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# A Dark Reflection of Society: Analyzing Cultural Representations of State Control in Black Mirror

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A Dark Reflection of Society:

Analyzing Cultural Representations of State Control in *Black Mirror*

By


Carl R. Huber

Thesis Approved:




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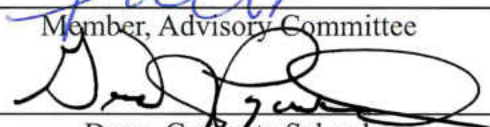
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Date

3-22-17

A Dark Reflection of Society:  
Analyzing Cultural Representations of State Control in *Black Mirror*

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## ABSTRACT

Recognizing the importance of visual criminology and media studies in contemporary academic criminal justice studies, I attempt to contribute to the field by analyzing three themes found in Channel 4's *Black Mirror* in relation to cultural fears of state control and the progression of technology. The themes, including state power and coercion, the spectacle of punishment, and panoptic surveillance, are placed in a popular criminological framework in order to examine the attitudes and beliefs of the culture in which they were produced and for whom they are intended. I conclude that *Black Mirror* provides a social commentary on the themes of state control, punishment, and surveillance, with respect to the role technology plays in extending the scope of the state's power.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

While contemporary productions of television programs and networks are expanding in scope and content, it seems that substantive themes are often neglected in favor of entertainment or a quick punchline. Despite this perceived trend of senseless television, there are programs that set out to reflect the society in which we find ourselves—even if that means reflecting the more unsightly aspects of our modern culture. By holding this proverbial mirror to society, television can critically examine the behavior of a society in ways that go beyond a text book or a verbal assessment. There is one television series in particular that captures this concept, and does so without sacrificing an entertaining storyline: Channel 4's *Black Mirror*. The title of the series is not just a catchy name; the series' creator, Charlie Brooker (2011), noted that the title *Black Mirror* sums up the show's theme—a dark reflection of society, derived from society's infatuation with technology.

*Black Mirror* is an anthology series, which allows each episode to critique some aspect of contemporary United Kingdom society by placing it in a science fiction-like world. While *Black Mirror* was originally produced in and for the United Kingdom, its themes apply to Western culture as a whole. The beauty of using subtext to relate a critical assessment of society is that the statement seeps into the episode without pushback.

Brooker (2011) uses *The Twilight Zone* as an example to discuss *Black Mirror*'s approach:

Serling, a brilliant writer, created *The Twilight Zone* because he was tired of having his provocative teleplays about contemporary issues routinely censored in order to appease corporate sponsors. If he wrote about racism in a southern town, he had to fight the network over every line. But if he wrote about racism in a metaphorical, quasi-fictional world – suddenly he could say everything he wanted (Brooker, 2011, para. 5).

Each episode presents a number of different themes that can be subjected to sociological and criminological examination as they contain elements present in modern society. It is worth noting that while each episode contains many different motifs and could be examined from various disciplinary positions, the main focus of this analysis are those aspects utilized in *Black Mirror* that engage with society's unease about the role of technology in state power, punishment, and surveillance.

Nevertheless, the relevance of the themes employed by the series can only be addressed through an analysis of the content. While the series was originally intended for a United Kingdom audience, its broader availability on Netflix and other media streaming platforms allows an analysis and commentary to be relevant to other countries such as the United States. As such, the examination of the show's narratives through works found in the sociology of punishment, cultural criminology, and social theory, are imperative to understand the culture in which it was produced and the population for whom it was produced.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The research conducted in this study is rooted in the combined fields of cultural and visual criminology. While the area of visual criminology is relatively new, there is a growing body of literature that addresses the importance of examining cultural productions in media. Rafter and Brown (2011) assert that ignoring cultural representations of crime in media is a disadvantage to the field of criminology as media is the largest platform for the public to think about crime. The value of analyzing film and television, according to Rafter and Brown, is in part due to integration of interdisciplinary alliances. Academic criminology is limited in its approach to articulating, shaping, and criticizing theories of crime, whereas the cinema can provide a less rigid and more inclusive take on criminological theory (p.4). This is not to say that academic criminology is outdated or less valued than media analysis, but rather the examination of popular culture complements the standard approach to criminology—thus providing a more rounded understanding of crime in the modern age.

The importance of understanding cultural depictions of crime should be taken into serious consideration. Rafter (2007) describes the examination of criminological discourse in film as “popular criminology,” which in itself is a branch of contemporary criminology. According to Garland and Sparks (2000), academic criminology must adhere to the growing nature of crime issues which includes the discourse from other disci-

plines and can no longer hold a monopoly over the representation of crime. With the global consumption of technology and mass media, limiting cultural representations of crime solely to the field of academic criminology creates a void that other disciplines can help fill. Hayward (2009) asserts that analyzing images through a cultural criminological framework provides “a new methodological orientation towards the visual that is capable of encompassing meaning, affect, situation, symbolic power and efficiency, and spectacle” (p.12). The emerging field of cultural criminology utilizes a multitude of methodologies including visual analysis and media studies in order to deconstruct beliefs held by society in the images they produce. Effectively, Hayward argues that it is becoming ever-important that criminologists embrace the various ways crime stories (and beliefs about crime) are “imaged, constructed, and ‘framed’ within late modern society” (p. 14).

The usefulness of visual criminology extends beyond the contribution to academic research. Rothe and Collins (2013) make a case for the use of media, more specifically film and music, as a tool for teaching students about criminological theory. Often, as the authors point out, these media methods allow students to be more receptive to abstract and far removed topics by placing the topics in a comfortable and complete presentation. This method not only introduced a new way of teaching and learning in the classroom, but also served the purpose of addressing the needs of students that belong to a generation so integrated with technology and media. Rafter (2014) asserts that criminology should be able to include media productions and visual renderings as subjects of analysis.

Hayward (2009) notes that images play an important role in reproducing cultural ideologies and that as such, analyzing not only the content of the image but the frame in

which is disseminated (that is, the narrative the image is conveying) is relevant to understanding the culture in which it is produced. Visual criminology is needed to expand on the analysis of the image, and tying in academic criminology would create a more exhaustive methodological orientation. In another piece, Hayward and Presdee (2010) present an argument for visual criminology's reflexive nature; the consideration of not only the images themselves and the context in which they were produced, but also the viewer's own interaction gives the images meaning. Production of film and television has shifted from conveying information or entertaining audiences to reproducing cultural beliefs that shape reality (Hayward and Presdee, 2010). Through this framework, we might understand *Black Mirror* as truly a commentary on its own medium. In fact, Brooker created the series to explore the "delight and discomfort" that is attached to society's access to mass media and technology—the title of the series itself alluding to the "cold, shiny screen of a TV, a monitor, a smartphone" (Brooker, 2011). The assertion that mass media influences society is also supported by Rafter (2007), who indicates that movies and television are cultural reproductions of held societal values and that analyzing the images could shed light on the beliefs of that culture.

