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# Literature as Virtual Reality: An Exploration of Subjectivity Formation in the Digital Era

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Literature as Virtual Reality: An Exploration of Subjectivity Formation in the Digital Era

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English

by

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University of Arkansas  
Bachelor of Arts in English, 2012

May 2016  
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This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

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## **Abstract**

This project traces a line of developing subjectivity in the history of mediation. Using Jacques Lacan's mirror stage to emphasize the relationship between social identification and self formation, I suggest literary virtual realities further our understanding of human-technology relationships. Examining the evolution of eighteenth and nineteenth century sympathetic consciousness reveals a subjectivity intricately bound to both cognitive and physical spaces. The emergence of the virtual body complicates this consciousness by obscuring physicality and mixing man and machine. To trace this consciousness this project looks at the work of Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf, and a contemporary television writer, Charlie Brooker. These authors utilize virtual spaces to disrupt self-possession and thus enable new subjectivities to emerge. In light of increasing technologies and globalization, this project raises questions about an emerging digital subjectivity.

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## **Dedication**

This project is dedicated to the incredible women who showed me there was an alternate universe in which I could be anything I wanted: Carol Wing, Amy Baldwin, and Amanda Grace.

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## Introduction

Charlie Brooker's 2011 television series, *Black Mirror*, evokes one common feeling for its audience, discomfort. This feeling stems from blurred lines between reality and fiction. Using speculative fiction as a lens, Brooker often creates worlds that seem futuristic, but could actually exist in real life. The rules of the fictional space are ambiguous and it is often uncertain if the world being viewed is real or made up because it so closely mirrors current relationships to technology. The series depicts an eerily familiar dependence on technologies to both connect and develop human relations. The series' predominant themes—viewing digital bodies, inauthentic relationships to technology and people, obsolete physicality—extends a long tradition of literary concepts of sympathy. Within this context, Brooker's series grapples with some alarming new formations of identity in the twenty-first century. He frequently employs mirror metaphors in order to question the effects of the digital era and its relationship to new subjectivities; and the reflection seems dark and distorted.

The mirror metaphor suggests connections to a history of film and psychoanalysis theory as Greg Singh, a scholar of media culture, draws the obvious relationship between “how cinema is *like* a mirror in its overwhelming Imaginary,” referring to Lacanian versions of the cinematic gaze in his article “Recognition and the image of mastery as themes in *Black Mirror*” (124). Using Jacques Lacan's mirror stage as a point of reference, the relationship between subject and object becomes increasingly more complicated with the mass production and dissemination of virtual realities. Brooker uses this contemporary medium to bring up age-old philosophical concerns about the self and its meaning making processes. The series holds up a mirror and forces the audience to view the self and imagine an inevitable future—if things continue unchanged—where technology determines all aspects of human connection and identity

formation. Though the outlook is bleak, and it would seem that sympathetic consciousness has been dulled by the over consumption of virtual realities, Brooker offers hope; the medium may have the potential to revive our consciousness or conscience.

By situating Brooker within the context of philosophical concepts of the self, as well as within the line of British authors such as Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf, I aim to trace a line of developing subjectivity in relationship to mediation. This relationship reveals the co-evolution of sympathy and mediation as they emerge from eighteenth and nineteenth century debates of identity formation. I begin by examining the existence of virtual realities through fiction and trace the move from imaginative virtual bodies to visible, material virtual bodies. Using Lacan's mirror stage to emphasize the importance of these figures in identity formation, I suggest that understanding this relationship between the fictive and virtual body furthers our understanding of technological effects on human identity in the age of the digital body.

Chapter one examines the work of Jane Austen. Austen's novels are particularly useful in exploring the social development of the self because she utilizes point of view—of both the reader and characters—to disrupt perception. Her playful use of the virtual world, created through fiction, reveals how the self can be altered through Smithian sympathy. The characters in the novels enter into what James Chandler names, in *An Archeology of Sympathy*, a “triangulation of spectatorship” that implicates us in this viewing process (Chandler 146). This specific kind of spectatorship—or reading—creates a new kind of reader consciousness. This results from the text's ability to both point out and utilize a liminal space for reflecting on the self. It is this virtual space that becomes crucial for alternate subjectivities. Austen highlights the vital role of the body in this virtual process.



It is often through viewing and reading other bodies that Austen's characters interpret relationships within the novel. The virtual space enables the reading of other bodies. It is not just through viewing that the self is interrupted, but also through feeling as what we view may not be reconcilable with what others feel. Austen often points out that interpretations of bodies may not always be reliable. This revelation interrupts stable perceptions of the self. Point of view becomes more complicated here because it functions in tandem with sensations. While sympathy relies on the cognitive processing of imagining how it feels to be in the case of another, it relies first on the body to both view and read. One must use the body to view other bodies and it is through the body that we are able to speculate on the thoughts, emotions, and feelings of others as we recognize bodily relationships to one another. The focus remains, at its very core, concerned with internalizing what the physical body may mean. It is this disorientating effect, and its relationship to physicality, that I want to explore.

Chapter two continues the line of contemplation on self formations by exploring Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*. Woolf's text both adopts and rejects the concepts of identity formation. The spectator still plays a vital role, but Woolf's emphasis is placed on a particular kind of viewing; one that extends Austen's recognition of the role of the body in self formation. By replacing bodies with the inanimate, Woolf complicates how identities are shaped. In tracing how modes of sympathy have changed since Austen, we can see how the relationship between the image and the body can be misrecognized and thus, complicated. If the self can be altered and seen in objects and the image of personhood can be conjured in art or things, how do we navigate this new form? And what does this suggest about new technology? As Woolf's characters demonstrate throughout the novel, we cannot *really* see each other, even in viewing the body and its performances. Even if we can, this raises the question, how can we know that

what we see is in fact knowledge? This inability to *know*, the misrecognition of embodiment, is disorientating for both the characters within the novel, and the readers. But there is something in the unknowing still to be explored. It is this recognition of the unknowing in which we can relate. The *feeling* of connection or similarity between persons through misrecognition, even if we miss the mark, seems to be some expression of knowing. If we can sympathize and/or relate to objects, does this confirm the disembodiment of the post-human?

The third and final chapter will explore Charlie Brooker's 2011 television series, *Black Mirror*. The genre of science fiction seems the perfect place to explore these questions of self formation in modern society because the genre already calls for a certain level of cognitive dissonance. While the series takes on a number of imagined directions for technology, I will explore the role of point of view in eliciting viewer participation. This film technique implicates the viewer in a kind of voyeurism throughout the series. The episode titled, "White Bear" uses point of view to raise questions about the relationship and responsibility of human/technology interaction. Brooker's series forces the viewer to externalize their perspective by implicating them in a specific kind of viewing. As Chandler points out, by recognizing our implicitness in this viewing process we can then change in the act of recognition, assuming this recognition should produce some kind of action. Chandler explains it as the "capacity to change our *case* by virtue of being able to behold it" (emphasis in original 146). In light of increasing technologies and globalization, much of how we view the world is mediated through technology, which calls for an examination of its effects on our perception of self and the world around us. There has always been something between the self and its representation, but what happens when fiction becomes partially actualized and mixed with realities, when real bodies also become mediated?

## Fiction and the Mirror: Literature as Virtual Reality

To read literature, to commit the mind to imagining to and through how a work of literature imagines, means to know something of the unbound, something of the expansion that moves us beyond the pressing immediacy and presence of the world—to know the life of the mind

-Kay Young, *Imagining Minds*

Jane Austen's characters seem to always require a bit of solitude. Elizabeth Bennett, in *Pride and Prejudice*, and Anne Eliot, in *Persuasion*, are often found in deep contemplation about other's character. It is ironic, then, that they hardly know their own character until the end of the novels. Elizabeth even postulates, "I must not decide on my own performance," while deciding on the performance of others (*Pride and Prejudice* 82). It is this inability to see one's own performance of character that causes the conflict for Austen. The main themes throughout these novels—apprehending and misapprehending relationships—unravel in a narrative of consciousness. The novels elicit a certain kind of reader consciousness, engaging the reader in the cognitive sympathy of Adam Smith while simultaneously submersing them in the sensory feeling of David Hume. Within this context, Austen's work explores subjectivity through mental processing of bodily sensations.

This chapter explores Austen's emphasis on self reflection through mediation. Narrating consciousness through the realist novel, Austen reveals the importance of exploring virtual spaces. By disrupting perceptions of the self through literary techniques, Austen suggests that in

order to avoid the misrecognition of character, interruptions in perception must first occur. Mediation becomes a key component in this process; evaluating the self first requires some distance in order to get an accurate view. Exploring scenes from both novels suggests that this distance stems from mediation—often literary—and this space allows new forms of subjectivities to emerge.

In Jacques Lacan's "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function," he examines the foundations of subjectivity. He suggests that the first recognition of the self develops when the infant sees his own image reflected back at him in a mirror. This "mirror stage," according to Lacan, develops the ego that eventually leads to the "*I*'s mental permanence" (Lacan 75). The child sees its own body and becomes aware that the image in the reflection is theirs, their *self*. The *I*. The purpose, or function, of this stage of identification is to "establish a relationship between an organism and its reality" between this "virtual complex" (the internal) and the "reality it duplicates" (the external) (Lacan 75). It is in this moment that mental habitation and sensation becomes tied to an external, physical reality. The intersection between these two realities can never be undone because they become "replete with correspondences" that both complicate and change the original image based on the things which "man projects himself" onto or "the phantoms that dominate him, and the automaton with which the world of his own making tends to achieve fruition in an ambiguous relation" (Lacan 77). Man becomes intertwined with the material world through these "phantoms". In other words, from these connections between the self and physicality, new ways of identification emerge. The mirror creates an awareness that carries these "phantoms" into the physical world as man begins to see himself in glimpses of other mediated bodies. The *I* leaves the original, isolated form of autonomy and becomes permanently intertwined in this social formation and an awareness of the internal and external

connection is formed. The “virtual complex” ceases to exist apart from the “reality it duplicates,” as the sense of self becomes mediated by these other images onto which “man projects himself” (Lacan 76).

Extending Lacan’s mirror stage and highlighting a more inclusive role of the body, Kaja Silverman asserts in, *The Threshold of the Invisible World*, that “our experience of ‘self’ is always circumscribed by and derived from the body” (Silverman 9). Following along with this assertion, the understanding of the self relies on the exchange between the internal and the physical. The image of the body alone does not allow Lacan’s child to recognize the self, but the image in tandem with sensations; the recognition of the self in relation to the physical or felt experience. The ability of the child to recognize the image in the mirror as bearer of this corporeality stems from sensation. A triangulation of selfhood emerges that places the body in the center. The body, and how it is imagined through mediation, becomes the link to understanding this triangulation. Thus, any understanding of selfhood must come from recognition of how these work together to form the self.

Because the illusion of an isolated sense of self no longer exists after the mirror stage, the mirror begins to look quite different. The space between the self and its reflection becomes mediated by these outside ‘correspondences.’ Prior to the child’s reflection in the mirror, the *I* includes sensations, and yet, the two have not yet been connected to the body. Once the recognition has been made, then self reflection becomes mediated by many things including art, literature, and eventually the digital. In other words, by observing other bodies, the *I* fluctuates in its impression of individual subjectivity and enters into a social selfhood, thus becoming subjected to other’s desires. This suggests that “there is no such thing as unmediated” subjectivity and “mediation is analogous to social construction,” as Robert Miles suggests in the

anthology, *This is Enlightenment*, meaning every understanding of the self is a result of mediation (Siskin and Warner 174). Examining the self without examining what mediates the impression of selfhood proves insufficient; mediation becomes the thing that both distorts and illuminates identity formations.

As Austen and Woolf suggest, a certain degree of distance is required to examine the self. Distance creates a space in which the self can zoom in and out and “mediation can ‘capture’ the ‘hidden complexity of the process’ it has for so long purported to describe—particularly ‘in what form a representation is transmitted’” (Siskin and Warner 7). Mediation creates the ability to mobilize and view the self at different angles. It provides a mediated representation, rather than a simple self-reflection, which deemphasizes the social aspect of selfhood. Examining the many ways that this form of representation occurs is key to understanding the referents in which the self “undergoes repeated disintegration and transformation” (Silverman 13). New subjectivities emerge from changes within mediation.

