The Elements of Contemporary Technological Dystopia in Dave Eggers' The Circle and TV Series Black Mirror

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Abstract

With the increasing use and development of technology, the interest in technological dystopias is increasing as well. Literary and TV dystopias are used as cautionary tales for what may come in the future and a wake-up call for what is happening in the present. Dave Eggers' *The Circle* is a novel about a technological company that has all the means to improve humanity but takes it too far and turns the society into a dystopian one with constant surveillance, tracking devices, mandatory registration, and an abundance of devices used for mass control. *Black Mirror* is a popular TV series that shows how technology influences people by using a different technological device or advancement in every episode, covering topics from surveillance, child tracking, oppression, tyranny, resurrections, punishment, and more. The aim of this thesis is, by focusing on these two technological dystopias, to outline the elements of the subgenre.

Keywords: dystopia, technology, *Black Mirror*, *The Circle*, technological dystopia, surveillance, social media, tracking

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Introduction

   With the rapid and exponential development of technology that has brought us in 60 years from computers occupying a whole room to smart wrist watches with greater processing power, fears of how that technology will influence human beings have been increasing practically at the same rate. Literature and other mediums are used to deepen our understanding of the present and are ways to escape reality. There has not been a more prolific theme in 2020 than the dystopian reality everyone has been living in. The most re-visited and analyzed works were George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, which are both extremely relevant to this day due to the lack of freedom and safety that was experienced by many, be it because of the global pandemic of Covid-19, distrust of governments and news media or because of the incredibly fast spread of misinformation caused by social media. However, this paper will not focus on those two most important works of the dystopian genre, but rather on the future of the genre. This paper will examine dystopias that show the grim reality of advancing technological societies, the societies whose lives revolve around social media, that are under surveillance and brainwashed, the societies where robots are an everyday occurrence and where humans are just as controllable as the aforementioned robots.

   The society we live in is not so grim compared to the one we see in the very popular TV series *Black Mirror,* but we can sympathize with the characters because it does not seem too far off. "*Black Mirror* is a series of sci-fi anthology that, since it first aired in 2011, has been widely discussed because of its depiction of issues on futuristic technology and its prediction about the future society" (Galieh Gunagama 38). *Black Mirror* covers a whole range of topics through a dystopian looking glass so this paper will only cover those episodes that are solely focused on technological control: "Nosedive" (S03E01), "Fifteen Million Merits" (S01E02), "Arkangel" (S04E02), "The Entire History of You" (S01E03), and "White Bear" (S02E02). The series was originally created in 2011 but did not reach global audiences until 2015 when it was purchased by the streaming service Netflix. The topics from these episodes are closely related to what Dave Eggers covered in his novel *The Circle* (2013) – a technological company that takes surveillance and social media presence too far. The technological company is described as the successor of the existing companies like Google and Facebook. "Google was undoubtedly the best example for *The Circle*: similar to *The Circle*, Google is generally seen as a fabulous institution for work and like *The Circle*, Google has come under fire in recent years, both for monopolizing the world's access to information and for using its customers' personal information in unethical ways" (AbdulZahra et al. 5). *The Circle* and *Black Mirror* may not be the most recent

technological dystopias based on their publishing dates, but they share their themes and worldviews.

The primary goal of this paper is to examine the dystopian genre in general, list the different subtypes, and exemplify them by focusing on contemporary technological dystopias, both literary and on television. The research method consists of literature and TV analysis. Furthermore, the paper will compare the themes that reoccur in the abovementioned works, focusing on one theme at a time and explaining it with the help of *The Circle* and the scenes from a chosen episode of *Black Mirror*. All the themes will also be contextualized within contemporary issues. Finally, this paper will list the possible elements of technological dystopia as a subgenre of literary and TV dystopia.

1. Dystopia

1.1. Defining Dystopia

> "Literature is essentially an interpretation of life, and literary form a technique for its expression. In our century, it must concern itself with science and technology because our lives are now bound up with developments in this field."
>
> (Mahida 1)

In 2020, the year when the pandemic of the Covid 19 virus hit the world and the year of global catastrophes and protests, people were going back to *1984, Brave New World*, and other famous literary works to understand what has been happening around them in these modern times. Technological dystopias are also gaining popularity because of the ever-growing technological businesses. In order to define dystopia, it is imperative to define its predecessor – utopia. "Utopianism generally is the imaginative projection, positive or negative, of a society that is substantially different from the one in which the author lives" (Claeys and Sargent 1). Utopia shows a completely imaginary society that is perfect and set in an imaginary world that always turns out too good to be true. The term, coined by Thomas Moore in 1516, is derived from Greek and means "no (or not) place" (Claeys and Sargent 1):

> As a literary genre, utopia refers to works that describe an imaginary society in some detail. Utopian thought construed more widely, however, is not restricted to fiction and includes visionary, millenarian, and apocalyptic as well as constitutional writings united by their willingness to envision a dramatically different form of society as either a social ideal-type or its negative inversion. (Claeys and Sargent 1)

The negative inversion mentioned above is dystopia, the utopia's negative equivalent. It is an antithesis to utopia, but one does not exclude the other, they complement each other and simply provide two different views on similar topics. "Dystopian thought can serve as a valuable corrective to this tendency, and therefore should be thought of as working *with* rather than *against* utopian thought" (Booker 177). According to Veira (16), dystopia originates from the 19th century, 1868 to be exact, and it was born as an antithesis to utopia. "Recognized as the negative counterpart of the utopia, that is, a perfectly organized, imagined society or place, dystopia is generally described as a bad place, or even more simply, a utopia gone wrong" (Pataki 426). The word dystopia is also derived from Greek "*dus* and *topos*, meaning a diseased, bad, faulty, or unfavorable place" (Claeys 4). John Stuart Mill used the word dystopia to name a

perspective opposite of utopia. "The term 'dystopia' enters common currency only in the twentieth century, though it appears intermittently beforehand (dys-topia or 'cacotopia', bad place, having been used by John Stuart Mill in an 1868 parliamentary debate)" (Claeys 107). Veira emphasizes that dystopia cannot exist without utopia because they share the same narratives and strategies:

> Literary dystopia utilizes the narrative devices of literary utopia, incorporating into its logic the principles of euchronia (i.e., imagining what the same place, the place where the utopist lives, will be like in another time, the future), but predicts that things will turn out badly; it is thus essentially pessimistic in its presentation of projective images. (17)

Dystopias create dysfunctional worlds and societies that terrify the reader and that are worse than their society, a cautionary tale of what might happen, or the worst-case scenario. Some utopias may seem dystopian in their nature, mainly in the fact that most utopias show us a "perfect society" that is always unattainable. The difference with these types of utopias and dystopias is that "here the individual's submersion in the group is consensual (though this concept is not unproblematic). It results not in enslavement but voluntary submission to group norms" (Claeys 7).

Literary dystopias are mostly written as warnings or caution tales of contemporary issues or reoccurring problems in society. "A dystopia is a future world that extends and distorts modern day issues into an inexhaustible and dehumanized state in which controls have been forced upon society and its inhabitants through social and physical limitations that restrict many aspects of life" (Spisak qtd. in Ryan 3). Dystopias always have a hopeful message, so the outlook is not always completely grim. The message of hope in dystopias is what differentiates them from anti-utopias, another subgenre of utopian literature. "Dystopia best fits the description of the subgenre of anti-utopia, wherein anti-utopian texts serve to discredit the mere possibility of ever achieving a utopian social order, and dystopias allow for the possibility by showing the horrifying, and very likely, outcomes following the realization of such utopian ideals" (Pataki 426). The other difference between anti-utopia and dystopia is that dystopia is not represented as a dystopia. The structure of the society in dystopia and all the rules that it has are shown in the image of utopia so unlike anti-utopia it is not self-aware. "Many dystopian worlds are formulated with utopic ideologies that have seemingly perfect ways of living and running a society, but only for the privileged few in charge" (Ryan 3). In Suzanne Collins' YA dystopian novel *The Hunger Games* (2018), the society is divided into twelve districts and the games themselves are represented as the perfect system. This system is presented as a solution that saved the country

from war and lets people live in peace today, totally unaware of the system and the effect it has on average people who are not at the very top of the society. The Hunger Games is an annual competition in which two people from every district have to participate and fight until there is only one victor. The games are represented as the memorialization of the civil war and as proof of how much better life is now, under the Capitol's control. The reason why people did not rebel against the system until they were incited was that they did not know they could. Every district has specific work to perform, and it is completely unaware that the Capitol is prospering from their hard work. "Panem resurrects the fantasy of a now-defunct model of state political economy in the role of principal antagonist. The 'ruling city of Panem' exercises absolute control over its subordinate districts, which are distinguished by their respective industries—a centrality symbolically reinforced and practically manifest in the city's geospatial location" (Smith and Korsnak 200). Anti-dystopia, on the other hand, is written as "a utopia that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as a criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia" (Claeys and Sargent 2).

1.2. The Types of Literary Dystopias

Dystopia of the 20th century became a synonym to totalitarianism because of the works like *1984, Fahrenheit 451*, and *Brave New World*. These novels were written as a response to the economic and historical changes in the 20th century, and were focused on the surveillance of citizens, governmental control, and oppression of the individual. These novels equate dystopian societies with "a regime defined by extreme coercion, inequality, imprisonment, and slavery. Often this is described as some concept of collectivism run wild, though some include conformist tendencies in liberal societies which encourage egalitarian repression and intolerance" (Claeys 5). It can be said that "[t]wo ideas, which are intimately connected, have fed dystopian discourse: on the one hand, the idea of totalitarianism; on the other hand, the idea of scientific and technological progress which, instead of impelling humanity to prosper, has sometimes been instrumental in the establishment of dictatorships" (Veira 378) and "restriction of freedom and possession of human lives" (Altunay and Aşkan 336).

