

Spectacle, biopower, performativity: a cluster of regulatory powers in action in Joe Wright's "Nosedive"

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Abstract:

By employing the episode "Nosedive" by Joe Wright as the object of study, this article aims to demonstrate how the concepts of spectacle, biopower and gender performativity form a causal chain, with the society of the spectacle presenting itself as a favorable sociocultural context for the practice of biopower, which, in turn, would reinforce gender-specific technologies of power, thereby stiffening and restricting the possibilities for expression of dissident gender identities. When carried out on the materiality of the body, these control and surveillance strategies become intertwined, forming a cluster of regulatory powers that are difficult to differentiate.

Keywords: Spectacle; biopower; performativity; Nosedive; *Black Mirror*.

Resumo:

Espetáculo, biopoder, performatividade: um aglomerado de poderes regulatórios em ação em "Nosedive", de Joe Wright

Tendo como objeto de estudo o episódio "Nosedive" de Joe Wright, procuro demonstrar como os conceitos de espetáculo, biopoder e performatividade de gênero formam uma cadeia causal, com a sociedade do espetáculo apresentando-se como um contexto sociocultural favorável para a prática de biopoder, o qual, por sua vez, reforçariam tecnologias de poder específicas de gênero, enrijecendo e restringindo, assim, as possibilidades de expressão de identidades de gênero dissidentes. Quando realizadas na materialidade do corpo, essas estratégias de controle e vigilância imbricam-se, formando um aglomerado de poderes reguladores de difícil diferenciação.

Palavras-chave: Espetáculo; biopoder; performatividade; Nosedive; *Black Mirror*.

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Although concepts such as the “spectacle”, developed by Guy Debord, Michel Foucault’s “biopower” and Judith Butler’s “gender performativity” have been used separately to explain power hierarchies and control mechanisms, in this article I seek, through the analysis of “Nosedive” – first episode of the third season of the British series *Black Mirror* and directed by Joe Wright - to demonstrate how these concepts, acting together, function as a cluster of regulatory powers. I defend the idea that, in “Nosedive”, we can identify a causal chain that originates in the hypervisibility of the spectacular life, which causes the expansion of knowledge around the body and the stiffening of self-disciplinary processes, which, in turn, are shaped by norms of gender. In the end, however, these regulatory powers end up intertwined and merged. This cluster of regulatory powers produces individuals whose existence and (gender) identity are not only performative, but, from the spectator’s point of view, are artificial and caricatured, as they take the constructions of femininity and masculinity to an extreme.

The concept of the spectacle was developed by the Marxist theorist, philosopher, and filmmaker Guy Debord in the surprisingly current and somewhat prophetic book *The Society of the Spectacle*, published in 1967. In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord criticizes human life’s decadence in modernity, discusses the relationship between mass media and commodity fetishism, draws a parallel between the spectacle and religious alienation, among other themes. Debord argues that in societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is no longer experienced directly but mediated by an accumulation of spectacles. For this reason, individuals cannot have more than a fragmented view of reality (DEBORD,

1994, p.2). Debord, however, emphasizes that the spectacle should not be interpreted as a mere collection of images or a visual excess offered by the mass media; the spectacle must instead be understood as “a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (*Ibid.*, p.2). The spectacle has been converted into the very objective reality of modernity, its materialized worldview (*Ibid.*, p.2). For Debord, the society of the spectacle is the stage at which the colonizing force of commodification reaches all spheres of social life; it is when “[c]ommodification is not only visible, [but rather] we no longer see anything else” (*Ibid.*, p.16). Aligned with the historical materialist method, Debord states that the spectacle is the project and the result of the modern industrial economy, the spectacle’s language reproducing the signs of the dominant production system (*Ibid.*, p.3). Since “the spectacle is an affirmation of appearances and an identification of all human social life with appearances” (*Ibid.*, p.4), we could expect spectacular life to present two intrinsic characteristics, i.e., permanent visibility – since every spectacle presupposes spectators – and, as a consequence of that, persistent surveillance.

