Invisible Extinction: Fragility and the Extinction of the Self in Neoliberal Societies

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Abstract   Understanding capitalism as a system that inherently triggers extinction, this article portrays how the self and its character have been modified within neoliberalism to a point in which it has lost its subjectivity and it is bound to the laws and logic of capitalism. By looking at necropolitics and psychopolitics from a critical neo-Marxist lens, this article puts external biopolitics at stake while connecting them with different ways capitalism has to alienate subjects that are victims and, at the same time, vassals of this extinctive ideology. In addition, this theoretical framework will be analysed in a more tangible way by close-reading some sections of *Black Mirror*'s episode "Nosedive" as an example of a dystopia that is not that far away from our reality, where value and morality depend on the superficial image and extreme individuality of the subjects that belong to and perpetuate the ideology and dynamics of internal control, extinguishing their own existence as subjects. Finally, this article interrogates present times attempting to understand whether we are living in the Necrocene, the age of extinction due to capitalist logic, and whether this extinction of the self and its subjectivity might be symptoms of it.

Keywords   Critical theory. Extinction studies. Neoliberalism. Neo-Marxism. Psychopolitics. Cultural analysis. Necrocene. Necropolitics.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 Beyond Biopolitics: Necro-realities, Psychopolitics, Extinction. – 3 The Disappearance of the Self: Dystopia, Realityand Extinction. – 4 Conclusion: The Necrocene, the Age of Extinction.

1   Introduction

The "character of the self" is something well discussed in philosophy and social theory. From the Greek classics to the twentieth-century French hermeneutics, the ideas of virtue, morality, subjectivity, and agency have been put at the forefront of most of the important debates in these disciplines. With these in mind, the character of the self has been defined as "the ethical values we place on our own desires and our relations to others" (Sennett 1998, i). By this, it is possible to argue that character depends on the connections a subject has with the world and its unique reality. In addition, s Richard Sennet puts it, individuals become and concern "the personal traits which we value in ourselves and for which we seek to be valued by others" (1998, i), having sustainable, lomg-term goals and sentiments as the items thats erve the character of a subject.. According to Michel Foucault (1993), the self is complex in the sense that techniques of domination can permeate subjectivity. In other words, the self can be modified by either internal or external constraints that will, in one way or another, interfere in its nature and the way in which exists and is perceived.

That is, because of this permeability of selfhood, the individuals in current neoliberal societies[1] seem to constitute themselves as subjects only through becoming subjected to domination and disciplinary tools and discourses. That is, individuals constitute their agency by means of the projection of the individualism, privatisation and selfishness that neoliberalism has internally inflicted in them. These aspects, in turn, originate and build upon the thoughts and choices of the subjects themselves, modifying the way they act according to a specific logic. Here, as a subject that is bound together to agency, the self falls into the danger of having a morality colonised by such domination tools. If one takes these statements into account and transmutes them into current capitalism, connections can be drawn between the notion and character of self and current capitalism. In addition, a link can be made to see how current capitalism has a noteworthy impact on the framing and nature of selfhood in this specific system. Using a quote by the novelist Salman Rushdie, it seems that

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[1]   Even though the current neoliberal state has been defined as "late capitalism" or "late neoliberalism" on several occasions, this text is reluctant to use these concepts and will use the adjective "current" instead of "late". Since we don't have the ability to predict the future and the forthcoming shapes capitalism might have, the Author believes we must avoid using the term "late". Using "late" has the connotation that capitalism or neoliberalism are in their final stage. Being honest, few theoreticians would agree to state with conviction that capitalism is in a final stage of development if they were asked to provide a serious answer, even though capitalism is facing an unprecedented crisis of sustainability, not only in the Earth systems through its dynamics, but also as a system itself – that can potentially lead to its extinction at the expense of the annihilation of everything else.

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the modern self in neoliberal societies is "a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved" (1992, 12). Thus, these dynamics help us highlight the impact of societal and cultural dynamics into the formation of the nature of the self.

In this sense, similar to Jonathan Crary's (2013) *24/7* theory and Simon Glezos' (2012) thoughts in *The Politics of Speed*, Sennett (1998) argues that in current capitalism, the time's arrow is broken and that is continually re-engineered even though it has no fixed trajectory in a short-term, flexible political economy. As a consequence, individuals tend to experience a lack of sustained relationships and purposes (84). In other words, under these conditions emerges a conflict that jeopardises character and experience, an experience of "disjointed time" that threatens "the ability of people to form their characters into sustained narratives" (25). Sennett also argues that in current capitalism the character and, consequently, the self are built on the grounds of a circumscribed idea of "we", which is transmuted in our daily lives through belonging to a certain group (work team, social tribe, group with similar interests, for instance), as a desire for self-protection (118). By saying this, he claims that this desire of belonging is a defensive one, which is usually expressed as a rejection of the "other" in Herbert Marcuse's ([1964] 2020) terms, to generate confusion and dislocation. It is not a surprise that this aims more at those who benefit less from the current economic system in order to make them flow in the frames of, in this case, neoliberal capitalism.

Nonetheless, and even though Sennet has a very important point, individuality is also a crucial part of the nature of subjects in neoliberal capitalism. As will be portrayed in further sections in this article, the subjects desperately try to foster their individual agency and essence and, by doing this, they become tools internally controlled by capitalist ideology (Han 2017). And it is precisely this internal biopolitical control that seems to be extinguishing the very idea of a free subject. These claims for individual self-realisation came up after the upheaval of neoliberalism as a hegemonic system in wealthy countries, and have become "a feature of the institutionalized expectations inherent in social reproduction that the particular goals of such claims are lost and they are transmuted into a support of the system's legitimacy" (Honneth 2004, 467). This paradox, in turn, shows that the processes that were thought to promote or enhance qualitative freedom, such as the will of individual realisation within the system, are altered through ideology, triggering "a number of symptoms of inner emptiness, of feeling oneself to be superfluous, and of absence of purpose" (467).

