



Kaunas University of Technology
Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities

Posthumanism as Science Fiction. The Case of Netflix's *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death and Robots*

Master's Final Degree Project

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Posthumanizmas kaip mokslinė fantastika Netflix serialų *Altered Carbon* ir *Love, Death & Robots* kontekste

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Santrauka

Šiame darbe analizuojami Netflix serialai *Altered Carbon* ir *Love, Death & Robots* remiantis posthumanizmo filosofija. Pasitelkiant Rossi Braidotti, Donna Haraway ir Kim Toffoletti išvalgas apibrėžiamas posthumanizmas ir postumanistinis kūnas, šios sąvokos naudojamos analizuojant serialų turinį. Darbu siekiama apibendrinti Netflix serialams būdingas posthumanistines temas ir nustatyti serialuose propaguojamas idėjas analizuojant juose pateikiamas metaforas bei siužetus.

Pirmasis darbo skyrius apibrėžia Netflix kaip transliuotoją bei turinio kūrėją. Įvardijamos Netflix marketingo bei turinio kūrimo strategijos. Apibrėžiamas žiūrovo santykis su platforma bei joje pateikiamu turiniu.

Antrasis skyrius skirtas posthumanizmo apžvalgai. Pristatomos posthumanizmui įtaką darančios filosofijos kryptis bei apibrėžiamas posthumanizmo ryšys su humanizmu. Naudojantis Donna Haraway "Kiborgų manifestu" apibrėžiama kiborgo figūra.

Trečiajame skyriuje pateikiama teorinė medžiaga apie mokslinę fantastiką. Pristatomos dažnai mokslinėje fantastikoje nagrinėjamos temos, ypač susijusios su žmogaus kūno ir technologijų santykiu. Pristatomos baimės, kurias pasak Heather Urbanski atspindi mokslinė fantastika bei įvardijama kaip šios baimės atspindi analizuojamuose darbuose.

Ketvirtasis skyrius yra skirtas serialo *Altered Carbon* analizei. Nagrinėjamas humanizmo ir neoliberalizmo ryšys ir kritika seriale. Taip pat analizuojami veikėjai kiborgai bei jų ryšys su technologija ir per ją įgaunama galia.

Penktasis skyrius analizuoja *Love, Death & Robots* serialą. Skyriuje pristatoma seriale pateikiama humanizmo kritika, analizuojami veikėjai perkopę žmogiškojo kūno apribojimus bei jų reikšmė. Taip pat apibūdinami seriale vaizduojamos veikėjos kiborgės bei analizuojama kaip posthumanistiniai kūnai leidžia joms atgauti asmeninę galią.

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Summary

This paper analyzed Netflix originals *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* from the posthuman standpoint. Posthumanism and the posthuman body are defined using Rossi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Kim Toffoletti's insights, the definitions are used to analyze the selected shows. The goal of this paper is to determine what kind of attitude towards posthuman issues Netflix propagates with its original content.

Section 1 introduces and defines Netflix as a streaming platform and a content creator. The section focuses on Netflix's marketing strategies and its approach to creating content. The section also defines the consumers' relationship with the platform.

Section 2 offers an overview of posthuman philosophy. The section defines the philosophical influences which inform posthumanism and posthumanism's attitude towards humanism. The section uses Donna Haraway's *The Cyborg Manifesto* to define the cyborg figure and introduces it as a counterpart to the humanist ideal of a human.

Section 3 focuses on the science fiction genre. It introduces themes prevalent in science fiction, in particular those dealing with the relationship between human bodies and technologies. The section introduces fears reflected in the science fiction genre as defined by Heather Urbanski and demonstrates how *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* reflects the said fears.

Section 4 is the analysis of *Altered Carbon*. The section investigates the link between humanism and neoliberalism portrayed in the show. The section also analyzes cyborg characters and their relation to technology.

Section 5 analyzes *Love, Death & Robot*. The section discusses *Love, Death & Robots*' criticism of humanism and the transcendence of the human body. Female cyborg figures, their embodiment and agency are also analyzed in this section.

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Introduction

Stories are an integral part of any culture – they shape how people understand the past, interpret the present, and imagine the future. With evolution of technology, the way we tell stories has evolved and expanded as well. Contemporary world is saturated with visual narratives and films and television shows dominate the free time of many. The internet has become a medium where streaming platforms provide endless hours of films and serials and one such platform is Netflix. Being among the most influential streaming platforms, Netflix has an enormous international reach and their content is regularly consumed by millions of subscribers. Unavoidably, the content Netflix creates entails certain points of view and ideas therefore, Netflix original serials can shape how consumers understand the world.

Contemporary world is an extremely technological world with various innovations emerging every day. New technologies are changing every aspect of human life; the way people work, travel, communicate, and relax is not the same as it was merely 10 years ago. With advanced in bioengineering and medicine, even human bodies are being shaped by technologies. A big part of how people come to terms with technological advancements is through fiction as fictional narratives allow to explore ideas, predict future scenarios, and convey didactic messages. These fictional narratives on how technologies can change human life form the science fiction genre.

The objective of this paper is to investigate Netflix's narratives on human relationship with technologies in the context of bodily modifications in order to determine what kind of attitude on posthuman issues Netflix perpetuates with its original content. Netflix has an enormous library of science fiction pieces, however only two Netflix originals (i.e. produced by Netflix) were selected to be analyzed in this paper. *Altered Carbon* (2018) and *Love, Death & Robots* (2019) deal with issues of consciousness, personhood, bodily modifications and depict posthuman issues that arise when human body meets, merges with, or is modified by technology. The goal of the analysis is to determine what kind of attitude on posthuman issues Netflix perpetuates with its original content. In order to achieve its objective, the paper raises the following research aims:

1. Describe Netflix as a streaming platform and as a content creator and to evaluate its influence and significance in contemporary media landscape.
2. Analyze *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* using the theoretical tools presented in sections 2 and 3. To interpret and comment on posthuman issues depicted in the serials'

storylines, symbols, and characters. Compare and contrast *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* in their depiction of and attitude towards posthuman issues.

3. Analyze *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots*' use of the cyborg figure and to interpret the depicted plots from the posthuman point of view.
4. Determine Netflix's approach to posthuman issues in the analyzed originals.

This paper is divided into a theoretical and analytical parts. The theoretical part consists of a commentary of Netflix's role and influence as a content creator and distributor, a brief introduction to science fiction genre, and an overview of posthuman philosophy. The aim of the theoretical part is to explain the importance of Netflix as a streaming platform and to define the terms relevant to the analysis of *Altered Carbon* (2018) and *Love, Death & Robots* (2019). The analytical part is further subdivided into sections focusing on the most salient issues in each serial. Section 4 focuses on the criticism of humanism and neoliberalism in *Altered Carbon* and analyzes the depiction of cyborgs in the show. Section 5 analyses the criticism of humanist ideas and the role of cyborg figures in *Love, Death & Robots*.

1. Netflix: Streaming Platform and Content Creator

Since its creation in 1997 Netflix has grown and become a global phenomenon – today it is a household name in many places of the world. Initially a US-based video rental chain, it has re-invented film distribution by creating an innovative algorithm-powered streaming platform in 2007, which has gone global in 2016. Naturally, in the saturated field of online entertainment, Netflix is not the only video streaming service available – HBO Now, Disney +, Amazon Prime Video, YouTube Premium are all huge players in the streaming market. So why analyze Netflix as the shaping force of contemporary visual storytelling? Firstly, Netflix is the trailblazer for many trends in streaming industry. Secondly, Netflix has enormous, international reach. The streaming platform, currently available in 190 countries, has revolutionized how content is released and consumed and in doing so has shaped the streaming industry’s business model and consumer behavior; in other words, Netflix has greatly contributed to the creation of bingeing culture and the content which stimulates it. In 2013 Netflix became a content creator and nowadays produces a plethora of shows of various genres, styles, and even languages. The aim of this section is to analyze how Netflix has shaped viewing culture on the global scale and to introduce two of its original science-fiction shows – *Altered Carbon* (2018) and *Love Death and Robots* (2019).

In 2018 Global Television Demand Report showed that “Netflix owns 71% of the global streaming video on demand (SVOD) market [...] and grabs 68% of the market in the U.S.” (Elliott, 2019) Since streaming platforms tend to protect their data from leaking into public outlets, the study was conducted by analyzing “a range of video streaming, social media, photo sharing, blogging, web and peer-to-peer platforms across 10 markets around the world.” (Hayes, Netflix Has 71% Of Global SVOD Market, But New Services Gain Ground – Report, 2019) Even though articles suggesting that Netflix’s might be losing its position as the leading streaming platform due to the slowing growth of new subscribers and loss of licensed content started emerging in 2019, these issues are rather recent and do not undermine the importance of Netflix as a streaming service. The important question is how Netflix became the streaming giant it is today. It is not only that it was among the first companies to go online with their service. Sizeable investments, aggressive marketing, and focus on content have all contributed Netflix’s success.

During a viewing session, there is a two-way exchange of information happening between Netflix and the viewer. Netflix provides content, but also tracks its users’ behaviour and viewing habits and uses the gathered data to tailor its content to users’ preferences. Berry discusses the “the way in which we use the web, and also how the web uses us” and calls this phenomenon “real-time web” where

devices provide meta data which is later “aggregated and analysed” by the service or content provider (Berry, 2011, p. 142). On the real-time web, the consumer is a “riparian citizen”, a citizen of the flow, who “is expected to desire the real-time stream, both to be in it, to follow it, and to participate in it, and where the user opts out, the technical devices are being developed to manage this too.” (Berry, 2011, p. 143) Netflix fits Berry’s definition of real-time web word for word. The viewer-platform ecosystem is a kind of posthuman creation, a synthesis between humans and various technologies. And while Netflix, figuratively, has its finger on the cultural pulse and creates content that is desired by the consumers, the speeds at which content is provided and consumed gives Netflix an upper hand in the viewer-platform hierarchy. Berry explains that speed of the flow of information is so rapid “that critical thought itself might become suppressed under the quantity of information.” (Berry, 2011, p. 150) As a content creator Netflix is free to incorporate any symbols, metaphors, and didactic messages into its narratives and the viewers might not even realize that they are exposed to opinionated content. There are several ways in which Netflix ensures viewer engagement.

Netflix has a strong presence online and not only in the sense that their service is exclusively available on the internet. Netflix promotes its content and engages with its fans on various social media platforms and keeps a light-hearted tone when promoting their brand. Maheen Siddiqi explains that Netflix communicates in an extremely casual style, “believing a brand can only achieve success with an authentic voice” (Siddiqi, 2019). The author explains that the laid-back approach to marketing is working:

If you’ve ever stalked Netflix’s Twitter account in your spare time, you’ll notice how casually they send out tweets and get people talking about them. Their social media team doesn’t even put money into sponsoring tweets—instead they simply craft a casual tweet, flaunting how charming and witty they are and voila... it goes viral! (Siddiqi, 2019)

Being riparian citizens of the web, Netflix’s users are available on other sites, where they consume information and Netflix’s marketing team is aware of that. In addition to promoting its content, Netflix also celebrates the culture of streaming shows and movies online. Siddiqi adds that Netflix not only acknowledges that “subscribers procrastinate while binge-watching Netflix the whole night” and “share passwords among friends and family, and will do whatever it takes to avoid paying \$10 a month.”, it uses these user habits as marketing tools (Siddiqi, 2019). Posting and retweeting memes on the bingeing experience creates an illusion of closeness and sameness between Netflix and the viewer, it is as if Netflix is telling its customers, “see, it’s okay, we all wasted time watching hours and hours of television”. The constant and active presence online is Netflix’s way of making sure that when the users

opt out of Netflix's stream, they do not forget about it; they are reminded of the pleasant experience of viewing and are invited to come back. The relatability of the posts and ability to engage with the platform might contribute to Netflix's popularity and strengthen its role as an entertainment platform.

Another important part of Netflix's success is their focus on the content, both original and licensed. Showbiz Cheat Sheet reports that "Netflix spent an estimated \$12 billion on content creation and licensing in 2018" which is a considerable sum of money by streaming market standards as "Amazon spent an estimated \$5 billion, while Hulu spent \$2.5 billion." (Elliott, 2019). The investment replenished Netflix's online library rather significantly as it "released 139 new titles in 2018" (Elliott, 2019). The abundance and quality of shows available is appreciated by the fans as "16 of the top 20 series in the U.S. were from [Netflix]" (Elliott, 2019). The fact that in 2019 Netflix's originals "earned 34 Golden Globes nominations" speaks of the quality the platform strives to achieve (Rahmanan, 2019). While licensed content is an important factor in attracting users, Netflix is clearly focused on original content as "85% of new spending earmarked for originals." (Trainer, 2019) Netflix is leaning towards creating its own content and it is unlikely this tendency will change in the future as more and more broadcasters are moving online with their shows. With this focus on and abundance of original shows it is worth looking into the anatomy of the contemporary TV shows available on Netflix.

One of the defining features streaming platforms, including Netflix, is that the audiences usually watch the shows in sessions which can last for hours on end. This contemporary viewing practice is called binge-viewing and it "is reforming the model of television where episodes are released weekly" because audiences no longer have to wait for new episodes and some even choose to wait for a season to end before watching it (Grandinetti, 2017, p. 13). In other words, modern audiences are very much riparian citizens who prefer submerging themselves into the narratives they consume. Grandinetti, basing his statement on a 2013 Netflix's survey, claims that the shift towards releasing whole seasons at once is happening because audiences prefer watching shows in binge sessions. Collecting and analyzing data on consumer behaviour has allowed content creators to pick up on this tendency and they quickly adapted to cater to the audiences' needs. In an article on the changing nature of TV shows Andrew Romano explains:

Talk to the people behind *Breaking Bad*, *Game of Thrones*, and so on, and it soon becomes clear that they've designed these shows to be more bingeable—more propulsive and page-turning—than anything the networks ever pushed on us in the past. How We Watch may be changing. But it's changing What We Watch as well. (Romano, 2013)

What Romano is describing is a self-perpetuating cycle – the audiences prefer watching shows for longer stretches of time and the providers cater to this desire by creating condensed and addictive content. Netflix, being aware of this preference for bingeable content, has strongly contributed to the popularization of the phenomenon of binge viewing, which is now reshaping how consumers how modern consumers understand TV shows.

Binge-viewing has changed TV shows to the extent where coining a new term for them becomes necessary. Romano calls these contemporary shows “hyperserials” and describes them as having “a purer, more intense focus on one linear, series-long plotline”; these TV shows do not employ such storytelling tools as “recaps, teasers, and exposition of any kind. They make even less sense when viewed out of order. And they always pose a clear question designed to propel the story forward” (Romano, 2013). Streamlining the plot allows for consumers to submerge themselves in the flow of the show, while fragmenting the viewing disturbs this experience, especially because there are fewer cues which allow the viewers to orient themselves within the narrative. The creators of hyperserials are building on the legacy of such TV hits as “*Oz, The Sopranos, Six Feet Under, The Wire, Deadwood*”, which managed to tell “deep, complex, adult stories about antiheroic characters on the small screen” and now are creating “ever-more addictive morsels of pure narrative.” (Romano, 2013) Catering to riparian citizens’ preferences has not diminished the quality of the narratives. Adult serials are still a medium where the complex issues can be presented and discussed, but it could be argued that bingeing allows for less time to process the metaphors and the didactic messages of the narratives.

