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**Unstoppable Decay and Relentless Hope:
Study of Alterity in Popular Culture**

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UNSTOPPABLE DECAY AND RELENTLESS HOPE: A STUDY OF ALTERITY IN POPULAR CULTURE

Abstract: Consequences of capitalism's crises and their manifestations in arts have deeply modified the way we can approach mental health. As Mark Fisher pointed out in 2009 with his book *Capitalist Realism*, neoliberalism is using mental illness as a way to keep existing. The capacity to think a way out of alienation is deeply linked with arts and popular culture.

The article proposes to study the uncanny dialogue between arts and politics in relationships to people, and mental health. The theoretical framework will show how arts are trying to build a way out of alienation, since 2009. The article will illustrate this research with the study of many artistic practices, including our own.

The findings will show how the ambiguous and uncanny relationships with the world is used by artists as a way out of alienation, despite the difficulties occurring with mental health in time of crisis.

Keywords: Capitalism, Uncanny, Alienation, Postmodernism, Fiction, Health, Trauma, Alterity, Internet, Relationships.

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In 2009, following the 2008 subprime crises, the philosopher Mark Fisher wrote *Capitalist Realism* (2009). This book was an attempt to answer the question previously attributed to Frederic Jameson: “Why does the end of the world seems more realistic than the end of capitalism?” It was also a deep study of neoliberalism’s commodification of crises, and depression seen as a systemic mental illness linked to politics (Fisher 2009, 26–27).

Ten years after Mark Fisher’s iconic text, the multiplication of oppression and resistance updated his thinking to the sharpness of our current events. On one side, several crises occurred to a point where capitalism seems to turn into totalitarianism to remain in power. On the other side, rebellions shattered indifference everywhere around the globe. We seem at the edge of a shift between two paradigms, but it remains difficult to distinguish what will be our future.

My goal is to study the uncanny feeling, taking place between the acknowledgement of capitalist realism and commodified resistance². I want to join relevant political and artistic practices together to identify various sources of resistance and oppression against capitalism and its disastrous impact on mental health.

With this aim, I will begin by demonstrating the growing mistrust towards capitalism in popular culture. I will sketch a *parasitic ideological battle*. We will see how capitalist realism is being acknowledged through popular movies, and how people try to connect with each other using symbols. We will observe the reflection of our dystopian fiction in reality and the feedback loop ensuing from this process.

I will then study the drive for change in alterity, with the desire and rejection logic infused throughout capitalism. This will allow us to study the folding process of glitch as a postmodern and deconstruction critic. Following this train of thought, I will address the similar struggle of freaks studied through the work of the *Ultravirus* record label.

Lastly, I will analyse dynamic reversals occurring in political repression and art. We will see how disasters push people to interact more with each other through intercreativity. Lastly, we will see how the work around visibility and sharing occurring in music and political resistance is a way to build our future.

2 A previous version of this paper was presented at Huddersfield University in 2018 for the study day *Capitalist Realism 10 Years On*. The study day followed the evolution of Mark Fisher’s legacy 10 years after his first book *Capitalist Realism*, just a few weeks before the lockdown in France and England: <https://capitalistrealism10yearson.wordpress.com/ordonneau-adrien-unstoppable-decay-and-relentless-hope-a-study-of-alterity-in-popular-culture/>

I. The growing mistrust towards capitalism

I. 1. A parasitic ideological battle

The parasite can be seen as an organism, living into or with another organism, which it feeds on. The word comes from the latin *para* (next to) and *sitos* (food). Literally, it takes the food next to another. Mark Fisher used it to define capital:

“The most Gothic description of Capital is also the most accurate, Capital is an abstract parasite, an insatiable vampire and zombie-maker; but the living flesh it converts into dead labor is ours, and the zombies it makes are us” (Fisher 2009, 15).

The parasite is now subjected to an ideological battle. People who benefit financial aids are sometimes described as parasites. Moreover, the climate crisis has surprisingly met the guilt created against the poor.

We must not forget how capitalism use parasite strategies to exist. It feeds from our labor, alienating our lives and our desires to continue to exist with our cooperation. Despite its abstract and impersonal structure. It remains hidden while absorbing every counterculture.

The parasite’s ontological patterns are closely linked to the uncanny. As we have seen, it has the capacity to hide and to exist within another organism. Therefore, it haunts like a ghost, and shares many similarities with monsters like vampires and zombies. It is indeed a part of many popular culture works like *Alien’s* 21st century mythology or Carpenter’s *They Live*³.

Furthermore, the uncanny is described by Fisher as the “unhomely” (Fisher 2016, 9-10). It is the strange within the familiar. The parasite and the uncanny force us to talk about our relationship to ourselves and to others. It embodies a mode of existence, and this mode is used both by capitalism and resistance to blame one another.

