Exploring Identity Construction and Livestreaming Culture in The Films *Nerve* (2016), "Nosedive" (from *Black Mirror*, 2016), and *Spree* (2020)

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that.

1. The thesis submitted is my original work while completing degree at BRAC University.

2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.

3. The thesis does not contain material accepted or submitted for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.

4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Approval

The thesis titled **Exploring Identity Construction and Live-Streaming Culture in The Films** *Nerve* **(2016), "Nosedive" (from** *Black Mirror***, 2016), and** *Spree* **(2020)** submitted by Mehjabeen Jahan Momo, ID: 22363001 of December 2023, has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Contents

Abstract

This dissertation aims to explore the relationship between virtual identity and live-streaming culture in order to understand how individuals in a postmodern society construct their identity and find meaning in their existence. The research will use a qualitative method, focusing on interpreting and critically analyzing collected data. The approach will involve a close textual analysis of three selected films: *Nerve* (2016), "Nosedive" from *Black Mirror* (2016), and *Spree* (2020). The main objective is to identify the potential consequences and influences of live-streaming culture on our society, particularly in terms of identity construction and worldview. Ultimately, the thesis demonstrates that the cyber narcissists will probably dissolve into multiplied images of themselves, which in turn, makes people lose their inner sense of morality and indulge in dangerous and oftentimes borderline criminal like activities that pushes them to self-destruction.

Keywords

Introduction

"We like the mirror, and the mirror likes us," observes Jonathan Franzen in the context of the life we live today in the social media interface, which he finds to be a great enabler of narcissism.

In this technology and media saturated postmodern time we indulge in widespread consumption not only of others' lives, but our own by turning our own lives into content in the form of live streaming. Thus, we produce endless mirrors that validate our sense of self. This dissertation is my attempt to understand livestreaming culture, its narcissistic tendency, and its impact on the identity that it helps take shape as represented in these representative postmodern films *Nerve* (2016), "Nosedive" from *Black Mirror* (2016), and *Spree* (2020). In light of this, I shall commence by outlining the concept of postmodern identity in order to establish the groundwork for my theoretical framework. By providing definitions for postmodern identity and the postmodern consumer, we can gain insight into the relationship between postmodern consumption behaviors and the society that emerged after panopticon surveillance.

Human beings do not exist merely as mechanical beings whose lives are dictated by external factors; rather, they are conscious of their actions and strive to exert influence on their environment. But social conditions are so pervasive that when a person is fully immersed in them, he can only perceive the world through affected lens. A wide range of social and structural factors influence modern identity formation; changes to any aspect of society, no matter how small or significant, can have an impact on people's perceptions of who they are and where they fit in. Clearly, identities underwent a number of transformations at different points in time, in line with the varied social

systems that existed at various times. The interpretation parameters of the notion of identity shifted

as civilizations evolved, got more complex, and underwent more changes. During the ancient period,

one's identity was closely tied to their family, clan, and ancestry. However, in postmodern societies,

the focus shifted to the individual, and identity became a complex web of multiple, transient

structures such as nation, state, religious, ethnicity, consumption, and technology (Mardin 32).

Furthermore, the connection between postmodern identity structures and consumption

practices has formed and begins to dominate the consumer identities of postmodern people. For

example, the degree of one's consumptions of various goods became the identity marker for one's

prestige and social status. As a result, the self as performer has arisen in contemporary consumer

culture, with a focus on outward appearances, public displays, and the art of making a good

impression, as pointed out by Mike Featherstone. This has replaced the values that were important

in the eighteenth century, such as citizenship, democracy, duty, labor, honor, reputation, and morals.

The self is increasingly defined mainly in aesthetic terms, that is, by one's appearance rather than

one's actions, as opposed to the past when other factors were more heavily weighted in the formation

of identity (Negrin 9). The significance of one's physical appearance in projecting one's identity in

the public sphere has grown, according to postmodern scholars who are keen on postmodern theories

of identity formation and consumption. According to Anthony Giddens, the body has evolved into

an introspective endeavor in the context of postmodernity. And so, here in this vacant space, the

emergence of cybernarcissists has come to the fore (Negrin 9).

To put it another way, we are "cybernarcissists" - people of the 21st century, fascinated by

our own and other people's reflections. We, who live surrounded by audiovisual social media create

various versions of autobiographies in the media, and yearn to be recognized for our uniqueness. Thus, we have formed a habit of constructing our identity based on online public's affirmation. As such, various modes of social media content have become popular in the present time. Among them, vlogs, profiles, and creating YouTube channels and broadcasting life content are the most sought after by the virtual content creators and consumers alike.

This study focuses on the autobiographical mode of live streaming. For instance, telling about the fate of other people - or, to an even greater extent, talking about oneself - is a method of literary expression of thoughts that we have mastered to perfection at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Autobiography is not only a literary genre; "autobiographical", as a narrative modality, has become a characteristic feature of postmodern culture. Talking (and writing) about oneself is considered an indicator of status, position, and skills. Holding onto this aspect, it can be said that things are no different in the virtual space, where the greatest value is the skillful presentation of one's image. The reason why live streaming content is becoming popular is because of the real time engagement feature of it. For example, viewers to engage with content creators instantly. It also fosters communities and creates a sense of belonging among viewers as well as the unscripted, unfiltered, and genuine nature of the content is more appealing to the viewers. As such, through this autobiographical mode, the content creators can indulge in documenting their life story and presenting it to the whole world. Here, they draw an image of themselves that they are most satisfied with, with the expectation that the viewers will also like the carefully chosen slice of life. This leads to questions like why the viewers' affirmation is important, whether the recognition from the public

has become essential for the content creators to validate their existence, and if this tendency of the content creators towards their viewers can become a weapon in the hands of the viewers.

Holding onto these notions, the area of problem that this research will focus on is the identity formation of the live streaming content creators and how their viewers play a role in defining their own self-image in the virtual world. Furthermore, the objective of this paper is to analyse the matter of how the need to public recognition has become an essential element in constructing one's identity as well as the role cyber narcissistic culture plays in the process of constructing one's image of oneself and meaning of existence in a postmodern society. Therefore, this paper aims to answer two questions such as what impact does virtual reality have on the construction of one's identity, and how has the conventional expression of identity changed in the postmodern time?

The general objective of this dissertation is to explore how virtual life has become a determinant of one's sense of self, aiming to demonstrate that narcissistic content has become the characteristic expression of postmodern identity. The approach that I will take is through conducting a close textual analysis on the three selected films *Nerve* (2016), "Nosedive" from *Black Mirror* (2016), and *Spree* (2020. The main purpose of this research is to figure out the possible consequences as well as the influences that the cyber narcissism in live-streaming culture has brought to our postmodern society as well as the possible implications it has on constructing one's identity and world view.

This study traces the interconnectedness between these three films through the analysis of the characters' mental journey in forming their own version of postmodern identity and how the cyber narcissistic culture is adding new layer of depth in the process. Here, the data is collected through

close text analysis of the three films. Furthermore, the films chosen for this paper is available on the online platform such as Hulu and Netflix. The reason for picking these three particular films is because each of them presents a different form of identity construction with an insightful look into the postmodern surveillance society. For instance, firstly, the film *Nerve* (2016), tells the personal conflicts of young people who, through exhibitionist behavior, seek popularity and acceptance in their social cycle, but in doing so they are subject to all types of manipulation, and even the risk of becoming at the mercy of the anonymous sadism of the masses. Secondly, the episode "Nosedive" from *Black Mirror* (2016), addresses a post-contemporary society in which each and every real encounter reflects on the virtual, due to a digital citizenship that punctuates individuals in each social interaction. Lastly, the film *Spree* (2020), depicts the desperate craze for attention and how recognition form the public becomes the key element in validating one's existence in a postmodern society.

Literature Review

2.1 Early Conceptualizations of Identity

There are various concepts of self and identity that are as old as humanity. In biblical understanding, the concept of self is established rigidly through three categories, such as creatural identity, fallen identity, and redemptive identity which is primarily based on religious concept. Here, the creatural identity talks about human's superior hierarchy in the species, the fallen identity hints towards the sinners who have sinned, and the redemptive identity expresses the idea that of redemption of a sinner. These historical concepts on self and identity are not only rigid but also tries to trap the dynamic human identity into bite size boxes.

However, the emergence of new variables in the construction of identity shows us that human identity is not only an ongoing endeavor but is also subjected to technological influences and social class. Marx, for instance, contends that communities rather than people's individual minds determine who they are (from Preface and Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy, 1859). In other words, identity is not individualistic rather it is collective. Freud, on the other hand, states that identity is unstable and irrational, and it is the constant struggle between the id and the ego, the conscious and the subconscious, that makes identity so unstable and illogical (The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, 1966). In addition to that, Nietzsche's comment on the construction of identity says that there is no truth; there are only different ways of seeing the truth. In other words, according to Nietzsche, self or identity is the product of history and this history includes embracing a tragic consciousness of existence. Here, Nietzsche emphasized the significance of embracing a tragic consciousness of existence, and said that genuine progress, creativity, excellence, and the ability to genuinely embrace life can only be achieved via the cultivation of a mindset called "tragic

disposition". Therefore, in Nietzsche's word identity is not a linear matter rather there are multiple possibilities in forming one's identity (*The Will to Power*, 1968).

Furthermore, when authoritarian identity markers like national identity and religious lifestyles lose their impact in this age of fractured identities and social structures, many other elements enter the picture. People have the ability to assume preexisting identities or construct new ones via the use of imagination. Many identities are created and destroyed simultaneously in this unstable postmodern environment. Being invisible online makes one's identity more fluid and fragmented. As a result, people have the opportunity and freedom to embrace numerous identities (Karaduman, 2886-2899).

Hence, identity is no longer a given in the modern world; rather, it is a subject of debate. In other words, the construction of identity is vulnerable to one's perception of society, different belief systems, interpretation of different philosophy ad world view, as well as disposition in society. Therefore, there is no definitive way through which one's identity construction can be understood and calculated. Rather, the formation of identity is very much similar to the way Raymond Williams views culture in everyday life. According to Williams, culture is the very life style of the person living in a particular society in a particular way. Parallelly, one's construction of identity is the summation of one's everyday way of life, one's principles and ideals, one's world view and belief system, and one's habit and behaviour.

With the advent of postmodern time, identity became increasingly ambiguous and a question without a clear solution. According to David Lyon, the contemporary social condition is characterized by the dominance of two realities which are the rise of new media technologies and the dominance of consumer culture. As a result, the feeling of instability and rootlessness among postmodern people has affected their sense of self. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2001) uses the term "liquid modernity": to refer to a period characterized by detachment, provisionally, and

individualization, resulting in a society that is separated and shattered. Simultaneously, this era is characterized by both a sense of liberation and a prevalence of uncertainty, unease, a sense of helplessness, and the commercialization of interpersonal connections. The concept of individualism gives rise to a society that is characterized by fragmentation into many groups, hence engendering a sense of anxiety and fear among individuals.

