

Chapter 6

Reflections in a “Black Mirror”: Reputation and Memory Conservation in a Too Technological Era

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this work is to analyse two episodes of the lucky TV series Black Mirror in an attempt to examine the descriptive trajectory of an increasingly technology-driven society. It has to be noted that the two chosen episodes describe a society seemingly working as a technological grammar which breaks down and rebuilds ubiquitous experiences and life stories more and more beyond the limit. This is not a criminalization of technology but, rather, a condemnation of lifestyles which lose their identity and become aspatial. Thus, conserving memories of the past or creating reputation become hybridized and twisted behavioural realities, which concur to structure a strongly ‘oligotrophic’ nature: that of the post-human versions, that of technological mediations and organic dominions which meet the inorganic and meld with it. The authors analyse these aspects through a diachronic perspective that minimizes dialectic polarizations in order to examine the exegeses of the post-human concept within a medial representation that intensifies the discriminating and causative factors.

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THE "BLACK MUSEUM" OF BLACK MIRROR, OR THE ABYSS OF CONSERVATION

Oblivion has never risen to the status of consubstantial value to every human action as in the present age. For millennia, history has been pursuing a laborious attempt to preserve memory while being aware - perhaps since the inception of mankind - that every small and significant event have an implacable enemy, which never stops threatening their foundations and corrode their appearance: time itself. If we hypothesize that time does not exist, rather being a dimension depending on the perception that each individual (and society as well as age) has of its flowing, it follows that the quicker the perception of such flowing, the harder preserving memory will be. Ancient populations, who had a dilated conception of time, elaborated some strategies to crystallize it: that is, the invention of writing to prevent the inconsistency of oral tradition; or the realization of objects meant to act as memory keepers; or, finally, realizing buildings and places dedicated to such conservation. The relationship between time and the crystallization of its memory had been continuously expressed through a mechanism of concretization: to give a "solid" body to an action and to enclose it in a durable "envelope" (e.g. papyrus scrolls, books, statues, tombstones carvings) was equivalent to ensuring the effective transmission of a fact from one generation to another. Nonetheless, as technology kept advancing, two aspects changed: on one hand, perceiving the time-flowing as faster progressively strengthened itself and the knowledge of events transmitted from one place to another with increasing rapidity; on the other hand, the object of memory became more and more fragile every day. Photography, for example, has exponentially multiplied the images (let us consider the works of art) but, in so doing, it dug an ever deeper line between who in the past could observe a painting only by seeing it in its place, and who - from a certain moment in history - could enjoy it *in absentia* (Benjamin 1936 (ed. 2014), p. 14). We are talking about a process that took millennia, reaching the present time with an appearance showing signs of something that has run its course. Today is a digital age that already shows marks of obsolescence, in which the virtuality of the image requires a memory capable of preserving it more than in any other time. Yet, memory (and in our daily experience we cope with larger memory devices, both in terms of dimension and storage capability) is fatally destined to run out: on one hand because a technology that keeps evolving at a rapid pace makes obsolete those media that could have worked perfectly in a very recent past, as well as the possibility of indefinitely accessing them (images, documents, videos); on the other, because the image hypertrophy and the even more metamorphic influence of trends sweep away what (with the same sudden clamor) had become trendy no later than yesterday. The mechanism of repression is at the same time the antidote to the proliferation of sensory stimuli

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