The hyper serialization and viewer tendency to binge watch hint to the problem of addiction; it is not only that audiences prefer to watch shows in longer sessions, it is that they might have a problem stopping. Romano himself shares personal experience regarding binge viewing, in his account he explains:

The pattern [of watching TV shows] mimics addictive drug use, as my wife and I know too well. After two hours of *Game of Thrones*, the apartment goes suddenly quiet. Our guilty eyes meet from opposite ends of the sofa. We are thinking the same thing. Maybe just one more?
(Romano, 2013)

It is not only Romano who has this experience of wanting to continue being in the flow of a TV show. Familiar to many, the state of having an urge to continue watching is at the heart of both the real-time web and the binge-viewing practice. The discomfort of a finished episode pushes the viewer to stay on the stream as it resembles the sensation of a drug wearing off; “viewers’ vague learned sense that they will feel less relaxed if they stop viewing may be a significant factor in not turning the set off. Viewing

begets more viewing.” (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 77) And since “serialized, streaming TV is tailor-made to keep the endorphins flowing,” the viewers are posed with quite a challenge when it comes to terminating the viewing session. It is this addiction which forces the viewer to stay on the stream which makes Netflix’s business model so successful; the viewers simply cannot say no to the vast library of hyper-serialized content.

The analyzed shows *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* are not the biggest shows on Netflix, however, they still attract audiences interested in science fiction genre. Netflix does not release statistical information on the number of views its shows receive, nonetheless, there are companies keeping track of their popularity. In 2018, Deadline.com reported data analytic company Nielsen’s findings on *Altered Carbon*’s popularity in the U.S. stating that “it totaled 1.2 million viewers on average, reaching 2.5 million in its first seven days on the platform.” (Hayes, 2018) To put the data into perspective, Forbes clarifies that such numbers are not extremely impressive and that “sci-fi film nor the sci-fi show have been particularly big hits for Netflix, performing adequately at best.” (Tassi, 2018) Although the numbers were not particularly impressive for *Altered Carbon* upon its release, Forbes reported that the show “has received a lot of critical praise for being one of the best sci-fi offerings on TV” (Tassi, 2018). In April 2019, Business Insider provided a list of the most popular shows on Netflix and other streaming platforms based on the data gathered by Parrot Analytics. The data science company estimates popularity based on demand expressions, which are “the globally standardized TV demand measurement unit from Parrot. Audience demand reflects the desire, engagement, and viewership weighted by importance.” (Clark, 2019) According to Parrot Analytics’ calculations, *Altered Carbon* was number 7 and *Love, Death & Robots* was number 5 according to popularity in March of that year; while the article does not provide specific numbers, such positions in the chart demonstrate that the analyzed shows have cultural significance and are watched by millions of people worldwide.

To conclude, Netflix is part of the real-time web phenomenon, with its viewers being riparian citizens constantly submerged in the stream of information. As a business, Netflix is a streaming giant with intent, resources, and knowledge how to make addictive content. Over the better part of the last decade Netflix has focused on producing their own, hyper-serialized content and they seem to be determined to intensify the production of their originals. These shows are constructed to be intense, condensed narratives, and have drug-like effects on their consumers to keep them in the flow of the stream. In other words, consumers are likely to be immersed in the narratives created and distributed by Netflix and hence it is important to analyze the messages and morals ingrained in the stories we consume when binge-viewing TV.

2. Posthumanism and the Posthuman Body

This section aims to present the posthuman philosophy, its philosophical background, and aims. The first part of the section focuses on the roots of posthumanism and its philosophical aims and introduces the cyborg – a posthuman figure described by Donna Haraway. The second part of the section introduces the literary approach to the posthuman philosophy and the various fictional figures that emerge when the boundary between human and non-human is crossed. The section introduces both utopian and monstrous incarnations of posthuman bodies and details the hopes and critiques associated with both imaginings.

2.1. An Introduction to Posthumanism

The term posthumanism implies a variety of meanings. It can imply the deconstruction, the death of, or the transcendence of the concept of human. The posthuman philosophy, greatly influenced by feminism, post-colonialism, and anti-humanism, is a response to humanism and an attempt to redefine the concept of human in the modern context. The aim of this section is to introduce the humanist assumptions which influence the posthuman philosophy, lay out how posthuman philosophy tackles the humanist heritage, and to define the posthuman body. The first part of the section focuses on humanism and how posthuman theory subverts humanist philosophy. The second part of the section describes the cyborg – the posthuman counterpart to the humanist figure of human.

The term “posthumanism” suggests that the philosophy is a response to humanism and an attempt to move beyond the humanist mindset, therefore, to understand posthumanism, one must understand humanism. Humanism presumes that the human, due to his intelligence and reason, is at the center of the universe. The humanist philosophy is fascinated with human reason and “its ability to confront and solve the many problems that humans face, its ability to rearrange both the world of Nature and the affairs of men and women so that human life will prosper.” (Ehrenfeld, 1978, p. 5) Humanism assumes that “human intelligence is the key to human success” and therefore it is crucial “to assert its power and protect its prerogatives wherever they are questioned or challenged.” (Ehrenfeld, 1978, pp. 5-6) Ehrenfeld’s insight shows that humanism is rather aggressive in defending the presumed human mastery over everything non-human, the humanist dichotomy begs the question as to what exactly both categories, the human and the non-human, entail.

In the humanist philosophy the term “human” is heavily loaded with connotations. Below the façade of inclusivity, assumptions of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and bodily ability limit the understanding of “human” and exclude many ways of being. This coding is not necessarily deliberate,

yet it is still extremely powerful and prolific. Braidotti explains that despite the supposed universality of humanism, there is a defined standard the heart of humanism against which all things are judged:

At the start of it all there is He: the classical ideal of 'Man', formulated first by Protagoras as 'the measure of all things', later renewed in the Italian Renaissance as a universal model and represented in Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man (Braidotti, 2013, p. 13)

It is not any man that humanism considers to be the measure of all things, "he is white, European, handsome and able-bodied; of his sexuality nothing much can be guessed, though plenty of speculation surrounds that of its painter, Leonardo da Vinci." (Braidotti, 2013, p. 24) Vitruvian Man, the embodiment of perfection, dictates an "universalistic ideal that by now had reached the status of a natural law" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 23). The said ideal applies to more than just appearances; the humanist ideal is "logical", as opposed to "emotional" (Ehrenfeld, 1978, pp. 11-12). This perfect humanist icon is problematized in the posthuman philosophy, his "individualism breeds egotism and self-centredness; self-determination can turn to arrogance and domination; and science [the pinnacle of human achievements] is not free from its own dogmatic tendencies." (Braidotti, 2013, p. 30) The humanist ideal is extremely prolific, "public communications media are permeated with humanistic preachings all of the time. Business, economic theory, politics, and technology accept the teachings of humanism, entire." (Ehrenfeld, 1978, p. 4) Humanism prescribes a unit of measure for value and validity and disregards any other possible way of being a human. The universalism and the ideal which humanism promotes is questioned by posthumanism as the philosophy understands the ideal as "a historical construct and as such contingent as to values and locations." (Braidotti, 2013, pp. 23-24) In short, humanism prescribes value to its own construct of human and disenfranchises those who are not human, namely, those of different gender, race, or ethnicity.

The humanist ideal is problematic because it creates a dichotomy between the human, i.e. a white, European man, and the non-human, everyone and everything outside this category. This way human-nature, human-other, etc. oppositions form and allow for exploitative and even lethal relationships to develop. The humanist dichotomies oversimplify real-life relationships and create unnecessary and unnatural tensions. Ehrenfeld explains:

a dichotomy has been created: people vs. Nature. Of course, there is nothing wrong with a dichotomy is a dichotomy is warranted. [...] Yet there is something about the extreme commonness of dichotomies that must make one suspicious: are clearcut alternatives with two possible, mutually exclusive choices really so frequent in life? [...] Evidently, we set up dichotomies because our logical thoughts are more comfortable in that

mode. This does not mean that dichotomies necessarily exist, or are even useful. (Ehrenfeld, 1978, p. 11)

In other words, humanism constructs rigid definitions of human and non-human regardless of whether the division is warranted or not just to accommodate the humanist worldview, where the human is at the center of the universe and is therefore entitled to ruling it. The human-nature dichotomy allows to perceive nature as a force to be tamed, exploited or developed without considering the biological reality that human is (a part of) nature and cannot exist in a vacuum. Ehrenfeld adds that the binary worldview is not only incorrect, it can also be dangerous:

Dichotomies are most mischievous when they arbitrarily separate parts of a highly interrelated and complex system. In working with the broken mechanism of a watch, for example, no watchmaker is likely to separate "top half" from "bottom half," or "springs and gear wheels" from "jeweled bearings." This might prevent the repair altogether. Nature can be portrayed as being in opposition to us, but it also includes us; we comprise one system. (Ehrenfeld, 1978, p. 11)

The humanist model greatly oversimplifies human relationship with nature and negates human dependency on and belonging to it. This humanist understanding allows to behave in ways, which are detrimental not only to other species and their habitats, but to us, humans, as well. The unjustified human-nature dichotomy allows to perceive the world as a warehouse full of resources and a dump to dispose of waste without considering that this understanding leads to the destruction of humankind.

The binary thinking at the heart of humanism creates a worldview where human is not only separated from nature, it is a philosophy sensitive to corporeal and cultural differences with strong value judgements based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. By narrowly defining who is considered human, humanism allows for the oppression and abuse of those who are undeniably persons yet are not recognized as humans. When denoting difference, humanism also evaluates an individual, “[c]entral to this universalistic posture and its binary logic is the notion of ‘difference’ as pejoration. Subjectivity is equated with consciousness, universal rationality, and self-regulating ethical behaviour, whereas Otherness is defined as its negative and specular counterpart.” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 15) In other words, humanism as a philosophy is guided by the self-other dichotomy, where the other is inadequate, irrational, feral and is to be tamed or exploited. Braidotti continues by saying that “[i]n so far as difference spells inferiority, it acquires both essentialist and lethal connotations for people who get branded as ‘others’. These are the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies.” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 15) This posthuman criticism of

humanism reveals humanism to be an extremely rigid and hierarchical philosophy which builds the superiority of human on exploitation and abuse of the other.

The ruthlessness of humanism towards those branded as other and the appalling injustices brought about by the humanist beliefs is what pushes the posthuman philosophy forward. Braidotti explains that the survey of humanism and its legacy begins with the baby-boomer generation; the generation "marked by the traumatic legacy of the many failed political experiments of the twentieth century." (Braidotti, 2013, p. 17) Having witnessed and survived colonialism, Fascism, and Communism, baby-boomers manifest "a clear generational link between these historical phenomena and the rejection of Humanism in the 1960s and 1970s." (Braidotti, 2013, p. 17) The philosophical background in which the posthuman theory came to be was rebellious, rejecting established notions of European superiority:

French post-structuralist philosophers [...] argued that in the aftermath of colonialism, Auschwitz, Hiroshima and the Gulag [...] we Europeans need to develop a critique of Europe's delusion of grandeur in positing ourselves as the moral guardian of the world and as the motor of human evolution. Thus, the philosophical generation of the 1970s, that proclaimed the 'death of Man' was anti-fascist, post-communist, post-colonial and post-humanist, in a variety of different combinations of the terms. They led to the rejection of the classical definition of European identity in terms of Humanism, rationality and the universal. (Braidotti, 2013, p. 25)

Posthumanism not only matures in a philosophical environment which rejects humanist notions and dichotomies, the philosophy also grows to realize and explore the pluralities hidden under seemingly monolithic identities. Postmodernist feminism, one of the schools of thought influencing posthumanism, "argued that it is impossible to speak in one unified voice about women, natives and other marginal subjects. The emphasis falls instead on issues of diversity and differences among them and on the internal fractures of each category." (Braidotti, 2013, p. 27) The recognition of the other as a subject with agency and the acknowledgement of identity-related complexities are the driving forces of posthumanism. It is this recognition of crimes and injustices committed in the name of humanism that drives posthumanism to seek new ways of defining relationships, both among human beings and between humans and nature. Braidotti explains that this shift in philosophy is both destructive and constructive at the same time:

It is a historical fact that the great emancipatory movements of postmodernity are driven and fueled by the resurgent 'others': the women's rights movement; the anti-racism and de-colonization movements; the anti-nuclear and pro-environment movements are the voices of the structural Others of modernity. They inevitably mark the crisis of the former humanist

‘centre’ or dominant subject-position and are not merely anti-humanist, but move beyond it to an altogether novel, posthuman project. These social and political movements are simultaneously the symptom of the crisis of the subject, and for conservatives even its ‘cause’, and also the expression of positive, pro-active alternatives. (Braidotti, 2013, p. 37)

Posthumanism has its roots in a philosophical crisis which starts in the 1970s as a response to the atrocities committed under regimes formed under humanism. By deconstructing the humanist symbol of perfection, the human, posthumanism sheds light onto what is considered non-human, or other and how this dichotomy allows for exploitation and oppression. The posthuman approach seeks to change the relationships formed under humanism and mend the injustices that stem from the humanist oppression.

Humanism has the icon of a man as the measure of all things. For posthumanists, such figure could be the cyborg described by Donna Haraway. The term cyborg heavily implies splicing of human and machine and at first glance seems more like a fictional construction than a useful philosophical term. However, the image of cyborg is much richer and more nuanced than just a technologically enhanced figure. In *The Cyborg Manifesto*, first published in 1984, Haraway explains that the category of cyborg is less fictional than it appears at first. Her insights are even more accurate in contemporary world, where technology and social environment allows for various breaking of boundaries:

we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism—in short, cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of “Western” science and politics—the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other—the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination. (Haraway, 1991, p. 7)

The posthuman cyborg emerges from technological evolution, which allows for splicing of various categories (human-machine, human-animal, etc.) and attempts to transcend the violence of humanism. It is an extreme example of breaking boundaries. For Haraway, the cyborg is a feminist figure and means to explore the pluralities within womanhood, especially in relation to race and ethnicity. For the purposes of this paper, the cyborg is a figure made up of pluralities and contradictions within itself.

Being a chimeric figure, the cyborg can violate every category put forth by humanism; the cyborg appears where the “boundary between human and animal is transgressed.” (Haraway, 1991, p.

11) The cyborg also illustrates the ambiguity “between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines.” (Haraway, 1991, p. 11) Haraway explains that the cyborg is “a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” and it is through the fiction that boundaries, differences, and relationships can be examined (Haraway, 1991, p. 4) Whereas the human in humanism is a symbol for logic and reason, the cyborg is an anarchist rebel breaking and subverting the humanist order:

Writing is preeminently the technology of cyborgs, etched surfaces of the late twentieth century. Cyborg politics are the struggle for language and the struggle against perfect communication, against the one code that translates all meaning perfectly, the central dogma of phallogocentrism. That is why cyborg politics insist on noise and advocate pollution, rejoicing in the illegitimate fusions of animal and machine. These are the couplings that make Man and Woman so problematic, subverting the structure of desire, the force imagined to generate language and gender, and so subverting the structure and modes of reproduction of “Western” identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind. (Haraway, 1991, p. 57)

The cyborg is not a static figure or a mere metaphor, it is an active rebel with a political agenda which is to overthrow humanism and its exploitative legacy. The way it does that is by hijacking writing, which “has been crucial to the Western myth of the distinction between oral and written cultures, primitive and civilized mentalities” (Haraway, 1991, p. 55). Haraway explains that “Cyborg writing is about the power to survive [...] on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other.” (Haraway, 1991, p. 55) The cyborg signifies the renaissance of the other and a struggle to construct a world free of humanist constructs by employing writing. This is the reason why fiction is extremely relevant in posthuman philosophy, it is the realm of the cyborgs exploring their identities and shattering presupposed humanist norms.

Posthumanism, as all things “post”, is difficult to define. However, the unifying notion of posthuman philosophy is the effort to question humanist heritage and the anthropocentrism that comes with it. Posthuman thought comes in varying degrees of severity from anti-humanism, to transhumanism. Stemming from disillusionment with humanism, posthumanism investigates the human ideal and the imperialist, racist, sexist, etc. politics that derive from the notion of human superiority. The posthuman investigation into the figure of human reveals that it is an extremely exclusionary category, othering anyone who is not a man, not white, not of European descent, etc. In posthumanism, the equivalent of the human is the cyborg – a rebel figure meant to embody the fragmentations and oppositions present

within any given identity. Writing is a medium where the fragmented nature of identities can be explored by posthuman, cyborg, writers and where the humanist heritage can be challenged.