A major event in mediation’s history was the invention of print culture. Although many other shifts have of course occurred, however, this event is particularly significant because through it a specific way of thinking emerges out of which modern virtual realities begin to become realizable. In, *Impressions of Hume: Cinematic Thinking and the Politics of Discontinuity*, David Panagia asserts that the ontology of the philosopher, David Hume, derived from the rise of print culture, “print, in other words, made it possible to conceive of thought as individual and individualized to such a degree that it could be something one holds in the palm of one’s hand” (Panagia 53). With the invention of movable type, Hume began to see his own world in movable type. The thought of language being broken down and separated, edited, and revised, radically changed his view of the self. Subjectivity could now be seen as something

transient and not permanent. Like language, he began to consider the self “as a collection of singular partialities pressing the one upon the other and that, through various intensities of association and disassociation are brought together or wrought apart” (Panagia 49). Thus, through this change in mediation, the self is movable or editable. This shift in technology created a new way to envision the self and its relationship to society. The arrangement of language into literal separate parts created the possibility for new versions of selfhood to arise. In this way, “one’s internal registrations shift from breast to mind such that the clarity of argument becomes palpable and evident on the page as the transcription of the clarity of an individual mind” (Panagia 52). Seeing the process of language formation allowed Hume to develop a new relationship between his internal and external existence. Print comes to mediate and occupy the space between the self and its representation. The occupation of this space creates a distance between the self and its “phantom,” thus changing the angle from which the self is viewed. In other words, this new medium shapes consciousness.

Print enables Hume to think of the self as partial and always moving. Panagia postulates, “our selves are the objects of our senses, to the extent that our sense of self is always an impression of self” (Panagia 3). Here, Panagia highlights two very important things. First, the self is subject to the senses. This creates an often dismissed relationship between the subjectivity and sensations present in the body. Second, it suggests a sense of self that is revisable. Just as we begin to catch a glimpse of the self, or *I*, the image is disrupted, and much like an impression, the sense is brief and “appears one way and disappears another way, without rhyme or reason” (Panagia 3). Here, Panagia highlights the apprehension of the self that is always just beyond our grasp, but, through mediation, we are able to see the process. This process is often manifested through literature. The emergence of print culture enabled the inward narrative allowing an

examination of the formation of identities. What this process reveals is the multiplicity of selfhood. The social relationship exists through mediation, which begins this process of revealing us to ourselves. The ego is situated within the frame of the senses, and like the senses, becomes social through its reliance on the subject/object relationship. As Silverman highlights, “images represent only one of the entity’s components,” suggesting the presence of other possible contributors (Silverman 12). The relationship between the internal and external unite through the body as it mediates the *I* and the external, material world. For, it is in the body itself that the child is first able to recognize its self-ness. The narration of consciousness, through the novel, opens up virtual spaces in which these relationships are revealed and complicated. Thus literary virtual realities become an extended version of the mirror.

Inhabiting alternate realities is more than a cognitive endeavor. As the self is bound to the senses, they play a vital part to this reflections process. Silverman highlights the necessity of the body by examining neurologist and psychoanalyst Paul Schilder’s theory of bodily sensation claiming, “it is only when the surface of our body comes into contact with other surfaces that we are even able to perceive it. This formulation stresses the crucial role played by one’s surroundings, but not necessarily by social exchange, [but] in the *construction of the body*” (Silverman 13). Appropriating Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological definition of the body as a place where “consciousness and reality occupy the same conceptual space,” the emphasis is placed on the physicality of this relationship (Taylor Carmen, “The Body in Husserl and Merleau-Ponty”). Extending Lacan’s mirror stage, Silverman emphasizes the existence of a sensational body prior to the recognition of the self’s image. This sensational existence exists both internally and externally. Thus, being able to identify with the reflection in the mirror requires recognition of the senses being tied to the image. This is perhaps where visualizing the



image of another becomes so integral to the imaginative process. Vision exists both within (as we imagine images) and without (as we see images). In *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*, Laura Marks suggests the eyes are intricately linked with our sensations, being the first part of the body to perceive the bodies of other's and in which the image is then transferred and then translated. They are our "organs of touch" in which the observer uses to sense what is being felt through the observation of the other body's performance (Marks 2).

Authors like Jane Austen found a way to represent this cognitive processing and write what Kay Young calls, "inwardness" (Young 37). By reading another's 'inwardness' we open ourselves up to imaginative processes that ponder what it means to be a self or to behold a self in a reflection. This inwardness, or consciousness, that Austen captures exists through vivid representations of virtual bodies. In *Persuasion*, Austen does not just use body language as a way to evoke sensations among characters and readers, but utilizes point of view to create a liminal space for the reader to see the character's body and read the body language itself. Adela Pinch points out in *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen*, it is "not simply other people's bodily presence that conditions mental life in this novel; mental life seems crowded in by bodily life in general" (147). This "crowding" refers to the mental translation constantly present within the text. Characters often engage in a kind of bodily conversation. These conversations saturate the narrative and thus emphasize the viewing of virtual bodies. While writing inwardness, Austen highlights the triangulation of selfhood by revealing how intersections between the body and mind create social understandings. This reading, or viewing, develops a new kind of reader participation, or reader consciousness that allows for the intersection between the real and unreal as readers begin to perceive their own realities within and without these imagined spaces. Rae Greiner likens this to a kind of virtual reality in

*Sympathetic Realism*. According to Greiner, this happens through a series of what she calls “sympathetic protocols” (Greiner 3). These protocols—language techniques—enact certain habits of mind in the reader by forcing the reader to reconstruct context on their own, forcing a kind of reader participation through imaginative reflection. This creates a virtual space habitable by the reader, open to endless exploration. In this space, the reader can conjure up a virtual body and view its actions.

This virtual exchange becomes intertwined with the mental viewing of bodies. The text creates a virtual reality where images can be conjured. This leads to what Panagia calls “the human something,” which is what we see when we view bodies on the modern screen (Panagia 36). These bodies “appear like an apparition” beheld on screen and “appears animated like a human, but is not live...rather it is the impression” of something mirroring the living (Panagia 36). The figure conjured in the imagination is analogous to this human something as it also “appears like an apparition” as it is beheld in the imagination (Panagia 36). Through this mirroring, these virtual bodies are conjured up cognitively and can be viewed and read similarly to film in the imagination. This imaginative apparition, or mental image of persons, can be seen as a kind of precursor to the “human something.” One exists internally, through mental processes; the other has been actualized and visibly exists in the material world.

Similarly to this ‘human something,’ these textual apparitions occupy the space between the self and its representation. The apparition becomes the face in the mirror. Peter Otto contends in *Multiplying Worlds*, that modern concepts of virtual realities (the actualization of the imagined into the human something) is a direct result of this type of affect from art and fiction claiming, “virtual realities have been around for centuries” (Otto 5). As we visualize (mentally) the bodies of these figures we read/view their bodies and our own bodies react sympathetically in turn. This

fiction does not just create a type of virtual body—that can be read and interpreted—but also models patterns in which we come to think of our own self. Whole worlds are created through fictions that enable us to make sense of our own reality as the real and unreal intersect (Otto 51). The “human something” later becomes what we know and see as images on the screen. Who am I in relation to this virtual body and what can it tell me about my own body and its relationship to others? According to Otto, “This kind of textual machine [fiction] combines elements in ways that conjure an unreal world” and this “unreal world” has effects on the real world, “reframing and reshaping” them (Otto 51). It is this reframing of sorts that calls for examination. What effects does this “human something” have on the reader? And what are the dangers of ignoring this figure altogether? Austen addresses this in the very first pages of *Persuasion*.

Jane Austen’s last novel, *Persuasion*, captures the effects of mediation in many ways. The novel explores how the socialization of the self often moves and persuades character. Austen is able to articulate this relationship through observation, both within the novel and through reader participation. Point of view functions as an extension of the senses as Anne, the protagonist, is usually found observing and being observed by other characters in the novel. This observation is accompanied by periods of reflection where the reader is exposed to the cognitive processing that viewing elicits. The plot follows Anne, a young woman seemingly beyond her prime, who maintains a sensible demeanor in spite of tribulation. She is not easily given up to emotions and maintains a stoic level of calmness even in situations throughout the novel where one would excuse occasional burst of passions, such as seeing the man she loves engaged to another woman; yet she keeps her emotional reactions to a minimum. The novel revolves around this relationship between Anne and her former love interest, Captain Wentworth. We learn of a complicated back-story that involves tensions between their social status and marriage. It

becomes clear later, through a series of exchanged looks and translating of bodily interactions, that the severed connection between the two of them is not lost and eventually they are reunited and married. But, before the resolution, there follows a series of exchanges between these characters that elicit the mental participation of the readers. These exchanges emphasize the role of the reflective process both within the novel and with the reader, creating a kind of multi-layered viewing process.

The image of the viewed is deeply connected to how the viewer defines themselves in relation to the other. There is something vital to interacting with this ‘human something,’ as Austen highlights in Anne’s father, Sir Walter Elliot. As the Baronetage of the estate and head of the household, Sir Walter Elliot maintains a certain level of pride in appearances. Yes, his character may represent a kind of dying aristocracy, but upon closer examination, there is much more to see beyond Sir Walter’s lack of depth. Austen uses Sir Walter’s character to reveal something important about the reflective process. Sir Walter is known for his vanity, but also for his complete inability to recognize his own faults. He obsesses over appearances, but cannot see himself in many ways. The opening of the novel gives us this first view of his character:

[He] was a man who, for his own amusement, never took up any book but the Baronetage; there he found occupation for an idle hour, and *consolation* in a distressed one. . . . there any *unwelcome sensations* arising from domestic affairs changed naturally into pity and contempt as he turned over the almost endless creations of the last century; and there, if every other leaf were powerless, he could read *his own history* with an interest which never failed (emphasis added, Austen 1).

Sir Walter is a man who does not read fiction. He dwells in the land and language of history and autobiography. What is it that he needs “consolation” from? What “unwelcomed sensations” would he be attempting to repress? We can assume it is the daily feeling or emotion from which he seeks to escape, the distress that arises from “domestic affairs.” To avoid feeling and

contemplating that feeling he reads his own history. By reading records of date and events (which is all the Baronetage consists of), Sir Walter need not use his own imagination. What is so disconcerting about reading fiction? By reviewing a historical account of his own life, he does not have to look inward, but only outward. He is comforted by his lack of feeling through facts. The biography, or retelling of his own history, does not give him anything to view except past actions—dates, marriages, and deaths—so he simply sees what is and what has passed. He avoids the spaces that construct meaning. There is no self reflection. This lack of meaning-making becomes significant later as Sir Walter cannot step out of the past and is failing to see his own demise, or the demise of his house, because he cannot see himself. Remaining on the surface of that initial mirror reflection creates a distorted unreal view of the self. He sees only an idealized version of himself, but not like he actually is. Austen reveals the role of fiction—creating these virtual spaces where we can see the body—that we have to see others in order to see ourselves.

In order to understand the urgency of this self reflection we can look to James Chandler's *An Archaeology of Sympathy*. Chandler explains the importance of viewing by explaining philosopher Adam Smith's *impartial spectator*. Smith's ontology rests on sympathetic cognitive processes. We imagine what others *should* feel—and we can see how sometimes it fails—but essentially what we are doing is reconstructing the imagined feelings in ourselves. We can have feeling emerge, but it does not just come from vision, but also involves speculation—thinking, reflecting—this enables the impartial spectator as it guides our response (Greiner 9). Chandler explains, “Assimilated to print fiction, this spectator functions both inside and outside of texts, both **as a part of** the diegesis (the story or case) and as the extradiegetic **witness to it**” (Chandler 17). In other words, the impartial spectator enters into a “triangulation of spectatorship” that

allows them to see themselves and also see how others see them (Chandler 149). By viewing others, even the “human something,” we are able to enter into this triangulation and view others as they view us. However, this requires contemplation, as Austen’s characters sometime highlight, impartiality is not so easily achieved and requires a certain readily consciousness.