In other words, in liquid modernity an individual is not bound by their place of birth, historical circumstances, or societal norms, as these regulations are not applicable to the present condition of society. According to Bauman (2001), several aspects of society, including private and public life as well as interpersonal connections, are currently experiencing multiple transformations. These changes are contributing to a gradual erosion of the social fabric and a subsequent loss of stability within institutions (p. 10). As a result, people are continuously made to reconstruct their sense of self in response to the ever-changing nature of their dynamic state.

Therefore, in the era of limitless identities and choices, the intricate "hyperreal" social environment that the media expansion of the late twentieth century developed, dilutes identities. Irresistible, captivating, and ever-changing visuals take precedence over the immediate physical and social surroundings. People are so enamored with these virtual worlds and images that they lack the ability to maintain the level of self-discipline that Foucault and other scholars have described in their discourse on the "totalitarian identity structures of modern era". (Elliot 140).

2.2 Identity in the Postmodern Consumption Culture

It should be noted that various scholars and critics have tried to not only outline the period of postmodernism but also to provide a comprehensive definition of postmodernism. According to Ihab Hassan in his article "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism", postmodernism as a concept does not break away from its relationship with modernism. Rather, it is a significant revision of various beliefs

such as modernism, expressionism, surrealism, and realism, especially in 20th-century Western society. However, Jameson in his article "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" expresses that postmodernism is a "cultural dominant" that has its fundamental relationship tied with late capitalism. Here, "cultural dominant" is a cultural form which has developed in the wake of the socio-economical order of present-day capitalism. In other words, postmodernism cannot be seen without its cultural impact on the society as well as the role this cultural impact plays in shaping the late capitalist society of the 20th century and onwards. This "cultural dominant" is not a trend, rather it affects all cultural productions. Therefore, form a postmodern perspective, theories of identity emphasize on the development of individualistic identity. In other words, from the perspective of postmodernism, emphasis is put on the importance of the person in the process of constructing identity, as it is seen as a chance for self-development and recreation.

This means that in the discussion of how identities are formed, modernity refers to the idea of the self-sufficient person who knows their own power and actively shapes their own destiny. However, in the liquid or postmodern era, this value is taken to an extreme, resulting in the emergence of a new archetype: the narcissus, which is coined by Christopher Lasch (1979). These emerging individuals exhibit a pronounced self-centeredness, forsaking altruistic principles, and embracing a process of personalizing that leads to heightened isolation within their subjective realm. In the present era, the predominant cultural value revolves around hedonism, specifically centered on the consumption of mass-produced goods. The pursuit of pleasure and the heightened sensory experiences have assumed a prominent role in everyday existence, hence pushing hedonistic principles to their utmost limits. Postmodernity launches man into an infinite universe of choices and limitless identities. However, this narcissistic euphoria that sees human beings existence as a collection of endless experiences ends up generating an identity crisis, as there are no more references, there is no foundation; in postmodernity, the individual floats aimlessly, emptied of meaning. Postmodernity dissolved the subject and ushered in an era in which the market, its products

and services determine people's lives, but the effect of this is paradoxical, as the excess of materialism also made possible the emergence of a culture centered on subjective expansion. of this narcissistic and individualistic person. And so, in the absence of external references, it is the individual who takes the central place in life, and begins to expand his influence to all instances of reality. Thus the "society of the Self" is formed, in which each individuality claims its right to be, to develop, to explore its senses and its possibilities of experiencing and feeling. In other words, individual identity has become self-righteous and self-centered. This happens, since "[...] individual freedom reigns supreme: it is the value by which all other values have come to be evaluated and the reference by which the wisdom regarding all supra-individual norms and resolutions must be measured" (Bauman, 9). In this regard, Jameson in his cultural logic of late capitalism also states the characteristics of consumerism where it engulfs everything including identity (1989).

Marx's theory of class and exploitation of labour had already hinted at this implication of commodification of the self. Marx characterizes capitalism as a period wherein the dominance of the commodity extends to the realm of labor, resulting in the worker becoming commodified by capital. In the current era of late capitalism according to Jameson, the internal aspects of human beings are increasingly influenced by market dynamics (1989). Another noteworthy aspect pertaining to the consumer society, specifically in relation to the person, is the occurrence of a transformation of individuality within the context of the consumption market. According to Jameson, the concept of the "pragmatics of purchasing" necessitates a highly personalized topic. The persistent and ceaseless pursuit of novel and enhanced exemplars and formulas for existence can be likened to a form of acquisition, one of significant significance. In other words, the slogan "you are what you buy" becomes the identity marker for the consumer culture. Therefore, the argument here is that there exists an exaggerated notion that our happiness is contingent only upon our own purchasing power (1989).

Moreover, Bauman conceptualizes the contemporary condition of postmodern existence as occurring within a socio-cultural context characterized by volatility and uncertainty. Within this framework, the notion of identity experiences a substantial and noteworthy process of metamorphosis. In contemporary consumer society, the concept of "fulfillment of identity fantasies" is emphasized, with a corresponding association between the notion of freedom and identity. The act of shopping, selecting or discarding one's "true self," and constantly being in motion have become symbolic of freedom within the context of today's consumer society. The concept of consumer choice has become inherently valuable, where the act of choosing holds greater significance than the actual item being chosen. Situations are evaluated and judged based on the variety of choices they offer, leading to either admiration or criticism, exploitation or resentment (Bauman, 99).

In the postmodern situation, it can be observed that the mediation of reality has undergone a significant transformation. Previously, this mediation was mostly facilitated by tradition or high culture. However, in the present context, it is evident that reality is predominantly shaped by the incessant circulation of commodities. According to Debord (1997), the spectacle society exhibits a remarkable inversion. For Debord, the society of the spectacle bases its experiences on images, establishing an intrinsically linked relationship between existence and its image, preferring the virtual image to the real representation of itself. Moreover, according to the author, in the society of the spectacle, material possessions are considered indicators of success and high moral standards, those who have more possessions are better positioned socially. In the case of live-streaming culture, one becomes what he decides to show about himself, mediated by the growing insertion of followers. What starts to have a lot of value for the subject or oneself is the way he or she is perceived by others, which indicates moving away from the reference of how he or she perceives himself or herself. That's because, according to Han, contemporary digital society makes use of freedom of information as a neoliberal device of control, a control based on the intensive use of freedom, configuring itself as a technology of power, "possible thanks to voluntary self-disclosure and self-exposure" (19).

In his analysis, Debord (1997) also makes a scathing criticism of the generalized focus on "appearance", which is worshiped at a time when social life ceased to be authentic and became simple images, with an evident degradation of the being to the having, and finally from having to seeming. At the same time, all individual reality became social, directly dependent on the social force, shaped by it. It is only allowed to appear in what it is not (Debord, 1997).

Holding onto these aspects, the visually striking image assumes a heightened level of influence, surpassing the actuality it represents. The supremacy of the image has major consequences for the formation of individual identity. The prevalence of consumerism couple with the primacy of the visual has the effect of diminishing the individual, as it distorts their moral consciousness and hinders the development of moral values. For instance, when the content creators' validation of his or her existence depends on the affirmation of his or her viewers, then this catering tendency becomes a weapon through which the viewers can attempt to control the content creators' actions. As such. It opens up a scope for dangerous activities. Therefore, such social structure gives rise to a chaotic and unpredictable atmosphere that causes confusion among individuals. As such, waning of emotion, depthlessness, and disconnection run amok in the psyche of the postmodern people which in return further pushes people into seeking various form of distraction, escapism, and violent pleasure (Jameson 1989).

2.3 Social Media and Identity

According to Azavedo et al. (2012, p. 243), the emergence of virtualized interactions brings forth a novel form of power, namely invisibility. The pursuit of visibility within networks can give rise to behaviors that are typically deemed unacceptable in the offline realm, where social interactions are governed by established standards and regulations. In the context of networks, it is important to note that norms and standards are not inherently fixed, but rather subjective in nature. Consequently, their ability to foster critical thinking is limited. In order to enhance one's online

presence, numerous resources are available for utilization on social media platforms, often disregarding moral and ethical considerations. It is evident that cyberspace serves as a conducive environment for the proliferation of violent behavior. Social networks have been found to operate as a collective entity with significant sway on the actions and behaviors of their users, hence exerting control over individual identities.

Freud's observation on the mob mentality of people is relevant here. He notes two factors in this regard. The first factor pertains to the individual's participation in a group. When the number of individuals in the group increases and the group remains anonymous, it creates a sense of power sole based on the number. This sense of power enables the individual to succumb to instincts that would have otherwise been suppressed under coercion if they were alone. Due to the anonymous nature of the group, individuals inside it may exhibit a reduced inclination to exercise self-regulation. In anonymous groups, the sense of personal accountability tends to diminish totally (Freud, 1996, p. 36). The second aspect pertains to the contagion relationship, wherein individual conduct is directly influenced, akin to the "herd effect." In this phenomenon, the subject's discernment and volition are entirely diminished, giving way to the prominence of group identity.

David G. Myers (2014) coined the term "deindividuation" to describe this process. The author claims that people are more likely to engage in destructive social explosions (like promoting lynchings or racial tensions) when excitement and diffuse responsibility combine and normal inhibitions decrease. These acts can range from minor restraint reduction (such as throwing food on the cafeteria floor, swearing at a referee, or shouting during a rock concert) to self-gratifying impulses (like engaging in group vandalism, orgies, or stealing). The unifying thread linking all these seemingly random acts is that they were all instigated by the might of the mob. According to Myers (224), as the size of the throng increases, its constituents become less conscious of their own transience and more inclined to engage in heinous acts, such as burning, lacerating, or dismembering the victim. This occurs because the dread of being judged is no longer present in the individual, as

the focus of the participants shifts from themselves to the situation at hand. "Moreover, since "everyone is doing it," each individual can ascribe their conduct to the circumstances rather than their own decisions", as stated by Myers (224). Therefore, through this notion it can be hypothesized that the viewers in the live stream can influence the content creator to take risks or otherwise dangerous activities while simultaneously hide in the anonymity of the mob mentality which prevents them from taking accountability of their speeches.

Moreover, the narcissistic culture of the twenty-first century extends beyond the digital technologies that predominate in quick communication—social media above all else. Taking account of the autobiographical nature of live stream, it appears that recounting the experiences of others, and even more so, discussing one's own experiences, has become a highly refined technique of literary expression in the transition from the 20th to the 21st century. Autobiography is not solely a type of literature; "autobiographical", as a way of telling a story, has become a defining aspect of contemporary culture. Discussing one's own experiences is commonly regarded as a sign of social standing, position, and abilities.