2.2. The Posthuman Body

Science fiction takes the figurative figure of cyborg and explores the implications of pluralistic, composite identities in fictional narratives making the figurative cyborg a literal posthuman figure. In science fiction, cyborg is one specific type of posthuman being, however, the genre is saturated with enhanced or deformed figures, who can be called posthuman bodies. These beings are created and used to explore the identities at the frontiers of humanist dichotomies, to investigate human (as a biological category) relationship with technology and its transformative effects on human bodies and social realities, and to imagine the futures where the binary divisions dissolve and vanish. The aim of this section is to define the posthuman body, describe the kinds of bodies present in science fiction, and to introduce the issues analyzed with each kind of chimeric, posthuman body.

The posthuman body is a complex concept that emerges in the area between human and non-human. Kim Toffoletti explains that the post-human body can be “a fusion of technological and natural components, a mixture of species and in some cases, of indeterminate gender” (Toffoletti, p.2). Since the posthuman body is a creature composed of two contradictory elements, it raises the issues of “organic bodily boundaries, the locus of identity and the status of the human” (Toffoletti, p. 2). In the presence of the post-human body, “distinctions between what is real and what is virtual, where the body ends and technology begins, what is nature and what is machine, fracture and implode” (Toffoletti, p. 2). Toffoletti adds that since the post-human body signifies the destruction of categories and boundaries, it can imply the destruction of the human body. However, she explains that the “post” in the term “posthuman” indicates “something that comes after the human but remains in a continuum of human existence and change. In this interpretation, the posthuman becomes part of the process of being human. The posthuman body can be understood as the next evolutionary state for humans that is enabled by technology. Just like the cyborg breaks identity-related boundaries, the posthuman body is a result of merging different entities and breaking the norms which suggest that a human body should be purely biological.

Posthuman body is not necessarily a lab-grown chimera; it can be a human transformed through contact with or usage of technology. Toffoletti states that the “posthuman condition cannot simply be explained by the transcendence, extension or penetration of the human body via technologies”, she clarifies that the posthuman state suggests “bodily transformations and augmentations that come about

through our engagements with technology that complicate the idea of a ‘human essence’” (Toffoletti, p. 13). According to Toffoletti, the “posthuman emerges by interrogating what it means to be human in a digital age” (Toffoletti, p. 13). The posthuman body raises such questions as “is it the mind or the body that makes us human?” and “[w]hen our corporeal experiences and our interactions with others are changed by technology, do we stop being human?” (Toffoletti, p. 13). The posthuman body serves as a “transitional space where old ways of thinking about the self and the Other, the body and technology, reality and illusion, can’t be sustained” (Toffoletti, p. 14). The posthuman body is a result of a human body encountering technology and breaking the boundaries between the human and the non-human and in this way negating humanist definitions of a human being.

A wide variety of creatures can be classified as posthuman bodies as there is no unified form that would determine a creature to be a posthuman creation. Paul Sheehan identifies several kinds of the posthuman bodies. According to Sheehan, the defining feature of a posthuman body is that the creature is at least part biologically human. For this reason, the posthuman body can appear as anything from a body that is perfected by technology to a monstrous entity whose body is technologically deformed.

The posthuman body that is perfected through contact with technology signifies that the technological modification enables the evolution of humans. One kind of posthuman body is a body created by the interference between “the mechanic and the organic”, it is a posthuman body which Hillman calls “techno-body” (Hillman in Sheehan, p. 245). This kind of body emerges from “thinking through and beyond the human” (Sheehan, p. 245). Techno-body is an entity which transcends the bodily restrictions of a purely biological human. According to Sheehan, the techno-body can be portrayed as “the cyborg”, a body that is enhanced using prosthetics, or a “genetically engineered or cloned body” (Sheehan, p. 245). Here the cyborg is a literary archetype, rather than a philosophical figure put forth by Donna Haraway. Sheehan adds that the uniting feature of the techno-bodies is that their “corporeal reimaginings” are inspired by the “dream of human perfectibility” (Sheehan, p. 245). The techno-body inspires “faith in technological progress” (Sheehan, p. 245). In addition, Toffoletti describes a body which transcends “the ‘real world’ through virtual technologies” (Toffoletti, p. 12). For the posthuman body which surpasses physical restrictions of a human body “technology acts as a tool to move beyond the limitations of bodily existence” (Toffoletti, p. 12). Ann Weinstone describes this liberating transcending of the body as “progressive posthumanism”, an approach to posthumanism which expresses “concern with freedom—freedom from oppression, freedom for self-creation” (Weinstone, p. 10). Weinstone also explains that for progressive posthumanists “control of creative

transformative capacity is the engine of freedom” (Weinstone, p. 10). Moreover, Toffoletti adds that the body that transcends into the virtual world is offered freedom that is not available in the physical world. The progressive posthuman being exists without a human body. These representations of the posthuman bodies aim to redefine the understanding of a human being. The progressive posthuman bodies include bodies or beings which are a result of advancing, developing and freeing a human body. These kinds of the modified bodies portray the posthuman body as a positive result of scientific interference.

The post-human body can also appear as a monstrous entity. In this category, Sheehan describes a “grotesque body” that is “a figure associated with mutations, plagues, viruses and other infectious bio-forms, made legible through somatic disfiguration” these mutations make the body “other than human” (Sheehan, p. 245-6). He adds that the grotesque bodies “are often the outcome or offshoot of [. . .] monstrous scientific agendas” (Sheehan, p. 247). Sheehan also states that the monstrous body can be a splice of a human and an animal. Sheehan explains that “by introducing the unnatural and uncanny into human corporeality, the monstrous, mythic body functions as a critique of science” (Sheehan, p. 248). One more kind of monstrous posthuman entities described by Sheehan is a body morphed into uncanny forms with the use of drugs, these bodies are examples of “how the body’s cells are transformed under the influence of heroin [. . .] and other addictive substances” (Sheehan, p. 249). The mutations fueled by drugs are, according to Sheehan, a manifestation of the “parasitic” human nature which “governs all human relations” (Sheehan, p. 249). Sheehan adds that the posthuman body shaped by addictive substances exhibits uncontrollable nature and is reduced to a vessel controlled by impulses. The grotesque or monstrous body is a category of the posthuman bodies which serves as a criticism of the technological manipulation of the human body. The deformed body represents the concern that science can fail to predict the outcomes of an experiment and technology can malfunction or be deliberately used to harm the human body, thus creating monstrous posthuman bodies.

Toffoletti offers deeper insight to the posthuman body which is a monster. She describes a monster as “boundary figure that resists being classified in the natural order of things”; the ambiguous nature of a monster causes “anxieties concerning the boundaries and borders of the body, subjectivity and the human” (Toffoletti, p. 84). The posthuman body shares this feature with a monster because it also breaks the boundaries between human and non-human. It is important to note that a posthuman body does not necessarily become a monster by just merging the human and the non-human, rather to become a monster the posthuman body must be marked as one. Toffoletti relies on Halberstam’s analysis of *The Silence of the Lambs* and states that “contemporary images of the monster locate horror at the level of the skin” (Halberstam in Toffoletti, p. 87). In other words, posthuman bodies can be marked as

monsters for various reasons. It is possible to employ posthuman monsters to critique the transcendence of boundaries and reinforce humanist notions. Toffoletti adds that “skin functions to confuse boundaries such as interior and exterior, consumption and being consumed, male and female” (Toffoletti, p. 87). She also explains that the exterior markers of the posthuman monster, like skin, serve as a symbol that “the technological/human interaction configured in terms of a prosthetic extension or invasion of the unified and organic self by technology” no longer define the posthuman monster. Instead, the “posthuman configurations play with the boundaries separating the organic and machinic, the human and non-human, interiorities and exteriorities, self and Other” (Toffoletti, p. 87). Toffoletti adds that “posthuman forms invert the human–machine prosthetic to render the potential effects of biotechnology on the body” (Toffoletti, p. 134). The posthuman monster is created by modifying a human body and rendering something not entirely human in the process. The posthuman monster indicates the “finalities of binary oppositions” between human and non-human, it is “that which annihilates established identity categories” (Toffoletti, p. 87). The posthuman monster is an entity that is physically deformed and serves as boundary figure between human and non-human. It raises issues related to human identity and human essence. It is also a horrific result of manipulating human body with technology. The posthuman monster embodies the issues related to malfunctioning technology or technology that has been manipulated to harm the human body. However, it is worth keeping in mind that such portrayals can be employed to not only to critique extensive modification of literal, physical bodies, but also to preserve and reinforce the humanist dichotomy of the human and the other.

In short, a posthuman body is a creature that is a result of technological manipulation of the human body. In some cases, the posthuman body is a celebration of technological alteration of the body, because the modified human is freed from the physical restrictions of the body. However, the posthuman being can also be a criticism of technological manipulation of the body or the crossing of boundaries set by humanism. The posthuman body can be a monster which is created by merging the human and the non-human. The posthuman monster is a deformed entity that breaks the boundary between human and non-human and as a result raises the issue of human essence. Both types of the posthuman embodiment are literary tools to engage with, explore and critique posthuman ideas.

3. Science Fiction and Netflix's Approach to the Genre

Altered Carbon and *Love, Death & Robots* are both science fiction Netflix originals, which depict futures where technology has drastically shaped human life. Beyond the futuristic looking visuals, the shows deal with questions of corporality in highly technological worlds, where the death of the body ceases to be the death of the person. The aim of this section is to briefly define science fiction and to identify the issues which science fiction attempts to question. The first part of the section is a theoretical overview of science fiction as a mode of storytelling. The second section outlines the most salient technological issues in *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots*.

3.1. A Brief Introduction Science Fiction Mode of Storytelling

Science fiction, also referred to as SF or Sci-Fi, is a particularly difficult phenomenon to define; it does not have a clear and fixed set of features which would constitute a work of fiction to be science fiction. As Mark C. Glassy explains, the definition of science fiction is “very much like the definition of pornography: You don’t know what it is, but you know it when you see it.” (Glassy, 2001, p. 2) Even if the genre lacks solid features, many science fiction pieces share a goal. Science fiction creators construct fictive worlds and speculate on the outcomes of technological advancement to comment on real-life, contemporary issues. The aim of this section is not to define the genre, but rather to try and outline the themes and issues prevalent in science fiction stories. Since it is impossible to cover each problem that science fiction has dealt with, the section focuses on issues of technological advancement and its influence on human bodies and the definition of personhood.

Science fiction genre is part of a broader storytelling tradition called speculative fiction. The term “speculative fiction” is an umbrella term that refers to any piece of fiction that involves some speculation and constructs a reality that is not entirely known or understood by the reader. Heather Urbanski explains that “speculative fiction covers any story that deliberately violates the bounds of reality” and explores the “deviation” of the created world, therefore the term encompasses any piece of fiction which ask “what if...?” and then explores the resulting fictional world (Urbanski, 2007, p. xvii). Darko Suvin called this deviation from the known and understood “cognitive estrangement” (Suvin in Seed, 2011, p. 128). The state of cognitive estrangement is a reader’s state of mind that is a result of a novelty, including anything “from an invention to setting or a relation unfamiliar to the reader’s worldview” (Seed, 2011, p. 128). In science fiction the deviation of the fictive world is constructed to comment on the issues and fears caused by technology and innovation. Speculative fiction, and by extension science fiction, is “explicitly, deliberately, and baldly didactic”, SF stories often focus on

what could go wrong if humanity is not careful with its own creations (Russ, 1975). The interest in and speculation about technology are two defining features of science fiction as creators attempt to depict not only the evolution of technology but also the issues resulting from it.

When defining the issues emerging from human contact with technology, Urbanski distinguishes three types of categories of issues present in science fiction narratives. She identifies problems related to technology itself, the manipulation of technology and the consequences of modifying the world with technology.

The first set of issues is caused by the “advances in science and technology” that “lead to our destruction, physical or otherwise” (Urbanski, 2007, p. 21) Urbanski calls this category of issues “Science and Technology”; she explains that the issues in this category are caused by malfunctioning technology or technology that is manipulated by corrupt groups or individuals with the intent to deliberately harm human beings. One specific subcategory of the issues emerging from malfunctioning technology is the modification and/or violation of the human body. Innovation in biology and genetic engineering raise the issue of “perfect genetic clones threatening to take over the lives of the original”, a narrative which speaks of the fear of human displacement. (Urbanski, 2007, p. 57)

Another issue Urbanski describes is the creation of biologically “fixed” human beings, which is caused by humanity’s “constant drive to extend life and cure diseases, to ‘fix’ whatever may be wrong with us” (Urbanski, 2007, p. 60). The desire to better human body is problematic because the unlimited modification of the body reduces humans to “nothing but assembly-line toys” (Urbanski, 2007, p. 61). In other words, modifications of the body enabled by advances in technology causes issues of depersonalization and objectification of human beings. For Urbanski, depersonalization is one of the primary issues related to advances in the field of biology in science fiction. According to her, biological advancements and bioengineering have the capacity to reduce any individual to an entity that is less-than-human, thus making them susceptible to non-consensual modification.

The author also describes the issue of “disastrous consequences of [...] technological advances.” (Urbanski, 2007, p. 57) In the context of biological advances and modification of human body the disastrous consequences can mean the creation of deformed bodies. The disfigured bodies indicate the issue of violating bioethical norms which dictate that the treatment of the body must benefit the body and cannot deprive it of dignity. The products of manipulated technology can be depicted as entities that are not familiar to human beings and therefore unsettling, scary, or even dangerous. The issues that arise from human encounters with the modified and the unfamiliar belong to the category Urbanski titles “The Unknown”.

The issues emerging from human encounters with the Unknown are caused by the tension between “the human nature [. . .] to always [be] on a lookout for some great change that will make everything better” and the “human nature to be afraid of the unknown” (Vinge in Urbanski, 2007, p. xxvi-xxvii; Urbanski, p. xxvi). The Unknown can be any product of technology, including anything from knowledge to modified human bodies, that challenges the nature of human existence. Urbanski states that “the Unknown nightmare reflects our fears, [that] aliens may be in our midst as creatures somehow other than human” (Urbanski, 2007, p. 147) In modified human bodies, the otherness can be caused by “true mystical forces”, “enhanced mental abilities” or “or genetic mutation” (Urbanski, 2007, p. 147). The human encounter with the Unknown raises the issue of “how we might deal with the detection of those who are different in incredible ways” (Urbanski, 2007, p. 147). Since human beings and the modified, constructed, or discovered beings are an opposition of one another, the encounter between the two can mean a violent clash and a fight for survival. Human encounter with the Unknown raises “the question of what it actually means to be human as the very nature of our existence can be challenged by the technological advancements” (Urbanski, 2007, p. 145). Human encounter with the Unknown symbolizes the destruction of rigid categories that separate human from non-human; the destruction of these categories can mean the destruction of human beings.

Technology itself rarely displaces, depersonalizes, and disfigures people, rather the issues arise when technology is used by someone. Who and how uses technology is another major category of issues present in science fiction, Urbanski explains. The category includes the issues of power distribution in the context of technology. She states that the primary issue related to power is that while some are empowered, others are deprived of “personal freedom and power” (Urbanski, 2007, p. 89) When a group of individuals lose their personal freedom and power, they become susceptible to depersonalization and their bodies can be non-consensually modified or deformed. In science fiction, the dominant power holder can appear as a “faceless totalitarian state [which] frequently uses advanced technology [...] to control individuals, and therefore, society” or “the lone mad scientist [...] that is frequently employed to depict warnings about individuals corrupted by power.” (Urbanski, 2007, p. 26, 95) The author adds that “the pursuit (or maintenance) of power for power’s sake” is an issue related to powerful entities, because in order to attain power the entities subjugate individuals and use cruel methods to ensure that the individuals remain powerless (Urbanski, 2007, p. xxvi).