The recognition of being viewed allows us to develop an awareness of how we appear to others. This is the beginning to opening up the space for contemplation. Austen recognizes the importance of this kind of sympathy by elevating fiction from the very beginning. We know there is something different about it; there is something tangible in this feeling that literature elicits. What are the dangers of not being able to participate in this kind of sympathy? Stagnation. Becoming like Sir Walter who cannot move beyond his own vanity because he cannot see it. The only thing that is reflected back to Sir Walter is his own image, which results in vanity. He has no awareness of his appearance, only the one he imagines for himself. We are reminded of the importance of external reflection as an acquaintance of his comments on the number of mirrors present in his room saying, “Such a number of looking glasses! Oh Lord! there was no getting away from one’s self” (Austen 125). Sir Walter only views himself through his own eyes and what he sees is only skin deep. His view of self is fixated on simple self regard and therefore not a real representation because it does not account for the unavoidable socialness of the self. Seeing oneself requires more than being able to view an image in the mirror, it is mediation that enables the distance that can alter the viewing angle. Thus, it allows for new form of identity to emerge. The consciousness created by fiction is one that goes beyond simple self reflection. Chandler goes on to discuss this spectatorship available through the novel asserting that, “standing outside one’s own life—**seeing ourselves as others see us**—is conspicuously

reinforced with visual and optical emphases” (Chandler 147). The direct reflection of one’s own image is insufficient as it does not deflect the direct internal gaze.

As Austen seems to suggest with Sir Walter in *Persuasion*, fiction can become an important aspect of this gaze. This is also seen in her previous novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, where the title alone gives us some indication that there is something in need of recognizing in terms of the self. Through the eyes of Elizabeth Bennett, the main protagonist, it becomes evident that who or what we are may not always be recognizable in isolation. But, through mediation, when something is placed between to disrupt the illusion of a self we’ve created, we become more attuned to the multiplicity of selfhood. The prejudices of Elizabeth are not as recognizable upon the first perusal of the novel. Mr. Darcy is a despicable character in the beginning because we see him through Elizabeth’s eyes. Once Darcy’s character becomes visible, something is decided about him and, both Elizabeth and the reader, come to expect a certain kind of behavior and even come to see certain actions as analogous with this behavior, even if it is not the case. All of this decidedness about character builds up to a pivotal scene in which a letter is exchanged. The contents of this letter supply Elizabeth with explanations of accusations she has held against him. The following describes her reading experience, “With a strong prejudice against every thing he might say, she began his account of what had happened at Netherfield. She read, with an eagerness which hardly left her power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before her eyes” (Austen 181). This pre-judgment—one prevalent in Elizabeth’s construction of Darcy’s character—pushes her to continue reading as she expects she will find what she has known about Darcy all along. However, she comes to read a different account of past events than she expected.

Elizabeth is presented with an alternate reality of sorts. She is forced to reexamine past events through another pair of eyes, Mr. Darcy's. It is through his account in the letter that she is able to "read, and re-read with the closest attention" and because of this reading she "was forced to hesitate" (Austen 182). In this hesitation Elizabeth experiences the reflection of her own performance and character. The letter mediates a confrontation with the ego in this scene. This interruption of her former perceptions allows for the construction of alternate, less prideful self. A self she could not see without the letter. It is important to note that this alternate self, or awareness of self, is not possible without this mediation. Mr. Darcy's spoken word does not allow for this kind of change because his character has been decided. Something has to interrupt her sense of self and its representation, as she mentions earlier in the novel in a dance with Mr. Darcy, "I must not decide on my own performance," it is clear she cannot recognize the vice in her own character because she cannot see it, or she is partial in her judgment (Austen 81). The letter allows for an "impartiality" which was absent in the naked perception (Austen 182).

What this suggests for the reader is vastly more important. The text represents the things that mediate our sense of selfhood, such as literature. By reading about the confrontation of the ego—about the difficulty in reading/viewing one's own character—we are in turn able to confront our own tendencies as readers of this text. Austen's novels elicit this meta-recognition. The *impartial spectator* becomes more obvious in this type of interactions between characters. A distancing is required in order to construct a self that is malleable. There is a kind of inception happening here as we (readers) are seeing Elizabeth see Darcy and then see herself, the same reaction is elicited through the reader. We can begin to construct an alternate version of our own self as we recognize the possibility of the same misjudgments as Elizabeth. The novel becomes a way to experience this as it mediates perceptions by disrupting a comfortable and stagnant



surety of identity. It slowly unravels our trust in the solid versions of identity we have built up. Though this reflection process exists cognitively, the meaning is built in a virtual space and closely tied to the body.

*Persuasion* is saturated with the translating of body language through the viewing of the other's, often resulting in the misrecognition and misinterpretation of relationships. This is often practiced between Anne and Captain Wentworth. The following scene reveals how Anne interprets the internal feelings of Wentworth based on his external habits:

There was a momentary expression in Captain Wentworth's face at this speech, a certain glance at his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth, which convinced Anne, that instead of sharing in Mrs. Musgrove's kind wishes, as to her son, he had probably been at some pains to get rid of him; but it was too transient an indulgence of self-amusement to be detected by anyone who understood him less than herself... (66)

Here, Anne interprets Wentworth's body language, the actions and sensations visible on his body through performance; the expression on his face and curl of the lip create meaning for her. From these things she sees on his body she infers meaning and imagines him to not be as interested in talking and/or hearing about this lady's lost son who everyone knows was less than agreeable. She gathers this information simply by viewing his body and his point of view, or gaze. While the translating of this body language is cognitive, it is the body that must first view and be viewed.

Another scene in which this type of interaction is evident comes toward the end of the novel when we already have a general sense of Anne and Wentworth's feeling for one another. After an evening dinner party the two interact in conversation with one another. Anne hears Wentworth speak in an "agitated voice" and begins to "breathe very quick, feeling a hundred things in a moment" (182). Both stop and start in their conversation abruptly. The agitation in his voice causes her body to react and while they are holding conversation momentarily, it is clear

that their bodies are being affected by one another's. While the act of viewing is clearly of importance here, it functions in tandem with sensations. One must use the body to view other bodies. It is through these bodies that we are able to speculate on the thoughts, emotions, and feelings of others. But the focus remains, at its very core, concerned with internalizing what the physical body may mean.

The transfer of emotion through visibility is also happening on another level in the novel through reader participation. The reader experiences bodily sensations through the form of the narrative as it evokes similar reactions between us as readers/viewers and the characters/viewers. The virtual experience extends beyond virtual worlds that can simply be seen, but can also be felt. As we see through a character's point of view, Wentworth's for example, we see what he sees; Anne's body. As he is mid-conversation he stops—"a sudden recollection...taste of that emotion," what emotion, we do not know, we are only given this image of her body as we see her "cheeks reddening, her eyes fixed in the ground" (181). But then Wentworth cuts in again and keeps talking. The effects of these sudden bursts of point of view, mixed with interruptions of images of her body, force us to quicken with the pace of the novel. We are lulled in and out as our own pulse quickens with Wentworth's even if we are unsure why. We begin to feel a physical reaction to the view of Anne's body. Now, emotion is being transferred from the imagined body of fiction into our own realities as readers. Even if we may not feel the sensations, we are still asked to interpret the bodies through blushes, gazes, tears, and other bodily text within the novel alongside other characters. This happens again when we are switched to Anne's point of view later on as she listens to Wentworth speak to her. It is in this scene that she begins to identify remnants of past feelings from Wentworth. The narrative streams along in a stream of consciousness-like narration of her experience in the following

description, “in spite of all the various noises in the room, the almost ceaseless slam of the door, the ceaseless buzz of persons walking through, had distinguished every word, was struck, gratified, confused, and beginning to breathe very quick, and feel a hundred things in a moment” (182). As readers we can see her from Wentworth’s point of view, her body in the middle of the room, cheeks red. And from Anne’s point of view we see her breath quickening and her numbness to the things happening around her. While this last part does not seem to deal with her body directly, if we look closer we can see that it does in her posture. She remains ambivalent to her surroundings in a stupor of some sort. Again, lulled into the narrative she is listening to, Wentworth’s musings of the heart, we as readers are also lulled with her. While Austen emphasizes point of view and visuality as a mode of sympathy, it is still the body that remains the focal point of the gaze.

These novels capture the process of this meaning building on two levels. One, in the novel itself we see the main protagonist develop a new sense of self. Two, the reader enters into a virtual space that allows the character within the novel to function like a mirror. By seeing someone else reason and make judgments, then I myself may have a better understanding of how to do so. The viewing process is deeply connected to how the viewer defines themselves in relation to the other. It is the “sensational as well as the visual dimension...[that] give rise to a unified sense of self” (Silverman 14). While sympathy in itself is a social act, being that it requires some attempt at sharing (mentally or physically) human experiences with another, it should also be noted that the body is also contingent upon its interactions (including seeing/viewing others) and exchanges within those interactions. Silverman highlights this relationship suggesting that “the body is not the simple product of physical contact, but that it is also profoundly shaped by the desires which are addressed to it, and by the values which are

imprinted on it through touch” (Silverman 13). Through bodily sensations we are able to connect further into the desires and/or intentions behind those physical interactions.

Though we can get closer to intentions, full comprehension is unfeasible and our attempts often result in misrecognition. It takes Anne and Wentworth and Lizzy and Mr. Darcy time to interpret their interactions and move past their own misjudgments. This interrupts our sense of accurately interpreting our relationships to one another. But, as Austen shows, interruption often reveals the misrecognition. Through this kind of insight from the body, and through the body, we can not only see others, but also see ourselves or how others see us. This interaction is always social as we are always viewing or being viewed by others. Through this mental and bodily exchange, Austen’s characters are able to imagine alternate realities. Anne is able to step back and review her own case through these interruptions of perceptions. Through language Anne (and presumably, the reader) can unravel and mix conclusions, create alternate endings for herself. Greiner contends, “that I rely on the sympathy of others to grant substance to my ideas, which in turn enables me to feel real to myself; that in my sympathy with others, I rely on fiction to grant their feeling a reality” (Greiner 69). Even though the plot has ended, she can still go on imagining other endings. This opens up many possibilities in the world of mediation. There is a surface level existence that man can inhabit—the world of Sir Walter Eliot—but then there is the world where the impartial spectator is inhabited.

Through this alternate ending view, we should be able to view others and build a meaning internally. The fiction does not think for us, but gives us the space to think for ourselves. How do we do this? –Viewing the virtual body. The novel becomes a mirror in this way, we can see our reflection in these characters and imagine alternative identity formations. In this case, mediation becomes crucial. This way, we can reconstruct and not be absorbed in, some kind of feeling or

knowledge of Anne's feeling based on what we see/read (Greiner 140). In other words, the fiction does not think for us, but allows us to think of ourselves. The reader sees only what Anne sees and is forced to interpret the view on their own. As Anne contemplates, we contemplate. What do these actions mean? What should be my reaction? Or Anne's reaction? The deciphering of character behavior works for both the character and reader. For if we know too much or see too far inside the characters we may lose imaginative space to reconstruct fellow-feeling. The mirror becomes blurred or non-existent and we cannot self-reflect but only see them.

This may be the danger in Brooker's *Black Mirror*. Seemingly caught in a sympathetic machine, how do we make room for contemplation? Greiner asserts, we must maintain a level of distance so as not to fall into total absorption and, "form proves a training ground for this sympathetic detachment, guiding readers to take on a variety of perspectives that need not fully inhabit" (Greiner 140). The digital form, however, seems to render us more fully immersed. Brooker explores both the possibilities and dangers of this immersion by using the form to disrupt our traditional sympathetic habits. It is through interruption that the self can become more constituted as our perceptions can be mediated through other aspects of the image of the body. Virginia Woolf deconstructs the image in *To The Lighthouse*, by blending the subject/object relationship, thus revealing new possibilities in identity formation. In doing so, she reveals how the digital may simply continue in the tradition of blending the subject/object relationship, albeit in a new way.