It is hard to define the exact subtypes of dystopia because they very often interrelate, yet we can indicate "three main, if often interrelated, forms of the concept: the political dystopia; the environmental dystopia; and finally, the technological dystopia, where science and technology ultimately threaten to dominate or destroy humanity" (Claeys 5). Some common dystopian themes

"include mastery of nature—to the point that it becomes barren or turns against humankind; technological advances that enslave humans or regiment their lives; the mandatory division of people in society into castes or groups with specialized functions; and a collective loss of memory and history making mankind easier to manipulate psychologically and ultimately leading to dehumanization. (Mahida 2)

Furthermore, we have to mention individualism as a dystopian theme because the emphasis in dystopian societies is usually on the society as a whole and not on the individual. Every step out of the ordinary or the norm can be punished, even fatally. The ones that do stand out are the heroes who start revolutions, or instigate change, but they still work for the benefit of the society as a whole. "People sacrifice their individual interest to the common good. Social solidarity trumps selfish individualism" (Claeys 8). For example, the loss of individualism is depicted in Ray Bradburry's *Fahrenheit 451* where books are censored and technology is on the rise, causing people to lose their ability to think freely and critically, and in Orwell's *1984,* in which the individual does not matter at all, everything is done for the benefit of society and the regime. Another common dystopian theme is survival as the dystopian protagonist is always running from the dystopian society in order to survive and save everybody else even if it means sacrificing himself/herself. This is "often linked with dystopia's obsession with enemies, and its determination to eliminate them, or at least neutralize their threat, while simultaneously creating them anew as a means of justifying the power of the regime" (Claeys 9). For example, William Golding's 1954 novel *Lord of the Flies* focuses on a group of young men who are stranded on an island, and are forced to survive by building a civilization for themselves. They try to form rules, govern themselves, and survive.

The interconnectedness of dystopian themes can be seen in all dystopian works. For example, Bradburry's *Fahrenheit 451* deals with the loss of individuality, but also focuses on the negative effects of technology and how much it can control and influence an individual. The technology itself is controlled by the government, so this novel addresses several themes characteristic of dystopian literature.

2. Technological Dystopia

"We must declare our virtual selves immune to your sovereignty, even as we continue to consent to your rule over our bodies. We will spread ourselves across the Planet so that no one can arrest our thoughts. We will create a civilization of the Mind in Cyberspace. May it be more humane and fair than the world your governments have made before." (Barlow, "A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace")

As previously mentioned, over the course of the 20th century, technological control has become the topic of many novels, films, television series, and articles. People are often afraid of the unknown, so various authors tried to explore new technologies as they came and to show the worst-case scenarios to make reality more appealing: "[i]t must serve as a warning for what is to come. What is the purpose of speculating in possible futures? It gives us a range of possibilities and reasons to avoid crash courses; it can provide an alternative to the purely technological pursuit that has ensued" (Dündar 9). A famous example of a dystopian cautionary tale is Huxley's *Brave New World* that, among other things, has introduced "complicated entertainment machines that generate both harmless leisure and the high levels of consumption and production," which are more controllable version of today's regular smartphones (Mahida 3). The technology that exists in 2021 is already being used for tracking, surveillance, and control rather than for simple entertainment. Social media platforms are so essential in our daily lives, education, socializing, and work that we continue using them despite all their side effects. There is VR (Virtual Reality) technology that has been

> featured in performances or theme parks, but virtual reality is also accessible at home. The Samsung virtual reality glasses use your smartphone to create a virtual reality in front of your eyes, whilst the HTC Vive uses virtual reality glasses, two controllers and sensors placed in your living room to recreate the room in your virtual reality game. (Van der Meulen 2)

There are self-driving cars and watches that monitor movement and health. This is the reason, among others, why the interest in technological dystopia has risen, the technological advances happened so fast that they have been implemented and replaced before we have even had the chance to understand and analyze their impact.

The beginnings of technological dystopias are to be sought in Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World*, but as technology develops these works are becoming slightly outdated. Yet, their influence is immense as "[c]ontemporary politics is still strongly influenced

by such vulgarized versions of the dystopian sensibility as distrust of 'big government.' These changes were accompanied by a dramatic shift in attitudes toward technology. By the end of the 1960s technophobia had largely replaced post-war enthusiasm for nuclear energy and the space program" (Feenberg 82). Nowadays, technological dystopias address contemporary, if not future, technological issues. *The Circle*, for example, was a direct response to the ever-growing number of technological companies and products:

> [t]he growth of the tech industry in the United States of America in the early 21st century, especially in California, was the most significant historical trend to which the novel *The Circle* response. Through this time, network programmers and computer engineers resided in California, especially in Northern of the city, and produced a startling number of the devices and websites that American people now take for invested: the personal computer such as Dell, the iPhone, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. (AbdulZahra et al. 11990)

According to Kaleta Jensen and Scall Sørensen (92), *The Circle* is a contemporary recreation of *1984* with the same topics of surveillance and security. "Both authors imagined a dystopian surveillance-driven futuristic society where the implementation of technology is utilized to obtain total control and domination over people" (Kaleta Jensen and Scall Sørensen 92). The goal stays the same, a cautionary tale for the reader, the difference is that the technology mentioned is far beyond a television that watches your every move. "Cautionary tales can also be applied to the notion of dystopias, seeing as dystopias at their core do not solely concern themselves with a particular government or technology, but rather the very idea that humanity can be formed and molded into a fitting entity" (Kaleta Jensen and Scall Sørensen 5).

2.1. The Types of Technological Dystopias

Technology became an integral part of human lives, so the classification of technology is done in relation to humans. The first type of technological dystopia is based on technology that is outside of the human. By outside, it is meant that it is a device that does influence the human life, but is not a part of the human body. "In this type, the idea of technology is presented in the form of a sophisticated device that is outside the human body and requires a certain way to use it" (Galieh Gunagama 40). The examples of these devices are cellphones, television screens, and most of the technology we possess today. Dystopias centered around surveillance also fall in this category because, even though surveillance is influencing humans, it is outside of them in form of cameras and microphones.

The second type of technological dystopia involves technology that is connected to the human body and is a part of the human body. An example would be a tracker placed inside of a human's skin, for example, a microchip "This type of technology is portrayed as a sophisticated tool attached to the human body, which can be used in specific ways and can also work automatically" (Galieh Gunagama 40).

The third type of technological dystopia uses the technology that is based on human consciousness, replicating human's thoughts and feelings. "The concept of this technology is displayed as a sophisticated tool that can be connected directly with the mind and consciousness of humans to carry out real-time commands in the brain" (Galieh Gunagrama 40). This kind of technology can be seen in one of the last *Black Mirror* episodes, "Rachel, Jack and Ashley Too" in which the singer's thoughts and consciousness were placed in a robot doll. The doll has all of Ashley O's personality, but it taps just one part of it, her stage persona, due to a limiter that was placed in it:

> [t]hey simply scanned Ashley O's entire brain and installed a "synaptic snapshot" of it into Ashley Too. But, since the real Ashley O is a little too full of attitude and swear words to be marketed as a wholesome companion for young teens, they also installed a "limiter" that restricted the robot to the 4 percent of Ashley O's brain dedicated to feigning the cheery disposition, incessant optimism, and "empowerment vibe" that comprise her public persona. (Dunn 265)

The whole personality unlocks once the singer rebels and is being put into an induced coma. This technology does not fully fit into the third type because it does not only coincide with a human's consciousness, it actually exceeds it, resulting in the doll operating as a singular entity outside of its human equivalent.

The last type of technological dystopias are those that combine one, two or all the above mentioned elements, and this is the category into which both *Black Mirror* and *The Circle* fall. The previously mentioned surveillance dystopia may fall into this category if there is a combination of outside technology (CCTV) and GPS trackers that are embedded into the skin.

3. Technological Utopias Gone Wrong

> "I held out hope that there were those who would rise up against you people. Or that a new generation would see all this as ludicrous, oppressive, utterly out of control. But now I know that even if someone were to strike you down if the Circle ended tomorrow, something worse would probably take its place."
> (Eggers 432)

Most technological dystopias, as most dystopias in general, start with a utopian vision. A vision of a beautiful, clean world that is very aesthetically pleasing, where nobody is sick because of technological advances in medicine, where you can look at your own memories, control your house with a remote control, etc. At first glance, who would not want that kind of life? A life that is stress-free because you can solve all your problems with the click of a button. Diving deeper, you get the aspects that make the story a dystopia, whether it is no privacy, no individuality, no critical thinking, or something different entirely, you see that maybe not everything is as perfect as it seems. "Take *Brave New World* for example; it all began with a utopian idea. No more sickness, cure for cancer, eternal youth, no more over-population or starvation and no violence – all utopian imaginings that most would want. But the fulfillment that utopia might bring often culminates into dystopia" (Dündar 5).

3.1. *The Circle*

The Circle and *Black Mirror* also portray the notion of utopia gone wrong. *The Circle* is centered around Mae who gets the opportunity of a lifetime, a job in one of the biggest, if not the biggest, technological companies in the world: "[t]here were over ten thousand employees on this, the main campus, but the Circle had offices all over the globe, and was hiring hundreds of gifted young minds every week" (Eggars 45). She is welcomed into a company that seemingly wants to unite the world with social platforms and devices, the company that pays well and that will open doors for her: "[b]ut here, all had been perfected. The best people had made the best systems and the best systems had reaped funds, unlimited funds, that made possible this, the best place to work. And it was natural that it was so, Mae thought. Who else but utopians could make utopia?" (Eggars 28). The company's goal mentioned many times in the novel is to close "the Circle," meaning that you will have one account for all platforms, payments, downloads, and everything else: "Your devices knew who you were, and your one identity—the TruYou, unbendable and unmaskable—was the person paying, signing up, responding, viewing and reviewing, seeing and being seen . . . One button for the rest of your life online" (Eggers 21).

The creators of the company, called the "Three Wise Men," have created the Circle as a company that will help with all the world's problems, cure diseases, make everyone and everything transparent and visible, connect the world. One of the wise men, Bailey, tells Mae why he wanted to be a part of the company's making:

> I'm a believer in the perfectibility of human beings. I think we can be perfect or near to it. And when we become our best selves, the possibilities are endless. We can solve any problem. We can cure any disease, end hunger, everything, because we won't be dragged down by all our weaknesses, our petty secrets, our hoarding of information and knowledge. We will finally realize our potential. (Eggers 291)

This utopian vision is seen throughout the whole novel, and the creators as well as the employees believe in this idea until the very end. This is a very common occurrence in dystopian novels, as was mentioned before, but not many are as persistent at keeping the image of utopia as Mae and her bosses. Even though the company was created as a means of connecting the world and making it a simpler place, without any crime or misbehaviors, it actually achieved control over nation and market dominance: "Was there really no competition out there? The Circle had 90 percent of the search market. Eighty-eight percent of the free-mail market, 92 percent of text servicing" (Eggers 173).

