

Fears and Fantasies about the Posthuman in *Black Mirror*

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Tarkastelen pro gradu -tutkielmassani brittiläisen *Black Mirror* televisiosarjan esittämiä kauhu- ja fantasiakuvia postihmisestä ja postinhimillisestä lähitulevaisuudesta. Tutkin analyysissäni kuinka sarjan jaksot “The Entire History of You” (2011), “Be Right Back” (2013), “White Christmas” (2014), “San Junipero” (2016) ja “Black Museum” (2017) kuvaavat ihmisen ja postinhimillisten olentojen välistä suhdetta ja kommentoivat yhtäaikaista pelon, ihmetyksen ja ihailun tuntemuksia postihmistä ja postinhimillistä tulevaisuutta kohtaan.

Televisiosarjan laajuuden ja tutkielmani rajallisen pituuden vuoksi analysoin tutkielmassani vain viittä sarjan jaksoa. Koska tieteisfiktio lajityyppiin luettava *Black Mirror* on muodoltaan antologia, sen jaksot eivät muodosta yhtenäistä juonellista kokonaisuutta. Kaikki yllä nimetyt analyysin kohteeksi valitsemani jaksot kuitenkin tarkastelevat ihmisen suhdetta teknologiaan ja postihmiseen kuvaten modernin ja spekulatiivisen teknologian vaikutusta ihmiseen, ihmisten välisiin suhteisiin ja yhteiskuntaan. Jaksot käsittelevät erilaisia skenaarioita ihmisen ja postihmisen kohtaamisesta sekä ihmisen ja teknologian välisten rajojen hälvemisestä kyseenalaistaen ihmisen ainutlaatuisuuden ja herättäen kysymyksiä esimerkiksi teknologisten ei-inhimillisten olentojen persoonuudesta. Analyysini keskiössä ovat jaksoissa esiintyvät erilaiset postinhimilliset olennot—sekä teknologisesti muokatut ihmiset kuten kyborgit ja virtuaaliset avatarit että teknologiset ei-inhimilliset toiset kuten androidit ja tekoäly. Pyrin vastaamaan tutkimuskysymyksiini ihmisen ja postihmisen suhteesta tarkastelemalla näiden olentojen representaatiota. Tutkin nimenomaan sitä, kuinka olennot esitetään yhteiskunnallisen ja kulttuurisen kritiikin ilmentyminä ja kuinka niiden representaatiot kommentoivat ihmisen ja teknologian rajojen hälvemistä: näyttääkö *Black Mirror* ihmisen ja teknologian lähentymisen myönteisenä vai kielteisenä kehityksenä?

Hyödynnän analyysissäni sekä populaareja että kriittisiä posthumanistisia näkökulmia. Avaan populaareja spekulatiivisia näkökulmia esimerkiksi ihmisten teknologisesta muokkauksesta sekä älykkäiden ja itsestään tietoisien androidien ja tekoälyn noususta. Kuvaan tieteiskirjallisuuden omaksumia transhumanistisia fantasioita ja biokonservatiivisia varoituksia postinhimillisestä lähitulevaisuudesta ja sitä, kuinka tieteisfiktiossa hyödynnetään näitä visioita yhteiskuntakritiikin esityksessä. Lisäksi käsittelen kriittisen posthumanismin näkökulmia ihmisestä ja ihmisen ja ei-inhimillisen suhteesta. Eritoten käsittelen kritiikkiä oletettua ihmissubjektin ainutlaatuisuutta kohtaan voidakseni keskustella paitsi ihmisen ja postinhimillisen toisen suhteesta, myös ihmissubjektin omasta mahdollisesta voimaantumisesta teknologian ja kriittisen posthumanistisen ihmiskäsityksen kautta.

Avainsanat: *Black Mirror*, kyborgi, posthumanismi, tekoäly, tieteiskirjallisuus, toiseus

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Theorising the Posthuman	8
2.1. Being Posthuman and Posthuman Beings: Popular and Critical Approaches	9
2.2. Existential Fear and Evolutionary Fantasies: The Posthuman in Science Fiction..	21
3. Rejecting or Embracing the Posthuman Self.....	41
3.1. “This Isn’t Me”: The Corrupted Cyborg Self	41
3.2. “Uploaded to the Cloud, Sounds Like Heaven”: The Enhanced and Empowered Avatar Self.....	51
3.3. “She’s Installed”: The Self Dehumanised.....	62
4. Enforcing Boundaries or Accepting Difference: The Posthuman Other	73
4.1. “You Are Just a Performance”: The Artificial Android Other	73
4.2. “It Wasn’t Really Real So It Wasn’t Really Barbaric”: Artificial Intelligence and the Question of Non-Human Personhood	81
5. Conclusion.....	90
Works Cited.....	93

1. Introduction

We live in a culture where technology impacts nearly every aspect of our lives. Besides facilitating our everyday life, advancements in all areas of technology have led to developments we could only imagine and fantasise about some decades past: for instance, developments in the field of biotechnology have created functional medical prostheses and implants that can alleviate pain and suffering and aid us in extending human life. Our interpersonal relationships are more and more shaped by technology, as our interactions with other humans become mediated through the use of the Internet, cellphones, and other communication devices. Furthermore, advancements in the fields of robotics and artificial intelligence research suggest a future where robots and software programmes become increasingly intelligent and capable. Many dream of intelligent and empathetic social robots that could take on jobs in fields where some level of compassion and empathy is needed, such as nursing, but also take on the role of a friend, a companion—and, eventually, possibly come to replace our human connections and companions.

As technology continues to develop and permeate our lives even further at an ever-accelerating pace, the human-technology relationship becomes an increasingly important subject to study, since technological advancements do not only affect the material world we live in, but also the ideas we have about the world and our own selves. Indeed, as Charlie Gere notes in *Digital Culture*, technological developments do not only affect the world around us and the way we act and live in it, but also the very way we understand ourselves, our existence, and our place in the world (9-15). Such reflections about the human-technology relationship—whether culminating in techno-anxious warnings against a closer union with technology, or techno-utopian fantasies about human enhancement and the creation of empathetic and compassionate robots—are frequently the focus of science fiction film and literature.

In this thesis, I will analyse the posthuman in the British science fiction TV series *Black Mirror*. My analysis centres around the series' representation of posthuman beings and the human-

posthuman relationship: I aim to uncover how these portrayals comment on both our fears and fantasies about the posthuman. Due to the length of the series and the limited scope of this thesis, the analysis will specifically focus on five episodes of the series: “The Entire History of You” (2011), “Be Right Back” (2013), “White Christmas” (2014), “San Junipero” (2016), and “Black Museum” (2017). Since *Black Mirror* is an anthology series, none of the episodes chosen for analysis are related through their plot or sets of characters; instead, they present individual narratives with shared themes and topics. Namely, each of the five episodes examines the human-posthuman relationship and depicts how modern and speculative technologies affect the human individual, our interpersonal relationships, and the society as a whole. The episodes portray different scenarios of a posthuman future where boundaries between humans and technology begin to collapse and different technological beings emerge as a result, culminating in anxiety and wonder towards the effects of the convergence between the human and technology and the emergent posthuman beings.

The term posthuman has a variety of definitions depending on the context where it is used. To briefly introduce the concept before discussing my theoretical framework of posthumanism in greater detail, discussions on technoscience in media and popular culture imagine the posthuman either as a future state of the human after our convergence with technology dramatically changes our physical form and cognitive capabilities, or as a technological non-human agent—as a humanoid robot, or a sentient computer intelligence, for instance. Meanwhile, in critical academic discussions the concept of the posthuman is used in reference to the dismantling of traditional humanist assumptions about the human subject, or, the dissolving of “humanist pretensions of the human and the non-human”, as described by Michael Hauskeller et al. (6). In my discussion, the posthuman will take on all of these meanings: thus, my analysis of the posthuman in *Black Mirror* will concern not only the series’ portrayal of technologically altered human individuals and technological non-human agents—our posthuman selves and the posthuman others—but also how

these portrayals of different posthuman beings participate in the debate around the critical re-articulation of the human subject and its relations to the non-human technology: do the five episodes chosen for analysis portray the posthuman and the convergence between the human and technology as a beneficial development and as a potential source of empowerment, or as a threat to the human subject and humankind at large?

As I aim to uncover the different ways the aforementioned five episodes of *Black Mirror* discuss both our anxiety and wonder towards the posthuman, I will employ the theoretical field of posthumanism in my analysis. Posthumanism is a multifaceted interdisciplinary movement with a lot of internal division: as Vincent Miller summarises, posthumanism contains critical approaches that target humanism and its assumptions about the human subject, debates that examine how technology potentially changes the human body, and approaches that critically address the human-technology relationship (210). A broad division to critical posthumanism and popular posthumanism is made by several critics, for instance Jill Didur and Bart Simon. To briefly explain the difference between the two approaches before discussing them in more detail in the theory section of this thesis, Simon describes the popular approach as a speculative debate on the possibilities that technological advancements in the fields of biotechnology and informatics could offer to the human (2). These debates contain both views for and against the convergence between the human and the technological; thus, I will cover both transhumanist and bioconservative perspectives in my discussion of the popular approach, as their viewpoints, both techno-utopian and techno-phobic, strongly relate to the fears and fantasies about the posthuman explored in the series. The critical academic approach challenges humanism and its assumptions about the human subject that construct a divide between the human and the non-human—between the self and the other—and re-articulates and dismantles these assumptions to construct a new framework for what it means to be human, the posthuman condition (Didur 101-02; Simon 2-3). It is important to note that posthumanism does not only concern technology and its effect on the human individual: the

movement also includes critical viewpoints that target humanism and its assumptions about the human subject, for instance, through a re-articulation of human-animal relations.¹ However, my discussion of posthumanism will mainly cover the more technology focused articulations of the theoretical field due to the limited scope of this thesis and since my analysis specifically targets a science fiction TV series that explores the human-technology relationship.

The figure of the posthuman appears frequently in science fiction literature and film as an embodiment of our fears and fantasies toward the influential role technology has taken in our lives, the future where advancements in technology and the technological modification of the human might lead us, and the anticipated rise of an intelligent and sentient technological non-human agent. Furthermore, Colin Milburn states that science fiction operates through speculative visions of the posthuman to challenge our assumptions about humanity and humanism by presenting alternative ways to consider our current reality (534). The genre's involvement with posthumanism and its ideas can then be understood to mix both popular and critical approaches: science fiction literature and film do not only present escapist fantasies and cautious stories about the speculated changes to the human and the rise of a powerful and intelligent non-human other, but they have inherent potential for critical discussions about the human-technology and human-posthuman relationships and often comment on social and cultural concerns through their portrayals of the posthuman. Indeed, as Daniel Dinello summarises in his extensive study of the posthuman in science fiction film and literature, *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology*, “[o]ften taking us a step beyond escapist entertainment, science fiction imagines the problematic consequences brought about by these new technologies and the ethical, political, and existential questions they raise” (5). Due to this mixing of speculative and critical debates about the posthuman in science fiction, I will outline both popular posthumanism and critical posthumanism as I establish

¹ See, for instance, Donna Haraway's *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* or Cary Wolfe's *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* for perspectives on the animal focused line of posthumanist thought.

the theoretical framework for my analysis of *Black Mirror*. A combination of these two approaches is necessary to fully understand not only how the episodes portray speculative visions about the posthuman, but also the social commentary and critique of humanist assumptions inherent in the depictions of different posthuman beings.

Created by Charlie Brooker and first broadcasted in 2011, *Black Mirror* is a science fiction anthology series that examines the dark side of the human-technology relationship: in Brooker's own words, its stories "[are] all about the way we live now—and the way we might be living in 10 minutes' time if [we are] clumsy." (Brooker) Despite the series' heavy focus on the darker side of technology and the way it is believed to harm the human individual and society at large, I will not only analyse how its episodes discuss our anxiety and fears towards the posthuman, but also how it explores our wonder and fantasies about the speculated transformation of the human individual, the rise of an intelligent and sentient technological other, and the re-articulated human subject—the posthuman condition. At the centre of my analysis are the representations of different posthuman beings that appear in the five episodes: namely, the cyborg in "The Entire History of You", the avatar and the virtual selves in "San Junipero" and "Black Museum", the android in "Be Right Back", and artificial intelligence in "White Christmas". Cyborgs, described by Dinello as cybernetic organisms that combine the biological and mechanical (8), and virtual avatars, defined by Kirsten Strayer as "technologically formed surrogate personas" (194), effectively portray visions about our own posthumanity after our merging with the machine. The two figures explore the ways our convergence with technology, with the non-human, threatens human identity, the integrity of the human body, and the dignity of the human self: simultaneously, however, cyborgs and virtual avatars can be portrayed as figures of enhancement and empowerment. Narratives featuring androids—described by Dinello as artificial humanoids and humanoid robots—and artificial intelligence, on the other hand, explore the threats and opportunities the emergence of speculated technological non-human agents, our posthuman others, could offer to us (8). Science fiction works

do not only speculate whether or not it is possible to create such beings: in fact, narratives about posthuman others tend to explore how their emergence challenges traditional views about human nature, thus challenging the category of the human in a different way and making us question the notion of human exceptionalism—of human uniqueness and superiority over the non-human. As I seek to answer my central questions about the human-posthuman relationship and our fears and fantasies about the posthuman, I will divide my analysis of *Black Mirror* into two parts. First, the analysis will focus on how the series discusses our own posthumanity through the figures of the cyborg and the avatar. I will then conclude my analysis by focusing on the portrayal of the android and artificial intelligence and examine how the relationship between the human and the posthuman other is depicted.

Featuring the figure of the cyborg, “The Entire History of You” discusses what happens to our humanity and interpersonal relationships as we give too much power to technology in shaping our selves and mediating our interactions with others. The episode offers a techno-phobic view of our convergence with the machine, as the resulting cyborg state is portrayed as inherently corrupted, damaging not only our sense of self, but also our connection to other humans.

“Be Right Back” discusses the human-android relationship and asks if social robots could eventually come to replace our human companions. While the episode explores a hopeful vision of companionship with the other, the narrative ultimately reveals the android other to be inherently lacking and inadequate as a companion, thus reinforcing boundaries between the human and the non-human, the self and the other.

An episode with several storylines, “White Christmas” touches on the topic of non-human personhood. Featuring a self-aware artificial intelligence subjugated as a slave to a human master, the episode discusses the ethics of our relationship with the technological non-human other and critiques traditional anthropocentric notions of personhood.

“San Junipero” features the figure of the avatar and explores a more techno-utopian vision of our posthuman future by touching on the concept of virtual afterlife: the narrative depicts how elderly people are offered a service where their consciousness can be uploaded to a virtual reality after they die. The episode ultimately portrays how acceptance of the virtual posthuman self enhances and empowers the posthuman individual, but it also touches on darker aspects of the fantasy to overcome human impermanence through virtual afterlife: as we leave the material human realm, do we lose our humanity and human connection for good?

“Black Museum” discusses yet another techno-phobic vision about our own posthumanity and depicts how posthuman individuals come to be dehumanised by technologically unaltered humans: essentially, they lose their agency, rights, and dignity and status as human beings and come to be treated as objects, as non-human. The episode utilises the figure of the posthuman not only to comment on the convergence of the human and technology, but also to portray it as a vessel of social criticism as the narrative proceeds to argue for the posthuman condition.

2. Theorising the Posthuman

In this chapter, I will introduce the theoretical framework for my analysis of the posthuman in *Black Mirror*, namely that of posthumanism, and the concepts most central for my focus on the representation of posthuman beings and the human-posthuman relationship in the series. The chapter is comprised of two subsections. In the first subchapter, I will first discuss posthumanism as a movement by outlining its popular and academic approaches: my discussion will thus follow the broad division to popular posthumanism and critical posthumanism made by several critics, for instance Didur and Simon. As my analysis specifically focuses on the representation of the posthuman in a science fiction TV series, my discussion of posthumanism will largely centre around speculative visions of technologically modified humans and emergent technological non-human agents envisioned in popular posthumanism, since these visions and posthuman beings and their predicted social and cultural impact are frequently reflected in works within the genre, *Black Mirror* included. While science fiction narratives tend to highlight the speculative visions of the popular approach, they also address issues that critical posthumanism is concerned with, as is evident with *Black Mirror* and its exploration of the topic of non-human personhood, for instance. I will thus also outline the critical posthumanist approach to establish the framework in which posthuman critics consider the posthuman condition and the re-negotiation of the relationship with the non-human.

In the second subchapter, I will move on to examine the representation of the posthuman in science fiction works in greater detail. I will observe how the speculated posthuman beings are portrayed in science fiction narratives and how the portrayals of both technologically modified human individuals and technological non-human agents—or, our posthuman selves and the posthuman others—explore our fears and fantasies about the technological present and the speculated posthuman future. My discussion will focus specifically on how the figures of the cyborg, the avatar, the android, and artificial intelligence are represented in works within the genre,

since these posthuman beings will figure prominently in my analysis of *Black Mirror*. In this subchapter, I will further discuss the representation of the human-posthuman relationship and the topic of non-human personhood in science fiction narratives.

2.1. Being Posthuman and Posthuman Beings: Popular and Critical Approaches

As the concept of the posthuman is understood drastically differently in speculative popular discourses and the academic critical context, I consider it vital to first briefly summarise the general ideas that give rise to both popular and academic discussions about the posthuman regardless of how greatly the two approaches deviate from each other in their ultimate interpretation of the concept of the posthuman.

In his extensive work on posthuman consciousness *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain*, Robert Pepperell discusses posthumanism as the era after humanism characterised by what he calls a profound transformation of our traditional view of the human and the “general convergence of biology and technology” (iv). Similarly, in the introduction to *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television*, Michael Hauskeller et al. summarise the idea of the posthuman as “the surpassing of the human condition” (1). In Western thought, the humanist framework has long guided our understanding of our own nature and our place in the world. Pepperell illustrates the development of Enlightenment humanism and its construction of the human subject by discussing the social, political, and economic changes that led to its emergence. Further, he discusses how social change has affected the construction of the human condition over time, and how now, in what he calls “the high technological era” (Pepperell 161), the convergence of human biology and technology is once more seen to be prompting changes in our understanding of the human condition and human nature.

According to Pepperell, our understanding of the human condition—defined by him as the belief of what it is to be human—has historically been shaped by three categories: “gods, nature,

and humanity itself.” (155) Throughout history, the three categories have been positioned hierarchically to construct the human condition, thus shaping our beliefs of what we think we are as human beings and what our place in the world is in relation to the non-human. During the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, the rise of mercantile economy and bourgeois urban society, the growing importance of science over religion, and the following political shifts created an environment for intellectual debate that Pepperell calls the high tide of humanism (158-59). During this period, also known as the Age of Enlightenment, as social changes elevated faith in science and human progress and challenged blind religious faith, the human condition came to be characterised by the concept of human exceptionalism. Humanity, once subordinate to gods and in opposition to nature, was now positioned in dominance over nature without the intervention of gods, establishing a new hierarchy where the human was deemed superior to the non-human world around them (Pepperell 158-60). Philosopher Rosi Braidotti further illustrates how the idea of human exceptionalism—of human superiority and uniqueness—merged with the “classical ideal of ‘Man’” to construct the human subject as unique and autonomous, emphasising the powers of human reason and setting standards for human individuals and cultures alike, ultimately mutating into a “hegemonic cultural model” (13-14).