O'Brien, Tzanelli, and Yar (2005) suggest that the stated aim of cultural criminology, that is to connect the phenomenal foreground of criminal acts to their material background, is relevant to the academic pursuit of criminology. However, there is also a need to connect that foreground to specific features of its cultural background. Their analysis of the film *Chicago* exposes the social reproduction of important cultural motifs that help to make sense of why certain kinds of emotional and sensual features might be attended

to in accounts of criminal activity. Similarly, Rafter (2007) reveals that analyzing films that contain elements of sex crimes uncovers misconceptions that are both present in modern society and are reproduced through film. Through this approach, *Black Mirror* is an ideal medium to analyze representations of state control and how they relate to the society for which it was produced.

Capitalizing on the analysis of crime movies, Yar (2010) clarifies that many motifs found in film are not intentional commentaries from the film's creators:

No one sat down with the explicit intent of making a movie that expressed the ambivalent meanings of criminal endeavour. Nor was it, on the other hand, simply a matter of accident that these layers or levels of meaning came to imbue the cinematic text. Rather, it was the unconscious reflection of a deep-seated feature of our common cultural dispositions, one in which we simultaneously hold normatively conflicting views of crime as both 'evil' and 'heroic', as both repulsive and seductive (p. 75).

This is particularly relevant to this study of *Black Mirror* as, just as Yar has mentioned, the presence of certain themes are complex and are sometimes contradictory.

Welsh, Fleming, and Dowler (2011) also recognize the importance of analyzing film in order to understand the cultural reproductions and the shaping of societal ideology. Their study, which focuses on the examination of how justice is portrayed and enacted in film, finds that people are often more receptive to films that validate their preconceived beliefs. Portrayals of the justice system are reflective of the attitudes society has about them—morally right, justified in their actions with some exceptions, such as depic-

tions of corrupt behavior. Nevertheless, Welsh et al. claim that one can understand the cultural beliefs and values of justice by analyzing films which center around the depiction of justice. The assertions by Welsh et al. can be brought into the analysis of other criminological elements in film; as viewers are more likely to consume images of crime and justice that fit their own ideology, it is reasonable to suggest that these elements found within television shows such as *Black Mirror* are also reflective of society.

According to Carrabine (2012) images (including film), while reflective of the culture in which they are produced, serve another purpose. The author claims that the most striking images in modern times are the representations of violence and suffering, as they illicit an intense response with the audience. Images of misery, as Carrabine asserts, should be analyzed for their politics of testimony and narrative of which they support. Carney (2015) expands on the representations of violence by analyzing Foucault's ideas on punishment in a punitive society and also brings those ideas onto a new medium: art. Carney relates Foucault's (1975) explanation of the physical body as a tool for the state to showcase its power (that is, to inflict pain is to show strength) to that of a virtual mark, or subject of power. Carney describes that even throughout history, images depicting punishment served as a similar purpose to public displays of punishment. Furthermore, the more realistic the images portrayed, the more profound effect they had on the viewers. Carney asserts that with modern developments in technology, such as the photograph, movie productions, television, and the internet, depictions of punishment have taken on a virtual form rather than the physical body.

Similarly, modern depictions of punishment (such as found within *Black Mirror*) can be seen as spectacles in their own right. The viewers are watching the punishment unfold, in vein comparable to a virtual form of dark tourism. Brown (2009) examines the role of visibility as it relates to punishment in modern and historical society, with an emphasis on the depiction of punishment on television and media as well as in prison tourism. Brown examines the role punishment plays in society and how the narrative of punishment and culture are reproduced within the realm of televised entertainment, and how the spectacle of punishment has evolved. Brown also speculates on the motives of the viewers and how the depictions of punishment are framed to influence the audience's attitudes toward the retributive practices of the state. The cultural and media representations of punishment are considered in relation to state controlled narratives and as a method of recreating the image of state power.

O'Brien, Tzanelli, Yar, and Penna (2005) use their exploration of the film *Gangs of New York* (2002) to suggest that popular culture, even through its most mainstream products, can be seen as a critical criminological space where alternative views of law, crime and the state are made available. Their argument gives support to the notion that cultural productions of crime offer the similar critical commentary and analysis found in various criminology literatures. Rather than understanding Hollywood movies simply as vehicles for disseminating conventional mores, they suggest that films can furnish critical (and complex) points of view on law and crime and that engaging more forthrightly with these ubiquitous cultural forms can strengthen the project of a critical criminology.



Thus, films are not used just as analytical tools for observing trends in the cultures in which they were created, but rather provide an opportunity to critically analyze different ways in which the film impacts society. Carrabine (2012), in citing Ferrell and Van de Voorde (2010), supports this conclusion, stating that film or image analysis “‘is most certainly not the answer to contemporary issues and images of crime, control and culture’, but rather it provokes a ‘set of dialectical questions, a series of creative tensions’ that should inform ‘criminology’s engagement with the image’” (p.486). By situating *Black Mirror* in this framework, I attempt to reveal images that can be engaged with criminological theory.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

Recognizing the growing need for visual criminology, I undertook this study with the purpose of addressing certain cultural fears that are represented in media. I found *Black Mirror* to be a particularly useful case study as the show itself was created to be a dark reflection of society's preoccupation with technology. Originally airing in December of 2011 on British Channel 4, *Black Mirror* premiered to a little over two million viewers (barb.co.uk). The series began gaining popularity in the following years, especially amongst American viewers. The first seasons consists of three episodes with each around an hour runtime, with the second season adding a fourth episode. In 2015, Netflix acquired the production and distribution rights to *Black Mirror*, and released a third season with six episodes the following year.

The series' social commentary, paired with its growing popularity, made it an ideal candidate for examination. I decided that focusing on the first two seasons (or "series") of the show was the best option for consistency, as production and ownership shifted from Channel 4 to Netflix between season two to season three. I originally watched the show for entertainment, but quickly realized the potential for academic inquiry. Displays of punishment and surveillance were featured in many episodes, thus establishing themselves as reoccurring themes to be used for analysis. Moreover, with every additional

viewing of an episode (totaling four views per episode) new concepts and motifs emerged.

The introduction of new material with each new viewing resulted in a collection of notes carefully written out across pages in a notebook that connected themes across different episodes. My method was fluid, as thoughts regarding the direction and content of the study were continually shaped by the emergence of new information—a process described by Bogazinaos (2012) as “at every stage, a layered process that grows ideas” (p. 150). Ultimately, using inductive methods I managed to refine the concepts into three major reoccurring motifs involving state control and technology: examples of state power, the spectacle of punishment, and panoptic surveillance. It is worth mentioning that there were a number of themes that were worthy of scholarly analysis, however I wanted the central focus of this study to be about criminological and criminal justice representations. In addition, I found that while some concepts did not contain enough examples to analyze, others could be tied back to larger motifs. For example, many episodes featured the seemingly casual use of social media by the characters—however I determined that social media was used primarily as a platform for surveillance purposes. In addition, after my observations I omitted one episode from season two as it lacked sufficient representations of criminal justice elements.