In the virtual realm, the most valuable asset is the adept portrayal of one's image. To what degree are these virtual "autobiographies" (profiles, vlogs, channels, etc.) connected to their literary counterparts? Undoubtedly, crafting a novel spanning several hundred pages, especially if it is highly autobiographical, has a greater level of challenge compared to composing a brief Facebook post or a 140-character tweet on Twitter. Hence, there exist "autobiographies" that vary in quality based on their structure and substance. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that in the present day, anyone has the ability to become, albeit to a certain extent, the author of their own autobiography. Alternatively, one could express it as: "Reveal to me the contents of your possessions, and I shall discern your true nature." Self-promotion, image promotion, or what Magdalena Szpunar refers to as "the culture of digital narcissism" - these concepts accurately describe the collision between "virtual reality" and "real virtuality". In simpler terms, we might be described as "cybernarcissists" - individuals in the

modern day who are captivated by their own and others' reflections, and who reside in a world saturated with audiovisual social media. In this digital landscape, we construct diverse iterations of our personal stories and biographies. The contemporary narcissist, hailed as the protagonist of our era, is no more a visually appealing young man fixated on his own reflection, but rather engrossed in the display of a laptop or smartphone or a content creator on the YouTube platform.

Furthermore, internet provides comparable levels of anonymity. In contrast to face-to-face interactions, Myers claims that chat rooms, discussion groups, and internet discussion lists foster higher levels of uninhibited antagonistic behavior. (225). The author proceeds to detail multiple instances within the virtual environment wherein individuals who were contemplating suicide were incentivized to carry out the act by anonymous observers, who occasionally broadcast live video feeds of the scene to dozens of individuals. According to Myers (226), group experiences that diminish self-awareness have the tendency to detach behavior from attitudes, resulting in deindividuation (i.e., lack of self-awareness). As such, this deindividuation causes individuals to exhibit less self-control and self-restraint, and they are more prone to acting without considering their own values and being insensitive to the circumstances.

2.4 Post-panopticon Surveillance Society and Its influence on Construction of Identity

As this study seeks to locate narratives of Foucault's panopticon in a post-panopticon surveillance society, Foucault's take on the panopticon is also relevant to my research. For Foucault, panopticon is a way to illustrate the proclivity of disciplinary societies to subjugate its citizens. He describes the prisoner of a panopticon as being at the receiving end of asymmetrical surveillance: "He is seen, but he does not see; he is an object of information, never a subject in communication" (Foucault, 1975). Here, it means that the inmate becomes accustomed to policing himself as he is unaware of when he is being watched, injecting a sense of anxiety into the subject and creating a

new form of self-discipline, thus, forming a self-regulated bio-political prison. Furthermore, Foucault defines power as being more than repression and prohibition. He also argues that, if power were never anything but repressive, nobody would agree to obey. What makes the notion of power overwhelming is that it not only holds the ability that makes us unable to say no but also it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, and produces discourse. Foucault equivalents power as a productive network that runs through the whole social body, to a form of access and influence to the bodies of individuals, to their acts, attitudes, and modes of everyday behavior. Therefore, in Foucault's theory of panopticism, he explicitly confines practices of surveillance to the larger area of gaining or maintaining power and analyses its manifestations in places such as mental health facilities or prisons. In order words, he bounds the practice of surveillance in institutional settings.

As such the emergence of post panopticon should imply that the panopticon era is over or the society has overcome the characteristics of the panopticon cage. However, in the discourse of post-panopticon, we can see that that in the postmodern society rather than overcoming the restrictions of the panopticon era, we have come to enjoy the 24/7 surveillance that surrounds us. We have even incorporated the surveillance culture in our day-to-day life in order to document our existence in the virtual world. Here, the post-panopticon is a form of neo-liberal way of surveillance which we have nicely named as a medium of self-expression. The main rule of the post-panopticon is a system of not just of monitoring oneself, but also of keeping track of one another. This form can be considered as a shift from the hierarchical model of the Panopticon. However, this neo-liberal way directly replaces the government's involvement with more direct, top-down forms of welfare strategies that preaches sentiments like responsibilities of citizens to stimulate self-management, and risk avoidance (Hathaway 2020). These strategies are associated with capitalist enterprise culture.

However, philosopher Byung-Chul Han expresses that, currently, "we believe that we are not submissive subjects, but free projects, which are incessantly outlined and reinvented" (9). In other words, we find ourselves, at this moment, in a great ideological battle between the rigidness and

stability of modernity and the freedom and instability of postmodernity. Despite all globalization, mobility, relativization, freedom of choice, and decentralization of power, the traditionalist discourses of the past are still being revitalized with great emphasis. This indicates that even though the era of late capitalism and postmodern culture screams of freedom and liberation, it should be noted that the central power is still in the hands of the authoritarians. Perhaps, on the surface, we have moved from a disciplinary society of modernity to a society of postmodernity where control is emphasized through consumption. But on the deeper level, the old model of the panopticon is replaced by the new model of post-panopticon, just the same as how colonization is replaced by neo-colonization or in other words globalization and neoliberalism.

Furthermore, the reason behind connecting control in a postmodern society with consumption is derived from René Kaës', a psychoanalyst, theory of an individual's approach to culture. According to René Kaës, in postmodernity, institutions seem to have been replaced by consumption where consumption indicates not only to just a promise but also fulfillment. However, there is a catch in this movement of the instinctual investment in oneself, and according to René Kaës, this consequence will bring suffering:

> What we call postmodernity has generalized the experiences of transplantation, exile and uprooting: it has accentuated violence. In this experience, we are confronted not only with what is strange (foreign) in the other, but, first and foremost, with what appears in us as unknown, undifferentiated and disturbing estrangement. Our identifying references and our identifications are modified. In this perspective, the failures (failles) in the safety of the environment are also an experience that generates anguish, insofar as the loss of the code re-updates the intrapsychic conflicts between tendencies of love and connection and tendencies of anger and disconnection.
>
> (p. 22)

In other words, the waning of emotion in a postmodern society causes a lack of dephthlessness and disconnection between social relationships that were celebrated in modern society (Jameson, 1989). And so, it generates a feeling of frustration that can only be elevated by either performing destructive acts or making others perform destructive acts where the instigator will not be held accountable, which is portrayed in the films.

For Juremir Machado da Silva (2007), individuals would no longer be exactly in a society of spectacle, but rather in one of hyperspectacle. Before, according to the Debordian conception, people lived in contemplation, people were spectators in front of the TV or cinema screen, where they just watched the programs. Now, in the face of digital social networks, the individual still continues to contemplate, but not only the life of others, but also their own. Previously, only big TV and cinema stars had the right to star. In contemporary digital social networks, however, everyone can aspire and achieve protagonism. If Debord previously showed the spectacle as an image of the world, the hyperspectacle is the image of oneself in the world, in which everyone seeks maximum visibility and maximum recognition of their existence. On the platform, cyberculture is hyperspectacular, the individual stops being a mere spectator to become their own spectacle, seeking a maximum of followers and fans.

Hyperconnectivity, in tandem with hyperspectacle, ultimately results in a deep sense of alienation among individuals. People nowadays are increasingly reliant on cell phones and computers, adopting a virtual identity while losing touch with their own physical and existential reality, isolating themselves in their own bubble. Moreover, when confronted with an overwhelming number of stimuli, the blase individuals run the risk of developing a state of utter indifference and apathy.

Furthermore, Kallas in his article "Contemporary Subject: The Virtual World and Psychoanalysis", expresses that one of the consequences of this phenomenon can be observed in the

way people behave on social networks, displaying the characteristics they consider most pleasant, at the same intensity in which they display their more aggressive side when they do not want to be recognized, creating fake profiles, for example. The internet has occupied a place of mediation between reality and the imagination of subjects. On the internet, pleasures are satisfied almost immediately. There is no such thing as long-term satisfaction. Everything is just a click away. Therefore, social networks have become a tool for many to vent their more aggressive sides. This is a type of play in which destructiveness predominates, a typical example of a psychotic mode of functioning, because, as Andre Green warns in his book:

> The psychotic's fantasy is not only a substitute for playing, as in neurosis, but
> also pretends to be reality, more properly called a new reality. It is no longer
> a question of playing, but of a substitute for a lost reality (p. 38).

For Green, playing can become a way of feeding a person's omnipotence, resulting in narcissistic satisfaction through the destruction of the other, therefore resulting in perverted playing. Hence, the society of the spectacle seems, from this perspective, to provide an opportunity for perverse control mechanisms, because the social networks in postmodern culture have presented resources for the individual to indulge in and get fixed in pseudo-power-play. A power-play that subjugates individuals without being perceived as such, according to Han, founding a kind of "democracy of spectators" (p. 22), based on a society of transparency, where public and private bodies mix. What Han seems to warn about is the psychic risks of contemporary escape that present itself under a cover of freedom to expand processes of exploration of the subject.

I do not dismiss the critical claims that the above scholars have to offer. On the contrary, these reviews are essential to highlight the vital notions of how a postmodern identity is constructed and how this identity formation is influenced by the post-panopticon surveillance society. This study aims at how the construction of identity is influenced in the presence of live streaming culture. The

selected three films serve as an opportunity, where narcissistic culture which in prevalent in the live-streaming culture and its potential dangers as well as influence can be studied as these films portray the use of technology in a way that intensifies reality by simulating a veil of childish contentment to showcase the pseudo-power-play between performer in front of the camera and the audience hidden behind the anonymity of the internet.

Chapter 3

Live Streaming Culture in *Nerve* (2016)

Before going in further, I would like to give a summary of the techno-thriller film *Nerve* (directed by Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost, 2016). In the film, the opening scene could not be more contemporary. For example, the protagonist, a young woman named 'Venus' or 'Vee' for short, uses her computer to access her e-mails, opening one window after another, without closing or replying to them. One e-mail, however, gains special attention, it is an invitation to the game: Nerve, which gives the film its title. Venus, the protagonist, is then faced with two positions to choose from in Nerve: 1) a watcher or 2) a player. Even without knowing the details or implications of this choice, Venus opts for the position of a player, automatically authorizing the game to access all of her personal information available on the Internet, such as bank details, search history, and access to websites, all with the aim of to set more personalized challenges. Here, from the position of "player", the character accepts to submit to the challenges that are forwarded to her, fulfilling them in real-time and with live-streaming the whole event for a crowd that chose the position of the "watcher". Given these circumstances, various questions arise in us such as what is the best option? What gains could there be in submitting to the exposure imposed by this game, and what are the costs for the subject? What role does the "watcher" play and what implications does this role give off? These are some of the different elements treated in the film that allow us to recognize the hidden mechanisms of post-panoptic surveillance and the social dynamics that have prevailed in contemporary postmodern live-streaming culture.