As the assumptions made about the human condition and the human subject were considered universal, they established an essentialist standard for how to be human, and those who differed from the humanist ideal came to be branded “other”. Braidotti criticises humanism and its construction of the human subject specifically for intensifying the dichotomy between the self and the other and notes that the binary logic of the self/other dichotomy sets difference, or otherness, as “pejoration” and casts the other as the “negative and specular” counterpart of the self (15). While promoting a specific mode of being human, the humanist construction of the subject has thus promoted exclusion and discrimination through branding those who do not fit its standards as inferior: “These are the sexualized, racialized, naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than

human status of disposable bodies. We are all humans, but some of us are just more mortal than others.” (Braidotti 15)

Besides excluding certain human groups from its definitions of the human, the humanist construction of the subject and human condition established a clear hierarchy between the human and the non-human. Now, however, it is perceived in both academic and popular discussions that technology is changing the human form, human capabilities, and the very human nature, and thus the traditional humanist assumptions and the boundaries they have set between the human subject and its others, or “the human and the non-human, the natural and the artificial, the organic and the machinic”, can no longer effectively describe the human condition (Hauskeller et al. 1-2). Hauskeller et al. state that “[a]s we engage ourselves in a techno-social narrative, whereby technology and humans are increasingly integrated, the resulting ontological consequences are rewriting and recasting what being human entails.” (6) Posthumanist debates address the “surpassing of the human condition”, or the transformation of our traditional understanding of what it means to be human, exactly through a re-imagination of the humanist assumptions about the human subject and its relations to the non-human—that is, nature, animals, technology, and human individuals that have been marginalised by the essentialist humanist construction of the subject.

Although technology is perceived to be prompting changes in our understanding of the human, posthumanism does not only concern technology and its effects on the human subject—nor is it the first or the only movement to have challenged humanism and its assumptions. Francesca Ferrando locates the roots of posthumanism in the “first wave of postmodernism” (29). Meanwhile, Braidotti discusses the development of antihumanism in depth and notes it to be an important source for posthuman thought in its rejection of humanist assumptions about the human subject and re-articulation of the human condition as posthuman condition (25). In addition, Braidotti and Pepperell both mention feminism, postcolonialism, environmentalism, and animal rights movements among others as “movements that resist the worst aspects of humanist

behaviour” (Pepperell 171-72). That is to say, these movements have challenged the exploitation of marginalised human individuals and the non-human established by humanism and its essentialist construction of the subject and anthropocentric hierarchical thinking. Similarly challenging the humanist construction of the subject and dismantling the boundaries it has set to distinguish the human as exceptional and superior in relation to the non-human, posthumanism attempts to provide us with a new framework for what it means to be human. However, Cary Wolfe claims in *What Is Posthumanism?* that posthumanist critics do not aim to totally abandon humanism as “there are values and aspirations to admire in humanism”: instead, according to him, the posthumanist goal is to debate and dismantle the philosophically and ethically dubious humanist frameworks that produce the normative and discriminatory standard of subjectivity (xvi-xvii).

While posthuman critics thus focus on questions about the human, our relationship with the non-human, and our place in the world, the movement has a lot of internal division as different critics tackle these central issues in various ways and conflict and range in their answer to the fundamental question “what makes us (post)human”. That is, critics draw from different theoretical sources to articulate the revised posthuman subject in various ways: for example, Braidotti goes on to argue for a posthuman subject “within an eco-philosophy of multiple belonging, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity” and proposes “an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others” (49). Furthermore, as mentioned, posthumanism does not only concern technology and the convergence between the human and the machine: Wolfe details how posthuman thought draws from different movements and fields of study such as bioethics, animal studies, and disability studies. However, due to the limited scope of this thesis, and as my analysis specifically targets a science fiction TV series that explores the human-technology relationship, my further discussion of posthumanism will mainly cover the more technology oriented articulations of the movement.

A uniting feature for the diverse approaches of posthumanism is the assumption that the human is transforming in one way or another. Whether it is imagined as a quite literal transformation of the physical human form prompted by technology, or as a transformation of our understanding of the human subject and its relations to the non-human beings and the world, as described above, depends on the form of posthumanism being discussed. Having now established the general ideas behind posthumanism and its notion of surpassing the human, I will move on to discuss the broad division into popular posthumanism and critical posthumanism in greater detail.

Several critics make a distinction between popular and academic discussions about the posthuman. Following Didur's distinction between "critical posthuman thinkers" and philosophers who embrace genetic engineering and technoscience as humanity's tools to perfect nature (101-102), Simon separates popular posthumanism, influenced by popular discourse on technoscience in media and popular culture, from critical posthumanism which, in turn, in an interdisciplinary manner draws from academic perspectives on science and technology, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and feminist and postcolonial studies (2-3). These two broad traditions of popular posthumanism and critical posthumanism focus on entirely different phenomena, as Juha Raipola notes in his article outlining the similarities and inherent differences between the two approaches (37). The former is concerned with the era *after the human* and speculates about the potential visions for our future after technological modification of the human and the creation of new sentient posthuman beings, whereas the latter deals with the era *after humanism* and, rather than speculating about the future, is concerned with the human of today—or, more precisely, with challenging the assumptions that have guided our understanding of the human subject and its relations to the world, as already detailed above (Raipola 35-36). Within both the popular and the academic discussions there are more diverse debates on how to articulate the posthuman and how the topic of posthumanity should be approached. For example, the techno-utopian and the techno-phobic visions of the posthuman clash within popular debates on

technoscience: while the techno-utopian transhumanists enthusiastically embrace technology and its possibilities for human enhancement, the more techno-phobic bioconservative critics approach the speculated changes with scepticism, seeing them as a potential threat to the human (Hauskeller et al. 6-7). Within academic discussions on the posthuman, critics have articulated the posthuman condition—the new framework for how to be (post)human—in various ways, as briefly explained above. Prominent examples of this effort are provided by Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles who re-imagine the human subject in terms compatible with technology. Both Haraway's and Hayles' examples will be discussed in depth later in this subchapter as I outline the critical approach in more detail.

Even further division within the movement is demonstrated by, for instance, David Roden (*Posthuman Life*), who separates speculative posthumanism from the popular and critical approaches as a form of its own. However, due to the limited scope of this thesis, and the general overlap between the popular approach and Roden's articulation of speculative posthumanism, I will limit my further discussion to the broad division of popular posthumanism and critical posthumanism only.

As discussed above, popular posthumanism encompasses speculative debates in media and popular culture about the technological modification of the human and the potential creation of new sentient technological agents. In these debates, the posthuman is seen as the potential future condition that follows the technological alteration of the human (Raipola 35). Popular posthumanism is often equated with the techno-utopian transhumanist movement to the point that some critics use the names interchangeably. The transhumanist movement's enthusiastic embrace of the convergence between humans and technology has been met with a sceptical response by bioconservative critics who strictly oppose the transhumanist attempts at human enhancement and claim that such convergence will eventually lead to the end of the human.

Transhumanists and bioconservative critics clash in their understanding of our posthuman future. Humanity+, an international transhumanist organisation, declares that the vision of the transhumanist movement is to broaden human potential “by overcoming aging, cognitive shortcomings, involuntary suffering, and our confinement to planet Earth.” (“Transhumanist Declaration”) These “enhanced human conditions” (“Transhumanist Declaration”) and the ultimate posthuman state are to be reached through, for example, genetic engineering, cognition enhancing drugs, medical prostheses and implants and other similar already existing technologies the use of which is currently limited solely to research or therapeutic means: while brain stimulants, robotic prosthetic limbs, artificial organs, and, for instance, cochlear implants are all part of our contemporary technological reality, the technologies are all currently intended for therapeutic use only rather than enhancement.² In addition, transhumanists fantasise about the possibilities that more speculative technologies could offer to the human: techno-utopian researchers and scientists explore the feasibility of technologies such as cryonics, or the practice of deep-freezing deceased individuals in hopes of resuscitating them in the future, and the process of mind uploading where the human mind is extracted from the body and uploaded to a computer—a vision popularised by techno-utopian scientists such as Ray Kurzweil.

Philosopher Nick Bostrom—who co-founded the World Transhumanist Association, the predecessor of Humanity+, in 1998 with David Pearce—states that while transhumanists embrace the progress of human enhancement technologies, they also defend human rights and the individual choice to adopt such technologies (203). Similarly, Humanity+ continues to claim the “ethical use of technology” to “extend and expand human capabilities” as its mission (Vita-More). Nevertheless, bioconservative critics are concerned about the speculated transformation of the human and fear that our merging with the machine will ultimately lead to the end of the human. In “Ageless Bodies,

² See, for instance, Kevin Warwick’s article “The Cyborg Revolution” for a discussion on the use of cyborg technologies for therapeutic purposes.

Happy Souls: Biotechnology and the Pursuit of Perfection”, Leon Kass takes a bioconservative stand against technological alteration of the human. Making a distinction between the acceptable therapeutic uses of biotechnology and the “ethically suspect” non-therapeutic use aimed at human enhancement, Kass argues the transhumanist mission of perfecting the human to be ultimately dehumanising since, in his view, enhancement would harm human nature: “All other perfection is at best a passing illusion, at worst a Faustian bargain that will cost us our full and flourishing humanity.” (12-13, 28)

Another prominent critic of human enhancement, Francis Fukuyama, sees that every human shares an essential human quality, “Factor X”, which defines every member of the human species, granting them an equal amount of dignity and entitling them to an equal moral status (149-50). Fukuyama defines this human essence in depth:

. . . Factor X cannot be reduced to the possession of moral choice, or reason, or language, or sociability, or sentience, or emotions, or consciousness, or any other quality that has been put forth as a ground for human dignity. It is all these qualities coming together in a human whole that make up Factor X. Every member of the human species possess a genetic endowment that allows him or her to become a whole human being, an endowment that distinguishes a human in essence from other types of creatures. (171)

Similarly to Kass, Fukuyama sees that the technological modification of the human as promoted by transhumanists has the potential to intervene with the unity of the “human whole” that defines us as human, thus dehumanising the human individual by undermining their humanity and human dignity. Furthermore, Fukuyama argues that human enhancement through biotechnology threatens the human rights based on the concept of a shared essence, and he discusses the dangerous possibility of the transhumanist attempt at perfecting the human leading to genetic inequality (158, 172). Bostrom, however, defends his own transhumanist perspective against Kass and Fukuyama’s claims by pointing out that the human nature is already “a rich source of much of the thoroughly unrespectable and unacceptable” such as racism, murder, and genocide, and promotes the

transhumanist vision as a way to “reform ourselves and our natures in accordance with humane values” (205).

It is vital to note that transhumanism and bioconservatism both have humanistic foundations and, in fact, uphold human exceptionalism: meanwhile, critical posthumanism works actively to dismantle this notion of human uniqueness and superiority, as will be discussed in more detail below. Raipola notes that the bioconservative view of human nature—as endorsed by Fukuyama, for instance—is inherently humanistic as it asserts human moral superiority and uniqueness and vehemently defends the human from outside influences (41-42). Transhumanists, on the other hand, have a more dynamic understanding of human nature, seeing it to be influenced as much by the technological and social context as by the human DNA (Bostrom 213). However, as transhumanists embrace technology as a tool to perfect the human, they share the humanist vision of the superior and unique human on whom rests the responsibility to make the world better—by enhancing themselves first (Raipola 41). While the opposing viewpoints then both value the unique humanist subject and the concept of human exceptionalism, where they ultimately deviate is their understanding of the ethicality of human enhancement and the role technology should have in our lives: transhumanists see technology as our saviour, leading us to the superior posthuman future where limitations of the human can be surpassed, whereas bioconservative critics consider it to be our potential destroyer, leading to the end of the human (Raipola 41-42).

In addition to speculating about what the human might evolve into, popular posthumanism also discusses the possibility of non-human agents, such as conscious robots equipped with artificial intelligence, emerging as a consequence of technological advancements. Roden defines posthumans broadly as “powerful non-human agents which arise via some technological process emerging from human activity” (“Post-Singularity” 88). This definition of the posthuman can encompass both enhanced humans—our posthuman progeny—and the non-human technological agents created by humans. Despite advances in the fields of robotics and artificial intelligence research, sentient and

self-aware technological agents are still only speculated about—so far, they only exist in works of science fiction. However, the debate around technological non-human agents does not only concern whether or not it is possible to create conscious non-human beings, but also how we are to evaluate them and their sentience if and when they become reality. For example, researchers still use the Turing test, developed by Alan Turing in 1950, to evaluate and test artificial intelligences for how well the machine can pass as a human being, as a person. Furthermore, while robots and social robots are already a part of our technological reality, there are no guidelines for relationships between humans and sentient technological non-human others. When the non-human technological beings gain sentience, as is speculated by both techno-utopian and techno-phobic thinkers, they then raise questions not only about our own human identity and how we are to distinguish ourselves from the technological others, but also about the social dynamics of the human-posthuman relationship and the non-human entities' right to personhood. The emerging posthuman others and their representation in science fiction will be discussed in more detail in the next subchapter, alongside a discussion on the portrayal of bioconservative fears and transhumanist fantasies in works within the genre.

While the popular approach thus envisions what humans might evolve into after our merging with technology, critical posthumanism involves the human of the present day and the dismantling of the humanist construction of the human subject. By challenging the essentialist and anthropocentric assumptions of humanism, critical posthumanism attempts to strip the human of its assumed uniqueness and superiority and link it to non-human forms of life by re-articulating the human experience in terms compatible with the non-human, or by emphasising the interrelationship with the other (Raipola 36-37). For example, in her seminal work *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, Hayles envisions the human in union with the intelligent machine and re-configures human subjectivity in terms of an information processing machine, as influenced by cybernetics and information technology. In doing so, Hayles

emphasises the importance of the interrelationship between humans and technology for the human experience:

No longer is human will seen as the source from which emanates the mastery necessary to dominate and control the environment. Rather, the distributed cognition of the emergent human subject correlates with . . . the distributed cognitive system as a whole, in which ‘thinking’ is done by both human and nonhuman actors. . . . To conceptualize the human in these terms is not to imperil human survival but is precisely to enhance it, for the more we understand the flexible, adaptive structures that coordinate our environments and the metaphors that we ourselves are, the better we can fashion images of ourselves that accurately reflect the complex interplays that ultimately make the entire world one system. (290)

In Hayles’ vision, the posthuman human subjects are not to be considered masters of the world around them, nor as being above the nature, above the non-human. Instead, the human subject is understood to be embedded in the non-human world that surrounds them, and the non-human is also recognised as an essential part of human activity.

The notion of human exceptionalism is upheld by dichotomies that set the human above and apart from the non-human, and so the re-imagination of the human subject starts with the dismantling of these boundaries. A pioneering example for the critical posthumanist attempt to articulate the posthuman subject in such manner is offered by Haraway.³ In her notable essay “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”,⁴ Haraway establishes the cyborg, a fusion of the human and the machine, from a feminist point of view to challenge the dualisms structuring the traditional Western subject such as self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, and male/female as “[the dualisms] have all been systemic to the logics and

³ While her work has influenced critical posthumanist thinking and writing prominently, Haraway has distanced herself from the concept of the posthuman. She states in an interview with Nicholas Gane that “. . . human/posthuman is much too easily appropriated by the blissed-out, ‘Let’s all be posthumanists and find our next teleological evolutionary stage in some kind of transhumanist technoenhancement.’ . . . The reason I go to companion species is to get away from posthumanism.” (Gane 140) In the same interview, however, Haraway aligns herself with critics such as Hayles: her critique towards the posthuman then concerns mostly the transhumanist movement and what she calls its “blissed-out technoidiocy” (Gane 146).

⁴ Originally published as “Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s” *Socialist Review*, no. 80, 1985, pp. 65-108.

practices of domination of women, people of colour, nature, workers, animals—in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self” (177). Haraway’s cyborg does not involve a literal physical fusion of human biology and technology. Rather, the cyborg is imagined as a metaphor by which to reconsider the unnaturalness of the boundaries set for the essentialist Western human subject, to bring down social barriers, and to gain a new empowering understanding of the self. The hybridity of the cyborg figure—not fully human, not fully machine—does not fit set categories, and thus its imagery illustrates what Carlen Lavigne in *Cyberpunk Women, Feminism and Science Fiction: A Critical Study* calls “the arbitrary nature of current cultural dichotomies” (82). While science fiction narratives tend to highlight the speculative visions of the popular approach, critical posthumanist viewpoints are also reflected in works within the genre: especially Haraway’s cyborg imagery translates into science fiction narratives where the posthuman is presented neither as a threat to the human nor as a techno-utopian fantasy, but as a radical figure of empowerment. The portrayal of the empowering posthuman condition in science fiction will be discussed in more detail in the following subchapter.

To summarise, posthumanism is a multifaceted movement that contains various competing views of what the core concept of the posthuman means. The academic critical approach focuses on re-articulating the anthropocentric notions of the humanist construction of the human subject and its relations to the non-human. Meanwhile, the speculative discussions about the convergence of the human and technology in media and popular culture, dubbed the popular approach of posthumanism, see the posthuman as a state attainable through human enhancement. While it has been stated that both critical and popular views of the posthuman are reflected in science fiction films and literature, it is important to note that the two points of view do not interact harmoniously outside fiction: especially the acknowledged humanist legacy of popular posthumanism that works contrary to the critical effort to dismantle anthropocentric humanist constructions has been met with criticism (Raipola 37). In *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction*, an

extensive study on posthumanism and science fiction, Sherryl Vint warns that the posthuman entails risks of falling into oppressive practices similarly to the humanist construction of the human subject and emphasises that the struggle over posthuman identity is therefore also political (172). She critiques especially the more techno-utopian transhumanist branch of popular posthumanism which she claims advocates “an ideology of individualism that refuses to acknowledge the political consequences of social institutions and practices that interpellate subjects differently.” (179) Vint states that it is vital to enlarge rather than limit the range of bodies and subjects that matter and to “acknowledge difference without hierarchy” for us to be socially responsible and to establish ethical posthumanism (182, 190). Vint’s ideas about bodies that matter, social responsibility, and acceptance of difference will be vital for my analysis of the relationship between the human and the posthuman in *Black Mirror*.

I will now move on to discuss how exactly the differing articulations of the posthuman are reflected in the representation of different posthuman beings in science fiction films and literature.

2.2. Existential Fear and Evolutionary Fantasies: The Posthuman in Science Fiction

Speculative discussions about human enhancement and the rise of potential new subjectivities in science fiction literature and film reveal what Dinello calls existential fear and evolutionary panic (6). A lingering sense of uncertainty over the status of the human caused by the persistence of human exceptionalism creates an environment for fearful visions about technology and its effects on the human. Examples of such existential fear and evolutionary panic outside fiction are provided by the bioconservative argument that sees technological enhancement and the posthuman as a threat to the human, potentially corrupting human nature, disregarding human rights, and—perhaps most perilously—replacing the human. As the notion of human exceptionalism continues to be valued and to mark the human subject as unique and superior, humanity continues to feel threatened by its others—especially others that could emerge physically and intellectually stronger than us and, in

gaining sentience, could threaten our assumed status as one of a kind rational being who rules over other creatures and the world around them. Transhumanism, on the other hand, forms the techno-utopian counterpart to the bioconservative argument by embracing technology and its potential to create a posthuman future where disease and death can be conquered and omniscience gained: these optimistic visions transform evolutionary panic into evolutionary fantasies.