In fact, in the last fifty years, there has been an increasing tendency towards individualism and individualisation of the *modus vivendi* in neoliberal societies that moved away from Fordist processes of production, by placing the self at the very centre. This, in turn,

is developing into effects that are harmful for the individual itself: depression, anxiety and an increase of suicidal tendencies amongst the subjects of a society (Han 2010, 11). It is no strange, then, that if this situation is read bearing in mind the ideas presented by Sigmund Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents* ([1930] 2014), humanity is a beast that, through its cruel virulence, hurts its members and destroys itself. Actually, humanity has always made use of violence in order to accumulate power and, thus, reach the false realisation of feeling invulnerable or immortal. However, this violence or, as Freud calls it, "death drive", has been represented by the logic of capitalist accumulation which grounds itself on the negation of death through selfish economic welfare. Humankind, according to Freud, flows between the death drive and the eros drive. In order to survive, humankind projects its aggressiveness outside its own body towards other living and non-living agents in order to prevent itself from self-destruction. Thus, this death drive, inherent in human instincts, is projected through capitalism as an economic system in which humankind can unleash its repressed aggressiveness towards those that benefit the least from it while, at the same time, being a non-deliberate reaction in order to escape the imagery of death through production, growth and accumulation (Han 2022, 11). Think about the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean and how it is invisibilised in mainstream discourses; the sixth extinction of species as the first one triggered by the actions of a single species on the planet; or, conversely, the usage of plastic surgery and cosmetic products to extend the young physical appearance of individuals as long as they can pay for it. As a result, going full circle, the capitalist will of negating death is actually self-destructive in a system where life is solely understood through utility and economic value.

In light of this, the very structure of selfhood has historically evolved in relation to the social, economic and cultural patterns within a certain society while, through this process of constant modification, it is also a modifier of these said patterns. It seems, then, that recent shifts in modern societies and, precisely, in Western current neoliberal societies have had a radical change on the self that is making us witness its dissolution and degradation (Thompson 2022, 3). In other words, capitalism and its voracious will and ability to integrate everything external into its market logic and dynamics seems to have penetrated the psychic level of personality. As Thompson (2022, 6) pointed out, the pattern of the modern self has been infected by a regime of social norms grounded in intensified and commodified technical apparatuses and logics that are, in fact, needed for the maintenance of a socio-political and cultural system rooted on extraction and accumulation to perpetuate hierarchical social relations.

With that said, this article will portray how capitalism, through individualism, is eliminating the conception and agency of the self

by means of the individuality that current neoliberalism promotes. In order to do so, this piece will critically engage with the ideas of necropolitics and psychopolitics, putting external biopolitics into question while connecting them with different ways capitalist logic tends to alienate subjects that are victims and, at the same time, vassals of this extinctive ideology. In addition, all these ideas will be practically looked at through a more tangible way by close-reading some sections in *Black Mirror*'s episode "Nosedive" (2016) as an example of a dystopia that is close to our reality, where value and morality depend on the surficial image and extreme individuality of the subjects that belong to and perpetuate the ideology and dynamics of internal control, extinguishing their own existence as subjects. The choice for this specific episode is by no means arbitrary, as it will not only help us illustrate the extinction of selfhood in current neoliberalism, but it also connects this critical issue with the rise of a cybernetic social realm that is having an impact in the daily lives of humans. Finally, this article interrogates present times attempting to understand whether we are living in the Necrocene, the age of extinction due to capitalist logic.

2 Beyond Biopolitics: Necro-realities, Psychopolitics, Extinction

For Michel Foucault ([1975] 2002, 142), bodies and societies are regulated through physical and mental discipline to produce tame and productive beings. In broad strokes, biopolitics connects power and life. Namely, power enters life, and, through an immunologic scheme, power tries to preserve life through negative control (Esposito 2004, 74). Nonetheless, as Deleuze (1999, 280) pointed out, in the state of affairs that current capitalism presents, societies are substituting the closed disciplinary model for another that does not come from the outside but rather from the internal psyche of individuals. Consequently, this internal domination extends control to the never-ending realm, in contrast to Foucauldian biopolitics. The Panopticon is no longer there. Control is no longer interested in said external scope. On the other hand, things tend to go towards transparency, that is, erasing traces of control both in the subject and the operator (Baudrillard [2006] 2021, 50). If, in classic biopolitics, subjects were under the anvil of some external disciplinary image, now subjects become images. Therefore, these images are intelligible at any moment by the subjects, overexposing themselves and overexposing their everyday lives with almost no secrets (Baudrillard 2021, 50).

Thus, as Han (2017, 25) points out, Foucauldian biopolitics can statistically frame and control the bodies and minds through external

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force. However, it does not have access to the direct control of the individual ontological realm through a shift from the external Panopticon-like control towards an internal borderless control. Biopolitics semiotically shifts from the "you must" to the "you can" as, in current capitalism, motivation and initiative are more powerful in terms of exercising power over subjects than external frames (Han 2012, 4). That is, internal positivist control is much more efficient within neoliberalism than external constraints, generating a domination mechanism that operates in a silent way. This control is, paradoxically, much more constraining that external power and, at the same time, much more accepted by subjects and societies as a whole. To put it short, neoliberalism has discovered the psyche as a productive and constraining force while putting said domination into an invisible practice of which the subject is not even conscious. Power positively adjusts itself to the psyche instead of negatively dominating it. The workers' goals and motivations must match whatever their job may need from them, showing their commitment to benefit the business as a whole, being entrepreneurs of their own, within a company or in their daily lives. This flexibility and adaptability of the individual imposed on themselves is used in order to benefit corporations, which no longer offer fixed positions with fixed tasks. On the other hand, it is these corporations that demand adaptability and a will to thrive in multiple tasks, burdening the workers. Then, very close to Zygmunt Bauman (2007) idea of *Liquidity* in the modern world, Axel Honneth (2004, 473), postulated that workers must arrange their biographies in a fictive manner in line with the imagery of self-realisation to pursue a job position while, at the same time, it is only the desire of social and economic security, something almost unattainable in modern societies.