One of the best success movies of 2019, *Parasite*⁴ directed by Bong Jong-Hoo, endorses some of the strategies seen in capitalism and resistance. The movie is about a poor family struggling with debt and living in a semi-underground flat. They get a glimpse of hope when the son, Ki-woo, is recruited by a rich family to teach English to their daughter. He then collaborates with his family to create fake experiences and diplomas and to allow everyone to get a job in the house.

3 Carpenter John, *They Live*, Universal Pictures, Carolco Pictures, 1988.

4 Joon-Hoo Bong, *Parasite*, CJ Entertainment, 2019.

Their capacity to adapt and to remain legitimate in their work demonstrate how meritocracy is a myth. The only time their origin is threatened is when they encounter other rival parasites or when the owners complain about the smell next to them.

Ki-jung, the false art therapist Ki-woo helped to get hired, soon discovers that Da-song, the rich son, was traumatized by a surreal scene. One night, when he sneaked downstairs to eat some cake, he saw a ghost, staring at him from the dark, before passing out. Ki-woo and his family will later discover that this ghost is in fact the husband of the previous handmaid. Before she was fired, she used to hide her husband in secret underground rooms, unknown from the current owners of the house, and fed him secretly with leftovers. We can see the man had gone mad from living underground for so long. His madness manifests itself with an unconditional love for the owner of the house praised like a god.

This vision of horror produces a brutal shift in the movie. We could hope for them that they identify with one another, but both parasites become instantly enemies. Ki-woo and his family are forced to deal with this sub-parasite, living among their own host. The family has a glimpse of how much their condition could worsen.

The discovering of the parasitic ghost under the house explains the traumatic memory of Da-song, but also the dysfunction of the lights above the stairs. The lights are indeed triggered by buttons underground and the parasitic ghost is activating them, in worshipping, when the owner of the house comes back from work. This shift creates a connection between many uncanny objects sharing similar patterns: Da-song's trauma, the parasites and the light glitches, buried underground.

I. 2. In search for a symbol to connect with

When this situation is revealed, it enables problems like systemic mental illness and hatred toward the poor to be more visible. Lost hopes of capitalism appear as a growing problem for these characters, whose only escape is to feed on others' economic success.

Stairs play a significant role in the movie. As we have seen, the space is constructed as a social hierarchy with the rich living upstairs and the poor below. While the mad parasite living under the stairs is literally walked upon, Ki-woo and his family are very close to living buried underground. Later in the movie, on the verge of being discovered, they escape and run away to their true home. We follow them through what seems to be endless stairs towards wretchedness before discovering their neighbourhood flooded with rain and sewage. This natural disaster reminds us once again that the poor are on the front lines of suffering from the climate crisis.

Stairs plays a part in a collective consciousness, often used to express conflict on screens. In Eisenstein's *Battle ship Potemkine*⁵, they are for example used to express the violent repression against revolutionaries. In the 2019 *Joker*⁶ movie, a scene pictured Arthur Fleck, aka Joker, finally letting his anger express itself after being too neglected by society. He then exults on top of stairs, going down while dancing with grace and joy. This scene became a popular meme shared through social media, multiplied through everyone's point of view with intercreativity, which I will talk about more in the last part of this paper.

This amount of interactions with the joker character could assert parasocial relationships relatable to a parasite pattern. Parasocial interaction theory has been used since the 1950s to describe the one-sided relationships that can occur between a media user and the character in a media being consumed. It gained a new strength through social media. The *Joker* movie became popular because of its capacity to reflect our own desperate existence.

The Joker's character is indeed built upon his loneliness while our own parasocial relationship with him is mirrored through his incapacity to connect. He fantasizes everyone around him without getting to really know them. It begins with an actual parasocial TV relationship: Murray, the TV show host; it will then continue with his presumed father, family and neighbors.

The connection created with the audience doesn't stop there. The dancing scene is indeed followed by FBI agents chasing the Joker down the stairs. He will eventually escape them by mingling with a large group of protesters in a subway, wearing masks in his image. In the fiction, the Joker indeed became popular and praised by many protesters, while staying anonymous, after having murdered three Wall Street men harassing him in the subway.

This incident quickly brought outrage and division across Gotham City but also controversy across America⁷ (Phillips & Phenix 2019). While the elite condemned the crime, a large amount of people saw in the Joker a symbol of resistance both in fiction and reality. As a result, the Joker's face was used in numerous protests following a wave of rebellions across the world. In Chilli, Lebanon, France, Hong-Kong, London or Beirut, the Joker's face was everywhere, growing like a virus.

Many ideas could be interpreted from this practice, from the will to disguise as a victim of the system, which Arthur Fleck clearly is, or to literally send the violence back, like him. However, one thing stands for everyone. The Joker's face

5 Eisenstein, *Battle ship Potemkine*, Goskino, 1925.

6 Todd Phillips, *Joker*, Warner Bros Pictures, 2019.

7 Many concerns were raised about the movie's capacity to empower people in doing violent things. Accusations in which director Todd Philips even had to respond "The movie makes statements about a lack of love, childhood trauma, lack of compassion in the world. I think people can handle that message. To me, art can be complicated and oftentimes art is meant to be complicated".

acted as a symbol of coalition to connect against our political system. This character became an uncanny symbol, spreading through the crowd, but coming from a distant fiction. Like a mirror, the joker mask created an uncanny reflection of fiction into reality.