The reader is fully aware that this company does have malicious intents, they see that Mae is being overworked and indoctrinated, but she does not. Even when it is implied that eventually everyone will be in the Circle, that everyone will have TruYou, even if involuntary, she still does not see the problem: "But this is just the pivot of history . . . I mean, during any major human turning point, there's upheaval. Some get left behind, some choose to be left behind" (Eggers 484). In most dystopias, there is a point where the main character realizes that they are not living in a utopian world, and they start seeing all the things that are wrong with the system, but Mae never does. There was a brief moment when she questioned the ideas of the Circle. She starts questioning whether everything should really be public after her partner recorded them during a sexual act and excused his act by saying that in the Circle nothing gets deleted: "We don't delete here, Mae. Bailey would freak. He'd weep. It hurts him personally when anyone even considers the deleting of any information" (Eggers 204). Mae appears to understand this idea but is seen questioning it later in a conversation about privacy and transparency with one of her bosses: "But I still think there are things, even if just a few, that we want to keep to ourselves. I mean, everyone does things alone, or in the bedroom, that they are ashamed of" (Eggers 288). Her boss manages to convince her that these are the things we should not be ashamed of because everyone does that and that maybe "if we all, as a society, decide that

this is behavior we'd rather not engage in, the fact that everyone know, or has the power to know who's doing it, this would prevent the behavior from being engaged in" (Eggers 288). Another moment of questioning occurs when she catches her parents in a similar predicament on her camera and wants to delete it, but knowing that nothing gets deleted at the Circle, she decides to get past it by burying herself in her work and eventually forgetting about it: "What would transparency be if we could delete anything we felt was embarrassing in some way? You know we don't delete" (Eggers 369). Despite a few moments of uncertainty, Mae eventually fully immerses herself into the utopian vision of the company, even if it completely changes everything she has stood for and essentially who she is. Until the very end of the novel, Mae believes that the Circle is the revolution; she keeps believing even when people around her, and the readers, see that it is a fully dystopian world that has no redeeming qualities: "All of that would be, so soon, replaced by a new and glorious openness, a world of perpetual light. Completion was imminent, and it would bring peace, and it would bring unity, and all that messiness of humanity until now, all those uncertainties that accompanied the world before the Circle, would be only a memory" (Eggers 387).

3.2. *Black Mirror*

All the episodes of *Black Mirror* are utopias gone wrong, each in a different way, with different types of technological advancements and different catalysts. "'Black Mirror' uses satire that puts to the proof the dark sights of modern society, especially as it relates to our connection with technology. Each standalone episode offers an illustration of a world that's involving very modern technology or design, yet credible" (Geçer and Serbes 1679). Killer robots, presented in the fifth episode, titled "Metalhead," of season four, are metallic robots resembling dogs that hunt men in a post-apocalyptic world. The protagonist is being chased by the robots, but the audience does not get an explanation why this is happening or who is behind these attacks. "The episode portrays a neo-noir type of robot nightmare in which the 'killer robot' persistently pursues the protagonist with the callous efficiency of cutting-edge military hardware" (Csernatoni 1). The protagonist manages to fight them off several times, but when they die, they release a shrapnel of trackers that sends signals about the person's location for them to be tracked down by other robots, making it impossible to escape. "The nature of the threat, the doglike robot, conveys the alarming possibility of a more than likely near future where humanity is under existential threat" (Csernatoni 1). It is important to note that the killer robots are just that

– the machines that are programmed for killing. They are not artificially intelligent robots, they have a mission and if they fail to execute it, one of their clones will take over using the tracking devices. "What 'Metalhead' is good at is illustrating the ultimate objectification of human life, reduced to a bleeping and pulsating dot exposed in this case to the structure of exception that constitutes technopower" (Csernatoni 3). The reason why the episode does not seem so unrealistic can be found in the fact that killer dog robots in "Metalhead" are the exact replica of a robot called BigDog: "BigDog is a legged robot under development at Boston Dynamics, with funding from DARPA. The goal is to build unmanned legged vehicles with rough-terrain mobility superior to existing wheeled and tracked vehicles" (Blankenspoor et al. 10823). *Black Mirror* creators used this robot to show what would happen in the worst possible scenario if somebody had malicious intents with a robot of this military grade power.

"Metalhead" is just one episode in a long list of *Black Mirror* episodes that show striking technological advances. The first episode of the second season, titled "Be Right Back," tells a story about technological resurrection, bringing a person back from the dead by piecing together all of their social media activities, their statutes, videos, pictures, thoughts, and feelings:

> it is possible to recreate a person after his death by relying on his social media sharings. The recreation of individual as a replicant of himself is based on the idea that a physical recreation is possible without implantation of memories. A real human simulacrum is present which have all the aspects of reality and is more real than reality, in a world where even death is impossible. (Altunay and Aşkan 337)

The protagonist brings her boyfriend back to life but is quickly disappointed and uncomfortable with the new version of him. This is a good example of the third type of technological dystopia, using technology that can reproduce the human consciousness, in this case even after death. The technology was shown as lacking even though the clone said everything he would and did say because humans are unpredictable. No matter how many posts and videos can be found online, it is highly improbable that a human's actual personality can be built, just their online persona, which is often unrealistic, or in the best case scenario incomplete.

The next episode to be discussed is the fourth episode of the second season, titled "White Christmas." It "takes place in a time when the communication can be carried out through small widgetish devices; the 'block' option in social networks is applicable in real life; human consciousness can be transferred to a program that manages all our personal work; and through Z-eye implants the actions of people can be controlled and shared" (Altunay and Aşkan 339). The technology in this episode seems unrealistic and impossible; the same feeling persists when watching any episode of *Black Mirror*: the audience feels as if they are watching a sci-fi movie

that will never become reality. Yet, each episode makes us question how similar the depicted technological devices are to the technology we already have and the technology we see being developed. "*Black Mirror* series focuses on the disadvantages of digital technology and founds a dystopic world. Such a world of dystopia does not seem distant if the rapid development in science and technology are considered" (Altunay and Aşkan 340). *Black Mirror* episodes never have a happy ending and the idea behind that is the "cautionary tale" dystopia, the audience is being warned about the dangers of the technology that they have and the technology that is yet to come. "The reasons why it is necessary to shock and mobilize the audience in order to arouse their consciousness is because it could become – and, in some aspects, it is already – our society in a few years" (Lopes 92).

4. The Elements of Contemporary Technological Dystopias

4.1. Human Rating Charts

> "I fear that we are beginning to design ourselves to suit digital models of us,
> and I worry about a leaching of empathy and humanity in that process." (Lanier 48)

Social media's system of ranking people based on their likes and followers has been implemented into many contemporary dystopian novels and TV series. Apps such as Instagram, Tik Tok, and Facebook have millions, even billions, of users who post what they are doing at any given moment; they are liking and commenting things, following and being followed. The growth of social media platforms has led to global connection, easier communication, and a community for everyone who is looking for it. "The bonds and connections formed online serve a multitude of valuable purposes, ranging from exchange of news and knowledge, collaborative working, through leisure and recreation, to therapy and friendship" (Yar 37). It can also lead to self-esteem issues, eating disorders, mental health problems, etc. because online everyone and everything seem perfect and reality is often distorted. It is inherently a numbers game; the more followers and likes you have, the more you will "grow" in popularity, gaining fame and riches. "It is the invasive logic of commercial social media and its financial incentive to keep us in a profitable state of anxiety, envy, and distraction. It is furthermore the cult of individuality and personal branding that grow out of such platforms and affect the way we think about our offline selves and the places where we actually live" (Odell 11).

Black Mirror's "Nosedive" takes social media to a whole new level. "Nosedive" is the first episode of the third season of *Black Mirror* depicting the dangers of trying to keep up with the numbers game. In the episode, everyone has an eye implant that shows them the "feed" in 3D, as if it is in front of them, and through the implant "every interaction throughout the day is rated on a 5-star scale" (Sculos 2). They can scroll through someone's "feed" with their eyes, see their scores (1-5) and the amount of likes and comments they have per post. The "distinction between real and virtual no longer exists. Indeed, the 'score' of an individual is not inscribed in a virtual platform which is a cyberspace different from the real world, but it defines his/her being entirely, and determines his/her status both socially and economically" (Bartolone 32). Lacie, the main character, shows how unreal life on social media really is. She practices her smile in the mirror, greats everyone, scrolls through the feed to ask them personal questions to seem like an

active listener, and does everything to be liked. "Lacie's unbridled pursue of happiness is straightly connected to the next point: to reach utopias, a performance is necessary – and if existence is a performance, there must be a rehearsal: consequently, Lacie rehearses in front of the mirror laughs, gestures and her speech as a maid of honor" (Lopes 89). Her score is 4.2, and she is satisfied with it till she needs a higher rate to get a discount for a very luxurious apartment complex that accepts only 4.5s or up. Living in a neighborhood like that is "in line with what the 'rating' system promotes as the image of the successful and happy individual" (Bartolone 33). In order to achieve her goal, according to the consultant she visits, Lacie needs "a punch up" or "votes from quality people," meaning "high fours" ("Nosedive" 00:13:09-00:13:18). Lacie has a lot of people in her circle who give her very high marks but her circle comprises of mostly "mid-to low-range folks" ("Nosedive" 00:12:56-00:13:00). Their votes do not have the same value as the votes from high fours so Lacie's rating is not going up.