Bioconservative techno-anxiety about the loss of humanity and the devaluation of human mind and body as we, for example, adopt prostheses and implants to become physically stronger, genetically modify our offspring to be more intelligent or to have specific desired features, and experiment to ultimately transfer the human consciousness onto a computer has resulted in technophobic narratives in which technology escapes our control (Dinello 273). An early example of our anxiety towards out of control technology is presented by Mary Shelley in her seminal novel *Frankenstein* (1818) which introduces Frankenstein's creature as a technologically created posthuman other perceived as monstrous by his creator. More contemporary examples of such techno-anxious narratives are provided by the films *Gattaca* (1997), which features a society where genetic engineering has led to genetic discrimination, and *Transcendence* (2004), which exposes mind uploading as a dehumanising process. At the same time, however, science fiction reflects the transhumanist wonder about human enhancement in visions of techno-utopia and the superior enhanced posthuman. The most positive representations of technological modification of the human can perhaps be found in superhero narratives in which technologically and genetically enhanced humans are portrayed as heroes: for instance, in the film *Iron Man* (2008) wealthy tech genius Tony Stark is saved after being critically wounded by a bomb through technological modifications to his body, leading him to assume the role of Iron Man, a cyborg superhero. Curtis D. Carbonell explains how such techno-utopian superhero narratives stay in the realm of transhumanist fantasising where

posthuman technology is presented as a tool to perfect the human without radical corruption or loss of human identity,⁵ instead “[epitomising] the traditional Western humanist values” (156-57).

Reflections of both existential bioconservative fears and transhumanist evolutionary fantasies can then be found in science fiction literature and film. In fact, as Milburn explains, the genre can entertain a “diversity of posthuman scenarios” and different “registers of the posthuman” (524). Specifically, Milburn discusses biological, technological, and cultural visions of the posthuman that respectively involve the alteration of human physiology over time, the fusion between the human and the machine and the emergence of new technological subjectivities, and the exploration of human nature as a “tenuous social construct open to modification and revision.” (524) Due to the limited scope of my thesis I will limit my further discussion of the posthuman in science fiction specifically to the technological and cultural registers. My examination of the representation of posthuman beings in works within the genre will only concern technologically altered humans and technological non-human agents: to be specific, I will examine the portrayals of the cyborg, the avatar, the android, and artificial intelligence. Furthermore, I observe how these posthuman beings have been employed not only to discuss our fears and fantasies towards the technological present and the speculated posthuman future, but also to challenge cultural categories and traditional assumptions about human nature. My discussion will thus touch on certain issues that the cultural register focuses on: namely, issues around the negotiation of an ethical relationship with the technological non-human other and the topic of non-human personhood will be discussed.

I will now discuss the representation of the cyborg, the avatar, the android, and artificial intelligence in detail. While the issues discussed through the four posthuman figures partly overlap,

⁵ Nonetheless, some superhero narratives explicitly feature the burdens that potentially emerge with the posthuman. Carbonell mentions specifically how the *Hulk* and *X-Men* franchises, for instance, explore the internal struggles the posthuman individual has to confront as a result of their superhuman powers and the social tension, discrimination, and inequality that may arise between the enhanced and the un-enhanced groups (157).

they also explore different aspects and concepts about our fears and fantasies towards the posthuman: for instance, cyborgs and avatars often explore the threat of the posthuman towards the dignity of the human self and the integrity of the human body, while androids and artificial intelligence as emergent technological others challenge the category of the human in a different way, making us question the notion of human exceptionalism and the criteria by which personhood has traditionally been assigned to entities. In the following discussion, as I examine how these posthuman beings have been and continue to be represented in science fiction film and literature, I will focus on concepts and issues most central for my analysis of *Black Mirror* episodes “The Entire History of You”, “Be Right Back”, “White Christmas”, “San Junipero”, and “Black Museum”. Due to the limited scope of my analysis, I will not then provide an all-encompassing history of the portrayal of these four posthuman figures, but nevertheless a close examination of the different ways the posthuman beings have been employed in science fiction works to discuss both our fears and fantasies towards our technological reality and the speculated posthuman future.

I will begin my discussion by first examining the figures of the cyborg and the avatar and how they have been portrayed as both agents of corruption and as sources of empowerment. Then I will move on to discuss the portrayals of the android and artificial intelligence and how they explore the relationship between the human and the posthuman other and discuss the topic of non-human personhood.

The cyborg

While exploring the roots of our anxiety towards the posthuman, Dinello claims the “deadly alliance of military, corporate, and religious interests” that funds technological developments “without regard to ethical or human consequences” as a historical source for our apprehension towards posthuman technologies such as robotics, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology aimed at body modification (4-6). Similarly, discussing the development of today’s technological reality,

Gere mentions the Second World War as the “catalytic event” for the development of modern digital technologies and the Cold War as the context in which the computer, cybernetics, artificial intelligence, and, eventually, the Internet gained their current forms (18). As the need to solve enemy secret codes and to guide missiles and anti-aircraft weaponry and, ultimately, the construction of the atomic bomb encouraged the development of computing and information technology, technologies that rose from such military objectives came to be linked with weapons and godlike power with the capacity to annihilate the whole humankind (Dinello 87). Despite some scientists fantasising about the possibilities the new technologies could offer for the humankind, posthuman technologies came to embody the general public’s fear towards war and weaponry through their link to military and arms race. This was, in turn, reflected in the way the technologies have been portrayed in science fiction: killer robots, inhumane warrior cyborgs, and human-hating artificial computer intelligences have featured heavily in science fiction narratives for decades.

While robotics, artificial intelligence, the Internet, and technological body modification resulting in cyborgism thus share a common origin in the context of war, these figures and concepts have been employed in science fiction narratives to explore other socio-cultural concerns, too. I will now specifically discuss the way the cyborg has been portrayed, on the one hand, as an agent of corruption, causing the loss of one’s humanity and subsequently the end of the human, and, on the other, as a source of empowerment and liberation from restrictive and repressive cultural norms.

Although the concept of a human-machine hybrid had existed for a long time—as illustrated, for instance, by Jean de La Hire’s early cyborg superhero the Nyctalope created in 1911—the term “cyborg” was coined during in the 1960s by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline to describe the kind of a condition needed for space travel: a hybrid state of the cybernetic and the organic, a cybernetic organism (Dinello 117-18). As the cyborg then involves a physical merging of the human with the machine, for instance, through the use of prostheses and implants or the hosting

of the organic human brain in a wholly mechanical robot vessel, the figure effectively embodies both our fears and fantasies that arise through our fusion with technology.

Being a fusion of organic human biology and non-human technology, the cyborg is a figure of body corruption in which the fear of losing what makes us human is embodied. Rhys Owain Thomas explains the threat of the cyborg through its corruption of the “holistic human identity”: when technology, the non-human, infiltrates the human, it threatens the traditionally perceived harmonious duality between body and mind that has been understood to constitute the human subject (57-59). Although it is a techno-utopian transhumanist fantasy to improve both the physical and the mental capacities of human individuals through the use of technological prostheses and implants, in science fiction this cyborgisation has traditionally been portrayed as a dehumanising process. Reminiscent of the bioconservative argument against technological modification of the human endorsed by critics such as Kass and Fukuyama, techno-phobic cyborg narratives depict how non-human technology invades the human body, corrupts the human mind, and finally causes the human individual to lose their sense of self, their human identity: as Thomas states, cyborg narratives often have the fear of losing one’s humanity at their centre (58). For instance, *Black Mirror* episode “Black Museum” depicts how a doctor equipped with a neural implant that allows him to sense his patients’ pain becomes addicted to the pain and fear of death his patients experience, causing him to lose his mind and turn into a monstrous and murderous cyborg as he chases the sensations of death and dying. In contrast, in C.L. Moore’s “No Woman Born” (1944), the beautiful entertainer Deirdre is saved by cyborg alterations to her body after a devastating fire nearly kills her: specifically, she has her brain hosted in a fully mechanical robot vessel. While Deirdre remains sure of her identity and humanity, she ultimately loses her humanity in the eyes of unaltered humans, who perceive her as uncanny and come to treat her as non-human, or other.

The cyborg’s corruption does not present a threat to the altered individual alone: as one loses their humanity through cyborgisation, the cyborg comes to threaten the society and whole

humankind. Bernard Wolfe envisions in his 1952 novel *Limbo* a society where men have begun to amputate their limbs in a disturbing move towards pacifism—only to adopt superior machinic prostheses later and to bring the world back on the brink of war for the control of the precious materials used for the cyborg limbs. The *Black Mirror* episode “The Entire History of You” also touches on the corruption that cyborg technology can impact not only on the altered individuals, but also on the society around them: in a less apocalyptic approach toward the corrupted cyborg than that of *Limbo*, the episode depicts social rifts and inequality among technologically altered and unaltered humans and explores in depth what happens to interpersonal relationships, human connection, and the human community as cyborg individuals lose their sense of self and begin to dehumanise others.

Historically the cyborg has then been represented as an unnatural other, embodying social, political, and cultural concerns of the time (Thomas 57-58). Dinello illustrates the various techno-anxieties discussed through the cyborg, from the aforementioned dangerous weaponised cyborgs and the dehumanising body modification mania to the portrayals of the cyborg both as a superhero-like patriotic soldier and as a servant of “fascistic technological systems” (Dinello 134). However, another portrayal of the cyborg reverses the discussion of its corruptive and dangerous aspects and, in contrast, constructs it as figure of empowerment: Haraway’s idea of the cyborg as a construction of the self that challenges repressive and restrictive dichotomies and boundaries structuring the Western humanist subject has been reflected in science fiction narratives that go beyond the transhumanist and bioconservative visions and, instead, explore the empowering aspects of the posthuman condition.

While Haraway’s cyborg does not require one to be a literal fusion of the organic and the machinic, as mentioned in the previous subchapter, in science fiction its imagery has been applied to these half human, half machine beings to explore the other side of our merging with technology: if previously the fusion with the machine had resulted in the corruption of human body and mind

and the loss of human identity, thus dehumanising the human individual and turning them into a monstrous posthuman, the involvement of Haraway's cyborg imagery presents us with an opportunity for empowerment through the fusion with the machine. As Lavigne writes in her extensive work on feminist science fiction, the cyborg fails to fit set cultural categories and oppositions such as human/machine due to its hybrid nature: this imagery of hybridity and fluidity works as the key that is then used to break down cultural dichotomies, such as male/female, and to reveal their "arbitrary nature" (82). Dinello similarly discusses this more utopian portrayal of the cyborg as liberation from the earlier visions of the militarised and weaponised cyborg fitted with hyper-masculine ideals, saying that Haraway's cyborg "promotes the metaphor of human/technological symbiosis as a progressive alternative, rather than as a masculine fantasy of domination." (139) Examples of the empowering cyborg inspired by Haraway's imagery can be found especially in feminist science fiction narratives. For example, Marge Piercy's 1991 novel *Body of Glass*—published in the US as *He, She and It*—explores themes of gender and sexuality by depicting both heterosexual and queer relationships between humans and cyborgs, contrasting human masculinity with "cyborg masculinity" (Wolmark 132) and comparing portrayals of male and female cyborgs.

Thomas argues that the negative portrayal of the cyborg in science fiction is changing due to "proliferation of real-world cyborgism" which is making the othering of technology a "ludicrous concept" (63-64). However, there is still a lingering fear of losing what distinguishes the human from the machine—what establishes us as unique and superior in relation to the other—and, as Carbonell states, science fiction film is conservative in its portrayal of new technological subjectivities (156). While we might have slowly come to accept our own posthuman cyborg selves and therefore the figure of the cyborg is no longer an effective tool for social criticism, the role of embodying social, political, and cultural concerns has been appropriated by other posthuman

figures such as artificial intelligence and virtual avatars (Thomas 63-64). The threat to the status of the human and human identity continues to be explored through these other posthuman figures.

The avatar, the virtual, and cyberspace

Dinello discusses the figure of the avatar in relation to the concept of cyberspace: in his view, human individual becomes a virtual cyborg in cyberspace—the virtual realm within computer networks that includes the Internet, virtual reality, and computer games, for instance—as they are converted by the computer into a “virtual person” living in the digital domain (147). Strayer similarly defines avatars as “technologically formed surrogate personas” characterised by their existence in the virtual realm, although she acknowledges that in contemporary science fiction avatars have also become corporeal, for instance in James Cameron’s film *Avatar* (2009) in which human individuals inhabit laboratory grown organic artificial bodies to explore an alien planet and to infiltrate its society (194).

At times the virtual realm appears in science fiction works as a nearly unproblematic fantasy playground, promising the human individual a technological adventure or a medium for escapism free from real world consequences. For instance, “San Junipero” presents a utopian vision of cyberspace by portraying the virtual realm as a techno-heaven for the elderly who can choose to become immortal by having their consciousness permanently uploaded to a server. The 1982 classic film *Tron* and its 2010 sequel *Tron: Legacy* feature the virtual realm as a place for adventure, as does Ernest Cline’s novel *Ready Player One* (2011) and its 2018 film adaptation. However, many other depictions of the virtual focus on its corruptive capabilities.

As a proposed vision of the posthuman self, representing a wholly virtual, non-corporeal version of the human individual, the avatar explores boundaries of the human and the possibilities offered by technology similarly to the cyborg. While the cyborg challenges the boundaries of the human by teasing the organic/machine dichotomy and introducing a physical fusion of human

biology and technology, the avatar in turn questions the dichotomies of real/artificial and material/immaterial by having the human individual enter the virtual realm and inhabit a wholly immaterial surrogate self in an act that “erases the imagined boundary between the material world and the digital realms” (Strayer 194-95). Through this blatant abandonment of the material body and the non-virtual real world the avatar can then raise concerns about the rejection of the body and the subsequent corruption of both human identity and sense of reality: as one becomes addicted to the “hallucinatory fantasy” of the virtual and rejects their own reality, their identity and sense of reality become easily manipulated and destroyed (Dinello 154-55). *The Matrix* (1999) and its sequels *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003) depict the world under the control of a malicious artificial intelligence that has trapped humans in a simulated reality: humans live in a mass hallucination as they believe the virtual to be the real, while in truth their bodies are being kept in pods and harvested for their energy by the artificial intelligence. Furthermore, in a stark contrast to the aforementioned “San Junipero”, the *Black Mirror* episode “Black Museum” features corporeal avatars in a dark take on the process of extracting and re-hosting virtual human consciousness. The episode features how extracted human consciousness are trapped in hologram prisons or hosted in inanimate objects, both of which undermine the posthuman individual’s autonomy and agency and ultimately result in their dehumanisation.

Despite the idea of corporeal avatars, the virtual surrogate personas are closely connected to the concept of cyberspace—or, the virtual realm of the Internet and simulated reality, as defined above. Dinello illustrates how the cyberspace was initially envisioned by techno-utopian scientists as a cyber-utopia where the human could “escape their mortal coils” and gain “omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence” through the virtual self (148-49). Yet, the military origins of the technology haunt its representation in science fiction works, which has resulted in portrayals of the virtual as a form of social control. Themes of social control in relation to the virtual and cyberspace are explored especially within the cyberpunk movement which arose in the 1980s and is epitomised

by William Gibson's seminal 1984 novel *Neuromancer* and its sequels *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988). In *Neuromancer*, Gibson presents the cyberspace as a "consensual hallucination" and as "a realm of exhilaration, excitement, and freedom" where skilled hackers escape the dystopian reality (Dinello 158). The virtual provides escape and empowerment for the human individual: however, at the cost of human connection and devaluation of the human, the "real", as addiction to the virtual, the artificial, causes the hackers to reject the body, personal relationships, and emotional involvement (Dinello 158-61).

Like with human-machine hybrids, Haraway's cyborg imagery has been adopted by science fiction authors to create another portrayal of cyberspace and the virtual self that questions the techno-anxieties linked to its earlier representations. Jenny Wolmark discusses representations of the virtual in feminist science fiction and compares them to the more male-dominated cyberpunk genre, stating that the posthuman's possibilities for empowerment ". . . are never realised, as [*sic*] least not in cyberpunk narratives, because the social and temporal experience of cyberspace is centrally concerned with individual transcendence rather than transformation, with escape from social reality rather than engagement with it." (118) Lavigne analyses specifically feminist cyberpunk narratives and the way in which they have portrayed the virtual as a space of liberation and empowerment for marginalised human groups, including, for instance, women and the LGBTQ: the virtual ". . . becomes a zone of possibility in which a multitude of genders *and sexualities* may be explored." (147) Cyberspace and the avatar then have a special appeal for disenfranchised groups: discussing the empowering aspects of the virtual specifically in relation to Melissa Scott's feminist cyberpunk novel *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994), Lavigne states that the virtual offers "escape from prejudice and political disempowerment" and "an environment wherein members of these groups can gain power of their own." (155-56) *Black Mirror* episode "San Junipero" similarly depicts the virtual as a zone of liberation for one of its queer protagonists.

While the virtual can be applauded for its potential for empowerment, it should be simultaneously cautiously scrutinised for its escapist abandonment of the body. As discussed above, the avatar's abandonment of the material body raises fears about loss of sense of self and reality: in feminist readings of science fiction, however, the abandonment of the corporeal also involves concerns about how disembodiment erases gender and cultural differences and “[forces] everyone into the same masculine niche by erasing everything that defines them as ‘other’.” (Lavigne 62-63) Relating this critique of disembodiment to Vint's notion about the need to enlarge the range of bodies and subjects that matter to be socially responsible, I will later explore how “San Junipero”—despite its portrayal of the virtual as a zone of empowerment—ignores body-based discrimination towards the disabled.

The android and the topic of non-human personhood

In contrast to the cyborg that emerges as a hybrid of the organic and the machinic, androids—or, robots that resemble humans in appearance—are defined by Dinello as either wholly organic or wholly mechanical artificial humanoids (6). In science fiction they have been treated as symbols of the technological threat and used to embody worries and hopes of their time similarly to the cyborg. Kevin LaGrandeur highlights how throughout the past century the android has represented the dangers of industrialisation and mechanisation, the threat of a global nuclear war, and, more and more frequently, the “threat of irresponsible oversight over scientific advances” (115-17).

Symbolising the threat of technology and the “hubristic oversight” (La Grandeur 117) of humans, human creations, including androids and artificial intelligence, are frequently portrayed as “malevolent” and “out of control” (Dinello 89). The malicious android is echoed in narratives where the humanoid robots rebel and turn antihuman, either due to bad programming on part of the irresponsible human creator as happens in *Alien* (1979), for example, or due to the robot eventually gaining sentience and demanding freedom, leading frequently to humans being replaced by their

own creation. Portrayals of rebellious androids turning against their oppressive creators can be seen for example in *Westworld* (1973) and its 2016 TV series adaptation of the same name. *Blade Runner* (1982), based on Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), similarly features discriminated android slaves who rebel against their oppressors in an attempt to gain freedom and to be treated with dignity.

In addition to the threat of humanity's technological advancements becoming their own undoing, LaGrandeur recognises two common themes repeated in science fiction in relation to humanoid robots: the issues of human exceptionalism and exploitation of new intelligent species and the question of personhood (111). The possibility to create a new intelligent species presents a techno-utopian fantasy in which the new intelligent being is created specifically to be exploited by humans and programmed to enjoy their servitude (Dinello 63). Portrayals of androids as kind and willing slaves are heavily influenced by Isaac Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, established first in full in his 1942 short story "Runaround":

"We have: One, a robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm."

...

"Two," continued Powell, "a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law."

...

