life. The crowd seems however much more interested in whether or not the intercourse will take place than in the current state of the princess. For Conley and Burroughs, this behavior is precisely what the episode denounces. They explain that “it is this collective compulsion to sneer, revel and wallow in the indignities of others, and then blithely turn away that the episode is most at pains to condemn” (2019). That idea is indeed confirmed by the end of the episode, when it is revealed that Susannah was released thirty minutes before the intercourse took place. This means that not a single person noticed that the princess was released because they were all busy watching television. In other words, and this can apply to both the episode and real life, people are so busy with sensationalist news that they do not see what is in front of their eyes. This is a metaphor for how technology and the media make people blind. In “The National Anthem,” Callow’s intercourse with the pig could have easily been avoided. People could have simply chosen not to watch, in order to preserve Callow’s dignity. The truth is that the masses did not want it to be avoided, to the contrary. As the live broadcast begins with a warning signal asking people to not watch, followed by a high pitched tone that is painful to the ear, and yet people keep watching.

As evoked before, the impatient crowd of “The National Anthem,” glued to their screens, might actually represent the majority of people in the digital era. *Black Mirror*, as always, invites its audience to look at themselves in the mirror. This is also one of Conley and Burroughs’ arguments, who argues that “*Black Mirror* viewers may reflect on their own voyeuristic tendencies and quietly align themselves with this critique of watching’s powerful otherness” (2019). They add that “the real horror *Black Mirror* is citing stems from the collective power of anonymous, detached, morbidly voyeuristic watching. ‘The people’ [...] in all their prurient, half-interested, vulgar curiosity are the real culprits here (2019). This might be the most inventive aspect of *Black Mirror*, as it depicts situations that appear utterly disturbing and yet so realistic. Simultaneously, the series shows its audience that they might as well feel involved in these situations. In the episode, it seems that the people watching do not realize that their actions are problematic. To some extent, they also are the victims of the “zombification” process provoked by the media (Raubenheimer: 2018). The crowd might not even be able to understand that, by watching, they become the main perpetrators of the violence inflicted to Callow. They are the perpetrators of active dehumanization while being totally dehumanized themselves. In “The National Anthem,” the act of watching is thus a form of violence.

“The National Anthem”’s crowd is oblivious not only to their responsibility, but also to the fact that their opinions and reactions are fully manipulated by the images they watch. Indeed, the masses’ opinion changes when the princess’ kidnapper uploads a video of him amputating one of her fingers. The online polls then shift, showing that the public opinion is that Callow should comply. This shows how current media can easily manipulate the public opinion. Pheasant-Kelly also makes this observation, explaining that the episode pictures “a further implication of the digital age, namely the capacity to manipulate imagery and mislead audiences” (2019). Observing and developing the ways in which the manipulation takes place,

Pheasant-Kelly explains that the media insists on sensationalism as a way of creating emotional responses in the audiences. This is exactly what happens with the finger incident. She explains that the media use “the ready malleability of public opinion and resultant collective agency via emotional response rather than rational process” (2019).

While everybody, whether they are enthusiast or disgusted, gathers to watch the Prime Minister having sex with a pig, there is a shift in people’s behavior when the intercourse takes place. Conley and Burroughs describe this very moment:

However, as [Michael Callow] proceeds with the act (mostly off-screen for extra-diegetic audiences), the sounds of cheering in the various workplaces and bars die down and slow pans across the now silent hordes show their facial expressions turn to horror, staring at the screen in disbelief. Otherwise, individuals look away, the crowds seeming to share his humiliation-in other words, the process of synoptic viewing also leads to empathy (2019).

It is as if something extremely shocking was needed to wake up the masses and realize the humanness of the man they are watching. A similar observation is made by Pheasant-Kelly:

The episode takes an ominous turn when the Prime Minister is ultimately broadcast live across the nation’s airwaves. At this point, late in the episode, things grow desperately bleak as the Prime Minister’s horror is trivialized by the casual watching of millions across the globe. The climactic scene is portrayed through the tormented expressions of those watching TV screens as the Prime Minister’s trauma is on full public display (2019).

The faces indeed completely change. Right before it happens, several scenes show people gathered to watch the television in the pub and at the hospital. One man is shown watching television alone in his bed and recording, which suggests that absolutely nobody is missing the show. Most people in the pub smile and scream in enthusiasm when an official announcement explains that the Prime Minister will perform an “indecent act”. At the hospital, the people seem

more shocked. After that, the streets are filmed. They are all empty, which indicates that the whole town is watching television at this precise moment. Most people happen to be entertained when the television shows Callow. When he takes his pants off, the majority of people are still smiling, but some faces change. Then, as Callow does what he is requested to, the camera focuses on people's faces in slow-motion while sad music is playing in the background. Not one single laughter can be heard anymore. It is important to note that the audience keeps watching no matter how disconcerting and embarrassing it may look, as if they were mesmerized by obscenity. It seems that, all of a sudden, they become aware. They finally regain their humanity. Sadly, it is too late. As if only a tragedy could wake people up, and lead them to a "never again" attitude, while a number of warning signs have been ignored.

The screen barrier phenomenon plays an important role in this episode. Just like other episodes of *Black Mirror*, "The National Anthem" shows how public personalities are often victims of dehumanization². These categories of people, such as politicians or celebrities, are almost only seen through a screen by most of the population. Because of that, they might appear less real, less human to the masses. Most people do not identify with them. Hate, insults and disrespect are thus extremely common on their social media pages, for example. These people somehow lose their humanness and are treated as if they were unreal, as if they were fictional characters rather than human beings. Alesci mentions this phenomenon, explaining that "technology modifies [people's] perceptions and Prime Minister Callow is no longer a person, he becomes a 2D card" (2017). Public personalities' privacy is rarely respected and, most importantly, those people are seen as pure sources of entertainment rather than actual human beings. "The National Anthem" however reminds *Black Mirror*'s audience of the humanness of such individuals. Most scenes of the episode focus on Callow, which creates a certain proximity between the viewers and the main character. The viewers are put in a position in

² "The Waldo Moment", "Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too" and "Hated in the Nation"

which they can see that Callow's privacy and dignity are violated while most of the other characters of the episodes do not acknowledge it. In that sense, the viewers share Callow's loneliness and discomfort. A lot of scenes focus on the Prime Minister's face, which often shows expressions of hopelessness, anger and sorrow. A scene shows Callow and some members of parliament watching the video in which Susannah's finger is cut. This video was sent as a response to the fact that a porn actor was hired to have the intercourse with the pig instead of Callow. The camera focuses once more on the Prime Minister's face, and his reaction reveals that he was not even aware of that choice. Something similar happens after the failed attempt to find the kidnapper. Callow gets angry and loses hope. He shouts at his colleagues: "We're not out of time. We're not out of time," in a voice that gives away his despair (29'12"). Right after that, sad music plays and there is a scene cut. In the next scene, Callow is alone in his office and takes his head in his hands, before his colleague comes in and basically explains him that he has no choice. She tells him, coldly: "You will be destroyed, I guarantee you. Utterly destroyed" (30'01"). Another colleague tells him: "I'm sorry Michael. It's out of your hands" (30'53). Callow then starts crying, the camera focuses on his face as the music continues playing. Callow is represented as always more powerless. The disregard for his privacy is also highlighted. As Suchandrika Chakrabarti explains, "the drama works on both a personal level - as we enter the living rooms and bedrooms of people watching - and on a grand political scale, as we see the PM taking phoned-in orders, direct from the Queen" (2018). There is no thus separation between the public and the private anymore, which amplifies the fact that Callow's privacy is completely violated.

Lastly, it is impossible to discuss "The National Anthem" without a reference to the infamous "Piggate" scandal. The episode was released in 2011. In 2015, there was a scandal concerning former British Prime Minister David Cameron, who was said to have inserted his penis into a dead pig's mouth during his years at the Oxford University, supposedly as part of

an initiation ceremony for the Piers Gaveston Society. The *Daily Mail* immediately published an article on this, followed by a myriad of other media. It quickly went viral thanks to social media like Twitter, on which the hashtags #piggate, #snoutrage and #hameron became a trend. Charlie Brooker himself reacted and tweeted “Shit. Turns out Black Mirror is a documentary series.” The parallels with “The National Anthem” were of course quickly pointed out, which led Brooker to tweet later on: “Just to clear it up: nope, I’d never heard anything about Cameron and a pig when coming up with that story. So this weirds me out.” Whether or not the plot of “The National Anthem” was based on a real event is not the point here. However, the way in which the media and people on social media reacted is sadly similar to the plot of “The National Anthem.”

Through “The National Anthem,” *Black Mirror* sets the tone from the opening of the series by demonstrating how mediated publicity, as it is known nowadays -namely voyeuristic and invasive-, allows itself to ruin lives under the pretext of wanting to inform the masses. This is the main social critique of the episode.