I. 3. The uncanny reflection of dystopia

Many other scenes create a feeling of *deja vu* throughout the Joker movie. After the Wall Street murder incident, the public declaration of the mayor of Gotham, who is none other than Thomas Wayne – Batman’s father – echoed Emmanuel Macron’s statement on July 29th 2017 in a train station. For Thomas Wayne “Those of us who made something of our lives will always look at those who haven’t” whereas for Macron “There are people succeeding, and people who are nothing” (Young 2018).

In another scene, it is very explicit that the Joker is a fragile individual being pushed to his last resorts. Right from the beginning, a social worker helping him explains that their meetings will end because the social help fundings were cut short. The first thing he said to her in the entire movie is: “Is it just me or is it going crazier out there?” To this day, this reply still haunts our current reality.

These two examples let us acknowledge systemic oppressions by pointing at different structures: the political elite and social welfare⁸. As a result, it seems like *Joker* has acted as an Overton window, normalizing the anger and rebellion against the systemic violence of capitalism, by making visible its dynamics.

In the same fashion, it has been a few years since the Guy Fawkes mask appears regularly across protests. The mask became popular with *V for Vendetta* and seems to have become a symbol of rebellion against power. A very similar mask was used in the successful series *Mr Robot*⁹ to portrait F Society, a hacker group trying to destroy capitalism. This fictional hacker group was itself mirroring the real *Anonymous* hacker group, who became famous by wearing the Guy Fawkes mask. We have here so many loops between signs in reality and fiction that they became distorted.

Mr Robot is great at picturing this process. The plot deals with mental illness, depression and suffering caused by capitalism. It is also about the will for change and the uncertainty behind it. The show contains many shots where people are isolated into a corner of the screen to picture loneliness.

8 The bourgeoisie is also exposed, ironically laughing at Charlie Chaplin roller skating next to a chasm in *The modern times*, referring both to the Joker’s destructive nature and to our tragi-comic postmodern times.

9 Esmail Sam, *Mr Robot*, NBC Universal Distribution, 2015-2019.

The main character, Elliot, is a security engineer and hacker suffering from various mental illnesses. He works for E corp, a personified copy of our GAFAM called “Evil Corp” by Elliot and taking as a logo a fragment of the *Dell* brand sign. At night, Elliot hacks people’s personal data to get to know them. He is quickly split between the desire to help F society and the fear of consequences.

Elliot’s alienation is overcome by breaking the fourth wall and talking to us, his imaginary friends. Once again, the parasocial relationships occur. All the show is trying to connect with us as well with a huge number of references to late 1990s shows like *Fight Club*¹⁰, *Requiem for a dream*¹¹, *American Psycho*¹², or *Matrix*¹³.

The plot itself, and its post-modern full circle references, seem to talk to us more about our need for revolution and our fantasies behind it¹⁴. The show demonstrates to us how rebellion is a matter of happiness and mental health survival, while imagining imperfect solutions. *Mr Robot* began to depict what change could look like, with all its doubts and nostalgic obstacles.

In many ways this could relate to the already porous fictions of the *Black Mirror*¹⁵ series, but *Black Mirror* seems to have worsened the dystopian inter-passivity theorized by Mark Fisher (Fisher 2009, 12). William Gibson, the famous cyberpunk novelist, himself found it hard to invent the new when reality is becoming stranger than fiction (Gibson 2020). Popular culture seems to blend so much with reality, that impotent dystopia no longer works. It’s because the dystopia is already here. Yet, it is in the most desperate times that the new can arise.

II. Towards a Search for Alterity

II. 1. Rejection and desire

The acknowledgement of capitalist realism in pop culture offers a tool to resist but still, the shows we have seen feeds from our desires in a capitalist logic. The conflict between commodification and subversion seems endless when every particular object is indefinitely absorbed. In February 2020, Rami Malek,

10 Fincher David, *Fight Club*, 1999.

11 Aronofsky Darren, *Requiem for a dream*, 2000.

12 Harron Mary, *American Psycho*, 2000.

13 Wachowski Lana and Lilly, *Matrix*, 1999.

14 As Eliot said in a video trailer: “We all wear masks of some kind. That’s really hiding our true selves. But what if we become who we are when we put them on. How do I take off the mask if it’s no longer a mask, when it’s as much a part of me as I am. It’s stripped away now, what’s left of me. Is this what a revolution looks like?” See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=njdfWulBIcY> Accessed August 08, 2021.