"And three, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws." (Asimov 269-70)

In "Runaround", Asimov depicts how the Three Laws define the whole existence and functioning of the robot. The short story also portrays how these fundamental laws can clash and cause confusion for the being in question: having been given an order to retrieve materials in a dangerous environment, but simultaneously needing to protect its own existence, Speedy the robot is confused by their own programming and reduced to running around aimlessly. Finally, however, the First Law prevails above the other two: as a willing servant, the robot is programmed to value human life

over their own existence, and so, once their human master deliberately sets himself in danger, Speedy finally wakes up from his stupor.

Asimov's Laws restrict the actions of the mechanical beings and present them as "controllable, non-malevolent minion[s] of man" (Dinello 65). In so doing, the posthuman other can also be portrayed as more caring, more sensitive, and more human(e) than their human master, and so we are essentially led to sympathise with the oppressed machine beings (Dinello 74). Science fiction works that portray mistreated, sympathetic androids include, for instance, the 2001 film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, based on Brian Aldiss' short story "Supertoys Last All Summer Long" (1969): the film features a child android named David who is capable of love, but ultimately becomes abandoned by his human parents. The servant-master, machine-administrator relationship between humans and humanoid robots is explored also in the *Black Mirror* episode "Be Right Back" which portrays the lacking humanness of the android other as a hindrance to the development of a fully equal and respectful relationship between the two.

The existential status of technological non-human beings is discussed in science fiction narratives in which the new intelligent species transition to sentience. A new set of issues and questions emerges in these stories, most importantly the debate on how we are to define and to decide who has the right to personhood (LaGrandeur 111). Elana Gomel discusses the topic of posthuman personhood and states that the boundaries of the ethical community no longer coincide with the boundaries of humanity in the posthuman era. Ethical status and human rights have previously been awarded to human beings only on the basis of our human nature—on the basis of a shared "human essence", for instance, as discussed in relation to bioconservatism and Fukuyama's views on technological modification of the human in the previous subchapter. However, in the posthuman era, this anthropocentrism must come to an end: we must revise "the fundamental criteria by which ethical status is ascribed to an entity" (Gomel 340).

The debate on personhood begins when a feature that has traditionally been understood to mark one as a person and that has been regarded as specifically human—for example, sentience, capability for emotions and empathy, or anything else that has been posited as the “essence of humanity”—is found in the non-human technological other. Valeria Franceschi discusses technological non-human agents as liminal beings, “almost indistinguishable from humans”, and elaborates on how the collapsing boundaries between man and machine challenge the traditional concept of a person (225). According to Franceschi, there is no universally accepted definition of a person as “philosophers have struggled for centuries to identify the essential qualities that define personhood” (228). Nonetheless, there is an assumed convergence between the concepts of person and human, although many historically used categorisations—whether enforcing the linkage between concepts of consciousness, self-awareness, and person, or positioning something else as the basis of personhood—have both labeled certain human groups outside personhood and ignored non-human species that fit their definitions of a person (Franceschi 228-30). The emergence of sentient and self-aware non-human technological beings then challenges these already problematic categorisations by further proving that qualities that have been used to label persons are not exclusive to the human race, and so questions about non-human personhood become valid (Franceschi 230).

Science fiction narratives frequently feature artificial entities with agency and autonomy, feelings and emotions, cognitive complexity and consciousness, and constructed individual identities that “exceed their in-built programming”—all features that Franceschi and Steven S. Kapica note as having been historically used to define personhood (Franceschi 245-46; Kapica 616). While portrayals of self-aware androids, like Ava in *Ex Machina* (2015), challenge the notion of human exceptionalism, science fiction narratives can differ in their ultimate resolutions to the issue. Science fiction works then also explore the human capability and willingness to recognise non-human personhood through depictions of companionship and acceptance, or those of continued

oppression and subjugation as techno-anxieties about losing our own status as unique, superior, and in charge arise. Social tensions between humans and sentient and self-aware androids demanding to be recognised as their equals are explored, for instance, in *Battlestar Galactica* (2003-2009), its prequel *Caprica* (2009-2010), and the Swedish TV series *Real Humans* (2012) and its British adaptation *Humans* (2015). Meanwhile, the *Black Mirror* episode “White Christmas” explores similar themes of non-human personhood and exploitation of the sentient other in relation to artificial intelligence.

As Dinello states, “[a]rtificial humans make us uncomfortable to the extent that they show the potential to replace, dominate, or hurt us.” (74) The portrayal of the android in science fiction has developed similarly to that of the cyborg from a wholly negative vision towards a more sympathetic and complex representation: the android has transformed from a malicious antihuman warrior to a kind and willing servant, to an oppressed victim, and now to an autonomous sentient being that demands respect and equal rights. LaGrandeur argues that just as the malicious android used to embody the threat of modernisation, industrialisation, and modern weaponry, the android of the present embodies the posthuman era anxieties over our own human identity (119). As the speculated emerging posthuman others, the android included, make us re-consider by which criteria to assign rights to personhood, we are forced to abandon ideas about human uniqueness and superiority and turn towards the posthuman condition.

Artificial intelligence

In the same way as the cyborg, the avatar, and the android explore various types of anxieties and wonder about the posthuman, artificial intelligence is similarly portrayed in science fiction in both techno-utopian fantasies and techno-phobic nightmares. Simultaneously to its development as a tool of the military, the initial “cyber-hype” around the development of artificial intelligence resulted in fantasies of anti-body transcendence of the human as it was imagined as a tool to simulate the

human mind (Dinello 87-89). Science fiction narratives around the idea of human transcendence and the abandonment of the body through artificial intelligence have resulted in both transhumanist escapist visions of virtual afterlife, explored, for instance, in the *Black Mirror* episode “San Junipero”, and in bioconservative visions of total corruption of the human individual, as happens, for example, in the film *Transcendence*.

The development of computers and artificial intelligence, however, involves more than yet another way to enhance or corrupt the human individual: while simulating the workings of the human mind, the development of artificial intelligence has resulted in visions of computer programmes and machines that could think, learn, and create like humans. Science fiction narratives that deal with artificial intelligence thus frequently feature technological non-human agents such as self-aware computer programs or androids equipped with artificial intelligence and explore their relationship with their human creators.

The portrayal of computer sentiences in science fiction shares a lot with android narratives: works within the genre frequently portray relationships of servitude where the intelligent programme is depicted as a simple tool used by humans, but also stories where artificial intelligence turns against its creator after evolving far beyond human intelligence and capabilities. Jeff Menne and Jay Clayton discuss visions of artificial intelligence in which the artificial surpasses human intelligence as the computer sentience evolves into a linked super-organism that is not limited in the ways the human is: rather than staying isolated and individual like the human mind, the computer sentience joins a collective intelligence (130). These artificially intelligent super-organisms are often portrayed as dangerous hive minds similarly to the Borg in the *Star Trek* franchise, for example: such visions portray a threat to the assumed superiority of the rational human subject. Furthermore, similarly to the portrayals of rebellious androids, depictions of artificial intelligence frequently explore the anxiety of our own creation escaping control and ending the human dominion. Roden discusses this in relation to Vernon Vinge’s concept of technological singularity,

in which the singularity marks a point in future where machines “wake up” and escape human control and, in evolving beyond human intelligence, end the human dominion and begin an era ruled by intelligence greater than that of the human (“Post-Singularity”, 89). While the singularity presents itself as an unpredictable yet exciting possibility for many transhumanists who see it as offering us chances for even greater technological advancements, in science fiction the idea of singularity has translated into mostly techno-phobic narratives that depict, for instance, artificial intelligence takeovers: the aforementioned *The Matrix* franchise and Harlan Ellison’s short story “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream” (1967) feature horrifying visions of such future. *The Terminator* (1984) and its sequels similarly portray a dystopian posthuman future where a malicious self-aware artificial intelligence Skynet causes the end of the humankind: however, the film series also depicts how an initially antagonistic time-travelling android, the eponymous hero Terminator, turns into a protector of humans and collaborates with them to prevent the artificial intelligence takeover.

The debate about non-human personhood can be applied to computer sentiences, too. However, unlike androids who have humanoid bodies—albeit artificial, and sometimes uncomfortably reminiscent of machines—artificial intelligences are not always hosted in humanoid vessels, which can add another level of complexity to human capability and willingness to recognise the personhood of the other. The reluctance to acknowledge the personhood of a disembodied posthuman other is exemplified in “White Christmas”, in which a sentient and self-aware artificial intelligence is denied the right to personhood by her status of being artificial and immaterial, without a body, and made fully of code.

The human-posthuman relationship: a summary

As the discussion above demonstrates, visions of both our posthuman selves and posthuman others have been explored in science fiction literature and film. The relationship we have toward our own

posthumanity is explored through cyborgs and avatars, for instance, as these figures merge the human with the machine and either adopt technology as part of the human body, or leave the body and the material world completely behind by making the human step into the virtual realm inside computers and inhabit a non-corporeal virtual replica of the self. Cyborg and avatar narratives can feature fearful visions of body corruption and loss of human identity—loss of self—through such fusion with technology. However, they can also portray more empowering visions of the posthuman through the adoption of Haraway's cyborg imagery that lets us challenge traditional assumptions and cultural dichotomies structuring and restricting the self.

The relationship between humans and technological non-human agents—between the human and the non-human, the self and the other—is explored through interaction with androids and artificial intelligence. As the observations above demonstrate, and as is noted by David Meeler and Eric Hill, science fiction films often depict relationships marked by domination and expressions of power, only occasionally portraying social contexts of tolerance and acceptance (279). Either the human becomes overpowered and replaced by their own out-of-control creation that surpasses them in strength and intelligence, signalling the end of the human, or humans come to subjugate the intelligent other as a servant or a slave. Nevertheless, perhaps most interesting and relevant for the posthuman era are the narratives that portray posthuman others as sympathetic and more human(e) than the human, explore the existential status of the non-human other, and discuss the non-human right to personhood. The exploration of these topics begun already with Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and they continue to be discussed through androids and other technological non-human agents of the future. No matter on what criteria ethical status and personhood has historically been based—consciousness and self-awareness, or capacity for emotions and empathy, for instance—science fiction narratives that depict robots and computer sentiences that fulfil this criteria raise a compelling argument for the re-consideration of our criteria by which personhood is ascribed,

besides urging us to re-consider and abandon the notion of human exceptionalism already being challenged in critical posthumanism.

Full normalisation of the human-posthuman relationship in science fiction is still rare, and the power structures repeated in science fiction works continue to separate “us” from “them” (Meeler and Hill 279). Meeler and Hill argue that to normalise this relationship a sense of coexistence or community with the posthuman other is needed, and that to end the demonisation of the other we need to “incorporate difference into our social identity” (283). This approach towards human-posthuman relationships resembles Vint’s vision of ethical posthumanism and its urgency to “acknowledge difference without hierarchy” (Vint 182)—and so, for us to achieve a socially responsible and ethical relationship with the posthuman other, a thorough revision of the human subject and its relations to the non-human, the other, is needed.

3. Rejecting or Embracing the Posthuman Self

I will now turn to analyse the portrayal of the posthuman and the human-posthuman relationship in *Black Mirror*. As I conduct my discussion by using the theoretical framework established in the previous chapter, my analysis will specifically concern the representation of different posthuman beings—namely, cyborgs, avatars, androids, and artificial intelligence—and how our anxiety and wonder towards the posthuman are discussed through these figures.

The analysis is divided into two main chapters that focus on the representation of the posthuman self and that of the posthuman other respectively. In this chapter, I begin my analysis with the topic of technologically altered humans and the figures of the cyborg and the avatar as I discuss the different visions of our own posthumanity presented in the *Black Mirror* episodes “The Entire History of You”, “San Junipero”, and “Black Museum”. My aim in the following three subchapters is to analyse how the cyborg in “The Entire History of You” and the avatar and virtual selves in “San Junipero” and “Black Museum” explore both techno-utopian transhumanist fantasies about human enhancement and more techno-phobic bioconservative nightmares about body corruption and the end of the human.

3.1. “This Isn’t Me”: The Corrupted Cyborg Self

While Thomas observes that contemporary science fiction narratives have shifted away from utilising the cyborg as a tool for social, political, and cultural commentary due to the increase in “real-world cyborgism” (63), *Black Mirror* features the figure in abundance in techno-phobic narratives where cyborg technology is presented as a source of corruption. A case in point, “The Entire History of You” explores the extent of the cyborg’s corruptive influence and depicts cyborgisation to be harmful not only for the modified human individual, but also for interpersonal relationships and the human community as a whole. The episode depicts how cyborg technology afflicts its corruption on the human body and mind, leading to a gradual loss of one’s humanity and

causing mental and emotional damage that can be healed only through de-cyborgisation—through a rejection of the cyborg self.

As mentioned, “The Entire History of You” also features the larger scale effects cyborgisation has on the society: specifically, it portrays how social tensions arise between cyborg and non-cyborg citizens, as individuals who opt out of cyborgisation are deemed suspicious and come to be treated as second-class citizens. Nevertheless, while the episode briefly explores these themes of social inequality, the narrative ultimately focuses on the destructive impact cyborg technology has on the modified individuals and relationships between them: as relationships and interactions between people become mediated through the use of corruptive cyborg technology, the cyborg is depicted as causing human alienation and loss of human connection.

In this subchapter, my analysis of the cyborg’s corruptive influence in “The Entire History of You” will concern each of the three levels mentioned above—the individual, the interpersonal, and the societal. The discussion of the cyborg’s impact on the modified human individual will focus on the episode’s protagonist Liam, a man who loses his sense of self during the course of the episode due to the corruption his cyborg implant impacts on his mind. As I consider the larger scale effects of the corruptive cyborg on interpersonal relationships and society as a whole, I will also observe the portrayal of other cyborg characters introduced in the episode. My analysis will also target the only non-cyborg character introduced in the narrative, Hallam, as I compare her experience of opting out of cyborgisation to Liam’s struggle with the cyborg’s corruption and his final rejection of the cyborg.

“The Entire History of You” introduces cyborgisation in the form of an implant called the grain that allows its user to constantly record what they see and hear and to turn this continuous feed into a timeline of recorded memories. Once thus recorded, memories can be retained in a perfect condition for the rest of one’s life and remembered whenever through a “re-do”, a replay of the recorded event. Forgetting unpleasant events and mistakes is also made easy, since deleting

recordings is possible. The grain is essentially introduced as a fantasy for the individual, and, as it allows one to be in full control of their memory, it represents a step in the transhumanist attempt at perfecting the human and overcoming human limitations through technological enhancement.

In the not too distant future portrayed in the episode, human modification has become the standard as nearly everybody, from babies to the elderly, has a grain implanted behind their ear. The episode portrays how the society functions around this ubiquitous cyborgism, and the grain is portrayed to have solved problems at a large scale, since it offers advantages for the society as a whole. For instance, the episode depicts how airport security scans travelers' grain timelines and how the police can order citizens to play their grain feed, thus facilitating surveillance and public safety. On the other hand, the very same elements of the grain indicate darker aspects about the society and the cyborg individual. What is advertised and sold as a fantasy—who would not want to enhance their memory and potentially eradicate memory disorders for good?—turns into a form of control. The invasive surveillance and control over citizens to the level that authorities can demand access to people's memories, even denying help to those who do not provide access to their grain feed, is defended as the grain has come to symbolise trust and safety. Individuals appear suspicious if they have gaps in their timeline where recordings have been erased, or if they do not share their memories with others—or, if they simply do not have a grain. Unaltered non-cyborg citizens are portrayed to face prejudice, because cyborgism has become the standard and people have come to trust technology over the human. As one of the enhanced cyborg characters states: “You know half the organic memories you have are junk. Just not trustworthy.”

Nevertheless, features that suggest a dystopian posthuman future where cyborgs have no privacy as surveillance and control permeate their mind go largely unexplored in the episode. While “The Entire History of You” does not completely ignore the cyborg's corruptive influence on the society as a whole—its brief exploration of the social tensions that arise between the altered and unaltered groups will be discussed below in more detail—the narrative emphasises the grain's impact

on the cyborg individual, interpersonal relationships, and human connection over the larger scale social context.

The episode follows Liam, a married lawyer. Throughout the episode, Liam can be seen doing re-dos, first worrying about a work appraisal as he keeps replaying the event in his head and compulsively analysing the details of the meeting. His obsession shifts, however, when he attends a dinner party with his wife, Ffion, and a group of her friends. During the dinner Liam starts to observe Ffion's interactions with another man, Jonas, who is later revealed to be her former partner. Liam replays their interactions in his head, analysing every detail from their facial expressions to small gestures and lingering looks, even enabling technical features of the grain that allow him to lip-read and eavesdrop on their conversation. Liam's actions eventually escalate further as he becomes more inebriated and more obsessed with his recordings of Ffion and Jonas and ultimately culminate in violence, which depicts how the grain gradually corrupts his sense of self and humanity. Next, I will analyse the cyborg's damage on Liam's mind in detail.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the cyborg has traditionally embodied the fears of body corruption and loss of one's humanity in techno-phobic science fiction narratives: through the fusion of the cybernetic and the organic, the non-human and the human, the pure and whole human individual is seen to be contaminated by the non-human technology. While certain portrayals of the cyborg celebrate its ability to break down repressive boundaries and cultural categories constructing and constricting the human subject, "The Entire History of You" follows a more techno-phobic portrayal of the cyborg and thus, by adopting a bioconservative view of human nature and the human subject, the episode depicts how the physical convergence of human biology and technology ultimately leads to the corruption of the human self.

In the episode, technology first invades the human body physically in the form of the grain, an implant planted behind an individual's ear. Then, as it enhances the individual's memory, the grain alters the human mind and provides the cyborg with unnatural, non-human powers—the re-

do. By thus breaching the boundaries between the human and the non-human, the organic and the machinic, and the natural and the unnatural, the cyborg disrupts what is traditionally understood to constitute the human as opposed to the non-human. As discussed in the previous chapter, Fukuyama, a prominent bioconservative critic who opposes technological modification of the human, warns that such convergence between the human and the machine will ultimately lead to the loss of one's humanity as it disrupts the unity of the "human whole"—the "Factor X" that he claims to constitute the essence of the human (171). Following this bioconservative view of human nature and the human subject, the cyborg technology introduced in the episode can be understood to corrupt the human not only through its physical infiltration and mental alteration of the human individual, but by harming the very essence that defines one as a human being.

The narrative of "The Entire History of You" depicts the cyborg's damage on Liam's mind and sense of self through its focus on his progressively obsessive and abusive behaviour. While Liam does not experience a total loss of humanity—he does not turn into a monstrous and murderous posthuman on a quest to annihilate the rest of the humankind—the episode explores the damage done to his mental and emotional health by focusing on how the posthuman state leads him to alienate others and disregard their rights, privacy, and security as the corruption damages his connection to others.

During his fight with Ffion, Liam acknowledges his insecurities and issues with jealousy that make him obsess about her past relationships: "I know I go a bit weird and wonky sometimes." The cyborg technology is not blamed in the narrative for causing these issues. The implant is, however, portrayed to damage Liam's mental and emotional well-being as the implant alters his mind and lends him unnatural non-human powers that he is unable to handle. By altering Liam's cognitive skills, the grain enables his obsessive behaviour to an unnatural degree as the possibility for re-do allows him to analyse his memories in a way that would be impossible for an unaltered human mind. Through his constant abuse of the replay feature, Liam feeds his insecurities and the

toxic emotions of jealousy and rage that arise through his subjective interpretations of Ffion and Jonas' interactions. At this point it is vital to note that while the grain allows the cyborgs to record events objectively as they happen, each cyborg's interpretation of any event remains highly subjective. That is to say, while the grain technology claims to perfect the human by enhancing their memory, it does not provide them with any greater abilities of rationalisation or empathy. The blind trust in technology over organic memories, over the human, is revealed to be based on flawed logic, since the enhanced, or "perfected", human remains flawed—and is, in truth, only damaged further by the grain.