The film *Nerve* is about a "game without rules", therefore it indicates that there is no limit to the actions that the players will have to perform at the whims to the watchers. No law or morality will act as a barrier to restrain the desires of the watchers. In other words, this means that it is a game where there are no barriers on the player's body which indicates to a relation of subjugation to the

conditions established by the game. The only rule is a prohibition, which is the impossibility of asking for help, and so, whistleblowers, those who denounce the abuses produced by the game, get stuck in the game. The film works with this idea of the absence of limits, as all suggestions need to be accepted and executed by those who accept the position of "player" in *Nerve*. Therefore, the film presents a scenario in which players submit to the whims of their watchers in favor of profiting from their enjoyments, regardless of the consequences that may arise and under the impossibility of denouncing abuse of any kind to anyone, being subject to conditions that are implicit in the contract established to enter the game. Here, the position of "watcher" has the favour of anonymity, the possibility of accessing "player information", and choosing the challenges that players will have to conduct. Therefore, the objective of the game "Nerve" is to win all the established challenges given by the watchers, and the prize is a small fortune intended for just one player. Furthermore, the film explores the category of "whistleblowers" or "snitchers" as those who were considered failures for not living up to the expectations of the game. These snitchers are then placed in a hidden third category which is prisoners who have got all their vital information under the clutches of the watchers and can only be able to escape from the game by winning the game. Therefore, the film portrays two aspects where one is the players need to please and get affirmation of the watchers, and the other is it is important not to show any weakness or resistance in the live stream.

Therefore, here the relationship between the "watchers" and "players" in the film embodies the anonymous and potentially dangerous culture of live-streaming. In live-streaming, there is a performer who is visible in front of the camera and there are numerous watchers who view the performer anonymously. It should be noted that in the view of postmodern identity, the freedom of choosing race, gender, and culture in an internet platform or social network is essential to the formation of an anonymous identity. While this indicates erasing background history of oneself and being in a state of uprootedness, this also gives illustrious power of the invisibility cloak that can not only hide a person's identity but also can act as a cover to hide a person's actions (Gordon Slethaug 2016). Hence, with the help of Kallas and Green's views on pseudo-power play on social media, in

live-streaming culture, the performer not only exposes himself or herself to the unknown danger of the anonymous viewers but also makes himself or herself vulnerable to the manipulations of the watchers by catering to these watchers' approvals. Here, the performer same as the player in the film bases their need for reaffirmations and their gratification on the whims of strangers who are hidden in the dark. For example, in the film, the watchers challenge Ian (the protagonist's romantic interest) and his friends to hang from a crane which led to the death of one of Ian's friends which is showed in the film later on to further cement the fact that the watchers in the film have completely liberated their criminal desires under to cover of anonymous identity. Furthermore, in the case of the protagonist, Venus, the watchers have at one point challenged her to commit theft, get tattoos, and towards forced her to either kill or be killed, again emphasizing on the lawlessness of the anonymity.

This might lead one to think that in this world the player's life choices take shape after the watchers' whims alone and the power dynamics is hierarchical. Contrary to such assumptions, the watchers' outrageous actions and their irreversible consequences - in this case a death - while being a bit exaggerated, is in fact a perfect portrayal of the pseudo-power-play that watchers of live-streaming platform tend to demonstrate. It is considered pseudo because the existence of post-panopticons shows us that while the viewers are anonymously watching the performers, there are also hidden authorities or real power-holders who are watching the viewers as well. For example, in the film, before the last dare is given by the watchers, Venus had her friends Tommy and Azhar who were computer geeks to try and hack the game "Nerve's" database in order to tear away the veil of anonymity of the watchers. Hence, in the last scene when Venus staged a fake show of being shot in order to complete the watchers' dare to either kill or be killed, the watchers were greeted with their identity and personal information exposure and threatened to be an accomplice with murder. In addition to that, they were given the choice of either logging out of the game forever or getting their actions and information exposed. Here, seeing that the promise of anonymity has failed, all of the watchers chose to log out which clearly points out the fact that these watchers who revel in anonymity, refuse to carry the responsibility and face consequences of their actions. Therefore, these

notions answer that there are many layers of forces that are in play in this post-panopticon surveillance society. Here, Venus' friends represent the authoritarian figure of our society who are in charge of the central monitoring system that is being hidden and not as glaring as it is displayed in Foucault's panoptic society.

Furthermore, the role and actions of the watchers imply that the postmodern people and its society are suffering from waning of emotion and depthlessness and these symptoms point to one of the characteristics of these typically virtualized relationships as being the possibility of seeking to satisfy fantasies on the "network" that would not be allowed to be realized in person. For instance, the watchers in the film lack the empathy they need to perform as a harmonious society. As such, with their depthlessness and callousness, they did not even hesitate to command the players to commit murder, theft, extreme sports and other risky activities because at the end of the day, they are not the one who is committing the crimes. It is the players to are doing it. Therefore, they view their accountability in these crimes as nonexistent because of their anonymous identity. Therefore, it can be said that the watchers unleash their inner id and satisfies their id through the players.

Furthermore, the central character of *Nerve*, Venus, serves as an allegory to portray the social logic to which we are all subjected: a shy young woman, with few friends who becomes the personification of extroversion, adventurous, courageous, fearless, fun, in short, the ideal model for the society of the spectacle, society of transparency and of freedom. Therefore, the protagonist is seduced by the culturally valued idea of heroism and popularity, which leads to joining the game. The plot of the film unfolds by presenting the perverse trait of the game "Nerve" when the protagonist realizes that she cannot give up the game, as her data and assets have been confiscated and the challenges, she has to go through are becoming increasingly risky. Here, it can be said that the character of Venus and all the other players perfectly portray that postmodern control is conducted through consumption. For example, with the promise of money, all the players are driven to perform dangerous dares and be under the whims of the watchers. Furthermore, the film also demonstrates the fact that with consumption comes suffering which is a nod to René Kaës' observation that

consumerism causes frustration that can only be increased by committing destructive activities or inciting others to do so without consequence. For example, Venus and all the other players are willing to satisfy their inner need for recognition, reaffirmation, and gratification by completing dares which at first start of innocently and become increasingly evil that turns into a source of physical and mental suffering for the players. In addition to that, the inability of the players to escape from the game and the watchers' personal information being exposed aligns with Han's observation on that no one is free from the post-panoptic surveillance even though on the surface it seems like everyone is free.

Lastly, this film makes a critical commentary on the invasive nature of such mediation that includes the emotional and personal attachments of those involved in this constant sharing and streaming. One of the film's turning points is the protagonist's love affair with Ian, a young Nerve player. Venus and Ian meet through one of the challenges set in the game: they need to kiss in public. It is from this contact that the characters establish a bond that begins to overlap with the affection initially established in the game. It is from this change of affections that the characters Venus and Ian turn against the game, starting to question it, trying to trespass its rules, and investing in strategies to get around the coercive system imposed by the game. However, while in the surface the romantic relationship between Venus and Ian seems to the much-needed variable or spark to ignite the rebellious plot to outsmart the game and the watchers, it should be noted that the fact that Venus and Ian got involved with multiple dares were done by the watchers. In other words, the watchers felt like they would make a good couple, and therefore, had arranged a series of dares to get them to communicate with each other. Hence, this leads to the question of whether the players are really out of the influence and manipulation of the watchers in the end, and also points out the horrifying degree of manipulation and influence that watchers have on players or live-streaming viewers have on the live-streaming performers.

When analyzing the work, the first question that comes to mind is: why do young people expose themselves to such extreme challenges? For Pondé (2019), the problem starts at home:

Young people are more insecure and anxious, perhaps, about the

increased protection that their parents give them. Because parents want to

protect their children from all forms of suffering. Protect your child from

failing at school. Protect your child from things that are justified, the world is

more dangerous. So, the security element is more important. So parents end

up rightly becoming more paranoid. This ends up locking the children away.

(Ponde, 2019, video on Youtube)

This contemporary phenomenon shown in the film is interesting for us to evaluate and

consider how far young people can go in search of attention. In the film, it can be said that even

though the watchers are hidden under the anonymous identity, it seems the players with solid identity

are the ones who are suffering from incomplete identity. Therefore, it is the players who risk their

personal information at the hand of anonymous viewers so that they can gain affirmation, fame and

recognition from the watchers by performing the watchers demands satisfactorily. As such the

attention, gained by whatever means, becomes an identity marker for the players. In the absence of

anything real in this hyperreal world, an individual grabs this opportunity to display oneself as a way

to build his or her identity. It also gives him or her a pseudo sense of power. An example is what

happened in 2015 when several parents received notifications about the "Blue Whale challenge",

created on a Russian website called Novaya Gazeta. The challenge consisted of completing fifty

stages of self-harm, the last of which was suicide. (Lopes, 2017)

It is worth remembering that identity formation encompasses different meanings, in the real

and virtual spheres. It can be said, based on the fiction *Nerve* and the reflections developed here, one

can question: What would be the effects of this perverse logic on the subject? Hunt, Marx and Lipson

et al warn that the exclusive replacement of physical and personal contact by the social network, as

a measure between them (the self) and the other, has been associated with reports of depression and

increased feelings of loneliness on the part of users of these networks themselves. This occurs

because, increasingly focused on oneself, the abundance of narcissistic investment turns into disinvestment, producing discomfort.

Even though Kallas points to one of the characteristics of these typically virtualized relationships as being the possibility of seeking to satisfy fantasies on the "net" that would not be allowed to be realized in person, and also the ease of disconnecting and restarting, tolerance to error does not seem to be compatible with the society of the spectacle. The error itself becomes a stage for a spectacle, no matter how much the possibility of starting over may be considered, the error is something reprehensible, and hidden.

Furthermore, regarding these symptomatologic reports, Paiva makes contributions when dealing with the relationship between imagination and social and subjective life. For him, the symptoms of the two main forms of neurosis - hysterical neurosis and obsessional neurosis - are not expressed today in the same way as they were expressed years ago. Today, subjects who seek psychoanalytic help complain of a lack of meaning, guidance, apathy, depression and a loss of reference, as traditional values and norms previously accepted axiomatically have been challenged. Therefore, people today live for themselves, concerned at all times with their own image, and anxiety seems to emerge as a pathology due to the uninterrupted search for immediate satisfaction of desires.