In his analysis of the disciplinary age in contrast to the sovereign age, Michel Foucault shows how visibility and surveillance are central to the processes of disciplining and regulation, which are the two complementary poles of biopower (SANDERS, 2017, p.40). In the book *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michel Foucault states that, in the disciplinary age, individuals are subject to a state of compulsory visibility, which works on several fronts: visibility is essential for the normalization process, in which individuals are differentiated so they can be judged (FOUCAULT, 1995, p.184); visibility is also required to ensure individuals

are under the control of disciplinary power, maintaining the continuity of their subjugation (*Ibid.*, p.187); constant visibility also secures the exercise of discipline in its most minimal manifestations (*Ibid.*, p.189), what guarantees the automatic functioning of power (*Ibid.*, p.201). And finally, visibility is essential for the internalization of the discipline since

"[h]e who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection." (FOUCAULT, 1995, p.202)

According to Foucault, discipline is the kind of power centered on the individual body. It seeks to optimize the body's capacities and compliance. Integrated with it is what Foucault calls regulatory power, which focuses on the body as species and as the basis for biological processes. These two complementary poles, the micro-physical represented by the disciplinary power (or anatomo-politics), and the macro-scientific represented by the regulatory power (or biopolitics), form the two levels of biopower, "the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed" (FOUCAULT, 1978, p.139). Therefore, just as biopower depends on visibility at its two levels of action, i.e., disciplinary and regulatory powers, we can assume that a state of hypervisibility, such as the one we encounter in the society of the spectacle, facilitates the implementation of discipline and surveillance.

However, in his discussion of biopower, Foucault treats the body with neutrality, as if all bodies were equally impacted by the mechanisms of power and the modern life

institutions (BARTKY,1990, p.65). We know that racialized bodies, gendered bodies, queer bodies, bodies marked as the Other, or stigmatized as "abject" (KRISTEVA, 1982; BUTLER, 1993), will be impacted/produced differently by socially established disciplinary and regulatory norms and, perhaps, by others in addition to these.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity comes to extend Foucault's discussion of the disciplined, subjected, and docile body so to include the regulatory practices exercised over sexed bodies. The American philosopher and queer theorist contends that gender is "an artifice, an achievement, 'a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh'" (BUTLER in BARTKY, 1990, p.65). Gender's social intelligibility is only attained through the constant repetition and "forced reiteration of norms" (BUTLER, 1993, p.94) that create the impression of a false stability. It corroborates with the naturalization of the binary frame, which serves the interests of compulsory and idealized heterosexuality, in addition to restraining sexuality to the domain of reproduction. In gender performativity, we see in action a work similar to that carried out by the exhaustive routines played out on regulated and disciplined bodies and lives. However, in the patriarchal society, femininity requires women's bodies to be still more docile than the bodies of men (BARTKY, 1990, p.65).

These three concepts/theories, and the relationship that seems to exist between them, provide a solid theoretical arsenal capable of offering an in-depth interpretation of the object of study chosen for this discussion, namely, the episode "Nosedive", which portrays a universe marked by reified relations mediated by images and the

consequences of that over the body and the construction of identity, especially in what concerns gender and hegemonic notions of femininity.

Black Mirror is a dystopian science fiction anthology in the lines of older TV series such as *Tales of Tomorrow* (1951-53) and *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64). Taking place in alternative universes or the near future, *Black Mirror's* episodes address, for the most part, the relationship between humans and technology and the unpredictable consequences of this relation. "Nosedive", directed by Joe Wright and first aired in 2016, is the first episode of the British show's third season. "Nosedive"'s protagonist Lacie, played by Bryce Dallas Howard, is an ordinary, white, middle-class, single woman. As it is typical in science fiction, the narrative takes place in a future time; that future, however, presents itself as an immediate possibility for our present, as it

shares our contemporary prevailing modern passivity (ROSA e MEDEIROS, 2017, p.116; DEBORD, 1994, p.13).

At the beginning of the episode, we learn about the existence of a ranking system that, unlike other social media such as Facebook and Instagram, not only evaluates interactions that take place on a virtual platform - such as liking or reacting to someone's photo and video - but extends it to interactions in the real world. With the help of ocular implants, the real world's information is formatted according to the ranking system standards. It allows that people, in their daily, real-life encounters, access the profile of those they meet, discover their score, and assess their interactions, whether related to services provided or simply to the treatment received (Image 1). The rank in the points system defines a person's socioeconomic status, popularity, and access to services and customized products.