### **Seeing Your Reflection in the Object: Woolf's Version of Virtual Reality**

The virtual worlds we inhabit through fiction are worlds that shape external realities. The image conjured in the imagination is a vital piece to apprehending identity formation. As previously shown through Austen's work, viewing others—as well as viewing how they view us—extends Lacan's initial mirror stage to include the social relationship with the external. The virtual world that fiction builds allows the reader to conjure the image of the other; this exchange extends beyond the cognitive as the body and sensations work in tandem to create a substitute for the real mirror. This substitute offers an image that allows for a distanced reflection. However, such reflection no longer functions as a simple re-presentation of the self. Here the relationship with the external creates multiple stand-ins, which complicate and interfere with the process of reflection. As Austen already demonstrates, images can be misinterpreted. Bodies can be misread. Images can be blurred and distorted.

Virginia Woolf projects images onto objects in *To the Lighthouse*. This is set up in the opening of the novel. A young boy, James Ramsey, sits on the floor “cutting pictures from the illustrated catalogue of the Army and Navy Stores, [and] endowed the picture of a refrigerator, as his mother spoke, with heavenly bliss” (Woolf 9). His mother tells him that on the next day they may be able to visit the lighthouse. In this moment, his sensation, his pure delight at this prospect of visiting this lighthouse, causes him to endow the image with meaning, to transfer the bliss onto the image. In doing so, Woolf illuminates questions about the subject/object relationship through personification and utilizes what Rosemary Luttrell calls “distant/proximate vision” (Luttrell 70). This ‘double vision’ may enable us to enhance meaningful relationships between

self and thing, to share feelings with and through objects—to replace the image of the body with the material. Woolf oscillates between this vision, interrupting our proximity to the body using mediation to reveal the multiplicity of self-reflection.

This interruption is made possible through the text as it creates the virtual space where reflection takes place. This space allows the reader to imagine other referents for identity construction. Peter Otto calls this virtual reality the “second-order world” (Otto 10). He says, “it is possible to argue that imagination is one of those terms...deployed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to mediate between first- and second-order worlds” (Otto 10). The first world being the everyday material reality, the second—imaginative spaces where images emerge. Imagination is analogous with virtual reality. Thus, these virtual spaces seem to exist as long as we have imagined. But, as Woolf reveals, this approximation has limitations. The body can, and often is, un-interpretable in these spaces, unless one can find a way to navigate these first and second order worlds. Woolf shows how these virtual and material realities intersect by opening up alternate ways of viewing.

Luttrell defines distant vision as “looking through an object...to what lies beyond the immediate subject” and proximate vision as “look[ing] at the object,” or its surface (Luttrell 70). This is explained using Ralph Waldo Emerson’s metaphors of distance. Emerson says the eye is one form of perception and the horizon that it views, frames another. Manipulating the distance between the two form a third possible view; the transcendent—to view what is not always visible within the initial perception (Luttrell 71). The eye focuses in on proximities in the first view, while the horizon maintains a kind of peripheral vision. The third vision captures what may not be readily available to the former and the latter. Following Luttrell’s assertion that Mrs. Ramsey possesses this third view in the material world, I suggest that this view can be applied also to the

viewing of bodies. Woolf blends the subject/object, so the body and the material are not always distinct from one another. This transcendence comes from viewing the surface, or body, a different way; if the image can be transformed into something else entirely, it opens the self up to potentially endless identity formations.

Remaining bound to the triangulation of spectatorship through Smithian sympathy (where we are viewing and interpreting the image of the body in imaginative spaces) could result in stagnant identity formations; it is only by breaking this up that new subjectivity can emerge. A possible way of interrupting this view is through the “double vision.” But, it is also more than that. Luttrell asserts it is the ability to oscillate back and forth between the two. This is evident in a dinner scene hosted by Mrs. Ramsey. She thinks to herself, “what have I done with my life? [As] she takes her place at the table” she “has a sense of being past everything ...as she helped the soup...ladling out soup—she felt, more and more strongly ...she saw things truly” (Woolf 125-26). Applying Luttrell’s reading here, it becomes clear how Mrs. Ramsey moves between the space of the material and mental at the same time. She performs domestic duties while contemplating the transcendental. Woolf emphasizes the ability to see beyond the inanimate or to mingle with a different vision. Mrs. Ramsey “views her own distant horizon, she often does not look at the material world outside of her but rather revels in prospects that she imagines inhabit her own interior, her body” (Luttrell 73). Mrs. Ramsey thinks of herself as “out of an eddy,” until she eventually becomes one (Woolf 125). By imagining a current “she often ‘became the thing she looked at,’” and thus “Oscillating vision, for Mrs. Ramsay, can be either an embodied or a disembodied act” (Luttrell 73). The line between the subject/ object seems to blur for Mrs. Ramsey, and the viewer. Her ability to do so comes from disruptions in perception as Luttrell reminds us “the interruptions catalyze her oscillations” (Luttrell 74-75). This suggests



that in order to develop a sense of self that is movable, one must first experience these interruptions in order to break away from seemingly fixed material relationships. The image cannot be the only source of reflection, but extending its capabilities may be a solution.

This reading applies this double vision to the viewing of other bodies and highlights that perhaps what is necessary in this process is a mediation that interrupts routine self formations. The ability to look at and beyond the external simultaneously breaks up previously captured images of selfhood. Because “our experience of self is always circumscribed by and derived from the body,” how we view the body becomes increasingly important (Silverman 9). What Woolf may be suggesting is that image itself may not be as simple as we first thought; simply viewing other bodies may be insufficient in apprehending a tangible malleable *I*. Identification with the image in the mirror can be misleading. Woolf suggest this by first showing us how distant we can be from the reality of accurately determining the feelings, sensations, or thoughts of others, and then morphing the image into something that takes many forms. This will be shown later by observing how her characters interact with objects and how they contribute to identity formation. By observing Woolf’s representation of the body and highlighting the necessity of this virtual reflection we can also see that misrecognition is prevalent and unavoidable, but could serve as a catalyst in apprehending the self.

In order to establish misrecognition as part of a self-building process, Woolf must first deconstruct the image itself. Recognizing the existence of multiple interpretations of the concept of the image, as suggested by Robert Mitchell and Jacques Khalip anthology, *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media*, I simply refer to it as the mental representation produced by the imagination. In other words, similarly to Panagia’s “human something” it is the apparition in the imagination, or who or what we picture in the mind when virtually visualizing another

human being. But, as Woolf highlights throughout *To The Lighthouse*, this image can and often does transform, through mediation, which alters how we relate to it. Leaving the virtually constructed world of Austen and crossing over into the virtual world of Woolf, the image begins to fall apart in its meaning and the meaning we can make of it. Woolf seems to pick up where Austen leaves off. Rather than simply questioning our assumptions and judgments, Woolf seems to reject the triangulation of spectatorship as something purely visual or cognitive, and suggests instead that it is an amalgamation of bodily sensations, cognitive processings, virtual realities, and the external/material world. Woolf's writing of "inwardness" reveals a much more complicated process.

The limitations of our sensations are brought to the forefront in this novel as we are made aware, through the multiple points of view, that what is represented may not always be reality. Woolf problematizes viewing the image by asking, surely not everything emanating from the body is worthy of perceiving and of what is worthy, how do we know our translations are accurate or even close to hitting the mark? The novel centers around the interactions of the Ramsey family in their house on the sea. They are frequented by eccentric guests, artists and poets, and much of the narrative is spent oscillating between the perspectives of each character, giving us a glimpse into the minds of everyone. The effects of this intimate look into each character allows us to see just how much we cannot see each other, even when viewing the body and its performances. While the novel does force us to question the accuracy of sympathy, it still centers this knowing around the body and sensation. Much like Austen's Captain Wentworth and Anne, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey spend a great deal of time observing each other and acting on these observations. In the following scene Mr. Ramsey sees his wife beside the fireplace and observes her:

He turned and saw her. Ah! She was lovely, lovelier now than ever he thought...she was aloof from him now in her beauty, in her sadness. He would let her be, and he passed her without a word, though it hurt him that she should look so distant, and he could not reach her, he could do nothing to help her (Woolf 100).

In this observation he sees his wife's gaze as distant and aloof, he reads her body and her posture, because she does not speak during this encounter, he infers from it some deep melancholy. He reacts to this. It causes him pain and makes him feel impotent because he cannot rescue her. Her body causes his body to react and sensations emerge. But as we know from her point of view in the same moment, she is not in a deep sadness like he would imagine, in fact, she contemplates the happiness she has known which elicits feelings of "pure delight," only this is not reflected on her external body (Woolf 99).

In this same moment, Mrs. Ramsey is feeling the "ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough!" (Woolf 99). We see here that her internal is not represented by her external as she stops knitting and stares off into the distance it becomes clear that these actions can be misinterpreted and that joy and sadness can have similar faces. The internal and external are no longer knitted together. In this moment, the body is viewing and a recognition is internalized in Mr. Ramsey. The uninterrupted image of the other is misread and thus, misunderstood. Here, Woolf disrupts our trust in the plain view of the body. The sense of knowing is lost in this transaction and we are forced to face the possibility that we cannot truly know the other. This interruption is heightened by the fact that through Mr. Ramsey's point of view we can recognize a certain sadness in Mrs. Ramsey's look, however, we cannot trust her look because we have her point of view, which is withheld from her husband. Her body exudes a deep melancholy which looks similar to deep contemplation—how do we decipher one from the other? Greiner points out that this is a "persistent ethical problem" among the nineteenth century philosophers and novelists, but a

certain level of distance creates room for multiple interpretations (Greiner 898). Therefore, the traditional sense of sympathy seems to be insufficient. The distance exists in mediation as readers are able to recognize the possibility of misinterpretation. As Greiner puts it, “sympathy flourishes precisely because the minds and feelings of others can never be known except in an approximate way,” approximation being the only way to reflect on the self image (Greiner 897). However, too much distance may create a new set of problems, as explored in chapter three.

The bodies in Woolf’s novel can be viewed but cannot be read. Through her novelistic form we are able to experience the transferring of emotion from body to body but also feel the frustrating agitation in the disconnect as characters can never quite say what they mean. We feel an array of emotion from different bodies but none of them are connected because none of the characters can truly connect. After Mr. Ramsey observes his wife they enter into a conversation where each feels something different than the other and “they both felt uncomfortable...No, they could not share that; they could not say that” (104). They remain at a distance that we can recognize but they cannot. While this feeling is disconcerting for us at first, we come to see there may be some “rest in the extreme obscurity of human relationships” because “Who knows what we are, what we feel? Who knows even at the moment of intimacy, *This* is knowledge?” (Woolf 252). We can read the body and translate and interpret, but we cannot inhabit. The view has limitations. Even in seeing the performances of the physical body, the blushing, tears, and posture, it could be all imaginative and we could be like Lily Briscoe who finds that, “making up scenes about them, is what we call ‘knowing’ people, ‘thinking’ of them” (254).

We can see the tangible effects of emotion on the bodies of others and see the same effects on our own bodies, and while we can imagine the case of others, it seems that the body is the only place where we can get close to affirming shared experiences through tangible

sensations. Presumably, it is through these sensations we get close to intentions and desires. However, as Woolf points out, there is no real sense of knowing through the body. By revealing how bodies cannot be known, she disrupts our understanding of how we interpret our relationships. Viewing others is supposed to orient us in our subjectivity, but the interruptions seem to disorient us. Thus, the reflection process becomes more difficult through misrecognition because the image cannot be trusted. Woolf, however, seems to suggest that something emerges from this disrupted perception, in the unknowing.