In this light, scholars such as Paul Ricœur (1978) have argued that human subjectivity is bound to a double allegiance: these subjects live and die through the laws of the natural world because of our physical and biological existence; but also, to the phenomenal world around the subjects in which we try to live and die by breaking away from some of the natural laws. This might imply that subjects are able to change, to a certain extent, their own efforts in the way they exist and co-exist with their own reality. However, if control has switched from externality to internality, the imposed laws that create the nature and character of the self in current neoliberalism are more complicated to be transformed because it is the subject itself the one that imposes its own discipline.

The material and psychological dimensions of capitalism do not allow human beings to culturally grasp an alternative to the current system. Capitalism has become a material and psychological force that steers our decisions and perspectives through its logic. It has become both material and mental, an element of global

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"psychopolitics":[2] the colonisation, exploitation, control and extinction of the self (Han 2017). Here, tackling the necro-realities of the current system is pivotal so as to come to terms with its psychopolitics and, thus, the different processes of extinction that unfold from it beyond non-human ecosystems.

The current neoliberal society embeds the idea of necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) at its core, understood from a rather historical materialist lens that does not cancel the post-colonial turn in Mbembe but complements it. Necropolitics here rejects the idea of necro- as the politics of having the right to kill. Instead, it refers to the right to expose people to death (Mbembe 2003, 12). For Achilles Mbembe, necropolitics is "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (14). In other words, in this process, humankind becomes subject to the negativity of this dialectic: death. The human being "becomes a subject – that is, separated from the animal – in the struggle and the work through which he or she confronts death (understood as the violence of negativity)" (14), which means upholding death.

Nonetheless, here it is interesting to go beyond Mbembe's ideas. If one includes human and non-human beings alike, it regroups the subjects in the process of becoming extinct. The exploited human and non-human agents are to be subjugated under the anvil of capitalism. Consequently, human beings who believe they are entitled to a degree of subjectivity, become a set of objects. They are objectified, just as non-human ecosystems are. Objectified agents lose subjectivity in front of capital and become victims of necropolitics. This death is intrinsically linked with extinction, since death is part of the process of extinction. Yet this death is unnatural as it is bound to the external forces of capitalism and it will lead to the disappearance of whole cultures and ecosystems as it unmakes the task of being and existing, as opposed to individual deaths that do not jeopardise the evolutionary process. Thus, this death triggers processes of extinction.

As a consequence, these politics of exposing entities to death and, thus, extinction in this paradigm, imply the right to enslave, oppress and subjugate said entities. Furthermore, as Mbembe pointed out, in our contemporary world "vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living-dead*" (Mbembe 2003, 40). Agents living in this system are too dead to be alive yet alive enough to be exploited.

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2 For Byung-chul Han (2017), psychopolitics are the biopolitics of current neoliberal capitalism. These politics aim to focus on the emotions to influence actions at a pre-reflective level and steer the integral person towards the goals of capitalism. Psychopolitics can do so through unconscious, Big Brother-like friendly control, the quantification, individualisation and constant self-optimisation of the self, and the gamification of labour. All these traits lead to the extinction of the self in favour of neoliberalism.

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When approaching such concepts, Warren Montag speaks of necro-economics, as an essential element that constitutes and is constituted by necropolitics (2005, 23). In his reading of Adam Smith ([1776] 2018), he acknowledges that Smith's economics rely on the dialectic between life and death (Montag 2005, 23-5). That is, necropolitics is the political dimension of death while necroeconomics portrays how the political dimension is transmuted into political economy. Based on Montag's development of necroeconomics, Chaka Uzondu high-lighted that, according to Smith, "the market reduces and rations life; it not only allows death but demands that death be allowed by the sovereign power as well as those who suffer it. In other words, it demands that the latter allow themselves to die" (Uzondu 2013, 328). If one considers that "what is valorized within necroeconom-ics is the accumulation of capital" (328), capitalism, and especially neoliberalism itself, are fundamentally bound to necroeconomics, and necroeconomics is bound to the former. As Uzondu pointed out, necroeconomics can be described as

> an economic system which is principally organized around the con-sumption of bodies as part of the process of accumulation. That is to say, necroeconomics consumes specific populations that are rendered "matter" that can be used and/or disposed of. These pop-ulations, as instrumentalized "matter", can and are used in the generation of wealth, in the accumulation of capital. It follows that they are not citizens in any substantive sense. These populations' relationship to the mainstream economy cannot rest on their in-trinsic value. They have none. (Uzondu 2013, 328)

Therefore, these two categories of necropolitics and necroeconom-ics feed one another in their own theoretical realms. These two deathly dimensions can be extrapolated into how the current world ecology works and how it is leading to extinction. Thus, a founda-tional intertwining between what we understand as necropolitics and necroeconomics and the correlation between them and current neoliberalism in a socio-political/cultural dimension seems to come to the surface. This, in turn, allows us to define the internal poli-tics and economics of the age of extinction and how the implemen-tation of this necrotic system is present on a daily basis in human cultures and non-human ecosystems, linking them in their multi-species interconnectedness.