15 Brooker Charlie, *Black Mirror*, Endemol Shine UK, 2011–2019.

the actor playing the main character from *Mr Robot*, became the new model of *Yves Saint Laurent*. Even brands are now pretending to be depressed to set up parasocial relationships strategies and gain new customers.

On 4th February 2019, the popular brand *Sunny D*, whose orange juice reminds us to the 1990s childhood of many millennials, tweeted “I can’t do this anymore” (@sunnydelight 2019). This mimicking of late capitalism depression attracted people, rushing to comfort the brand, while other brands would play humans and comment things like “are you okay bro?”, “we’re gonna get through this”, “I love you”.

The hauntological crisis stressed by Mark Fisher (Fisher 2014) seems to have worsened since the uncanny became a mode of existence. As a result, an absurd and profound nihilism is mirroring the incessant streams of horrors in our world. In psychology, the trauma can occur when the fantasy becomes reality. What then, when the dystopian fiction succeeds?

Popular culture seems to function more and more with this dynamic between rejection and absorption, between the parasitizing trauma and horrors and the haunted promises of lost hopes. While alienation is becoming visible, we find ourselves in recursive feedback loops, feeding from it, to move forward and somewhat resist. This feedback loop is a component of a glitch aesthetic, destroying and deconstructing medias, and language in arts. Its use is clearly pervasive in today’s electronic music.

In 2000, Kim Cascone described what he called “the aesthetic of failure” to define the disillusion of the digital revolution, occurring in glitch music (Cascone 2000). Like the trauma, the glitch is the result of a hidden process. It haunts a media like a ghost reflecting the failure of a device. Cascone’s aesthetic of failure seemed to fold into itself, not only by using occasionally feedback processes, but by using the technological device as a source of inspiration and a tool. I could add that the glitch with its unexpected appearance creates alterity and life in a predictable, dead system.

For Rosa Menkman, glitch is “an unexpected occurrence”, a “disruption in a system” which cannot be codified (Menkman 2011, 26). As she witnessed, the glitch aesthetic is a culture in constant redefinition, transforming its audience into highly trained people (Menkman 2011, 58).

This assumption can find an echo with the glitch sounds occurring in electronic subgenres like IDM, Breakcore or Glitch-Hop. These musics have always worked on the weird, despite their balance between the popularity of Warp Record’s artists and niche producers sharing their music online. From Qebrus (pretending to be an alien), to Aphex Twin, electronica, glitch and breakcore artists always worked on the outside, on “things which do not belong together” to quote Mark Fisher’s definition of the weird (Fisher 2016, 10). For example we can create glitch by adding something that doesn’t belong to a file into its raw

data. The weird is at the core of these genres, creating the new, using montage on sounds and visuals with a harsh desire to create. By doing so, it digs more into our own humanity while reversing the outside and the inside of media.

II. 2. Alienation in Ultra Virus

Audio and visual glitches are omnipresent in the *Ultravirus* label. More than a failure in a system, the Australian label seems to push forward the boundaries of alienation in every aspect of their aesthetic. One of their first compilations *Plunderzon*^{TM16} was sold on stylized USB keys, fantasizing a hacker imaginary.

Hacking and copyleft seems to be at the core of their work, since the label tries to coagulate everything in a chaotic miasma. Thorsten Herzog, aka Thick Owens, the creator of *Ultravirus*, described himself as inspired by the ideal promises of 1990's internet free culture, when netlabels were linked with counterculture (Owens 2020).

As a result, contra-internet is also a big part of *Ultravirus*. Zach Blas described it as the transformation of the internet into an instrument for state oppression and accelerated capitalism. Invoking a practice of utopian plagiarism, *Contra-Internet* utilizes queer and feminist methods to speculate on internet futures and network alternatives (Blas 2016). It is also deeply influenced by accelerationism and *Xeno-Feminism*, trying to find a way out of patriarchy and capitalism by accelerating its inner paradoxes and seize technology.

Zach Blas described the internet as a mode of existence, something we're so hybridated with we can't function anymore without it. As he explained (Blas 2016):

“Like capitalism, the internet has come to exist as a totality, with no outside, no alternative, no ending. This provokes a question that Julian Assange once asked: Is the future of the internet also the future of the world?”

If our culture and our feelings are pervasively linked to the internet, we can consider our mental health grimed by all its data gathering and consumer reification. Then, how does *Ultravirus* tries to appropriate and hijack this?

They refuse to broadcast themselves on Spotify, opposed to the economic imperative to listen as long as possible, with very innocuous music serving an attention economy. On the contrary, most of their music and visuals seems to be a compulsive experience of alienation. Illness, as its name suggest, is at the core

16 Various Artists, *Plunderzone*tm, Ultravirus, 2010.

of it. Their album covers, designed by the same visual artist¹⁷, melt together hyper-saturated images, post-internet aesthetic, memes and popular figures such as Alien or Mario.