## CHAPTER IV

### REFLECTIONS OF STATE CONTROL FOUND WITHIN BLACK MIRROR

#### *Technology and State Power*

Examples of state control of information manifested themselves often in select scenes of a three episodes, such as “The National Anthem.” However, there are a two episodes that capitalized on the manifestation of state power. Perhaps the best examples come from the second episode of the first season, entitled “Fifteen Million Merits,” which explores how a hyper-capitalistic society is subject to the will of the state. The episode begins with a young man Bingham “Bing” Madsen (portrayed by Daniel Kaluuya) as he begins his daily routine by waking up in a cubical surrounded by walls that project virtual images. Madsen, like every other character in this universe, is constantly bombarded with advertisements that cost “merits” (the form of currency in this episode) to skip (i.e. opt out of being shown the advertisement). These merits are used for nearly every action a person does: dispensing toothpaste and soap, skipping advertisements, buying food, and entertainment. Despite the fact that Bing has inherited 15 million merits from his deceased brother, he (like his fellow citizens) peddles a stationary bike in order to earn more merits. Those who do not peddle are custodians—second-class citizens marked by their yellow wardrobe (as opposed to grey jumpsuits that regular citizens wear) and their excess weight.

While using the bathroom, Bing hears a girl, Abi (Jessica Brown Findlay), singing and comments that she should try out for a popular television show called “Hot Shot.” The show is a reality series that is judged by three members of a ruling class that evaluate contestants’ talents. They then decide whether or not the contestants can become rich and famous (thus escaping their repetitive world of peddling a stationary bicycle for merits). However, a ticket to even appear on the show costs 15 million merits. After some consideration, Bing gifts a ticket to Abi, which costs him nearly every merit he has. Abi is selected by the judges to perform before them and a virtual crowd of avatars and is given a light sedative called “Cuppliance” in order to calm her nerves.

While her performance is successful, the judges decide that they do not want another singer and persuade Abi (with the help of a cheering audience) to become an adult actress on one of the judge’s television channels. Over the following weeks, Bing is forced to watch advertisements of Abi’s adult video debut as he does not have enough merits to skip the commercials and closing his eyes only pauses the advertisements until he reopens them. Angered, Bing punches one of his walls causing it to shatter. Bing hides one of the shards and begins saving his merits by excessively peddling, eating junk food (which costs less than healthy food), and conserving where he can. Bing eventually saves another fifteen million merits, and purchases a ticket admitting him on the show.

After being the last person to be called before the judges, Bing skips the “Cuppliance” and performs a dance routine. However, at the end of the performance Bing pulls out the shard and holds it to his neck, threatening suicide if he is not able to say what he came there to say. Bing shouts about the unfair system, society’s coldness toward one

another, and calls out the judges for corrupting contestants. However, instead of throwing out Bing or changing their ways, the judges offer him a slot in one of their channels so that he may express his concerns on national television once or twice a week. The episode concludes by showing a clip of one of Bing's episodes, before he signs off and walks to grab a glass of orange juice in his new, lavish apartment.

This episode portrays state power as being omnipresent within the overall structure of the society in which the main character resides. The judges can be interpreted as societal elites or even state actors which rules over its citizens by maintaining a social order through hyper-capitalism and technological consumption. Due to the cost of living, the citizens' time is occupied by working on a regimented schedule in order to earn merits. While their bodies are occupied with physical labor, the individuals' minds are entertained by continuous digital distractions in the form of advertisements, adult videos, video games, and television—all of which cost merits to engage with or dismiss. Adorno (1984) argues that this instant gratification from technology and pleasure provides a superficial satisfaction, and prevents people from challenging the inequalities present in the social order. Socialization is limited to small talk at work and social media, lacking any meaningful in-person interaction. This is reflected in this episode of *Black Mirror*, where social order is so extensive that the only form of individuality comes from the customization of the citizens' digital avatar and the performances of the lucky few able to make it on "Hot Shot."

In fact, the only way to escape the life of repetitious work is to enter the "Hot Shot" contest where the judges act as gatekeepers that decide who can move up the soci-

oeconomic ladder and who must remain in low positions. In addition to deciding the fate of the wealthy few able to purchase a ticket onto the show, the judges also control what content is shown to the general public. Each judge owns a specific channel that the public has access to, which serves to reproduce hegemonic ideology or to entertain the citizens while they perform their work duty. However, public opinion does play a certain role in the judges' decision making. "Hot Shot" is a "live" television show, in which the audience is represented by their avatars. The show is a virtual coliseum reminiscent of ancient Rome, with the crowd's cheers or jeers aiding the judges' decision on a contestant's fate.

The maintained social order is also present in the ostracizing of those who do not fit the hegemonic standard of the ideal citizen. Those who are overweight are seen as second class citizens, forced to perform janitorial serves and wear bright yellow uniforms that distinguish them from the "normal," grey-jumpsuit wearing citizens. For Gartman (2012), this aligns with a Bourdieuan explanation of social inequality; people in society are distinguished by symbolic differences (in this case, weight and uniforms) that reinforce a hierarchy of classes. The class divide is also apparent, as the second-class citizens are the subjects of ridicule through game shows that humiliate and berate the individuals, with their weight being the main target of mockery. In addition, Bing and others are seen playing a first person shooter video game that targets characters in yellow uniforms, an obvious form of symbolic violence.

The television show and the game, both supplied by one of the judge's channels, reinforce the notion that individuals in yellow are second-class citizens, allowing them to be treated with disdain because they do not fit the status quo. The representation of culture

in “Fifteen Million Merits” aligns in part with Bourdieu’s (1984) assessment of power inequality in a given society—“aesthetic judgments based on disinterestedness thus make all other classes seem inferior, because their lack of resources dictates that they must always be concerned with the pay-off culture” thus the dominating culture to be seemingly deserving of more resources for they are culturally superior (Gartman 2012, p. 43). The belief that the class Bing belongs to is somehow superior legitimizes the state facilitated “othering” of those who do not comply with hegemonic ideology and who do not contribute to labor (peddling the bikes).

However, the most significant example of state power does not come from the enforcement of social order but rather the persuasive abilities of the judges. The viewer first gets a hint of the state’s coercive nature during Abi’s performance. Abi is reluctant to take the offer of being an adult film actress but the judges, with the help of a drug (Cuppliance, a clever wordplay for compliance), the audience, and threats of a fruitless life peddling for merits, are able to convince her to abandon her dream and give in to their offer. Despite witnessing the state’s manipulation of Abi, Bing also succumbs to the state’s will. However, rather than convincing Bing to give up a dream, the judges offer him a platform to broadcast his rants against the state. While this may seem counterintuitive, the state in fact adopts the attempted counter-hegemonic intervention in order to neutralize the potential threat to the establishment and repurpose it to support the dominating ideology.