Image 1 - Ocular implants shape the real world's information according to the ranking system standards.



Lacie, who is already obsessed with her rating, becomes even more obstinate after being invited by Naomi, her childhood friend with whom she had long since lost contact, to be her bridesmaid. Naomi is a popular woman, with a score of 4.8 out of 5; her wed-

ding thus represents the perfect opportunity for Lacie to get positively ranked by Naomi's guests, who, just like the bride, are appointed in the episode as belonging to the rank of "quality people" ("NOSEDIVE" 00:13:11). Being upvoted by those whose vote is more

valuable given to their higher status would significantly affect Lacie's score, making possible her goal of reaching 4.5. Ascending on the ranking system would make Lacie eligible for moving to the luxury residence of her dreams, a condition that she naively associates with the possibility of encountering a love partner and feeling fulfilled. Throughout the episode, we follow Lacie's journey to Naomi's wedding and witness all the mishaps that occur on the way, events that will culminate in the nosedive in her score.

As the individual's goal in the ranking system is to obtain the greatest number of positive responses and, consequently, ascend in its scale, any material that goes public, whether in the real or virtual world, undergoes a series of previous treatments. In the virtual realm, images are edited to look more attractive. In the realm of reality, the body, which is the individual's signifier, will also be transformed, mainly by disciplinary methods, to allude to states of "happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (FOUCAULT, 1998, p.225). The result of this process will be spectacular, fragmented, and commodified individuals and interactions.

In the same manner as in *The Society of the Spectacle*, in "Nosedive" we should not understand spectacle as a mere collection of images exposed on the virtual platform where the ranking system is calculated, but rather the society's actual *modus operandi*, pervasive to its most fundamental structure. Debord emphasizes this point when stating that "[t]he spectacle presents itself simultaneously as society itself, as a part of society, and as a means of unification" (1994, p.2). Since the apprehension of the real-world in "Nosedive" is mediated by an ocular implant that turns real encounters into an experience similar to accessing a user's profile on a social network, "Nosedive"'s reality is at the mercy

of the spectacle, which has become "the focal point of all vision and all consciousness" (DEBORD, 1994, p.2). Thus, colonized by the spectacle, social life loses its connection with material reality and adopts as its symbol the form that governs the spectacle, namely, the fragment (*Ibid.*, p.2, 16, 27).

Since spectacular life is a highly visible construction open to public surveillance and whose goal is that of attracting more and more endorsement from the viewers, the result of it is that spectacular life will consist of carefully selected fragments, of a wise choice of what elements must go on-stage and what must be hidden offstage, or, as Debord says: "[w]hat appears is good; what is good appears" (1994, p.4). Therefore, whether posting on her social media's profile or having a real-life public encounter, Lacie is disciplined to keep her appearance, demeanor, facial expressions, tone of voice, and speech mindfully aligned to the expected norm of politeness, beauty, good taste, so to obtain the highest level of approval. Notwithstanding, these fragments of her corporeality, even if arranged to evoke a sense of wholeness, fail to rescue the unity lost in the spectacular life:

"[t]he images detached from every aspect of life merge into a common stream in which the unity of that life can no longer be recovered. Fragmented views of reality regroup themselves into a new unity as a separate pseudo-world that can only be looked at. (...) The spectacle is a concrete inversion of life, an autonomous movement of the nonliving." (DEBORD, 1994, p.2)

Besides that, the hypervisibility and surveillance that characterizes the spectacular life lead to an investment in self-knowledge, which will be later employed in the process of self-discipline. Foucault had pointed this out when he contended that, throughout

history, humans employed different types of sciences, or what he calls “truth games”, which allowed people to know more about themselves (1988, p.18). In “Nosedive”, since the body is the screen on which the spectacle of social interaction takes place, spectacular life requires individuals to be more knowledgeable of their bodies so to gain control over it. In other words, spectacular life leads to bio-power, which is “what [brings] life and its mechanisms into the realm of explicit calculations and [make] knowledge-power an agent of transformation of human life” (FOUCAULT, 1978, p.143).