Along this line of reasoning, the film introduces a character Venus who, at a particular juncture in the storyline, is enticed by the notion of heroism and popularity that are highly esteemed in society, but later declines this status at a the end plot where the watchers' commands Venus to either kill herself or her romantic partner. The character undergoes a transformation from a coveted prototype to a target of censure and censorship due to her dissent towards the game that initially bestowed advantages upon her. Within the realm of fiction, the protagonist Venus acknowledges and embraces the position of "failure," "unpopularity," and diminished favorability in comparison to his fellow social peers. For instance, in the film Venus along with her friends unveils the watchers anonymous identity so that she does not have to commit murder. By rejecting this perverse game and instead embracing otherness, the character emancipates themselves from the logic of dominance

through the means of transparency, freedom, and performance, as posited by Bauman and Han's theories.

It is worth asking, then: Would the fictional setting of the film *Nerve* be very far from reality? When we assume such a film as a product of culture and take some of the aspects of its narrative for discursive analysis, it becomes possible to consider that the scenario presented by the film has many similarities with reality. It is enough to recognize that today's world has many public figures who accept various challenges for amounts of money, for views, for subscribers, followers, for sensations, to acquire the acceptance and applause of people, or "observers", as the film Nerve portrays.

What was previously done and was limited to the resolute physical social circle, can now be seen and given opinions by all followers who know little about the daily life of that public person; they only know about a section and give their opinion only about that section. These are signs that seem to indicate the maximum expression of the society of the spectacle in terms of Debord, which indicates a subject who bases his experiences on images, on a fragment of reality that is presented as truth.

The "voice" of otherness that could offer ways of dealing with reality, giving it meaning, establishing affective parameters for the subject, is absent, causing the subject's voices to turn to themselves, compulsively and fleetingly. Furthermore, as Han warns, the "self" as a project believes itself to be free, when, in fact, it is surrendered to the (now) internalized constraints of mandatory performance. The more focused on oneself, the less conditions the subject will have to deal with the demands of desire and the demands of culture and, in a scenario similar to the film *Nerve*, the more control society there will be, meeting market demands and, perhaps, producing malaise.

All in all, the live streaming culture of reality in the film *Nerve* (2016) showcases how the existence of solid identity acts as a barrier to restrain the id of the people. In other words, it is because in the film the watchers' identity were erased and labeled as anonymous and the players got the identity of puppet in the hands of the puppeteers which is the watchers, that they have liberated their id and become slaves to their id. And so, the reality they live in became a game like reality that is

disconnected from the real world where law and morality bind their id. As such, when the game like reality is destroyed with the unveiling of the watchers' identity, the original reality connects itself with laws and morality and so, in the end we can see the watchers urgently signing of from the live stream with a fear and they will hold accounted of their actions. Through this notion, the film depicts various kinds of identity formation in which, we have players identity that lives of the attention of the viewers, we have the watchers' identity which is anonymous that gives them the security they need to incite others to perform violent acts and lastly, we have the notion of complete identity that can restrain the uncontrollable id of the watchers. However, the main impact on identity that we can see in this postmodern society is how the uncontrollable id has made the process of constructing identity regressive. In other words, regressive identity has become a marker for the postmodern people.

Chapter 4

Fragmented Identity in "Nosedive" from *Black Mirror* (2016)

The second film is taken from the series, *Black Mirror*'s dystopian fiction and acute social satire episode "Nosedive" (directed by Joe Wright, 2016). The story takes place in a near future in which everyone in a society is rated on a scale from zero to five stars based on how others see them. In the film, the ultimate goal of every citizen is to attain the status of "five stars," or extremely close to it. The main character, Lacie Pound is seen throughout the episode working hard to boost her statistics to finally be among those with high four-point ranks. She never offers anything original and instead conforms to the group's standard of behavior. In the end, despite her best attempts, she gives up and runs away from the constraint's society imposed on her. The concept that individuals would do anything to embrace and fit in was demonstrated in several ways throughout the episode. The issue of maintaining a positive self-assessment in the face of the myriad human interactions required by daily living includes, but is not limited to, working relationships, social interactions, business-to-consumer interactions, and family ties. Every type of social interaction is subject to regulation by unbiased observers who grade it using a smartphone and submit a report to the online system with a score indicating how enjoyable or unpleasant it was to interact with the other person

From a communication point of view, technological innovations have undeniably improved communication relationships, generating new possibilities for interaction between people in the virtual environment. This chapter explores this contemporary phenomenon of virtual environment, taking the episode "Nosedive", from the third season of the series *Black Mirror* as a representative context of a society increasingly connected in virtual environments, exhibiting behaviors that sometimes generate conflicts and fragmentation in the construction of identity.

Several films have provided their viewers with important reflections on the emergence of behavioral changes in relationships, and the series *Black Mirror* can be identified as one of the most

relevant in this context, with characteristics and style of approach mixing fiction with an eventual reality projected in a current space of time or in the near future. Charlie Brooker, producer and creator of the series, states that each of the episodes has different casts, settings and even realities, but with the same purpose: to address the way we are living in the present and bring to light possible ways of experiencing it ten years from now (Brooker, 2011). In essence, the episode "Nosedive" illustrates the potential repercussions of our increased reliance on cutting-edge technology, the operation of post-panopticon surveillance in new media environments, and the nature of society that such surveillance will unveil.

In the third season of *Black Mirror* brings the episode called "Nosedive" where the plot is set in the near future, where all the people who live in a society have their reputations evaluated among themselves, on a numerical scale of importance that goes from zero to five stars. In the film, reaching five stars, the highest peak, or being very close to this level is the main objective of any citizen. The daily challenge is to keep the assessment constantly high during the human relationships that everyday life imposes, such as coexistence in the work environment, casual encounters in public environments with neighbors and colleagues, commercial consumer relations, among others. Each and every type of social interaction is guided by evaluations from third parties who will judge the satisfaction of that interaction through the smartphone, delivering to the virtual system a score that identifies how satisfactory, or not, it was to interact with the other person.

An intriguing fact is that outside of this work of fiction, in current times, we are evaluating applications for smartphone, through similar notes and scales, some commercial consumer relationships, such as meal delivery services, accommodation, private drivers, among others. And at this moment, Charlie Brooker's satirical warning about future possibilities in our inattentive, clumsy or even indifferent behaviors to the impositions that technological innovations are gradually bringing to society begins to make a lot of sense. Virtual reputation is already dictating some of the rules of

human relations in society, and this is perhaps the beginning, the embryo of the search for acceptance, incessant and unbridled, demonstrated by Brooker in the episode.

Before any comparative film analysis with contemporary times, it is important to report that since the beginning of human civilization, long before the emergence of new digital technologies, science, especially psychology, sociology and medicine, pioneered important discoveries regarding human behavior and life in society. The fact is that, to date, there is no human evolution or scientifically proven change that demonstrates the emergence of unprecedented behavioral factors developed exclusively in the 21st century. After all this century is the era of limitless identities and choices. What is happening is an increase in exposure, individual and collective, of already existing behavioral characteristics. The most recent concern is regarding virtual environments and the consequences that the intermittent presence of social networks in human relationships may (or may not) affect an individual's mental health, depending on their routine use and handling of networks.

Another intriguing paradox is that not everything published on social networks is genuinely true. The virtual environment provides the simulation and/ or editing of content with the aim of omitting imperfections or even fantasizing non-existent events, although it is these fantasy publications that often arouse frustration in other people who feel inferior. Filters and other virtual makeup resources, for example, in the search for a more than perfect face on the networks can generate frustration and a view that the natural is less beautiful. This vain atmosphere stimulates disputes for greater popularity and awakens a revanchism that adheres to at least six of the seven deadly sins: pride, avarice, wrath, lust, gluttony and, mainly, envy, all used in this filmic analysis.

The episode "Nosedive" which depicts the dystopian fiction and acute social satire humorously invites the viewer to reflect from beginning to end. As already pointed out, the work is temporally situated in a future close to current times. The main character, Lacie Pound, lives in a world where people are evaluated by a popularity index with a maximum of five stars. The closer to

the number five, the more relevant the person is to society. A reputation close to five stars also provides benefits and easier access to consumer relations, an indicator that addresses sociologist Bauman's thesis, in which the theorist relates social conflicts and advances in modernity directly to increasingly consumerist cultural practices.

In the episode, at the beginning of the plot, Lacie has a 4.2 grade and is obsessed with raising her stars. It is important to remember that, according to the narrative, people with social characteristics similar to Lacie's form a vast majority in the society in which they are inserted and all physical or virtual interactions with other individuals count points that establish the popularity score, which it can fluctuate according to the different experiences of these personal interactions. In "Nosedive", there is no way to escape virtual judgments and evaluations, as the technology that governs the evaluations is installed in electronic contact lenses, in the iris of the human body, also making a direct interface with the smartphone of each individual. People receive notes all the time, whether when they post on social media or when they meet in person. Casual encounters in a simple elevator and a possible lack of empathy in interactions may lower the grade of one or more participants in this casual encounter. With this, "Nosedive" leaves a very clear message that, in that filmic context, all relationships are monitored virtually, even if they are in person, and a person's identity and reputation is practically a currency in commercial and interpersonal relationships.

In other words, humans are driven by a need to consume and display their achievements, making them active participants in the pursuit of success. Individuals are endeavoring to perform in a theatrical production. Goffman (1959) draws a parallel between social interaction and a theater stage, where individuals engage in performances. Han refers to the players as performers on stage. Individuals exit the stage with an altered sense of self and frequently experience a distortion of their identity and a breakdown of their character when assuming their role. Two key events in the episode show how social media encounters are more like surface displays than real depictions. While enjoying some pastries and coffee in the first scene, Lacie snaps a photo. To enhance the visual

appeal of the photograph, she plays the part of a victim by biting into her cookie and then vomiting

it out. She captions the photo, "I feel as though I am in paradise." However, the post does feature a

real person who, due to their disdain of the coffee's flavor, does not drink it and does not even touch

the cookie. Another episode features her making a delicious olive tapenade—one that she chooses

not to eat—for a customer. Scenes like these make me think of the common ideals that people display

on social media these days. People caught up in the hyperreality of the postmodern period are vividly

shown in the episode through a number of comparable events. There is no authenticity or depth to

the way these individuals engage with one another. They always seem to be smiling indicatively

when they meet. They boost each other's ratings by prioritizing their own, and they wear artificial

smiles and put on an act of being happy all the time. These scores indicate the social status and

achievement of individuals. Engaging in conversations with others who have achieved high scores

yields a similar impact as attaining a commendable score oneself. Engaging with those who have

low scores can potentially result in a decrease in your own score. Individuals who have poor

scores/status often experience indifference in their daily lives, as if they are completely disregarded.

Despite being playful and fictional, the work reflects a reality not far from what we are

already experiencing in society. The central theme of postmodern culture—the idea of gaining one's

identity through material possessions—is explored extensively in the episode. The Pound family's

rent is about to expire. Lacie intends to live in a more spacious condominium with better leisure

options, but her family income does not fit into the rent budget. However, she has a second

alternative: getting a good discount on the installment amount if she has her credit score. increased

reputation and popularity from 4.2 to a minimum rating of 4.5. In other words, the consumption is

based on the desired social status in here and Lacie is a product of the society that emphasizes

likability.