Siq~1 compilation
Cover album made by Simon Villaret
Music composed by various artists, Ultravirus, 2020

Their music is unpredictable, oscillating between speedcore, sliced beats, deconstructed sound, organic textures and wild samples. It's difficult to distinguish between the seriousness of this aesthetic radicality and the grotesque subversive feeling. Artificial voices and deconstructed language plays a big part in the label as well, promoting alterity, detached from anthropocentrism. Their typography even resembles alien pictograms reminding us of Qebrus.

Aphex Twin did something similar with his *Ventolin*¹⁸ track in 1995. *Ventolin* was inspired by Richard D. James' illness, asthma. He described it as having his

17 Simon Villaret is the *Ultravirus* visual artist. Accessed August 09, 2021. <https://www.instagram.com/s1m0nc3ll0/tagged/?hl=en>

18 Aphex Twin, *Ventolin*, *Ventolin EP*, Warp Records, 1995.

lungs violently erupting with mucus, permanently swollen and sore¹⁹. The music is the harshest the producer ever made. The composition is constructed around a sound of a high pitched ringing, mimicking the side effect of tinnitus occurring when taking an asthma treatment. The rhythm supporting this unpleasant experience is distorted and violent. The illness becomes a source of inspiration as well as an aesthetic experience mediated through music.

More than any other process, the illness and the glitch occurring both with Aphex Twin and *Ultravirus* troubles us, creating a feeling of indeterminacy. When a glitch or an illness occurs, things don't seem as sure as they were before. Like acid, it destroys, or rather, deconstructs, things that were previously fixed. The serendipity of this aesthetic could in many ways break use from our aghast existential crisis²⁰.

Rhythms research occurring in these electronic practices in fact demonstrates a kind of opposition to repetition, but the iconography seems to push further into this. Electronic music presents us deviant bodies and identities, lurking us in the dark only to appear in the audiovisuals shows of capitaloscene.

II. 3. Freaks, illness and great health

One important link between the *Joker*, *Parasite* and *Mr Robot* was their main characters. They were always suffering and seen as pariahs. They are what we could call freaks, a word haunted with its past, embracing the uncanny.²¹

Since freak shows and colonial exhibitions, freaks could relate to any people being exhibited for their alterity, most of the time because of their body or, with Charchot's recording of hysterical women, because of their mental illness. Freaks are historically rooted in a spectacular economy, feeding a need for strangeness and exoticism. Indeed, these freaks are seen as split between humans and monsters. Their ontological being is exploited by capital in an ambiguous call between rejection and fascination. The shaming culture surrounding them could also be linked with the parasite culpability we have previously seen. They exist to be scapegoats for an oppressive system.

Without objectifying them, the ambiguous nature of freaks challenges our beliefs about reality, humanity and values. Freak shows expose us to different individuals, but they are also all part of a collective. I believe their major presence

19 See the inside of the album visible on discogs. Accessed August 09, 2021. <https://www.discogs.com/Aphex-Twin-Ventolin-EP/master/20524>.

20 The distortions and sense of community *Ultravirus* creates could refer to Mark Fisher's unpublished works on acid communism. Mark Fisher's work on acid communism tried to see a way through capitalist realism, inspired by the 1960's freak left and their psychedelic mindset.

21 The term itself could refer to the sixties "freak left", following again Mark Fisher's acid communism.

in electronic music²² could inspire a cut through capitalist realism and develop new ways to apprehend our own humanity.

The Nietzschean concept of great health can give us a powerful tool to understand how freaks could shatter capitalist realism. Nietzsche spent all his life sick. This condition influenced his work on the body and the mind (Cybulska 2019)²³. Slightly different from most occidental thinkers, he considered the body as a rich phenomenon, connected with the mind. Both parts are feeding each other in a feedback loop.

His thoughts were far from a Manichean and religious opposition. Indeed, for Nietzsche, illness is not opposed to health but includes it (Nietzsche 1887, 220). It forces our health to become great, conducted by our will to live and survive. It forces us to conquer our health. The illness is then seen as a temporal retreat from the sane body, giving perspective to apprehend the future and feeding the desire to return to a healthier situation.

Works we have seen can be considered through this prism, a kind of mutation, using illness as a means of survival, taking it as an aesthetic to give meaning to our world. They could at least politicize mental illness, like Mark Fisher did with depression. Our lives, and particularly mental health, are now so interlinked with technology, that this aesthetic creates a desired alterity, stimulating a desire to drill through the emotional sclerosis of capitalist realism.

We have here, again, an uncanny dialectic of hiding and revealing. Freaks and illness could embody this transitional stage, between an anthropocentrism stage and a mutating world, coping with its own alienation. Reversal of dynamics is a component of the uncanny. It is the upside down, the dead becoming alive, the body betraying the mind, the inside swapping with the outside. The uncanny is already working towards a revolution.

22 In Aphex Twin and Autechre's collaborations with Chris Cunningham, freaks keeps an active role to illustrate the music. They are also presents in Flying Lotus' production, both as a director and music producer. We can also encounter them with Qebrus, Anklepants, Arca, Venetian Snares and many other artists.