The importance of the numbers is seen not only in real estate, but in every aspect of people's lives. At the airport, where Lacie starts yelling in frustration and has security called on her, she gets a penalty of -1 point in her overall score. The fast line and last-minute flights are for members of the Prime Flight Program for which "you gotta be a 4.2 or over to qualify" ("Nosedive" 00:28:11-00:28:16). The same system applies to every place of business, car rental places, banks, companies, coffee shops. "According to this hierarchy, the high fours deserve rights and privileges that are denied to those who are in a lower position in the rating pyramid – they are not allowed to go into some spaces and might have health treatments rejected if there is a person with a better rating waiting for the same medical care" (Lopes 88). Lacie catches a break when she is invited to a wedding of an old friend, Naomi, who is a high four and has many high four friends. Lacie was supposed to be her maid of honor, and if she could get some good ratings from Naomi's high four friends, she could significantly improve her rating. Through a series of unfortunate events, Lacie gets "downvoted" and barely makes it to the wedding, not giving up even after getting stranded, thrown out of the airport, and losing her belongings. Naomi does not want Lacie in her wedding anymore because "the authenticity of a vintage bond low four at a gathering of this caliber played fantastically on all the simulation we ran. But now you're a sub three. Sorry. That just puts the stink on things a little too much" ("Nosedive" 00:45:46-00:47:07). Both Lacie and her friend Naomi have ulterior motives: Lacie wants to be "upvoted" by high fours and Naomi wants to seem gracious for inviting a 4.2. Lacie attends the wedding anyway in a final attempt to get her votes and gets thrown out after threatening Naomi's husband, yelling at everyone, and debasing herself. At the end, Lacie goes to prison for her tantrum at Naomi's wedding and her punishment is the removal of her eye implant. The final

scene of the episode shows, in an ironic way, that it took going to prison for her to finally be free of the numbers prison.

In *The Circle*, there is only one social media platform, used by everyone and controlled by the Circle. As mentioned, the company Circle gained success after buying Google and Facebook and other social media platforms to gain complete monopoly over all users: "[i]t was they who monetized TruYou, who found ways to reap funds from all of Ty's innovations, and it was they who grew the company into the force that subsumed Facebook, Twitter, Google, and finally Alacrity, Zoopa, Jefe, and Quan" (Eggers 22). The social media that is created in *The Circle* is a combination of all existing social media platforms today, Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, and it is incorporated under the name *Zing*. Mae, the protagonist of the novel, is presented with a Zing account consisting of two circles based on the proximity of the connection: "next to the Zing feed, you'll see a window for your primary social feed. You'll also see that we split it into two parts, the InnerCircle social feed, and your external social, that's your OuterCircle" (Eggers 98). The InnerCircle is more important because it contains her close team and the news for mandatory events while the OuterCircle is for everyone and mostly for entertainment purposes. For Mae, the social media platforms mean almost as much as her job. As the plot progresses, Mae goes from someone who did not really care about social media and did not really use them to someone who is amongst the highest numbers in "PopularityRank," which is "an algorithm-generated number that takes into account all your activity in the InnerCircle" (Eggers 83). The algorithm is generated through everything Mae does on her platform, everything she likes and comments, all her "zings" or posts, attendance at events (Eggers 83). The ranks are presented as a way to keep in touch with colleagues, creating a community and finding likeminded people, but the true intentions behind it can be seen only when reading between the lines: "[a]nd that means the fostering of community. In fact, it must be a community. That is one of our slogans, as you probably know: Community First. And you've seen the signs that say Humans Work Here—I insist on those" (Eggers 41). Even though participation is encouraged and not obligatory, Mae gets reprimanded for her lack of participation and is asked to keep up with her "zings" even though the flow of the page is impossible to keep track of: "We actually see your profile, and the activity on it, as integral to your participation here. This is how your coworkers, even those on the other side of campus, know who you are. Communication is certainly not extracurricular, right?" (Eggers 78). The absurdity of the Circle's expectations of their employees' social media presence is best seen when Mae goes to visit her parents for the weekend to take care of her father after receiving news of his heart attack and does not post anything to her feed. She is invited to a meeting with

one of the "wise men" and is asked where she has been, with whom, what she was doing and why she was hiding it: "That's very understandable. To spend time with your parents, believe me, I think that is very, very cool . . . But we have no record of you being there. No photos, no zings, no reviews, notices, bumps" (Eggers 178). After that meeting, she is moved to another one, speaking with two other supervisors, who try to retrace her whole weekend with just two pieces of information: "We know you left campus at 5:42 p.m. on Friday, and you got back here 8:46 a.m. on Monday" (Eggers 181). The whole meeting is a series of questions, asking Mae why she would not share this and telling her that maybe some Circlers could have benefited from her experiences and that she is depriving them of crucially important information: "How do you think other Circlers feel, knowing that you're so close to them physically, that you're ostensibly part of a community here, but you don't want them to know your hobbies and interests. How do you think they feel?" (Eggers 188)

Eggars' descriptions of social media feeds and timelines seem paradoxical at times, with the overflow of messages, funny videos, people posting their food, their every thought, but five minutes of Instagram can make it seem very realistic: "now that became more challenging. The third-screen feed dropped forty new InnerCircle messages every few minutes, fifteen or so OuterCircle posts and zings" (Eggers 87). Just as in *Black Mirror* and in social media today, Mae's online presence is full of empty gestures. She spends hours and hours zinging and smiling, bumping and liking everything that came up on her feed to bump up her PopularityRank: "she embarked on a flurry of activity, sending four zings and thirty-two comments and eighty-eight smiles . . . after joining and posting in eleven discussion groups, sending another twelve zings . . . and signing up for sixty-seven more feeds, she'd done it" (Eggers 190). Eventually, when Mae starts liking the work, the repetitiveness and her rising up in the ranks give her a sense of accomplishment, so she starts pulling all-nighters to keep up with her "socials" and, in order to keep up with everything, starts sleeping in a company-issued apartment on Campus, one of many created for the employees who may need them: "Mae's new feeling of competence and confidence carried her through the week, and given how close she was to the top 2000, she stayed at her desk late through the weekend and early the next week . . . sleeping in the same dorm room every night" (Eggers 192).

Just like Lacie, Mae starts getting so influenced by the social media platforms that she does not do anything without posting it and there is not an hour of her life when she does not check her PopularityRank. She is obsessing over the numbers and the full scope of that is seen when she goes to visit her parents and her ex-boyfriend Mercer who forces her to face reality: "you willingly become utterly socially autistic. You no longer pick up on basic human

communication clues. You're at a table with three humans, all of whom are looking at you and trying to talk to you, and you're staring at a screen, searching for strangers in Dubai" (Eggers 260). Unlike Lacie, Mae does not snap out of it and never realizes that social media is influencing all her personal relationships. She does not get her moment of clarity. She goes from someone who was not posting anything to one of the most influential people in the Circle who is selling the idea of the company more vigorously than its creators.

Considering today's social media outreach and how widespread it is, there seems to be no way to avoid it. Even when one is conscious of the malicious intents, the mental health problems it can create and the dehumanization of it, there is no other option but to use it. If you want to communicate with people and stay up to date, you need to have at least one social media platform, and that does not include only Instagram and Facebook, it also applies to texting apps and emailing apps: "the social and economic system pushes on the addictive effect of new technologies, on people's need to conform to the standards of society and not to be excluded to keep control and protect the status quo or, in the case of a private business, to increase profit" (Bartolone 35). Mae's ex-boyfriend demonstrates that not everyone is enchanted with the Circle's "utopian" idea. He is trying to raise awareness on the privacy and liberty issues produced by social media platform and the Circle in general. On many different occasions, he tells Mae that he just wants to talk to her, that she is not present, that she has lost herself and cannot have a conversation anymore, but Mae always disregards him as somebody who is behind his time and who is a conspiracy theorist: "You and your ilk will live, willingly, joyfully . . . commenting on each other, voting and liking and disliking each other, smiling and frowning, and otherwise doing nothing much else" (Eggers 367).

Mae's reality check comes from Mercer, and Lacie's from her brother, who is very critical of the society they live in. In a discussion, her brother tries to convince her that the rates do not matter and that most of the high ranked people are not as happy as they seem on social media: "I am sorry, but I miss the normal you. Before this obsession, when we had conversations, remember? . . . High fours like Naomi, I bet they're suicidal on the inside" ("Nosedive" 00:24:17-00:24:41). Lacie disregards his comments and is only taken aback when he gives her a low grade because she is so number-crazed that nothing he could say would hurt more than him damaging her rank. "Nosedive" presents a utopia online and offline. Everyone is dressed in pastel colors, everyone looks similar, acts in a similar way, and nobody wants to do anything out of the ordinary because of the fear of bad rank. This episode is so aesthetically pleasing to watch because this is exactly what we see when we open an influencer's Instagram

profile or a YouTube video. This is what we are used to seeing and "Nosedive" shows us how ridiculous it would be if this was our reality.

While the apps existing today do not have the rating system or the PopularityRank, our reality is not too far from reaching this type of ranks. Apps like YouTube push their top creators to the main page, TikTok has an algorithm that favours more followed creators, and the same goes for Facebook, Instagram, and all other social media apps. People become worried if their views are low or if they do not have as many likes as they usually do. They buy fake likes and followers in order to gain more real likes and followers to hopefully increase their revenue or simply feel better about themselves. The true immersion into the system that rates them is seen in both Lacie and Mae. Both start living for the numbers and lose track of the humans behind the marks. This is used "[t]o show how current new technologies such as social networks are critically represented as a means empowering images, signs and appearance to the benefit of consumerism, and paralyzing any spirit of protest or resistance. In fact, the protagonist, Lacie, is immersed into a virtual and controlled world that is almost completely detached from reality" (Bartolone 8).

4.2. Child Tracking

"You want a living kid with a chip in his ankle, a kid who you know will grow up safe,
a kid who can again run down to the park, ride his bike to school, all that? . . .
Right, or do you want a dead kid?" (Eggers 89)

Every parent would agree that knowing where their child is at all times and that he/she is safe would save them a lot of headaches. Kidnappings, injuries, rapes, how much nicer would the world be if all the children would be monitored and safe? "So immediately you take all child abduction, rape, murder and you reduce it by 99 percent. And the price is that the kids have a chip in their ankle" (Eggers 89). This point of view seems like the answer, but it raises the issues of privacy and sheltering. "Arkangel," the second episode of the fourth season of *Black Mirror*, focuses on the issues of child tracking and serves as a cautionary tale for this advanced technology. The main character Marie uses a company called Arkangel to monitor her daughter Sara after an incident on the playground when she thought Sara had gone missing. The monitoring is done through "a device implanted into Sara's brain. With its paired handheld parental operation tablet, Marie can track Sara, monitor her health, and can even see what she is seeing" (Christian and Gardner 151).