Hence, if one considers economy and politics to be a cultural construction and ontology as "the most fundamental assumption that one makes about the world" (Uzondu 2013, 327), ontology is to be regarded as a core part of culture. In other words, "culture is constitutive of ontology" (327). Thus, there needs to be an intertwin-ing and a correlation between necropolitics/necroeconomics as a

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necro-ontology by saying that politics, economy, society, and culture are mutually constitutive under the canopy capitalism. And by necro-ontology is meant

> a systematic rendering of particular populations as bodies that must necessarily be killed [...] necro-ontology can be understood as a philosophical orientation that rationally organizes populations for their necessary death. (327)

That is, necro-ontology frames the current times as an age in which death and, precisely, extinction are present and caused by the internal logic of capitalism. Due to its systematic and hegemonic nature, necro-ontology generates under its canopy the categories of necropolitics and necroeconomics which are, at the same time, mutually constitutive. These three necro-realities shape the necroculture in which humankind is immersed, where the non-living is valued over the living and where life only has value as long as it can be exploited to meet capitalism's ends (Thorpe 2016).

Although it could be said that this death is part of the natural selection, in other words Social Darwinism,[3] that capitalism has promoted, these ideas in the shape of a narrative help us go beyond this realisation. In a system bound to the war of all against all and the survival of the fittest that neoliberalism has fostered for decades, together with the depletion of non-human ecosystems through extractive practices, the disappearance of human cultures in a globalised world and the disorientation that the inner human self attains, capitalism is putting itself at stake through its own logic. Hence, the capitalist logic transmutes these deaths into processes of becoming extinct, making the agents in which capitalism is grounded and dependent insofar as extraction, accumulation and surplus-value are concerned face their inevitable disappearance.

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3 In general terms, Social Darwinism applies Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's ([1809] 2017) and Charles Darwin's ([1859] 2019) evolutionary theory, and Herbert Spencer's ([1864] 2009) and Thomas Hobbes' ([1651] 2017) social theory to portray that life is based on inherent competition in the human environment and condition, thus necessary for historical progressive development. In this light, William Graham Sumner (1881) theorised that civilisation is the survival of the fittest and that the survival of the unfittest is anti-civilisation. Therefore, socialism was unattainable as it went against the idea of a progressive civilisation. By using this theorisation, capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, racism and extractivism have been defended because, if one takes Lamarck's physical inheritance theory, the wealth inherited by a family or an individual was legitimate in this competition. That is, there was no real competition since after the feudal ages and the forthcoming industrial centuries, the ones that had the economic means were the ones that, in most of the cases, inherited them. In addition, humankind (in most of the cases white, male, rich individuals) have portrayed non-human ecosystems as matter to be exploited due to this ideology. For more information on this see Raymond Williams' "Social Darwinism" ([1980] 2020) and Friedrich Engels' *The Dialectics of Nature* ([1925] 2012).

Therefore, these necro-realities are pivotal to come to terms with the current times and how this narrative helps us move beyond the geological/ecological/cultural debate by analysing how the current hegemonic structure has subjugated entities to a psychological extinction of the human self. These necro-realities embrace and go beyond external negative biopolitics in different internal dimensions. That is, contrary to a conventional understanding of biopolitics as external force implemented on a subject, neoliberalism exploits and gains its force both from the external/physical and precisely from the internal human psyche.

With that said, although Han (2017) does not illustrate an explicit connection between death, extinction and psychopolitics, it can be articulated if analysed closely. In the age of the dissolved self, where society has never been committed to work that much due to the individualisation of such and the gamification of labour itself, necro-realities have been hidden under a friendly mask in the aegis of psychopolitics and the control of our unconscious. Nonetheless, the logic of current capitalism and, therefore, death and extinction, is still there, underneath the friendly face of the game-like, addictive and appealing mask of current neoliberal capitalism. Connected with Mbembe's (2003) society of the "living-dead" and Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1995), the current psychopolitics makes all subjects under the anvil of capitalism part of such conceptualisations. Subjects are positively subjugated to the internal domination of the maximum efficiency. On the other hand, uselessness and rejection of the agents that are not useful for the system is present in a systematic manner. In a way, all subjects are *homines sacri* that are only executed to death if they are not productive or beneficial for the system, while at the same time internally exercising positivist disciplinary smart power on them. The others are Mbembe's (2003) "living-dead": too vital for the system to be annihilated, and already dead to live a full life with no constraints due to the *modus vivendi* of current neoliberalism (40).

In other words, necro-realities and psychopolitics become "smart power" (Han 2017, 15): a friendly and permissive power that appraises our conscious and unconscious thoughts with no direct violence whatsoever. Nevertheless, through this friendly image, current capitalism is still inherently connected with the processes of death and extinction. It does not only destroy the cultural-ecological world through material practices, but it also extinguishes the emotional self through a conscious and unconscious control of the subjectification of the subject. To sum up, by connecting and understanding these necro-realities with psychopolitics in the paradigm of capitalism as a system that triggers extinction, a new space might be opened for researchers, thinkers and activists to understand the current age, its material and psychological forces, and its foundations.

To support this acknowledgement, Alain Ehrenberg ([1968] 2008) pointed out in his work *La Fatigue d'être soi* that neoliberal societies are inflicted with an increase in the frequency of depression diagnoses, anti-depressant sales, and symptoms of neurosis. Very much in line with Han's (2010) ideas in *The Burnout Society*, Ehrenberg ([1968] 2008) postulated that individuals have been overburdened by the demands they implement on themselves, looking for an almost-impossible self-realisation through the internal biopolitics of current capitalism. This never-ending spiral in the shape of an, apparently, innate, unquestionable and self-imposed compulsion in the pursue of a self-realisation necessary in the neoliberal societies to thrive, never accomplished because of the flexibility and liquidity of the current times, tends to leave individuals with a feeling of emptiness, where they finally seem to realise that inner experience is not what determines the path of someone's life, leaving human beings with a feeling of burnout and frustration which, in many cases, can lead to depression, amongst other mental health illnesses.