2.2 From 2D to 3D

The section entitled “From 2D to 3D” deals with the analysis of the episodes “Hated in the Nation” and “Nosedive.” Both episodes propose a version of reality in which social media has an important impact on reality. The unawareness around the consequences of actions taken online, as well as the lack of concern for online bullying are highlighted in “Hated in the Nation.” Along with that, the pressure imposed by social media is pointed out, as every action is likely to be recorded, diffused, and punished. Because of that, the phenomenon called “cancel culture” will be explored in relation to this episode. A similar pressure is observed in “Nosedive,” which shows a version of the world that is totally ruled by social media. Here, every single action is punished or rewarded, which leads people to act in the most perfect way

possible. In order to achieve that, they have to act in a way that is less and less natural, less and less human. Throughout the order in which episodes are analyzed, the omnipresence and influence of technology increases. The different instances of dehumanization illustrated by these episodes will be discussed as well.

2.2.1 Hated in the Nation

The sixth episode of the third season, “Hated in the Nation,” follows Detectives Karin Parke (Kelly Macdonald) and Blue Coulson (Faye Marsay) during their investigation of a number of murders. The victims are chosen online with the hashtag “#DeathTo,” and are killed by a new form of technology, Autonomous Drone Insects (or ADIs). These were originally deployed to make up for bee extinction. This episode approaches different current tendencies and worries, such as online hate, the non-consideration of the consequences of such abuse, cancel culture and government surveillance.

“Hated in the Nation” is reminiscent of cyberbullying and highlights the lack of consideration around it. Indeed, at first, most characters do not take the hashtag seriously. It seems to be more of a game to them. For example, Liza Bahar, a teacher who sent a “fucking bitch” cake to the first victim Jo Powers, explains to Karin and Blue that she simply found it funny. She talks about the hashtag and says: “It’s not real, it’s a joke thing” (21’35”). She is not the only character to think that way. Indeed, Parke herself, at first, totally dismisses the cyberbullying of Jo Powers, saying “It’s half hate. They don’t mean it” (15’55”). Coulson shares a similar opinion. James Smith, in his essay “On Killer Bees and GCHQ: ‘Hated in the Nation’” highlights the gap between the lack of concern of some characters and the reality of the people bullied: “Yet while Parke can dismiss online mobbing as something that will ‘drift off like weather,’ for the victim of such an event this ‘weather’ is devastating and a core thematic of ‘Hated’ is to dramatise the personal and psychological impact of such attacks (2009).

The screen barrier plays an important role in that tendency. Indeed, it is likely that a portion of people do not realize that their words and actions have an actual influence in real life. They somehow forget that they are attacking actual human beings. Smith explains that “[o]ne of the deepest tensions explored in ‘Hated’, therefore, is the false dichotomy people draw between what happens ‘in real life’ and online, and the illusion that the internet and social media can give its users that actions on this platform are ‘free speech’ or without serious consequences” (2019). The episode indeed reminds its audience of the consequences of such behavior. Outside the online world, what is considered a joke often affects the victims’ mental health, sometimes leading to suicide. The end of the episode reveals that a friend of Garrett Scholes (Duncan Pow), the man responsible for the hashtags and the murders, killed himself as a reaction to cyberbullying. Garrett’s intention, that can be read in a manifesto saved into the memory of one of the ADIs, is to make technology users realize that “[they] have the power to rage and accuse spout bile without consequence” (Smith: 2019). Moreover, he wants to make them “recognize the power technology grants [them], to acknowledge individual responsibility” (Ibid). The victims’ deaths can be perceived as a metaphor for suicide. The ADIs, which symbolize online hatred, cause them so much pain that they end their life to escape their suffering.

The psychological consequences of online bullying, sadly, are far from being only an element of fiction. The Megan Meier Foundation is a global bullying and cyberbullying prevention foundation which was created by Megan Meier’s mother, Tina Meier, in reaction to her daughter’s suicide after being bullied on MySpace. The website provides studies and statistics on the subject. Here are some of their conclusions: “Individuals who have experienced cyberbullying at some point in their lifetimes have more than doubled from 18% (in 2007) to 37% (in 2019).” “59% of U.S. teens have been bullied or harassed online, and over 90% believe it’s a major problem for people their age (Pew Research Center, 2018).” “Targets of

cyberbullying are at a greater risk than others of both self-harm and suicidal behaviors (John et al., 2018).” “Students who experienced bullying or cyberbullying are nearly 2 times more likely to attempt suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018).”

Other statistics are provided on the Markinstyle website. This website provides information about cyberbullying among UK students. They provided the similar conclusions: “Out of 12,2387 UK students, 27% identified their bullying experiences as cyberbullying in 2021, online bullying facts confirm.” “Swearing and offensive messages were the top forms of cyberbullying in 2020.” “In 2017, Childline received 24,000 cyberbullying complaints” (Markinstyle). These statistics concern students, but many victims of online hate are adults. This is very visible in celebrities in particular, since they are often exposed and heard. Zayn Malik, Selena Gomez, Taylor Swift, Lizzo, Lorde, Demi Lovato, Ed Sheeran, and many more have opened up about it. It is also important to keep in mind that the hate sometimes steps out of the screen. Victims of cyberbullying often face aggression, stalking, or other intimidating behaviors. This is, notably, represented in the episode with the “fucking bitch” cake.

The dehumanization taking place in “Hated in the Nation” shares similarities with the one in “White Bear.” In both episodes, the dehumanizers’ cruelty is believed to be justified. In “Hated in the Nation,” every victim has done something wrong that is used as an excuse to hate them. These mistakes, in “Hated in the Nation,” were inappropriate comments on a disabled woman for Jo Power, mockery and shaming of a fan for Tusk (Charles Babalola), an inappropriate photo at a war memorial for Clara Meades (Holli Dempsey), and being Chancellor for Tom Pickering (Ben Miles). It is interesting to observe that once people think they have a good reason to do so, it becomes really easy and even pleasurable to dehumanize someone. This is once again reminiscent of Victoria’s treatment in “White Bear.” In the series, that tendency often ends up in people being way crueler than their target, which illustrates the notion of reflective dehumanization. In “Hated in the Nation,” the plot twist fully embodies the second

type of dehumanization. Indeed, at the end of the episode, every single person who took part in the hashtag #DeathTo game ends up being killed. It also shows what Smith calls the “the dangerous illusions of online anonymity” (2019), in the sense that many people think that they are completely safe behind their screens while it is not always the case. Smith argues that “‘Hated’ therefore offers us a sustained imagining of a scenario in which the online cloud of social media is given a physical form—the devastation wrought by the ADIs suggesting the true destructive impulse lurking behind much of the discourse online that is otherwise safely hidden from public view” (2019). Smith’s words sum up the idea behind the title of this section, “From 2D to 3D,” that is online life and its consequences breaking the screen and emerging in reality.

“Hated in the Nation” is also extremely reminiscent of today’s cancel culture. In the New York Times, cancel culture is defined as follows: “Cancel culture or call-out culture is a modern form of ostracism in which someone is thrust out of social or professional circles – whether it be online, on social media, or in person. Those subject to this ostracism are said to have been ‘cancelled’” (Mcdermott: 2019). The verb “to cancel” even gained a new meaning on the Merriam Webster website: “*Cancel* is getting a new use. *Canceling* and *cancel culture* have to do with the removal of support for public figures in response to their objectionable behavior or opinions. This can include boycotts or refusal to promote their work.” Cancel culture mostly takes place on Twitter.

The most famous case of cancel culture might be Donald Trump. The former United States President was permanently suspended from Twitter after a series of tweets before and during the Capitol riots of January 2021. These posts were violating the social network’s Glorification of Violence Policy. Some people say that “Hated in the Nation” predicted Donald Trump’s cancellation. It is not the first time that *Black Mirror* anticipates a scandal.

Trump is however only one of many cases. Gina Carano, who played Cara Dune in the Disney+ Series *The Mandalorian*, is another victim of cancel culture. After posting a tweet in

which she compares the hate received by Jews during Nazi Germany to the hate received by conservatives in the US, she lost her role in the show. Even Hasbro decided to stop producing Cara Dune figures (Suciu: 2021). Marjorie Taylor Green, an American Republican lawmaker, was repeatedly suspended from Twitter after posting tweets against wearing masks and getting the Coronavirus vaccine, as well as comparisons between Nazi Germany and the hate received by the people refusing to wear the mask. She also posted conspiracy theories on matters like school shootings, religious minorities, Democrats or forest fires. She ended up banned from Twitter, but it does not stop there. Democrats as well as 11 Republicans in the House of Representatives voted to remove Greene from her congressional committee assignments (Zurcher: 2021).