23 According to Eva Cybulska, Nietzsche suffered from bipolar affective disorder as well as cyphilis. This mood and physical shifts may have inspired his work, including his reflexions on great health, mind and body.

III. At the edge of decay and hope

III. 1. Dynamic Reversal

The strategy of uncanny alterity was also used by the state. In France, the repression against Yellow Vest protests was extremely severe. According to a medical investigation, between 2018 and 2020, the so called less-lethal weapons (40mm rubber projectile launchers and sting ball grenades) were the suspected cause of most ocular lesions, with twenty five cases of open-globe injury and eighteen cases of blunt-force bruising. CT scans showed twenty five cases of orbital fractures, twelve cases of simple or complex facial fractures, and two cases of brain injury²⁴. The journalist David Dufresne, whom proceeded to almost systematically report injuries caused by law enforcement, stated that “the police had in fact hurt as much people in a few months as in twenty years of protests” (Dufresne 2019). The apparent war injuries ultimately reflected the military deployment around the Arc of Triumph, and the anti-terrorist laws used against protesters.

This brutal repression was constantly denied by politics. Emmanuel Macron stating that “You can’t talk about police violence and repression, these words are unacceptable in a State under the rule of law” (Macron 2019) was another way of telling policemen how their acts would go unpunished and supported. Indeed, the disfiguration of faces acted like a warning to instill fear among protesters. This strategy of denying should not help. The Yellow Vests have indeed turned into ghosts by having their lives brutally changed and their existence denied. They are now forced to haunt the political framework until they earn the justice they deserve.

As a result, the Yellow Vests would have more ways of connecting with each other. Leaders would arise from the physical and psychological trauma. Jerome Rodrigues, a regularly threatened Yellow Vests leader, was finally shot in the eye while Antoine Boudinet, who lost a hand during a protest, became a municipal councilor of Bordeaux. Creative ways of connecting with one another would result from this movement as well.

After the evident sign of the yellow vest, symbolizing an emergency, and various masks like Guy Fawkes and the Joker, protesters would disguise themselves as injured protesters to create a tribute to the martyrs of repression for the act twelve of Yellow Vests protests. Their way of marking each protest with acts

24 See the Lancet report. © 2019 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved. “Ocular Injuries caused by less-lethal weapons in France”. November 02, 2019. Accessed August 09, 2021. [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)31807-0/fulltext#articleInformation](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)31807-0/fulltext#articleInformation).

was an even stronger reference to the theater, playing with reality and fiction, to finally invoke a life-saving *Deus Ex-Machina*. The movement, long missed, now seems to return more strong than ever, due to growing threats on individual liberty with the sanitary crisis. Police brutality is increasingly called into question. The anger is still here, and more people seem to be involved in politics since this crisis.

As we have seen, since the 1990s and the emergence of Warp Records label – as well as *Planet Mu*, *Brainfeeder*, and others – a growing number of electronic artists glorify a freaks ontology. It probably began with the ability to remain hidden. As Ben Ramsay states in his PhD thesis on relationships between acousmatic music and electronica, the albums covers were almost exclusively devoid of images of composers (Ramsay 2013, 13). This undisclosed identity helped them work on different projects in various record labels without restrictions. The split identity itself was a step towards duplication, dividing their inspirations, desires and forms in numerous ways.

The dissemination of identity is also linked with the internet. Internet became a powerful tool for every organized revolution from the Egyptian take over to the Yellow Vest uprising. The internet, as we have seen with contra-internet and *Ultravirus*, must be used as a tool of resistance and care.

III. 2. From disasters to intercreativity

Jean Baudrillard and Marc Guillaume studied different approaches of modifying one's identity with carnivals, transvestism, masks and the use of aliases. All of these practices and rituals, including technology, would transform identity to a point where they talk about mutations (Baudrillard & Guillaume 1994, 38). For them, anonymous people could be cut from their social background and could free their imaginations (Baudrillard & Guillaume 1994, 29-30). Following their conversation, we learn that the phone was, since its original creation, restricted to have only two people in a conversation, probably to avoid such transformations. The technology of that time could indeed have allowed phones with more than two people listening and speaking. For them, the fear of uncontrollable socialization was the reason technology was restrained. They thought about a disease pointed to modern life, where infinite desire could not be satisfied because of a lack of goals.

The dying scene of rave parties and the growing individualism bonded with feedback loops progressively pushed people into sharing micro-aesthetics of bedroom-produced music. With the growing cultures of intercreativity, DIY and data bending, the aesthetic base for electronic music began to extrapolate like Overton windows. Obscure and infinite subgenres began to multiply leading us to absurd bands embodying a mysterious and unpredictable signature.

Now that our network is broadcasting every piece of protest and cultural creation, the strategies we have seen are creating connections with symbolic tools and spectralization at the same time. Artists and people using masks, freaks aesthetics, or glitches could be detached from our current reality, and re-articulated with their own practices.