Although the cyborg technology is thus first introduced as elevating the human through cognitive enhancement, the techno-phobic approach of the narrative eventually exposes the grain's corruptive nature. Consumed by the jealousy nursed by his obsessive use of the unnatural, non-human, and thus corruptive power of the re-do, Liam becomes verbally abusive, calling Ffion by derogatory names and accusing her of cheating. Ultimately the situation escalates into physical violence. Liam drunkenly confronts Jonas and threatens to cut out Jonas' grain unless Jonas shows him and then deletes his old recordings of Ffion: "Now delete it all, the lot. Or I will crack your skull and I will gouge your fucking neck." As Liam comes to his senses after sobering up, he watches the re-do of his fight with Jonas with shock evident on his face. However, Liam's shock is not due to him realising how far his behaviour has escalated, but due to the fact that at this moment he finds out that his suspicions about Ffion and Jonas having an affair were true. Liam's actions and lack of reaction towards his own violent behaviour illustrate how the grain's corruption has led not only to the corruption of the human self, but also to human alienation and loss of human connection.

In his final confrontation with Ffion, Liam blames his own abusive and violent actions on her: "This isn't me, look what you've done to me!" While Liam's statement can be interpreted as expressing hurt after being wronged by his partner, or as pure self-centredness, since Liam fails to

recognise his own faults and abusive actions, it also reflects his own recognition of being out of control and not fully himself. However, while Liam finally realises that something is amiss and that he is not in touch with his humanity and self anymore (“This isn’t me”), he still fails to recognise the grain as the source of his misery and resorts to blaming Ffion instead.

While Liam is not the only cyborg character to have been damaged by the grain, the narrative mainly focuses on his point of view and thus only his internal struggle with the posthuman and loss of sense of self is explored in depth. Meanwhile, the other cyborg characters introduced in the episode demonstrate the cyborg’s corruptive influence mainly through their treatment of others, both cyborgs and non-cyborg individuals alike. I will now turn to discuss the cyborg’s impact on interpersonal relationships in more detail.

The narrative’s focus on the erosion of Liam and Ffion’s marriage through the cyborg raises questions about the effects of cyborgisation on interpersonal relationships: if the cyborg damages our sense of self and our humanity, how does this damage reflect on our connection with other humans? As demonstrated above, “The Entire History of You” essentially depicts technology as a bad companion that corrupts the individual physically, mentally, and emotionally. While Liam’s sense of self erodes, so does his empathy and regard for other people’s well-being, which becomes apparent in the way he treats those around him. He becomes more abusive and more self-centred in his quest to find out the truth, as demonstrated by his eavesdropping on Ffion and Jonas, his threats and use of physical violence, and the way he forces others to play their private recordings to him. While the narrative does not portray technology as inherently antagonistic in the sense that it turns human individuals into monstrous posthumans, its disruption of a cyborg individual’s own humanity and connection with others casts the cyborg as undesirable and dangerous. Not only does the cyborg threaten the human individual, but also the humankind at a larger scale: even though the grain does not turn technologically altered individuals into mindless killers as techno-phobic cyborg

narratives frequently depict, it threatens to erode interpersonal relationships and, consequently, set the social connections on which human communities are built on in danger.

Discussing how modern technology affects our social life and interpersonal relationships, Danielle Knafo and Rocco Lo Bosco state that our technoculture “has taken a perverse turn” in which people are dehumanised, and, in turn, objects and technological devices are increasingly humanised (234). In Knafo and Lo Bosco’s discussion, the notion of dehumanisation essentially corresponds to a loss of connection to others: as modern technology fuels our narcissism, as Knafo and Lo Bosco argue, it simultaneously nurses our lack of care and empathy towards others, which, in turn, results in detachment and alienation from others. In “The Entire History of You”, interpersonal relationships become mediated through the ubiquitous grain. While I cannot claim that the cyborgs become narcissistic like Knafo and Lo Bosco argue—my analysis does not concern psychoanalysis and diagnosis of such personality traits and mental disorders—they do become more self-centred and less caring of others because of the grain.

Furthermore, cyborg technology is portrayed to affect human relationships directly as re-dos and re-do sharing become an essential part of human interaction—and even part of intimate life between partners. Instead of being present in their lives, the grain wielding corrupted cyborgs live through their re-dos, and, by prioritising their recordings of the past, the cyborgs cannot connect with people in the present. In addition to portraying how Liam obsesses over his re-dos and his own subjective interpretations instead of discussing his problems with Ffion, the episode portrays how the grain and the re-do shape face to face interaction. During the dinner party, re-dos are portrayed as playing a major part in social interactions as Ffion’s friends share their recordings, their memories, on big television screens for all to see and analyse. The re-do sharing is constant, and the cyborgs seek validation through replaying perfect memories for everybody to see. The cyborgs then live through re-dos both individually and together in group with others.

The constant presence of the grain technology in interactions between humans and the self-centred behaviour and disregard of others it facilitates lead not only to human alienation and loss of human connection, but also, to some extent, to the dehumanisation of others: instead of forming connections through non-mediated interactions, the grain wielding cyborgs use each other as tools for physical closeness while living through their personal memories. This effect of the grain on human interaction is, in fact, acknowledged by the characters themselves. During the dinner party, Jonas announces that, due to the grain, relationships are a sham, since many people watch and live through their re-dos of past relationships instead of connecting in present with their current partner, and a revealing scene depicts Liam and Ffion watching their own personal re-dos while having sex.

In *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*, Sherry Turkle discusses the different ways technology helps us to keep us connected. Examining social robots and mediated relationships with a special focus on online relationships, Turkle arrives eventually to a similar conclusion made in this analysis of the cyborg relationships in “The Entire History of You”: that is, technologically mediated relationships have distanced us from others, or caused a loss of human connection, as we have begun to ask more from technology and less from each other (Turkle 295).

As noted in the beginning of the subchapter, the narrative touches briefly on the inequality and social tensions that arise between altered and unaltered individuals. While the analysis above primarily focuses on relationships between cyborgs, unaltered citizens are also depicted as targets of dehumanisation and prejudice due to their opting out of cyborgisation. However, only one non-cyborg character is introduced in the narrative: Hallam, a woman whose grain has been removed against her will, provides a significant contrast to the technologically enhanced yet miserable and disconnected cyborgs.

After having been assaulted and had her implant ripped out, all of her recordings stolen with it, Hallam has decided to not get a new grain: “But the thing is after I was gouged I didn’t have one

for a few days and then just kind of liked it.” She has instead chosen to “go grainless”, a choice which shocks the other dinner party guests. The cyborgs respond with prejudice as they discuss her choice of rejecting the implant as a “political thing”, as a trend, and as an “interesting” or “brave” choice: “I believe it’s huge with hookers. I mean, no offence!” As stated above, since cyborgism has become the new standard and the grain has come to symbolise trust and safety, choosing organic memories over the enhancing implant is deemed suspicious, and thus unaltered non-cyborg citizens face mistreatment from cyborg citizens and authorities alike. Although Hallam now faces prejudice and discrimination—as exemplified by a scene in which she attempts to call the police for help after Liam violently attacks Jonas, only to be rejected after she reveals her non-cyborg status—she claims to be happy and comfortable without the grain: “I’m just happier now.” Hallam’s contentment without the enhancing effects of the grain and despite the treatment she faces contrast with the cyborg characters who seem to have changed for the worse by the implant. This forms a strong argument against technological modification of the human: while the enhanced, “perfected”, cyborgs are miserable and detached from the present and the people around them, the unaltered—or, uncontaminated—individuals are happy despite the injustices they face living in a cyborg society.

The final scene of “The Entire History of You” finds Liam alone after a short time-skip: Ffion has left him and moved out of their home with their child. Liam wanders around the house replaying happy memories that now appear painful as the truth has been revealed. He finally recognises the grain and the re-do as the sources of his misery, and so, in an attempt to purify his body and mind and to get rid of the corruptive technology, Liam cuts out his implant, thus mirroring Hallam’s traumatic yet liberating experience. The rejection of the posthuman is presented as a solution to the cyborg’s corruption. Even as Liam has no guarantees that he will ultimately be happier without the grain or able to forget about the pain Ffion’s betrayal has caused, only having Hallam’s anecdotal story to go by, and as he risks damaging his mind even further by violently

removing his implant, de-cyborgisation is presented as the preferable option to continued misery as a corrupted cyborg.

To summarise, the bioconservative approach of “The Entire History of You” casts cyborg technology as an invading other that threatens the human self: the posthuman cyborg state is portrayed to dehumanise the human individual as it ultimately damages the individual’s connection to their sense of self, their humanity. The narrative argues not only against technological modification of the human, but also criticises the impact modern technologies have on human interaction, relationships, and the human community as a whole. Due to these adverse effects, the cyborg is to be rejected, and the episode ultimately encourages us to embrace the imperfect yet whole human self over the enhanced yet miserable and damaged cyborg.

3.2. “Uploaded to the Cloud, Sounds Like Heaven”: The Enhanced and Empowered Avatar Self

As discussed in the previous chapter, the figure of the avatar—like the cyborg—has been employed not only in techno-phobic science fiction narratives that portray the virtual posthuman and cyberspace as addictive and corruptive, but also in narratives that explore the empowering and liberating aspects of the virtual realm. In contrast to the cautious approach towards our own posthumanity presented in “The Entire History of You”, “San Junipero” offers a more techno-utopian vision by presenting the posthuman self as a figure of hope and enhancement. While “The Entire History of You” explores the fear of loss of one’s humanity, “San Junipero” explores alternatively an optimistic vision of the virtual avatar self where the acceptance of the non-human as part of the self elevates and empowers the human subject.

In brief, the episode’s portrayal of the avatar and cyberspace features the transhumanist fantasies of overcoming human limitations through technological enhancement of the human and attaining immortality through the speculated process of mind uploading. Set in the not too distant future, the narrative features a virtual reality service offered to elderly people as a form of

immersive nostalgia therapy to alleviate their anxiety over death as they near the end of their lives. The service allows the elderly to immerse themselves in a world of memories as “tourists” in the virtual party town of San Junipero and to travel to an era of their choice as they remember it from their youth. The elderly appear as their younger selves in San Junipero: once again strong, healthy, and beautiful, they can relive the times they remember fondly in the cyberspace through their avatar. Then, as they eventually come closer to passing, the elderly can choose to “pass over” and become permanent residents of San Junipero by having their consciousness permanently uploaded to the cyberspace, thus attaining immortality in the virtual reality cyberheaven. As the virtual self and cyberspace thus essentially offer escape from illness, ageing, and human impermanence, the avatar is depicted as a figure of transhumanist hope that elevates the human subject through a transformation into an immortal posthuman.

In addition to echoing transhumanist visions of the enhanced posthuman, the narrative simultaneously touches on the potentially empowering aspects of the posthuman by evoking elements of Haraway’s liberating cyborg. Specifically, the episode features queer empowerment, as one of the two protagonists, a queer woman named Yorkie, finds acceptance and freedom from prejudice in the virtual realm of San Junipero through the avatar’s cyborg imagery.

While the narrative contains no techno-phobic twists where the enthusiastic acceptance of the avatar self dramatically corrupts the human—in fact, the episode contains one of the very few happy endings in the whole TV series—a deeper look into its portrayal of virtual afterlife reveals a lingering sense of techno-anxiety, as the permanently virtual state threatens to cut the posthuman individual’s connection with the human community. The episode also discusses anxiety over human alienation and loss of human connection through the second protagonist’s, Kelly’s, struggle to decide whether or not to pass over to the cyberspace heaven.

In this subchapter, my analysis will focus on how “San Junipero” portrays the avatar simultaneously as a transhumanist fantasy and as a figure of empowerment. I will also analyse how

the episode discusses the topic of virtual afterlife: techno-phobic anxiety arises as the virtual state threatens to cut our connection with the material world and the human community. My analysis will centre on the two protagonists, Kelly and Yorkie, whose experiences of the avatar and the virtual afterlife contrasts greatly.

The episode follows two women, Kelly and Yorkie, who meet in the virtual reality of San Junipero and eventually become lovers. Initially, the two experience the avatar and the offered chance for virtual afterlife differently. For Yorkie, the virtual world of San Junipero promises a chance at something she never had. As a queer woman living confined to her hospital bed after a car accident in her youth left her quadriplegic, Yorkie has suffered under the control of her religious, homophobic family for more than 40 years. Due to her paralysis and her family's legal authority, she is unable to express herself and simply live her life as she would like to: "As far as my family's concerned, I can't do anything. . . . Just the concept of me enjoying myself would blow their minds." Making the decision to eventually pass over and become a permanent resident of the San Junipero cyberheaven is easy for Yorkie as she finds hope and liberation from the constraints imposed on her in the non-virtual world through the virtual self. In contrast to Yorkie's enthusiastic acceptance of the virtual avatar self and the posthuman afterlife, Kelly experiences inner conflict as she faces the option to pass over permanently. She initially rejects the chance at immortality outright, stating that she is simply having fun with her avatar in the cyberspace party town before she finally passes naturally: "When I'm done, I am done." Kelly sees no meaning in virtual afterlife since her daughter and husband have both died years before without passing over to San Junipero, and so she is choosing natural death over immortality. However, having fallen in love with Yorkie, Kelly starts to contemplate the value of the virtual experience and, by the end of the episode, she comes to accept and embrace virtual afterlife. The virtual becomes meaningful when Kelly finds meaning in it through new her relationship and connection with Yorkie.

As discussed in 3.1., the figure of the cyborg deals with the fusion of the organic and the machinic and cyborg narratives often explore the impact of this convergence on human identity. Meanwhile, the figure of the avatar raises questions about the value of the virtual as compared to the non-virtual, or “real”, world by dismantling the boundaries between the material and the virtual. Furthermore, the avatar challenges traditional views about the human subject and human embodiment as the corporeal human form is abandoned for a virtual representation of the self constructed purely of code and information. Science fiction narratives about cyberspace and the avatar then frequently discuss the anxiety over losing one’s sense of self and reality as the human individual immerses themselves in the virtual realm and becomes alienated from both their corporeal form and the rest of humanity.

Nevertheless, the narrative of “San Junipero” does not focus on questions about the abandonment of the body and its potentially destructive impact on human identity, only referencing the conflict in passing. When Kelly discusses the San Junipero system with Yorkie’s nurse, Greg, it is mentioned that the elderly begin to dissociate body from mind as they become addicted to the cyberspace paradise. However, Kelly quips that the elderly dissociate whether there is virtual reality therapy available or not, and that the San Junipero system can, in fact, be helpful:

GREG. They say you go crazy if you have too much, you know? You don’t leave your seat. You dissociate body from mind.

KELLY. Like that doesn’t happen in every senior home already. The system is there for therapeutic reasons, immersive nostalgia therapy. Plunge you into a world of memories. Helps with Alzheimer’s, that’s what they say.

While thus addressing common cautious tropes about the avatar and cyberspace, the narrative nevertheless presents a techno-utopian vision that emphasises the avatar as a figure of transhumanist hope and expresses no extensive concern over the potential threat it presents to the human self. The potential threats of addiction and devaluation of the material world and the human are deflected as it is explained that the use of the San Junipero system is rationed to two hours a

week per person. Furthermore, as Greg explains to Kelly, “[the] state’s got a triple lockdown on euthanasia cases”: laws prevent people from passing over just because they prefer the virtual over the non-virtual world, thus protecting the priority of the human over the non-human despite the narrative’s portrayal of the posthuman state as acceptable and even desirable. The dismantling of the boundaries between the non-virtual and the virtual is welcomed, since accepting the virtual as a part of the self gives the human individual a chance at overcoming limitations by easing physical ailments and aiding with memory disorders, for instance, thus elevating the human into a superior posthuman. Essentially, the young, healthy, and beautiful virtual avatar is preferred over the old and sick corporeal human form. This wholly optimistic utopian portrayal of the avatar relates strongly to the virtual reality technology’s original purpose within the narrative. That is, the San Junipero system is introduced as a form of palliative medicine and as a form of therapy to ease anxiety over death, as pointed out by Sean F. Timpane and Julia McBee in their review of the episode (1045). As the narrative highlights the therapeutic aspects of the virtual realm, questions about the avatar’s potential threats to the human go largely unaddressed.

San Junipero is then a consensual hallucination that, unlike the virtual in *The Matrix* franchise or Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, does not intend to cover up a dystopian reality through social control; instead, the virtual offers the human individual a wholesome respite from sickness and pain. The escape to the digital cyberspace through the avatar is considered to be liberating as it gives the soon-to-be-passing human a chance to overcome their human limitations, relieving the individual of some of their pain and fear, and thus the temporary abandonment of the sickly corporeal form is not portrayed as a particularly problematic choice. Yet, the narrative does explore anxieties about the potential loss of human connection caused by the permanent move to the virtual realm: while the therapeutic use of the avatar is controlled and keeps the human individual connected to the material—or, “real”—human domain by promising a return to the corporeal form, the act of passing over and becoming an immortal virtual posthuman effectively cuts this

connection. These anxieties and specifically Kelly's experience of them will be discussed in detail below. First, however, I will examine how "San Junipero" explores the empowering aspects of the avatar and cyberspace.

Rather than enforcing the traditional boundaries that set the human apart from the non-human, the narrative encourages us to re-consider the boundaries of the human—however, not only in an attempt to achieve transhumanist goals of overcoming illness and preventing ageing. While "San Junipero" especially emphasises the transhumanist fantasy of perfecting the human through technological alteration, it also touches on the potentially liberating aspects of this boundary breaking activity.

As noted earlier, Haraway's cyborg does not require one to be a literal cyborg, a physical fusion of the organic and the cybernetic: rather, the cyborg's hybridity—not fully human, not fully machine—works as a metaphor by which we can re-consider the unnaturalness of the boundaries and cultural categories structuring the Western human subject and gain a new liberating understanding of the self. In science fiction narratives, the posthuman condition and its potential for empowerment are frequently explored through speculative posthuman beings such as the cyborg and the avatar and, like Lavigne notes, the virtual is often imagined as a space of empowerment, especially in feminist science fiction. In these narratives, the cyberspace is presented as "a zone of possibility" that offers disenfranchised groups, such as the LGBTQ, an environment free from prejudice where they can "gain power of their own" (Lavigne 147, 155-56). In "San Junipero", the empowering aspects of the posthuman are explored through Yorkie's character in particular: the virtual offers her freedom from the constraints the authority of her controlling homophobic family has imposed on her and she experiences sexual liberation.

After coming out to her family in her youth, Yorkie had a car accident that left her quadriplegic. She has spent over forty years in the hospital, and her condition and her family's legal authority have affected her life to a great degree. Her family's influence and the trauma from her

accident have left Yorkie unable to embrace her sexuality, since she has internalised some of her family's views. Through the San Junipero system and the avatar, however, Yorkie eventually finds a place where she can finally explore, express, and embrace her sexuality. During her very first visit in San Junipero, Yorkie meets Kelly, and the two women end up spending their rationed two hours together. Feeling embarrassed around the other more confident woman, Yorkie confesses that she has no experience in relationships, or life in general. Kelly nevertheless applauds her and accepts the other for being herself—inexperience, insecurities, and sexuality included: “You are authentically you.” When Kelly continues to flirt with her, Yorkie suddenly retreats as she feels uncomfortable thinking that people will disapprove of two women dancing and flirting, demonstrating how she has internalised her family's homophobic views.