Therefore, upon seeking advice from experts, Lacie engages with individuals who have

achieved high scores in order to enhance her own score. Her interactions sometimes falter, resulting

in a decrease in her score. In pursuit of that objective, she reaches out to Naomi, a childhood

companion with limited nostalgic recollections. Ryan, Lacie's sibling, has the belief that her

endeavors to enhance her score are devoid of value. When Ryan encounters his sister reuniting with

Naomi affectionately, Ryan denounces the show as absurd. Ryan criticizes the self-centeredness

prevalent on social media, referring to it as a system of evaluating oneself in comparison to those

who simply feign happiness. For instance, he says in the episode regarding Lacie's reunion with

Naomi that "this whole ranking thing, just comparing yourself to people who only pretend to be

happy, high fours like Naomi, I bet they are suicidal on the inside". Here, Ryan specifically mentions

that Naomi may be experiencing internal turmoil no matter how she appears on the outside. He

characterizes Lacie's situation as an "obsession". In contrast, Lacie is prepared to sever ties with her

brother in order to partake in the program and achieve her ambitions. This is due to the fact that

bonding is not appropriate for the postmodern consumer. Personal well-being requires the act of

breaking familial ties. Here, Ryan is a young man who is in opposite of his sister in terms of

prioritizing the popularity rating in their social system. If Lacie is someone who is very desperate for

a high popularity point, then Ryan does not care about what points he is getting in his social profile.

Simultaneously, by chance, Lacie is extended an invitation to partake in the nuptials of

Naomi, a long-time acquaintance, not only as a bridesmaid but also as a speaker during the ceremony.

The character Naomi is depicted as affluent and narcissistic, a youthful woman who garners

exceedingly high ratings on social media due to her ideal combination: a rating of 4.8, membership

in an affluent social circle that thrives on daily content, such as her physical fitness, her fiancé, and

her seemingly flawless relationship portrayed on social media. This collection, characterized by its

aesthetic appeal and idealized qualities, is the outcome of meticulous assessments. Moreover, it

elicits obvious parallels between the depicted scenarios and some actual behaviors observed in our

everyday existence. Viewers of "Nosedive" inevitably draw parallels between the behavior of the

main characters and individuals in present-day society. In the opening scene of the episode, a

phenomenon is depicted that is already prevalent in today's society. It shows hundreds of people gathered in a public square, standing just a few meters apart from each other. However, there is very little interaction between these individuals who are in close proximity. Instead, their attention is solely focused on their smartphones, engaging with virtual social environments that are either non-existent or geographically distant. Andrew Keen supports and elucidates this reasoning:

> No, social media is not very social. "The ties we form over the internet, after all, are not the ties that unite". Social media platforms are built around fragile bonds, thereby turning us into perpetual adherents rather than the active participants that political theorists considered the essential ingredient of a successful democracy. So, social media networks connect people who for the most part have not met and will never meet, transforming these "communities" into libertarian aggregations of autonomous individuals, in constant movement, who reinvent their identities when they want and integrate, disintegrate and rejoin these groups with just a tap on the screen. (Keen, 2012, p. 79)

Although Lacie is not frequently present and no longer maintains a strong bond with her friend Naomi, she agrees to the invitation to participate and deliver a speech at the wedding. This decision serves as another example of the shallow nature of modern social connections, which revolve around shared interests that can enhance one's reputation and personal popularity. Lacie intends to engage with the affluent wedding guests in order to enhance her individual score, which currently stands at 4.2. By doing so, she hopes to improve her chances of relocating and residing in the new, opulent house. A well-crafted speech delivered at the ceremony will not only please the attendees, but also enhance Lacie's reputation, maybe surpassing a rating of 4.5. Naomi resides in a remote urban area, and Lacie must make arrangements for her transportation in order to be present at the wedding.

Lacie Pound's strategy appears flawless; however, a convergence of circumstances is poised to undermine it completely. While in the taxi on her way to the airport, Lacie fails to display any empathy for the driver as she is engrossed in a video conference with Naomi. Consequently, upon reaching her destination, the taxi driver rates her poorly, resulting in her score decreasing from 4.2 to 4.18. Following that, her ticket is cancelled and in order to be able to board on the same day and not miss the wedding, Lacie would need to have a minimum score of 4.2, as specified by the airline. She displays annoyance and mistreats the person at the service desk, resulting in a disturbance that irritates other individuals in the queue. As a consequence of this unfavorable encounter, Lacie Pound's rating is further diminished. The employee contacts the authorities and Lacie faces consequences, resulting in an increase in her unfavorable ratings for the following 24 hours. The airport scenes highlight the phenomenon of superficial interactions among strangers, emphasizing the overwhelming nature of such encounters. Although physically proximate, individuals engage in a veiled manner, presenting smiles that lack authenticity. This serves as a cautionary message, a form of satire employed by the artists to underscore the potential offerings of virtual and superficial interactions in the imminent future. Additionally, it serves as a daring method of revealing the virtual realm as a possible danger to deeply personal ties, while simultaneously encouraging the reestablishment of links between the fragmentation of one's sense of self and identity.

It's worth comparing the scenario under examination to MIT sociologist and professor Sherry Turkle's three books on excessive digital technology use. The first book, titled "The Second Self" (1984), explores the captivating allure of computers in providing an alternative existence - a virtual one. This virtual life gradually supplants personal connections, replacing them with impersonal interactions, such as conversing with a machine. Additionally, the book delves into the emergence of social networks facilitated by computers. In his second publication, "Life on the Screen" (1995), the author proposes the examination of identities in relation to their transformation facilitated by mobile devices. Living in a digital network, through screens, appears to be more alluring than face-

to-face interactions, while being shallower compared to long-standing friendships. The premise of the third book, titled Alone Together (2011), is based on the author's extensive investigation into the course of modern relationships. Evidently, social networks offer opportunities to establish connections with numerous followers, guaranteeing friendships and virtual bonds. These potential outcomes, meanwhile, rely on ongoing evaluations of performance. In the analysis, Lacie understood that her invitation to her friend's wedding would be her unconditional friendship, but she gradually realized that it would be linked to her grades and actions, which echoes Turkle's book's subtitle: Why do we expect more from technology and less from each other? Furthermore, this scene can also be linked with the culture of narcissism, which can also relate to the conduct of invitations to marriage and the role of the mirror, including in the title of the series *Black Mirror*. Naomi thinks more about herself and her reputation than Lacie as her friend. Her mirror, in this case the social network, is more significant for her score.

In "Nosedive", it is depicted that life in the digital age is quantified. However, while performance and efficiency are critical, bulk data cannot answer the question "who am I?" Nonetheless, given the widespread adoption of score-based treatment, acquiring points is crucial for achieving social independence and successfully moving into mainstream society. Scoring is necessary for the purposes of airport and elevator boarding, automobile and housing rentals, as well as wedding and communion attendance. Given the notices stating "minimum entry 3.8, no exceptions," it is imperative for members of society to improve their performance. Lacie has a semblance of autonomy, nevertheless, she is endeavoring to conform to societal expectations. Within this cultural context, her primary motivation stems from the need for social inclusion and the avoidance of exclusion. Individuals who criticize the grading system and resort to adopting these peculiar phony identities are essentially ostracized from society. These individuals are excluded from contemporary society due to their subpar academic performance and their failure to take advantage of many chances.

Indeed, in this particular episode, individuals are required to demonstrate a performance that consistently results in an increase in their rating scores, rather than occurring randomly or without deliberate effort. During each transaction, customers present their scores to the counterperson. If they have accumulated sufficient points, they are eligible to purchase an airplane ticket or charge their automobile, among other options. The score decides whether a transaction is eligible or not. Lacie's loss of composure results in severe consequences as her score renders her ineligible for aviation. Witnesses swiftly decreased Lacie's score using the gadget, imposing a deduction of one point as a penalty. Lacie requires this measure to be conducted continuously for a duration of 24 hours. In order to achieve a score of 4.5 and secure her dream property, she is required to attend a wedding of a childhood acquaintance, deliver a speech, and make a favorable impression on the guests who have achieved high scores, all within a 24-hour timeframe.

In the subsequent narrative, Lacie endeavors to find desperate means of covering vast distances in order to attend the event. Her point is steadily and swiftly declining as a result of the airport police's round-the-clock disciplinary measures. Lacie relinquishes the rented vehicle and requests transportation once the battery becomes depleted during the journey. Several vehicles will refuse to transport an unfamiliar individual with a negative reputation due to their low reputation rating. Lacie, who has a rating of 2.6 and lacks hope, receives encouragement from Susan, a truck driver with an impressive but disappointing rating of 1.8. Halfway through her journey, Lacie, covered in dirt and not having had the chance to clean herself, loses almost all of her belongings. However, her will to attend her purported friend's wedding remains strong, despite being uninvited due to her poor reputation point.

Upon her arrival at the event, Lacie successfully diverts the attention of the security personnel and stealthily penetrates the party. Upon infiltrating the festivities, she seizes the microphone from the emcee and commences her address. Speaking of her is no longer that prepared speech, creating a fictitious intimacy and fondness for her childhood friend Naomi. The speech is characterized by

blunt candor and abundant indignation, featuring allegations of unfaithfulness and a distinct exhibition of her lack of authority. In the speech, Lacie jealousy towards Naomi's "perfect life" as well as expresses her despair at the act of Naomi prioritizing numbers above her friendship with Lacie. In the scene, Naomi finally admits the hypocrisy of their friendship by saying that "I cannot have a 2.6 at my wedding," and when Lacie asks "so it's just about numbers for you", Naomi replies "it was numbers for both of us". Based on the prestige earned during the wedding, Lacie and Naomi came up with their own quantifiable figures. However, because Lacie lost points, her calculations were flipped.

At the end, Lacie brandishes a knife, instilling fear in everyone, and ultimately, she is incarcerated as a result of the incident. While incarcerated, her digital rights and privileges are revoked, including the confiscation of her smartphone and virtual contact lenses. Lacie Pound, who is experiencing psychological distress and without any external incentives to uphold a polite and superficial demeanor, concludes the story by loudly shouting and engaging in a verbal altercation with a fellow inmate situated in a next cell.

The movie has a meaningful ending that makes you think about how important it is to have a balance in superficial connections in a virtual world. There is a lot of exaggeration in the work on purpose so that warnings can be understood and so that everyone can think about what can happen in relationships that don't have empathy. This makes people think about how important it is to value accomplishments based on what they truly deserve. The piece is a fun and playful look at what society has turned into so far and how it will continue to change over the next few decades, making social relationships more surface-level and mixed. The conversations happen quickly and right away, and some people are close to the virtual eyes. However, they are very far from real understanding. Lacie Pound's speech at the ceremony is a great example of someone who only posts on their virtual networks what they think is appropriate, and they may even change or fake the facts they post because they are free to control and share the information in any way they want.