The problems arise with the so-called blurring filter, which is operated by Marie and which lets her blur out things that could trigger her daughter, like pornographic contents, blood, needles, shards of glass, anything that could hurt her or is pain-related, censoring the world around her. "Most significantly, she can also filter out disturbing or unpleasant sounds and images from her daughter's experiences" (Christian and Gardner 151). Her worldview is censored but, as any child, Sara is curious. After trying to watch a video with her friends, which was blurred, she asks what it is about. One of her friends describes the video showing a fight and tells her what blood looks like. She starts drawing people fighting and uses the red crayon. After seeing that the red is blurred, she wants to see if the same will happen with real blood, so she starts stabbing herself with a pencil. She gets very frustrated and continues to harm herself until her mother gets an alert on the tablet. After this incident, Marie takes Sara to a child psychologist, who tells her that there is nothing wrong with Sara. He tries to explain that Arkangel is not working for her and that Marie should just turn off the parental filter and the tablet: "You can't remove the implant, but you can get rid of the parental unit. The screen. Just throw it away. Problem solved" ("Arkangel" 00:18:41- 00:18:49). Not seeing the bad includes everything that could possibly be triggering, which causes Sara not to be able to help her grandfather when he has a heart attack. Marie is able to save him because the tablet got an alert that Sara is seeing something that is making her upset. Sara's view of her grandfather was blurry, and she could not see or hear him. Marie removes the filter after the incident and puts away the tablet, only to take it out when Sara is already a teenager because she realizes Sara has been lying to her. "Marie's use of the Arkangel device is clearly a violation of her adolescent daughter's adult-child right to physical and mental health. Sara suffers from psychological trauma and even harms herself as a result of having her experience filtered by the device. But it is Marie's violation of Sara's rights as a child that are especially disturbing" (Christian and Gardner 152).

At a younger age, tracking could potentially be justified because everyone worries about their children and they are at higher risks of danger. However, Sara's example shows that censoring all the bad just makes the child more curious and more reckless because they would do anything to get answers. Children are very curious about the world around them, especially about the things that are forbidden to them. In general, everyone should have the right to privacy and freedom, and even though it is normal for parents to worry about the children, tracking them and censoring their world can only end badly for both sides. In "Arkangel," Marie crosses a line with Sara when she meddles in her almost-adult life and her behavior drives Sara crazy. After turning the tablet back in when Sara is already a teenager, Marie watches Sara have intercourse with her

boyfriend and later sees on the tablet that Sara is pregnant, so she plants a Plan B pill in her breakfast. Sara realizes what happened because of the side effects of the pill and becomes aware that her mother has been watching her again even though she promised she would not do that anymore. At the very end, "in a violent angry outburst, Sara beats Marie unconscious with the operation tablet, breaking it" (Christian and Gardner 152). This tragic end can be blamed on the censorship as well because Sara's view was blurred when she was hitting her mother, so she could not see how much damage she has done already and she only stopped when the tablet started breaking from the hits and her blurring filter shut off. She is shocked when she sees her mother's face covered in blood. After the incident, Sara runs in a haze and leaves the town with a stranger, Marie survives the attack but is completely distraught because of the loss of her daughter. "Admittedly, Sara cannot actually see the pain and fear she is causing when she physically hurts others, but Sara doesn't even seem to understand what she is doing" (Christian and Gardner 154). The end of this episode shows the worst possible scenario, but it amplifies the end goal of the episode. It shows the effects of child tracking, censorship, surveillance, and overbearing parenting:

> [i]f you create a false reality for your child, under the guise of protecting them, you're altering the natural course of how a person discovers their own life. You're breaking their independence and controlling them. You're actually enabling the thing you hoped wouldn't happen, which is that they have to abandon you and leave you. And there's a necessity for the violence of that rupture, because of the control that's been exacted. (Foster qtd. in Christian and Gardner 152)

In *The Circle*, child tracking is depicted through a program that is still being developed so the reader does not see how it actually works, but even in its developing stages important questions arise. Francis, an employee of the Circle, sets out to create a program, called ChildTrack, that would protect children all around the world. One of the problems he comes across in the making of his program is the location of the chip: if the chip is in the hand of the child, it can easily be taken out. This happened in Denmark where they implemented the program and seven children ended up dead and missing. The only thing that was traceable was a bag that contained all the chips: "Seven kids go missing one day. The cops, the parents, think, Hey, no problem. We know where the kids are. They follow the chips, but when they find them all in a paper bag, all bloody. Just the chips" (Eggers 88). Because of what happened in Denmark, Francis suggests putting the chip directly into a bone so it cannot be cut out. He is focusing solely on the medical side of the program and not on the consequences this could have on the children. ChildTrack eventually grows into TruYouth, which encompasses much more

than the original app intended. TruYouth is an umbrella term for the ChildTrack program and YouthRank. YouthRank is a ranking system that compares students from around the globe according to their school achievements: "all homework, reading, attendance and test scores . . . every word they read, every word they looked up, every sentence they highlighted, every equation they wrote, every answer and correction" (Eggers 343). The creators of ChildTrack and YouthRank decided to combine these apps into a system "that provides both locational tracking and educational tracking" (Eggers 343) – TruYouth. *The Circle* also addresses the problem of the perpetual use of such technology as it would not be used only until a specific age but forever. The chips are not taken out when a person reaches a certain age, so this type of technology shows the intent of corporations to track and control everyone. The implications of TruYouth and YouthRank are competition from the earliest childhood, not only within their local communities but among children worldwide. If students are being ranked simply by their results, they could compare themselves to others and strive to be the best they can, but what if they are mediocre? If you compare all students from all over the world, there will always be someone who is better, and that would raise anxiety levels among students. It would also create self-image problems that teenagers deal with on a daily basis even without a ranking system in place. Also, if a person grows up with this type of technology, chipped and tracked, it becomes part of your reality and therefore it is completely normalized: "[a]ll the kids get a chip embedded in them, for safety, when they're infants. And yes, it will save lives. But then, what, you think they suddenly remove them when they're eighteen? No. In the interest of education and safety, everything they've done will be recorded, tracked, logged, analyzed- it's permanent" (Eggers 481).

The child tracking technology, as well as social media ranking systems and other technological devices seen in *Black Mirror*, do not seem so unrealistic from a 2021 point of view. Similar apps already exist. An example would be an app named Life 360[1]. It is the app designed for friends and family to be able to track each other's locations. All of the people who are part of the family or friend circle can find each other at any moment by tapping on their icon because of the location tracking through GPS. There are driving options to share one's information with other members, for example when one is travelling or is in a taxi. It is mostly used by families so that the parents can monitor their children whereabouts. The app itself is not restricting the children's privacy in the way the Arkangel does, it simply shows the location of the person's phone, but it can be seen as the introduction to much more restricting and dangerous apps. "We already have the technology for the basis for such a system. Today's smartphones

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[1] Life 360 is a location-based app made in 2018 in San Francisco by the company Life360 Inc. It is used to enable family members and friends to share their locations with each other and track their movements.

track our whereabouts and can make them visible to others if we so choose; tech such as Google Glass lets others see what we are seeing" (Houser 2). Safety is important but censoring the children's view of the world and tracking their every move can result in them becoming completely detached from reality. Additionally, rating all their school successes or failures and comparing them with all students from around world can only increase their anxiety level and fear of inadequacy. Social media and videogames are already contributing to this phenomenon, so if children's views become distorted in addition to this and all the harmful things around them blurred, they would start living in a simulation controlled by their parents.

4.3. Screen Overload

> You know how you finish a bag of chips and you hate yourself? You know you've done nothing good for yourself. That's the same feeling, and you know it is, after some digital binge. You feel wasted and hollow and diminished."
> (Eggers 134)

"The 'black mirror' of the [TV series] title is the one you'll find on every wall, on every desk, in the palm of every hand: the cold, shiny screen of a TV, a monitor, a smartphone" (Brooker). The screen is merely a connection between a human and the device he is using. In today's society, this refers to phone screen, television screen, monitor, but what is waiting for us in the future? "Fifteen Million Merits," the second episode of the fifth season of *Black Mirror*, presents a reality in the near future where the walls of bedrooms are fully covered in screens. People wake up, work, and go to bed looking at a screen. "One of the most important features of this world is the fact that nearly every surface and wall is covered in screens. The walls of the single rooms in which people spend their leisure time consist of screens" (Radovanović 106). This episode mostly represents a simulated reality that is usually seen in post-apocalyptic dystopias, for example *Wall-E[2], Divergent[3], The Giver[4]*, etc. People are living in identical rooms, wearing identical clothes, everyone is doing the same job strictly for survival. The walls made completely of screens is the motif that is putting this episode into the technological dystopia category. The job that most inhabitants of the bunker-like facilities are doing is cycling for points

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[2] *Wall-E* is a 2008 post-apocalyptic science fiction cartoon produced by Pixar Animation Studios and released by Walt Disney Pictures. It is about a robot who was left on Earth, which was deserted, to pick up rubbish. People have all left Earth and are living on a spaceship.
[3] *Divergent* is a 2011 YA dystopian novel by Veronica Roth, set in a post- apocalyptic future. The society in *Divergent* is divided into five factions and nobody is allowed to stand out. The Divergent are banished or murdered for not fitting into the system.
[4] *The Giver* is a 1993 YA dystopian novel by Lois Lowry. The novel is about a post-apocalyptic society that accepts "Sameness" and where every member has a specific job to do determined by the Ceremony of Twelve.

or, as they are called in the show, "merits." While cycling they are also looking at the screen on which they can watch reality shows, pornographic content or just follow their avatar cycling down an animated road. "Resembling today's television programs, cyclists can watch the talent show Hot Shot, reality show Botherguts, where obese and overweight people are subjected to humiliation, and the pornography show WraithBabes. If, however, the cyclists decide not to watch any of the shows, they can be immersed in the simulation of their cycling performed by his dope" (Radovanović 106). On the screen, they always appear as avatars, and they can buy things for their avatars using their merits as a currency: "The peak of our dreams is a new hat for our dopple; a hat that doesn't exist; that's not even there!" ("Fifteen Million Merits" 00:53:03-00:53:09). They can also use their merits to pay not to see commercials, which are very loud, aggressive, and mostly contain pornographic content. This element is already a feature of apps today – paying an upgraded version of the app so one does not have to see the commercials.