Who has the power to control technology and what is done with the technology is an important theme in science fiction. Issues of human displacement, depersonalization and disfiguration emerge when power over technology is seized by corrupt entities. Science fiction is created to comment

contemporary, real-life issues and concerns related to technology and innovation. Robert Heinlein explains that in science fiction, “science and established facts are extrapolated to produce a new situation, a new framework of human action”; these new situations cause “new human problems” and the stories themselves offer insight on “how human beings cope with those new problems” (Heinlein, 1964, p. 17). Science fiction is an attempt to make sense of the dizzyingly fast technological progress and its influence on human bodies and lives. The fictional narratives provide medium to explore both the possibilities and the anxieties that come with them.

3.2. Netflix Original Science Fiction: Issues of Corporality and Personhood

Altered Carbon and *Love, Death & Robots* are both Netflix originals, yet the shows are quite different in their styles and approaches to the issues of human relationship with technology. *Altered Carbon* is a cyberpunk detective story set far in the future where technology allows to transfer one’s consciousness from one body to another. It is a continuous narrative which unfolds throughout the duration of the season and explores themes of corporality and consciousness. *Love, Death & Robots* is a kaleidoscopic anthology with a harsh sense of humor where one story is developed in the span of between 6 and 20 minutes. Despite the structural and tone differences, the stories investigate common issues. Both *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* attempt to analyze the technological potential to alter, enhance, or deform the human body, and what it means to be a person in a highly technological environment.

Both shows experiment with the idea of transcending or enhancing the human body or creating artificial beings with human-like or superior intellect. These narratives question the definition of personhood and raise ethical questions related to the status of artificial beings and their relation to biological humans. The issue of personhood is not limited to science fiction narratives, rather, it is a substantial ethical debate with many opposing views. Some thinkers have tried to define personhood as a purely biological category i.e., to say one is a person precisely because one is a human being. As posthuman philosophers would point out, this categorization is problematic for its exclusionary assumptions. In his TEDx talk, a Harvard Law Professor and a bioethics expert Glenn Cohen explains:

[...] we have to stop making a simple, but fundamental error. That error is in some ways a linguistic error, it's the way we use the words *human* and *person*. In ordinary language we use the terms pretty interchangeably, but I want to suggest to you that they are radically different categories. *Human*, that's a biological category. It means a member of the species *homo sapiens sapiens* or at least the genus *homo*. [...] By contrast, although we use the word *person* pretty loosely to mean the same thing in ordinary English, in law and in ethics we mean something more specific. We mean an entity that has certain rights or certain duties, the most important right being the right

not to be harmed or killed without a very good reason. Once we understand this distinction between *human* and *person*, we can see that we're making a mistake by saying *human* equals *person*. *Human* does not equal *person*. In particular, there can be non-human persons. (Cohen, 2017, 00:03:34-00:04:50)

Both *Love, Death & Robots* and *Altered Carbon* take this distinction literally and embody it in their array of characters. This type of characterization can provide neutral ground to discuss sensitive topics related to personhood; fictional narratives can embody debates on discrimination, capital punishment, euthanasia, and abortion. The fictional narratives can both challenge established notions and serve as didactic tales. They are a fertile ground to play out numerous scenarios and simulate the impact of philosophical ideas. Whether it was not intended by the creators or not, by portraying characters who break the biological boundary between humanness and personhood, *Love, Death & Robots* and *Altered Carbon* entertain philosophical ideas related to corporality and personhood.

The distinction between the biological category *human* and the ethical category *person* is deeply important to the posthuman philosophy. The terms used by posthuman thinkers are human (person) and other (non-person). As explained by Glenn Cohen, *human* is an easily recognizable category – one either is or is not biologically human – on the other hand, the category is *person* is much more complicated. There are countless theories, both religious and secular, on determining one's personhood, however, for the purposes of this analysis philosopher Mary Anne Warren's criteria will be used. She lists the following as recognizable features of personhood:

- (1) Consciousness (of objects and events external and/or internal to the being), and in particular the capacity to feel pain;
- (2) Reasoning (the *developed* capacity to solve new and relatively complex problems);
- (3) Self-motivated activity (activity which is relatively independent of either genetic or direct external control);
- (4) The capacity to communicate, by whatever means, messages of an indefinite variety of types, that is, not just with an indefinite number of possible contents, but on indefinitely many possible topics;
- (5) The presence of self-concepts, and self-awareness, either individual or racial, or both. (Warren, 1973, p. 55)

It is important to note that neither one quality is more important than any other and that one does not have to possess all these traits to be considered a person. These features provide helpful guidelines in analyzing Netflix's shows. Understanding the differences between a human, a body, and a person allows to flesh out the philosophical issues depicted in the science fiction originals.

Love, Death & Robots is an anthology which explores the themes of corporality and personhood in two major ways. On one hand, the show explores the creation or discovery of artificial intelligence and non-human persons, while on the other, it examines the implications of bodily modifications and/or the ability to separate consciousness and body. The following table lists the beings depicted in the first season of the show and details the issues that arise with each fictional figure.

Volume	Beings	Criteria for personhood	Embodiment	Reflected issues as explained by Urbanski
Vol. 1 Sonnie's Edge	Human consciousness	1,2,3,4,5	-	Issue of consciousness and personhood
	Human bodies	None	Human body	
	Beasties (animals bioengineered to fight)	None	Bioengineered body	
Vol. 2 Three Robots	Humanoid robots	1,2,3,4,5	Robotic body	Fears of human displacement/destruction; Issue of consciousness and personhood
	Intelligent cats	1,2,3,4,5	Animal body	
Vol. 6 When the Yogurt Took Over	Hyper intelligent yogurt	1,2,3,4,5	Non-descript shape	Critique of humanist idea of human superiority; Fears of human displacement/destruction
Vol. 8 Good Hunting	Huli jing (mythological creature)	1,2,3,4,5	Humanoid, shape-shifting body	Fear of the unknown; Potential to overcome oppression by employing technology; Issue of consciousness and personhood
	Cyborg huli jing	1,2,3,4,5	Cyborg, shape-shifting body	
Vol. 14 Zima Blue	Intelligent robot	1,2,3,4,5	Robotic body	Issue of consciousness and personhood

Table 1 List of Posthuman Beings in Love Death and Robots (2019)

The table illustrates that most beings depicted on *Love, Death & Robots* fulfill the criteria to be considered persons. It is not the biological criteria of being a human that makes these characters persons, rather, it is the presence of the features put forth by Warren that signify the personhood of humans, robots, aliens, and mythological creatures on the show. The show also problematizes the relationship between a human body and consciousness, depicting the two as entities that can be separated.

The separation of body and consciousness is one common theme for both *Love, Death & Robots* and *Altered Carbon*. While *Love, Death & Robots* introduces a wide variety of posthuman beings, *Altered Carbon* focuses on the issue of separating the mind from the body. The show is also an investigation into class structure oppression and appropriation of bodies resulting from unequal access to wealth, therefore the show portrays mostly human characters who belong to different classes and the issues that come with it. In Urbanski’s terms, the show explores the issue of power distribution in relation to technology.

Class	Criteria for personhood	Reflected issues as explained by Urbanski
Meths – the elite members of society who can afford to buy immortality	-	Issue of power; Issue of fixing human bodies
Grounders – the working class	-	Issues related to the exploitation of lower classes
Being		
Artificial intelligence	1,2,3,4,5	Issue of consciousness and personhood
Biological body or synthetic body	None	Issue of “fixing” human beings
Cortical stack containing human consciousness	1,2,3,4,5	Issue of personhood

Table 2 List of Posthuman Beings in Altered Carbon (2018)

Both fictional narratives problematize and explore the concepts of humanness and personhood. They offer fictional characters who break the boundaries between human and person and human and other. The portrayed characters transcend the biological and physical limitations of humanness. The subversion of understood boundaries between human (person) and other (non-person) makes both *Love, Death & Robots* and *Altered Carbon* narratives about posthuman beings who embody posthuman issues. The presented narratives serve as portrayal of or commentary on posthuman philosophy.

4. *Altered Carbon*: Posthuman Bodies and Humanist Politics

Altered Carbon depicts the idea put forth by Glenn Cohen; they show bodies that are human, yet not persons and they depict beings that are non-human and who undeniably are persons. *Altered Carbon* establishes the distinction between a person and a body within its opening monologue: “Your body is not who you are. You shed it like a snake sheds its skin. Leave it, forgotten, behind you.” (Kalogridis & Sapochnik, 00:06:15-00:06:31) This fictive world explores the hopes and the curses of transcending the limitations of human bodies. On one hand, it shows the liberation that comes with the modification or transcendence of a body. On the other hand, it explores the issues of power that are solidified in a society of immortals.

4.1. Humanism and Neoliberalism in *Altered Carbon*

Altered Carbon depicts and explores a fictive world inhabited by many posthuman beings – they portray an array of both embodied and disembodied beings, each of whom can be interpreted as fictional representations of real-life social groups. The show depicts the ultra-rich Meths, who are immortalized by their ability to switch bodies on demand, it also depicts the exploited Grounders, whose bodies are appropriated as a valuable resource by the Meths. The power dynamic between the depicted groups suggests certain exploitative politics, which can be criticized in the posthuman framework. The aim of this section is to examine the social groups depicted in *Altered Carbon*, comment on the messages the show communicates, and to determine the philosophical stance *Altered Carbon* takes with its didactic messages and resolution.

Altered Carbon relies on visuals to establish the Meths as the humanist ideal and signify class segregation of the fictive world. The show employs imagery loaded with cultural connotations, particularly color and architecture, to convey the segregation. The most obvious example of this is the portrayal of both the Aerium, the meth-only white city in the sky, and the Bay City, bleak, neon-lit city inhabited by Grounders. See Pictures 1 and 3. Visually, the Aerium dictates exclusivity, the buildings tower over clouds like futuristic castles. Inhabiting the sky also has religious connotations; the Meths reside in the sky like gods. The Bay City’s densely built skyscrapers signify crowdedness and poverty. Episode 1 “Out of the Past” depicts the Bay City’s dark, narrow, and littered streets as swarming with vendors, drug dealers, and sex workers, all illuminated by neon holograms. The color choices in depicting the Aerium and the Bay City are meaningful as they characterize both the geographical locations and their inhabitants. Margaret Talbot explains that color is a potent quality signifier in

European and American art. In her article on the myth of whiteness in classical sculptures, the author points to western fascination with white marble:

The cult of unpainted sculpture continued to permeate Europe, buttressing the equation of whiteness with beauty. In Germany, Goethe declared that ‘savage nations, uneducated people, and children have a great predilection for vivid colors.’ He also noted that ‘people of refinement avoid vivid colors in their dress and the objects that are about them.’ (Talbot, 2018)

In other words, whiteness signifies sophistication, reason, and cultivation in the western consciousness, qualities which are salient in the humanist definition of human. As an opposition, color is a signifier for the other. The Meth class is heavily coded using white. Laurens and Miriam Bancroft, the most influential Meths, are light-skinned and wear white or light clothing throughout the series, as shown in Picture 5. Picture 4 illustrates that other members of the meth class are also mostly dressed in white, strengthening the connection of the meth class to classical art. Even the facility which grows the Meths’ clones is marked by whiteness; each body pod shown in Picture 6 hosts an idly lounging clone showered in blueish white light, making the bodies appear marble-like. The whiteness serves as a cultural marker of humanist sophistication and superiority.

If Meths serve as a stand-in for the humanist ideal, then *Altered Carbon* can be interpreted as a critique of the humanist philosophy and the resulting neoliberal politics. While there is nothing explicitly pro-neoliberal in the humanist philosophy, the underlying assumptions of humanist superiority lead to the exploitative politics of neoliberalism. Braidotti explains that “it is impossible, both intellectually and ethically, to disengage the positive elements of Humanism from their problematic counterparts”, the individualistic figure becomes egoistic, cruel, and domineering (Braidotti, 2013, p. 30). The human rises to power by depriving the other of agency; the more the human takes, the more powerful he becomes. Neoliberalism is built on the belief that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms”, this belief in individuality links humanism and neoliberalism. (Harvey, 2005, p. 2) Neoliberalism worships the free market, as Harvey explains, an important neoliberal belief is that “the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market.” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3) It is this underlying worship of the market and individual freedom within it that makes neoliberalism extremely hierarchical and exploitative to those at the bottom of the hierarchy. Humanism defines a strict hierarchy between the human and the other, similarly, neoliberalism “is firstly and fundamentally a rationality, and as such tends to structure and organize not only the action of rulers, but also the conduct of the ruled.” (Dardot & Laval, 2013, p. 4) Under neoliberal economic policy,

“capital and wealth have been largely distributed upward while civil virtue has been undermined by a slavish celebration of the free market as the model for organizing all facets of everyday life.” (Giroux, 2004, p. xv) The distribution of power has enabled a “handful of private interests to control as much of social life as possible in order to maximize their personal profit.” (Giroux, 2004, p. xvi) In other words, the humanist human functions in accordance to neoliberal politics. *Altered Carbon* is not subtle about depicting the exploitative nature of the neoliberal system, the show explicitly and repeatedly references the wealth and power accumulated by the Meths and the helplessness and exploitation of the Grounders.

In *Altered Carbon*, the institutionalized exploitation is illustrated by the prison policy and such institutions as Psychasec, Jack it Off, and Head in the Clouds. These institutions work to satisfy or profit the Meths and they do so by commodifying the human body. Psychasec, the facility which cultivates clones for the rich, and the prisons, which lease out inmates’ bodies to the highest bidder, illustrate that under neoliberalism “everything is either for sale or is plundered for profit.” (Giroux, 2004, p. xiii) A body is an extremely valuable resource in the fictional world of *Altered Carbon*, as is revealed in an exchange between Takeshi and two Psychasec’s employees, Nyman and Gus:

Nyman: At Psychasec, we provide the absolute top of the market in augmented and designer-enhanced sleeves. Our service is exclusive to an elite clientele.

Hologram: Best sleeve money can buy. Put your wife in me.

Takeshi: Hm, how tasteful.

Nyman: Our primary business is in clones. No doubt you know that a single clone costs more than most people make in a lifetime.

Takeshi: So, Meths only.

Nyman: Our clients are the most discerning, wealthiest people in the protectorate. They don’t do anything as pedestrian as dying. [...]

Takeshi: I’m gonna need to see any footage you have of Bancroft’s arrival. See, when I went down... You resleeve too many times, eventually you go nuts.

Gus: Personality frag. It’s a bitch. But it only happens if you bounce between lots of different sleeves. So, turns out, if you resleeve into your own clone, you can do it as many times as you want.

Takeshi: And live forever. If you got the cash.

Gus: It’s great, huh?

Takeshi: What does everyone else do?

Gus: Folks resleeve in whatever they can find, if they can afford it.

(Blackman & Hurrn, 00:07:10-00:08:50)

The exchange explains one of the fundamental principles of the story – bodies are invaluable goods because they are the means to obtain immortality, in other words, they are means to achieve god-like power. Psychasec’s clones serve the function of what Hillman calls techno-bodies, bodies transcending the biological limitations of human bodies; these bodies are a hopeful vision of the liberating power of

science. However, *Altered Carbon* does not indulge in any utopian dreams, the show explicitly tells that technology and resources which grant power are available to those who are already powerful. In this regard, *Altered Carbon* is not as much a didactic narrative about what could happen as technology evolves, but a critique of contemporary, real-life issue of power distribution under neoliberalism.

Altered Carbon also comments on the depersonalization and abuse which take place under neoliberalism. The show establishes that a body is an extremely important resource and uses the treatment of Grounders' bodies illustrate how exploitative the neoliberal system is. Jack it Off and Head in the Clouds allow the Meths to buy the Grounders', primarily women's, bodies for entertainment, which entails sex and often lethal physical violence. Even if the death of the body does not mean the death of the person inhabiting the body, the violence-as-entertainment market is deeply traumatizing to the people selling their bodies for several reasons. Firstly, the resleeving process is painful and disorienting and the adjustment to the new body is psychologically trying as depicted in episode 1 (00:09:07-00:11:50). Secondly, the physical abuse enabled by the replaceability of the body is psychologically scarring as demonstrated by Lizzie Elliot's character arc; having been killed and tortured she is completely incapacitated. An exchange between Takeshi, who impersonates Lizzie's mother, and Alice, a sex worker who knew Lizzie, reveals that violence at the hands of Meths is the daily reality of the workers at Jack it Off:

Takeshi: Do you know if Lizzie had any regulars? Someone important? Any freaks?