3 The Disappearance of the Self: Dystopia, Reality and Extinction

One of the most prominent examples to come to terms and make these theories more tangible might be the usage of social media and how it has become a tool that modifies the self towards a series of behaviours that go very much in line with Han's internal psychopolitical control. So as to do that, it might be interesting to scan through the imagery presented in the dystopian world that "Nosedive" (2016), the first episode of the third season of *Black Mirror*, presents.

This episode, which has become a very important and celebrated one within the sci-fi/dystopia community, is placed in a society where people have embraced technology and share their daily activities through social media, the same way Instagram, TikTok or Facebook work. People can rate each other and their interactions from one to five stars and, through eye implants, can see the ratings people have. These ratings, in turn, can have an important impact on their socio-economic status. People with higher ratings have more privileges (i.e., skipping cues, having discounts, access to exclusive facilities or better job opportunities), whereas people with lower ratings are left aside in most of social and economic spheres. Therefore, most people are obsessed with getting higher ratings and, more importantly, not losing points.

Lacie Pound, the main character in this episode, who is obsessed with her rating (the same way most of society is), wants to raise her 4.2 rating to a 4.5 to get a 20% discount on a luxury apartment in a residential complex. Through the advice she gets from a consultant,

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she decides to work her way to get ratings from very highly rated people. Naomi, rated with a 4.8, sees a picture that Lacie intentionally uploaded on the social platform everyone uses to catch Naomi's attention and decides to ask her for a wedding speech as her maid of honour. Lacie agrees and gives the entrance deposit to the apartment, anticipating many high ratings from the popular guests that will be at the wedding.

On the day of her flight, several misfortunes and events cause her ratings to radically drop way below her initial 4.2. After managing to get different lifts to get to the wedding, Naomi tells Lacie not to come, as her low rating will have a negative impact on Naomi's own rating. Lacie decides to go to the wedding anyway, sneaking into the villa. She grabs the microphone and gives a modified version of her speech as she becomes more and more upset. Lacie is eventually arrested. It is then when our main character and the man in the cell opposite hers realise they are freer now than they were in the open world, and start insulting themselves in a gleeful way, enjoying freedom for the first time in a while, since they don't have to worry about ratings that can jeopardise their lives.

What is interesting for us here is to see that, even though the police have tools to execute a downgrade in the ratings of the individuals as a punishment measure, the actual control is internal in the sense that people auto-infringe the politics that these apps have upon their daily lives. Although this might seem quite dystopian, apps such as Peeple[4] function in very similar ways. Dating apps such as Tinder or Hinge work similarly, too. In the case of the latter two, for instance and as a quick note, algorithms determine one's popularity based on the number of right swipes that an individual gets. This, in turn, makes individuals be more present or less present on other people's screens when selecting those people with whom they want to interact regarding the amount of likes or dislikes that they have received (Tiffany 2019).

In this sense, Instagram also becomes a key tool to take into consideration in order to realise that we might not be that far out from the world presented in "Nosedive". Being one of the most used social media platforms worldwide, with its peculiar format of posts, stories and reels Instagram has made its users show their daily lives on a constant basis. The very intrinsic ideas of the "like" or "followers" are also a prominent example of how capitalism has monopolised the way in which we interact with the social beings around us.

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[4] Peeple is a mobile app that allows its users to leave recommendations and reviews for other people regarding personal, romantic, or professional relationships. It has been subject of criticism because of cases of cyberbullying, lack of privacy or harassment (Wattles 2015).

The more you get, the more recognition you will have both in the virtual world and outside of it. Even though many people just post content to unconsciously seek for approval or get in touch with their friends, many others have found in Instagram a way to promote their lives and themselves as individuals. This transparency and control, connected with how the control of populations is carried out these days as opposed to the control put into practice by external biopolitics, is promoted or seen as something good or even necessary if you still want to interact with people around you. This is not an arbitrary choice, as these individuals, by consciously or unconsciously promoting their lifestyle, bodies or experiences, once they have reached a certain number of followers, can start getting access to things that "ordinary" people don't. This might mean free products, paid promotion campaigns, discounts in establishments, etc. In fact, it is no secret that nowadays there are advertisement companies that specialise in looking for Instagram/TikTok/Twitch users with 100,000 followers to use as sponsors to promote their products.

This, in turn, portrays how technology and the "device paradigm" illustrated by Albert Borgmann in *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (1984) generate an intimate relationship between people, everyday life, politics and technology, defining economic and cultural relations. Even though it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully dive into this concept, we can actually see that reality has been moved into the cybernetic realm. The relationship between social media, technology and selfhood is put at stake and it is precisely the latter the one which has been degraded from its autonomy through internal control.

This tightly connects us again with the ideas on psychopolitics. Capitalism becomes this logic of internal exploitation and control that individuals suffer. As said, this control is executed by the individuals who happily access the logic in which the world is immersed. In certain spheres, if people are not on social media or, conversely, do not interact or don't have a lot of presence there, they are forgotten or left aside by the system which, in turn, grants those who make the effort to comply to certain standards. Therefore, individuals modify and eliminate their own selfhood in order to establish themselves within the boundaries of a certain order or system. It could be said, then, that these influencers or known personalities on Instagram or TikTok belong to a different social order or class that, although it seems virtual, it has transgressed the boundaries of the digital world and is having an important impact on the way in which people understand their everyday lives, social media, and technology.