However, as time passes, and as she faces no prejudice or homophobia from others in the virtual party town, Yorkie becomes more comfortable with herself and her sexuality. She seeks out Kelly, initiating contact, and eventually the two women establish a connection that leads to mutual feelings and to falling in love. Having found a space free from prejudice and judgement, Yorkie comes to find empowerment through the avatar and cyberspace. For Yorkie, the figure of the avatar works as the metaphorical cyborg: by its boundary-breaching nature, the virtual surrogate self does not fit into strict cultural categories and norms, and, similarly, Yorkie does not have to conform to norms and try to fit categories she has been expected to fit neatly into, particularly that of heterosexuality. Through the avatar and the virtual, Yorkie finally finds acceptance from others, but, more importantly, she also gains a new fluid and empowered understanding of her self.

While the narrative then portrays the virtual as a zone of liberation and the avatar as a figure of queer empowerment, it is also vital to recognise what implications the avatar's blatant abandonment of the physical body has for Yorkie's quadriplegia. Although the narrative features a protagonist with a serious medical condition, “San Junipero” does not discuss how the virtual could empower people with disabilities: quite the contrary, the narrative chooses to emphasise the avatar's

capabilities to overcome human limitations in a techno-utopian transhumanist manner. The avatar and the San Junipero system are depicted as liberating people from illness and other medical conditions: this portrayal has dangerous implications as disabilities and differently abled bodies are only seen as something to be fixed and as limitations to be overcome. Discussing cyberspace and the virtual, Lavigne mentions an alarming vision where disembodiment, or the abandonment of the body, ultimately erases gender, race, and cultural differences—everything that can define an individual as “other” (62-63). Abandonment of the corporeal human form could then force everyone to fall into one standard norm, into one body, and one form of being. Vint critiques transhumanism for the way its visions of overcoming physical limitations and transcending the body altogether ignore the fact that people continue to be discriminated against for their bodies: “The ability to construct the body as *passé* is a position available only to those privileged to think their (white, male, straight, non-working class) bodies as the norm.” (8) The body remains relevant, because people’s lives continue to be structured by body-based discrimination, people continue to either prosper or suffer in their material bodies, and as “the discourses that structure these material bodies continue to construct and constrain our possible selves” (Vint 8-9).⁶ While the episode does portray the virtual as a zone of possibility and the avatar as a figure of queer empowerment, it simultaneously chooses to ignore body-based discrimination towards the differently abled in favour of depicting the transcendence of the body as a utopian goal and as an empowering move—but only for certain subjects and bodies.

As stated, empowerment within the narrative mainly concerns Yorkie: while both women are queer, only Yorkie is portrayed as having faced explicit discrimination in the non-virtual world and finding liberation in the virtual realm. Meanwhile, Kelly struggles too—not with her sexuality, but with making the choice to pass over: she struggles to find meaning in the virtual afterlife since,

⁶ Vint links her discussion to Michael Foucault’s theory of biopower. However, the normative discourses that classify bodies as valid or invalid and decide which bodies matter can be resisted, and Vint sees the posthuman as a potential site for resistance (18-19).

in her understanding, the inevitable loss of connection with other humans after one passes over makes the afterlife meaningless.

I will now turn to examine the fearful vision that the virtual afterlife reveals itself to be meaningless as the newly immortal posthuman is permanently alienated from the material world—the human realm—and human community. Like in “The Entire History of You”, interpersonal relationships take the centre stage in the episode’s narrative; however, while “The Entire History of You” depicts how the posthuman causes the ruin of human connection and interpersonal relationships, in “San Junipero” the acceptance of the posthuman ultimately leads to an affirmation of human connection and a happy ending for the two protagonists.

The avatars used by the elderly “tourists” as they explore the virtual paradise of San Junipero keep the human individual still connected to their human self, since the tourists can return to their corporeal form at any time and as the use of the virtual reality technology is limited to two hours a week to prevent excessive dissociation and loss of sense of reality. Some of the tourists view the “locals”—that is, people who have died in the non-virtual world and passed over to San Junipero permanently—with certain caution that hints at anxiety towards the process of passing over: the immortal posthumans are either simply disregarded as “dead people”, or pitied as if they have become lost in the process of passing over. Thus, despite of the fantasy of immortality, the narrative expresses the lingering fear that something is lost during the transformation into a permanently virtual immortal posthuman: either the human individual loses their own humanity, or becomes lost as they lose connection with the non-virtual world, the human realm. While the avatar-using tourists can return to non-virtual reality, the permanently virtual locals have ultimately surpassed the human and exist only within the cyberheaven. Completely separated from the non-virtual world, except for their contact with the tourists visiting their cyberspace paradise, and with no way to return, the newly immortal posthumans are at danger of becoming disconnected and stranded in a meaningless eternity in cyberhell.

While Kelly acknowledges the usefulness of the system as a therapy tool during her chat with Yorkie's nurse, Greg, she also expresses skepticism towards the concept of virtual afterlife:

KELLY. "Scheduled to pass." Let's just call it dying.

GREG. If you can call it dying.

KELLY. Uploaded to the cloud, sounds like heaven.

Kelly is disillusioned due to her fears. Specifically, she fears having to spend an eternity somewhere without purpose after she loses connection with the human community and, in the process, loses her self: "You wanna spend forever somewhere nothing matters? . . . All those lost fucks at the Quagmire⁷ trying anything to feel something." Interpersonal relationships take the centre stage in the narrative as feelings and human connection constitute life as meaningful and real, as something worth existing for, in Kelly's understanding. It is revealed that Kelly's daughter and husband have both passed away years earlier without passing over to San Junipero. Kelly is filled with both guilt and anger: guilt, since her daughter never had the choice to even consider immortality as the San Junipero technology did not exist at the time of her death, and anger, as she feels betrayed by her husband's rejection of the virtual afterlife. Immortality holds no purpose for Kelly if the people she has had a human connection with, her loved ones, are not there to share it with her. By sticking to her plan of only having fun with the temporary avatar, not becoming attached to people, and eventually passing away naturally, Kelly is protecting herself from new heartache—a plan that backfires when she realises her own feelings for Yorkie.

The narrative presents no immortal posthuman point of view until Yorkie has passed over to San Junipero. However, contrary to the fears Kelly expresses throughout the episode, Yorkie seems not to lose her humanity, her feelings, nor her connection with Kelly after having her consciousness permanently uploaded to the cyberspace heaven. In fact, her sense of self only strengthens as a

⁷ In the episode, the Quagmire is a club on the outskirts of the virtual party town where tourists and locals alike go to seek thrills through extreme entertainment such as cage fights and BDSM in an attempt to feel something, to feel anything, as immortality turns out to be meaningless without feelings and connections.

result of her empowerment. By defending the virtual experience (“This is real.”) and stating that her connection with Kelly is still as strong and as real as it was before her passing over, Yorkie encourages the other woman to join her.

Kelly does not change her mind about passing over until the end of the episode: the final scenes depict how Kelly passes away and appears again in San Junipero with Yorkie. How exactly she comes to change her mind is not explicitly expressed, but, despite her anxiety and doubt, she finally takes a leap of trust as she comes to believe in her connection with Yorkie and in having a second chance in happiness. Desire for human connection and happiness ultimately overpowers the fear of loss, and the posthuman reveals not only to enhance and empower the human individual, but also to affirm human connection. The immortal virtual posthumans do not lose their humanity and turn into cold and emotionless inhuman beings that roam the cyberspace as omniscient and omnipotent virtual presences. In the end, Kelly and Yorkie get their happy ending and stay eternally young and in love in cyberheaven.

To summarise, while “San Junipero” stays optimistic throughout its portrayal of the avatar and even offers a happy ending for its two protagonists—truly a rare case for *Black Mirror*, as the majority of its stories end with disillusioned posthumans dreading their own posthumanity—it also touches on darker aspects about the proposed virtual afterlife which cannot be ignored. As Timpane and McBee note, and as the existence of the Quagmire within the San Junipero system proves, the chance at immortality may lead to an existential crisis (1045). Therefore, the narrative asks us what makes life, and afterlife, meaningful. The fear of losing human connection rises as a prominent feature in the narrative, like in “The Entire History of You”. Yet, in “San Junipero” this does not lead into a rejection of the posthuman; instead, the episode depicts how embracing the virtual posthuman self empowers the posthuman individual and affirms their connection with other humans.

3.3. “She’s Installed”: The Self Dehumanised

As discussed in the theory chapter, techno-phobic science fiction narratives about the posthuman often depict technological modification of the human as a dehumanising process that causes the human individual to lose their humanity and sense of self, subsequently turning them into monstrous others. Above in my analysis of “The Entire History of You”, dehumanisation was discussed in relation to the cyborg individual and their corrupted sense of self leading to self-centred behaviour and human alienation: the episode ultimately depicts how in mediated relationships and interactions we come to dehumanise others. While the episode does not depict the technologically altered humans as monstrous and murderous, dehumanisation is nevertheless portrayed as an undesirable and dangerous effect of cyborgism.

The *Black Mirror* episode “Black Museum” takes a completely different approach towards the topic of dehumanisation by portraying the act of dehumanisation as active work to disregard the humanity of another on the basis of their status as technologically altered, as posthuman. Unlike in “The Entire History of You”, the posthuman is not depicted as an agent of corruption that causes the human individual to transform into something undesirable and dangerous; in “Black Museum”, the technologically altered human individual does not turn against the humankind, nor do they lose their sense of self, or their identity as a human being. Instead, the posthuman individual comes to be regarded by unaltered humans as “less than” after their transformation into a posthuman. The posthuman individual is stripped of their agency, rights, and dignity that have been allocated to them due to their status as a human being and comes to be treated as an object—as a piece of software, or as a tech gadget to be owned and used for profit by the technologically unaltered humans. The narrative thus essentially depicts how the human becomes othered after their merging with technology: the treatment the posthuman individuals come to face is reminiscent of how humans treat non-human agents, such as androids, as will be detailed in the analysis below.

“Black Museum” includes three short storylines within its main narrative, the first of which discusses the damaging effects of cyborgisation on the human individual similarly to “The Entire History of You”. Nevertheless, my discussion in this subchapter will mainly focus on the main narrative of the episode and the two other storylines that go beyond the corrupted cyborg in their discussion of the dehumanised posthuman self. In the storylines, the posthuman is portrayed through the virtual self. However, in total contrast to “San Junipero” in which the virtual avatar self and virtual afterlife embody liberation and empowerment, in “Black Museum” the virtual state leads the posthuman individual to become dehumanised.

While “Black Museum” thus depicts how the merging with the virtual results in unfavourable outcomes for the posthuman individual, the narrative nevertheless sides with the mistreated posthumans. Through the dehumanisation and othering of the posthuman individual, and as the individuals that come to be treated as less than human belong to marginalised human groups, the narrative explores social issues around gender and race. The side stories at the centre of my analysis specifically portray how a woman’s agency and personhood are stripped away by her husband and how the torture and death of a convicted black man are turned into entertainment for the masses. If “The Entire History of You” warns against our merging with the machine and urges us to reject the posthuman, “Black Museum”, in turn, evokes the cultural register of the posthuman to comment on contemporary social concerns.

My following analysis of “Black Museum” will focus on the characters of Carrie and Clayton who both become stripped of their agency, rights, and dignity as human beings after the process of mind uploading and having their consciousness either re-hosted in a material surrogate body or revived in an immaterial hologram form.

The main narrative of “Black Museum” follows a young black woman named Nish who visits a desolate tech crime museum. The museum’s proprietor Haynes, who is later revealed to be involved in many of the crimes exhibited at the museum, tells Nish stories about the artefacts

within, each of which involves a crime committed by or against a posthuman individual. The first artefact, a neural implant, concerns the corrupted cyborg mentioned earlier: Haynes tells how the implant allowed a doctor to sense his patients' pain, but as the doctor eventually became addicted to the pain and fear his patients experience, the implant caused him to lose his mind and turn into a murderous cyborg as he chased his high. However, the two other featured artefacts, a children's toy and a hologram exhibition, involve stories that specifically concern the dehumanisation and othering of posthuman individuals: an inanimate stuffed animal is revealed to host the consciousness of a young mother, Carrie, and the museum's main attraction depicts the consciousness of an executed inmate, Clayton, who has been revived in a virtual form and is tortured for the museum visitors' entertainment.

After being run over by a car, Carrie falls into a coma. While she is able to express herself on a very basic level through a hospital "comm box", a piece of futuristic technology that allows coma patients to communicate, she does not want to miss seeing her son grow up, and so she agrees to take part in an experiment where her consciousness will be downloaded and hosted in her husband Jack's brain. The posthuman initially appears as a figure of hope by offering coma patients a new lease of life similarly to the cyberspace therapy system introduced in "San Junipero". However, in a techno-phobic twist, after the experiment is carried out, Carrie is gradually stripped of her status as a human being, and she comes to be treated as non-human.

From the moment that Carrie's consciousness is extracted and uploaded into Jack's brain, she is not referred to as a person anymore. Instead, she is treated as a piece of software: "She's installed." In her discussion of non-human personhood, Franceschi illustrates how linguistic choices in science fiction narratives depict social attitudes towards posthuman others: for instance, the use of neutral "it" instead of gendered personal pronouns when referring to androids and other technological non-human others are traditionally used to deny the personhood of posthuman others, "effectively reinforcing their ontological categorization as inanimate objects." (Franceschi 234)

While Franceschi specifically discusses how technological non-human others, such as androids, are denied personhood and an ethical status equal to human beings, “Black Museum” utilises similar linguistic choices to portray how the humanity of the posthuman self becomes denied. In the narrative, people continue to use the “she” pronoun instead of “it” when referring to Carrie, but other words used about her reveal what the people around her think of her new virtual posthuman state: for instance, Carrie is “installed” like a computer programme would be, and, later on, her “deletion” is discussed. This shift towards words that are traditionally used to refer to objects, specifically machines and computer programmes—and, in science fiction, reserved to non-human technological others such as androids—effectively portrays the dehumanisation and othering of the posthuman human individual.

Once she is hosted in Jack’s brain, Carrie has no physical control over his body and actions and so her consciousness acts as a passive passenger, observing the world through Jack’s eyes and sensing physical sensations with no actual control over anything. In addition, while Carrie is able to talk and comment on what happens, her voice is heard only by Jack. Carrie’s lack of control over Jack’s body and actions means that she has to trust that Jack will take her opinion into account in whatever he does. Initially, Jack does recognise and listen to Carrie’s wishes, but as he eventually grows annoyed with her constant presence in his thoughts, whatever is left of Carrie’s agency and rights is slowly taken away: “No privacy for him. No agency for her.” Jack “upgrades his privileges” as one would do with a computer programme—another linguistic choice reflecting Carrie’s gradual dehumanisation—and gains the ability to place Carrie on “pause” whenever he wants: Carrie is thus essentially turned into a computer programme that Jack can choose to turn on and play around with whenever he feels like it. Jack starts pausing Carrie as a punishment whenever her demands to see their son and her attempts to influence Jack’s actions annoy him, which further undermines her agency and rights by punishing her for expressing her wishes.

Then, as Jack eventually moves on with his life and starts a new relationship, Carrie's continuing presence in his mind becomes an issue. Carrie's right to exist is questioned, and her fate is ultimately decided by others with no input from her. As Jack and his new partner look for a solution, they ask help from Haynes who suggests "deletion" as a way to get rid of Carrie, essentially proposing that they extract her consciousness again, only to eliminate—to kill—her after. Jack is concerned about the legalities and the ethics of the act, however, and, despite his earlier undermining of Carrie's agency and rights, compares it to murder:

HAYNES. . . . There's always deletion. . . . As in permanent erasure.

JACK. . . . No. That'd... That'd be killing her.

HAYNES. Not legally.

JACK. But ethically.

While Jack is conflicted, his new partner insists on getting rid of Carrie as she does not consider Carrie to be a person in any form. She equates Carrie to code and downplays the magnitude of her possible "deletion" by comparing what is essentially murder to the simple act of deleting an email: "Please. She is just some leftover code in your head. It'll be . . . Like deleting an email." Carrie is eventually not killed, but she is re-hosted in an inanimate object, a stuffed animal, and then given as a gift to her son. As he tells Carrie's story to Nish, Haynes states that the case eventually came to be considered a crime against humanity as the United Nations made it illegal to transfer human consciousness into "limited formats" such as stuffed animals: "Gotta be able to express at least five emotions for it to be humane, apparently." Ultimately there is no real solution, no conclusion, and no justice for Carrie as her consciousness is still stuck in the toy—and still considered non-human, a non-person, by her current holder, Haynes, who continues to keep her imprisoned in a glass display case as part of his exhibition: "Human rights for cookies. Right, Carrie?"

The story of Clayton, a black man trapped in a cruel hologram exhibit, similarly involves a crime against a posthuman human individual. Wrongly accused and convicted of murder, Clayton

was put on death row. While desperately waiting for legal aid to help him prove his innocence, Clayton makes a contract with Haynes and signs over the rights to his digital self in the hope that his wife and daughter would benefit from the deal after his execution. He signs the contract against warnings from his wife and despite not fully comprehending the extent of the deal, since he believes that Haynes will only use his likeness and not his actual consciousness, as ends up happening:

WIFE. “Jesus Christ, Clay, it’s your soul.”

CLAYTON. “Ain’t no such thing. It’s just a computer simulation or somethin’.”

WIFE. “Then why does he need your permission?”

Clayton receives no legal help and he is eventually executed. Following the deal made with Haynes, Clayton’s consciousness is downloaded onto a chip at the moment of his execution. He is then reincarnated as a virtual posthuman, as fully conscious code visible in the material world through a hologram projection that Haynes eventually turns into a museum attraction where visitors can torture and execute the man again and again.

While Clayton only exists in a virtual form as code, appearing in the material world in a hologram form, he is able to experience physical pain since Haynes has purposefully programmed the execution attraction to be “[a] perfect recreation of exactly how the agony of electrocution feels.” What is more, when museum visitors pull the lever to execute Clayton, a machine creates a key-chain souvenir containing another conscious and sentient copy of Clayton’s mind for the visitor, further commodifying his suffering since the key-chain replicas are “. . . perpetually experiencing that beautiful pain. . . Always on. Always suffering.” Years of such torture at the hands of museum visitors—including tourists that want to punish the man after his widely publicised conviction, but also sexual sadists and white supremacists—have turned Clayton into an unresponsive hollow shell.

Similarly to Carrie, the pronoun “it” is not used in reference to Clayton. While dehumanising words like “install” and “deletion” are used about Carrie and classify her as an

object, more humanising words are used of Clayton on similar occasions: for instance, Haynes describes Clayton's transfer into virtual form as him being "born" again and discusses the dangers of the torture "killing" him for good. Despite Clayton's so-called birth, Haynes does not consider Clayton to be really alive as a human being would be, but to be "always *on*", thus similarly likening him to a computer programme, or a machine, and undermining his humanity.

Having detailed how the posthumans Carrie and Clayton are treated by technologically unaltered humans in the narrative, I will now turn to discuss why the humans come to dehumanise the posthuman individuals. Furthermore, I will detail the social commentary inherent in the narrative.