While cancel culture is very visible among celebrities, they are not the only victims. Several “random” people ended up losing their jobs because of cancel culture. Amy Cooper is notorious for having called the police and falsely reported that she was threatened by a black man in Central Park, while the man was just watching birds. The video became viral in no time. A criminal case was opened and Amy was fired from her job (Bromwich: 2021). Michael Lofthouse was filmed while he was shouting racist insults at an Asian family in a restaurant in California. The video, once again, quickly became viral. Lofthouse later explained that he had stepped down as CEO of his start-up in reaction to the events. Those real-life examples might not lead cancel culture’s victims to death, but, just like in “Hated in the Nation,” the consequences got out of the online world and were very serious for the people concerned. By slightly exaggerating reality, *Black Mirror* raises awareness on current tendencies and shows their repercussions.

The episode also highlights other current concerns, such as the environmental crisis and global surveillance. The ADIs were indeed created because, in “Hated in the Nation’s” universe, bees are extinct. The episode also shows the politicians’ lack of concern for the environment,

as the audience learns that the funds invested in the ADIs were justified by another motivation, government surveillance. Indeed, the robotized bees allow the government to keep an eye on the population. The dialogue between the principal character Blue and the National Crime Agency officer Shaun Li (Benedict Wong) reveals the delicate and problematic aspects of the matter:

- *Blue Coulson*: So what don't you have your fucking noses in?

- *Shaun Li*: Look, millions of those things flying around, propping up the ecosystem? Well, that's just great, "Save the planet", hallelujah. Government's not going to pump billions into it just because some lab coat says so, and it grabs 200 green votes. They saw an opportunity to get more, they took it.

- *Blue Coulson*: Total nationwide surveillance.

- *Shaun Li*: We tracked suspects for weeks in ways they couldn't dream of. We prevented bombings, mass shootings...

- *Blue Coulson*: By spying on the public.

- *Shaun Li*: And keeping them safe, which is what they want.

- *Blue Coulson*: Clara Meades isn't safe, though, is she, Shaun? Knowing what you knew, that might've helped us, but no, you kept your little fucking secret.

-*Karin Parke*: Okay! Okay! The government's a cunt. We knew that already (57'38").

The sarcastic tone of Shaun Li when he mentions the environmental crisis is bitterly reminiscent of the lack of concern most governments for the question. Moreover, this conversation about global surveillance raises the delicate question of whether or not privacy should be sacrificed in the name of safety. As Sonia Saraiya notes, "Brooker pivots from social media's unknowably diffuse intent to government surveillance's unknowably vast intelligence — observing how both blur the divide between the public and private spheres, and asking if either massive network ends up making us more connected or safer" (2016). This anguish around surveillance is very strong in the digital era, especially because of social media. Smith makes a strong

parallel between the concerns around surveillance in “Hated in the Nation” and the NSA files leaked by Edward Snowden. Among other information was revealed the existence of PRISM, “a tool used by the US National Security Agency (NSA) to collect private electronic data belonging to users of major internet services like Gmail, Facebook, Outlook, and others” (Sottek, Kopfstein ; 2019). These data consist of chats, videos, photos, logins and more. This incident confirms the fact that the private lives of many people are accessible to security agencies.

Through the stories of the victims of the hashtag #deadto, “Hated in the Nation” reminds its audience that online hate has terrible consequences in real life. Moreover, with its unexpected plot twist, the episode denounces the behaviors of the masses, just like “White Bear” and “The National Anthem” do. The plot twist is a clear indication that the real perpetrators are the people behind their screens that chose to engage in the game. And once again, these are the characters with whom *Black Mirror*’s audience can easily identify.

2.2.2 Nosedive

The first episode of the third season, “Nosedive,” is set in a reality that is totally shaped by social media. Adam Chitwood describes the episode as “a darkly funny social satire about status anxiety in the social media age” (2016). Through the principal character Lacie’s descent into hell, the episode reveals a bitter dystopian future set in a pastel colored setting that looks too good to be real. This episode is reminiscent of the growing omnipresence of social media. As it takes more and more space into everyone’s life, the consequences get more and more out of the screen. Themes like self-representation, the dehumanizing power of social media through the repression of “undesirable” emotions and the accuracy of these themes in the digital era will be explored here. Once again, with “Nosedive” *Black Mirror* gives its audience a barely

exaggerated version of their world. This is also what Chitwood observes, explaining that, “with devastating accuracy, *Black Mirror* poses questions about authenticity, expression, and agency, exploring not just the specs of our technical world but the intimacies, or lack thereof, that it provides us” (2016). An important tendency that will also be observed here in relation to “Nosedive” is the possibility to rate services online and the consequences it can have.

As a number of apps now provide the possibility to rate restaurants, hotels, companies and even people, such as an Uber Eats delivery guy, some people can see their business or career badly impacted. In “Nosedive,” it goes as far as having social classes totally shaped and defined by people’s rankings on an app. The episode is particularly disturbing because of how close it is to our modern reality. In an interview with Jackie Strause, Bryce Dallas Howard, who plays the main character Lacie, explains that “this world of ‘Nosedive’ and *Black Mirror* is one click away from reality” (2016). She adds, talking about the app, that “it could absolutely happen, it is happening already with Uber and Airbnb and Yelp. These tools, oftentimes, they serve us until we become a slave to it” (2016). It is actually happening in China with “Zhima Credit,” or “Sesame Credit,” which will be explained in a following paragraph. In a way that is similar to “Hated in the Nation,” “Nosedive” shows an insight of what happens when happens on people’s phones materializes into the real world. Moreover, a lot of scenes in “Nosedive” are reminiscent of smartphone users’ behaviors in real life.

The first scene shows Lacie running in the afternoon in a beautiful neighborhood. As she gets closer to the camera, the audience can see that she is glued to her phone. She does not look at where she is going or at her surroundings at all. She is totally disconnected from the reality around her. She then takes and posts a picture of her stretching. This first scene sets the tone and represents the compulsion to post everything online. Later on, Lacie and every client of the place where she gets her coffee are on their phones in the queue or at their tables. Lacie is

watching the app feed on her tablet while eating. A lot of other scenes show the characters glued to their phones during their daily activities.

In the universe of “Nosedive,” human beings gradually lose their humanness. Indeed, because no negative emotion must be shown, no bad words should be heard and no negative critic should be stated, the characters act in a way that is less and less natural. Otherwise, the consequences can go as far as ruining one’s whole life. Lacie’s descent to hell demonstrates it. For instance, after fighting with her brother, Lacie hurries out of their house to get her taxi. She accidentally bumps into a woman who was walking. The woman spills the coffee she was holding and decides to give Lacie a low ranking on the app, which will have consequences on Lacie’s life. In “Nosedive,” everyone must be in total control of their behavior. It is as if human beings were asked to become their social media’ personas. That is what Chitwood notes, writing that “‘Nosedive’ [...] instantly registers as timely for the superficial way in which we all use social media to present our best selves, all-too-eager for that ‘like’” (2016). As an expected consequence, there is no more room for spontaneity in “Nosedive”. A number of scenes emphasize. One of the first scenes, for example, shows Lacie practicing her laugh in front of her mirror. Another one shows Lacie going out for a coffee. She receives a free cookie, in which she takes a bite and spits it out. She then places the cookie next to her coffee and takes a picture which she posts online with the caption “Brushed Suede w/ cookie. Heaven!” After that, she takes a sip of her coffee and makes a disgusted face that reveals that the coffee tastes far from “heaven” (3’15”). Her completely staged conversations with her colleague Bets in the elevator also illustrate how fake the characters of “Nosedive” are, even in their relationships. This is reminiscent of the fact that everything that is posted online is so staged and appears so perfect that it is not spontaneous at all.

While this fakeness is incredibly annoying, it is also terribly understandable. In the world of “Nosedive,” a single mistake can lead someone to lose everything. This is what happens to

Lacie, who, on her way to Naomi's wedding, learns that her flight is canceled at the airport. The woman who works at the airport tells her that another flight is available but Lacie's ranking is too low for her to have access to it. Lacie knows that being on time at the wedding is crucial for her social rise, which is why she quickly loses her temper. She insists, raises her voice and ends up shouting and being rude, as the woman will not cooperate. Everyone in the queue gives her a low ranking. The security is called and Lacie receives a penalty. She temporarily loses a whole ranking point plus double damage for every low ranking. This scene highlights the pressure which these characters are confronted to, a single mistake being likely to have terrible consequences on their quality of life. Ariana Bacle explains, in relation to that scene, that "[i]n real life, you'd throw a tantrum at the airport and piss off the people around you, who you'd (hopefully!) never have to see again. In this world, you throw a tantrum at the airport and it stays with you. There isn't any room for mistakes here" (2016). This intolerance to negative emotions and reactions is the most important form of dehumanization in the episode. Because nothing worse could ever happen than receiving a low ranking, the characters of "Nosedive" act more like robots than actual people. In order to fit in, some human emotions, such as anger or frustration, must be deleted.