Therefore, the necro-realities of the psychopolitics of capitalism become present when seen through this lens. Capitalism renders individuals towards their internal death and, when done in mass, extinction, through its logic. Although it is not something new to say

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that capitalism, as a system, has modified the way in which people live and understand their reality as something given (the same way any other social and economic system would if established as the given truth),[5] when this logic is framed within the confines explained throughout this text, the self becomes an element bound to extinction. If we consider the internal psychopolitics and extremely efficient tools of control with friendly imagery that current capitalism provides through technology and social media, together with the discourse that current neoliberalism has had in terms of giving agency to the individual to seek emancipation playing by the rules of a system which does not allow social welfare or development in most of the cases, the self is at stake. And by this we need to understand that the self is not free to act, or to challenge the given, if it is strictly confined into the frames of capitalist ideology, and it can only be kept alive if capitalism is proven to be extremely unfair and inconsistent by the mainstream discourse, so alternative ways of perceiving the reality around are generated.

As Michael Thompson postulated in his book *Twilight of the Self* (2022, 10) current neoliberal Western democracies are now operating in such a way as to absorb individuals in their own matrix. As it has been portrayed in the previous discussion between external biopolitics and internal psychopolitics, the individual is not annihilated through coercion but provided with encapsulated desires, needs, interests and limited perimeters of knowledge and imagination. In what Thompson (2022) coins as the "Cybernetic Society" (11), very much in line with Han's (2017) psychopolitics and relying on György Lukács philosophy ([1923] 1972), "the technical logics of organizational management and control have been able to socialize the self, making it the simultaneous object and subject of control and surplus extraction" (Thompson 2022, 6). Thus, as Thompson sharply highlighted, and as foreshadowed at the beginning of this article, we might be facing the elimination or, in other words, extinction, of the self-reflective, ethically engaged, autonomous self that was an aftermath of the developments in the Enlightenment (20). That is, selfhood as understood in this text is eliminated and, therefore, autonomy and identity are jeopardised through individualism and self-executed internal psychopolitical control bound to the aforementioned necro-realities.

As Fredrick Jameson (2003, 76) once mentioned, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to conceive the end of capitalism.

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[5]   See, for instance, the ideas by Antonio Gramsci on "Cultural Hegemony" ([1929-35] 2011) or the Gramscian-inspired scholar Raymond Williams and his texts on "Cultural Materialism" ([1980] 2020).

And it is precisely this capitalist realism[6] that does not let the individuals see beyond it what makes selfhood diluted and does not let most individuals out of this ideology, no matter how in favour or against capitalism they are. Even alternatives such as ecological movements, conservation or feminism, initiatives that were grounded in a radical critique in political economy terms, have now been absorbed by capitalism to fulfil its aims of endless accumulation and economic growth.[7] The character of the self becomes infected and part of the system itself. It aligns with the internal means of coercion and control that appear in a friendly manner and, thus, the subjectivity of the self is diluted, extinguished in the logic of current neoliberalism. The norms and logic of capitalist economy have penetrated inside the cultural sphere of current neoliberal societies and the psychological structures of individuals. This results in a world that cybernetically steers selfhood by systems of control that serve as items of transformation of the relational matrices of sociality that shape new impulses within the self (Thompson 2022, 11). This results, as in "Nosedive", in a radical deformation of the material and psychical abilities for autonomy under the influence, almost impossible to evade, of the internal control that psychopolitics provides. Consequently, this develops, as we have already seen, in an extinction of selfhood and its autonomous self-reflection and ethical development of ideas that was fostered from the Enlightenment onwards, and put at stake from the very start of capitalism up to the current neoliberal systems Western democracies experience today.

Finally, and in a speculative way, referring back to Ehrenberg's ([1968] 2008) and Han's (2010) notions on burnout and mental health, it seems that the fact that there is no way out of it and that individualism and internal control are non-negotiable, mental stability is put in a very unstable position. Just as Lacie's emotions burst out when she couldn't handle the pressure of the situation anymore, current neoliberalism individuals feel the burn and pressure of a system that is restless and puts all its pressure on them while, at the same time, eliminating their selfhood as understood in this text.

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6 Based on the Frankfurt School, Antonio Gramsci, and Louis Althusser, for Mark Fisher capitalist realism is the widespread thought that capitalism is the only possible and viable economic and political system, and that is impossible to imagine a coherent alternative to it (Fisher 2009). This concept is developed into a critique of neoliberalism and its usage capitalist praxes in all aspects of governance.

7 Under no circumstances I am saying that anti-capitalist movements within feminism, conservation or ecology do not exist. The point that is being made, however, is that alternatives that embrace capitalism have appeared within movements that, if were to be taken seriously considering their most basic fights against inequality, would need to be profoundly anti-capitalist. No capitalist society has been built on the grounds of equity, solidarity and justice for all human and non-human beings.

According to the hermeneutics scholar Santiago Zabala, "the truth of art no longer rests in representations of reality but rather in an existential project of transformation" (2017, 10). Interpretation allows us to challenge the given rational truths and, in this sense, the hegemonic structures that frame our daily lives and the way in which we interact with the different human and non-human agents in such reality. By doing so, artistic representations might give the viewer information about certain emergencies that are around us and make the viewer itself participate in an interpretative exercise to "call into question our comfortable existences" (122). It is precisely here that taking a look at "Nosedive" becomes of interest in order to understand the different ideas proposed by this paper, allowing us to explore them in a context outside our real world that might be more real than what we can think at first glance. In current capitalist societies, we are bombarded with the existence of emergencies around us but somehow the media apparatuses and the mainstream political, economic, and cultural discourses seem to avoid pinpointing the causes of most of the emergencies that strictly affect the inhabitants of a certain city, country, or the planet. Thinking through the different ideas presented in the previous sections in order to understand the internal dynamics of this system becomes of interest for us, because extinction is put at the forefront and the narrative clings to this idea to generate new thoughts regarding the inconsistencies of capitalism, and the dangers that current neoliberalism has posed upon the individual self.