Intercreativity was already a practice of long resistance defined by a lot of activists, artists and developers. We saw it with the Joker memes but it is used widely by everyone on the internet. Intercreativity is the process of changing and sharing things out of their original context. For Tim Berners Lee, it can be seen as “(...) the process of making things or solving problems together” (Berners Lee 1999, 182). This process uses collaboration at its core. It is also used by artists to resist the rules of capitalism.

The COVID-19 crisis also aroused a kind of sense of community among musicians. Intercreativity was involved for its underlying feeling of connection provided by technology, and it seems to persist at the time of writing. For example, the *MUTANTS Mixtapes*²⁵ was created to support people of colors, queer and trans community, with every fund redistributed to local support groups during the sanitary crisis and after the murder of George Floyd.

The name of mutants is once again promoting the ontological alterity needed to create another reality and group consciousness. This praxis was also distinguished by its apparent heterogeneity. The *MUTANTS Mixtapes Vol.2: Riot*²⁶, in which I had the chance to participate, gathered 44 different musicians and as much visual artists from all sort of aesthetics. Surprisingly, a cohesion was raised around this multiplicity and the alterity previously defined. This work around culture is necessarily political working both on identity, consciousness raising and collaboration²⁷.

Moreover, this project was born on the *Mutants1000000* Discord server²⁸. This chat originally brought together a lot of queer and non-binary people, helping each other during the lockdown with emotional support and reflections about identity philosophy. Later followed by Arca, this support would extent to every minorities suffering from oppression, from the National American Right Funds²⁹ to the Palestine Red Crescent Society³⁰.

25 <https://mutants1000000.bandcamp.com/album/mutants-vol-1-131222/08/2020>.

26 Various Artists, *MUTANT Mixtapes Vol.2: Riot*, Self Released, 2020.

27 We could link to that to the work of the anarchist theorist Kropotkin. He stressed the importance of collaboration to survive and condemned the social darwinism of capitalism. Kropotkin also proposed to create a science to understand the needs of society and adapt the production to those needs. In every other political system, production comes first and can create artificial needs.

28 Accessed August 09, 2021.

<https://discord.com/channels/687337003989073972/691368903166918687>.

29 Various Artists, *MUTANT Mixtapes Vol.3: Seed*, Self Released, 2020.

30 Various Artists, *MUTANT Mixtapes Vol.5: Free*, Self Released, 2021.

Intercreativity is at the core of this aesthetic for its pervasive quality to remain indeterminate. It is also a way to create a different production system focused on collaborations without hierarchy. This desire for collaborations implies the visibility of the resources that drive our world. It also lets us acknowledge group consciousness with technology.

III. 3. Reverse visibility

A post-capitalist society should work on the visible and the invisible. As we have previously seen, systemic oppression of capitalism is slowly being made visible in popular culture, but capitalism itself is the parasite hiding in our life. The power dynamics can change when the underlying oppressive forces are made visible, as in the Yellow Vests protests and consciousness raising.

The individual, the ego, and its collaborations are in fact the last battleground against capitalism when personal data and identity are becoming a mean of pressure. We can remember the Cambridge Analytica scandal suspected to have exploited Facebook's user data to manipulate them, promote the Brexit vote and the Trump campaign. The whole project of Cambridge Analytica itself is based on a warped perception of its identity to look "more academic" according to the whistle blower Christopher Wylie (2018).

Similarly, the intimate and the folding into one's identity and alienation is defended by the artists we have seen. It is this very interiority, explored by *Ultravirus* and many musicians, that seems to get out to find the new. It is also why more and more artists have worked on facial recognition.

The artist Zach Blas tried to reverse this kind of domination by swapping the visible and hidden. His workshop *Facial Weaponization* (Blas 2013) consisted of building masks to protect from facial recognition systems but also to reveal the racist bias of such systems. The identity is again a matter of political struggle when we know that facial recognition systems can be corrupted with racist bias and are advised to handle everyone's safety (Wevers 2018).

While Zach Blas is working on making people invisible with a collective anonymous mask, James Bridle is showing us the technology surrounding us. His work consists of following data center lines or exposing drone shadows. He always wanted to understand how technologies modify our lives with all of its bias. In fact, he demonstrated how our collective understanding of reality would become adrift because of technologies, impacting our politics and behaviors. He also exposed how "the most successful empires have always promulgated themselves through a selective visibility: that of the subaltern to the center" (Bridle 2018, 246) while pointing at the imperialist reign of data.

