



Netflix Original **BLACK MIRROR** shines light on future society

by Jesse McCauley

From “Orange is the New Black,” to “House of Cards,” to “Stranger Things,” Netflix has helped create the art of binge watching.

One of its more recent gems, “Black Mirror,” is nothing like we’ve ever seen before. The first episode dates back to 2011. It debuted on Channel 4, a British television network, and produced two series. Netflix took over after that and the newest season was released in December of 2017.

In its unique style, “Black Mirror” does not have chronological structure. Each episode has new directors and cast members and does not connect to the previous story. However, every episode carries its own futuristic theme and revolves around technology in an often satirical manner.

The title literally refers to a technology screen. The “black mirror” is the screen we look at on a daily basis, whether it be a phone, TV, camera, etc.

The very first episode, “The National Anthem,” spotlights the effect social media has on society. A member of the royal family has been kidnapped, and her freedom depends on an embarrassing and horrific act forced upon the prime minister, which will broadcast to the entire world.



“Black Mirror” highlights potential inventions, as well as our current relationship with technology | Netflix

One of the two main writers of the show and UK satirist, Charlie Brooker, does not hold back on his portrayal of society’s relationship with the digital world.

Another well-known celebrity, Jodie Foster, directed an episode called “Arkangel,” which follows a girl who is implanted with an advanced tracker at a young age. Implanted in her head, the tracker allows her mom to control what she sees, how she is feeling, and where she is. For her entire early life, the

girl lives the censored version of life. Things like a scary dog, violent movies, and other traumatic imagery are blurred in her line of sight. When she finally takes off the tracker, she discovers everything she had previously missed.

Daniel Kaluuya, later star of “Get Out,” began his rise to fame in a season-one episode called “Fifteen Million Merits.” Kaluuya’s character, Bing, must ride on exercise bikes in order to gain credits, which can be used to buy food and other goods, in

an enclosed space covered in video screens. Credits can also help skip advertisements that interrupt daily activities. Bing meets a musically talented girl and helps her perform on a famous singing show, Hot Shots, a victory on which would be a ticket out of the enclosed area.

“San Junipero,” a season three episode following two women in love, won two Primetime Emmy Awards, the only episode to do so.

Each of the nineteen episodes takes its own spin on a potential

futuristic development that will change the way society interacts, all of which make their own subtle comments on the current trajectory of our world. It has everyone questioning, “Is this possible? Are we watching our own future unfold?”

Other than the show being wildly creative and clever, much of the popularity stems from the fact that it may be more realistic than we think. An episode titled “The Entire History of You” contains an implanted device that allows the characters to record what they see and play it back. Although not very successful, were Google Glasses headed in a similar direction?

Technology is no doubt our future. From artificial intelligence to 3D printing, we have reached a point that seemed impossible decades ago.

Not only does “Black Mirror” ask us to question technology’s ceiling, but it also highlights the pros and cons of these wild advancements.

Not all of the episodes have happy endings, and the characters experience severe trauma. As interesting and fun as it is to watch, we cannot help but worry and analyze the current and future state of our society. “Black Mirror” truly hits home in the most satirically haunting way possible.

Shunning nature in favor of technology



by May Paddor

From the TVs hanging in the Commons to the iPads in everyone’s backpacks, it’s clear that students spend a lot of time in front of a screen. But as we increase our use of technology, we may be decreasing our connection to nature.

The popular term that has been used to describe the effect technology is having on our relationship to nature is nature-deficiency disorder. This unofficial disorder describes the growing gap between kids and nature due to an increasing emphasis on technology.

Environmentalist and author Richard Louv told NPR, “Society is telling kids unconsciously that nature’s in the past. It really doesn’t count anymore, that the future is in electronics, and besides, the bogeyman is in the woods.”

This message is prevalent through the constant use and need for electronics in the classroom. A report from nonprofit Common Sense Media said that tweens, kids ages 8-12, spend an average of 6 hours a day online. By the time kids reach their teenage years, Common Sense Media reported that they would spend an average of 9 hours a day online.

The hours spent online may be the reason why kids are spending less and less time outside. The National Trust survey reported that children

spend 4 hours a week outside. The Suzuki Foundation, on the other hand, found that 13 to 20 year olds spend less than an hour outside each day—most of which is for transportation purposes.

The less time we spend outside, the more we miss out on the benefits that nature has to offer and increase the likelihood of experiencing the negative side-effects of technology.