4 Conclusion: The Necrocene, the Age of Extinction

Bearing everything said so far in mind, capitalism can be established as a system that builds the lived and current experiences in an absolute sense. In addition, reality experienced beyond this hegemonic structure is barely possible for most social beings living in a capitalist society. Then, capitalism, through its logic and practices that lead the world to a multi-focal extinction,[8] manages to renew itself and defend

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[8] Bear in mind that extinction, in the light of this article, should be expanded beyond the sixth extinction of species and biosphere, as can be seen, for instance, in the mass-bleaching episodes that have hit the Great Barrier Reef in Australia (Batalla 2022). Languages and cultures seem to be facing a similar fate in a globalised world with the hegemony of English as a *lingua franca* in many professional, educational and entertainment spheres and the influence that the British and the North American culture have had worldwide since World War II, precisely through the entertainment industry. As a matter of fact, Chinese is also becoming a hegemonic language in the East Asian context which can undoubtedly mean the speculative decline of certain languages and cultures overtime as well. These are just examples of a kind of decline that is taking place in many other different situations around the world as well through neocolonial-

its ultimate goals, limiting the existence of alternative possibilities that could become forms of opposition. Extinction lies at the heart of capitalism, and, through its logic and practices, it triggers these extinctive events in order to stay afloat as a system that, through human action, seems to have transgressed its passivity towards an entity that has its own will and power. In other words, capitalism is a system that now operates internally in the psyche of human beings living in current neoliberalism, thus, thinking outside of it or acting against its rules is not even an option. However, it is through these ways of operating that capitalism will destroy the world that it is exploiting and, ultimately, will become extinct, too, at the expense and annihilation of everything else.

It is here where it might be interesting to refer to stratigraphy and geology studies. As weird as it might sound, the ideas of extinction that lie at the centre of this article might denote a tendency in the organisation of the world in the human and non-human sphere. That is, the extinction of selfhood that has been outlined throughout this text can be an illustration of the dynamics of extinction that play part in our world. Furthermore, these dynamics are inherently linked with processes of mass-accumulation, extraction and surplus value, together with the modification of the psyche that capitalist ideology inflicts in individuals and societies in a global world.

In this light, the idea of Anthropocene (Crutzen 2002), the age of man as a geological agent that has modified the structure of the Earth, is one of the few ideas that come from said fields of study, later brought into the humanities and social sciences. This concept has opened new ways of theorising and researching, becoming a core element in order to recast modern history as the history of humanity. Nevertheless, scholars such as Naomi Klein (2011) or Jason Moore (2016) have opposed this nomenclature as they believe that not all humans are to blame for this modification of the Earth, yet it is the capitalist expansion, accumulation, and extraction. It is no surprise that dissident voices appeared criticising the anthropocentrism of the Anthropocene narrative as a way of perpetuating and whitening colonialism, extractivism, ecological degradation and slavery, amongst other issues. Thus, alternative nomenclatures such as the "Chthulucene" (Haraway 2015) or "Capitalocene" (Moore 2016) appeared so as to illustrate the issues that the Anthropocene narrative was leaving aside, consciously or unconsciously.

Without diving very deep into this issue, as it is not the aim of this

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ism. Not to mention the various crises of refugees who will suffer the fall of a culture in the coming generations, becoming minorities in other countries (Batalla 2021). The extinction of selfhood is, therefore, the ultimate example of how we are living in an epoch dominated by extinction caused by the logic and practices of accumulation, exploitation and economic valuation of elements and beings.

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conclusion, in the debate of the "Many Anthropocenes" (Chakrabarty 2018), the idea of "Necrocene" (McBrien 2016), twists the previous nomenclatures focusing on capitalism as the inconsistency, and re-casts the current age as one in which "capitalism leaves in its wake the disappearance of species, languages, cultures, and peoples. It seeks the planned obsolescence of all life. Extinction lies at the heart of capitalist accumulation" (116), reframing the history of capitalist expansion within the process of becoming an element that triggers extinction. According to McBrien, "capitalism is the reciprocal transmutation of life into death and death into capital" (117) which is, at the end of the day, extinction through the reproduction of productivity.

The Necrocene narrative allows us to move beyond geology and the ways in which the Anthropocene as a theory looks at deep time, approaching the cultural, ecological, political and historical dimensions of it. In addition, the Necrocene as a narrative puts extinction as an intrinsic cause of capitalism while, at the same time, becoming capitalism the potential cause of its own destruction. That is, while capitalism is bound to this logic of extinction, this extinction will mean the eventual extinction of capitalism at the expense of the annihilation of everything else. In McBrien's words,

> The accumulation of capital is the accumulation of potential extinction – a potential increasingly activated in recent decades. This *becoming extinction* is not simply the biological process of species extinction. It is also the extinguishing of cultures and languages, either through force or assimilation; it is the extermination of peoples, either through labor or deliberate murder; it is the extinction of the earth in the depletion fossil fuels, rare earth minerals, even the chemical element helium; it is ocean acidification and eutrophication, deforestation and desertification, melting ice sheets and rising sea levels; the great Pacific garbage patch and nuclear waste entombment; McDonald's and Monsanto. (116)

The Necrocene narrative, thus, allows us to reframe the subject of justice, moving from the individual to the collective knots of life that hold life together on Earth, and back to the individual self. By placing extinction at the centre of the debate, it calls for an attentiveness to redefine what it matters to the entities that coexist in the planet and, above all, rejects the truths established by the capitalist logic in order to acquire a level of equity, justice and solidarity for all, redefining what it means to be alive, dead and extinct.