The way “Fifteen Million Merits” expresses the state’s adoption of Bing’s counter culture resembles Gramsci’s (1971) assertions about civil societies. In modern civil socie-



ties, Gramsci argues and the episode seems to suggest, hegemonic ideology is tied to the economic structure of the society (capitalism) through the state's facilitation of a social order that supports the system. Katz (2010), employing Gramsci (1971) and Buttigieg (1995), explains:

Class dominance, as theorized by Gramsci, results from a combination of coercion and consent. The dominant class becomes hegemonic and promotes its own ideology as the commonsensical way of thinking through leadership and persuasion, so that instead of imposing itself on the subaltern classes, it acquires their consensus. The dominant class becomes firmly established not by forceful repression of the subaltern classes but rather by creating and disseminating an ideological commonsense, what Gramsci calls 'forma mentis', and by establishing a system that embodies this forma mentis and transmutes it into a certain social order, or even "makes it appear to be orderliness itself" (Buttigieg 1995: 13, in Katz 2010, p. 410).

The group consensus as described by Katz (2010) is evident in "Fifteen Million Merits" by the citizens' acceptance of the social order and by Bing's acceptance into the hegemonic ideology. In the episode, the judges act as the dominating societal elites (or even state actors) that benefit from the economic structure in place and the hegemonic ideology that supports this system. When one person (Bing) from the civil society challenges the societal structure, the judges absorb the counter culture Bing presents in a way that benefits the hegemonic ideology; they commodify Bing and his ideology for capitalistic gain while neutralizing the potential threat to the system. Bing's initial resistance to the

state power also diminishes, as the root cause of his opposition — a system that exploits himself and others like him — begins to work in his favor.

The display of state power and technology is also present in a later episode of *Black Mirror*, though with different manifestations. The fourth episode of the second season, entitled “White Christmas,” again shows the state using manipulation and technology to control and punish members of society. The episode begins on Christmas day with two men, Joe Potter (Rafe Spall) and Matt Trent (Jon Hamm), apparently exiled to a small cabin due to circumstances in their past. Matt tries to convince Joe to divulge what brought him to the cabin, revealing that the two rarely talk in the five years since they have been there. While Joe remains silent about his past, Matt begins telling his story in hopes of breaking the ice.

Joe and Matt belong to a reality where people have access to optical implants (called Z-Eyes) which allows them to engage in communication via the internet and the potential to stream what they are seeing through computer access. Matt reveals that he ran a dating service in which he would help single men navigate through social interactions in order to secure a romantic partner. Matt continues talking about a particular client he had, named Harry, whom he convinced to go to a random office Christmas party in order to pick up a partner. What Matt does not tell Harry (or Joe) is that he live-streamed Harry’s experiences with a group of other men for entertainment purposes (and sometimes to ask their suggestions on how to handle a given situation). Matt finds the party goes on social media in order to help Harry blend in with the crowd. Eventually, Harry

(with the help of Matt) receives an invitation from a member of the office to head back to her place.

Unfortunately, the woman Harry goes home with is mentally unstable and poisons an unsuspecting Harry in order to release him from “the voices in his head” that she too has (as a result of mental illness, not technology like Harry) before committing suicide herself. Matt quickly destroys all evidence of the event but wakes up his wife in the process. Angry at Matt’s actions, his wife blocks him using the Z-Eye implants, which scrambles the user’s (and the target’s) ability to see and hear each other, before taking custody of their daughter. Matt tells Joe that he willingly came to the cabin to avoid remnants of his past life.

As Matt continues his story, he reveals that being a dating consultant was just a hobby and that his real job was setting up cognitive devices that wealthy people could acquire. The device records a person’s consciousness and places a copy in a electronic unit called a “cookie” for the purpose of handling any responsibilities the client does not want to be concerned with. Matt is shown setting up a cookie for a woman named Greta, for whom the cookie will control Greta’s smart house to her preferences (as the cookie itself is a replica of Greta’s consciousness, thus knowing what exactly she likes)—such as sleep alarms, controlling appliances, etc.. During the set up, it is revealed that the owner can alter the cookie’s perception of time, simulating lengthy periods as punishment if the cookie does not comply with an order. Joe expresses his disgust for Matt’s treatment of the cookie, believing the punishments to be a form of torture since the cookie is self-aware.

After Matt's story, Joe reveals how he came to the cabin. Joe previously had a girlfriend, Beth, who broke up with him after an argument over her decision to abort their child. Beth blocks him after the incident, however Joe continued to stalk her. He finds out that Beth decided to keep the child, and when he tries to approach her Beth's father has him arrested. Beth issues a legal restraining order against Joe, which also blocks any offspring from Beth. Joe continues to watch from afar, deducing that Beth has had a little girl. When Joe sees a news report indicating that Beth had died during a train wreck, he decides to approach his daughter (since the restraining order is lifted due to Beth's passing) who lives with Beth's father. However, Joe discovers that Beth's daughter was not with him but with a mutual friend—which Joe concludes was the reasoning for Beth's initial decision for the abortion and for blocking Joe from the child's life. When Beth's father tries to get Joe to leave, Joe kills him with a snow globe he bought for his assumed child.

Matt prompts Joe about the fate of the child, to which Joe replies he cannot remember (or remember how he got to the cabin). Joe reveals that the child, alone in the house since Joe killed her grandfather, wandered from the house during a snow storm and froze to death outside. Joe admits to killing two people before realizing that the cabin Matt and he shared is a replica of Beth's father's house. Matt appears relieved for coercing a confession from Joe, then disappears after apologizing. Joe is revealed to be a cook-  
ie that police retrieved from the real Joe in custody (who is unwilling to talk about the killings). As a part of a deal for his freedom, Matt had agreed to draw out the confession from Joe.

The police reveal that while Matt is cleared of his charges (for running the illegal dating business and failing to report the murder of Harry), he is to be placed on the sexual registry as a “peeping tom.” The registry blocks Matt from everyone in the public and vice versa, while he appears to the public as a red distorted image to show the rest of the world that he is a sex offender. Meanwhile, one of the police officers simulates 1,000 years on Joe’s cookie implying that they will shut it off after the weekend. Joe’s cookie is then stuck in the cabin, unable to change anything in it including the radio that continually plays the same song.

While the examples of state power in “White Christmas” are far removed from reality, the consequences bear a striking resemblance to state power in reality. Perhaps the best relation to reality is the stigmatization of Matt’s actions even after helping the police. Because Matt’s criminal actions include a sexual component, he is labeled as a sexual offender and put on a registry—resulting in the exclusion from society and the visible marking indicating he has committed a sexual crime. While contemporary society does not have technology available that would allow people on the sexual offender registry to be so visible, Schultz (2014) claims that the technology that is available is just as damaging. Schultz asserts that easy access to the sexual offender registry via the internet has damaging consequences on those who have already been punished for their crime. The result is similar to that seen in “White Christmas;” people on the registry are marked and ostracized from the community, exacerbating the punishment for a crime they have already been punished for.