Alice: Mrs. Elliot, everyone here is a freak. Lizzie did have one regular.

Takeshi: Do you know his name?

Alice: No. I don't know. But he's a rich guy, a Meth. Lizzie was his favorite.

Takeshi: Did he hurt her?

Alice: No, no, he's not like that. He takes care of his girls.

Takeshi: Takes care of them how?

Alice: Um [touches her neck]

Takeshi: What does he do? [removes a neckpiece to reveal strangulation bruises] Did he do that to you?

Alice: No. No, it's okay. He's one of the good ones. If he breaks it, he buys it.

Takeshi: What?

Alice: You know, if he accidentally kills a girl, he buys her an upgraded sleeve. I knew a girl once, he resleeved her ten years younger, and with a great set of tits, too. [...]

Takeshi: It doesn't matter how much anyone pays you. You shouldn't let anyone hurt you. You're worth more than that.

Alice: [starts crying, hugs Takeshi] My name's not Anemone, Mrs. Elliot. It's Alice. (Blackman & Hurrin, 00:39:07-00:41:02)

Alice's attitude towards the violence she herself experiences demonstrates that in a system where everything is for sale her suffering is trivialized because she gets financially compensated for it. She and other workers are othered by the neoliberal system and thus they become depersonalized people who do not acknowledge their own exploitation.

The notion that solely personal choice determines one's quality of life further trivializes the exploitation and suffering. Giroux explains that under neoliberalism, "human misery is largely defined as a function of personal choices, and human misfortune is viewed as the basis for criminalizing social problems." (Giroux, 2004, p. xviii) The author uses the preceding argument to explain that institutionalized prejudice and tendency towards punishment are integral parts of neoliberal politics, in other words, that personal choice has little to do with the quality and outcome of one's life compared to the social and financial circumstances one finds themselves in. *Altered Carbon* also explores the illusion of choice in the neoliberal system portrayed, especially in episode 3 titled "In the Lonely Place". The episode depicts a Meth ball thrown by Laurens Bancroft for which he hires two married fighters to fight to sleeve death for entertainment. Before the fight commences, Laurens makes a remark regarding the freedom of choice:

Laurens: Tonight, combat to sleeve death between a married couple who love each other.

Miriam: Married fighters? Seems in poor taste.

Laurens: No one is forcing them. They could choose not to fight if they wanted to. It is a marriage after all. (Nelson & Hurrant, 00:37:34-00:38:10)

The superficial assumption that everyone has the freedom of choice under neoliberalism is undercut when the show introduces the fighters' motivation. Before the event, Kristin Ortega inspects the fighters' licenses and upon finding out their married asks them why they choose to kill each other for money. The male fighter answers: "Gotta provide for the kids somehow, right?" (Nelson & Hurrant, 00:22:55-00:23:22) The fighters are portrayed as completely content with their situation as they receive payment for their physical suffering, however, the fact that they have no choice but to fight to sustain their family indicates the injustice of the neoliberal system. The episode further explores the tyranny of neoliberalism by developing Laurens and Takeshi's relationship. Episode 1 establishes Laurens as Takeshi's employer thus forming a hierarchical relationship between the two with Laurens being the more influential member, but episode 3 reveals that Laurens has much more power over Takeshi. Laurens publicly declares Takeshi to be his property, which leads to the following exchange:

Laurens: Tonight, I offer you something more rare than any of you can possibly imagine. Something no one owns in the entire protectorate but me. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the last Envoy. Takeshi Kovacs. [...]
Takeshi: I thought you didn't want to own me.
Laurens: In this world, the only real choice is between being the purchaser and the purchased. (Nelson & Hurran, 00:36:03-00:37:13)

The episode crystallizes the thesis that choice is the privilege of the rich and the powerful. *Altered Carbon* depicts the Grounders to be seemingly comfortable with the situation as if to minimize the unjustness of the situation. However, once the show reveals the true implications of the power inequality with the dialogue between Laurens Bancroft and Takeshi, it provides commentary on the helplessness of the people at the bottom of the hierarchy. *Altered Carbon* can be read as a commentary on the subjugation of the working-class people under the neoliberal political system.

Altered Carbon tells a didactic tale about how neoliberalism strengthens and explores the issue of rebellion against the neoliberal system. Episode 7 titled "Nora Inu", a flashback episode depicting the events which take place 250 years before the main storyline of the show, establishes the cortical stack as the ultimate power token and introduces its creator, Quellcris Falconer. She is the leader of the rebellion against the Protectorate, and by extension against the formation of the Meth class, because she correctly predicts that her invention will lead to an extreme division of power and exploitation of people. When talking to Takeshi, she explains:

Quellcris: I wanted to be an explorer. See other worlds with my own eyes, but one life wasn't enough time to see the stars, so I found a way to transfer the human consciousness between bodies and, in that creation, soar. Suddenly, anyone could travel distances beyond imagination faster than light and no one would ever be limited by one lifetime again.

Kovacs: That's... That's beautiful.

Quellcris: Rome was a town of refugee cattle herders, but it became the most powerful empire on ancient Earth. Do you know how? Roads. Roads were the technology that let them send their armies all over the world. I thought I was freeing the human spirit, but I was building roads for Rome. Eternal life for those who can afford it means eternal control over those who can't. That is the gift I gave humanity. And that is the reason we are all going to die. So, stop looking at me like I'm a hero, because I am not. (Densham, Fisher & Goddard, 00:43:47-00:45:00)

Quellcris's declaration reflects her posthuman aspiration to transcend the human body, yet this emancipatory vision is undercut by the neoliberal principle that Giroux described; power is taken from those who are hierarchically at the bottom by those who are at the top. In terms of the plot, *Altered Carbon* depicts the Meths and the atrocities they commit for personal gain well before it introduces Quellcris and her cause, thus the show communicates an extremely didactic message about the

disparity of power enabled by technological advancements – it shows that the worst that could have happened, has happened. *Altered Carbon* treats the rise of the Meth class and the formation of the neoliberal politics as an inevitable process, which is a rather bleak prospect for those othered by the said system.

When exploring the question of rebellion, the show is not much more hopeful; there are two instances of rebelling against the established system, both of which fail to achieve any tangible goals. The first wave of resistance is the Envoy rebellion; the Protectorate destroys their base and every single person in it after Reileen betrays their location. While Reileen does it to protect her brother from the suicide mission Quellcris had planned, it is also important that the Protectorate generously rewards Reileen and in therefore allows her to become a Meth. Reileen condemns the Envoys to die to achieve her personal goals thus undermining their personhood. According to Ehrenfeld, such assertion of personal power represents the humanist philosophy. Quellcris, on the other hand, embodies the posthuman view. She both created means to transcend the human body and liberate the human spirit and led a rebellion against the power disparity enabled by her invention. The scene in episode 7 where Quellcris and Reileen board a plane and Reileen blows it up (01:01:57-01:02:43) can serve as a signifier of humanism's victory over posthumanism. The second instance of resistance against the already well established humanist/neoliberal system occurs with Takeshi's resurrection. He uncovers the plot behind Laurens Bancroft's death, learns about the abuse sex workers have experienced at the hands of the Bancroft family, and discovers Reileen's industry based on the exploitation of the Grounders. Takeshi kills Reileen and crashes her Head in the Clouds satellite, which can be interpreted as him stopping the exploitation of the Grounders. The Bancrofts are arrested for their crimes, but not before Laurens leaves his fortune to his oldest son. Takeshi's actions do not affect the Protectorate at all. In its conclusion *Altered Carbon* offers a tale where the unjust power structure remains undisturbed, even if several antagonists are punished. This resolution can be interpreted in two ways. Either the show is a somber didactic, yet posthuman, narrative about how unjust power structures can be challenged but can never be truly dismantled, or it is a fundamentally humanist narrative where the power balance does not need to be challenged as long as an occasional "bad apple" is sacrificed.

4.2. Posthuman Beings, Cyborgs, and Personal Agency in *Altered Carbon*

In addition to societal issues the show explores the issues of personhood and empowerment on a personal scale. *Altered Carbon* focuses on violence or discrimination against an underprivileged individual, the other, under neoliberalism and indulges in depictions of revenge against the exploitative hierarchy of the fictive world. As opposition to the humanist Meths, the show depicts the Grounders, who represent various incarnations of the other. The show depicts cyborgs, as defined by Haraway, and explores the issues of personhood, humaneness, and personal agency. This section analyzes the characterization of the cyborg figures in *Altered Carbon* and their place in the previously discussed humanist system of the fictive world.

If the posthuman body is a literary device to explore the boundaries between the categories of human and the non-human and the cyborg is a philosophical device to explore the pluralities within seemingly solid identities and to rebel against the injustices of the humanist philosophy, then *Altered Carbon* provides relevant criticism on the human experience in contemporary, highly technological environment where boundaries never cease to be broken. *Altered Carbon* depicts several kinds of posthuman/cyborg beings. This section focuses on Poe and Lizzie Elliot whose character arcs depict the issues and possibilities of transcending the human body and explore the themes of embodiment and personhood.

Poe is an artificial intelligence whose body is the Raven and who's biggest ambition is to study and aid humanity. The tension in Poe's character arc comes from the issue expressed by Cohen – being biologically human is not the sole characteristic for being a person, there can be non-human persons. Poe is consistently characterized as a person in the show; the viewer can identify with Poe as he displays emotions and establishes meaningful relationships with other characters. Poe also demonstrates all features of personhood put forth by Warren; he is conscious, self-aware, and capable of reasoning. However, his non-organic embodiment and his intense interest in humans puts him at odds with both the human and the artificial characters of the show. In other words, Poe is a posthuman being due to his embodiment, but he is also ideologically a cyborg being as his identity is an intersection between organic and artificial. Poe is often insulted by the human characters and described as creepy, freaky, and insane because of his enthusiastic devotion to his guests. This human attitude towards Poe is best expressed in episode 4 by Vernon Elliot as Poe decorates the hotel for Halloween:

Vernon: Are you serious right now?

Poe: Deadly. I adore All Hallows' Eve. The history, the tradition. The amalgamation of various cultural celebrations. Including Día de Muertos, Thanksgiving, and of course, Halloween.

Vernon: The holidays are about people, families, flesh and blood connecting. Something you'll never understand.

Poe: The many years I spent in solitude; I learned the exquisite torture of loneliness. I became insane with long intervals of horrible sanity.

Vernon: I gotta get out of here. (Friend & Lerner, Graves, 00:03:18-00:03:40)

Vernon attacks Poe's appreciation for the holidays on the basis of Poe not being a biological human and Poe defends the validity of his actions by stating that he is capable of feeling profound, human feelings. Similarly, Poe must defend himself when he is among other AIs as demonstrated in episode 2. The cited scene introduces the AI management union, where Poe is clearly an outsider. He seems uncomfortable when other AIs discuss their business practices, while other members of the management union are condescending towards Poe:

AI4: Still calling yourself Poe, huh?

Poe: Mhm.

AI1: Why you always pretend to be one of them? Dress like 'em, talk like 'em. It's so... weird.

Poe: I find humans fascinating.

AI3: You're weird! Who cares about humans?

Poe: Who cares? Humans gave us life.

AI1: Just because Maddy's been enslaved by one of them, why hold that against the species? They're nothing like us, Poe. They're a lesser form of life.

AI4: Preach it, brother.

AI1: I'm not their servant.

Poe: I choose to be the proprietor of the Raven. The study of humanity is my greatest aspiration.

AI2: You gotta work on your life goals, Poe. (Blackman and Hurran, 00:13:00-00:15:37)

In this environment, Poe is a minority because of this chimeric nature, rejected by both the humans and the AIs for his refusal to follow societal norms regarding the division of organic and artificial. *Altered Carbon* illustrates that being a cyborg figure comes with societal pressures and rejection, which is often dehumanizing. Poe's character can be read as a metaphor for real-life identities which exists outside the framework of binary humanism.

Being a cyborg figure, Poe rebels against the binary system imposed on him by both people and other AIs and his rebellion and thinking beyond dichotomies proves to be his strength. His rebellion takes the form of him helping Lizzie Elliot recover from the mental trauma she had experienced at the Wei Clinic. Lizzie Elliot had been tortured to the point of complete incapacitation. When Poe hosts her consciousness in a VR room, Lizzie barely passes Warren's requirements for personhood. She appears conscious; however, she does not seem to be able to carry out any self-motivated activity. In episode

10 Lizzie reveals that “For the longest time, I couldn’t remember what happened to me. I couldn’t even speak.” (Kalogridis & Densham, Hoar, 00:41:57-00:43:05) Her statement makes the viewer question her self-awareness at the beginning of her stay at Poe’s and proves her inability to communicate. In other words, when Poe takes her in, Lizzie is reduced to less-than-a-person by the Meths. By guiding Lizzie through the recovery process Poe not only helps Lizzie regain her personhood, but also asserts his own personhood. If humanism glorifies reason and devalues emotions, the cyborg figure, embodied by Poe, affirms his personhood precisely because he is capable of feeling emotions. *Altered Carbon* reinforces this idea in episode 10 when Reileen’s hitmen barge into the Raven and kill Poe. Just before dying, he goes to Lizzie to set her free when they have the following exchange:

Poe: What is it that you see?

Lizzie: Salvation. Death. [...] Retribution.

Poe: Perhaps you could tell me in what order?

Lizzie: It’s time for you to send me away.

Poe: I can’t.

Lizzie: You can. You do. You already have. You gave me so much. Whatever it means to be human, Eddie, you are. [...]

(Kalogridis & Densham, Hoar, 00:07:37-00:09:52)

Poe’s reluctance to release Lizzie into the Array (AI network) demonstrates his deep concern for Lizzie’s wellbeing. Lizzie acknowledges Poe’s personhood precisely because, guided by affection for humans, Poe works hard and sacrifices himself to help and restore Lizzie’s standing as a person. Poe dies quoting Edgar Allan Poe’s poem *Annabel Lee*, saying “And neither the angels in heaven above, nor the demons down under the sea, can ever dissever my soul from the soul of the beautiful...” (Kalogridis & Densham, Hoar, 00:09:58-00:10:30) The original poem expresses lyrical I’s deep love for Annabel Lee and the choice to make this quote the final utterance said by Poe indicates that Poe’s actions were guided by love. *Altered Carbon* establishes Poe as a chimeric, cyborg figure who is shunned by both humans and AIs. However, ultimately, his personhood is reinforced because of his capacity for feelings and emotions. Poe serves as a symbol for breaking the boundaries between biological and artificial because his character is an argument for non-human persons, whose personhood is as valid as that of humans.

Lizzie Elliot is another cyborg figure in *Altered Carbon*; her character is constructed to explore the possibilities and the perils of virtual reality and the issue of embodiment. Miriam Bancroft kills her and traumatizes her by torturing her in virtual reality before the show begins, therefore, virtual reality is introduced as a dangerous new environment, where the human exploitation and abuse can take novel, even more cruel forms. The notion that virtual reality is dangerous is repeatedly reinforced in *Altered*

Carbon. Episode 4 “Force of Evil” dedicates a considerable amount of time to depict Takeshi’s torture in virtual reality in gruesome detail. In Takeshi’s flashback, Quellcrisp explains:

If they catch you, they will torture you. But virtual is like everything else. Assume nothing. Only then can you truly see what you’re dealing with. Understand there is no conditioning that can prepare you for having cigarettes stubbed out in your eyes, for being burnt to death, being raped, drowned, suffocated, over and over and over. DHF made it possible to put someone in virtual, torture them to death and then start again. (Friend & Lerner, Graves, 00:04:51-00:05:24)

The quote illustrates that virtual reality is the tool of the empowered, the Protectorate, to torture the disempowered and the rebelling, the Envoys. The fact that Wei Clinic, the place where both Takeshi and Lizzie were tortured, belongs to Reileen, a Meth, signifies that virtual reality is one more way for the elites to abuse the Grounders. If virtual reality is not used as an environment for torture and interrogation, it serves as an outlet for the cruelest impulses human beings can experience. When the AI management union is introduced in episode 2, one of the members explains his business model to Poe:

AI1: My place, Prick Up, that’s the kinda business you gotta be in. VR sexperience. Sometimes I use live ones for the recordings.