Throughout the episode, we witness how Lacie disciplines herself, not with the sole purpose of acquiring new skills - as cooking her homemade tapenade, imitating Naomi’s fiancé after watching him in one of his viral posts (“NOSEDIVE”, 00:16:35) - but, and mostly, with the goal of developing new

attitudes (FOUCAULT, 1988, p.18; HEYES, 2006, p.137). The scene in which she stands in front of the mirror and rehearses different modes of smiling, varying the opening of her eyes and mouth, modulating the pitch of her laugh, her face severed from the body by the mirror frame (“NOSEDIVE”, 00:01:45 – 00:02:00), is just one - exaggerated, but believable in a dystopian piece - example portrayed in “Nosedive” of the specific mode of training we could relate to what Foucault denominates “technology of the self” (Image 2). According to Foucault, this kind of technology

“permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality.” (1988, p.18)

Image 2 – Lacie rehearses her best smile in front of the mirror.



Nevertheless, Foucault also warns us that this type of knowledge/technology is always associated with a certain type of domination. In the case of “Nosedive”, just as any other disciplinary power that is exercised through invisibility while imposing compulsory visibility on those subjected to

it, the hypervisibility made possible by the ranking system and its ensuing heightened awareness of the body promote normalization and lead to the exercise of self-docilization (SANDERS, 2017, p.39). In “Nosedive” attitudes are rehearsed, emotions are controlled, and speeches are kept on schedule.

Life must stay within the predictable, the norm, the discipline. It is not by chance that the episode adopts pastel tones as its aesthetic since this color palette evokes feelings of tranquility, relaxation, as well as safety and sanity. Pastels can also be associated with delicacy, cleanliness, passiveness, and, by extension, with femininity (Image 3). On the other hand, uncontrollable aspects of

life are not only recriminated but are socially criminalized, with the "criminal" being punished with a low score in the ranking system, which places them in the position of a social pariah. Thus, we have a sanitized society formed by self-disciplined citizens who distance themselves as far as possible from too human characteristics, which are an attack on "Nosedive"'s civilization.

Image 3 – Pastel colors predominate in "Nosedive".



Furthermore, as we follow the experiences of this female protagonist, we are called to observe how gender norms come to join other disciplinary methods to regulate and exert control specifically over female bodies. In "Nosedive", we can say that biopower and patriarchy do not only share the same interests and strategies but are progressively able to operate through each other (SANDERS, 2017, p.40). Regarding the correlation between biopower and patriarchy, Rachel Sanders, in the article "Self-tracking in the Digital Era" (2017), explains that

[b]oth regimes (...) fulfill their goals of surveillance and regulation by governing at a distance – that is, by commissioning ensembles of expert knowledges to articulate norms of embodiment and lifestyle and to incite self-disciplinary subjectivities and behaviors pursuant to these norms." (2017, p.39)

Therefore, the dominant political and social rationalities portrayed in "Nosedive" only exaggerates what Sanders defines as the contemporary neoliberal and postfeminist forms of biopower.

Moreover, suppose we had access to other protagonists' perspectives; in that case, other additional regulatory powers could probably be identified, such as specific self-control regimes for racialized, LGBTQIA+, and disabled individuals, for those belonging to ethnic or religious minorities, among other examples. In the present analysis, I will limit my focus to patriarchy in conjunction with the other mentioned regulatory powers and, although my critique also includes fatphobia, it appears here incorporated within the scope of a gender critique since I am assuming, with Sandra Bartky (1990) and Susan Bordo (2003), that the tyranny of slen-

derness is one of the numerous patriarchal disciplinary practices that act on the female body, which intends to make it more docile with its “powerful symbolism of self-discipline, controlled appetites, and the circumscription of appropriate feminine behavior and appearance” (HEYES, 2006, p.126).

We notice that in “Nosedive”, there are specific self-disciplinary mentalities for men and women, which reinforce binary gender stereotypes at an individual level, but, since practiced by an entire group, become a gender regulatory power that “re-establish status-quo gender arrangements” (SANDERS, 2017, p.39). Expanding on Foucault’s notion that power operates at the most mundane level of daily practices, Judith Butler contends that identity, and consequently, gender, cannot be understood as a stable and homogeneous category once it occurs only through the materialization and reiteration of norms, that is, through performativity.