Bryce Dallas Howard, in the interview mentioned before, talks about losing humanity: "With *Black Mirror*, it presents this version of reality that is so close to our own. Where it sees new technologies in these new sorts of paradigms of thought that we're already leaning into, and yet just taken a step too far, we lose our own humanity" (Strause: 2016). Sean Redmond, in the essay "The Planned Obsolescence of 'Nosedive,'" makes a similar observation: "[t]he insipid pastels that fill the void of 'Nosedive' begin to show us that what has been left out of the scene is humanity, intimacy, feeling" (2019). In both of these quotations, the notion of dehumanization is evoked, and it is mostly realized in the episode through the suppression of unwanted emotions. Emotions are not only suppressed, but transformed into data that have lost

all traces of spontaneity. This is also what Jin Kim observes, explaining that “[the episode] reflect[s] the ways in which qualitative human conditions are replaced by quantitative measures in a world of automatic calculations” (2021). Indeed, in “Nosedive,” emotions completely lose their initial purposes to become merely a way to gain or lose ranking points.

Because all of this happens because of the app, the dehumanization observed in “Nosedive” is realized directly by the smartphones, or by their users, depending on the point of view. The users also wear contacts that immediately shape their reality. The use of the app and the contacts are thus instances of concrete dehumanization. The whole reality of the characters is altered. The intention behind every single action becomes linked to acquiring a higher ranking. Not only does that completely erase the original purpose of such actions, but it makes the users always more unsatisfied. Redmond observes:

“Nosedive” draws attention to the digital rematerialisation of the social world and the supposed loss of an indexical reality through which one directly feels and experiences everyday life. In ‘Nosedive,’ directly seeing, touching, hearing, smelling, and tasting things is always conjoined or layered with virtual versions of the sensorial. When one prepares a meal, one does so with the intention of photographing it for sharing, with the virtual presentation more important than its actual taste, since in “Nosedive” a gorgeous culinary aesthetic gets one higher status ratings (2019).

This attitude towards social media, and especially the habit of photographing and posting one’s food is reminiscent of Instagram.

In “Nosedive,” the screen barrier is always in-between people and their experiences. It is stronger than ever, because it operates even when two people are facing each other. Indeed, the contacts allow the characters to immediately see the ranking of the people around them. The ranking becomes the root of every social interaction. It creates an idea of a person before they even talk. It also hugely influences how people see themselves. In the scene that shows Lacie practicing her fake laugh, the audience can see that her ranking appears in the mirror, details

that highlights and represents the self-consciousness of the character. At this precise moment, she refuses to accept herself as she is and prefers to adopt an image that would exist only to please others. The fake laugh thus symbolizes the repression of her real emotions, her sadness and frustration.

Social media create an actual filter before every user's eyes, represented by the contacts in the episode. The contacts also hold a strong symbolism, which is subtly revealed in a short scene at the end of the episode. When Lacie is jailed, her contacts are taken off. In her cell, she observes small particles in the air and she seems relieved, happy. Bryce Dallas Howard talks about the scene in her interview, explaining that it was the first time that Lacie could see the particles: "[s]he sees the particles and little pieces of fluff in the air that exist around us for the first time" (Strause: 2016). This detail reveals that the contacts disconnect people from reality, from nature, and as a consequence from one another. The final scene, in which Lacie and another man in jail start insulting each other is extremely powerful because the characters seem to be finally free, while in jail. This pictures the omnipresence of social media as a prison. Another reference to prison and is made by Lacie's brother Paul. When he and Lacie argue about her wanting to have access to a "Pelican Cove" apartment, Paul says that "they are fake-smile jail cells" (24'08"). Paul calls the apartments that everybody dreams to have "cells." Paul is actually the character that provides a different point of view. He is one of the few characters who is able to see that the app completely changes people's behaviors, removing all spontaneity.

The pressure put on the characters of "Nosedive" is reminiscent to the pressure felt by social media users. Because they tend to show the best part of their users' lives, and because they show tons of edited content, social media create unreachable goals. Charlie Brooker himself, in an interview with Annabel Rackham, evokes the pressure of social media. Here, he talks about teenagers and young adults in particular: "I don't know how at an age when you're trying to put your identity together, how you cope with the pressure of a performance space,

which is what social media is” (2017). He adds that “[t]he level of judgement that goes on there, just the pressure of it - I can't begin to imagine what that is like for someone today” (2017). This pressure is precisely the reason why social media are compared to a prison: in order to be accepted, one is compelled to act in a certain way.

Under such conditions, the behavior of Lacie is understandable. As Chitwood observes, “Howard’s character is frustrating precisely because she is too much like the most insecure parts of ourselves — the part that counts, silently, how many likes one has gotten on a post” (2016). Lacie is indeed the archetype of any social media user. For that reason, the audience can easily relate to her. This is what Kim explains as well, writing that “Joe Wright, the writer of ‘Nosedive,’ imagines Lacie as a likable character who wants to be loved and, thus, audiences can easily identify with her (Brooker, Jones, and Arnopp 143). She is genuine and vulnerable, but also strategic and ambitious” (2021). Once again, *Black Mirror* gives its audience a reflection of themselves.

It was evoked before that, in “Nosedive,” dehumanization is illustrated by people losing their humanity by suppressing some of their natural emotions. It is also shown in the way the characters treat one another. Indeed, in “Nosedive,” when a human being meets another human being, their respective rankings are the first piece of information that they have access too. In other words, people are numbers on a screen before anything else. The screen barrier is constant. Because of that, it is easy to forget about the other person’s humanness. Moreover, there is no room for empathy, let alone compassion. Someone having a low ranking must be treated as such, otherwise, there will be consequences for the people showing them compassion. If someone acts nicely towards a person who has a low ranking, their own ranking tumbles down. This is illustrated by the treatment of Lacie’s colleague Chester (Kadiff Kirwan) in the episode. Chester comes to Lacie’s desk and offers her a smoothie. He tells her he has bought one for everyone. He still holds six of them, which already reveals to the episode’s viewers that the

other colleagues refused their smoothies. Lacie checks his ranking and notices that it is much lower than before. She accepts the smoothie reluctantly. All of her colleagues stare at her. There is an awkward silence, after which she gives Chester a high ranking, who seems a little too grateful. When he is gone, a dialogue between Lacie and another colleague reveals the situation:

Lacie's colleague : “We’re kind of not talking to Ches.”

Lacie: “3.1? What happened?”

Lacie's colleague: “Him and Gordon split up.”

Lacie: “Oh. Poor Ches”

Lacie's colleague: “No, no, no. We’re all on Gordon’s side.”

Lacie : [reluctantly] “Sure. Obviously” (7’38”).

Even though Lacie’s face shows that she is sad for her colleague, she understands that she has to follow the mass, otherwise her ranking will go down. Indeed, right after this conversation, Lacie already receives three low rankings because she accepted Chester’s smoothie. Later on in the episode, Lacie goes to work and sees Chester stuck behind the door. He tells Lacie that he has a score of “2,4” so the door will not open. He almost implores her to give him a good ranking but Lacie does not. She seems to feel guilty as she enters without him. While Lacie’s face shows sadness, her other colleagues seem totally insensitive to Chester’s situation. Some of them even find it funny. Because their perception of others and of reality in general is totally modified by the app, the characters of “Nosedive” seem to perceive the whole as a sort of game. Kim describes their behavior with the notion of “gamification.” The notion was created by Daphne Dragona, who defines it as “the process of turning something that is not a game into a game” (Dragona, 2013). Kim states that “‘Nosedive’ is a satire about gamification” (2021). Lacie, however, even though she tries her best to fit in, still has compassion and empathy. She seems more human than the rest of the characters, as she does not see the world around her and the poor treatment of other people as a game.

It was briefly mentioned before that “Nosedive” was not only a fiction. In 2014, the Chinese government started Zhima. Zhima, also known as Sesame Credit, is a Social Credit System and loyalty program that collects data from Chinese citizens. These citizens receive rankings based on their social media interactions and online purchases on the various websites from the Alibaba Group. The information is collected on other popular apps, such as Alipay and WeChat (Hvistendhal; 2017). To get a higher ranking, one needs to realize “good” actions, such as sorting their waste. “Bad” actions, such as littering, will lower the users’ scores. People with higher scores have more privileges than the ones with lower scores. They, for instance, have access to some housing loans, job opportunities and schools that are refused to people with lower scores. They can also rent a car or reserve a hotel room without a deposit. It goes as far as limiting access to health care. For instance, there is a hospital in Shanghai that allows people with higher scores to see doctors without waiting. This is probably the inspiration behind the story of “Nosedive”’s character Susan (Cherry Jones), who completely stopped caring about her ranking after her husband was refused cancer treatment because of his score, considered too low. With Zhima, people with lower rankings are limited in using planes, trains, cars, high-speed internet, and even have less visibility and options on dating apps (Rollet: 2018, CBS: 2018). In “Nosedive,” people with higher scores have access to better housing opportunities, they can get haircuts for free and have access to certain bars and restaurants. A lower ranking can also limit one’s access to work, as Lacie’s colleague explains, talking about Chester: “If it [Chester’s score] drops below 2,5, then it’s bye bye” (7’46”). It also limits access to planes and cars to rent, as shown by Lacie’s airport scene.