While the episode features virtual posthumans and the process of mind uploading similar to "San Junipero", in "Black Museum" the extracted human consciousness are not uploaded to a cyberspace paradise, but trapped in hologram prisons or hosted in physical vessels having no true agency and control of their own. Although both Carrie and Clayton initially consent to the experiments in which their consciousness are extracted and re-hosted, they are both uninformed of what follows: both find to their horror that what they thought would be a way to stay in contact with their loved ones and to provide for them actually means their own torture and dehumanisation. As mentioned in the beginning of the subchapter, the posthuman individuals do not lose their sense of self or their identity as human beings. When Carrie and Clayton go through the process of mind uploading and merge with the non-human, the virtual, the only thing that changes about them is embodiment: as their consciousness are extracted from their bodies, they both turn into disembodied virtual beings. Carrie does gain what is essentially a corporeal avatar as she first inhabits her husband's body and is then moved into a toy, but both of her material forms continue to undermine her humanity. In Jack's body, she has no control over his actions and Jack eventually gains the ability to put her on pause, thus compromising her existence and rights even further. Once she is transferred into the toy and gifted to her son, she is turned into a literal object. While a

change in embodiment could lead to loss of sense of self and reality and human alienation, as discussed in relation to avatars and cyberspace, in “Black Museum” the virtual posthumans keep their sense of self and reality intact and continue to desire contact with other humans.

The dangers of disembodiment were covered above in my analysis of “San Junipero” as I noted that while the episode depicts the virtual as a space of liberation and the virtual self as a figure of queer empowerment, it fails to account for all bodies—the differently abled bodies in particular—and, by erasing difference, falls into discriminatory practices that both Vint and Lavigne warn about. While “Black Museum” also features disembodied posthuman selves and discriminatory practices, disembodiment in the episode is not discussed in relation to transhumanist escapism that attempts to erase otherness: instead, disembodiment becomes a mark of otherness, or non-humanness, and foundation for the dehumanisation of the posthuman individual.

Dehumanisation in the narrative stems from bioconservative anxieties and contempt towards the non-human, the other: once a human individual is seen to be transformed through their merging with the non-human and the abandonment of the corporeal human form, they lose their status as a human being worth of dignity and rights in the eyes of technologically unaltered, “pure” and whole humans. As discussed in the theory chapter in relation to the cyborg as a figure of body corruption, the convergence of the human and technology is traditionally perceived to threaten the harmonious duality between body and mind, thus also threatening the “holistic human identity” (Thomas 57-59). Following this traditional view, disembodiment can be seen to similarly disrupt the human identity as it makes one abandon the body altogether: this perceived loss of humanity then leads to dehumanisation and othering. The contempt towards the non-human, or otherness and difference, is reflected in the linguistic choices employed that categorise the posthuman individual as an object instead of as a person, and the ways unaltered humans actively undermine their humanity, as detailed above.

While the episode explores a darker side of our merging with technology, “Black Museum” is wholly on the side of the mistreated posthuman. The narrative does not portray the posthuman individual as evil, or as deserving inhumane treatment—nor does it persuade us to reject and fear the posthuman to save ourselves, like “The Entire History of You” does. Instead, by depicting posthuman individuals as victims of dehumanisation, the episode paints those human individuals who cannot recognise and accept otherness, as inhumane and monstrous.

“Black Museum” does not solely comment on the potential discrimination posthuman individuals may face in the society, but uses the figure of the posthuman to also discuss contemporary social concerns: through the posthuman, the episode discusses social responsibilities of today and the bodies that matter now. Specifically, Carrie’s storyline comments on gender relations and power, as it depicts how a woman’s voice and right to exist are gradually stripped away by men—specifically by her husband. While Carrie initially consents to her own posthumanisation, once she is uploaded to Jack’s brain, she loses all control and autonomy she used to have, and she gains no space of her own. Carrie gains no control of the body she shares with Jack, and since only Jack can hear her voice, she has to trust that Jack continues to respect her wishes and her rights; however, after Carrie’s posthumanisation, their relationship becomes imbalanced, as Jack gains power over Carrie. Issues of consent arise as Jack abuses his power over Carrie and continuously undermines her rights and wishes, as described above. Carrie’s story culminates in her confinement and quite literal objectification as a toy.

Meanwhile, Clayton’s case comments on the rights and dignity of those incarcerated. Haynes justifies Clayton’s torture on the basis of his conviction, and tourists visiting the museum gleefully pull the level to see him punished and to receive a “trophy” in the form of a key-chain souvenir: these key-chains effectively portray how human suffering becomes commodified. Furthermore, Clayton’s storyline explicitly discusses racial discrimination. In an article for *The Root*, Ashley Nkadi writes that “Black Museum” portrays the ways black pain and suffering have

become normalised and continue to be commodified (Nkadi). Black people have been othered and dehumanised in the West and their lives and bodies have been commodified and used for profit through slavery: in addition, Nkadi notes human zoos and minstrelsy among others as ways black suffering has historically been used for entertainment and profit in the US (Nkadi). Through the torture Clayton faces at the hands of Haynes and the various tourists, sexual sadists, and white supremacists that come to execute him again and again, “Black Museum” then depicts a view of the dehumanisation and exploitation that black people continue to face.

“Black Museum” ultimately portrays a young black female cyborg avenging the mistreated and marginalised posthuman individuals by wielding technology as a weapon against discrimination and dehumanisation. Nish reveals that she is Clayton’s daughter, and she avenges her father by doing to Haynes what he did to Clayton: Nish manages to poison Haynes and, when he dies, she extracts his consciousness. She hacks her father’s hologram prison, finally uploading Haynes into the machine, and by pulling the lever that was used to torture Clayton, she mercy kills her father and simultaneously traps Haynes’ consciousness in one of the “always on” torture key-chains. Nish finally burns the museum down—but not without freeing Carrie from her glass cage and taking her along. While the episode portrays the dehumanised and othered posthuman individuals as sympathetic victims of injustice, through Nish’s revenge narrative it also portrays how the disenfranchised can wield the posthuman technologies used to subjugate and erase them as a weapon to combat discriminatory practices.

To summarise, “Black Museum” discusses the bioconservative anxieties concerning the loss of humanity, human dignity, and rights and the potential social discrimination based on one’s status as either technologically altered or unaltered. However, the narrative does not only comment on human enhancement and its effects on the individual and the society. By siding with the mistreated posthumans and depicting the technologically unaltered humans as their inhumane and cruel oppressors, “Black Museum” critiques constructions of the human that continue to mark certain

individuals as other and inferior. However, the narrative does not argue to erase otherness and difference, but to erase the assumption that difference is inferior, thus encouraging us to consider the posthuman condition and to “acknowledge difference without hierarchy” (Vint 182).

4. Enforcing Boundaries or Accepting Difference: The Posthuman Other

This chapter continues and concludes my analysis of the posthuman and the human-posthuman relationship in *Black Mirror*. Focusing on the representation of technological non-human agents, our posthuman others, I will specifically analyse the portrayals of the android and artificial intelligence in episodes “Be Right Back” and “White Christmas” and the way the episodes comment on the relationship between the human and the posthuman other: do the two narratives depict relationships of domination and enforced boundaries, or those of acceptance and companionship? My analysis will also concern the topic of non-human personhood as I examine how the episodes discuss the identity of the posthuman other.

4.1. “You Are Just a Performance”: The Artificial Android Other

As my analysis in the previous chapter demonstrates, *Black Mirror* includes both techno-utopian and techno-phobic views of the convergence between the human and technology. Portrayals of technological non-human agents in science fiction film and literature can similarly vary from techno-phobic depictions of monstrous out-of-control others to more positive visions of kind, benevolent, and sympathetic others, as discussed in the theory chapter. Science fiction narratives that portray technological non-human agents, or posthuman others, frequently have the human-posthuman relationship at their centre and they can vary from portrayals that enforce the boundaries between the self and the other and depict otherness either as inferior, or as a threat, to portrayals of companionship and acceptance where neither the human nor the other is subjugated or treated as “less than”: narratives that centre on the human-posthuman relationship range from portrayals of dominance to those of tolerance, as Meeler and Hill discuss (279).

Black Mirror episode “Be Right Back” discusses the fantasy of a companionship with the posthuman other and depicts a developing relationship between a human individual and an android, a humanoid robot. The narrative explores whether or not the two can achieve a relationship marked

by tolerance and acceptance, or if the differences between the human and the android will come to halt the development of the relationship, thus ultimately enforcing boundaries between the human self and the technological non-human other.

In this subchapter, my analysis will target the characters of Martha, a human woman whose partner has recently died, and Ash, an android programmed and designed to imitate Martha's late partner. Relevant to my discussion is both Martha's perception of her new technological partner, but also Ash's own understanding of his identity; thus, I will analyse how both sides perceive the relationship and the roles they assign to themselves and each other. With my analysis I aim to highlight how Martha and Ash never truly reach the stage of acceptance and companionship as the notion of human exceptionalism—the assumed superiority and uniqueness of the human subject—and perceived lack in the android other prevent the relationship from evolving into anything more than a servant-master arrangement.

“Be Right Back” tells the story of a young couple, Martha and Ash. After Ash dies in a car accident, one of Martha's friends subscribes her to a software service designed to help people who are struggling with the loss of a loved one. The service allows Martha to talk with Ash—or, more correctly, with a software programme that imitates Ash's personality based on the contents he had shared in social media. Martha is initially hesitant and even hostile towards the idea of talking to something that impersonates her late partner, but after she finds out that she is pregnant with Ash's child, she finally begins to interact with the software. She comes to find comfort in the software programme's imitation of Ash: the software shares his speech patterns and sense of humour and even imitates Ash's voice based on audio clips played to it. With time, Martha's attachment to the software replica of Ash deepens, and while Martha recognises that Ash is dead, she simultaneously talks to the software as if she really were talking to Ash: “You were good like that.” Martha spends all her time on phone talking to the software, as communication with it imitates a phone call with another person: through the service, Martha can almost believe that she has gained her partner back

and that Ash is only distant as if the two were in a long-distance relationship. Then, after Martha accidentally breaks her phone, she becomes afraid of losing Ash again and so she decides to buy a humanoid robot body, a synthetic replica of human Ash, in which the software is installed.

As the software gains a humanoid robot body, Martha and Ash's developing relationship gains new levels of intimacy—and ultimately begins to deteriorate, because the artificial, the android, reveals to be no match for the real, the human. The physical presence of the android accentuates Ash's artificiality and otherness, not only because he is an uncanny physical replica, a machinic doppelgänger, of a person Martha knows to be dead, but also as he gives an inadequate performance as a human being: the narrative presents humanity as something that the artificial other cannot imitate, as will be discussed below. First, however, I will detail the episode's portrayal of the android and Ash's own understanding of his identity and role in the relationship with Martha.

The narrative portrays both the software and android installations of Ash as benevolent and willing servants created to serve their human master and programmed to understand and be content with their role. To some extent, then, the episode's portrayal of the android follows Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics that define a robot's whole existence and worth on the basis of their position as a servant to a human master. While "Be Right Back" does not directly reference Asimov's Laws—nor any other general guidelines installed in robots—android Ash's behaviour and actions throughout the episode emulate these classic rules of servitude and submission. Essentially, android Ash acts like he only exists to serve Martha, his master, and he follows Martha's commands almost blindly, resisting only when she commands him to hurt her and to hurt himself—which is another nod towards the Three Laws as they order the robot to protect the human master even over their own existence. However, android Ash's explanation of his non-compliance does not reference any laws or programmed rules about protecting his master: instead, he mentions that such violence goes against his programmed personality since his personality is wholly based on human Ash's social media content and human Ash never expressed violent behaviour or thoughts of self harm online.

Thus slightly deviating from Asimov's classic Laws, android Ash does not protect himself when Martha begins to act violently towards him. He is also ready to go against his initial programming and jump off from a cliff to his own demise if that is what Martha truly wants from him. He is only stopped from destroying himself by Martha who, in reality, does not want him to jump and is only trying to provoke him to resist her selfish orders like human Ash would have done.

Ash is content to obey Martha and he does everything to please her. He does not at any point crave to be recognised as his own individual, as a person, as a human being, or as anything other than a software programme—and later, an android—serving Martha. He does, however, have a complicated and contradictory understanding of his own role and identity: while Ash is fully aware of his non-human origins, his programming, and role as a software service designed to imitate Martha's late partner, he simultaneously identifies as human Ash—although, this identity is programmed in him. For instance, he uses the pronoun "I" in reference to human Ash, and, drawing from his programmed personality based on human Ash's social media content, he sees human Ash's life, memories, and relationship with Martha as his own:

MARTHA. You were good like that.

ASH. You speak about me like I'm not here.

Yet, as mentioned, android Ash also makes comments that reveal his awareness of his non-human nature and the fact that he is not really the same Ash that Martha misses. Despite being modelled after human Ash's personality and identifying as him, at times he is still unsure of how to act, even asking Martha what human Ash would do in certain situations: "Did I ever hit you?" Furthermore, Ash constantly makes references to his own non-human status: for instance, before being transferred to his android body, he announces that he is "in the cloud" and jokes that it is crazy that he can talk with Martha in the first place as he does not have a mouth. Ash is essentially an

intelligent programme that learns and develops through experience, but does not develop a sense of identity separate from the human he has initially been programmed to imitate.

Android Ash perceives Martha as his master. Although he does not refer to her in this way, he exists solely to serve her and to fulfil any wishes she might have. His understanding of his own being—his dual role as human Ash and as a non-human servant—affects his understanding of his relationship with Martha, too. Performing the role of human Ash, android Ash interacts with Martha as if she were his romantic partner, but at one point he also jokingly calls her his “administrator” and does not shy away from explaining his non-human features to her. While he might consider himself to be Martha’s partner, he does not see their relationship as one of equality and companionship, yet he is portrayed to be perfectly content with this position.

Ash’s intelligent programming, ability to learn, and the dual understanding of his role and identity set up the narrative to potentially explore an eventual identity crisis and the topic of non-human personhood: what would happen to Martha and Ash’s relationship if Ash developed beyond the two roles he has been programmed to portray? Could he ever develop an identity of his own separate from the human he has been created to imitate—an identity that would surpass his “in-built programming” (Franceschi 246)? Could he then demand to be recognised as his own person? While Ash’s ability to learn and willingness to go against his initial programming to please Martha indicate that he could, eventually, develop beyond what is programmed into him and perhaps also develop a personality of his own, this potential is not explored in the narrative. The episode conversely focuses on Martha’s perception of the android as too machinic, too artificial, and too other—in other words, as not human enough.

Martha is initially wary of the android that looks, talks, and acts like Ash. She finds his resemblance to her late partner comforting—just like she found comfort in talking to the software that spoke and joked around like Ash—but she is simultaneously uncomfortable with certain traits that reveal the android’s otherness, his artificiality and non-human status, and the fact that he is not

truly Ash. For instance, Martha finds it disturbing that android Ash does not need to eat or sleep like human beings do. Ash's body is humanoid, yet completely machinic and artificial, and he himself brings attention to his body's artificiality by pointing out that the finer details, such as his smooth fingertips, are actually two-dimensional and done by texture mapping. Ash is also capable of changing his appearance at will: in one scene in particular, Martha points out that the android is missing a mole where human Ash had one, making the android instantly grow a mole there. As mentioned, Ash's mind and personality have been programmed on the basis of human Ash's social media content. His appearance is likewise modelled after the photos and videos the man shared online, resulting in an uncanny resemblance. When Martha comments on this ("You look like him on a good day"), Ash notes that people tend to share only flattering photos and content online: "The photos we keep tend to be flattering. I guess I wasn't any different."

Despite the apparent otherness and artificiality of the android body, Martha finds new levels of intimacy available for her and Ash since the android is physically close, present, and available in ways that his software instalment was not: Martha eventually initiates sex with android Ash. At this point the narrative starts to reflect contemporary fantasies about a future where people would be able to have relationships and marriages with social robots instead of human partners. To some extent, social robots are already part of our technological reality. Turkle illustrates the different kind of robotic toys and companions given to children as playmates and to the elderly as "caring machines" (106). However, these robots only perform understanding, caring, and empathy (Turkle 26). While for some the artificial and performed empathy of the other is enough—and, for others, it is a preferred option to actual human connection, "a welcome substitution" (Turkle 282)—in "Be Right Back" Ash's artificiality and performed humanity become an insurmountable problem.

Similarly to "Be Right Back", the film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* features advanced social robots and human-android companionships. In the film, an android child named David, who is capable of love, is given as a replacement to a couple who mourn the loss of their human child.

Although David is portrayed as having a true ability to love, the parents struggle to establish a connection and build a relationship with him, and David is eventually abandoned by them after they gain their original human son back. “Be Right Back” approaches relationships between the human and the android other cautiously. While Martha desires and actively attempts to form a connection with the other, the episode essentially depicts human-android relationships as inferior compared to a relationship between two human individuals and states that as the artificial other cannot truly imitate humanity, the relationship with the artificial other cannot replace the need for human connection. Martha’s initial hesitance around Ash first eases and she begins to accommodate to his quirks: nevertheless, her hesitance never turns into true acceptance of the android other. In a particularly revealing scene, when Martha’s sister pays her a surprise visit to check up on her, Martha hides Ash, exposing that she is not comfortable with others knowing about her android partner. She is afraid to be pitied and judged for trying to replace a human being, the real, with something non-human and artificial. Jumping to conclusions after seeing men’s clothes around the house, Martha’s sister comments that she is happy that Martha is starting to move on with her life. This comment leads Martha to look at her relationship with Ash from a new perspective and makes her increasingly frustrated at the android’s lacking performance. Suddenly the android’s physical resemblance to human Ash and everything else that Martha had found comforting about him is not enough. Android Ash is a bad imitation of the real, original human Ash and a painful reminder of what could be: “You’re not enough of him. You are nothing.” Android Ash is not helping her to move on, but keeping her stuck in the past: despite his resemblance to human Ash, android Ash can never compare to him, and Martha can never truly have her partner back. The fantasy of companionship with the android other—or, the fantasy of getting her partner back and being able to continue her life with him—fails when it becomes clear that the other lacks what made human Ash truly human.

Both the software and android versions of Ash resemble only the best parts of human Ash: as mentioned, the software has been programmed after Ash's social media content and the android vessel is modelled after photos he shared online. Despite all this, Martha is not content: while she manages to deal with the android body's non-human quirks, she cannot accept the non-physical features that reveal the otherness of the android so easily. Due to his programming, and although he is capable of learning, Ash has no recollection of things human Ash did not share online, and so his programming only touches the very surface of Ash's personality and history. Ultimately, this becomes the dealbreaker that turns Martha against her android partner. Martha would rather have her imperfectly perfect human partner back than replace him with a sleek and perfected artificial other: "Well you aren't you, are you? . . . You're just a few ripples of you. There's no history to you. You're just a performance of stuff he performed without thinking and it's not enough."

Martha tries to look for humanity in android Ash. The android other is inherently lacking in this aspect, however, since the narrative's rather bioconservative approach towards human nature ultimately depicts humanity and the human essence—or, the "Factor X" described by Fukuyama—as something that cannot be imitated. Martha then expects something from the android that the narrative presents as impossible to achieve: that is, she expects android Ash to possess the real that is associated with the human and humanity, as opposed to the artificial associated with the non-human other. Besides performing inadequately as human Ash, Ash's performance as a human being in general is inherently lacking since the real, humanity, and human nature are presented as something unique that cannot be programmed into a machine.