Thus, the hegemonic ideal of a given identity is produced through the arrangement of certain acts, language, bodily movements, among other strategies. It means that identity does not cause those acts, language, and movements, but rather “all identities are cultural fictions that produce

the *effects* of identity” (MCKINLAY, 2010, p.236, italics in the original). In this way, we can understand that this process presupposes some degree of homogenization. In “Nosedive”, we encounter many scenes in which Lacie’s manners homogenize with that of her interlocutor’s. When interacting with her friend Naomi, the two adopt a similar tone of voice, the same linguistic expressions, their bodies move in a similar way, as if one were the other’s image on the mirror. On the other hand, when Lacie meets a former co-worker on her way to the office, she takes an entirely different attitude from that shown with Naomi, now aligning her manners with the conduct of this new interlocutor (Image 4). Although different from each other, both performativities are within the spectrum of “Nosedive”’s hegemonic femininity – perhaps indicating how a woman should behave/look/sound in a casual and in a professional context -, one individual’s performativity being reinforced by the other’s, by the very act of repetition, which endorses the authenticity of those acts. For the audience, nevertheless, the characters’ behaviors are perceived as exaggerated, caricatural, with no trace of spontaneity nor sincerity.

Image 4 – Lacie meets her former co-worker on the elevator.



However, they are only perceived as such by the audience outside "Nosedive"; within its diegesis, these magnified expressions of femininity and masculinity are perfectly normative and not viewed as deliberately staged at all. And this is because, as it is typical in dystopian narratives, elements of the present are taken to their extreme so to highlight their absurdity and ideological nature. Therefore, in "Nosedive", the exaggerated gender performativity evidences its social construction, demonstrating that those gestures "are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (BUTLER, 1999, p.173). For us, viewers outside the narrative's socio-historical reality, the artificiality of the gender performativity is apparent; the same does not happen, as it is expected, with the characters who are individuals molded by the values that govern that society, who would readily accept these identities as natural and, very likely, possessing ontological reality.

Even in the scene I mentioned earlier, in which Lacie rehearses her best smile in front of the mirror, which denotes a conscious act and thus suggests we are dealing with a gender performance instead of performativity, within "Nosedive"'s universe, this attitude would be comparable, differing only in degree, to the beauty routine imposed on women, who dress, makeup, do their hair, control their bodies, to become palatable and socially acceptable. "Nosedive" only exaggerates this ritual, underscoring the production of docile bodies, which require "coercive attention to be paid to the smallest details of the body's functioning, partitioning its time and space under relentless surveillance" (HEYES, 2006, p.132). Furthermore, according to Butler, performance is a "contesting of realness" (1993, p.130).

It does not have the privileged signification that performativity has, and, for this very reason, it "exposes the norms that regulate realness" (*Ibid.*, p.130). Although "Nosedive"'s characters appear artificial for the viewers, the way they express their gender identity does not contest the norm, much on the contrary, it reinforces it, being the very reason these individuals are socially intelligible. Therefore, I believe that in "Nosedive", gender identity falls into Butler's category of performativity, not performance, since performance only works when it cannot be read, when its interpretation is no longer possible, "when what appears and how it is 'read' diverge" (*Ibid.*, p.129), thus unveiling itself as an artifice.

However, although Lacie is the pure image of the disciplined woman, who adheres to society's standards of sociability and femininity, her efforts are not sufficient for her to reach 4.5, her score goal. It is stubbornly stuck in 4.2. Thus, we could ask: since she speaks, moves, and enact her identity in a way to emulate a broader imagined tradition (MCKINLAY, 2010, p.235), as much as Naomi, why is the latter a 4.8, very popular and in the rank of "quality people" ("NOSEDIVE", 00:13:11) while Lacie is in the sphere of "middle to low range folks" (00:12:56)?