The state also is depicted as using invasive measures and deception in order to secure a confession out of Joe. Toward the end of the episode, viewers are informed that the police agency has copied Joe's consciousness into a cookie, in which they are able to simulate passing time to chip away at Joe's resolve. Joe was in custody for the killings of Beth's father and daughter, and because he was unwilling—or unable—to talk about the crimes, the police forced Joe to undergo the procedure to extract a copy of his mental workings. This depiction of state power is clearly futuristic, but implications suggests an underlining fear of state overreach into our personal lives and privacy—after all, what is more invasive than someone literally copying your disembodied self and subjecting it to isolation in order to secure a confession?

The manifestation of state power is briefly seen in the first episode of the series, entitled “The National Anthem.” When a terror threat targeting the British Prime Minister is broadcasted on YouTube, the government quickly orders a D-Notice in order to prevent any information being leaked to the public. The D-Notice is an official request from the United Kingdom's government aimed at media outlets to suppress the coverage of a particular topic in the interest of national security ([dsma.uk](http://dsma.uk)). While it is important to note that the American government has no such policy in place, and the organizations that the D-Notice is sent to have the option of ignoring it, state suppression of information is seen in the episode. It is not a far reach to suggest that there is a certain amount of concern present in both real world society and the episode about governments censoring media. Moreover, media censorship is also seen later in the episode (after the news station has

dismissed the D-Notice) when producers try to prevent details of the threat from being discussed on television.

State power is seen as utilizing technology in order to maintain a certain amount of control over its citizens. While not always displayed as overt measures of authority, such as in “Fifteen Million Merits” where state coercion and manipulation are the primary methods of social order, the notion that government holds power over the people is a common motif found throughout a number of episodes within the first two seasons of *Black Mirror*. Additionally, episodes like “The National Anthem” and “White Christmas” show a state that blatantly uses technology to further their own interests. The reoccurring theme of state power suggests that society is concerned with state control, with technological developments making it easier for the state to wield this power. Nevertheless, *Black Mirror* also shows how that state can enforce its power by using technology to punish those who break societal norms or laws.

### *Technology and the Spectacle of Punishment*

French philosopher and theorist, Michel Foucault, introduced the phrase “spectacle of punishment” to scholarly communities. Foucault (1975) observed that historically, the state enforced social order through the public display of punishment. Foucault remarked that the ritual of public humiliation included a number of characteristics that all served the purpose of showcasing the state’s power over its citizens. One of the most important aspects of this display of control revolved around the infliction of pain (even to

the point of death) to the subject's body, which became a tool for punitive action. However, Foucault explains that the "spectacle of punishment" has become more "humane" as society has progressed, moving from public spectating to private containment while transforming the use of the physical body from that of a vehicle of pain to an instrument of control. The state need no longer harm an offender's body but rather confines and controls it in order to produce the desired effect of dominance over the individual.

Despite Foucault's (1975) argument that society has evolved in its practices of punishment, *Black Mirror* shows that the element of the spectacle is still present in society's consciousness. Episode one of the first season, titled "The National Anthem," is a clear example of how modern culture's notion of the spectacle of punishment is manifested. The introductory episode into the *Black Mirror* series depicts Great Britain's fictional Prime Minister, Michael Callow (played by Rory Kinnear) being awakened by his staff in the middle of the night. Callow's staff shows him a video submitted to YouTube by an anonymous user that reveals the Duchess of Beaumont, Princess Susannah has been kidnapped. The panic strikes Callow as the Duchess is forced by her captor to explain the terms of her release: the Prime Minister must engage in intercourse with a pig on live television. The kidnapper also includes a list of video specifications to ensure that the request is conducted without deception.

Due to tricky technical maneuvering, the kidnapper is able to elude the British government. Growing pressure and faulty information makes the government prematurely raid an abandoned building where they think the Princess is being held, which results in the injury of a journalist. As the deadline nears, one of the Prime Minister's cabinet



members attempts to devise a plan that would spare Callow the humiliation of committing the act by hiring an actor and digitally manipulating the broadcasted image so that the kidnapper would believe it was Callow on the screen. However, after a fan of the hired actor leaks a photo on Twitter, the abductor sends a finger, believed to be the Princess's, to a news station in order to prove that he is serious about his demands. With mounting pressure from the public (in the form of online polls) and his party, Callow reluctantly agrees to perform the sex act.

Despite pleas from the British government that viewers should turn off their televisions, people gather around screens everywhere to watch the obscene act take place. Initial cheers and jeers from the spectating public quickly turn to disgust and shame after a few minutes of watching. However, while everyone is indoors watching the event unfold, the Princess is seen walking down an empty street toward downtown. It is revealed that the kidnapper released the Duchess before the deadline and committed suicide afterwards, indicating that she was to be released regardless of the Prime Minister's compliance. It is also revealed that the severed finger was the kidnapper's, and the Princess was unharmed during the ordeal.

While the main character, Prime Minister Callow, never committed a crime to invoke such a punishment, Foucault's (1975) explanation of the spectacle of punishment is applicable to the events depicted in "The National Anthem." On the surface, the episode parallels Foucault's description of an individual brought before the public in order to receive a bodily punishment (in this case, copulating with a pig), an act that showcases the power of a dominating institution (in Foucault's assessment, the state). The purpose of

this spectacle of punishment is to instill obedience in the spectators, making them fear of similar public humiliation if they were to disobey the group in power. However, with the introduction of modern technology, Foucault's assertions about the display of power seem to be reversed.

It appears that technology can be the great equalizer when combating state control and power. Historically, the state employs the spectacle of punishment—however, “The National Anthem” depicts one of the state's highest officials, the Prime Minister, as the subject of discipline. In fact, it is revealed in the post credit scenes that it was a civilian who orchestrated the kidnapping and ransom. It is through the use of technology and cyber maneuvering that the kidnapper was able to gain the upper hand on those who traditionally hold the power. With the power shifted in favor of a civilian, the state was forced to be obedient to an anonymous citizen. In addition, the captor was able to detect dissent and retaliation from the subject of his prosecution (the state officials) through a leaked photo on social media that went “viral”—their disobedience being met with further punishment, i.e. the severed finger believed to be the Duchess’.

Like the hooded executioner of days past, technology also allowed the kidnapper to be shrouded in anonymity. This anonymity, much like the hooded executioner, allows the person administering the punishment to be a representative of power behind the punishment—the executioner as a representative of the state, the anonymous kidnapper as a representative of the people. In addition, advancements in mass media allowed the dissemination of information to reach across the world despite the government's attempts to block it. The ransom video was posted to a public website, YouTube, which allowed it to

be downloaded and reposted before the government could contain it. While the British government issued a D-Notice, a request from the British government to news organizations not to release particular subject matter in the interest of national security, social media (including Facebook and Twitter) allowed the information to be spread regardless. Moreover, the punishment itself was broadcasted to televisions across the country. Rather than a public gathering to witness an execution or punishment (as would have previously been required), mass media allowed viewers to witness the spectacle of the Prime Minister's punishment from the comfort of their own homes.