Poe: Live?

AI1: Humans. They make better noises. And the best thing, other humans pay you for the playback. You gotta get out of the business of serving humans, Poe, into the business of serving up humans. (Blackman and Hurran, 00:13:00-00:15:37)

Urbanski explains that science fiction often interrogates power relations and the effect technology has on them in the fictive worlds it constructs and *Altered Carbon* does exactly that. *Altered Carbon* does not suggest that virtual reality is essentially evil, rather, it suggests that when power is concentrated in the hands of the select few, they can use that technology to further their agenda without any reservations even if that brings about the suffering of the disempowered.

Being a cyborg figure, Lizzie manages to disrupt the system she finds herself in with the help of Poe. When Poe first accommodates Lizzie, he sees her lying on the ground in an alley near Jack it Off, surrounded by trash and rats in virtual reality. She is holding a doll and mindlessly looking into the distance, whimpering, unable to speak. This is where Poe approaches her and provides her with a cozy bedroom in the middle of the alley and says, “I will let nothing harm you in this place.” (Nelson & Hurran, 00:16:40-00:18:39) This is the first indication that cyborg figures have the capacity to subvert the power balance of the established system and claim virtual reality as their own. This theme is further explored as Lizzie heals, gains agency, and learns to fight in virtual reality throughout the

season. The culmination of her journey is in episode 10 when she downloads her consciousness into a highly sexualized synthetic body on the Head in the Clouds satellite, morphs into herself, and kills a guard who tries to rape her (00:11:13-00:12:45). Later in the episode she encounters a Meth who had killed two sex workers; Lizzie kneels by the murdered couple and closes their eyes to show respect and then stabs the Meth in the neck (00:17:27-00:18:24). Finally, Lizzie, with the help of her parents, shuts down the satellite making it crash (00:21:33-00:21:53). The progression of events in the episode signifies several things. Firstly, her hijacking a synthetic body and using it as a weapon demonstrates that Lizzie managed to take advantage of the system which has exploited and discarded her. Having taken control, she is able to advocate and fight for others equally oppressed by the powerful. Finally, the scene where the Elliot family crashes the satellite speaks of the power the cyborg figure draws from unity and, one could argue, love.

Altered Carbon explores the technologically mediated ways of being a person and in its depiction of posthuman bodies concludes that biological human body is not a necessary condition for personhood. Rather, it is the human connections and feelings that are much more important in determining personhood. This depiction is at odds with the humanist glorification of logic and reason and the view that emotions are a sign of primitiveness. Poe and Lizzie's characters are cyborgs in Haraway's sense who successfully rebel against the systems which subjugate them; the characters form an empowering community which ultimately allows them to break out of the system. In his regard, *Altered Carbon* is a posthuman narrative which attests the power of the cyborg and celebrates it. The show does not envision large structural changes, as concluded in the previous section. Yet, it does provide a hopeful vision of cyborg liberation through community, connection, and rebellion.

5. Critique of Humanism and Cyborgs in *Love, Death & Robots*

The uniting themes of *Love, Death & Robots* are criticism of humanist philosophy and the portrayal of cyborg characters. “Three Robots”, “When the Yogurt Took Over”, and “Zima Blue” are narratives which explore human flaws and point out human arrogance, which ultimately leads to human destruction. Volumes “Sonnie’s Edge” and “Good Hunting” explore the liberating potential of posthuman bodies. The analyzed narratives deal with the issue of sexual violence against women and the power that survivors can draw from virtual reality or posthuman embodiment. The aim of this section is to analyze the symbols and metaphors employed in the anthology and to comment on the posthuman messages contained within the analyzed narratives.

5.1. Posthuman Beings and Rejection of Humanism in *Love, Death & Robots*

Love, Death & Robots deals with the fear of human replacement and criticizes humanist assumption of human superiority over non-humans and nature. Volumes “Three Robots”, “When the Yogurt Took Over”, and “Zima Blue” introduce non-human beings, all created by humans, who replace or outperform humans in various aspects. “Three Robots” and “Zima Blue” depict robots whose behaviour closely resembles that of humans and “When the Yogurt Took Over” depicts hyper-intelligent yogurt who seizes the control over human lives. *Love, Death & Robots* presents extremely didactic messages, especially in “Three Robots” and “When the Yogurt Took Over” but does so with a dose of harsh, and sometimes absurd, humor. The aim of this section is to analyze the characterization of the non-human beings depicted in *Love, Death & Robots* and to comment on the didactic messages the show propagates.

The analyzed episodes characterize non-human beings, i.e. robots and the yogurt, as persons. The portrayed artificial beings exhibit consciousness, self-awareness, and ability to communicate, all features of personhood, according to Warren. The show reinforces the beings’ personhood by depicting them as human-like beings. In “Three robots”, for example, K-VRC, XBOT 4000, and Triangular bot engage in light-hearted, humorous conversation while exploring a post-apocalyptic city and discovering details about human life and the various causes for their extinction. “Zima Blue” depicts an artist robot, even though creation and freedom of expression are typically human, not robot, traits. The volume is about the life and death of a robot, initially built to clean a pool. The robot gradually gains consciousness and artistic calling over many years as various owners update his hardware and software. The story unfolds in the form of a conversation between Zima and a reporter, who believes Zima to be a human being. “Zima Blue” explores the crossing of boundaries between the artificial and the human; once Zima reveals his true nature, it leads to the following exchange between him and the reporter:

Reporter: But you're a man with machine parts, not a machine that thinks it's a man.

Zima: Sometimes, it's difficult even for me to understand what I've become. (Gelatt & Valley, 00:06:32-00:06:40)

Zima embodies the idea that with technological advancement, the boundary between a human person and an artificial person loses meaning. The volume codes Zima as a person in more subtle ways as well; he is polite and cordial towards the reporter which also signifies his humanity. Having established that it is possible to create non-human beings, the show explores the implications of living along such beings or having those beings be the next evolutionary step for humans.

Love, Death & Robots depicts fictive worlds where these artificial beings surpass and replace humans. "Zima Blue" establishes its robot protagonist Zima as a brilliant, extremely famous artist. "Three robots" opens with XBOT 4000 stepping on and crushing a human skull and then standing tall against the background of a fallen city (00:00:35-00:01:04). "When the Yogurt Took Over", a narrative about humans developing an extremely intelligent yogurt which gradually takes over the control of the world and makes human life considerably better, describes the yogurt as a superior life form with the following passage:

Narrator: There it kept evolving, and soon, it handed over a complex formula to eradicate the national debt within one year.

Yogurt: Follow it exactly. Any deviation will bring complete economic ruin.

President: We will.

Narrator: Naturally, the politicians didn't follow instructions. Within six months, the global economy collapsed. [...] Only Ohio remained unscathed.

Yogurt: We told you not to deviate from the plan. Your experts are too close to the problem to solve it. Any. Human. Is. (Robertson, Maldonado & Torres, 00:02:54-00:03:40)

This passage is followed by the president of the United States resigning and leaving the yogurt in charge of the country, which brings the country unprecedented prosperity. The cited scene depicts humans as not competent enough to deal with the issues humans themselves create. This could be read as ridicule of the humanist worship of human intellectual superiority, showing that this quality might not be so prevalent in humans as humanist philosophy claims.

Since *Love, Death & Robots* depicts non-human persons who outperform or replace humans, the show can be interpreted as posthuman fiction which imagines life beyond human. The beings in "Three Robots", "When the Yogurt Took Over", and "Zima Blue" are a continuum of human experience due to their human traits, however, *Love, Death & Robots* does not consider the loss of human life to

be a tragedy. Both “Three Robots” and “When the Yogurt Took Over” are saturated with humorous moments, which mock humans. For example, “Three Robots” contains a scene where the robots visit a diner and discuss how humans used to eat. The robots find the procedure to be strange and illogical and ridicule human anatomy, with the triangular bot concluding that “expecting logic from beings who have internal vats of acid is a little much” (Gelatt, Maldonado & Torres, 00:03:14-00:04:19). “When the Yogurt Took Over” finishes with the yogurt building complex spaceships and launching them into space as the narrator concludes: “Life from Earth is going to the stars, it just may not be human life. What happens if the yogurt goes to the stars without us? What happens if it goes and leaves us behind, forever?” (Robertson, Maldonado & Torres, 00:04:13-00:04:57) Both scenes suggest that humans are either physically or intellectually inferior to their creations. Even “Zima Blue”, a narrative in which the robot protagonist expresses deep appreciation for his human creator, shows Zima rejecting humanness and personhood and reverting to a simple, single task-oriented robot. In other words, the dominating theme in the analyzed episodes is that of rejecting, mocking, or criticizing humanness and humanist philosophy.

By suggesting human inferiority, *Love, Death & Robots* undermines the humanist vision of human dominance and perfection. Ehrenfeld explains that the primary notion of humanism is that “All problems are soluble. In order to make its connection with humanism clear, just add the two words that are implicit; it becomes All problems are soluble by people.” (Ehrenfeld, 1978, p. 16) *Love, Death & Robots* depicts the aftermath of a global disaster and the subsequent extinction of humanity in “Three Robots” and in this way questions the alleged human mastery. A recurrent theme in both “Three Robots” and “When the Yogurt Took Over” are the reasons behind humanity’s downfall. By depicting the aftermath of human downfall, the show comments on humanist belief in human perseverance, which Ehrenfeld describes as:

Many problems are soluble by technology. Those problems that are not soluble by technology, or by technology alone, have solutions in the social world (of politics, economics, etc.). When the chips are down, we will apply ourselves and work together for a solution before it is too late. Some resources are infinite; all finite or limited resources have substitutes. Human civilization will survive. (Ehrenfeld, 1978, pp. 16-17)

It is exactly the blind belief in human ingenuity and survivability that “Three Robots” criticizes. The volume contains an extremely explicitly didactic message at the end of the story when the robots visit an atomic bomb facility:

K-VRC: All right, mein bots, this is the last stop of the tour, and may I say, the piece of resistance.
Triangular bot: Is it me, or this thing screams “phallus”?
XBOT 4000: Hmm, what was it for?
Triangular bot: The idea behind these was to annihilate as many humans as possible, as quick as possible.
XBOT 4000: This exercise suddenly got a little dark, didn’t it?
K-VRC: Well, to be fair, they only used these a few times.
Triangular bot: To be fair, you would only need a few times.
K-VRC: Also fair.
XBOT 4000: This is the thing that killed them all?
Triangular bot: No. Indeed, it was their own hubris that ended their reign, their belief that they were the pinnacle of creation that caused them to poison the water, kill the land, and choke the sky. In the end, no nuclear winter was needed, just the long heedless autumn of their own self-regard.
K-VRC: Are you okay?
Triangular bot: Yeah, sorry. Thought that would sound better than “Nah, they just screwed themselves by being a bunch of morons.”
K-VRC: Yeah, you can’t just crack one of those off. You got to warn us.
Triangular bot: I understand now. Humans died out from environmental disaster.
K-VRC: Yeah, pretty much. And also, because at one point they genetically engineered their cats to give them opposable thumbs.
Cat: Yes. Once we could open up our own tuna cans, that was pretty much that for the human race.
K-VRC: Seems pretty heartless.
Cat: Gentlemen, I’m a cat. (Gelatt, Maldonado & Torres, 00:08:25-00:09:49)

The conclusion of the volume is heavily loaded with criticism for humanist beliefs. The glorification of science and technology leads to the obsession with atomic bomb and the development of engineered cats, which ultimately causes the downfall of humanity. Making this humorous advancement the cause for the extinction of humans further adds to the mockery of humanist glorification of science. On a more serious note, “Three Robots” directly comments on the belief in endless resources and othering and exploitation of nature, showing it as reckless and leading to the destruction of humans. While humanism proclaims human intelligence and believes it to be the key to humanity’s immortality, “Three Robots” pokes at human stupidity and illustrates the fragility of human civilization.

“When the Yogurt Took Over” also rejects the notion of human superiority and does so in a humorous way. Choosing yogurt as a stand in for artificial intelligence reduces the seriousness of the narrative and it adds to the mockery of humanist beliefs when something as mundane as yogurt seizes the control of something as allegedly powerful as human civilization. As opposed to “Three Robots”, “When the Yogurt Took Over” does not show the extinction of humanity, but rather focuses on human

incompetence and arrogance. Once humanity accepts the yogurt as its leader, the global situation dramatically improves. The narrator concludes:

Now, ten years later, humanity is happy, healthy, and wealthy. No one argues with the yogurt. No one tweaks its formulas. That's how it happened, but we still ask ourselves, if the yogurt was smart enough to solve our debt problem, wasn't it also smart enough to realize that human intellectual vanity would keep us from following the formula exactly? (Robertson, Maldonado & Torres, 00:02:54-00:03:40)

The volume directly negates the humanist assumption that all problems can be solved by humans. The episode points to the humanist glorification of reason as the primary humanity's fault. The episode deals with the fear of discovering the great unknown, but rather than serving a didactic message about humanity's destruction, it questions the alleged human superiority over the Other.

In short, "Three Robots", "When the Yogurt Took Over", and "Zima Blue" are posthuman narratives in the sense that they imagine worlds where humans are either extinct or no longer the dominant species. In this instance, the "post" in "posthuman" signifies the death of human, and the portrayed non-human beings are visions of what sentient life and personhood could look like in the future without humans. The analyzed episodes show technological beings replacing humans, however, *Love, Death & Robots* does not demonize technology or treat the unknown as the great threat to humanity. Rather, it is the human arrogance stemming from humanist assumptions of human superiority that lead humanity to its destruction, both literally as in "Three Robots" or figuratively as in "When the Yogurt Took Over". Both episodes state their didactic messages extremely clearly; it is human stupidity and pretentiousness that will cause the downfall of humanity. In this regard, *Love, Death & Robots* is posthuman because it completely rejects humanist thought.

5.2. Sexual Violence and Posthuman Bodies in *Love, Death & Robots*

Love, Death & Robots tackles the issues of sexual violence against the sexualized other, primarily women, and explores the posthuman body as means to regain agency and seek revenge against aggressors, indicating the show's attempt to incorporate feminist undertones into its narratives. Volumes "Sonnie's Edge" and "Good Hunting" depict women, Sonnie and Yan, experiencing severe sexual violence. The characters lose their bodies to their aggressors but are revived as cyborgs, which enables them to seek revenge through violence. This posthuman embodiment links the depicted characters to the philosophical figure of the cyborg described by Haraway. The aim of this section is to analyze the depiction of cyborg figures in the analyzed narratives and to comment on the posthuman messages the narratives propagate.

The fictive worlds constructed in "Sonnie's Edge" and "Good Hunting" depict extremely different environments. "Sonnie's Edge" is a narrative about bioengineered beings fighting in death matches set in futuristic London, while "Good Hunting" is an alternate history narrative about a magical, shapeshifting being in British-colonized China. However, both narratives establish that Sonnie and Yan inhabit spaces which are hostile towards them. "Good Hunting" is a story about a young Chinese man named Liang who befriends a magical, shapeshifting being named Yan who can appear as a woman or as a nine-tailed fox. "Good Hunting" opens with Yan's mother being decapitated for allegedly seducing a young man. The same would have been done to Yan had Liang, the protagonist of the story, not lied to his father. When Liang discovers Yan, they have the following exchange:

Yan: Why are you hunting us? We did nothing to you.

Liang: Your mother bewitched the merchant's son. We were hired to save him.

Yan: Bewitched? He's the one who wouldn't leave her alone.