The climax of this logic is probably the Wikileaks organization. In a way, with Edward Snowden's revelations, the organizations tried to turn NSA's pan-

opticon against itself. The possibility of a reverse visibility promised by its creator Julian Assange could explain why he was forced into exile, isolated in the Embassy of Ecuador for so many years. Not only was Wikileaks an organization of reverse visibility, it was collaborative. The platform dangerously exposed how states would prioritize their own desires over justice when its famous leak *collateral murder* (Wikileaks 2010) led us to the grotesque trial of the self-confessed leaker Chelsea Manning. Yet its basic principle remains outstandingly simple. Whistleblowers just give their information while staying anonymous. Julian Assange played an important part in the cypherpunk movement. He advocated for the privacy of users with cryptography and the transparency of States for a political change. In a similar fashion, the artistic practices we have seen are working on an uncanny aesthetic, supporting change through reverse visibility.

According to Nils Melzer, The United Nations special rapporteur on torture, Assange's torture is comparable to wartime torture. In fact, Assange was so much mentally abused that he was unable to remember his own identity. It is a warning for others who would want to create a second platform similar to the Wikileaks model (Melzer 2020). The manipulated charges confirmed by Nils Melzer and the denial of a fair trial is another proof of culpability for Sweden, England, and the US, as well as for other countries like France, which refused to grant their protection when it was requested. As a previously Red Cross delegate, Nils Melzer teaches us how lack of transparency is at the very root of states turning into infernos.

By making visible things concerning everyone and using singularity as a mean to connect with everyone, these movements, constitutive of many art practices, can also result in political organizations and build new ways of apprehending our future and save our mental health.

Conclusion

Through this article we saw how popular culture could make capitalist realism visible, by working on different patterns, like the parasite and, by extension, parasocial relationships. This demonstrated a need to connect with one another, through symbols in political protests and arts. The use of symbols and the visibility of capitalist realism would however feed a feeling of uncanniness.

The search for alterity was then explored from the commodification problem, to the possibility of building a self-reflexive critic. Pushing further into this idea, we saw how a different ontological mindset could be a way to deconstruct our reality, and conceive alienation through a Nietzschean great health.

We finally demonstrated how the strategy of freaks was used by the state as violent repression, and saw strategies of resistance. We studied the possibility of intercreativity brought by the Mutants Mixtapes. Finally, the work around

visibility and transparency was seen as a way to build our future, both in artistic and political practices.

Of course, freaks and intercreativity will not entirely save us from the disasters yet to come. However, the uncanny remains today a useful tool to cognitively prepare for a paradigm shift. Throughout this article, the uncanny was seen as a pervasive feeling, helping us through difficult times. The uncanny let us acknowledge the porosity of the human towards everything else, extricating us out from anthropocentrism and questioning the place of the human with the world and with each other.

With reality now exceeding the fiction, there is a need to create and conquer our future again. The resistance could take shape in the acknowledgement and recognition of our existential illness. We shall cope with it and use it to connect again with one another, tearing the new off from the chaos that arrives.

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**UNSTOPPABLE DECAY AND RELENTLESS HOPE:
A STUDY OF ALTERITY IN POPULAR CULTURE
(summary)**

My proposal will analyze cultural tendencies of change and resistance in the late capitalism era since 2009 through the scope of mental illness, crisis and arts. As a result, the ongoing pandemic crisis will be seen as an amplifier of capitalism's previous crises and unsustainability.

I will begin by demonstrating the growing mistrust in society towards neoliberalism. I will then study the drive for change in alterity. Lastly, I will see how the future is being prepared to survive the end of our current system.

I will firstly study how mistrust has grown to create a feeling of alienation over the last decade. Life under late capitalism will be analyzed with the TV show *Mr Robot* and other mainstream movies like *Joker* or *Parasite*. This will allow us to witness how systemic problems stressed by the philosopher Mark Fisher in his book *Capitalist Realism* are being known and reclaimed. The existential crisis of postmodern life, lost hopes of liberalism and mental illness will be seen as an uncanny mirror different from Fisher's impotent dystopia. This collide between reality and fiction will raise questions about parasocial relationships and the commodification of mental illness.

Following this train of thought, I will study a drive for change with unassimilated alterity. Baudrillard and Marc Guillaume's sight on this topic will be studied with examples from popular electronic music. I will highlight the presence of political practices in popular electronic music. These practices will be linked with the unconscious, and the possibility of escaping its commodification by capitalism. This feeling of alienation will make us dive into the *Ultravirus* record label in which I was involved as an artist. Using postmodernism impermanence and post-internet aesthetic as a way to create the new, I will observe *Ultravirus*, through the lens of a Nietzschean focus on health and Derrida's deconstruction.

The last part will demonstrate how this aesthetic suggests an end to our current system and tries to build a future with tangible utopias. The Yellow Vests protesters suffering from traumatic experiences will show us how the repression of neoliberalism isn't working and forces the mind to adapt into a resilient form. As a result, I will observe intercreativity strategies with the collaborative project *Mutant Mixtapes*, in which I was involved with dozens of artists. The money given to charities with this project will stress the importance of interdependence and consciousness raising. These practices and thoughts will lead us to a conception of a postcapitalist world, inspired by new desires and a reverse visibility creating an escape to mental alienation.

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