Interestingly, the intention of the spectacle is also shifted within the episode's depiction. Traditionally, the spectacle of punishment was meant to be visceral image to repel the spectators from disobeying state ideology. However, in "The National Anthem," the role of the spectacle appears to invoke a different response. While the public is initially sympathetic to the Prime Minister's position, as the situation developed the online polls showed public support for compliance to the ransom while social media revealed sadistic comments about the act. In addition, the initial reactions toward the first few minutes of the broadcasted punishment were laughter and jeers (though, they quickly changed to disgust and shame). It appears that the display of punishment was not to invoke fear amongst the spectators, but rather to allow the viewers to participate in the mockery and humiliation of the Prime Minister—the head of the state.

While many of the episodes in *Black Mirror* have a relatively critical outlook on the uses of technology, "The National Anthem" shows how technology can be used to reverse the techniques of state power—in this case, the spectacle of punishment. Due to

the state's reliance on technology to exercise power and control over its citizens, technology can often be viewed as inherently oppressive. However, as "The National Anthem" has showed, when wielded by the people technology can be used as a tool for liberation. This is not a concept limited to this episode of *Black Mirror*, as similar examples of technology being used to combat state control can be seen in films like *Fight Club* or in other televisions shows such as *Mr. Robot*. Technology, then, can be seen as a figurative double edged sword—it is a vehicle that can inspire hope in the face of adversity, or it can be used to ensure one's submission and compliance. As shown in *Black Mirror*, it is the entity that controls the technology that determines how it is used.

Elements of the spectacle of punishment are also found in a later episode of *Black Mirror*. In season two, the second episode titled "White Bear" also shows how technology is used in modern reproductions that include the display of punishment. The episode begins as Victoria Skillane, the protagonist played by Lenora Cichlow, wakes up with no memory of her life. After some searching of the house she wakes up in, Victoria explores the outside only to find that dozens of people are videoing her on their phones. Everywhere she goes, there are people filming her—not talking, not engaging with one another, just following her around on their phones. It is not long after her initial contact with the unresponsive observers when Victoria is shot at by a masked man who randomly pulls in a car. During this attack (which subsequently leads to a brief chase), the observers remain unfazed and continue to follow the game of cat and mouse with their video phones. Eventually Victoria escapes with the help of three individuals, one of whom loses their life to the gunman during a close confrontation.

One of Victoria's cohorts informs her (and the audience) that the behavior exhibited by the bystanders was caused by a signal on their phones, televisions, and computers; causing everyone to become spectators to the unfolding horror. Victoria is informed by her rescuers that the signal that caused everyone to turn into "techno-zombies" is coming from a radio compound called White Bear. On their way to the White Bear station, one of Victoria's rescuers reveals himself to be a "hunter" (similar to the masked man that attacked her in the first place), and forces Victoria and her cohort into the woods where previous victims hang from the trees. Again, the "techno-zombies" surround the area and video the event. Luckily, Victoria and her friend escape by incapacitating the attacker during an attempt at torturing the protagonist.

Victoria and her partner manage to make it to White Bear, but just as they are about to shut down the signal they are attacked again by a group of hunters. Yet as the hunters close in, the wall opens behind Victoria revealing a large audience applauding. The man that attacked her in the woods appears, sporting a microphone and commenting on the events that just took place as Victoria is strapped to chair by the "hunters" and her "ally." The shock and confusion settle as Victoria is forced to watch a video that explains the events of the past day; the whole experience is her sentence for aiding in the kidnapping of a young girl and video recording (on her phone) as her fiancé killed the child. The memories flood back to Victoria as everyone around her spout out their disgust and disapproval, yelling "murderer" while continuing to film from their seats.

Victoria is placed in vehicle that has a glass enclosure for her to be put on display, while the host addresses a roaring crowd lining the sides of the street:

Welcome citizens, to the climax of the day! Take as many photographs as you want, take as many photographs as you can. But most importantly what I need from you is to shout and scream and let that bitch know that you are out here! Let's get this show on the road! (Brooker 2013).

With that, the host gets into the vehicle as the car (with Victoria on display) drives to the location where she first awoke, all while the civilians are taunting and screaming at her. Victoria is then strapped to the chair she found herself in at the beginning of the episode, as the host begins the process of erasing her memories—an extremely painful process—in preparation for a new day of the same torture. It is then revealed to the audience that Victoria's punishment is cyclical and that she relives the same experience daily, while her memory is wiped every night; thus forcing her to repeatedly experience the horrors of her punishment without any recollection of prior day's events.

Foucault's (1975) explanation of the spectacle of punishment is once again explored in "White Bear," however this episode bears a closer resemblance to what Foucault described than "The Nation Anthem" depicts. Victoria is punished for a crime she committed (an accomplice to the kidnapping and murder of a young girl) by some kind of authority (assumed to be a representative of the state). In addition, her punishment is witnessed by a large group of individuals that follow her throughout the unsettling process. Moreover, while Victoria's body is at times the focal point of the punishment, the entire ordeal is aimed toward inflicting a psychological pain on her—an element to punishment that Foucault claims is indicative of modern societies. Foucault remarks that as societies progress, they move away from punishment that inflicts harm on the body of an individu-

al, to a form of discipline that impacts the soul or mentality of the individual. However, Foucault stated that the state also shifted its form of punishment in order to achieve this mental discipline by confining the physical body rather than inflicting harm upon it. While Victoria is clearly not confined to a small place, the revelation at the end of the episode reveals that her punishment is to be relived every day. An argument can be made that the repetitive nature of her punishment is comparable to that of a person incarcerated in “traditional” prison; cyclical, regimented patterns to their days of punishment with little to no variation that causes strain on their psyche. However, while a piece of technology allows Victoria to have her memory erased every night (an arguably worse fate, considering she awakens to a fresh Hell every morning) incarcerated individuals are stuck acknowledging the mind numbing repetition to their punishment.

Despite fitting the traditional model of the spectacle of punishment, like “The National Anthem” the “White Bear” episode indicates a different motive for viewership. The individuals filming the experience are eagerly contributing to the spectacle of Victoria’s punishment, rather than being repulsed or fear stricken. In fact, during the post credit scenes Victoria wakes up while the audience is shown that the bystanders are not only witnessing and engaging in someone’s punishment, they are customers paying for an experience in a twisted form of prison tourism. The “guests” are briefed by the host and actors (the hunters and cohorts) on what things they should and should not do, encouraged to take pictures, and informed of the process as if they were visitors of a theme park rather than witnesses to a punishment. It appears that the engagement with Victoria’s punishment stems from a retributive attitude. Welsh, et al. (2011) uncovered a similar phe-

nomenon in their research. According to the authors, retribution is a prominent theme found in film and television that deal with differing forms of justice. This is due to the notion that people believe in a just world, in which everyone deserves the punishment they receive.