With or without the app, “Nosedive” is reminiscent of the digital era reality. The episode invites its audience to reflect on actions that are considered random, such as ranking people on certain apps like Uber, Airbnb, Yelp, and so on. It also reminds of the fakeness of social media and the pressure it puts on users.

2.3 Dear Progress

This section consists in the analysis of episodes that feature advanced technology implying abuse. The technological progress highlighted in “White Christmas” is morally questionable because it implies violence towards sentient beings. The notion of cruelty in the justice system is also raised, along with the fears usually associated with the development of artificial intelligence. In “Men Against Fire,” the downsides of progress are even more intense, since they imply the eradication of a portion of humanity. The episode also redefines empathy as a flaw that needs to be suppressed. Once again, the notion of progress under such conditions is questionable. Both episodes show instances of every type of dehumanization. In “Men Against Fire,” the last episode to be analyzed in this dissertation, every type of dehumanization is at its climax.

2.3.1 White Christmas

“White Christmas” is the one-off special episode that aired on Channel 4 on 16 December 2014, between the second and the third seasons. It was the last *Black Mirror* episode to air before the series moved to Netflix. Throughout a conversation between the main characters Matt and Joe, the episode tells three stories, before revealing that Matt and Joe are in a simulation and that Joe is actually a clone. “White Christmas” makes its audience reflect on the cruelty with which human beings treat each other. With the presence of AI entities, the episode also invites *Black Mirror*’s viewers to reflect on what makes a human being human. Whether or not these entities should be considered real, human and worthy of respect are crucial questions raised by “White Christmas.”

Christine Muller evokes the common fears around the development of artificial intelligence in her essay “We Have Only Ourselves to Fear: Reflections on AI Through the

Black Mirror of 'White Christmas'." According to her, the main one is the possibility of violence and cruelty from AI towards human beings. She explains how this fear is actually rooted in the fear of others, the fear of human cruelty rather than AI:

In keeping with the show's theme of technology as not necessarily a threat in and of itself, but rather as a mechanism to reflect and facilitate human-originated harm, the treatment in *Black Mirror* of the "cookie," the reproduction of a particular person's consciousness, affords insight into just how precisely the ways we treat AI could mirror the ways we have already treated real human beings (2019).

"White Christmas" seems indeed to denounce the way in which human beings treat each other above all, especially through the character of Matt and his relationships with the other characters, human or not.

"White Christmas" proposes a new possibility: cloning people with the aid of an implanted chip that creates a copy of people's minds. The clone is fully sentient. Matt describes the first way in which those clones are used when he narrates his first story. Matt explains Joe's clone that he used to work for an innovative house management system in which clones of clients were created, trapped onto little devices and used as "house assistants." They had to perform daily tasks for their owners such as regulate the house temperature, prepare coffee and toasts, set up the alarm clock, turn the lights on and off, and so on. Matt's job consisted in "setting up" the clones, who, possessing freewill, were not always willing to work. Matt's story focuses on Greta's clone, who was not willing to execute the tasks that she was given. In order to make her obedient, Matt tortured her. Because he can manipulate Greta's clone's perception of time, he made her spend three entire weeks with absolutely nothing to do. After that, she was totally mortified, but still not complying. Matt then opted for a six-month torture, which made her change her mind. While Matt is talking, Joe's clone is revolted by his story, and he calls the practice "slavery." This already shows that Joe's clone possesses empathy and cares about the wellbeing of other people. With that story, *Black Mirror* features an unprecedented form of

progress: a new type of labor that makes some people's lives easier, more comfortable, at the cost of torture and slavery.

Because the clones are not technically "human" or "real," it is debatable whether or not it is acceptable to treat them the way they are treated. Moreover, the question here is whether or not this sort of behavior can be considered dehumanization. In order to be dehumanized, one must be human. It also seems that the lack of humanness of the clones is precisely the justification for the cruelty inflicted to them. However, according to the models of humanness presented in the first section, the clones should actually be considered human. Several scenes show that they possess attributes of both human nature and human uniqueness from Haslam's model of humanness. Scenes also show that they are capable of having secondary emotions. A scene shows how Greta's clone is created. The operation consists in the removal of an implant (called a cookie) that was implanted in Greta's brain a week before. Removing the implant creates a copy of the person's mind. When she is created, Greta's clone is extremely scared and panicked. She screams sentences like "Oh my God! Oh my God! What's happening? Excuse me? Oh my God!" and "Oh my God! Where am I? I don't know what's happening! I don't know what's happening to me!" while sobbing (30'45"). She also shows fear when she sees the "real her" for the first time. She is even capable of physical pain, which is shown just before Matt talks to her for the first time, in a scene in which he taps on the little object in which the clone is contained. Greta's clone then cries "Ow!" (31'08"). All of these instances prove that Greta's clones possess elements of humanness. The sincerity of her emotions is undeniable after Matt tortures her in order to make her obedient.

As mentioned before, Greta's clone refuses to perform the tasks she was created for, such as opening Greta's shutters, wake her up by playing music in the morning, preparing her coffee, toasting her bread and so on. She is angry and wants to go back into "her" body. Greta's clone believes and claims that she is the "real" Greta. After changing Greta's clone perception of time

so that she spends three weeks with absolutely nothing to do, the episode shows her sitting on the floor, looking mortified. Her hair is a mess and she has dark circles. She begs Matt not to do that again, but since she still does not comply, Matt does the same thing for six months. After that, Greta's clone looks even more insane, her hair is messier and she has holes in her clothes. She then begs Matt to give her something to do, anything, while sobbing. All of these scenes prove that Greta does possess human nature and feels primary emotions. She also possesses human uniqueness, as she shows attributes linked to a high cognition. She masters language, knows concepts like "a copy," and is capable of basically everything the real Greta is capable of. As secondary emotions, Greta's clone, for example, shows a little embarrassment when Matt says that she is thirty years old instead of twenty-nine.

It is very still unlikely that the majority of people would call Greta's clone a human being. Indeed, there is something lacking. The clones do not have a material, biological reality. In other words, they do not have a (natural) human body. This confirms the necessity of adding a third dimension to Haslam's model of humanness. The importance of the body is evoked in the episode, during a conversation between Greta's clone and Matt. While the clone claims to be "the real Greta," Matt answers: "Try to blow on my face. You can't. Because you don't have a body. Where are your fingers? Your arms? Your face? Nowhere" (32'12"). With this particular scene, "White Christmas" confirms that the human body is a crucial requirement for someone to be considered human. Lacking a human body then becomes a perfect justification to the torture inflicted to the clones. Muller explains:

In 'White Christmas,' human beings routinely dehumanize one another, raising the question: If living human beings treat one another this way, what kind of treatment could be expected for an entity that seems to think, feel, and act like a human being, but is in fact the product of inorganic digital code rather than organic biological reproduction (2019)?

Indeed, entities that do possess every other aspect of humanness but no human body are easily dehumanized in the series. Other episodes feature similar treatments of these “almost human” beings. “Black Museum,” “Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too” and “U.S.S. Callister” are some of them. Muller also notes that human beings dehumanize one another in the episode, which will be discussed later.

The second use of the clones is related to justice. Clones of suspects are created and interrogated. The cloning is probably made against their will. Using people’s clones to get information without prior consent is a already violation of their privacy and integrity. However, just like Victoria in “White Bear,” it is easily made acceptable to dehumanize a person who is supposedly a criminal. On the other hand, Joe’s case shows that the technique works. The clones allow justice to progress.

After being dehumanized a first time by being cloned, it is the clone’s turn to be dehumanized. Just like Greta’s clone, Joe’s one is capable of feeling primary and secondary emotions, and possesses human nature and human uniqueness. From the beginning of the episode, the clone’s humanness is in fact highlighted. The first scene of the episode shows Joe’s clone waking up and looking at himself in the mirror, which already reveals that he is aware of himself. He then caresses a photo of a woman, which shows that he has feelings. Another example is when, in the middle of a conversation with Matt, he hears a door slamming shut. Joe’s clone quickly turns around, startled, and his facial expression reveals that he is scared. He even has a sense of humor, which is shown when Matt asks him to guess what his last job was. After saying “marketing person,” “door-to-door salesman,” Joe’s clone proposes “proctologist” and his facial expression reveals he found it funny. He also does feel nostalgia, which is shown when he tells Matt about his relationship with Beth. Joe’s clone is capable of remorse as well, which is confirmed when he says “I am not a good man” after Matt tells him that he is kind and empathetic (42’01”). Nostalgia and remorse are secondary emotions. His remorse and sadness,

highlighted by the close-ups of his face, make it difficult to doubt the veracity of the clone's feelings.