In another scene, Lacie Pound seeks guidance from an unnamed professional, whom we shall refer to as a "Reputation Analyst." This individual provides advice to Lacie on managing her public interactions and improving her client's acceptance rates. Will professionals in the fields of reputation analysis and psychology have sufficient job opportunities in the foreseeable future to prevent becoming obsolete and maintain societal cohesion? Prior to the 21st century, previous generations have been raised in a society that values the pursuit of power and success based on individual merit. Irrespective of the timing, the notion of "earning it" was the guiding force. The episode "Nosedive" postulates that in the future, there would be a greater emphasis on the "culture of impressing" rather than on actual execution and achievement. The proliferation of virtual worlds, characterized by their diverse range of interactive features, content sharing, development, and exchange, has intensified and dramatically escalated a societal disorder: the craving for recognition and acceptance. The prevalence of virtual disputes serves as a valid justification for the emergence of the "FOMO syndrome," an increasingly prevalent pathological condition. The one who actively seeks virtual approval and admiration enhances their notoriety and standing.

Furthermore, Susan and Lacie's chat serves as the episode's critique of an age dominated by extravagant displays. Despite Susan's score of 1.4, Lacie perceives her as exhibiting typical behavior. Although Lacie has a 2.8 rating, Susan believes that Lacie does not appear to have such rating. In describing her backstory, Susan states that she had a strong passion for higher rating previously. However, upon discovering her spouse's cancer diagnosis and his inability to receive treatment due to his low score, her perspective underwent a significant change. In the absence of therapy, he perished. Subsequently, she renounced the score/caste system and communicated openly with all individuals. In her environment, the importance of sincerity is diminished, resulting in a decrease in her score and social status. Despite Susan's professed honesty, the majority of her friends have a negative opinion of it. Susan displays a sense of satisfaction despite the negative judgment from society. When asked about her aspirations in life, Lacie expresses her desire to achieve contentment.

This is a prime example of irony. Lacie experiences dissatisfaction throughout the program due to her lack of awareness that contentment is not an objective.

To sum up, "Nosedive" used hypothetical devices implanted in the protagonists' irises, which gradually altered society's behavior, perceptions, and expectations. Individuals who fail to satisfy the norms of hypocritical maximum marks are not accepted in this place. In this authoritarian environment, there is a constant risk of exclusion and the erosion of one's identity. This situation is more likely to foster a superficial identity rather than an authentic one. Therefore, the fragmentation of identity is demonstrated through Lacie Pound where her public identity and private identity are in complete juxtaposition. In the public or social identity, others' affirmation plays a leading role in validating Lacie's existence in the society. On the other hand, in her private identity, we can see her repressed emotions and desires created a violent identity that has become a marker for a criminal identity in this fictional society because of the danger level. As a result, it can be said that because of the fragmented identity. Lacie's id became uncontrollable at the end and so, we watch her true awakening when she reaches rock bottom.

Chapter 5

Identity, Recognition, and Existence in *Spree* (2020)

In the horror-comedy movie Spree (2020) directed by Eugene Kotlyarenko, Kurt Kunkle, portrayed by Joe Keery, is a sociopath who is dissatisfied with the fact that his Instagram following has remained in the single digits for over a decade. His overexcited father (David Arquette), a disc jockey in pursuit of his own Xanadu of screen views, and a friend plus rival (Josh Ovalle) whose online fame far exceeds Kurt's are just two examples of the rough sketches that make up his life so far. Kurt, a driver for the ride-share service Spree, gets sick of begging other influencers to tag him in their feeds and comes up with a plan: if he kills his more repugnant passengers, such as a white supremacist here and a toxic misogynist there, and streams their deaths online, his online fame is bound to skyrocket. Here, it can be said that Kurt Kunkle is the Rupert Pupkin of the Internet age. This movie takes the approach of screens-within-screens, which showcases real-time commentary on Kurt's horrific acts. Through this film, the paper will analyse how in post panopticon society identity, recognition and existence have become an interconnected aspect through which content creators and viewers validates each other's identity.

Given the increasing dependence on our phones in our daily lives, it is not surprising that horror movies based on apps have gained popularity. Contrary to the supernatural, *Spree's* has a very human origin, where an individual is warped by an unwavering ambition to become a social media influencer. The film *Spree* features Kurt Kunkle as the protagonist, a peculiar individual who has dedicated the last decade of his life to achieving online fame. After his unsuccessful pursuit of recognition by conforming to current trends, he resolves to create his own success by working as a driver for a fake ride-sharing app called Spree. Regrettably, his passengers are subjected to a new social media campaign that extensively involves acts of homicide. Spree is a captivating semi-found

video movie that mostly features Kurt's live-streaming cameras, highlighting the main character's pitiful lack of social skills and his delight in committing acts of murder.

Kurt Kunkle, the protagonist of the film, is a versatile content creator on his channel "KurtsWorld96." He engages in many activities such as producing "Draw My Life" videos, live-streaming gaming sessions, and providing reviews on shoes and keyboard shortcuts. In contrast to Bobby, who has achieved internet fame and a substantial fan base with his channel "Bobby Base Camp," Kurt has been unsuccessful in attracting viewers to his videos and live streams, despite his persistent efforts. The friendship between Kurt and Boody is linear, with Kurt consistently experiencing feelings of envy towards Bobby's substantial following. Conversely, Bobby undermines Kurt's feeble endeavor to become a social media sensation and achieve virality.

In the movie, Kurt has reached a breaking point after ten years with single-digit viewers, and he's prepared to try one final time with a project he calls "The Lesson," which teaches people how to build an online following. While preparing his car with water bottles and cameras, Kurt makes a profound statement: "If you do not document yourself, it is a simple fact that you do not exist." This view is depressing, but it's also likely shared—if not explicitly—by a large number of people whose identities are entirely determined by the quantity of likes they receive.

The spectacle, a prominent feature of the postmodern era, encompasses the wide range of mass media and the behaviors exhibited in everyday life. This phenomenon leads to a societal obsession with spectacles and its allure (Serdar, 2012, p.90). The statement "you need to know and be known" piques the curiosity of all individuals. Individuals fulfill this requirement by voluntarily sharing details of their personal life with the public (Niedzviecki, 2010). The dissemination of personal information has permanently diminished the concept of privacy in every sphere of existence. The infringement of privacy poses a significant threat to individual freedom. However, the threat has also reached towards the identity of the postmodern people. The fascination with concealed and

confidential matters has led to a widespread tendency to publicly display personal information, so compromising individual privacy and security. As a result, the constant need to be on the surveillance of the public has become a marker for identity in the sense that those who are successful in grabbing and attaining the attention of their viewers are synonymous with the words like prestige, fame, and money. As such, the live streamers or the influencers start to embrace the carefully constructed virtual identity and make themselves absent from the real world. Thus, the interpersonal relationship in the real world becomes non-existent and the live between the persona and the person dissolves as the fake identity gets more recognized and reaffirmed by the viewers.

As the narrative progresses, we can see that in an attempt to attract attention, Kurt begins picking up passengers and poisoning them with water bottles. In the film, Kurt specifically documents a segment of his life where he carefully demonstrates how to poison the water bottles and the science behind it. However, he fails to attract any audience apart from Bobby, who holds the belief that the shenanigans of Kurt's are just a façade. That the murders are not genuine.

In a scene, Kurt agrees to take on Jessie Adams as one of the passengers. Here, Jessie Adams is a comedian who has a significant presence on social media. And so, Kurt is filled with admiration for Jessie, but she is not impressed by Kurt and his fixation on acquiring followers, which in turn causes her to abandon the trip. However, this marks the beginning of Kurt's obsession with Jessie Adams. Through Jessie's social media, Kurt discovers that Jessie will be participating in a comedy event that will be broadcasted live to a vast audience of millions. Seeing this, Kurt is in awe because of her online following and presence. However, this encounter further aggravates Kurt to keep on driving down the murderous path he has chosen in order to get the same level of following as Jessie Adams has.

And so, Kurt attempts to add excitement to his live broadcast by engaging in dangerous driving feats for his upcoming passengers, a group of affluent individuals named Richard, Kendra,

and London. Initially, both individuals are frightened by the exhilarating experience, but London is remarkably more receptive to Kurt's proposition of an escapade. He transports them to a junkyard and instructs Richard and Kendra to protrude from the sunroof. They begin to enjoy themselves as well as starts live streaming in their own social media their late-night fun, despite Kurt accelerating and exceeding the speed limit of the junkyard. However, Kurt's primary motivation is to take lives, so he deliberately shuts the sunroof to ensnare his fashionable victims. With the immersive sound of his personalized KurtsWorld music playing, all three of his passengers meet their demise. Richard and Kendra are attacked and killed by wild dogs that are not shown on television, while Kurt uses a power drill to forcefully penetrate London's face. This scene boldly showcases how vulnerable people are even when they are made to believe that they are in a safe space. For example, Kurt's car is fully armed with cameras that are constantly live streaming his and his passengers' states. The passengers, Richard and Kendra also have started their own love streaming while standing from the sunroof. However, because Richard and Kendra were more interested in capturing their fun for the online views, they missed out on picking up Kurt's malicious intents.

As the film progresses, we can see the relationship between Kurt and Bobby reaches a breaking point as Bobby tells Kurt to be more like Jessie Adams, because she comes across as authentic in all her social media posts. This stimulates Kurt as he is once again reminded and influenced by Jessie Adams' success, while his own audience remains minor. Therefore, Kurt visits Bobby's residence, insisting that Bobby distribute his fame to Kurt's live broadcast. However, Bobby declines and proceeds to commence a live stream of their dispute, subsequently garnering a substantial viewership. As a result, Kurt murders Bobby and confiscates his firearm prior to live broadcasting for Bobby's followers, who mistakenly believe the act to be staged.

Here, this scene of Bobby live streaming his genuine dispute with Kurt and the audience believing that the whole thing is staged is an example of simulacrum. According to Baudrillard, in this day and age, where images are more important than identities, there is a sovereignty of

simulations that have taken the place of reality; we see things that are not real being exhibited or simulated as if they were genuine (2005, pp.15, 35). Therefore, the implication of identity here is that Kurt and Boddy's real identity has become a fabricated identity constructed for the viewers enjoyment. As such, Kurt takes full advantage of the viewers ignorance and disbelief to reality of the situation and keeps on performing and live streaming his "The Lesson" show as if all the murders, the blood, and the screams are all constructed and staged for a theater show.