Garland (1990) asserts that a retributive mindset plagues modern criminal justice processes, citing the “expressive moral idiom” as well as the declaration of “substantive values and openly conveyed emotions” that a “large section of the public and many politicians” utilize when addressing the issue of punishment (p. 192). The word choice used by the host (using expletives, name calling, and assigning blame) shows that those delivering the punishment believe Victoria to have responsible agency and thus justifying their treatment of the protagonist due to her ability to understand and follow through with her criminal actions. Victoria becomes a “symbol of the public’s collective fears and of its desires to triumph over and destroy the underserving and ‘evil’” (Linnemann, Wall, and Green 2014).

The root of retributive justice, as hinted at by Garland (1990), lies in the emotions society expresses as a reaction to a crime. Durkheim (1893) cites society’s drive to make the punishment fit the crime, as well as the need for collective rejection as a characteristic of a punitive and retributive society. Garland (1990) expands on this notion by stating that “modern penal systems may try to achieve utilitarian objectives, and to conduct themselves rationally and unemotionally, but at an underlying level there is still a vengeful, motivating passion which guides punishment and supplies its force” (p. 31). The last part of this statement is what is really highlighted in the “White Bear” episode of Black Mir-



ror. While Victoria's punishment is clearly reflective of the crime she committed (as seen by the events depicted throughout the episode, as well as the monologue from the host), it can be inferred that the intensity of the punishment is derived from the anger expressed by those inflicting the punishment. Indications of an emotional origin can be found in the foul language directed toward Victoria as well as the lengths to which society goes to punish her for her crimes (despite the fact that she was not the one that killed the child).

Interestingly, the episode initially infers that the behavior of the spectators is due to a signal found in their technology: phones, computers, televisions, etc. Throughout the episode, the viewer is under the impression that technology is responsible for the bystanders that continually film the events as they unfold. Superficially, this type of behavior can be seen as a characteristic of modern society that is fascinated with acts of violence. However, Linnemann, Wall, and Green (2014) assert that this cultural acceptance of violence (by the state, more specifically) is furthered by media demonization of an offender—society permits, and even requests in some instances, the use of state violence in order to detain, punish, or eliminate a perceived threat especially when the media frames that threat as a monster. The conclusion of “White Bear” confirms what Linnemann, Wall, and Green suggest. The closing moments of the episode reveal no technological signal artificially causing people's passive viewership of violence but rather a punitive public demanding brutal state punishment of an offender.

There is a certain degree of concern over punishment tactics that the state employs in order to discipline its citizens. More specifically, depictions of punishment in *Black Mirror* indicate societal fear with respect to the spectacle of state sponsored pun-

ishment. Despite Foucault's (1975) assertion that developed and modern societies have abandoned the use of the spectacle of punishment, it appears that remnants of the archaic act are still present in society. In fact, episodes such as "White Bear" suggests that modern advancements in technology can amplify the impacts of the spectacle—cell phones can record acts of punishment and share them on the internet, mass media can broadcast a person's crimes thereby influencing public opinion on how the state should handle the punishment, all while the masses continue to consume the image of a fellow citizen's punishment.

However, while the fear of the spectacle of punishment is still present in our cultural psyche, the role technology plays can be beneficial to combating the state. "The National Anthem" shows a bit of a contradiction within the power of technology; at times, it can shift the power from the state to the people. However the episode still supports a common theme present in the entire series: much like a weapon, technology gives power to the entity that wields it—and while "The National Anthem" shows that scenario in which a civilians holds the power, most often times it is the state that is in control of how the technology is used. However, the series also reveals another method in which the state manipulates technology to further its power: surveillance.

### *Technology and Surveillance*

Concerns over the use of surveillance to ensure social control by the state is not a new fear. Perhaps the greatest example of state sponsored surveillance to maintain con-

trol over a group of individuals comes from Jeremy Bentham's proposal of the panopticon — a prison that centered around a watchtower, forcing the inmates to believe that they were continually being watched. The notion is that people are less likely to misbehave if they know, or think, they are being watched. In modern society, the panopticon has entered the public sphere through surveillance technology. With the introduction of CCTVs, cameras, GPS tracking, civilians are continually being watched in the hopes of preventing crime.

However, in more recent years panoptic surveillance has taken on a new form: the Internet. Social media sites have enable geolocating, allowing users to tag their current location. Moreover, people are constantly posting pictures on social media sites or live-streaming video to their Facebook pages. In a world where every person has a handheld recording device, the fear of being caught doing something that breaks the social order has steadily increased. This concern does not go unnoticed by the depictions of technology and surveillance in *Black Mirror*. "White Bear" addresses the notion that these recording devices can cause apathetic bystanders — civilians more concerned with videoing a disturbing event unfold rather than intervening to help. However, something far more unsettling is the potential for the state's use of technology to surveil its civilians.

The third episode of the first season, titled "The Entire History of You," addresses the subtleties of surveillance in an interesting way. Like the reality found in "White Christmas," this episode features people that live in a world where ocular implants are readily available. The implants in "The Entire History of You" differ however, in that they allow the user to access every one of their memories, as well as selective control

over which ones get deleted or replayed—much like a video library. This idea in itself presents a certain form of self-governance; if everyone (or the majority of individuals) have this implant, one can infer that they are constantly being recorded thus less likely to break social norms. This notion is already present within modern society: Yar (2012) explains that society uses surveillance (CCTVs) not only as a tool for crime observation and deterrence, but also as a form of social control. When people are aware of the constant recording of their actions, they self-discipline as their violation of a social norm would be recorded (thus increasing the likelihood of negative consequences from being “caught in the act”).

Like the majority of his fellow citizens, the main character in this episode, Liam Foxwell (Toby Kebbell) has the implant in his head. The viewer watches as Liam is questioned by his employer about an upcoming audit in which the company will review Liam’s work history via his implant to make sure that his work performance is up to par (and that no major deletions have occurred). After his meeting, Liam is seen going through airport security. While the rest of the episode shows how the complete recollection of memories has damaging effects on Liam’s personal life, it is the airport security scene and the discussion of the employer audit that worth mentioning the purposes of this study. This is because Liam is compelled to allow both his employer and a state employee access to his private memories in order for them to ensure that he has not done anything illegal or unethical. While the audit is never shown to the audience, the airport security agent is shown requesting Foxwell play back his memories of the past week in or-

der for the agent to scan the memories for any suspicious activity before Liam can board the plane.