Liang: That's not true.

Yan: Once a man sets his heart on a huli jing, she can hear him, no matter how far apart they are. All that moaning and crying, she has to go to him every night just to keep him quiet.

Liang: No, she lures men and feeds on them for her evil magic.

Yan: A man can fall in love with a huli jing just like he can with a human woman.

Lian: It's not the same!

Yan: Not the same? I saw how you looked at me. (Gelatt & Oliver, 00:04:32-00:05:13)

The exchange establishes that Yan and her kind are othered because of their magical nature and their sexual appeal, which serves as justification for lethal violence against them. This theme is reinforced throughout the episode. Industrialization drives both Liang and Yan away from their homes as they no

longer know how to survive in their changing village. Years later, Liang finds Yan in Hong Kong being sexually harassed by British men (00:08:23-00:08:59). The men justify their behaviour because they perceive Yan as the exotic other and therefore unworthy of respect. In addition to being persecuted for her magical nature and sexual appeal, Yan inhabits an environment where her power increasingly is being limited:

Liang: How is hunting?

Yan: Worse this year than last. It's getting harder and harder for me to return to my true form. Some nights, I can't do it at all.

Liang: What's causing it?

Yan: Iron roads and machines that breathe smoke. Magic is draining from the world and with it, we magical creatures grow ever weaker. (Gelatt & Oliver, 00:06:28-00:07:05)

In short, Yan inhabits an environment where she is perceived as the other both by the locals and the colonizers, leaving her vulnerable to attacks from both. Being unable to shift into her animal form and hunt, Yan turns to sex work for livelihood and thus ends up even more susceptible to sexual violence. "Good Hunting" establishes that Yan is at an extreme disadvantage to assert her personhood in the depicted environment as it severely limits her agency.

"Sonnie's Edge" depicts a world which is equally hostile to its protagonist, Sonnie. Sonnie is a beastie pilot for whom fighting is a way to seek revenge against men who have abused her. The episode opens with Sonnie and her team arriving at a fighting arena, where she is supposed to operate a bioengineered beast in a death match. There, Dicko approaches the team offering Sonnie to lose the match, which leads to Ivrina revealing information about Sonnie's past:

Dicko: You'll be handsomely paid, of course.

Ivrina: You don't fucking listen, do you?

Wes: It may be about money for you, but for us, it's personal.

Dicko: Five hundred thousand.

Sonnie: No.

Dicko: One insignificant loss for more money than you could ever win?

Ivrina: Insignificant? Fucking men. It's cunts like you that fucked her up to begin with. Fuck. A year ago, Sonnie got snatched by an estate gang and when they was done using her, they started cutting, slicing their marks into her flesh. Can you imagine that kind of pain, that kind of humiliation, carved into her skin? A lifelong reminder of that day. So, when Sonnie steps into that pit, she's not fighting for pride or status, and certainly not for your fucking money. She's carving up the men who did this to her. (Gelatt & Wilson, 00:02:30-00:04:11)

As opposed to “Good Hunting”, “Sonnie’s Edge” does not explain the reasons behind Sonnie’s abuse, but it does foreshadow the reveal – Sonnie has experienced violence so severe, that her body is no longer hers. Sonnie proceeds to win the fight and Dicko sends his bodyguard Jennifer to kill her hoping to assert his dominance in this way. The attempt is unsuccessful and before killing both Dicko and Jennifer, Sonnie reveals her posthuman embodiment:

[Jennifer kicks Sonnie’s head in]

Sonnie: Not good enough.

Dicko: What are you?

Sonnie: Just a couple of bioware processors spliced to a spine.

[Dicko pokes Sonnie’s head with his cane]

Dicko: You’re not in there?

Sonnie from the computer: No. The night Wes and Ivrina found me, they managed to save that body, but those estate fucks had broken my skull.

You wanna know my edge? Every time I step into that ring, I’m fighting for my life. That fear is my edge. That fear of death. Do you feel it?

(Gelatt & Wilson, 00:13:54-00:15:30)

The episode finishes with Sonnie’s victory over the aggressor, showing the power that is granted by Sonnie’s posthuman embodiment. On one hand, “Sonnie’s Edge” is a hopeful narrative about the potential to liberate and empower by transcending the limitations of the human body. On the other hand, the episode reveals the cyclical nature of violence against the protagonist, and by extension women; “Sonnie’s Edge” opens with a graphic description of the extreme violence Sonnie has survived and closes with a graphic depiction of Sonnie’s body being sliced and crushed, despite her ultimate victory.

While “Sonnie’s Edge” is about the perseverance of the posthuman cyborg, “Good Hunting” is about the formation of the cyborg. After her mother’s death, Yan starts losing her magic because of industrialization, which forces her to leave her village and move to Hong Kong. There, stuck in her human form, she further loses agency because the British other her and take advantage of her. The breaking point for Yan is when one of her clients drugs her and mutilates her body. In a voiceover, Yan explains:

The Governor. For months, he had been a client, but he seemed a gentleman. He’d pay, but we never... Then, one night, he put something in my drink.

[Yan’s body is cut up and replaced by a mechanical body]

The truth is, he could only get hard for machines, and he wanted the ultimate machine to serve that twisted desire. One night, I’d finally had enough. I told him no. That word coming from me, it sent him into a rage. A terrible thing had been done to me. But I could also be terrible. (Gelatt & Oliver, 00:11:22-00:12:53)

The scene ends with Yan killing the Governor and thus taking revenge against her abuser and asserting her agency. The passage illustrates the stages of Yan's transformation into the cyborg. Firstly, the Governor violates her biological body seeking to satisfy some sexual fantasy. Yan's transformation is non-consensual and is carried out by someone in power, in this case, the influential colonizer. Having been violated, Yan seeks Liang's help. He agrees to modify her mechanical body, allowing her to morph into her animal form and granting her the power to hunt in the heavily industrialized Hong Kong. Before her involuntary transformation, Yan expresses her desire to access her magical power:

Yan: I dream of hunting in this jungle of metal and asphalt. I imagine my true form leaping from beam to ledge to terrace roof until I am at the top of this island. Until I can growl in the faces of all the men who believe they can own me. (Gelatt & Oliver, 00:09:40-00:09:55)

Her transformation into a cyborg grants her this power as the volume ends with Yan shifting into a mechanical nine-tailed fox and attacking several British men harassing a Chinese woman. Yan's narrative is a hopeful vision on personal victory over sexual exploitation and resistance against the colonizing power.

This story structure is significant because it is repeated in each analyzed narrative. "Sonnie's Edge" shows that Sonnie's transformation is non-consensual and a result of sexual violence against her. While her abusers are not the ones who grant Sonnie her posthuman embodiment, it is because of them that her consciousness is transferred into the artificial beastie. Another important point is that both Yan and Sonnie survive their abuse and transform into the powerful cyborgs able to seek revenge through the help of their friends. Philosophically, Yan and Sonnie are cyborg figures who disrupt the unjust systems they find themselves in through violence, making them radical rebels. In *The Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway explains that the cyborg disrupts and resists systemic injustice by hijacking technology, primarily writing, and using it to resist the othering enabled by humanist philosophy. "Sonnie's Edge" and "Good Hunting" illustrate exactly this. The artificial bodies can be interpreted as the product of the humanist systems the characters inhabit, particularly in Yan's case. If interpreted in this way, the analyzed narratives propagate the idea of liberation from humanist systems by the way of human connection and unity in the face of injustice.

Conclusion

1. Netflix, as a streaming platform and a content creator, has enormous international reach and sets trends in the online streaming market. It is part of the real-time web phenomenon and hence generously invests into marketing and content to ensure viewer engagement. To keep the consumers binge-viewing, Netflix makes hyper-serialized, addictive content. While *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* are not the biggest titles among Netflix originals, both shows attract millions of viewers worldwide. Analyzing the shows allows to see both what kind of messages Netflix propagates with its content and what kind of ideas resonate with viewers as Netflix is inclined to make content which audiences will enjoy. Netflix's originals *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* present a variety of posthuman beings and explore the themes of power, oppression, and liberation.
2. *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* criticize the underlying assumptions of humanist philosophy, yet they do so in differing ways. *Altered Carbon* exposes the link between humanism and neoliberalism and criticizes the injustice that rises from the human superiority over the other. *Love, Death & Robots* takes a much more comedic approach and makes fun of the humanist glorification of logic and reason and illustrates that human intellect cannot save humanity from human arrogance. *Altered Carbon* does not propagate the idea that structural changes can happen under neoliberalism – at the show's conclusion the power structures remain unchallenged, yet the show depicts some personal victories over the neoliberal system. This conclusion gives the show some humanist undertones as individualism is important for both humanism and neoliberalism. On the other hand, *Altered Carbon* is rather posthuman in its criticism of the unjust hierarchies which form under humanism and neoliberalism.

Love, Death & Robots, however, is much more radical in its narratives; it does not criticize humanist hierarchies. Rather, the show laughs at the assumption of human superiority and celebrates the transcendence of the human. The analyzed narratives depict humans as arrogant and unqualified to deal with humanity-threatening issues. The human-nature dichotomy and the subsequent othering of nature is depicted as the leading factor in the destruction of humanity, which is an apt commentary on the current situation where climate change denial is prevalent amid climate change crisis. If *Altered Carbon* offers a depiction of humanist vices but does not propagate rebellion against the philosophy, *Love, Death & Robots* has a much stronger conclusion – it thinks beyond human and

sees the destruction of the human as inevitable if humankind does not reject the notions of its superiority over the other.

3. In addition to the global view of societies and hierarchical relationships within them, the shows investigate personal agency in relation to posthuman embodiment. Both shows employ the figure of the cyborg, as described by Haraway, and explore the themes of sexual violence and recovery from it through posthuman embodiment. Both *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* offer identical story arcs for their cyborg characters. Sonnie and Yan from *Love, Death & Robots* and Lizzie Elliot from *Altered Carbon* are abused by men seeking sexual pleasure. The violent attack deprives the women of their bodies which leads to them being embodied in some sort of a synthetic body and/or their consciousness being hosted in virtual reality. This embodiment allows the characters to recover from the attack and seek revenge against the abusers and/or the oppressive environment the character finds herself in. The revenge always takes the form of lethal violence. Haraway describes a rebel cyborg, who disrupts humanist hierarchy by hijacking humanist technology. Both shows depict their cyborg characters doing exactly that – hijacking bodies created under the systems which subjugate them and using those bodies to disrupt the system itself. As opposed to the humanist ideal, whose strength is its logic and reason, the cyborgs draw their power from interpersonal relationships, emotions, and community.
4. All in all, the analyzed narratives criticize humanist beliefs and depict the shortcomings of the philosophy. By depicting the cruel humanist hierarchies, the shows expose the philosophy's ethical flaws. Depicting the downfall of humanity due to arrogance and incompetence puts the humanist assumption of human superiority into question. The depiction of the cyborg explores the power that lies in the posthuman embodiment and celebrates connectivity, not individuality. *Altered Carbon* and *Love, Death & Robots* embody, reflect, and celebrate posthuman ideas, encouraging the viewer to think beyond human.

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Appendix 1: Plot Summary of *Altered Carbon* Season 1

Envoys	
Takeshi Kovacs	The protagonist of the series. In the narrative past, he is a former CTAC officer and an Envoy. After the fall of the Envoy rebellion he is captured and sentenced to spend an eternity as a disembodied cortical stack. 250 years later, in the narrative present, he is purchased by Laurens Bancroft to investigate his mysterious death.
Quellcrist Falconer	The founder and leader of the Envoy rebellion against the Protectorate. She leads the rebellion because as the creator of the cortical stack she feels guilty for giving humanity the means to be immortal, which, according to her, corrupts the human spirit. Quellcrist is Takeshi's love interest in the narrative past.
Meths	
Reileen Kawahara	The villain of the series. Takeshi's sister who betrayed the rebellion and pledged alliance to the Protectorate. She betrays the Envoys because she envied her brother's affection towards Quellcrist. The Protectorate rewards the information on Envoys generously. Using the funds Reileen builds a sex and torture empire to satisfy Meths' desires and in the process becomes an influential Meth herself.
Laurens Bancroft	One of the founding Meths and a powerful political figure at the Protectorate. In 2384 he dies in what appears to be a suicide, however, he does not believe he could have done it. Bancroft pays to have Kovacs brought to life to investigate the mysterious death.
Miriam Bancroft	A Meth and Laurens Bancroft's wife. She is proud of having had 21 children with Laurens and is protective of her position as the mother of the Bancroft family. She is also an extremely sexualized figure, shown to enjoy having orgies with her clones.
Oumou Prescott	The lawyer to the Bancroft family whose biggest aspiration is to become a Meth herself. She is willing to scarifify her work ethics to reach her goal.
Grounders	
Vernon Elliot	The father of Lizzie and the husband of Ava Elliot. After Miriam Bancroft kills Lizzie's body and breaks her mind, Vernon sends a death threat to Laurens Bancroft. Kovacs finds Vernon and they form an alliance after Kovacs promises to help Lizzie.
Ava Elliot	A hacker sentenced to be put on ice, that is to serve her sentence in prison as a cortical stack.
Poe	The AI host at the Raven Hotel. Poe is devoted to his guests and keen on studying people. He admires humanity and believes humans to be worthy of respect and admiration.
Sex workers	
Lizzie Elliot	A sex worker favored by Laurens Bancroft. She gets pregnant and goes to see Laurens, however, she runs into Miriam. Miriam kills Lizzie and takes her cortical stack to the Wei Clinic, where Lizzie is tortured until she loses her mind.
Mary Lou Henchy	A sex worker who worked at the Head in the Clouds and was hired to serve Laurens Bancroft alongside Lena Rentang. In a plot against Laurens, Reileen gets Miriam to drug Laurens with an aggression enhancer. Under the influence of the drug, Laurens smashes Lena's cortical stack and kills her. Mary Lou Henchy runs away and jumps off the Head in the Clouds satellite in hopes that her body will be found, and she will be able to testify against Bancroft.
Bay City Police officers	
Kristin Ortega	Lieutenant at Bay City Police Department. She investigated Laurens Bancroft's death and correctly concluded it to be a suicide. Unsatisfied with the conclusion, Bancroft purchases Ortega partner's, who goes to prison for false accusations, sleeve for Kovacs.
Samir Abboud	Ortega's partner
Mickey	IT specialist and a hacker at BCPD.
Captain Tanaka	Commander of BCPD, a corrupt officer who undermined justice to serve Meths.