Joe's clone, who refuses to talk at the beginning of the episode, finally tells his whole story after Matt talked opened up about his last jobs. Joe, after being blocked by his ex-fiancée Beth after a random argument, discovered that she was pregnant. In "White Christmas," as in many other episodes, everyone wears contacts. Those allow people to block each other in real life. When someone blocks someone else, they cannot hear them anymore and only see a grey silhouette instead of the person. As Joe had no way of contacting Beth, he drove every year at Christmas Eve to Beth's father's house to see her walk with their child. The block was also on the child, so all he could see was a grey silhouette. After four years, he learned that Beth died in a plane crash, which removed the block and finally allowed him to see their child. He then went to Beth's father's house for Christmas Eve and saw the little girl's face for the first time. That is when he learned that the child was not her daughter. Indeed, the little girl had Asian features. The shock was so strong that he went to talk to Beth's father and kept repeating that he wanted to see his daughter, as if the shock made him lose his mind. The man told him to go back home, and, in a burst of anger, Joe hit Beth's father's head with the snow globe he had bought for the little girl. That was a fatal blow and Joe, panicked, just left. He later learned that the girl, after hiding alone in the house for a whole day, went out looking for help and froze to death. While he tells this story, Joe's clone gets really emotional. When Matt asks him about the child, the camera focuses on Joe's face, which makes his emotion even more intense. Tears are running down his face as he closes his eyes. His mouth is trembling. After explaining to Matt that the little girl froze to death, Joe's clone's sobs and says "May God forgive me. God forgive me" (1h05'22'). Joe, through his clone, is depicted as a kind, caring man who just made a big mistake by accident. He is not portrayed as a cruel person. The irony is that, just like

Victoria in “White Bear,” Joe’s clone appears as the most “human” character of the episode, especially in comparison to the other principal character Matt.

Matt is indeed portrayed as a cold man that never seems to feel compassion. The first story narrated by Matt is shown as a flashback. Matt helped single men seduce women using the “Z-eyes,” the contacts that everyone has to wear in the episode. Matt could watch through his clients’ eyes (everything they looked at was shown on a screen) and communicate with them thanks to an earpiece. The story narrated is the experience he had with his client Harry. At a Christmas work-party, Harry was looking for a woman to seduce. The girl Harry seduced heard him talk to Matt and thought he was schizophrenic, just like her. She took him to her place and made him drink poison with her, so that they would commit suicide together and be free from the voices. Matt watched it all happen and did nothing. Instead of sending help, he turned his screen off and told everyone to erase the videos (Matt shared his screen in order to let his other clients watch Harry’s party). When Matt tells this story to Joe’s clone, no traces of guilt can be found in his facial expression or voice tone. Another scene shows Matt’s lack of compassion as well as empathy in this particular case. When Matt talks to Greta’s clone for the first time, he explains her that she is a copy. Greta’s clone is obviously upset and scared, as the tone of her voice shows. She thinks that she is the real Greta and says to Matt: “But I am me” (32’09”). Matt answers her that she is merely code, chuckling. He then explains her the whole process and purpose of her creation in a very detached tone. Even when Greta’s clone starts panicking and screaming that she does not want to be there, Matt does not show any sign of empathy, let alone compassion. He instead chooses to mute her until she becomes quiet again. He then uses torture to make Greta’s clone obedient. His lack of emotionality is also shown when Joe’s clone tells him about his ex-fiancée blocking him after an argument and about the way in which he found out she was pregnant. Matt simply answers, in a very cold tone, “Harsh” (52’52”). When Joe’s clone tells him about her ex-fiancée’s death, Matt only briefly says “Sorry” (57’16”). The

following scene shows Matt's absence of empathy, and even some cruelty. When Joe's clone sobs and begs God to forgive him, Matt is glad he succeeded in his mission to make him confess. He gets excited and screams happily "Whooh! I knew I could do it. Boom! I told you I'd get it" (1h06'08"). The fact that Matt is portrayed as a cruel character in comparison to Joe, who is a criminal, is reminiscent of the way in which the crowd of "White Bear" was denounced instead of Victoria, the criminal in the episode. These two episodes confirm that *Black Mirror* is about human cruelty rather than a denunciation of technology.

Joe's clone's humanness has already been discussed. The episode shows that he also has empathy and compassion. As mentioned before, when Matt told him about how he used to treat the "house assistants," Joe's clone gets upset and calls it "slavery." He also says that the process is "barbaric." When Matt justifies his behavior by saying that Greta's clone was not real, Joe's clone answers: "but she thought she was real," which shows his sincere ability to empathize (41'08"). With this answer, Joe's clone somehow answers the question of whether or not it is acceptable to abuse an unreal entity by pointing out the clone's ability to feel.

Joe's clone is treated relatively well until he admits his crime. His confession opens the door to unapologetic cruelty from the other characters. This part of the episode shows that some people are happy to be given an opportunity to be cruel. Just like in "White Bear," Joe's story sounds like a pretext for people to unfold their violence. Most of the violence and torture does not serve justice in any way. For instance, at the end of the episode, an officer puts a Christmas song in Joe's clone's reality in order to drive him crazy, the memory of Christmas being associated with the day when Joe killed Beth's father and caused the child to die. The officer then changes the clone's time perception so that he will experience a thousand years a minute. The officer smiles while telling his colleague, who finds it very amusing too. There is absolutely zero interest in terms of justice since Joe's clone has already confessed. This is an instance of pure cruelty in the name of entertainment, and this is precisely what *Black Mirror* denounces.

Joe and Matt's stories evoke another tendency that is born with the digital era. They both mention the act of blocking and ghosting people. Ghosting is suddenly ending a relationship, often by blocking the other person on social media, without any explanation. While social media gives the opportunity to connect the whole world in a click, it is often used by people to hurt each other or to build walls between them. Charlie Brooker, in an interview with Clark Collis for *Entertainment Weekly*, discusses the possibility of blocking people in real life, explaining that "like a lot of *Black Mirror* ideas, that sounds like it would be useful. But actually that would remove the ability to ever build bridges with somebody, or ever communicate" (2014). Indeed, most of the technological progress in the series seems exciting and useful at first, but, by showing the downsides of such devices and possibilities, the series suggests that this progress might not be worth it. Phil Brown argues that "'White Christmas' explores the way ever increasing modes of digital communication have created all new ways for us to hurt each other" (2014). Indeed, blocking people online is very common nowadays. This element in the episode reminds the audience of the series' accuracy, and reinforces the idea that *Black Mirror* is more about human cruelty than it is about technology. The presence of artificial intelligence serves the same purpose and invites the audience to come to the same conclusion.

"White Christmas" is one of the episodes that clearly shows every type of dehumanization. Active dehumanization is used against suspects in the justice area through the creation of clones and the stealing of information against their will. Active dehumanization is also shown by the act of blocking people. The torture and enslavement of the house assistant clones and the ones in the penal system can also be considered to be an instance of active dehumanization. Reflective dehumanization is embodied by Matt, who shows compassion neither for the clones, nor for human beings. Reflective dehumanization is also represented by the fact that Matt becomes a victim at the end of the episode, which is reminiscent of the plot twist in "Hated in the Nation." Concrete dehumanization is also there with the contacts, which

modify people's perceptions and allow people to blocking each other, and is more importantly represented by the whole cloning process, which creates the possibility for a human mind to exist without a human body.

2.3.2 Men Against Fire

“Men Against Fire” is the last episode to be analyzed because it is the episode in which dehumanization is the most intense and in which technology has the most important influence. The “roaches” and the metaphor behind them will be analyzed. Moreover, the way in which “Men Against Fire” materializes the tendency of media and social media to use dehumanization in relation to Otherness will be explored, as well as the metaphor behind the alteration of reality achieved by the MASS implant. The notion of progress and the paradoxes that it implies in the episode will be discussed as well, in relation to eugenics and posthumanism.

In “Men Against Fire,” the roaches are the people that the main character Stripe and his army unit are to eradicate. These have the appearance of monsters, with extremely pale skin, lots of teeth and small black eyes without pupils. Their screams are awful and they do not seem to be able to speak. It is later revealed that the roaches are totally normal-looking people and that the MASS implant that every soldier carries is responsible for their horrible appearance. The roaches, in the several analyses that will be proposed here, are understood as a metaphor for Otherness in general, refugees and foreigners in particular. Matt Patches argues that “‘Men Against Fire’ is a catch-all metaphor for how we deal with the disenfranchised members of our global society”. He then proposed a few examples to illustrate his argument: “The black Americans impacted by police violence are the roaches. Groups targeted by Brexit-fueled xenophobia are the roaches. Citizens of war-torn Aleppo [...] and the Syrian refugees escaping the civil war are the roaches (201). Alex Mulane makes a similar observation and goes even

further. According to him, not only do the roaches represent Otherness, but they actually embody the way in which the media describe them. He explains:

What starts as an action thriller turns into a very prescient commentary on media representations of certain groups of people. Brooker's script takes the current fear of immigration that's rife in the British press and takes it to its logical and literal extreme – Stripe's implant allows his superiors to quite literally demonise the people they're hunting (2016).