While the depiction of this social contract is greatly exaggerated beyond anything found in contemporary society, the concern of state overreach is present in these scenes. Authorities no longer have to surveil civilians from afar, they merely have to sync with a person's memory implant to discover any evidence of wrongdoing. The memory recollection device acts as a camera that is constantly recording the user's every waking moment, capable of being accessed by state agencies in the name of security. This invasion of privacy is comparable to the revelations about the National Security Agency's collection of personal data on American citizens.

The collection of an individual's Internet presence is further addressed in a later episode, "Be Right Back." In this episode, a young couple, Martha and Ash (played by Hayley Atwell and Domhnall Gleeson) are torn apart when a car accident takes the life of Ash. Desperate and trying to cope with her loss, Martha turns to a company that will recreate Ash's personality into an artificial intelligence from accessing and compiling everything Ash has said, posted, or used on the internet. While the scenario is somewhat comforting in the context of the episode, the reality of such a service takes on much more sinister aspect when looked at critically. The availability of such technology would allow the user to literally recreate a person's identity (with some limitations) just from viewing and compiling their Internet usage.

The examples presented in these episodes of *Black Mirror* indicate an underlining concern over technology's ability to invade one's personal life through surveillance.

While “The Entire History of You” is perhaps the best example of a state’s willingness to observe its citizens in the name of security, the process of recording a person’s digital presence as depicted in “Be Right Back” is more comparable to real world application. Combining the depictions of surveillance in each episode, one realizes that state agencies such as the NSA already have rudimentary forms of technology present in “Be Right Back” for the purposes of security surveillance in “The Entire History of You.” With this in mind, an argument can be made that Bentham’s notion of the panopticon has shifted from a physical building to a digital watchtower, making sure that every individual’s actions are recorded and are within parameters of the social order.

However, there is one other element to consider. As the events in “The National Anthem” show, technology can be used in order to balance the state’s power dynamic over its citizens. This is also true with technological capabilities of surveillance—with citizens having the ability to record and surveil, state actors are too under scrutiny. A growing number of police agencies are using body cameras in order to record officer interactions with civilians. In addition, recent examples across the nation have shown citizen’s willingness to record unjust actions committed by state actors. While depictions of surveillance, such as with “The Entire History of You,” show the potential for increased state power and control, it is important to realize that technology can be used to combat said growth.

## CHAPTER V

### FURTHER REFLECTIONS: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The literature on media analysis and visual criminology indicate that cultural fears and ideologies are presented in the productions of mass media, including television series. Applying this framework to the common themes found within several episodes of *Black Mirror* allows for the examination of cultural fears manifested within the show. While often rooted in reality, these fictional depictions are slightly skewed in their representations and thus allow us—moreover, invite us—to imagine what might become. For example, while the technology used in the punishment of fictional character “Matt” in the “White Christmas” episode is clearly more advanced than anything contemporary society has available, the scenario is comparable to modern treatment of sexual offenders—public registries, readily accessed through a quick internet search, mark sexual offenders even beyond their punishment of incarceration.

Rafter (2007) asserts that popular criminology, in which visual criminology is situated, can provide a window into the cultural understandings of crime and provide a platform to analyze how media representations of those culture understandings impact society. The dark reflections of modern society manifested in *Black Mirror* reveal societal fears of state control through the use of technology. Technology, it seems, provides an avenue for the state to exert its power. Episodes such as “Fifteen Million Merits” and “White Christmas” show that the state uses technology to manipulate society into a social

order through covert methods such as class hierarchy or televised propaganda to support the hegemonic ideology or through more straightforward measures such as mental torture or coercion. Thus, it stands to reason that the society in which the episodes (and the show as a whole) are produced share the fear of the state power depicted in the show.

Another common fear of state control stems from the state's ability to make a spectacle out of the punishment of offenders and people accused of a crime. The progression of technology has made information widely available, from Internet searches to news coverage. The episode "White Bear" capitalizes on the fear of state sponsored spectacle, highlighting the media coverage of the main character's crime, the violent nature of her punishment, and the dark tourism encouraged by the state. As discussed by Linne-  
mann, Wall, and Green (2014), negative media depictions of offenders makes state violence more acceptable to the public. Additionally, "White Christmas" reveals a concern over the state's ability to extend punishment through technology—forcing the conviction of certain criminal acts to be broadcasted to the public like a scarlet letter (Schultz 2014).

Interestingly, while "The National Anthem" episode correlates with the fear of broadcasted punishment, the role of technology can be seen as having a neutralizing effect of state control. The themes portrayed in this episode suggest that technology is still a tool to aid the spectacle of punishment, it can also be used to level the playing field and be used against those who traditionally wield the power: the state. Nevertheless, technology is to be feared by whoever is on the receiving end of the punishment.

The last common motif is perhaps the one most discussed both within the show and in academic circles: the fear of state surveillance. With the increase in technology,



modern society has seen an increase in state surveillance—from CCTVs, to NSA collection of Internet habits and phone-tappings. *Black Mirror* does not dismiss this fear of a panopticon-like surveillance, as multiple episodes include some method of surveillance. The most striking scene comes from the episode, “The Entire History of You,” in which an airport security agent is able to scan through a man’s entire week in search of any suspicious activity. In addition, it can be argued that this episode is a commentary on what Foucault (1973) describes as capillary power or the dispersal of power through the social body— with everyone having the capability of seeing everything, everyone becomes an active participant in furthering state power as they act as the state’s eyes and ears. Even the seemingly innocent collection of internet presence in order to recreate a person in “Be Right Back” has disturbing implications when considering state agencies have a more primitive form of the same information-gathering technology.

In short, the examples of state control through technology commonly found in episodes of *Black Mirror* are not just fantastical images meant to entertain viewers, but rather represent society in which they were produced. These reoccurring motifs imply that there is a societal concern over the state’s ability to control and monitor citizens through technology. Applying a visual criminological framework allows these themes to surface, allowing them to be addressed and discussed in a constructive manner (Hayward 2009). In addition, Rafter and Brown (2011) assert that the use of popular criminology to address cultural reproductions found in film and television series such as *Black Mirror* allow criminological concerns to be openly discussed, challenged, and analyzed by ap-

plying academic criminology to them while providing commentary on the society in which the media depictions were created.

By using a visual criminological framework to analyze a popular television series, *Black Mirror*, one is able to draw conclusions about societal fears of technology and state control. The manifestations of these fears are then able to be addressed within academic literature to evaluate the context in which they were produced (that is, the reality in which these fears stem from). In addition, studies such as this can help usher in a new way of examining criminological issues within a modern society. Just as a person examines the ingredients in the food they are consuming, we too must examine the cultural productions we consume from mass media. Therefore, by examining television and film, we can identify what the media productions stem from and how they influence the society which views them. As such, the depictions of state control and technology within episodes of *Black Mirror* are not just mere spectacles of entertainment, but are rooted in reality. The program acts as a dark reflection of societal fears about technology and its potential to further state control.

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