In the book *Femininity and Domination* (1990), Sandra Bartky investigates the practices that engender the "docile bodies" of women. She considers three categories of disciplinary practices that turn a body into feminine: 1) those that produce a body of a certain size and configuration; 2) those that bring forth a "specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements"; and 3) those that turn the body into an "ornamented surface" (BARTKY, 1990, p.65).

Lacie's friend, Naomi, is a white, pretty, and thin woman. She appears in photos and

videos practicing yoga and eating healthy food alongside her handsome and athletic fiancé. According to the beauty ideals, she “looks hot”, as pointed out by Lacie’s brother (“NOSEDIVE”, 00:21:17). Naomi’s slender body works as an “avatar of the neoliberal tenets of self-discipline, hard work, and discerning consumerism”, her body being elevated to a “supervalue”, a “paramount moral pursuit” (SANDER, 2017, p.47). Naomi holds an “aspectival captivity” over Lacie: her image is “subject to reflection and taken to be universal, necessary, or obligatory” (HEYES, 2006, p.130); it is the utopia Lacie has to pursue eternally.

On the other hand, despite Lacie’s efforts, her body is too big for the female beauty standards. Throughout the narrative, we learn about Lacie’s lifelong dedication to her body project, illustrated in the show by her commitment to exercise daily and by the suggestive references to her bulimic discipline and “self-immolation by hunger” (WOLF, 2002, p.180). Lacie’s carries her teleological program of self-perfection religiously, it holding much similarity with what Naomi Wolf’s denominates the “One Stone Solution”: “one stone, the measurement of fourteen pounds, is roughly what stands between the 50 percent of women who are not overweight who believe they are and their ideal self” (*Ibid.*, p.186). Lacie’s devotion to her body project suggests that she sees the latter as a self-imposed rather than a patriarchal command (SANDERS, 2017, p.49).

In the chapter “Hunger” from the book *The Beauty Myth* (1990), Naomi Wolf contends that the significant weight shift in the second half of the 20th century represents the backlash against the women’s movement and their growing economic and reproductive freedom. Wolf says that “[d]ieting is the most potent political sedative in

women’s history; a quietly mad population is a tractable one” (2002, p.187). Wolf cites J. Polivy and C.P. Herman’s research, whose results show that “‘prolonged and periodic caloric restriction’ resulted in a distinctive personality whose traits are ‘passivity, anxiety, and emotionality’” (*Ibid.*, p.188), features that are culturally associated with the feminine. In a society where the disciplined body is the spectacle, such as “Nosedive”’s, it makes sense for female thinness to be the prevalent aesthetic norm since, in order to achieve it, a self-denying mentality is required. Up to the moment when Lacie begins her journey to Naomi’s wedding, she endeavors and manages to comply with two of the three disciplinary categories presented by Bartky but fails to discipline herself to produce a fit, feminine body. Perhaps, the reason for her 4.2 is there.

On the way to Naomi’s wedding, however, we witness a series of situations in which Lacie’s actions will infringe the other two categories presented by Bartky. These transgressions end up causing her final downfall. Bartky contends that gender differences are also expressed through general bodily comportment and that women’s manner of movement and lived spatiality are far more restricted than men’s (1990, p.67). A woman is always reluctant “to reach, stretch, and extend the body”, assuming a “typically constricted posture”. A woman’s hesitation to move beyond is not limited to concrete spaces but should also be understood in abstract terms: “[t]he “loose woman” violates these norms: her looseness is manifest not only in her morals, but in her manner of speech, and quite literally in the free and easy way she moves” (*Ibid.*, p.68). Lacie’s downfall begins when she, upset after arguing with her brother, hurries out of the house and bumps into a pedestrian,

spilling coffee on her. Soon afterward, Lacie is unable to control her disappointment when she finds out that her flight has been canceled and that, due to her score, she is not eligible for the only available seat on the next flight. Terribly distraught, she raises her voice and is rude to the airport staff. She allows herself to be seen in all her frustration and humanity in front of other customers, who, as expected, downvote her. These examples demonstrate Lacie's disobedience to the rule of self-constriction, either in her motility and her behavior. She breaks this rule when she allows both her body and personality to expand to the

point of trespassing the imaginary frontier a woman's body must keep up to stay within the realm of the feminine.