Woolf continues to utilize the method of interruption through the transformation of Mrs. Ramsey into the inanimate. Lily Briscoe's first attempt at painting Mrs. Ramsey takes place in the first section of the novel titled, "The Window." In this section, Lily has a plain, interrupted view of the body, she thinks, "she could see it so clearly, so commandingly, when she looked," but she is unable to capture her (Woolf 32). She struggles, "it was in that moment's flight between the picture (image) and her canvas that the demons sets on her...and made this passage from conception to work as dreadful as any down a dark passage for a child" (Woolf 32). The space between, the "passage," from what she sees and what she can articulate is conflicted. There remains something in the process that blocks her articulation. Perhaps this accounts for the title, "The Window," as it seems she must pass through something in order to really get to Mrs. Ramsey. In "Modalities of the Gaze: Windows, Mirrors, and the Veil," Claudia Olk postulates, "the window allows for both participation in and separation from 'life,' it involves the notion of an existence of two worlds or realities" (Olk 55). Part of Lily's inability to capture Mrs. Ramsey may be that she remains bound within this particular framing of Mrs. Ramsey's body. It is only by passing through the window that Lily is able to get closer to her.

In the book's third section, Lily continues in her attempt to represent Mrs. Ramsey in her painting after Mrs. Ramsey has died. It is in the painting where Mrs. Ramsey (the image) becomes substituted with the object (line in the center of the painting). This transformation process is captured through the narrative as Lily struggles to articulate this representation. The narrative switches back and forth between the perspective of Lily painting and a memory of Mrs. Ramsey. This switching creates a pseudo-hypnagogic state replacing the immediate imagery into visual metaphor as Lily tries to capture it through her art. This is illustrated in the way Lily struggles to articulate both the cognitive and bodily effects of the memory. As she sits at her easel remembering, she attempts to articulate her own feelings in the following scene:

Lily stepped back to get her canvas—so—into perspective. It was an odd road to be walking, this of painting. Out and out one went, further and further, until at last one seemed to be on a narrow plank, perfectly alone, over the sea. And as she dipped in to the blue paint, she dipped too into the past there. Now Mrs. Ramsey got up, she remembered. It was time to go back to the house—time for luncheon. And they all walked up from the beach together... (Woolf 252).

Lily frames her view both mentally, through the canvas, but also cognitively “into perspective” as she navigates reality and a dream/memory-state simultaneously. She oscillates between the memory and the canvas as she dips into both the past and the present. Occupying both spaces, she remembers not only the image of Mrs. Ramsey, but the feeling and sensations that emerge from that image. It is Mrs. Ramsey's presence she wants to capture—the image of her body, the sensations that emerge from her physical presence, as well as the emotion—and yet the combination of these things elude her. Perhaps this is Woolf's way of suggesting that the representation of another is not found simply in their bodily image, but in the feelings and sensations that arise from them. If “images represent only one of the entity's components” then perhaps Lily needs to cross the visible in order to capture the thing itself (Silverman 12). Thus,

Lily finds that she can capture what she desires through the inanimate—something lifeless that she can endow with meaning.

The reproduction of Mrs. Ramsey's image would be insufficient in recreating Lily's emotional relationship to that image. She cannot paint the body itself because the body is sealed in its nature and, as previously established through the Ramsey's interactions, can also be misinterpreted. Remaining bound to the body as a source of representation becomes troublesome. Silverman asserts, "the shape of the body also shifts with the desire of the subject, desires which position him or her once again in a structuring relation to the Other" (Silverman 13). In other words, our own posture, as well as the posture of the one being viewed, interferes and interacts with how we view another. There exists a certain kind of framing in these boundaries of posture. The act of viewing Mrs. Ramsey through Lily's eyes projects a certain kind of vision bound to posture. Lily seems aware of this paradox as she moves about in a virtual recollection that force her to ask, "Who knows what we are, what we feel?" (Woolf 252). There is something impenetrable about the body itself that does not allow the viewer to fully apprehend its meaning. Kristina K. Groover highlights an important aspect of this bodily relationship saying, "All knowledge, including spiritual knowledge, emanates from the embodied experience" (218). Thus, the body is both "a means *and an obstacle* to knowing others" (emphasis added, Groover 218). The obstacle is both a result of posture and vision.

The body can remain in "proximate vision" if one remains bound to a certain manner of attention or focuses on only one aspect of the entity. This is Lily's struggle in viewing Mrs. Ramsey through the window. In other words, if we simply use the virtual space to interpret the surface of the body, and let that be the basis for self reflection, we remain in the proximate view. If we remain within one frame—do not pass through the window—we do not get closer to

*knowing* others. Woolf opens the body up to a transcendental viewing. An example of this is briefly embodied by Lily in the first section of the novel as she observes Mr. and Mrs. Ramey observing a game of catch among their children. Lily observes them “in the dusk standing, looking, the symbols of marriage, husband and wife. Then, after an instant, the symbolic outline which transcended the real figures sank down again, they became, as they met them, Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey watching children throwing catches” (Woolf 111). Similarly to Mrs. Ramsey’s experience in the earlier dinner scene, Lily is able to enter into an oscillating vision by viewing the bodies of the Ramsey’s. Rather than simply reading their bodies she experiences the third view and “for one moment, there was a sense of things having been blown apart, of space” (Woolf 111). If we can apply the “distant vision” to the body, we may be able to see beyond the body itself, and apprehend it through its representation. This is accomplished through these temporary interruptions in vision. We are able to catch a glimpse of something as “two perspectives, the near and the distant—both valid, true observations, both necessary for intuiting the transcendent laws” break up our regular view (Luttrell 77). Woolf is mediating our view as we recognize the constant distortion in the perception of the social aspect of the self.

As Lily continues with her painting, the image of Mrs. Ramsey is transformed into the inanimate as memory and present vision oscillate. The memory extends for long periods of time and the present seems overlaid with the imagery as this hypnogogic effect lulls us into a smooth transition between Mrs. Ramsey’s physical presence and absence. This unfolds in the following narration of Lily’s point of view:

“For how could one express in words the emotions of the body? express that emptiness there? (She was looking at the drawing room steps; they looked extraordinarily empty.) It was one’s *body feeling*, not one’s mind. The physical *sensations that went with the bare look of the steps* had become suddenly extremely unpleasant. To want and to not have, sent all up her body a hardness, a hollowness, a strain. And then to want and to not



have—to want and to want—how that wrung the heart, and wrung it again and again! Oh Mrs. Ramsey!...It had seemed so safe, thinking of her. Ghost, air, nothingness...and suddenly she put her hand out and wrung the heart thus. Suddenly, the empty drawing room steps, the frill of the chair inside...became like curves and arabesques flourishing round a centre of complete emptiness” (Woolf 262).

Her feeling is one she cannot articulate. She only knows that there is some deep attachment to this new image, the empty steps. The absence of the image disrupts her ability to build meaning out of sensations. She only knows that she *feels*. In this moment, Lily is no longer trying to capture the image, but a feeling, in order to make the image permanent; it is through painting that she attempts to do so. She imagines Mrs. Ramsey sitting before her on the concrete steps and she begins to call out to her as if she were still there. It is perhaps this calling out to an apparition that captivates the reader. “To want and to not have” becomes a mantra for universal feeling. Here, the reader can feel themselves slowly slipping into this dream-like space where the repetition of the mantra aligns with the object; the empty steps. Suddenly, it is no longer Mrs. Ramsey that occupies these steps or the space in the imagination, but the feeling or sensation of “to want and to not have.” To imagine Mrs. Ramsey is now to imagine a feeling, or longing. The reader can now substitute their own longing in the place of these empty steps and thus, see beyond the body and more into what the body represents. Woolf uses the inanimate to capture the sensation Lily attempts because the inanimate object can be endowed with meaning. It becomes a blank canvas. In the absence of the image, the representation—image, sensation, and emotion tied to the image—can emerge. But, it is in the movement that this is accomplished, as staying within the boundaries of one point of view seems to be what keeps Lily within the frame of the window.

This effects of this boundary is perhaps most articulated in Mr. Ramsey’s character. Mr. Ramsey seems to only exist within the boundaries of the abstract. If Lily moves from the ‘proximate’ view, Mr. Ramsey inhabits the ‘distant,’ unable to move between the two. He

remains fixed in his view. In looking at his wife and son in the window he then feels “consecrated” in his “effort to arrive at a perfectly clear understanding of the problem which now engaged the energies of his splendid mind” (Woolf 53). His attempt to understand his own dilemma comes from his viewing of Mrs. Ramsey and their son, James. It is their presence that evokes his dedication to deciphering his ‘problem.’ By positioning them in this window, we can see both his separation and closeness to the ‘problem’ he mentions. He seems to be right on the cusp of an understanding, but does not quite get there; he remains at the threshold between the mind and the material, without quite crossing over. Woolf seems to suggest that this is problematic. This threshold is revealed in the narrative of his consciousness as he thinks, “if thought were like the alphabet ranged in twenty-six letters all in order, then his splendid mind...reached, say, the letter Q” (Woolf 53). When we enter into this narration of Mr. Ramsey’s point of view, we do not have a body to read. We could imagine him, but the passage is framed around the inanimate and the image fades out of focus. He continues, “if he could reach R it would be something. Here at least was Q. He dug his heels in at Q. Q he was sure of. Q he could demonstrate. If Q then is Q—R” (Woolf 54). Now, we have entered into a space where the image is replaced with the inanimate, but it does not seem to work in the same way. The text leaves the reader just on the brink of R’s meaning with this kind of enjambment. If R...the reader is forced to ask—to fill in the blank—then what? What could be after R? In this space of R, we are not quite sure what we (as readers) are looking at, but we know to be at Q suddenly seems inadequate and we can feel his desire to move up the alphabet as synonymous with success.

The virtual space is confusing as we only have access to the letter R. Mr. Ramsey switches back and forth between descriptions of places, almost opening up virtual spaces to

explore such as “a ship’s company exposed on the broiling sea,” and an “expedition across the icy solitudes of the Polar region,” while describing his need to get to the next letter, R (Woolf 54). He has no grounding and seems to be looking everywhere at once and nowhere at all. This effect transfers to the reader as we are not quite sure where our stable, virtual view should remain. His gaze is described as obscured by the “leathern eye of a lizard” and “in a flash of darkness he heard people saying—he was a failure—that R was beyond him” (Woolf 54). He inhabits a space here that disorients us. Where are we to look? And at what? The letter R begins to fall into abstraction as it becomes synonymous with both failure and success. To reach it is to move forward, but in his contemplation, the R begins to slip into multiple meanings. Herein lies the problem, Mr. Ramsey remains bound to this abstract vision; he is separated from materiality. Perhaps this is why he demands sympathy from other characters, but is incapable of extending his own sympathy beyond abstraction. This problem remains mysterious to him as he moves forward in his contemplation of R, never really resolving it. In this view he can only remain at the threshold of understanding.

The emphasis on the shared space between the material and the mental is emphasized through the reading of Mr. Ramsey’s body throughout this scene. Though he remains focused on the abstract, we catch glimpses of his physical reactions. The narrative inserts brief moments where “He braced himself. He clenched himself,” allowing us to react to his change in posture (Woolf 54). As his posture changes, so does the reader’s. The repetition the letter transfers this feeling of frustration to the reader and we are left wondering, what is R? And what comes next? As Rosemary Luttrell points out, according to Kenneth Burke, the change in posture allows “our manner of attention to change the object” itself (Luttrell 70). Because Mr. Ramsey is frustrated and closed up by the letter we recognize the frustration in the letter itself and can share in this

feeling. By narrating the character's posture, it changes the reader's attention; it becomes source of vexation, rather than another step to look forward to in the alphabet, thus, shaping the way we apply meaning to this letter. Much like Jane Austen's bodily conversations among characters in *Persuasion*, our understanding of this concept is tied to our interaction with this virtual body. Thus, our understanding is solidified through the intersection between the virtual and the material, while ironically, Mr. Ramsey remains out of touch with the latter.