Eugene Kotlyarenko, the director and co-writer, intended for this film to function as a cautionary tale about the sinister aspects of the internet. Therefore, he made the deliberate choice to enhance the protagonist's character by portraying him as an unappealing individual who relentlessly seeks attention and popularity. Kotlyarenko desired for him to appear exceedingly pitiful, to the extent that individuals would subsequently refrain from imitating his acts of aggression. He explicitly expressed his desire to create a work that is diametrically opposed to Joker, citing his dissatisfaction with the film's portrayal of violence as liberating. His aim was to ensure that Kurt Kunkle was never considered charismatic by the Spree audience.

Furthermore, shortly after, when he receives a text from his DJ father Kris requesting a lift to a performance, the first thing he calculates is how this act can benefit in raising and solidifying his viewership numbers. As a result, upon hearing his father mention another DJ named Uno, Kurt, who is always seeking attention and popularity, seizes the opportunity to borrow Bobby's clothing and join his father Kris in an attempt to get in contact with the famous DJ Uno. It should be noted that Kris is also an aspiring live-streamer who seems to have lost his momentum as it raises a question whether his father's obsession and failure in being a successful influencer has influenced Kurt's own obsession to gain recognition from the public. In addition to that, this hypothesis regarding his father's role on his upbringing also hints towards possible negligence from his parents which might have led Kurt to be chasing after recognition from the public in order to validate his existence and identity.

And so, with the desperate thirst for viewership numbers, Kurt approaches DJ Uno in order to publicize himself in her social media. However, she first declines to tag him but later invites him to accompany her to a taco truck, promising to tag him. During the meantime while waiting for Kurt to retrieve food from the truck, Uno stumbles onto Bobby's firearm and proceeds to take a photograph with it on a Livestream. Subsequently, Uno consumes a portion of the contaminated water and loses consciousness. Upon this realization, Kurt endeavors to depart in his vehicle but is intercepted by two law enforcement agents, who become wary of his actions. It has been disclosed that the public is already aware of Kurt's killings, and he has been dubbed "The Rideshare Killer" as the police have been unable to identify him.

Kurt attempts to escape, although he is being chased by additional law enforcement officers, compelling him to flee by forcefully driving his vehicle through a makeshift settlement of homeless individuals. Due to the increasing notoriety of Kurt's killings, Spree is temporarily suspended to facilitate an investigation. In the midst, Jessie commences her stage performance by delivering an iconic line "I said, 'All eyes on me, I wanna be seen!" in this scene, Jessie discusses her Spree encounter with Kurt, highlighting Kurt's insatiable need for social media followers, which prompted her to engage in introspection. At this point in the movie, the hashtag The Lesson is introduced again, as Jessie asserts that true happiness cannot be attained through having a large number of subscribers. During this scene, Jessie imparts a statement which touches the central theme of the movie:

> "Regardless of whether you possess a following of 20 million individuals or merely 20 individuals, we are all subject to observation, evaluation, and animosity. And you have a strong affection for it, you hate it, and you have a strong dependency on it. You are all highly dependent on it. Furthermore, you have developed a strong dependency on the presence and influence of others." (Jessie, *Spree*)

The implication of this speech by Jessie encapsulates this paper's arguments. For instance, the entire the autobiographical mode of live streaming culture and the narcissistic culture live on the fact that this medium of sharing oneself is not a one-way route. Rather it is a two-way route. On one hand, the performer in front of the camera has a strong need for affirmation and attention from his or her viewers because it is through the constant attention that he or she validates his or her existence in the postmodern society. On the other hand, the viewers also have the voyeuristic tendencies and desires the pseudo power they hold over the performer they are watching. In this two-route way the performer is observing the viewers and the viewers are observing the performer. Each is sizing up one another and testing each other's the bottom lines. It is through this two-way constant supervision and surveillance that one (the viewers) satisfies their id by making demands on the performer and the other (the performer) satisfies his or her own desire for attention and reaffirmation. In the situation, identity has become a tool for the performer and the viewers to validate their reality.

In this scene, we can see Kurt in a moment of self-reflection where he, through Jessie's speech, connects with his inner desire for continuous affirmation from the public. Even the commenters in Kurt's live streaming site comments on how Jessie is directly describing him character. In other words, the viewers in Kurt's live stream sees this statement as Jessie constructing Kurt's identity in front of him in an attempt to make him realize how desperate and unhinged, he has become by chasing after likes, numbers, and recognition. However, in Kurt's eyes, Jessie's statement was a reconfirmation on his belief that only by documenting one's life in the virtual media can one construct one's identity as well as validate one's existence.

Therefore, in the final scene, Kurt kidnaps Jessie through an alternative rideshare application called GoGo, with Kurt having already murder of the prior driver. Kurt boasts that due to Jessie's phone being damaged on stage, she lacks the means to request assistance. Upon discovering that he intends to bring her to his residence, she attempts to flee. And so, she incapacitates Kurt by strangling him with a charger cord while they are both inside the car, resulting in a collision. However, Kurt

manages to regain control and renders Jessie unconscious by physically assaulting them. Upon reaching his residence, he places Jessie's incapacitated form outdoors, only to be implored by his now-enthusiastic audience to end Jessie's life. Engrossed by a malfunctioning camera, Kurt is oblivious to Jessie's reawakening. Therefore, she successfully gains control of the vehicle and deliberately collides with Kurt's residence in an attempt to strike him. Kurt hastily enters the house while Jessie is faced with an inebriated Kris. The duo uncovers the lifeless body of Kurt's deceased mother, whose demise was inflicted by Kurt himself during the initiation of his Livestream. Kurt fatally shoots his father and attempts to murder Jessie. However, she proceeds to propel the car in a forward direction, resulting in the forceful collision of Kurt Kunkle against the wall. It does not cause him immediate death, prompting Jessie to use his phone to complete the task. A flashback reveals Kurt's sense of triumph, as he now has an audience of 50 thousand people following his live feed. The scene juxtaposes Kurt's previous statement about his substantial viewership, "I suppose I achieved my desired outcome," with the current situation where his demise has garnered him 50 thousand viewers and a collaboration with Jessie Adams. At the end, Jessie captures a photograph of his lifeless body and shares it on her Instagram profile. Jessie Adams achieves unprecedented fame, establishing herself as a prominent figure in various forms of media. Conversely, Kurt is widely detested by the majority of media platforms, but unsurprisingly, he is hailed as a heroic figure by certain unsavory corners of the internet. The movie concludes with a depiction of the murderer receiving disturbingly genuine admiration on the online platform 4chan, to the extent that one of its users even produces a film centered around him. The film is titled "Spree".

To summaries, the film *Spree*, sheds light on the postmodern idea of existence and how a person's identity can only be found in the virtual realm and at the recognition of others evidenced by the primacy of the cyber narcissistic culture. In the film, the real meaning behind Kurt's "The Lesson Plan, is to serve as a warning about the obsession with internet fame and the lengths individuals would go to in order to obtain it. The internet is an expansive realm teeming with profound and

obscure information. *Spree* reveals that the level of concealment regarding sensitive and taboo matters has diminished since the advent of the internet domain. Indeed, now it is far easier to get access to violent matters as it posits that individuals prone to violence are camouflaging themselves in plain view, regardless of whether they are perpetrators of murder or harassment. While it is true that not all individuals online have malicious intentions, Kurt is an exception since he is actively engaged in doing abhorrent offenses. It is possible that there are other individuals similar to him. The Instagram account @kurtsworld96 demonstrates the process by which fiction is manifested in reality. The individual's profile portrays someone who craves attention and will not be fully content until they attain fame. Indeed, Kurt Kunkle is willing to go to any extent, including resorting to homicide, in order to achieve his goals. And it is through this desperate desire for fame and recognition of others, that Kurt finds meaning to his existence. Therefore, by being violent and a murderous criminal is how Kurt constructs his identity so that he can add essence to his existence. In other words, in Kurt's eyes life is a theater show and so, the more spectacular his performances are, the more he will get the attention he craves for. Hence, the fact that perpetual public attention has become a marker of identity in the postmodern society.

Conclusion

Television, as it existed in the 20th century, is now outdated. In the 1990s, Pierre Bourdieu argued that at the start of the new millennium, television was mostly characterized by discussion shows that combined low-cost sensationalism with equally unimportant self-display. The Internet has revolutionized television in the 21st century, with "users" now participating in television programs, particularly in formats like talent shows. This allows anyone to potentially become a hero for a brief moment in front of the camera, similar to the phenomenon seen on YouTube. In the era of digital media, narcissism is taking on a new form. And so, the proliferation of the Internet has led to a noticeable rise in narcissistic tendencies, as a growing number of individuals are drawn to platforms that cater to their desire for self-admiration. One potential distinction between the traditional narcissist and the contemporary cybernarcissist resides in the fact that the latter possesses numerous reflections, which they replicate and multiply in order to maximize their reach to a wider audience. However, in doing so, the construction of identity has come under the threat as the cyber-narcissist is likely to disintegrate into numerous self-replicating pictures which in return will ultimately lead to a loss of self-awareness and identity.

The present study shows how virtual identity and the post-panoptic surveillance culture have influenced the construction of one's identity and the meaning of existence in a postmodern society. The research includes three films that explore the interconnectedness between the performer and the viewers relationship, with a focus on the role of cyber narcissism in live-streaming culture. The films *Nerve* (2016), "Nosedive" from *Black Mirror* (2016), and *Spree* (2020) all highlight the desire for recognition and acceptance in a society where public recognition has become essential in validating one's existence.

Additionally, the study's primary points of contention center on the identities of those who produce live streaming content, the audience's participation in the process, and the influence of cyber

narcissism on identity formation in postmodern society. Upon careful examination of the three films, it can be deduced that the connection between content creators and viewers is mutually dependent. Both sides depend on one other not only to accomplish their respective objectives, but also because the reciprocal support connection provides them with a sense of purpose in their lives within postmodern society. Moreover, due to the impacts of cyber narcissism, the development of one's identity today relies on receiving public attention and affirmation. This presents the possibility of placing greater importance on the superficial aspects of identification rather than the actual truth. Consequently, this leads to both the deterioration of an individual's mental state and the formation of a fragmented sense of self, as the distinction between one's public image and true self becomes blurred.

Furthermore, by analyzing the consequences of the actions taken by the characters in the three films, we can see a pattern of embracing the violent nature of the human psyche as well as glorifying criminal activities. In other words, by living under the post panopticon surveillance society, the characters tend to lean towards harboring criminal mentality, taking potentially dangerous risks, and even committing murder just for the sake to gaining recognition from the anonymous public in order to validate their existence in the eyes of the postmodern society. As such, the practice of adding essence to one's existence has become synonymous to getting public validation at the expense of committing crime, murder, and potentially dangerous activities.

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