Apart from providing a coherent narrative to attempt to reorganise the existential, cultural, political, historical ecological and social crisis of the twenty-first century, the Necrocene challenges to the core the given in the capitalist realism in which humanity is framed, becoming a potential heuristic to analyse and (de)construct the

relations between capitalism, human cultures, non-human ecosystems and the self, illuminating the inconsistencies of capitalism in a historical sense. In other words, if extinction is put at the centre of the debate, further relationships between capitalism, its logic and extinction can be pinpointed, even beyond neoliberalism. With that being said, the global ideas of death and extinction through capitalism might allow us to conduct a biopsy of the contaminated parts of the system and radically scrutinise them through a lens that frames death and extinction as intrinsic in capitalism, putting capitalism itself at the centre of the question.

Even though critical engagements become more and more difficult

> because there is, after the end of formal domination, neither a clear measure of the difference between the possible and the real, nor a straightforward reasoning why more is possible than that which is real. (Wagner 2016, 139)

The force of critique in fact consists in "demonstrating that the real is deficient with regard to the possible" (147). Therefore, any alternative nomenclature that puts at the forefront the flaws or weaknesses of the Anthropocene is of important consideration insofar as the narratives towards equity are concerned. Subsequently, staying with this debate is crucial in the current state of affairs.

With that being said, through the Necrocene narrative, a new conceptualisation that challenges the Anthropocene narrative, the logic of neoliberalism and the extinctive nature embedded in such a system seems to come at the surface of the discourse. This narrative threatens the biosphere and the humanisphere as we know them with the imagery of an extinction process that is in fact multiple, as a result of a growth based on the paradigm of technological domination. In the current state of affairs "marked by the globalization of markets, the privatization of the world under the aegis of neoliberalism and the increasing imbrication of the financial markets, the postimperial military complex and electronic and digital technologies" (Mbembe 2017, 3), where forms of belief "get in line with the dominating techno-capitalist society, undergoing a process of deterritorialization and deculturation that renders them apt for global consumption" (Ungureanu 2017, 277), the Necrocene narrative helps us theorise a world-ecology that challenges the anthropocentrism of the Anthropocene and the inconsistencies of capitalism itself by putting extinction at the centre of its imagery. By identifying the issues at hand as intrinsic in the logic of capitalism, the Necrocene narrative might be a generative tool of analysis to engage with theory and matter at the same time. That is, by using alternative nomenclatures, we force us to think beyond the given truths, and new spaces for analysis that tackle the inequalities that lie beyond the spectrum of capitalism itself.

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Therefore, the Necrocene, the age in which extinction is everywhere we look, seems to have become the hegemonic structure in terms of materialism and psychology in our reality. We do not question its fundamental existence. We might not even recognise it. As previously mentioned, individuals fall into the ideological realm of current neoliberalism without even knowing what they are doing. It is provided as the given rule, what should be done and what is right for our social coexistence.

Thus, the Necrocene age is characterised by the extinction of non-human ecosystems, human cultures and the human self through its necro-realities and psychopolitics. This extinction exists because it stops the evolutionary process and unmakes the task of being. Although this might be clear when it comes to non-human ecosystems and human cultures, the self, as we have seen throughout this article, is also facing extinction in a world in which everything is rationalised through neoliberalism, its free-market nature and the fact that anything outside the confines of it will be discarded.

With that said, it is too soon to outline a direct correlation between the degradation of selfhood as proposed in this article and the ecocidal epoch in which we are living. It is not the fact that the self is actually at stake in the current paradigm that is enabling ecological decline through human action. This decline can be traced back to the very first fifteenth-century expeditions of the Europeans into America, where some voices claim that current logics of global exploitation, extraction and accumulation gave rise to capitalism as we know it (Patel, Moore 2018). As we have seen, and even though capitalism has always been critically portrayed as a system that has had an impact in culture and in the *modus vivendi* and *operandi* of the people under its influence, the ultimate decline of selfhood has just happened only when control and power have transgressed the external realm to the internal psyche. Nonetheless, what we can actually weave together is the fact that extinction as a cause of the logics and practices of exploitation, extraction and accumulation is happening at different levels (non-human entities, human cultures and, lastly, the self). And it is precisely the latter that completes the circle and allows us to talk about an epoch dominated by extinction. An extinction that is consciously or unconsciously perpetuated through the dynamics of people living and acting in this system.

The biopolitical realm of psychopolitics is, thus, a very clear example of how the system itself is grounded on practices that trigger extinction. The self has been destroyed through current neoliberalism and, in a paradoxical manner, it is not strange to see those that benefit less from this system to be self-exploited and defending the free-market and the *entrepreneurship of the self* as a liberating category for the individual.

Finally, and even though it goes beyond the scope of this article, if we go full circle, the decline of selfhood that has been made clear in neoliberal societies can be connected with the tipping point in ecological degradation that the Great Acceleration signified. With the dilution of the self in neoliberal societies, the psyche was dominated for the first time in history by the logic and dynamics that make capitalism work. The will of extreme marketisation, surplus-value mass-accumulation and extraction of resources, together with the privatisation of commodified goods, privatisation and the enhancement of individualism, and an ever-expanding technological power can undoubtedly be connected to this turning point of degradation. With selfhood in a state of decline in terms of agency, the logic of capitalism had (and has) free reign to act upon the self and, through it, apply its praxis on the different elements and entities that needed to be exploited to fulfil its ends. And it was precisely the turn towards neoliberalism that, as mentioned throughout this article, because of its internal control as opposed to external biopolitics, the individual has the illusion to feel freer and with the liberty to act and do as they wants. Nonetheless, an individual cannot be emancipated within a capitalist society, without mentioning a society that does not look towards a future based on the grounds of equity, solidarity and justice for all human and non-human beings.

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