The repetitiveness of the inhabitants' lives makes it seem as if they are living in a simulation. They do meaningless jobs, sleep in their pods, do not really interact with one another, and watch scripted reality TV: "While we ride day-in day-out, going where? Powering what? All tiny cells and tiny screens, and bigger cells and bigger screens" ("Fifteen Million Merits" 00:53:32-00:53:44). Their avatars interact more than they do in person. We follow the story through Bing, who is not satisfied with this way of living, constantly in a loop, doing the same things over and over again, and wants something to change. Everything does change when he hears a girl singing in the bathroom. The girl's name is Abby, and he decides to give her his 15 million merits so she can apply for the talent competition named Hot Shot. He sees hope in Abby, something tangible and real. All of that crumbles down when he accompanies her to the show and the judges decide to make her a porn star and not a singer. Devastated by their decision, Bing decides to risk everything and go in front of the judges himself. He works non-stop to collect another fifteen million merits so that he can apply for the show. When he succeeds and gets on stage of Hot Shot, he delivers a monologue about the world they are living and how utterly devoid of meaning it really is. "The emotional culmination of the episode is reached when Bing delivers to the audience an unprepared speech decrying their living conditions, the way they're being treated, and the artificialness and numbness of the system" (Radovanović 107). Bing's idea is that the screens made everyone so numb to actual emotions they cannot recognize them anymore: "'Cause we're so out of our minds with desperation, we don't know any better! All we know is fake fodder and buying shit!" ("Fifteen Million Merits" 00:52:51-00:52:58). The judges like his sentiment and decide to give him his own TV show. This is not what he expected at all, but in the end he realizes he does not have a choice and accepts it. He starts his own

program and the audience can see his new luxurious apartment and the view of the outside world that may or may not be real. He essentially gives up on the idea that their lives can be better as he realizes that he cannot save the society. He decides to take the job to, at least, change his monotonous life. He is now doing his monologues for the camera and continues to explain how nothing is real and how all they do is buy things for their avatars and look at the screen. He has many watchers and fans, however, like the audience of Hot Shot, they just see it as an amusing program, they are not seeing the point of his speeches.

Mae's walls may not be covered in screens, but she sees nothing outside of one. As mentioned before, Mae is overloaded with the amount of work she has to do for the Circle. Her work started on two screens, and as time passes she gets more obligations and more screens: "So your second screen will continue to be the way you'll stay in touch with your team. That will be exclusively for CE business. Your third screen is for your social participation, in the company Circle and your wider Circle" (Eggers 97). Working as a customer service representative, keeping up with her socials, doing meetings and being a mentor, she has almost no time for herself. At one point, she works simultaneously on five different screens, even sleeps in a pod at the company in order to be able to do all the work that is expected from her. The sixth screen is introduced only as a TV screen, not a computer monitor, that is projecting what is recorded by the SeeChange cameras. Mae is not overwhelmed by the screens as Bing is. She feels like her life finally has a purpose. Unlike Bing, she believes her work is meaningful: "she was communicating with clients all over the planet, commanding six screens, training a new group of newbies, and altogether feeling more needed, more valued, and more intellectually stimulated than she ever thought possible" (Eggers 243). Her friends start noticing that she does not have a life outside of work anymore. She does not visit her parents, she does not associate with anyone, she does not even leave the company to sleep at home. "It no longer made sense to drive back to her apartment, which was expensive and, last time she'd been there, after being gone for eight days, had mice. So she gave it up, and became one of the hundred Settlers, Circlers who had moved onto campus permanently" (Eggers 332). She is living in a simulated reality, just like Bing, through the screens. All of her interactions are done through screens. She is focused on building up her social rank inside the Circle through social media posts, she watches the Campus and her coworkers on the screen as if watching a TV show. Mercer, her ex-boyfriend, is one of the first people to warn her about the dangers of the Circle and this lifestyle, this fake life she is living through a screen: "you're not doing anything interesting anymore. You're not seeing anything, saying anything. The weird paradox is that you think you're at the center of things, and

that makes your opinions more valuable, but you yourself are becoming less vibrant. I bet you haven't done anything offscreen in months. Have you?" (Eggers 261).

Both Mae and Bing are living their lives surrounded by screens, the screens that are making their reality. Mae is constantly getting more and more screens so by the time she has nine of them this becomes almost comical to the reader. Technically, there is no difference between what she sees and what Bing sees with his screened walls. The difference between them is that Bing at least realizes that this is completely numbing him and everyone around him. This element of technological dystopia seems unrealistic to us, comical even, but this is our reality already. Television screens are becoming bigger and bigger, as well as phone screens and computer monitors. This element is an obvious critique of the society we live in today, and nothing proves that more than Eggers openly mentioning Google and Facebook as the predecessors of his imaginary company. The technology of the world in *The Circle* (or rather at the Circle, the fictional company), is actually very close to currently existing technological devices and developments. Most young people today cannot live without their phones, they are the ones that grew up looking at screens, doing everything through their devices, just like Mae is now. The screens may not be from floor to ceiling yet, but in the future they might.

4.4. Full Transparency

> "But my point is, what if we all behaved as if we were being watched?
> It would lead to a more moral way of life. Who would do something unethical
> or immoral or illegal if they were being watched?" (Eggers 288).

The idea of surveillance instigates morality and the slogan "Secrets are lies, sharing is caring, privacy is theft" (Eggers 303) is used to justify the full transparency and constant surveillance depicted in the Circle. Once again it is a representation of a seemingly utopian world. If everyone is being watched, there will be no crime, no malicious acts, no harm done: "Who would commit a crime knowing they might be watched anytime, anywhere?" (Eggers 66). The idea of full transparency is being in the public eye 24/7 by having a camera and a microphone on you and by being surrounded by cameras. A person who is going fully transparent chooses to be seen at all times, even while sleeping. It all started with the Circle operators installing cameras all over the world. Cameras that are barely visible and cameras they did not get permission or permits for:

Now remember: no one sees these cameras. I've hidden them pretty well. To the average person they look like weeds, or some kind of stick. Anything. They're unnoticed. So in a few hours this morning, I set up perfectly clear video access to six locations that help me know how to plan my day. And everything we do here is about knowing the previously unknown, right? (Eggers 63)

All these cameras, encompassed under the name SeeChange, get people to start questioning the Circle. Why are they using them around the world but not in their own building? The creators anticipated this and "started the Circle's own transparency plan, which began with the installation of a thousand SeeChange cameras on campus. They were placed in common rooms, cafeterias and outdoor spaces first" (Eggers 241). Mae realizes that her life choices have changed because of the SeaChange camera in her pod: "She started thinking more about her behaviour, about her outfits and movements. She thought more about where she scratched, when she blew her nose or how" (Eggers 242). When watched, people start acting, basically putting on a performance because they know someone is watching their every move. Mae was struggling with this idea in the beginning and even though she was not completely opposed to it, she did not feel fully comfortable. The moment that changes her mind about privacy and the SeeChange cameras is when she takes a kayak, from a store she usually goes to, without permission. She is caught on one of the SeeChange cameras that someone placed on that beach and is used as an example by her boss, Bailey, at a seminar. She admits that she would not do it if she knew there was a camera there: "The very fact that you thought this action would remain secret enabled you to commit this crime, correct? Correct. Would you have done it had you known people were watching? Definitely not" (Eggers 296). Her boss continues on how this is the perfect example that no crime would be committed if everyone was being watched and at the end of the seminar he announces that Mae will be going fully transparent: "Mae, in the interest of sharing all she saw and could offer the world, would be going transparent immediately" (Eggers 304). She was not asked if she wanted to go transparent but given how much she believed in her bosses' vision, especially Bailey's, she probably would not refuse anyway. "The Circle's administrators, particularly Bailey, support the view that surveillance is intrinsic merit. He also thinks that permitting the individual himself to be under-watched and being transparent in all the times' heads on the enlightenment" (AbdulZahra et al. 11992)

After she goes fully transparent, she starts wearing the SeeChange camera around her neck that is only supposed to be off when she is asleep, but Mae keeps it on even at those hours for the full experience: "She was allowed to turn off the SeaChange cameras in the room, but she found she rarely did" (Eggers 333). She "was averaging 845,029 unique visitors to her live

footage in any given day" (Eggers 312) and gets so intoxicated by those numbers that she starts to completely disregard privacy. She finds it normal to keep the cameras on and to think constantly about her behaviour. The ultimate goal of this project is to get everyone to eventually go fully transparent so there would be no crime and no misdemeanors. The control does not only come from the Circle, but from the audience too. Even if they are not telling Mae what she should wear and do, the idea of them watching is influencing her behavior. The "use of surveillance tools by individuals, rather than by agents of institutions public, or private, to keep track of one another" is called lateral surveillance (Andrejević 488).

The rejection of full transparency and surveillance is, however, seen as a problem, especially when the government and politicians are involved:

> The pressure on those who hadn't gone transparent went from polite to oppressive. The question, from pundits and constituents, was obvious and loud: If you aren't transparent, what are you hiding? Though some citizens and commentators objected on grounds of privacy, asserting that government, at virtually every level, had always needed to do some things in private for the sake of security and efficiency, the momentum crushed all such arguments and the progression continued. If you weren't operating in the light of day, what were you doing in the shadows? (Eggers 239)

The politicians who refused to go transparent are consequently exposed for some petty crimes and wrongdoings they did in the past: "every time someone started shouting about the supposed monopoly of the Circle, or the Circle's unfair monetization of the personal data of its users, or some other paranoid and demonstrably false claim, soon enough it was revealed that that person was a criminal or deviant of the highest order" (Eggers 240). Mae sees no connection and thinks this is "a wonderful thing that tended to happen, something that felt like poetic justice" (Eggers 240). The more politicians start to go fully transparent, the more the ones who do not want to do it seem guilty and suspicious. After they get exposed for some crime they did, and all of them were exposed for something, they resign and the Circle is one step closer to a fully transparent political system. Mae does not see anything wrong with this and even after she has been faced with the reality of why these people were suddenly on display, she does not see the connection: "You think it's just a coincidence that every time some congresswoman or blogger talks about monopoly, they suddenly become ensnared in some terrible sex-porn-witchcraft controversy? . . . You're so paranoid. Your conspiracy theory brain always depressed me, Mercer" (Eggers 259-60).