For Mr. Ramsey, the letter R becomes a measurement of where the mind sits ranked among other men. He sees it as a "distinction between the two classes of men," and seeking the next letter becomes a way to get closer to a more heightened state of mind (Woolf 55). One class is distinguished by mediocrity, the other by genius. The pursuit of Z is to elude the feeling of mediocrity and to get further than most men. The pursuit of Z seems to be the way to avoid the feeling of failure, or elude the fear of failure. But we are unsure of what that pursuit entails or even what it would look like to arrive at Z. Mr. Ramsey is misperceiving the problem and the solution. He gets close to understanding the problem as a problem of knowledge—he does not *know* the others in the novel—but he fails to recognize the kind of knowledge in which he is lacking. This is why his contemplation is sparked by the image of his wife and son in the window; the problem lies in his inability to connect with them. This is apparent in the following chapter as it opens with, "But his son hated him" (Woolf 57). This hatred stems from Mr. Ramsey's constant demand of sympathetic attention. He seeks sympathy but is incapable of extending it to others because he does not participate in the physicality of sympathy; he exists in a world of ideas rather than physicality, unable to understand how to oscillate between the two.

The inwardness that Woolf captures here functions, as Marco Caracciolo argues in "Leaping into Space: The Two Aesthetics of *To the Lighthouse*," like a kind of "second

aesthetics [that] hints at the theory of art's virtuality," thus Woolf's work is purposeful in giving the symbolic and the body other qualities (Caracciolo 253). This "second aesthetic" is an alternate view, a disrupted view. Woolf seeks to extend the inanimate beyond its material nature by inviting the reader into a virtual fictional world, and then disrupting their perceptions of that world by having the inanimate elicit shared representations with other bodies. What does it mean then, if bodies and objects are interchangeable? Caracciolo continues, "it constructs a fictional world literally perceived by no one; but in doing so it foregrounds the absence of this perceiving consciousness, so that readers are themselves forced to enter a world projected by the text and occupy its central blank," the "blank" being the virtual canvas—the imaginative space (Caracciolo 262). If the inanimate and the body are exchanged, then the body has the potential to be this "blankness." This moves beyond the triangulation of spectatorship present in Austen's texts and moves us into something different, something more complex. Rather than entering into a space where we can see representations of the self, we move into a space where perceptions of the self are exchangeable for the inanimate and the abstract.

Readers are occupying the virtual space with multiple representations, thus, the virtual becomes a space where vision is not the only catalyst for virtual realities. The subject/object relationship becomes blurred in this exchange between the inanimate and the image, thus deconstructing the image as it relates to the self-reflection process. What emerges is sense of multiplicity in how we perceive the self. Panagia refers to David Hume's ontology to explain this divergence. He states, "Hume's intangible sympathy...is a force of discontinuity," this discontinuity being recognizable through interruptions in self-formations (Panagia 107). He continues, "sympathy eventuates from the practice of impartiality to the extent that it makes an unholding or an ungrasping (i.e. a dispossession) of the given form ourselves. The given is the

self-evident system of distribution between the self, interests, and objects” (Panagia 108). Thus, the impartial spectator—the cognitive sympathy of imagining the feelings of others by viewing bodies—is a starting point, however, it is this “dispossession” of the self that proves vital to extending subjectivity.

It has already been established through Austen, that these virtual spaces become part of the socialization of the self—the extension of Lacan’s mirror reflecting the image of other’s into our consciousness. But Woolf seems to be concentrated on the inability to really see the other through visual interpretations. Viewing the body becomes one way to form perceptions of the self, but these perceptions can, and often are, wrong. Woolf argues for a different kind of socialization process, one that is formed through a “specific type of looking,” according to James Harker in his article, “Misperceiving Virginia Woolf” (Harker 8). This “type of looking” is similar to the Luttrell’s “double vision.” The act of viewing itself is flawed and it is this, “the *imperfect*, sensing body engaged not impassive observation, but in ‘skillful looking’ [that] is the focus of Woolf’s experiments, which, despite being an integrated whole, are too often pushed into the service of depicting the inner or the outer world” (Harker 8). Woolf does not center in a dichotomy of the internal/external or distant/proximate vision, but rather, suggests an oscillation between the two that focuses of the inclusion of the body and sensation. In addition, she highlights the necessity for interruptions to these perceptions. Simply viewing the virtual image of others does not allow for sufficient self formations, but it is in the disruption of these things—the discontinuities—the unknowing, in which we open ourselves up to something bigger, something deeper and possibly more meaningful.

The double vision that Mrs. Ramsey embodies seems to be the key to apprehending human relationships and selfhood. Often, it is the in between—mediation—that allows for

certain kinds of disruptions to *knowing* others. Through Woolf's novel the reader can begin to grasp the unknowing as a part of knowing. As Rae Greiner examines in "Knowing Your Own Nothingness," simply consuming the image of others becomes a materialist endeavor and sympathy "lies in the recognition of a subject-formation that takes place through the techniques of literacy, and is dialogical in its operation: the activation of 'sentiment' occurs in a sympathetic transaction between the *representation* and the reader or audience, as opposed to its being found 'in' either text or the reader's psychology" (emphasis added, Greiner 896). If the transference of sympathy happens through the "triangulation of spectatorship," it calls for a certain kind of reader, one that can embody this "skillful looking" or "double vision," but more importantly, embodies the disruption as part of that "subject-formation." It calls for a more Humean model of sympathy. What Greiner seems to be getting at is that the act of sympathy or sympathetic consciousness happens in spaces that are mediated. The virtual realities that enable distance between the self and its representation are crucial for identity formation. It is through this mediation that one can begin to build a more movable self. Greiner asserts that Smithian sympathy provides a "theory of fiction as sympathy's commerce" that exists through "representations that provide the motion through which our sense of fellow feeling develops" or feeling of ourselves (Greiner 896). Her theory is really a theory of mediation as what is in-between the self—and its representation—becomes the commerce that develops subjectivity.

In an attempt to not only capture, but make permanent, the representation of Mrs. Ramsey, Lily chooses paint as her means of expression. Just as Woolf is changing characters into objects, Lily transforms the image of Mrs. Ramsey into "a line there, in the centre" and "it was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision" (Woolf 306). Here, is Mrs. Ramsey in her final state for Lily, one that captures more than

the image of her, but a representation of her; all sensation and feeling embodied in the thought of her; a line. This is the “second aesthetics” as the “virtual space Lily Briscoe discovers on the ‘other side’ of her canvas enables her...to diffuse the anxiety” about knowing (Caracciolo 253). Like Lily’s painting, Woolf’s novel enables this “second aesthetics” by transforming the virtual into a space that disorients our perceptions, but it is this disorientation that allows us to see beyond our initial self; to discover the possibility of a new self, a movable self. It becomes more than a way to see how others see us, but extends this view by allowing us to imagine infinite alternatives to our own self. Harker points out, “Woolf’s characters are constantly observing and thinking as they navigate the world” and Woolf shows the “inner life is rich with sensation and thought, inspired by the lowest and most common of material artifacts” (Harker 2). Woolf forces us to examine our assumptions about ourselves. If, as Woolf seems to suggest, the image cannot fully break up these assumptions, what happens in a society riddled with image consumption? Is there room for disruption?



### **The Virtual is the New Reality: Misrecognition in *Black Mirror***

The virtual realities of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries remain, at their core, situated within cognitive spaces. While the body is central to the focus of interpreting relationships between subject and object, the process of interpreting the mediated body is tied to the imagination. Referring back to Peter Otto's "first and second-order worlds," the first world is our material reality, the second our imagined reality; a binary seems to have been present in former traditions of virtual spaces (Otto 10). But, virtual reality means something different in the digital age. Otto states, it is the "ability of digital virtual reality to recreate the appearance and sensations of first-order reality that engineers its break from [former] traditions of representations" (Otto 12). In other words, virtual realities now look and feel real. The distinction between the first and second-order world is less clear. The virtual no longer exists simply in the imagination, but has been actualized through diverse mediums. The figure formerly present in the mind is now conjured in your choice of screen; computer, television, video game, etc. In order to fully grasp the difference in this new figure we must return to Panagia.

The emergence of this partially actualized figure is described by Panagia as having been a "monstrous figure in modern conceptions of human action and freedom" as it "interrupt[s] our deeply held convictions about the nature of humanness" (Panagia 35-36). It is monstrous in its deviation of the natural, or traditional, order of virtual bodies. It calls into question the very nature of what it means to be human as the "duplication of the real implies that the first-order realities may themselves be second-order realities" (Otto 12). If we can so artfully imitate the real in a way that makes it indecipherable, is the real simply an illusion? This upsets any

possession of self we may have formerly had. This interruption stems from the disconcerting real capabilities of the “human something.” It looks and sounds *real*. It has human elements. The actor on the screen is a real person, but the figure we see transmitted, the image itself, is only part real. This distinction is what makes the “human something,” because it is human, something else entirely. It obscures the very dichotomy of subject/object and renders it obsolete.

There is clearly something different about this partial figure in comparison to the precursor—the apparition present in the imagination—which interrupts our preconceived ideas of the reflection process. Literary time and space happens within the confines of the imagination, and while it affects the real world, it is not necessarily present in it. The “human something” is present in the material world; it is viewed outside the imagination. This external viewing, and the way in which we react and interact with it, makes it more complicated. The very existence of this figure may change the way we relate to the self entirely. With the invention of new media, the reflection in the mirror seems to be reflecting something back that is less clear, possibly even less human as the figure blends the human and non-human. When examining virtual worlds, it is best to experience them to decipher their meaning. Charlie Brooker provides that experience as he examines humanity’s relationship to developing technology in a 2011 television series titled, *Black Mirror*. The series explores our current relationship to this new technological era through speculative fiction. Mixing current realities of technology obsession, Brooker imagines a world where the lines between subject and object are confused.

Continuing in the line of British fiction, *Black Mirror* explores sympathy through a contemporary lens. The results seem disturbing at times and yet something exists in the medium that allows for the proximate view. The series uses a technological medium to highlight, and then resist, a certain kind of viewer consciousness. This viewer consciousness is reminiscent of the

reader-consciousness Austen and Woolf's texts elicit through sympathetic protocols. While these protocols exist in their texts dialogically, the effects are mirrored in film as the medium provides a similar distance for self-reflection. Free indirect discourse, metonymy, and other language tactics enable the sympathetic reader-consciousness while point of view, camera angle, and other film techniques enable a similar viewer-consciousness. Film seems to be the zenith of this consciousness as viewers can simulate the literal habitation of other bodies. Referring to the novel Greiner asserts, "virtual reality transform[s] the actual particularity of others into concrete particularity of others-as-ourselves," the same can be said of new media (9). Though, as Brooker points out, there is something disconcerting about this new viewer consciousness. The title, *Black Mirror*, alludes to this self reflection process. What has become of Lacan's mirror with the emergence of the technological self? The previous states of reflection emphasized through modes of sympathy seem to have become distorted or darkened in some way. The medium has changed and opened us up to something different, and without a certain kind of viewer consciousness, something potentially more dangerous.

Brooker's series is often compared to Rod Sterling's *The Twilight Zone* for its ability to subtly tackle social issues through a dark and cynical lens, while also evoking a deep sense of contemplation on the current state of affairs. Brooker uses cognitive estrangement to place us in an alternative reality, and then reveals the reality to be our own. This defamiliarization often occurs in the beginning of the episodes where the human/technology relationships seem like something in the distant future. It becomes clear as plots progress that we are often closer to the science fiction world—sometimes already in it—than we realized. This is perhaps the most disconcerting aspect of the series. We feel an initial distance from the fictional world, but Brooker utilizes point of view to implicate his viewers in the bleakness of the world he has

created. Because the anthology series unfolds with different story-lines and cast members for each episode, there is no sequence of events to follow or characters to attach to. Every episode opens into a new narrative in a new space. This element contributes to a reoccurring trope throughout the series; disorientation. This feeling of disorientation emerges out of the often confusing relationships between technology and culture. Brooker does not force us to look at technology specifically, but rather what technology does to the self; what happens when the tool itself begins to change the shape of its user? Brooker seems to recognize that the evolution of virtual reality has developed a new relationship to our sense of self. His show often raises questions about how the self is changing with the emergence of A.I, social media culture, and the transhuman movement.