Sophie Gilbert shares a similar point of view, as she explains that the episode evokes “different prejudices still rife among humankind, particularly institutionalized racism, tribalism, and fear of refugees (the villagers don't see the roaches as other, it's worth noting—they've simply been taught to see them that way) (2016). Here, Gilbert evokes the fear of Otherness represented by the episode, but she also highlights an important detail. The villagers in “Men Against Fire” indeed do not have a MASS. This means that they see the roaches as they really are, that is completely normal-looking human beings. However, they still consider them to be monsters. This is a strong metaphor for the way in which the masses are manipulated by the media into hating other people. The MASS implant might be a metaphor for the choice of vocabulary and images used by the media to refer to refugees or other minorities. Indeed, these categories of people are often pictured as monsters, or talked about as if they were not human. As for the villagers, according to Mulane, they represent a portion of British people. He observes that, in “Men Against Fire,” “we – a frighteningly increasing proportion of the British people – are those villagers; conned into believing the worst about people who are just like us; people that need help, but whom we offer only prejudice” (2016). The fear of refugees is not limited to the British population, the villagers could represent any person, from any country, who is attached to that kind of ideas. Mulane's argument would however imply that, once again, *Black Mirror* pictures its own audience's flaws. This is typical of the series.

Dehumanization plays an important part in war as well. Indeed, dehumanizing the enemy can be helpful to suppress empathy in the soldiers. For instance, war enemies can be represented as non-human in cinema. Ana Došen explains that “[t]hroughout film history, war films have tended to dehumanize the enemies through various stereotypes that deprive them of their individuality, often turning them into a wicked, collective body” (2019). The process of dehumanization in “Men Against Fire” is similar to what Došen explains here. Indeed, the roaches of the episode have no individuality. They are represented as a collective body that needs to be destroyed, with one roach being equal to another. Došen also argues that dehumanization is at the root of these representations. Referring to John W. Dower’s work, she explains that “mass media generated the imagery of the enemy that shifted from superhuman (emphasizing the boldness and fanaticism of their attacks) to subhuman (insisting on their primitivism, inherent inferiority or mental deficiency). He [Dower] suggested that the “subhuman and superhuman share common the ascription of being nonhuman” (1986, p. 99). This distinction between “subhuman” and “superhuman” is particularly interesting for the analysis of “Men Against Fire” because the episode contains characters who correspond to these concepts. The roaches are represented as subhumans, whereas the soldiers, whose bodies and perceptions are modified by technology, could be considered “superhumans.” As Došen explained, these two types of representations share the feature of being nonhuman. The soldiers indeed are as dehumanized as the roaches.

In films, the dehumanization of others is realized by the way in which they are portrayed. In mass media and on social media however, dehumanization mostly occurs through language. In other words, the vocabulary chosen to describe certain groups of people dehumanizes them, which has an important impact on the minds of the masses. Došen explains the phenomenon and provides examples:

[T]here is a need for a vocabulary that distinguishes those being human from those only appearing to be. Therefore, to kill a subhuman is different from killing a person—the Nazis labeled their enemies rats, Rwanda’s Hutus named Tutsis cockroaches. [...] The need for ‘proper’ language when referring to an enemy is evident in a scene when Arquette’s attention calls Stripe’s use of the pronoun *he*, instead of *it* while speaking about the roaches (2019).

The use of a vocabulary that erases the humanness of the enemy indeed helps reduce the soldiers' empathy in the episode, which in turn makes it easier for them to kill them. The dialogue between Stripe and the army psychologist Arquette mentioned by Došen shows the importance of language. After Stripe notices some problems with his MASS, he goes to see Arquette. They have a conversation about Stripe’s first kills. Stripe describes how he automatically killed the first roach. Then, talking about the second one, he says:

-*Stripe*: “I mean, he was on the ground with me.”

-*Arquette*: “He?”

-*Stripe*: “It was a he.”

-*Arquette*: “Oh [...]” (23’02”)

Arquette’s reaction shows that he already sees a problem in Stripe’s behavior. Michael Kelly, who plays Arquette in the episode, also evokes this tendency of dehumanizing people through words in the media and how related it is to the episode. In an interview with Jackie Strause for *The Hollywood Reporter*, he explains:

That’s how people are being referenced in the media when discussing Brexit and these refugees, being “swaths” of people. Just the negative connotation that these massive groups of people are put in. And then you look at someone like Donald Trump who is going to ban all Muslims from our country. It’s this rhetoric, this negativity that exists in both political climates right now that makes this episode so incredibly relevant right now. You can’t label people like that. Or at least, it’s not the right thing to do, in my

mind. We are better than that as a race and as a people. We need to be inclusive and think of everyone as being the same (2016).

Once again, this shows that *Black Mirror* denounces human cruelty towards each other.

This tendency of dehumanizing groups of people with language, in the digital era, is reinforced by the omnipresence and operating speed of social media. This is, according to Patches, one of the metaphorical meaning behind the MASS implant: “Sift through social media and you'll find politicians and pundits campaigning to sweep the suffering under a rug. ‘Men Against Fire’ imagines if the compression of computers into wearable devices could turn those Twitter smear campaigns into our physical perception of the world” (2016). The MASS, as it directly modifies the soldiers’ perceptions of other human beings, indeed physically illustrates the influence of social media on people’s representation of reality.

The real-life MASS is thus language, and the motivation behind such choices of words is to make the “enemies” appear less human, which will eventually reduce people’s empathy towards them. This is the ultimate goal of the MASS in “Men Against Fire.” Indeed, erasing the soldiers’ empathy allows them to transform into killing machines, into “perfect soldiers” that are closer to robots than human beings. In that regards, the soldiers are as dehumanized as the roaches are. An important scene shows the conception of empathy in the episode. After finding out that roaches are normal people, Stripe helps a woman and her son (both roaches) hide. Stripe is then found by his fellow soldier Raiman, who hits his head with her rifle. There is a scene cut after that. The next scene shows Stripe in a small white cell that looks like an isolation room. He is sitting on the floor, curled up. A man yells for him to get up but he does not obey. Arquette comes in to talk to him. Stripe is angry because the army lied to him and made normal people look like monsters. Arquette then explains the reason why they are doing this. Their conversation goes this way:

-*Stripe*: The whole thing is a lie.

-*Arquette*: I understand why you’d say that, yeah.

-*Stripe*: Roaches. They look just like us.

-*Arquette*: Of course they do. That's why they're so dangerous. Humans... You know, we give ourselves a bad rap, but we're genuinely empathetic as a species. I mean, we don't actually want to kill each other... Which is a good thing. Until your future depends on wiping out the enemy. [...] Many years ago, I'm talking early 20th century, most soldiers didn't even fire their weapons. Or if they did, they would just aim over the heads of the enemies. They did it on purpose [...] The fate of the world at stake and only fifteen percent of them fired. [...] So we adapted. Better training. Better conditioning. Then comes the Vietnam War, and the shooting percentage goes up to eighty-five. Lots of bullets flying. The kills were still low. Plus the guys who did get a kill, well, most of them came back all messed up in the head. And that's pretty much how things stayed until MASS came along. You see, Mass... Well, that's the ultimate military weapon. It helps you with your intel. Your targeting. Your comms. Your conditioning. It's a lot easier to pull the trigger when you're aiming at the bogeyman, mh? (48'05")

The MASS thus allows soldiers to kill without guilt, as well erasing stimuli in order to make the experience appear less real. Through concrete dehumanization, soldiers are freed from their handicap, which is empathy. Indeed, in the area of war, empathy is seen as a weakness. Whether or not this is progress is questionable.

Gilbert comments on that as well, explaining that “[i]t’s a terrific, unexpected twist, mostly because it seems so plausible: What could be more enticing to an advanced military power than a device that allows soldiers to kill without suffering any guilt or emotional repercussions?” (2016). Indeed, if such a technology was available in real life, it is likely that the different armies around the world would use it. Once again, *Black Mirror* stands out because of its frightening accuracy.