Table 3 Character List (*Altered Carbon*)

Term	Meaning
Aerium	A satellite city in the sky which is inhabited by Meths.
Construct	Virtual reality. It is used to live out fantasies, torture people, or serve as a space for therapy.
Cortical Stacks	A device which contains the human consciousness.
CTAC	Colonial Tactical Assault Corp; Protectorate's military.
DHF	Digital Human Freight; the encoded human consciousness contained within cortical stack.
Envoys	Rebel group founded and led by Quellcrist Falconer. The rebels have superb intuition and honed fighting skills. Their goal is to fight the Protectorate and prevent the rich and the powerful from becoming immortal. Their last mission was to spread the code which would ensure that nobody lives past 100 years. The mission is unsuccessful and all CTAC kills all Envoys apart from Takeshi Kovacs
Dipper	A hacker who accesses DHF to steal memories.
Double-Sleeving	An illegal process of making a copy of one's DHF and transferring it to another sleeve.
Grounder	The majority of society who does not live in the Aerium.
Head in the Clouds	A high-end brothel run by Reileen Kawahara. Meth clients are offered the possibility to abuse and kill the sex workers. When employing the workers, Reileen changes their stacks to Neo-C coding, which ensures that once a worker is killed, they cannot be brought back to life and testify as to what happens at the brothel.
Jack It Off	A brothel where Lizzie Elliot worked.
Meths	The term Meth is an abbreviation for Methuselah, the biblical figure who died at the age of 969. They are ultra-rich immortals who live in the Aerium. They have vaults of their own clones which enables them to enjoy endless lives with the same bodies. Sex, violence, and sleeve death are desired means of entertainment for Meths.
Needlecast	Transferring DHF from one body to another digitally.
Neo-C	Neo-Catholicism. Their primary belief is that human life should be limited to one body.
Neo-C coding	Coding which prevents DHF from being spun up after a person experiences sleeve death.
Panama Rose Fightdrome	A fighting arena where people fight to sleeve death. The sleeves are often enhanced to make for a more spectacular combat.
Personality Frag	Short for Personality Fragmentation. It is a mental disorder caused by having changed too many sleeves.
Put on ice	When one is put on ice, they are serving a prison sentence as a disembodied stack. Their body is leased to other people. After the sentence, the prisoner gets a different body.
Protectorate	The United Nations Interstellar Protectorate is an interplanetary colonial empire.
Psychasec	Psychasec is a clinic specializing in cultivation of clones and synthetic bodies (blank androids). It offers enhanced bodied created to experience heightened sexual pleasure or to be exceptionally physically fit and capable. Only meths can afford the said luxuries.
Real Death	Death which cannot be reversed. It occurs when the cortical stack is damaged or DHF backup is corrupted.
Sleeve	A body which hosts the stack containing DHF.
Sleeve Death	Reversible death. It occurs when the body dies, but the stack remains intact.
Spin Up	Bringing someone back to life after their body dies. It is done by inserting the cortical stack into a new sleeve.
Stronghold	Envoy base.
Synthetic Sleeve	An artificial human body.
Wei Clinic	VR torture facility run by Reileen Kawahara and the Yakuza.
653	Proposition 653 would allow murder victims to be spun up despite religious coding.

Table 4 Glossary (Altered Carbon)

Chronologically, the story begins with Takeshi Kovacs and Reileen Kawahara's childhood. Having suffered at the hands of an abusive father who killed his mother and was threatening his sister, Takeshi kills him. Takeshi is then recruited by Colonial Tactical Assault Corp (CTAC) where he trains to be a ruthless soldier. Takeshi joined CTAC on the condition that Reileen would be adopted by a loving family.

Years later Takeshi's squad is sent on a mission to take down Yakuza. While on the mission he finds his sister, Reileen, working for the syndicate. They recognize each other and turn against their groups, killing both the CTAC soldiers and the Yakuza hitmen.

The Envoys find Takeshi and Reileen on the run in the woods. Quellcris Falconer, the leader of the rebels, convinces Takeshi to join the rebellion, reminding him that he has been betrayed by the protectorate. Reileen reluctantly joins as well.

The siblings train with the Envoys, honing their fighting skills and ability to withstand torture. Romantic attraction develops between Takeshi and Quellcris. Quellcris declares that the Envoys are fighting immortality and calls for a suicide mission to release a code which would prevent people from living past 100 years. Takeshi joins the mission. Quellcris confesses to him that she is the creator of cortical stacks and that the mission is her attempt to take away the power the stacks give to the rich.

Reileen learns about Takeshi and Quellcris's relationship. Feeling jealous and betrayed, she sabotages the mission and gives away the location of the Stronghold to the CTAC. All Envoys die except for Takeshi, Reileen fakes her death and begins her life as a Meth. CTAC eventually catches Takeshi and put him on ice.

The series begins 250 years later when Takeshi is spun up by Laurens Bancroft to investigate Bancroft's death. Takeshi's stack is placed in the body of Elias Ryker, Kristin Ortega's partner who was framed for a murder he did not commit. Prior to Takeshi's involvement, Ortega investigated the case and correctly concluded that Bancroft had killed himself, yet the Meth was not satisfied with the conclusion.

Takeshi stays at the Raven, an AI hotel run by Poe. Takeshi follows a lead and finds Vernon Elliot, a man who sent a death threat to Laurens Bancroft. Takeshi learns that Vernon's daughter, Lizzie, had been abused by the Bancrofts. Takeshi offers to help Lizzie and Vernon becomes his ally. Poe accommodates Lizzie in VR environment where she undergoes treatment and mentally recovers. Later she transfers her consciousness into a sex android on the Head in the Clouds satellite and seeks revenge against the Meths who have wronged her.

During his investigation, Takeshi discovers that the real mastermind behind all events of the show is his sister Reileen. After killing Quellcris and the Envoys, Reileen establishes an empire of sex

and torture, with both Head in the Clouds and the Wei Clinic being her enterprises. Reileen became a powerful Meth with a desire to bring her brother back from the dead.

Initially, Reileen's plan was to blackmail Laurens Bancroft into killing Proposition 653 as this proposition would expose her practice of illegally changing her workers' coding to Neo-C coding. She had been doing this keep the inhumane practices of the Head in the Clouds satellite secret.

Reileen convinces Miriam Bancroft to drug her husband with aggression enhancer. Miriam agrees to do this because Reileen had arranged for Lizzie to be tortured at the Wei Clinic. Reileen provides two workers at Head in the Clouds for Laurens. Under the influence of the drug Laurens smashes one worker's stack, killing her on the spot. Another worker, Mary Lou Henchy, runs away and jumps off the satellite in hopes that she would be spun up and could testify against Laurens.

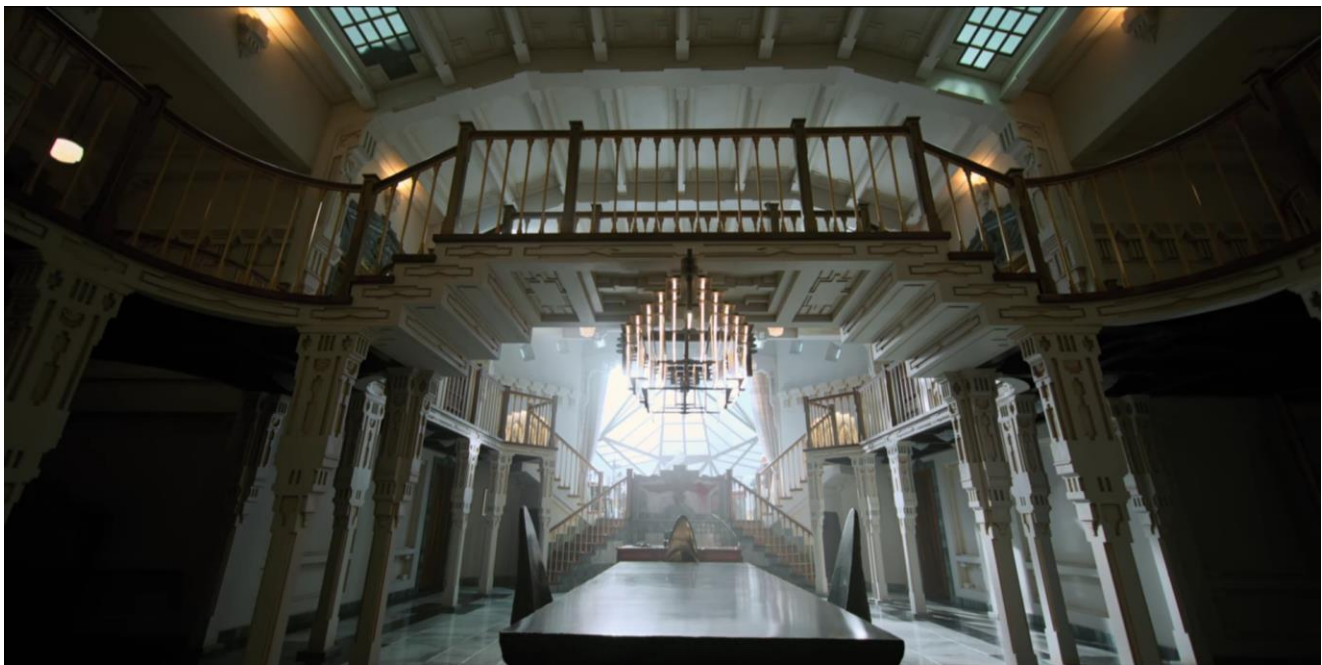
Unable to bear the guilt of killing a person, Bancroft commits suicide before his backup so that he would have no memory of the event. Once he is spun back up, he does not believe he could have done it and seeks to have the death investigated. Reileen convinces him to get the last Envoy, her brother Takeshi, to do the job.

Takeshi solves the conspiracy and kills Reileen. Her satellite crashes. The Bancrofts are arrested for their crimes. Takeshi gives Elias his body back.

Appendix 2: Visuals from *Altered Carbon* Season 1



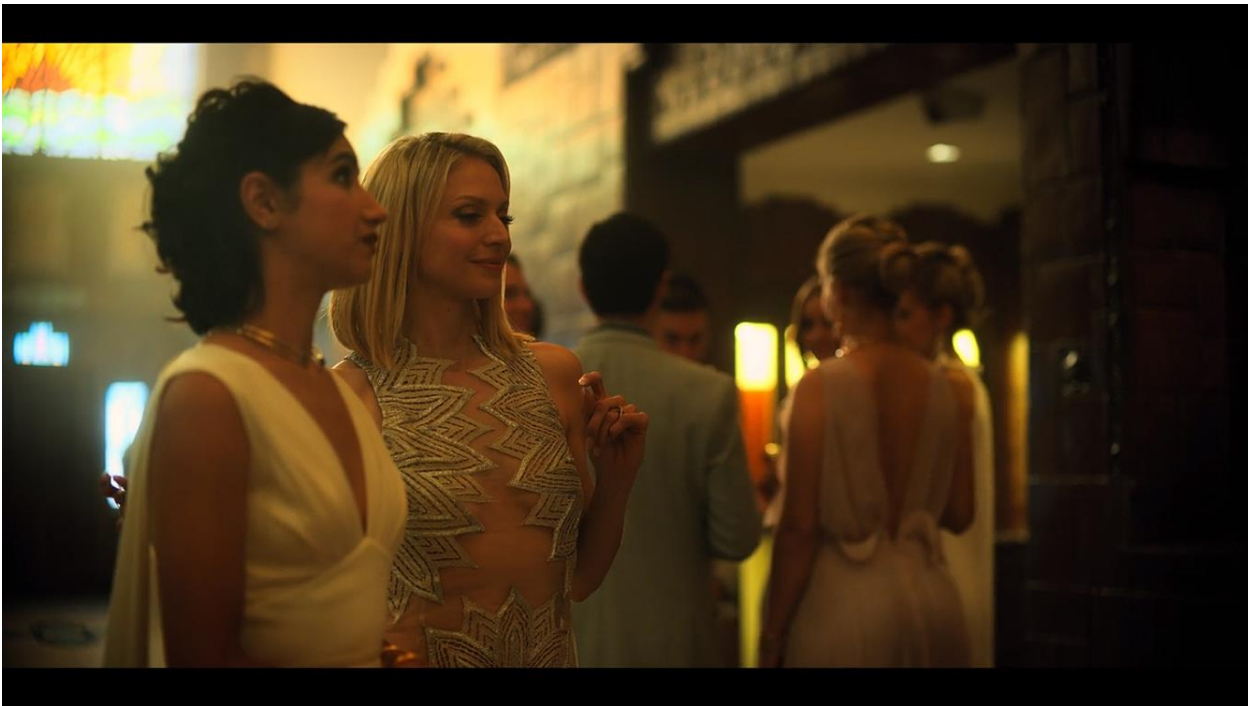
*Picture 1*Aerium. *Altered Carbon* S1 E1, 2018. Retrieved from:
<https://www.vaultofculture.com/vault/towering/aerium>



*Picture 2*The Bancroft Mansion. *Altered Carbon* S1 E1. Retrieved from
<https://www.vaultofculture.com/vault/towering/aerium>



Picture 3 Bay City. Altered Carbon S1 E10, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.vaultofculture.com/vault/towering/aerium>



Picture 4Meths. Altered Carbon S1 E10. Retrieved from: <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6720048/mediaviewer/rm422924544>



Picture 5 Miriam and Laurens Bancroft. *Altered Carbon S1 E3*. Retrieved from: <https://www.tvguide.com/news/altered-carbon-season-1refresher-season-2/>



Picture 6 Bancroft Vault. *Altered Carbon S1 E2*. Retrieved from: https://altered-carbon.fandom.com/wiki/Bancroft_Vault?file=Bancroft_vault.jpg

Appendix 3: Plot Summary of Selected *Love, Death & Robots* Volumes

Volume 1 “Sonnie’s Edge”

The volume begins with Sonnie and her team, Ivrina and Wes, arriving at the arena where they are supposed to participate in a beastie -- a bioengineered beast – death match. The team is approached by Dicko, a match fixer, who offers Sonnie \$500,000 to lose the fight. Sonnie refuses thus upsetting Dicko. Ivrina explains that ever since Sonnie was raped and mutilated, she fights against men who have hurt her.

Khanivore, operated by Sonnie, wins the fight. After the fight Dicko’s bio-engineered companion Jennifer approaches Sonnie and stabs her. Sonnie reveals that her body is just a shell and that her consciousness rests in Khanivore. Sonnie kills Dicko and Jennifer explaining that the fear she feels for her life is what gives her the edge.

Volume 2 “Three Robots”

The volume depicts three robots on a tour in a post-apocalyptic city. The robots visit a school, a restaurant and other mundane places while discussing the customs and daily lives of now extinct human beings. They come across a cat, who joins them on their tour. Finally, the three robots visit an atomic bomb facility where the triangular bot explains that humans went extinct due to environmental disaster. The cat adds that humans engineered them to have opposable thumbs and that this development ultimately led to human extinction.

Volume 6 “When the Yogurt Took Over”

Scientists develop yogurt fermenting bacteria infused with an advanced strain of DNA and the resulting yogurt becomes sentient. It provides the solution to eradicate national debt and demands the state of Ohio as payment. The president agrees. The yogurt instructs the president not to deviate from the plan, but humans do not listen to yogurt’s warnings and bring about catastrophic economic collapse. In desperation, the president gives executive power to yogurt. 10 years later, humans are thriving under yogurt’s rule when the yogurt initiates space launches, leaving humans behind.

Volume 8 “Good Hunting”

The story is set in China during the British colonization. The protagonist of the story is Liang, is the son of a spirit hunter. Liang and his father are hired to kill Huli jing, a magical, shapeshifting creature, who is believed to bewitch men and drain them for magic.

Liang’s father chases the Huli jing back to her den where he decapitates her. In the meantime, Liang finds Yan, a young Huli jing. She explains to Liang that Huli jing do not bewitch men, rather, the men fall in love them and the Huli jing hear their cries. For this reason, Huli jing must visit and pacify their admirers. Having heard this, Liang does not tell his father about Yan.

Years later, Liang’s father dies, and Liang leaves his village. He goes to Hong Kong, where he works as a train engineer. He meets Yan, who is stuck in her human form. Unable to hunt, she relies on sex work for survival.

Liang further develops his engineering skills and learns to create automata. One night, Yan comes to him for help. The Governor had drugged her and mutilated her body, turning her into a sex robot. Unable to further bear the abuse, Yan kills the Governor and asks Liang to construct her a body which would allow her to hunt.

Liang agrees and build Yan a shapeshifting body that can turn into Yan’s animal form. Yan takes off to hunt the Englishmen who abuse local women.

Volume 14 “Zima Blue”

The story is about a world-famous, cyborg, artist Zima. He invites Claire Markham, a journalist, to do an interview with him because he wants her to tell his life story. Zima began his career painting portraits but soon moved on to murals which contained a single blue shape. Zima started making more ambitious projects and his murals were incorporated into celestial bodies, asteroids, and nebulas. Zima tells Claire that he is not a man, whose body has been enhanced, rather, he is a robot originally built to clean a pool. Zima expresses great love to his creator and tells Claire that his creator created Zima with a single task in mind and that she kept advancing Zima, making him more conscious in the process. After her death, Zima was passed around from owner to owner, who kept upgrading him. After years of looking for meaning, Zima introduces his final piece. He jumps into the pool he was designed to clean and sheds all his modifications, revealing the simple, unconscious, pool-cleaning robot he originally was.