In season two episode two titled, “White Bear,” the image-obsessed future—which is eerily similar to the one we live in now—illuminates possible flaws in constantly engaging with this “human something.” Modern virtual reality technologies rely on a certain level of absorption in its very nature. It mimics sight, sound, and sensation, often rendering the first and second worlds inseparable. Its ability to feel real is based, in part, on how immersed in the process we become. In fact, the more immersed we are, the more successful the virtual reality. This immersion can be problematic. As Greiner points out, “form proves a training ground for this sympathetic detachment, guiding readers to take on a variety of perspectives that need not fully inhabit” (Greiner 140). Similarly to the multiple perspectives in Virginia Woolf’s *To The Lighthouse*, there is a multiplicity of self present in this new figure. However, the dispossession of the self seems to have gone too far. Previously, the ‘sympathetic detachment’ left a space for self reflection and creativity; now there seems to be a kind of immersion present which tends toward total absorption. This immersion extends beyond the multiplicity of perspective. It leaves

us simply voyeuristically *looking at*, rather than inhabiting other perspectives, thus, changing the reflection. It is as if we are too far detached and the mirror is too distant to see. Brooker uses this detachment as a way to show us ourselves viewing.

The episode begins with static fuzz that mimics an error in the display (see fig. 1). It is uncertain if the show has begun or if we are being subjected to some kind of opening credits. This digital breaking of the fourth wall, one that subtly continues throughout the episode, creates a disorientation that will mimic the disorientation of the main protagonist, Victoria. This shot quickly changes to the official opening of the episode where we visualize the effect we were just embodying. A confused Victoria wakes up in an empty house unsure of where she is or who she is. She stumbles around trying to orient herself into a stable position that will illuminate her situation and self. As this is happening, it is important to note that we are always viewing other bodies throughout the episode; point of view only shifts in strategic moments that heighten the episode's ending. We watch Victoria's experience and share in her confusion as we attempt to orient ourselves in the rules of this new reality. Close ups of her face elicit the appropriate amount of sympathy as we share in her feeling.

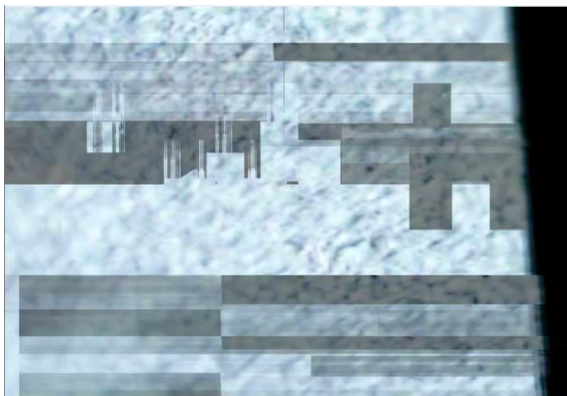


Fig. 1. Digital interruptions that appear on screen; Brooker, Charlie; *Black Mirror*; 2011; Netflix. Still

The first few minutes establish an important theme, viewing. Upon the first moment of waking, Victoria looks in a mirror. The remainder of the episode will echo Victoria's search for self identity as she repeats the phrase, "I do not know who I am." (*Black Mirror*, 2011). This repetition serves as a reminder that the external world has the power to shape the sense of self, for better or worse. It also suggests that the reflection in the mirror contributes to this identity construction as Victoria's inability to recognize her self in the reflection haunts the rest of the narrative. She continues down the stairs of the house and views the few photo frames on the mantel. She sees a photo of a young girl and caresses it, but it is unclear what their relationship is, even Victoria seems to not know. As the plot continues we follow her outside as she roams around a seemingly deserted neighborhood looking for answers. Things get more confusing from here as she looks up. The camera angles upward and we see a series of shots where people are positioned behind windows and they seem to be recording her on their phones. The mise-en-scene reveals an emphasis on framing. Each person behind the window seems to be peering at her through the window frame first, and the phone screen second.

Applying Virginia Woolf's focus on the window, we can see the set up of a particular kind of viewing. Victoria's body is framed first through the window. Claudia Olk postulates, "Windows, mirrors, and veils present what Woolf emphasises as 'another medium,'" this other medium "creates a boundary of perception or a threshold" (Olk 56). Much like Mr. Ramsey's failure to pass through the window and into an understanding of his relationships with others or Lily's struggle to articulate Mrs. Ramsey before her final vision in the painting, the viewers in the window above Victoria remain unable to cross over. They seem bound to a certain posture or manner of looking. It is even more significant then that framed within the frame of the window is a new apparatus in which the view is doubly mediated. Are there now two thresholds to cross

over? We see several people—of all ages—keeping a distance from her, but filming her and watching her through their hand-held devices. A distinction is made here in the way Victoria is being viewed. People are not looking at her, but her image, mediated through the screens in their hands. The technological devices mediate the way she is viewed. She is literally framed within a technological space. They also remain at a distance at all times, backing away from her if she moves towards them. This becomes more and more unsettling throughout the episode as things escalate and the viewers remain bound to these same positions. There seems to be a physical barrier that keeps people from interacting. The way their bodies are positioned in these shots suggests a closed off posture to Victoria. It is as if they cannot look up and see the material world, only the world through the screen. The first real unsettling moment is when a man gets out of a car and loads a shotgun and aims it at her. The surrounding viewers simply watch as she runs away screaming for their assistance the whole way (see fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Victoria runs from as onlookers film; Brooker, Charlie; *Black Mirror*; 2011; Netflix; Still.



Fig. 3; Viewers only view through the screen. Brooker, Charlie; *Black Mirror*; 2011; Netflix; Still.

It does not seem to be just a few people who are bound by this particular framing, but the whole world seems entranced by these lenses. The narrative continues and Victoria stumbles upon someone not using a technological lens named Jem. Jem fills us in on what is happening in this apocalyptic world as everyone seems to be mesmerized by these devices. She explains that these viewers are mesmerized by a signal coming from a place called White Bear. As the shooter progresses towards Victoria and Jem, who join together in their escape from this strange environment, the following dialogue takes place:

Victoria: What's wrong with all of these people? Why are they just watching?!  
Jem: The signal makes them do it. But they were always like that underneath.  
(*Black Mirror*, 2011).

This interaction suggests a certain type of self present before the use of the technology. The devices used to watch are only tools that extend a behavior that was already present. The crowds are unfeeling and voyeuristic. The transfer of emotion between bodies is almost non-existent. It seems these technological apparatuses are mediating our images, thus increasing an already present disconnect in an increasingly physically disconnected world. It seems that the windows have become walls. What is important to note here is the complete disconnect between the viewers and the viewed throughout the crisis is heightened through this particular framing. This voyeuristic behavior, though present in a speculative narrative, warns of the potential effects of a technologically viewing-based culture. It is not just Victoria's body from which they are disconnected, but all bodies as they zoom in and out of viewing the body of man who has been shot in the cross fire. The way they crowd around him to simply record his lifeless body, rather than help or call for aid, is terrifying. They seem to only be capable of peering through their digital lenses. This emphasis on the medium becomes significant in the end as the mystery of this mesmerization is unveiled.



The digital static from the opening of the episode reoccurs through flashbacks. Victoria is prone to what seem like flashbacks or premonitions—uncertain at first—that mimic the digital in the way they appear to the off-screen viewer. The screen flickers and point of view shifts as images flash before us. The camera angle becomes shaky, the lens becomes grainy, and lines flicker across our view associating the memory with what seems like a digital video of some kind. Victoria seems disheveled after each flashback and more confused. The shift in point of view allows us to be subject to the same memory confusion as Victoria. Part of this effect contributes to the sympathy that we (as off screen viewers) feel for her. We are able to enter into her point of view, and thus imagine and embody her feeling momentarily as our confusion is heightened alongside Victoria's. Though this sympathy seems similar to the traditional Smithian version as we have a body to read, the perspective is not internalized. We are still *looking at*, rather than looking in. Certain qualities are lacking. James Chandler points out what is missing, “*the dual sense of reflection* that combines seeing oneself in the eyes of another with the act of looking into our own hearts” (emphasis added, Chandler 142). Simply sharing in her feeling is not enough if it does not provoke a turn to the reflective gaze. As the camera zooms in each time to reveal the sweat on her body, we can see the terror in her eyes as the camera consistently frames around her face. It appears painful each time these flashbacks appear as she winces after. These flashbacks consist of images of a man and the little girl from the photo she found on the mantel. The disorientation seems to be the only shared feeling, which does not elicit a connection between Victoria and the viewer. It is only through these digital flashbacks that we begin to enter into an exchange that allows us to see ourselves.

The images in the flashbacks are often indecipherable and consist of glimpses of other people not yet known and places we have yet to see. While this effect contributes to shared

feeling, as we are literally able to live her case and see through her eyes, it also interrupts our view of her by blending it with technology. The flashbacks highlight the digital lens in which we are viewing her body. This is perhaps where sympathy begins to emerge as it briefly allows us to glimpse ourself viewing. This interruption heightens our awareness of the layered viewing in which we are participating. It momentarily disrupts our absorption. This awareness briefly interrupts our immersion in this virtual medium and reminds us that we are viewing bodies on a screen. We are momentarily glimpsed with our own reflection as we see ourselves viewing, much like the people on screen. This alignment with the viewers within the fictional world is disconcerting as we already recognize something disturbing in their viewing habits. This brief recognition allows us to momentarily reflect. There is a clear leap from the image conjured in the imagination and the image present before us. This new figure requires a different kind of participation than previous mediums like art, photography, and the literary world. While participation may imply action, Brooker seems to suggest that there is a kind of danger lurking in this participation. It is through the momentary interruption that we are able to catch a glimpse of the voyeuristic tendencies this new virtual space creates. While Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf may have opened us up to the possibility of new subjectivities, Brooker seems to warn us of having too many. Greg Singh asserts that Brooker's depiction of these technologies frame a self that "is not an authentic, *true* sense of self. It is an over-identification with the projected *persona* which, potentially, has the power to distort intersubjective relations" (emphasis in original, Singh 126). The inauthentic self results from both the medium and its effects on the *I*'s relationship to society. The identification results from something only part human.

The medium, according to Panagia, "captures the actor's luminous impressions automatically" and because it is part real "it is in every respect an artificial person...*something*

*real bodies forth*,” giving the impression of authenticity (Panagia 36). He goes on to say, “ the reason why it is unlike anything [we] have ever known is because a human something is not something we can know...the best [we] can do is experience the appearance of a human something and attend to its luminous partiality” (Panagia 36). This “partiality” comes from the mimicking of the real. The figure seems real because it interacts with the real. It speaks and moves and even can be said to be real in that behind the lens, a person exists somewhere that allows this figure to exist. This makes the immersion into this virtual world much easier. The kind of mesmerization the viewers within the show are performing reflects the common appearance of user attachment in real life as we often see people interacting with their screens almost daily. Drawing on this relationship, it is clear Brooker is commenting on an already present phenomenon—immersion in the technology. What he highlights in this particular episode is that this immersion can deflect sympathetic consciousness. The “human something” partiality interferes with our relationship to the self by consistently engaging us in part-real selves. Therefore, we become so detached through the impartiality that there seems to be nothing to ground us in a material reality.

Modern society is both saturated and obsessed with this “human something.” Brooker highlights this figures inescapability throughout the series by having these viewers everywhere. They show up even in the midst of nowhere. The proliferation of the part real image is distinct from previous virtual realities in its ability to render the viewer powerless. As Peter Otto has already established, virtual realities have existed long before the creation of the digital and the “poetic genius steps into an open-ended virtual space that lies between subject and object, known and knower (Otto 174). The literary image we view through the poetic genius allows us to create our own image in the imagination; we have a degree of power over the emergence of this image.

In other words, the image is a product of our own imagination. Though the image may reflect certain ideologies, we have some control over how we view it. The “human something” however, is created for us. It exists outside the imagination and is created by someone/something else. We are *looking at* something that is actually there and thus lose a certain level of control over how we perceive this part live image. The angle is decided for us, it is framed in specific ways.