Black Mirror's third episode of the first season, "The Entire History of You," shows a different version of surveillance, one that does not follow people's action from the outside, but

from within. It is a personal form of surveillance in which "people can record every scene they observe or experience through a chip placed under their ear. They can rewind back and review the scene and moreover, they can show these personal experiences to others" (Altunay and Aşkan 337). One of the most interesting moments of the episode is when the main character Liam goes to a party after a job interview, which did not go well. Everyone at the party is interested in what happened and they ask him to show them the interview: "Well let's have a look, re-do, we can appraise the appraisal" ("The Entire History of You" 00:07:37-00:07:39). By rewinding his grain, he could show them the whole interview but he refuses because the interview went badly. For example, just moments before his arrival to the party, one of the guests was showing his new apartment, projected on the television screen from his point of view. The reason why they can see it exactly as he did is because "the grain captures both audio and video from the user's point of view" (Blackwell 55).

During dinner, the guests at the party start a discussion about the grain and one of the attendees talks about how she does not have one anymore because it was stolen from her, gouged out of her neck "about 12 months ago" ("The Entire History of You" 00:11:47-00:11:50). She also states that spending some time without it made her realize that she does not want or need one anymore: "But the thing is after I was gouged, I didn't have one for a few days and then just kind of liked it" ("The Entire History of You" 00:12:38-00:12:43). The grain stores all of people's memories, and "seems to lack an on/off switch, which suggest[s] that it is always on and always recording" (Blackwell 55). If or when people are gouged, whoever gets their grain can see everything that has ever happened to them: "Yeah, and none of it was encrypted, so... So they saw the lot?" ("The Entire History of You" 00:12:33-00:12:38). The guests also note that many people are "going grainless" ("The Entire History of You" 00:12:49-00:12:52) because "with half the population, you can implant false memories just by asking leading questions in therapy" ("The Entire History of You" 00:13:46-00:13:51). Liam, however, does not want to go grainless because even going grainless will not exempt you from surveillance. The people who are grainless can still be seen in other people's memories and tracked down. "Given the technology's widespread use, one becomes subject to its consequences regardless of whether or not one chooses to 'buy in'" (Blackwell 62). At the party, he notices that his wife Fi and one of the guests, Jonas, are flirting so he starts rewinding and watching all their moves during that night. He starts obsessing over it and rewinding the same moments over and over again, asking his wife an excessive number of questions about the two of them, goes to Jonas' house to confront him about it when drunk, attacks him, and makes him project his grain recordings on TV. He threatens Jonas that he will gouge his grain if he does not delete all the recording of Fi he

has. Jonas does it and Liam leaves his house, drives drunk, and crashes his car. His rage culminates when he confronts Fi. He shows her what he did to Jonas and confronts her about the videos of them he saw on Jonas' grain, proving that she has cheated on him. He tries to convince her to show him everything, but she claims she deleted all the videos. She apologizes and tells him it was a mistake but he wants to see it and gets aggressive, so she eventually shows him the video. Thus, Liam "forced himself into seeing other people's memories, threatening their safety" (Rodrigues Teixiera and Santoro 2). He drives himself crazy by rewinding his memories of what he saw and eventually gauges his own grain. By "watching re-do after re-do of the dinner party and poring over the minute of their interactions . . . Liam is unable to focus on the present due to his obsession with looking back" (Blackwell 58).

The grain and the option of rewinding all the bad moments he has ever lived through essentially leads Liam to self-mutilation. Liam was performing lateral surveillance on his wife and friends, just like the Circle watchers do. The most used type of surveillance in dystopian novels has been the government surveilling people to control them, but the lateral type of surveillance is a more appropriate element in contemporary dystopias because it occurs through social media and smartphones, so it is more relatable to the readers. Other than lateral, the characters experience standard surveillance as well because at any point, anyone in power could ask them to rewind their memories and show them specific events. This goes for all types of authorities, as exemplified by airport security who asked Liam to show them what he was doing in the last 24 hours before his flight, and then to fast forward through his whole week. Even though it is simply for safety reasons, it still compromises his privacy and freedom So, by "requiring grain users to share their re-dos as a safety checkpoint, the state reduces its own workload, while the citizens essentially supervise themselves" (Blackwell 61).

As mentioned before, memories can be false and implanted, yet that is not the only problem with the grain. Liam uses the grain to actively harm people and invade their privacy. The grain can be used to remember your happy moments, to win simple arguments, and remember your lost loved ones. However, it can also be used for blackmail, extortion, and exposing private things. "The device contains most, if not all, of the user's life, which is undoubtedly useful in many daily events, like court cases, debates, reliving previous experiences, security checking, etc. However, it can be a huge problem if somebody tries to see memories that are supposed to be private" (Rodrigues Teixiera and Santoro 1). It is also dangerous to even have one because people "get gouged" for information, physically hurt permanently, or even killed for their grains.

Full transparency means that nobody will ever commit a crime if everyone is being watched at all times, but at the same time privacy and living in the moment are entirely lost. Thus, "'The Entire History of You' illuminates several of the potential implications of a society in which the digital archive serves as an accessory to surveillance and surveillance technology is omnipresent. These include implications both for the watcher and for the watched" (Blackwell 57). The similarity between the grain, the full transparency program, and our daily life is in the (partial) lack of privacy as people post most of what they do throughout the day, live stream on multiple platforms, and are also being recorded at all times by surveillance cameras on every street corner. This "makes sense since every day, as over one billion people actively use Facebook, sharing their lives online and all this data has been stored and can be revisited on demand. In a way, we are already digitizing part of our lives and, thus, creating digital memory" (Rodrigues Teixiera and Santoro 1). We also have a version of the SeeChange camera: the GoPro that you can tie around your neck and broadcast with it. The grain may be a bit more sophisticated but who is to say it will not exist in the near future? The same applies to smartphones, which capture everything we do and are always with us. "While these inventions have yet to be released, the mobile media industry has embraced wearable recording devices . . . even the average smartphone, with its increasingly sophisticated digital camera, might be seen as a distant relative of the grain" (Blackwell 62).

4.5. Digital Prosecution

"If punishment is to be enjoyed, it's best enjoyed as a spectacle."
(Simpson and Lay 56)

The second episode of the second season of *Black Mirror*, "White Bear," shows a rather unusual approach to punishing and hunting criminals. The audience is introduced to Victoria, a very confused woman who wakes up not knowing where or who she is. By the things found around her, it seems that she attempted suicide. "Leaving the house, Victoria looks at people frequently recording her on their phones" (Gecer and Serbes 1682). A man with a mask and a shotgun tries to kill her, so she starts running away. The man with the shotgun is accompanied by two other masked people, and they all seem to be chasing only Victoria. While running, she meets Jem and Damien who appear to be the only sane people left and they decide to help her, telling her that "an enigmatic signal over television and the internet turned most of the population into peepers who do nothing but record everything around them" (Gecer and Serbes 1682). Jem explains to her that some people were not infected by the signal: her and Damien,

who were trying to run away from it, and a few others who decided to use this opportunity to steal and hunt others for sport: "Like almost everybody just became onlookers: started watching, filming stuff like spectators who don't give a shit about what happens. Some of us weren't affected, I don't know why" ("White Bear" 00:12:02-00:2:16). Damien gets left behind so Victoria and Jem continue to a transmitter called White Bear that caries the enigmatic signal. After many obstacles, they manage to reach the transmitter and Jem and Victoria get into a shootout with two hunters, but when Victoria shoots the gun, it fires confetti. This is where the plot twist of the episode occurs as the wall opens and she appears on a stage in front of a live audience. White Bear is not a transmitter but the name of Victoria's punishment, for being a murder accomplice. She and her boyfriend kidnapped a little girl; Victoria was recording while he was murdering her. Her punishment is to be recorded and chased, repeatedly, by a different audience every day. The reason why every day of torture is new for her is because her memory is erased every night.

"The White Bear Justice Park" is made as an amusement park, people can pay a ticket to either sit in the audience or to be one of the bystanders recording and chasing Victoria in the streets. "We then learn that this macabre recreation is the centerpiece of the *White Bear Justice Park*, where families can pay to participate as onlookers of Victoria's punishment. Her memory is torturously extinguished every night so she can play out the same storyline the next day" (Simpson and Lay 50). The instructions the audience get is not to talk to her, stay far away from her because she is dangerous, and record everything: "Last but not least, enjoy yourself. That's probably the most important rule of all, okay? Take lots of photographs run around through the woods but try and stay safe" ("White Bear" 00:38:55-00:39:04). We learn that Victoria was an accomplice in a murder, and obviously she deserves to be punished, but the question is if her punishment fits the crime. "Just because Victoria deserves some sort of punishment doesn't *necessarily* mean that she deserves to have an entire commercial park built around the spectacle of her twisted *Groundhog Day* nightmare" (Simpson and Lay 52). The way Victoria's torture is presented is the reason why people buy tickets for it. It is not presented as a torture or punishment of a human being, but as an entertaining reality show, fictional even. If it was just about the punishment she could have been put in jail, but she has to be made an example and her punishment turned into a spectacle: "After all, if we cared only about Victoria getting punished simply because she *deserved* it, there would be no need for the justice park" (Simpson and Lay 56). This episode may seem extreme for people in modern societies, but it is very much up to date. The people who are paying to see her tortured and who are recording it represent the desensitized society of today. Seeing criminals on television, social media, and through the

screen makes them inhuman and just another story in the news. "The findings show that the story has also critique to the existing way of life, with people not interacting with the others and passively watching the world through the screens like 'black mirror'" (Gecer and Serbes 1690). Being bombarded with information like we are, it is difficult to separate reality from fiction. People see murders, kidnappings, torturing, and wars every day, be it real or fictional, so at one point nothing shocks them anymore. In addition, "the point that the episode emphasizes is how the modern individual who has become 'the audience' becomes insensitive. The modern individual perceives the atrocities in the world he lives in as a film shown on television. *Desensitization* is shown as one of the most important problems of the modern individual" (Gecer and Serbes 1687).