As evoked earlier, in real life, the enemy is dehumanized by words. In “Men Against Fire,” the enemy is dehumanized not only by words, but most importantly by the dehumanization of the soldiers themselves through the use of the MASS. The MASS modifies the soldiers’ perception of reality in the most intense way of the whole series and thus, the MASS is the most important instance of concrete dehumanization. It does not only modify the soldiers’ perceptions of the roaches, but their whole reality. The soldiers, for example, cannot smell. It is also shown in the episode that they have pre-programmed dreams, as a way of staying motivated or as rewards for their killing roaches. Their whole experience of life as human beings is modified. Moreover, it is important to note that the soldiers have little to no agency. Indeed, a scene shows that if a soldier chooses to rebel against the system, their MASS implant is used to make them obey by means of psychological torture. This is what happens to the main character Stripes. After the revelations are made by Arquette, Stripe loses his temper and becomes violent. In order to calm him down, Arquette, who controls his vision thanks to the MASS, makes him temporarily blind. He then explains to Stripe that he has two options: have his MASS reset and forget about the past few days, or be incarcerated. Arquette also tells Stripe that without the MASS, he will remember killing the two roaches. Stripe does not agree to have his MASS reset. Arquette, still controlling Stripe’s vision, makes him see himself killing the two roaches. However, in this version of the memory, the roaches look like the normal human beings that they actually are. This drives Stripe crazy. He screams and begs Arquette to stop it, to which the psychologist responds: “You’ll see and smell and feel it all. Is this what you want? On a loop? In a cell, all alone?” (55’57”). After that, Arquette rubs Stripe’s back and tells him that they can erase all of this if he just agrees to. A tear runs down Stripe’s cheek. After that, there is a scene cut. The next scene shows Stripe coming to what seems to be his house, wearing an army uniform, which suggests that he chose the second alternative.

“Men Against Fire” is the last episode to be analyzed because it shows the most intense forms of dehumanization. Every character in the episode is dehumanized. The roaches are victims of active dehumanization, being represented as monsters and being killed. Reflective dehumanization, embodied by the soldiers, is extremely strong because it is reinforced by concrete dehumanization. Indeed, the soldiers’ lack of empathy, partially induced by the MASS implant, dehumanizes them. Finally, even the army staff are dehumanized by their own beliefs and by their lack of empathy towards both soldiers and roaches.

“Men Against Fire” explores the limits and paradoxes associated with the notion of progress. Progress is represented by two aspects in the episode. The first one is the MASS implant, that is, a technological device that can literally dehumanize people by depriving them of some of their most basic human features. The second one is contained in the eugenistic ideology that is at the root of the whole plot. It is more specifically embodied by the character of Arquette. “Men Against Fire” confronts its audience with the impossibility that is inevitably implied within the notion of eugenics. Došen argues that “[t]hroughout the twentieth century, both the East and the West demonstrated that the hopeful vision of transforming the world for the better is often followed by mass killings and genocide done in the name of the progressive future (2016). Throughout history, progress through eugenics has indeed shown itself to be an illusion, provoking atrocities instead of emancipation. The idea of progress through eugenics being an illusion was also addressed by Friedrich Nietzsche, who considered the idea of providing humanity a better future by getting rid of “problematic” individuals to be merely a fantasy. Even though his beliefs and actions cause the eradication of a whole community, Arquette genuinely believes that he is doing humanity a favor. He is not aware of the fact that he is following a pipe dream. He, for example, tells Stripe “You are protecting the bloodline and that, my friend, is an honor” (51’35”).

The cold behavior of Arquette, as well as the whole process made possible by the MASS is also reminiscent of a tendency of praising cold, detached behaviors over emotionality. This tendency is also evoked by Haslam, who observes how society tends to prefer rationality upon warmth and emotionality. He explains “traits associated with human uniqueness (e.g., conscientiousness) are perceived as increasing with age, whereas those associated with human nature (e.g., extraversion and neuroticism) are seen as decreasing. Similar developmental trajectories may be perceived for societal development, where refinement, sophistication, and rationality rise with modernity, but at the cost of a loss of warmth and authentic emotionality” (Haslam et al. ; 2008). In Haslam’s terms, this represents an increase of human uniqueness and a decrease of human nature, considered progress by a big portion of society. This progress however involves the abnegation of crucial human features. In other words, this progress involves dehumanization. In “Men Against Fire,” this is represented by the eradication of empathy.

Another important aspect of the episode regarding progress is that, while “Men Against Fire” shows incredibly advanced technological means, it seems that, ideologically speaking, there is no progress at all. Došen highlights this contrast:

[t]he evident technological advancement that allows the control of soldiers’ vision is not preceded nor followed by an ideological evolution. [...]. Continuous stagnation could be interpreted as a result of a progressive preservation of the powerful class, always in fear that their sovereignty may come to an end (2019).

Došen talks about “continuous stagnation,” however regress could be argued. Indeed, having a western country openly killing people with the sole motive of them having bad genetic baggage is regress.

It has repeatedly been argued in this dissertation that technology in itself was never the enemy in *Black Mirror*. It was also Brooker’s words: “In our stories technology is never the

villain” (Rackham: 2017). Technology in the series, as the title suggests, acts like a mirror. As a consequence, if there is no ideological progress in society, technology can only reflect and emphasize what is already there. As Brooker explains, “[i]t’s about giving an individual great power but if that individual is weak or has a flaw that’s where the problem comes in, it’s not generally inherent in the technology itself” (Ibid). “Men Against Fire” is not an exception. As long as human beings think that the enemy is the Other, and that empathy is a weakness, no real progress can be attained.

It has been discussed before that the soldiers in “Men Against Fire” had little to no agency. They also are totally dehumanized by their MASS. Because of that, they could be considered victims. While the audience of “Men Against Fire” might be tempted to pity them, another plot twist changes that. In the conversation in which Arquette explains the functioning of the MASS to Stripe, he reveals that Stripe actually knew and agreed to have his MASS implanted. Stripe does not believe him, so Arquette shows him his “consent video.” The video shows Stripe agreeing to have the implant as well to have his memory wiped. He seems indifferent and even calls the process “funny” (52’52”). In that particular scene, the strongest message of the episode can be found. Atrocities cannot happen without people agreeing to them, or Patches phrases it, “[t]he moral apocalypse is a choice.” He adds that, “if we’re aware of what we’re signing up for, cautious of what we’re being fed, and empathetic to the strife around us, maybe we’ll bypass it” (2016). Once again, a parallel with current technologies is made here. Countless social media and various apps users, every single day, agree to and sign policies they have never read. “Men Against Fire,” and *Black Mirror* in general, reminds us that unawareness can lead to atrocities, and that everyone can be responsible. Everyone could be Stripe.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of a selection of *Black Mirror*'s episodes, this dissertation has discussed the various ways in which the series illustrates dehumanization. One of the core ideas is that *Black Mirror* never pictures technology itself as an enemy, but rather as a mirror that allows the observation of the human mind and of human behaviors, such as the different instances of dehumanization. Because the notion of "being human" is such an important aspect of the series, this dissertation has proposed an elaborated presentation of humanness, adding a third aspect to the notion, the material/biological dimension of humanness. A new theoretical model of dehumanization has been proposed as well, dividing the concept into three types: active dehumanization, reflective dehumanization and concrete dehumanization. Subsequently, this dissertation provided an analysis of these types of dehumanization in *Black Mirror*'s episodes. It also showed that the themes approached by the series are reminiscent of current tendencies in the digital era.

The fundamental tendency observed in the episodes analyzed in the section titled "The Love of the Show" is a strong human attraction for any sort of scandalous and violent show. This kind of show automatically involves the dehumanization of both their "victims" and audience. This inclination has been linked to the proliferation of violent images online and the enthusiasm it generates, as well as the fact that a lot of films are based on tragedies. With "White Bear," the legitimacy of revenge in justice has been considered, as well as the way in which criminals are dehumanized. The analysis of "The National Anthem" has evoked the fact that most people only show interest in politics when it involves drama and tend to fail to recognize the humanness of public personalities. Both the audience of "White Bear" and "The National Anthem" have been interpreted as a metaphor for the masses, whose perceptions of reality are totally altered by current technologies such as smartphones.

The episodes of “From 2D to 3D” have highlighted the unawareness around the consequences of actions taken on social media, especially social hate and the various forms of rating human beings. These two phenomena are instances of dehumanization. This chapter has also revealed the gamification that often results from the use of social media, which leads to dehumanization as well. Both “Hated in the Nation” and “Nosedive” show the direct consequences of actions taken online in the digital era, while a great portion of the population still acts as if it was only a game.

The section titled “Dear Progress” has questioned the notion of progress and its limitations. Both “White Christmas” and “Men Against Fire” have highlighted the fact that technological progress without ideological progress often ends up in regress, respectively slavery and mass murders. These were the most intense instances of dehumanization observed in this dissertation. This section also have deeply questioned the notion of humanness with the presence of entities that are in a position between human and non-human.

Even though the episodes of *Black Mirror* have unrelated plots, they all tackle human behaviors that lead to dehumanization. They also show the way in which technological progress without ideological progress, or human progress, leads to no progress at all. Rather than a denunciation of technology, *Black Mirror* is a profound reflection on (the lack of) humanity. By showing the humanness of its main characters, *Black Mirror* reminds its audience of the consequences of their behavior. Even though the series leads to some kind of pessimism, it raises the awareness required to start any sort of progress, which might be the ultimate purpose of the series.

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