As Jacque Khalip and Robert Mitchell explore in *Releasing the Image: From Literature to New Media*, “visuality is our most significant and primary form of ethical engagement with the world” and therefore “the continued refinement of image-producing technologies...and their dissemination... justify claims that modern society is...*inscribed by* spectacles and images” (Khalip 2). If we are inscribed by interactions with images, and the part real image is more potent, then the way we view our sense of self can be potentially determined by other’s desires. The relinquishment of control over this imaginative space, through the total absorption, opens us up to identity formations both inscribed by and controlled by others. This control has political implications which Brooker addresses in his series.

The political implication, as the show highlights, is a kind of memorization that produces inaction. If fictional worlds affect the real world, then we can assume those who control the fictional world could possess control over its viewers. This disturbing suggestion of inaction is highlighted as the episode progresses. Victoria and Jem find themselves in the woods with a seemingly friendly man who has taken them to a “safe place.” We soon learn that this safe place is a pseudo-torture chamber in the woods. The man holds them hostage and proceeds to tie up Victoria as Jem gets away. He pulls out an automatic screwdriver and suddenly people begin to come out of the woods. These viewers do not pause in their viewing, rather they continue to

watch and gawk through their screens as the torture scene unfolds. Brooker portrays these watchers as particularly voyeuristic in this scene. They creep out of the woods and silently watch as Victoria screams, tied to a fallen tree (see figure 2). They seem unaffected by the content on the screen. This is particularly disturbing as bodies are tied in trees in a graphic, crucifix fashion. People just remain at a distance, watching through their devices. The viewers do not seem particularly unable to offer help, but seemingly unconcerned with helping at all. The framing of Victoria's body seems to produce inaction in these viewers. Their concern for maintaining her body within this technological frame prevents any disruption in their gaze. For a medium that literally allows you to be in the case of another—by viewing their life—there seems to be an absence of sympathy.

This absence exists through the medium itself. By actualizing the image—extracting it from the imagination into the material world—the previous cognition recedes, or changes at the very least. We are another step removed. The viewing of Victoria's body is replaced with the viewing of a “human something.” And by doing so, Brooker seems to suggest, it renders her body into nothing. This nothingness is the absence of her physicality, the absence of her body. She becomes the “human something” and takes on its partiality. Dennis Weiss suggests, in *Design, Mediation, and the Posthuman*, that this kind of relationship between technology and the real is prevalent and recognized among interdisciplinary scholars. He states, “the role of technology design in facilitating the kinds of extreme mediation...can lead to subjectivities and embodiments that are neither fully human nor fully mechanical” (Weiss xvi). The result of this blending of man and machine seems to have created an impenetrable distance that dulls our responses and our ability to act. Thus, we enter into a medium that simply produces voyeurism, rather than self reflection.

Though the medium has the potential to bring Smithian sympathy into modernity as we can live out other cases by being able to behold them, and inhabit multiple alternate endings and realities, it seems to have immersed us past the point of recognition. James Chandler suggests “the sentimental sometimes becomes so pervasive as to leave no room whatsoever for recognition or real analysis (Chandler 36). The mass dissemination of the medium has rendered the “human-object dichotomy obsolete,” according to Weiss (Weiss xvi). The complete absorption of the “human something” has blurred the lines between virtuality and materiality. Chandler takes up the task of tracing this particular relationship between cinema and sympathy asserting, “one of the several paradoxical developments in the story...is that this embodied sensorium is more and more finely articulated as the spectator turns virtual” (16-17). As Chandler points out, there is something paradoxical in this sympathetic machine. By viewing Victoria’s body, we do feel sympathy for her, her tears evoke discomfort, pity. Her visible exhaustion is moving. We feel for her as outside viewers, but the viewers within the show do not. The distance that is necessary for sympathy seems to be present as sympathy “operates best when we can abstract other people’s feelings, approximate rather than share them,” according to Greiner (899). However, this double framing extends the approximation too far and we are left with this partially mechanical image in the reflection.

This modern medium mediates the body in a new way. As Chandler points out, there seems to be a lack of recognition through the distanced view of the screen. This lack of recognition comes from the obscuring of bodies through this new technology. Brooker speculates on the consequences of this new mediation. There is something about the unwillingness to look up from the screen that is disconcerting in the episode. Viewing the body through the screen distorts the view of the body. Greg Singh highlights, in “Recognition and the Image of Mastery

as Themes in *Black Mirror*,” this distortion happens because, “In the first place, it [the human something] is not really a mirror, but a mirror-like impression, or image, of connectivity” (Singh 123). In other words, it acts as part real, giving off the impression of a certain level of interaction. This impression of interaction creates a further distancing from the body as it simulates closeness simultaneously. It *seems* like we are engaging in the material world in the same way, when really we are not engaging in it at all. The presence of this “human something” may conjure a body to view, but there is a kind of over-identification happening. Singh suggests that this is a result of “dysfunctional relationships with technology...[and] characters misrecognizing the relationships they have with other people, and therefore feeling the bite of their alienated existence” (Singh 121). However, misrecognition has always been present in relating to others, as both Austen and Woolf have shown.

When misrecognition is present, as Woolf seems to suggest, there is something in the misrecognition that is useful. The relationship between the self and others is always based on some form of misrecognition as we cannot fully know others. Brooker seems to be getting at something deeper than misrecognition. It seems that these new technological apparatuses are the new frame in which we view the world. While, it is obvious that we look up from these screens on a day to day basis, our relationship to the world now seems largely dictated by this new relationship Singh calls “always on culture” (Singh 126). This “always on” phrase refers to the interconnectivity that new media has supposedly brought the digital era. It is the social aspect of technologies that enable us to stay ‘connected’ to everyone all the time via Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, even virtual gaming communities and the like. The longer these technologies have been around, the easier it has become to identify the un-socialness about them. Weiss’s anthology asserts, the idea that the current age has taken “a turn from the virtual age to the age of the thing”

affirms the notion that these “social” technologies can be just as isolating (Weiss xv). In a way, these virtual social spaces only connect “human somethings” as digital bodies come to replace personal interactions. In an “always on” state it becomes almost impossible to enter into the space of reflection that has been so vital to the functioning of sympathy because there is no disconnection or isolation from these digital bodies.

In an image obsessed era, the overload of sentimental material can have disastrous consequences. The end of “White Bear” depicts an even darker world than we could have imagined. Victoria and Jem get to their destination; White Bear. This place is supposed to house the signal that is perpetuating the strange state of mesmerization everyone is trapped in. The plan is to douse it in gasoline and set it on fire. This will inevitably shut down the signal and liberate the people from this zombie-like attachment to viewing their screens. The characters are executing this plan when they are ambushed by “hunters” (people not mesmerized and taking advantage of others) and Victoria snags a gun and turns to shoot in self-defense. In a strange turn of events, the gun shoots confetti. This is where the mystery of the episode begins to unravel and the futuristic world of being becoming zombified by signals sheds its science fiction-like attributes as the world is not that distant from our own. In fact, it could very well be our own. This closes the gap of cognitive estrangement and places us back into our own recognizable environment. The very ground Victoria is on shifts as the setting rearranges itself and turns to reveal a stage fully equipped with an audience; an audience recording through their phones. Victoria is strapped to a chair and a host walks out on stage and begins to reveal the story. News stories flash on large screens behind Victoria as her identity is finally revealed. It is in this moment she begins to know herself (see fig. 4). The photo of the little girl in the beginning, as well as the flashbacks that include her, are all part of memories. As the news story reveals,



Victoria is the accomplice to the kidnapping and murder of the little girl in the photo. Her sentence is to relive this nightmarish journey day after day of people viewing her through their phones—a reenactment of her participation in the crime as she held the device that recorded the whole thing. Victoria faces this wall of screens and watches her identity revealed in horror as she listens to the narrative and the jeering of the angry audience. This is her justice; *to see how the world sees her*. The triangulation of spectatorship becomes a form of punishment.



Fig. 4; Victoria is forced to see others see her. Brooker, Charlie; *Black Mirror*, 2011; Netflix; Still.

Suddenly, any amount of sympathy or pity we have felt for Victoria feels confusing. If the narrative is true, Victoria is not someone we would want to feel sympathy for. She filmed her boyfriend murder and burn the body of a young, innocent girl. And yet, there is something disconcerting in her punishment, something that gives us an uneasy feeling in the way this episode is playing out. What Brooker is able to highlight, in this unraveled mystery, is our participation in it. We become implicated in the viewing process. For a brief moment, As Victoria is being loaded into the van and the performance is in full swing, we (off screen viewers) are subtly implicated as point of view shifts momentarily and the screen holds a small red “record” button in our screen view. This camera framing positions us from the point of view

of the crowd. While before we would catch glimpses of ourselves viewing, now the mirror is forced upon us and we are shocked by our own reflection. This kind of meta-recognition—us viewing her through the same lens as the viewers within the screen—implicates us in the creation of this kind of world. The reflection in the mirror has become darkened and almost unrecognizable as we are participating in this strange form of visual justice; forcing Victoria to endure seeing how others see her every day.

It is perhaps this very participation that Brooker wants to warn us about. As Victoria is jeered at and mocked she is loaded up into a clear vehicle that drives her through the crowd and right back to the house in which she woke up. As the vehicle passes people are still viewing her through their devices, but they are now capable of action as they throw things at the moving vehicle taunt her. The crowd's sudden break from the screens in order to engage in violence suggests a kind of devouring consciousness. The only action they are capable of are brief pauses from virtuality in order to participate in mob-mentality. Is this the effect of the permanent connection to the digital? If the bodies we view feel like non-bodies, then our ability to sympathize deteriorates and a kind of groupthink kicks in. We become so de-possessed of a self that other's desires become indecipherable from our own. The individual can be lost in the construction of the self through the lens of society. There is a subtle lamenting of the past sympathetic consciousness in the form of justice that emerges in this bleak world. As the vehicle returns Victoria to the house she woke up in, she is placed back in the same chair, and a small device is forced on her head to erase her memory and start the process back over again. The logic is that she will wake up terrified, confused, and unable to gain sympathy from others, even though there are plenty of people around—viewing.

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Returning to the title, *Black Mirror*, Singh reminds us of the black mirror effect that phones/screens have when turned off. He states, “you see your reflection, darkened, untrue” and asks if this is what Brooker’s world forces us to peer into—what kind of viewing habits are we involved in? (Singh 122) As we have glimpsed the black mirror, we recognize that we are becoming disconcerted as our composure of self possession is breaking down. What kind of world would emerge from a self that evolves with a part real sense of subjectivity? Brooker suggests that perhaps the bleak form of justice that emerges is a result of dulled sympathetic consciousnesses; our view is voyeuristic. A disembodied sympathetic consciousness is dangerous. In a world where “connectivity is assumed and ubiquitous” and the “lines between virtuality and reality have become blurred,” how do we navigate sympathy? (Singh 128). Like Hume’s ontology of the movable self, have we already come to think of ourselves as both virtual and material? The rise of digital technology has revealed a major shift in the history of mediation. While Austen and Woolf disrupted our sense of self through virtual spaces, enabling a sense of self that could be potentially malleable, Brooker reveals that this new identity formation may create a self that is so malleable that it never fully takes its form but remains immersed in the flow of other’s desires.

One common theme in this trajectory of mediation is interruption. The things that inhabit the spaces between the self and its representation, while they have the potential to hinder identity formation, can also be a place of resistance. Austen interrupts our perceptions of the self through the novel by questioning how we make judgments; Woolf uses misrecognition as a way to break down our assumptions and thus enables alternative views of representations; Brooker’s show shocks us into recognition by revealing a new distorted and darkened figure in the mirror.

Revealing what has become of sympathy in the modern era allows us to reevaluate our viewing tendencies. Brooker's use of digital media reveals a potential resistance in the medium itself; however, it requires a more intense kind of interruption from the immersion because this reality is harder to shake due to its simulation capabilities. In some cases, even the material begins to mimic the virtual and we do not think twice about re-viewing the "human somethings" on the screens, even if somewhere in the world, they are in fact real. The human is hard to locate among the mass dissemination of the virtual. Will we know it when we see it?

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