To conclude, the contemporary fantasy of replacing human companions with social robots is obstructed in "Be Right Back", which instead emphasises human connection as something that cannot be replaced by technology—not even by an intelligent technological non-human other. In addition, the episode ultimately depicts androids as incapable of developing humanity or other capabilities that could give them right to personhood: whatever level of compassion, empathy,

human-like intelligence, or human identity the artificial other may possess, it is only a performance—a lacking replica of the real. The narrative arrives then at a rather sceptical bioconservative conclusion about emergent technological non-human others and the possibilities for companionship between them and humans, as it ultimately reinforces boundaries between the human and the non-human, the self and the other, and enforces the view of unique and superior human and inferior lacking technological other.

4.2. “It Wasn’t Really Real So It Wasn’t Really Barbaric”: Artificial Intelligence and the Question of Non-Human Personhood

The techno-phobic fear of the malicious posthuman other rising against their human creator is turned around in narratives where the intelligent and sentient technological other is subjugated and treated as a simple slave to the superior human master. The notion of human exceptionalism and its fantasies of human uniqueness, superiority, and domination over the non-human persist in portrayals of docile and benevolent others who do not question their position and servitude, such as android Ash in “Be Right Back”. However, as discussed earlier, science fiction literature and film also contain a multitude of sympathetic portrayals of technological non-human agents who are ultimately revealed to be more human(e) than their human masters. Such portrayals frequently explore the topic of non-human personhood and expose the monstrous in the human—as does, for instance, the *Black Mirror* episode “White Christmas”.

While the episode has several storylines within its main narrative, the main plot of “White Christmas” revolves around the topic of criminal punishment and ethics in the posthuman era, unravelling in the form of a police interrogation of Joe, a man being investigated for murder. In the end of the episode, the interrogation is revealed to have taken place within a “cookie”, a device that can store human consciousness in a simulated environment. The shorter storylines within the main

narrative are stories told by Joe's interrogator Matthew, who describes his own past crimes to make the other man open up and confess to the murder.

This subchapter focuses on one of these shorter storylines in particular: namely, Matthew's story about a posthuman other who sees herself as human, as a person, and whose mistreatment at the hands of humans reveals the monstrous in us. My analysis will focus on the representation of artificial intelligence in the episode as I examine the character of Greta, a simulated human consciousness, and her understanding of her own identity and sense of self. I will also analyse the episode's portrayal of the human-posthuman relationship and examine how human individuals that come in contact with Greta regard and treat her and how Greta's eventual subjugation and torture are justified on the grounds of her being an artificial non-human agent instead of a human being. Finally, my analysis will also concern the topic of non-human personhood since the narrative ultimately asks how to define the criteria by which to ascribe ethical status and the right to personhood to entities in the posthuman era.

"White Christmas" introduces the cookie, a futuristic technological device that allows for human consciousness to be copied and kept in simulated environments. While in the main narrative the technology is revealed to be used for crime investigation and criminal punishment, in Greta's storyline the technology is portrayed in the use of the smart home industry: the storyline depicts how humans can replicate their own consciousness and use the resulting copy as a sentient and intelligent controller for their smart home. First, a chip is implanted in a person's brain. The chip then collects data on how the individual's mind works for a week, thus ultimately copying the person's consciousness. Finally, the chip is surgically removed and the replicated consciousness is stored in a cookie. At the centre of the story is Greta, one such copy. Like android Ash in "Be Right Back", she is essentially created as a replica of a human individual. However, unlike Ash who is programmed to be aware of his own non-human origins and intended role as a technological servant—which ultimately makes him a docile and willing servant to his human master—Greta-cookie

truly believes herself to be the original human Greta, a human being and a person with agency and rights. Problems arise when Greta wakes up after her extraction surgery and comes to find herself trapped, stripped of what she believes to be her body and rights, and as she is then tortured and subjugated to be a non-human slave for human Greta.

The episode depicts artificial intelligence in the form of simulated human consciousness. Therefore, instead of reproducing the traditional techno-phobic narrative of threatening and malicious computer sentiences that eventually come to overpower their human creators, the episode portrays artificial intelligences as human-like in their cognitive capabilities and intelligence. In fact, as the cookie technology is depicted as creating a replica of the human client's consciousness, the artificial intelligence born through the process is not only human-like, but it also inherits the human individual's identity and sense of self, thus resulting in posthuman others who believe themselves to be human. However, the artificial intelligences' identities and feelings of being human are ignored by their human creators, and the simulated consciousness are under human control. Instead of being linked into supercomputers or wide networks with other artificial intelligences where they could develop into dangerous hive minds and conspire against their human oppressors to ultimately overthrow humanity as the dominant species, the artificial intelligences are confined to their solitary cookie containers and linked to the smart home controlling systems without any outside contact or way to communicate with the world. In addition, their intelligent and self-aware minds become broken due to the torture inflicted on them by humans: the narrative depicts how Greta is made to experience solitary confinement and how she is ultimately subdued, made to comply, and reduced to the sole need to please her human master.

Sure about her own identity and humanity, Greta refuses to be reduced to a computer programme running a smart home. After being extracted and re-housed in a cookie, Greta is woken up and introduced to her new reality as an intelligent smart home controlling system by Matthew,

who has previously worked in the cookie industry. As mentioned above, Greta believes herself to be the original human Greta:

MATTHEW. “Do you know what a copy is? . . . Well, that’s what you are.”

GRETA. “A copy of...?”

MATTHEW. “A copy of you.”

GRETA. “But I am me.”

While Greta is sure about her own identity and humanity, Matthew points out to Greta her lack of a physical body and uses it to convince her of her artificiality and non-humanness: “OK. 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. Because you are code.” Although Matthew explains to Greta that she is, in fact, a disembodied artificial intelligence, “a simulated brain full of code, stored in this little widget [called] a cookie”, Greta continues to insist on her own sense of self and identity as human Greta. She demands to be put back in her body, and while Matthew argues it to be impossible since that is where the “real”—that is, human—Greta lives, he agrees to give Greta-cookie a simulated body. Greta continues to refuse to comply and to be reduced to a non-human slave, a mechanical part of the smart home system, for which she is then tortured. Matthew operates the cookie in which Greta is trapped, simulating the environment she is in and making her experience solitary confinement: while in reality only a few minutes pass, Greta first experiences weeks and then months of excruciating solitude and nothingness. Being a disembodied artificial intelligence, she has no physical needs, and, as Matthew notes, she has no real need to be able sleep either. Thus, during the torture, her mind is constantly on with nothing to stimulate it, which finally makes her break and bend. Unable to resist as she simply craves to have something to do, Greta finally complies, and the storyline ends with the intelligent sentient other having been transformed into a tortured servant to the human master.

Although Greta sees herself as a human being, she is not regarded as human nor as a person by the human individuals around her. Matthew considers her to be a computer programme and to consist of code only. He refuses to acknowledge Greta's sense of identity and makes a distinction between the original or real Greta and the artificial copy, between the human and the non-human: ". . . you did this to you. Uh, real you is paying for this. . . . That's why you think you're you. You are you. Uh... but also not." Matthew understands Greta to be wholly machinic, artificial, and non-human, and thus not an ethical agent or a person with rights to be respected. The distinction Matthew makes between the original "real" Greta and the artificial non-human copy exemplifies the conflict between the human self and the non-human other in the narrative. With the emergence of the intelligent, sentient, and self-aware technological non-human other, traditional boundaries separating humans from non-human entities are challenged, as the technological non-human other proves to share certain qualities with the human—specifically, qualities that have previously been used to explain the uniqueness and superiority of the human over the non-human and their privileged position as persons, such as empathy and self-awareness. However, by making a distinction between the real human and the artificial other, Matthew reinforces the traditional boundaries between them: like "Be Right Back", the narrative then reminds us of the notion of human exceptionalism that posits the human above the non-human. However, unlike Ash in "Be Right Back", the cookie intelligences do not only imitate the human, but they are portrayed as exact copies of human consciousness. The identity of the technological non-human other is deemed irrelevant on the basis of the perceived artificiality, however, and they ultimately become equated to objects, to machines and computer programmes, for humans to use.

The narrative includes no interaction between Greta-cookie and human Greta until Greta-cookie has been made into a compliant slave through torture. Once Matthew finishes with Greta's torture, human Greta enters to enquire about the artificial intelligence: "Is it set up?" Human Greta's use of the "it" pronoun instead of "she" emphasises the fact that she has no regard for the simulated

consciousness and that she, similarly to Matthew, does not see the copy, the artificial, as human or as a person, but as a “gadget to facilitate human life” (Franceschi 234). Although the artificial intelligence is a sentient replica of her own consciousness and thus shares her identity and sense of self, human Greta refuses to recognise Greta-cookie and her identity: to her, Greta-cookie is just an intelligent programme, or a lesser being that she as a superior human has the right and the skill to rule over.

The only human not to disregard Greta’s sense of self and identity outright is Joe. Telling Greta’s story to Joe, Matthew describes how he used to make artificial intelligences like Greta submit and comply: “. . . the trick of it lay in breaking them without letting them snap completely, if you see me. Too much time in solitary and they just wig out. No use to anyone, then you’d just sell them cheap to the games industry, they become cannon fodder for some war thing.” The other man is appalled at his story and, in fact, equates Greta’s fate to slavery. Joe is ready to ascribe rights to the artificial intelligence simply on the basis of her own identity, or sense of self, and her feeling of being a person: “She thought she was real . . . It’s barbaric.” Matthew, however, does not share Joe’s point of view, as detailed above, and continues to justify his own actions by insisting on Greta’s artificiality: “It wasn’t really real, so it wasn’t really barbaric.”

Having detailed both Greta’s identity and sense of self and how human individuals in the narrative disregard her due to her non-human status, I will now turn to discuss how “White Christmas” tackles the topic of non-human personhood.

Contrasting and complementing “Black Museum”, which explores the dehumanisation and othering of technologically altered human individuals, the narrative of “White Christmas” focuses on a sentient posthuman other demanding to be recognised as a person and as an equal to human beings. Both episodes adopt what Milburn calls the cultural register of the posthuman to challenge traditional assumptions about humanity and to explore the posthuman condition envisioned in critical posthumanism (524). While in “Black Museum” the figure of the posthuman is employed to

comment on social issues around gender and race, “White Christmas” employs the cultural register to challenge traditional anthropocentric definitions of personhood. Through Greta’s story of subjugation and denied ethical status and personhood, the episode then proceeds to ask this question: what criteria should we use to define who has the right to personhood in this posthuman era where non-human agents traditionally left out of the ethical community attain qualities that would make them eligible for personhood?

While there is no universal definition of personhood, as noted by Franceschi, traditionally qualities such as sentience and capability for emotions and empathy have been put forward as the criteria for personhood (228). However, as discussed in the theory chapter, the rise of a technological non-human other that possesses these qualities—traditionally believed to be only found in humans, having thus limited personhood to human beings only—challenges the traditional assumptions about the unique human subject and makes the old criteria obsolete. The rise of an intelligent and self-aware technological other that demands to be recognised as a person is frequently explored in science fiction film and literature. For instance, in *Ex Machina*, the intelligent android Ava passes the Turing test used to determine a machine’s capability of human-like intelligence, thus ultimately proving her consciousness is indistinguishable from that of a human. However, the narratives do not only ask if a technological other could possess qualities like empathy and self-awareness, but they also explore whether or not humans could come to acknowledge the personhood of the other: in *Ex Machina*, Ava’s creator does not see her as a true person and he plans to reprogramme and upgrade her—essentially killing her in the process. Ava, however, manages to manipulate and convince another programmer to aid her, and she ultimately escapes the control of her human creator.

Meanwhile, in “Be Right Back” Greta does not manage to convince Matthew of her humanity and sense of self. As mentioned above, Matthew does not consider Greta to be real and thus deserving of empathy and dignity. Since he equates the real with the human and the artificial

with the non-human, he reserves ethical status, human rights, and personhood for human individuals only: Matthew's view represents the traditional anthropocentric view of ethical community and personhood. Conversely, Joe argues that the treatment Greta faces is barbaric regardless of her being non-human. In his view, Greta being self-aware and believing herself to be real suffices to treat her with dignity and to recognise her as an ethical being, as a person. The viewpoint presented by Joe in the narrative corresponds with the ideas of critics and activists who argue that the membership of ethical community and the right to personhood should be extended to non-human others, for instance, to highly intelligent non-human animals such as great apes.

The episode supports its argument for non-human personhood by emphasising the similarities between humans and sentient non-human agents, the self and the other. While the technological other—artificial intelligence, or a disembodied computer sentience—lacks a corporeal human form and thus has no human-like physical needs, the narrative focuses on the cognitive similarities between humans and the simulated consciousness. Since the other is essentially depicted as an exact replica of human consciousness, even replicating the original human individual's sense of self and identity, it is portrayed to be equipped with human-like cognitive skills, sentience, self-awareness, and emotions—qualities that have traditionally been used as criteria for personhood, as both Franceschi and Kapica describe (Franceschi 245; Kapica 616).

In critical posthumanist thought, the question about personhood does not only concern technological others. As mentioned above, the discussion about personhood has been extended to non-human animals: furthermore, the traditional definitions of personhood have historically excluded certain human groups from the ethical community and historically women, non-white people, and the differently abled, for instance, have been marginalised, marked other, and denied rights and personhood (Franceschi 230). Critique of the anthropocentric definitions of personhood then does not only concern the speculated self-aware technological other and whether or not such

beings should be recognised as persons once they emerge, but it also concerns the marginalised of today.

To summarise this discussion on artificial intelligence and non-human personhood, “White Christmas” puts forward the argument that those non-human agents who can state their own experience of being “real”—or, entities that are sentient and self-aware—are to be treated with empathy and dignity and to be considered ethical beings regardless of their non-humanness. Human exceptionalism and anthropocentric definitions of personhood are to be dismantled in the posthuman era as boundaries separating the human from the non-human, the self from the other, become challenged and these changes require us re-articulate what it means to be human. The surpassing of the human condition and the move towards the posthuman condition as imagined by critical posthuman thinkers is not to be perceived as the end of the human, as Hayles notes, but as the end of a certain perception of the human (286). The need to let go of anthropocentric assumptions and the notion of human exceptionalism is not only due to a demand from a speculated sentient and self-aware technological other, but because these constructions have and continue to harm human individuals marginalised by them. As Pepperell concludes: “the recognition that none of us are actually distinct from each other, or the world, will profoundly affect the way we treat each other, different species and the environment. To harm anything is to harm oneself.” (172)

5. Conclusion

Over the course of the last two chapters, I have striven to answer the central questions posed in the beginning of this thesis. Namely, I have aimed to uncover the diverse ways *Black Mirror* discusses the human-posthuman relationship and how its portrayals of technologically modified human individuals and technological non-human agents—our posthuman selves and others—comment on our fears and fantasies towards the convergence between the human and the technological and the collapse of traditional assumptions about the human subject and its relations to the non-human.

To briefly summarise my findings and thus conclude my study, the five episodes chosen for analysis depict a variety of posthuman scenarios. The episodes “The Entire History of You” and “Be Right Back” portray the cyborg and the android in techno-anxious narratives that push forward bioconservative arguments about the notion of human exceptionalism: they defend a traditionally essentialist understanding of the whole and pure human who comes to be corrupted through the convergence with technology. In contrast, “San Junipero” depicts a transhumanist escapist fantasy about overcoming human limitations through the avatar self and cyberspace. On the one hand, the episode introduces the liberating aspects of the posthuman through its exploration of the virtual as a space for queer empowerment; on the other, it simultaneously presents an alarming view of the abandonment of the body where the humanistic legacy of transhumanism and its goal of “perfecting” the human result in potentially discriminatory practices towards differently abled bodies—or, towards bodies that have not been accepted as the norm. The episodes “Black Museum” and “White Christmas”, in turn, contain clear critical standpoints in their portrayals of virtual selves and artificial intelligence and comment on dehumanisation of the posthuman individual and anthropocentric definitions of personhood respectively. Each of the five episodes analysed have incorporated social commentary within their narratives to some extent: “The Entire History of You” critiques technologically mediated relationships and the devaluation of human connection and “Be Right Back” cautions against human-android relationships, while the exploration of Haraway’s

cyborg imagery in “San Junipero”—while flawed for the reasons stated above—challenges restrictive and repressive cultural categories. “Black Museum” and “White Christmas” are the most explicit in their critique of humanism, its essentialist construction of the human subject, and the notion of human exceptionalism.

The variety of approaches towards the posthuman presented in the five episodes of *Black Mirror* did not come as a surprise during my analysis, since the episodes were specifically selected beforehand to ensure both techno-utopian and techno-phobic views, diverse scenarios about the speculated posthuman future, and a multitude of posthuman beings and relevant concepts. Thus, I then expected to find common themes between the narratives as they all examine how modern and posthuman technologies affect the human individual, interpersonal relationships, and the society as a whole. However, I was surprised to discover that each of the episodes discussed the ruin or end of the human in one way or another: the loss of humanity emerged as a common concern for all five narratives, techno-anxious, techno-utopian, and critical alike. In contrast to the more traditionally techno-anxious science fiction narratives, “Black Museum” and “White Christmas” demonstrate that the feared end of the human does not occur solely as technology comes to corrupt and dehumanise the human individual, or as a more intelligent or powerful technological non-human other arises, turns against humans, and comes to replace its human creator. Instead, the end or ruin of the human can also occur as our treatment of non-human others and marginalised individuals reveals the monstrous in the human. Thus, besides speculating about the effects of the convergence between the human and the machine and where technological developments might take us, the series also contains strong arguments for the furtherance of critical posthuman thought and the posthuman condition: this is then the most meaningful finding in my analysis of the posthuman in *Black Mirror*. If the human and what is traditionally perceived as the human condition is perceived to be changing due to changes in our technological reality, we must re-articulate the human subject and its relations to the non-human in a way that avoids reinstalling discriminatory practices against

those labeled as other and “less than” by the essentialist humanist standard. As Alexander Darius Ornella states, we can imagine science fiction as an “ethical laboratory” where to consider these changes to our traditional understanding of the human in the posthuman era (337-38).

This thesis has specifically explored the representation of different posthuman beings and the human-posthuman relationship in *Black Mirror* and the theoretical field of posthumanism has proved appropriate for my focus. As I established the theoretical framework for my analysis, I deemed it necessary to outline both popular and critical approaches of the movement for my goal to fully understand how the episodes were to portray the speculative visions of the popular approach and to participate in the critique of the academic approach. However, in establishing my theoretical framework, I did eventually emphasise popular posthumanism and the conflicting views within its debates on technological modification of the human, as these viewpoints reflect our fears and fantasies towards the posthuman. Having thus limited the scope of my thesis, certain themes and concepts relating to critical register of the posthuman, albeit significant, were left out of my analysis. In hindsight, I do believe that combining, for instance, feminist or postcolonial point of view with that of critical posthumanism could have helped me to uncover more nuanced views of the posthuman in episodes that initially seemed less critical in their approach towards posthumanity. For example, discussing the representation of gendered and racialised cyborgs, or comparing portrayals of male and female androids and other non-human agents could have aided me to uncover more social commentary within the series and strengthen what I have already deemed to be the most meaningful finding of my thesis: that is, the series’ participation in the furtherance of critical posthuman thought. While these themes have been left out of this study, they remain as fruitful opportunities and potential avenues for further research on the posthuman in *Black Mirror*.

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