Victoria does not know what is happening because her memory gets erased, but the audience is aware of it. She is tortured day in and day out and she is reliving her crime and nobody reacts. For them, this is only entertainment. It can be debated whether there would be a reaction if only one person was watching: Yet, "it's precisely this sense of community and participation in the spectacle that makes *White Bear Justice Park* so riveting to its attendees" (Simpson and Lay 56). A whole group of people chasing her together, watching her running around confusedly, turns this cruel act into a fun game for everyone to enjoy, without repercussions. The other reason why nobody reacts is the bystander effect. The bystander effect basically says that if we witness a crime alone, we are more likely to do something than if we are in a group of witnesses: "[a] person who faces a situation of another person in distress but does so with the knowledge that others are also present and available to respond is slower and less likely to respond to the person in distress than is a person who knows that he or she is the only one who is aware of the distress" (Garcia et al. 843).

The Circle does not have a fake amusement park for torturing people, but it does have a search tool that is used for chasing criminals and it comes with a much more interactive component than standing around and recording. SoulSearch is a search engine that is designed to find anyone and everyone the operator chooses, and it does so with the help of the entire network of Circlers, their customers, and their SeeChange cameras that are placed all over the world. In a presentation of the search engine that occurs in front of both a live and online audience, the engine randomly chooses a person who is convicted of any crime with the purpose of showing how quickly this search engine can find anybody: "[i]n seconds, the computer will select, at random, a fugitive from justice . . . whoever he or she is, SoulSearch will locate him or her within twenty minutes" (Eggers 447). The engine chooses Fiona Highbridge, who has escaped prison after being sentenced for triple homicide. Before the search starts, Mae announces that

"over a billion people are watching" this search and that they can participate (Eggers 447). Fiona Highbridge is from the UK, so they alert their UK watchers to start the search: "We have dozens of groups all over the country, who will be banding together, in addition to the power of the network as a whole" (Eggers 448). The photo of Fiona is sent out and the search starts. People start cross-referencing photos, commenting, and making polls. Two similar pictures appear in the city in Wales, and Fiona is recognized as Fatima Hilensky. Fatima's coworker takes the lead in the search, or pursuit, turns on her camera, and that video is being broadcasted live at the Circle's headquarters. When she gets to Fiona, the crowd goes wild, and Fiona starts running. Surrounded by other Circlers, "Fiona Highbridge was trapped against a wall, surrounded by a dozen people, most of them holding their phones to her, aiming them at her. There was no possibility of escape" (Eggers 451). After one of the people in the crowd yells "Lynch her" (Eggers 451), Mae pleads with them to call the police and do not take matters into their own hands. Unlike "White Bear," *The Circle* does not introduce a torture chamber or a punishment circus. However, the spectacle element is still there: "[t]he audience exploded with cheers, and the participants who had trapped Fiona Highbridge were congratulated worldwide in seconds" (Eggers 451). The Circle can easily find people without making it a public live show with SeeChange cameras and other technology they have. They could sell the technology to the police and let them find criminals on their own. Yet, the Circle uses all of its technology to showcase their power and strength in numbers, while at the same time making everyone want to be part of it so they can close the circle. The proof of this tool being more of a power showcase than an actual well-intended search engine to rid the world of criminals is the second victim, Mae's ex-boyfriend Mercer. Mercer tries escaping the surveillance and the Circle's tyranny by leaving his home and going to secluded areas that do not have so many SeeChange cameras. Mae decides to find him in front of a live audience to show him just how powerful the Circle can be: "How better to prove to him the reach and power of the network and the people on it? His skepticism would fall away" (Eggers 452). Just like with Fiona, Mae sends out his picture and the hunt begins. For him, Mae pulls no stops, she uses all the tools at her disposal: "Let's check local real estate sites for rental histories. Let's check card records, phone records, library memberships, anything he would have signed up for" (Eggers 453). In less than ten minutes, Circlers find him and when he notices them, he starts running away in his car. His run away makes Mae angrier and she becomes even more persistent: "Okay, Mae said, knowing she was about to wow the audience. Release the drones, she roared in a voice meant to invoke and mock some witchy villain" (Eggers 457). Mercer does not acknowledge her, which makes Mae even more furious: "something about his inability to give in, to admit defeat, or to at least acknowledge the

incredible power of the technology at Mae's command… she knew she couldn't give up until she had received some sense of his acquiescence" (Eggers 459). Even though they have a long history, Mae decides to include the audience in the whole process: from the live studio audience to the people chasing after Mercer's car, everyone is invested, cheering, and laughing: "Now another voice, this one a woman's and laughing, boomed from the third drone: Mercer, submit to us! Submit to our will! Be our friend!" (Eggers 460). It is very important to note here that the audience knows Mercer is not a criminal, Mae refers to him as "a fugitive of friendship" (Eggers 452) so the people chasing and harassing him do not do it for justice or punishment, they do it simply for fun. While people are cheering and Mae is telling Mercer to pull over, he makes a decision: "[h]is right arm spun the steering wheel, and he disappeared from the view of drones . . . the truck broke through and leapt into the gorge . . . and then the truck dropped from view" (Eggers 461). Mercer decides that he would rather die than live in a society in which people chase each other for fun and are being under surveillance 24/7. Mae does not learn her lesson even after this horrible event as she keeps thinking of him as an antisocial individual who chose to escape this wonderful society she and all the other Circlers have been creating.

Any form of power can be abused at the expense of others regardless of the intentions behind it. Catching a criminal is certainly a good deed, but that is what the police is for. None of the examples given above can be excused even if the end goal is catching someone who is a menace to society. *Black Mirror* shows the punishment as a spectacle trope while *The Circle* depicts the chase as entertainment. Both display how quickly a group of every day individuals can become a power-hungry mob because "it is cognitively easier to act grossly inappropriately if others (particularly if there are many others) are doing the same. Such behavior becomes even more cognitively comfortable if there is some sort of public pronouncement for doing so" (Replogle 801). Both mobs did not have a single individual who objected to this behavior. Even if there was somebody who was thinking that this was wrong, nobody said anything because of the fear that the mob would turn against them. Looking individually, most of those people are probably not evil or malicious, but when the mob mentality takes over, everyone can be drawn to it and it tells "us something about underlying social, political, or cultural beliefs in a society" (Replogle 801). In both the novel and the TV series, nobody thinks they are doing anything wrong. The Circlers believe in the utopia the company presents, they believe that criminals should be chased and punished, and they believe Mae enough to believe that Mercer deserved to be chased just because he did not want to become one of them. The bystanders in *Black Mirror* pay to chase and harass Victoria because they believe she deserves this form of punishment for her crime or because they simply think it is entertaining.

Conclusion

As a genre, dystopia originated in the 19th century and was created as an antithesis to utopia. Dystopian novels have always mirrored the society of the times they were created in and have been used as cautionary tales to show what is happening in the present and what might happen in the future. Some works like *1984* and *Brave New World* are considered dystopian classics and, while they may still be relevant in 2020 and 2021, they are not as relatable to the audience as contemporary technological dystopias. As technology is progressing in real life, so is the technology in dystopian novels. Contemporary technological dystopias do not use smartphones and televisions to scare their audience, they use chips that are implanted in people and that record their thoughts and track their movements. They describe drones and tiny cameras that are used for surveillance and social media platforms that become more real than reality itself. TV series *Black Mirror* has reached a massive following because the audience could find connections with themselves and the characters. The episodes, which are all different yet all terrifying, have hooked the audience and made them question their reality. *The Circle*, the novel from 2013, tells the story of what could happen in the future if we let the big companies have their way. It almost lulls the audience into believing that it is a utopia, spinning the story that the world is a better place when tracked and recorded, showing how easily people can get brainwashed. In a world where everyone is policing each other, there would be no crime, but there would also be no freedom or privacy.

The comparison of these two works, which deal with similar topics and depict technologies with the same effect on humanity, showed just how prominent the chosen elements of technological dystopia are. Human rating charts are shown through "Nosedive's" social media society where the feeds are not only in your phone but are tangible and are an essential part of everyone's life to the point where there is no life without social media anymore. *The Circle* shows a PopularityRank inside of the Circle as a company and in society in general, which makes people smile, zing, like, and comment everything just to rise through the ranks. It also demonstrates how people are being bombarded with an excessive amount of information but not actually processing or acknowledging any of it. This element of social media's ranking system is very prominent in today's world because it is happening already through existing platforms. The element of tracking children for their own safety is shown in "Arkangel" and *The Circle*'s ChildTrack program. *The Circle* depicts the making and perfecting of the program that can be used to track children while "Arkangel" demonstrates what happens after the tracking system is

used. Both emphasize the fact that while it is perfectly normal to want to protect your children and keep them safe, it is not normal to censor the world around them and completely violate their privacy and liberty. The third element this MA paper focused on is living in a simulated reality, which can be manifested in different ways. From the futuristic gray world of "Fifteen Million Merits" to the screen-obsessed utopian world seen in *The Circle*, this element may seem to be the closest to the present. Living through screens and constantly being surrounded by them is not only Bing's and Mae's reality, but also ours. Furthermore, surveillance is presented as one of the elements of contemporary technological dystopias, even though surveillance is an element of every dystopian novel because of the new technologies used for its perpetuation. *The Circle* presents the SeeChange cameras, which are the size of a thumb, easily hidden, and placed all over the world without any permission or permits, introducing the idea of full transparency where people are willingly recording everything they see all day long, from regular Joes to politicians and government officials. The novel also introduces TruYou, one account for everything you may ever need and involuntary registration for anyone who may not see it as a utopian dream company. The element of surveillance also occurs in many *Black Mirror* episodes, with "The Entire History of You" offering an interesting perspective on lateral surveillance and self-surveillance with the grain. The last element of technological dystopia discussed in this thesis is digital prosecution. Everyone who is standing out from the norm can now be not only chased by the police, but tracked through social media, geolocations, followed by drones or millions of cameras that can be found in any regular phone.

These elements were selected because they were the most recurrently used ones in the novel and TV series. Together, they present a contemporary image of technological dystopia, but given how fast technology is progressing, they might be outdated in a few years. Not the elements themselves, they will probably still be present in technological dystopia, but the technology used for them will change and progress. The technologies discussed could significantly improve society, from health care to reduction of all crime, but in the wrong hands and in excessive amounts they can also be very damaging. Reading works like *The Circle* and watching TV series like *Black Mirror* can give us a manual we can use to prepare ourselves for this future, and, hopefully, we will be able to recognize the elements as they come before it becomes too late.

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