Lacie's downfall is also an aesthetic one. If, until now, the protagonist has fulfilled her role as an ornamental surface, which, according to Bartky, is successfully achieved much more through discipline than art (1990, p.69), Lacie's decline is symbolized by the escalating misalignment of her clothes, her hair, and makeup. She arrives at Naomi's wedding drunk, covered with mud, her dress torn, her mascara smeared, her bra exposed, and barefoot. She is the exact image of the fallen woman (Image 5).

Image 5 – Lacie as the image of the fallen woman.



Thus, we can conclude that Lacie's abrupt drop in the ranking system happens in parallel to her small and involuntary challenges to the performativity of femininity and the rediscovery of her body, which is represented in the show as a territory subject to discipline at the same time that a space of resistance and insubordination. Unlike Foucault, for whom resistance to power is not only ineffective but is destined to backfire, thus reinforcing power/knowledge regimes, Butler's performativity escapes "the dualism of structure and agency" (MCKINLAY, 2010, p.235): it is "a process inherently

unstable, latent with the possibility of resistance" (*Ibid.*, p.235). Performativity rejects any essentialism, and this is both its point of resilience and fragility. Its resilience is maintained through the repetition of a prescribed language inherited from a broader imaginary community, which makes us assume gender is endowed with ontological reality. Its fragility lies in the possibilities that this very repetition opens for alternative forms that subvert this pre-established language (*Ibid.*, p.235).

Suppose Lacie's weight was the obstacle for her to achieve a score that would allow

her access to a fuller and more meaningful life. In that case, her failure to comply with the other norms of sociability and femininity - norms that are safeguarded by hierarchical and lateral surveillance and by normalizing judgment (FOUCAULT, 1995, p.162) -, causes her final downfall. However, it is through this fall that Lacie has the chance to recover an insubmissive part of her identity and to reconnect with her body, which, in the final scenes, is revealed in its full corporeality - as when she finally gets rid of her constricting tight dress (“NOSEDIVE”, 00:58:55) - and not as a mere territory colonized by regulatory powers. Simultaneous to Lacie’s fall

to “Nosedive”’s metaphorical hell is her rise to a state of grace caused by the unveiling of the material world outside the spectacle. With her score below one and after being expelled from Naomi’s wedding party, Lacie is detained in what appears to be a type of prison or correctional facility, where her eye implant is removed. She can now see the world without any filters, any rank, or pressure to please. Lacie is then enchanted by what she sees and in one of the last shots, she is shown as genuinely moved, to the point of crying of emotion, with the sight of dust particles illuminated by the light (“NOSEDIVE”, 00:59:10; Image 6).

Image 6 – Lacie moved by the unveiling of the material world symbolized by dust particles in the light.



Moreover, Lacie’s fall, besides giving her the chance to “unmask signs of power”, also grants her the opportunity to confront the “panoptical male connoisseur [that] resides within the consciousness of most women” (BARTKY, 1990, p.72). This anonymous patriarchal Other, whom all women “stand perpetually before his gaze and judgment” (*Ibid.*, p.72), is materialized in the last scene by the black man incarcerated in the cell in front of hers, who, on his part, must also be confronting his own anonymous Other, Lac-

ie thus representing his panoptical white connoisseur. The episode ends with both insulting each other and taking immense pleasure in not having to please or be pleased, delighting themselves with a behavior so socially recriminated and dangerous within “Nosedive”’s universe that it could only happen outside the limits of the community, inside a correctional institution.

With this analysis, I aimed at offering an interpretation of the episode “Nosedive”, in which the concepts of spectacle, biopow-

er, and gender performativity form a causal chain, where the society of the spectacle presents itself as a socio-political context proper to the practice of biopower, which, in turn, reinforces gender-specific power technologies, which stiffens and restricts the possibilities of (gender) identities. When carried out over the body's materiality, these controlling and surveilling strategies become imbricated, forming a cluster of regulatory powers, making it difficult for us to differentiate between them. As mentioned earlier, because we are dealing with a text that belongs to the dystopian subgenre, these mechanisms, which are also part of our reality, are made evident in the TV show's narrative, revealing its absurdity and ideological nature.

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