A study by Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project reports that increased use of technology shortens our attention spans and can result in an increase of attention disorders like ADHD.

There have also been correlations made between technology use and depression. A 2012 study from the AMA illustrated how the artificial lights from screens affects our circadian rhythms, which regulates our sleep schedule. This was shown to be linked with depression and mood disorders.

Spending time in nature seems to have the opposite effects. It has been shown to lower stress levels and make people happier.

National Geographic reported a study from researchers led by Yoshifumi Miyazaki at Chiba University that proved the benefits humans reap from spending time in nature with a study that showed a 15-minute walk can lead to a 16 percent decrease in cortisol, a 2

percent drop in blood pressure and a 4 percent drop in heart rate.

Another study from Stanford researcher Greg Bratman and his colleagues found that 90-minute nature walks correlated to decreased activity in the prefrontal cortex, a region of the brain that is tied to depression.

This led to Bratman’s hypothesis that time in nature influences how we “allocate [our] attention and whether or not [we] focus on negative emotions.”

This loss of connection may be detrimental to humans as well as the environment. Science teacher and cross country coach Matthew Sloan said, “The main theme in my [AP Environmental Science] class is that we’re not going to protect something we don’t care about. We’re not going to care about something until we go out and experience it.”

Junior and member of Environmental Club, Stella Cook, agreed that our relationship with nature influences whether we value nature, which affects how we treat our planet. If someone has a good relationship with nature they will want to treat the planet better in order to foster that relationship.”

However, while increasing screen time can negatively impact the time we spend in nature, it can also be a useful tool in educating ourselves.

“Technology is good for educating people on the effects of climate change and new technologies can bring new and efficient forms of energy,” said President of New Trier’s Environmental Club, William Kincaid.

Technology can also be helpful in advertising nature. Some national parks have even created social media accounts to advertise their parks to appeal to younger demographics.

Ultimately, while technology can be helpful, it’s only half of the experience.

“At some point you have to enjoy the experience and not be so focused on capturing everything on your phone. It’s nice to disconnect and enjoy what you’re looking at,” said Sloan.

Are we in a ~simulation~



Musk spoke about the simulation hypothesis at the 2016 Code Conference | AP by Katie Kim

computer simulation. One of these physicists is Neil deGrasse Tyson. Tyson believes our simulation may be controlled by more intelligent beings. “What would [humans] look like to them? We would be drooling, blithering idiots in their presence. And if that’s the case, it is easy for me to imagine that everything in our lives is just the creation of some other entity for their entertainment,” said Tyson during the 2016 Isaac Asimov Memorial Debate.

“I’m saying, the day we learn that it is true, I will be the only one in the room saying, ‘I’m not surprised.’” However, although these well-respected scientists say they will not be surprised if solid evidence comes out proving the theory, it may not be enough for the average thinker.

There are compelling arguments to be made. One is a common human experience: déjà vu.

Some scientists believe that déjà vu may be connected to the life simulation hypothesis. Déjà vu is scientifically defined as an improper electrical discharge in the human brain, or a brain glitch. According to the life simulation hypothesis, déjà vu is a glitch in the computer simulation, and not the human brain.

“Real universes don’t have glitches, but computers can have them,” explained physicist Brian Greene. “But if it’s a really good simulation it should be able to rewind, erase the memory of the glitch, then fix it. Then the simulated beings have no memory of it ever happening.”

Conspiracy theories generally aren’t taken seriously by many, but what if you were to find out that some world-renowned scientists and engineers believe in these theories? “The Matrix,” “Black Mirror: Hang the DJ,” and “The Truman Show” are films and television shows in which a protagonist struggles to find sense in a made-up world. Under the control of technology or another person, the protagonist is blind to the world in which he or she lives.

However, instead of this concept simply being the plot of an entertaining film, some say this may be a possibility in the world in which we live.

This is called the life simulation hypothesis. The life simulation hypothesis poses that what humans perceive to be reality is actually a computer simulation created and controlled by a higher power.

“There’s a billion-to-one chance we’re living in base reality,” said Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla, during an interview at Code Conference 2016.

Musk adds that humans should actually hope that the life simulation hypothesis is true. “Otherwise, if civilization stops advancing, then that may be due to some calamitous event that stops civilization,” he said at the same conference.

It is widely agreed among physicists and philosophers that it is impossible to absolutely prove we live in base reality and not in a