BIOPOLITICS AND COMMODIFICATION OF BODY AND FAITH IN ALTERED CARBON: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

ALTERED CARBON'DA BEDENİN VE İNANCIN METALAŞTIRILMASI VE BİYOPOLİTİKA: ELEŞTİREL BİR SÖYLEM ANALİZİ

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the concept of commodification of the body and belief through the discourses in Netflix's science fiction series Altered Carbon. The series is set in a future where human consciousness can be downloaded and stored as 'cortical memories' that can be transferred to different bodies or 'synthetic bodies'. This technology creates a sharp class divide where rich 'Meths' can afford to take on multiple bodies and can effectively live forever, while poor 'synthetic bodiless' are often relegated to menial jobs or even used as disposable labor.

The article argues that Altered Carbon's depiction of the commodification of the body and belief raises important questions about the ethics of technology, the nature of identity, and the meaning of life. In evaluating these questions, the intersection of theories regarding concepts such as biopower and biopolitics with the practice of the universe of the series is also examined. The program suggests that without caution, obsession with technology could lead to a future where humans are nothing more than commodities to be bought and sold.

Keywords: Science fiction, Biopolitics, Body and faith, Digital identity, Altered Carbon

ÖZ

Bu makale bedenin ve inancın metalaştırılması kavramını Netflix'in bilim kurgu dizisi Altered Carbon'daki söylemler üzerinden incelemektedir. Dizi, insan bilincinin indirilebildiği ve farklı bedenlere veya 'sentetik vücutlara' aktarılabilen 'kortikal bellekler' halinde saklanabildiği bir gelecekte geçmektedir. Bu teknoloji, zengin 'Meth'lerin' birden fazla beden almaya gücü yettiği ve fiilen sonsuza kadar yaşayabildiği, yoksul 'sentetik vücutsuz'ların ise genellikle sıradan işlere gönderildiği ve hatta tek kullanımlık iş gücü olarak kullanıldığı keskin bir sınıf ayrımı yaratmaktadır.

Makale, Altered Carbon'un bedenin ve inancın metalaştırılması tasvirinin teknolojinin etiği, kimliğin doğası ve yaşamın anlamı hakkında önemli soruları gündeme getirdiğini savunmaktadır. Bu soruların değerlendirilmesinde biyoiktidar ve biyopolitika gibi kavramlara ilişkin teorilerin dizinin evreninin pratiğiyle kesişimselliği de incelenmektedir. Program, eğer dikkatli olunmazsa teknolojiye olan takıntının, insanların alınıp satılacak metalardan başka bir şey olmadığı bir geleceğe yol açabileceğini öne sürüyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: Bilim kurgu, Biyopolitika, Beden ve inanç, Dijital kimlik, Altered Carbon

INTRODUCTION

Technological developments that may take place in the near future are seen as a candidate element that will systematically change social structures from their meaning as we know them. These developments, along with widespread use, accelerate communication and information exchange, thus, increasing the potential for change in daily life and culture. For example, the widespread use of television technology is a phenomenon that has caused major changes in daily life and family structure. As with all other technological developments in history, with this technology, users have encountered new opportunities, both in terms of communication and in matters such as entertainment consumption. The daily life practices of housewives brought about a series of developments, including the meanings attributed to technology and occult discussions. Collective monitoring activities have been added to in-home activities, and with the widespread use of electrical home appliances, there has been a decrease in routine tasks that require physical strength, therefore, the demand for electrical entertainment systems brought to the home has increased in order to utilize the remaining free time. With this development, in which electrical-based communication such as telegraph, radio, etc. evolved into visual and live communication, various reservations about technology also found a place in society. Individuals have developed various concerns about this new world that they welcome into their living rooms, not only as spectators but also considering the possibility of being watched. Therefore, "...as the development of television accelerated in the 1930s and the experimental technology became more widely known to the public, both scientifically 'factual' predictions and wildly 'fictional' prognostications of a future with television emphasized the new medium's astonishing qualities of visual presence in terms of electronic transportation" (Sconce, 2000, p.127).

The change of these structures is not limited to the cultural level only, it is expected to bring about some political changes as well. It is crucial to ensure the regulation of the usage of these innovations at the social level, regarding the legal and ethical considerations they may reveal. Educational and religious organizations opposed the principles of commercial broadcasting and raised arguments about broadcasting's philosophical foundations and national jurisdictions. According to Sconce (2000, p.94), "Such concerns even took legislative form in federal regulations of the 1920s and 1930s that defined the airwaves as a 'public resource' and required broadcasters to be 'licensed' by the government". Based on these changes in the past, it is possible to see today's technology, which is rapidly developing and available to the public, as the harbinger of a future whose boundaries are unknown but only can be depicted by imagination. Therefore, it can be concluded that every new technological development shapes our understanding and expectations about the future.

Depictions of the future have long been the subject of works of art in different variations, and have been one of the main themes of science fiction cinema and television series. Screenwriters' different depictions of future times, utopias, dystopias, and the reflection of techno futuristic perception of space on the screen are some of the frequently encountered elements of productions. Again, with the widespread use of television technology, these elements found a place in many science fiction TV series such as *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), *Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966-1969), and *Doctor Who* (1963-1989). Likewise, those have been the subject of examination in many academic studies.

Adapted by Laeta Kalogridis in 2018 from the hard science fiction[1] book *Altered Carbon*, which is the first of Richard K. Morgan's Takeshi Kovacs trilogy of books, *Altered Carbon, Broken Angels,* and *Woken Furies*, the *Altered Carbon* TV series is a series designed in the cyberpunk subgenre of the science fiction genre. This series, adapted for the Netflix platform, remains faithful to the book in major points during the adaptation but has some minor changes in terms of characters and organization. The details of the story of the series, whose two seasons were published in 2018 and the anime film was released in 2020, and which takes place in a futuristic future with different social structures than today and where interstellar travel is possible, will be examined through processes.

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[1] Hard science fiction prioritizes scientific accuracy and plausibility. Stories within this subgenre feature technologies and concepts that are based on established scientific principles or well-founded speculation. See also: Westfahl, G., 1996.

Throughout the study, how the body, belief, and social infrastructure issues are handled in the universe of the series and philosophical discussions about existence will be carried out by making use of theories on biopolitics, existentialism, philosophy of technology, and theology. The study is limited to examining the discourses in the script of the series, and critical discourse analysis will be used as a method to analyze the representations permeating these discourses. It was deemed appropriate to use it because it is a method that will serve to examine the data portraying clues about the social order that is processed into language and culture in microcodes and 'constructed' in a collaborative way with the participation of the individuals and the authority. This perspective not only opens doors for us to ponder the potential implications and the new opportunities of the rapidly evolving electronic, algorithmic, and medical technologies but also prompts us to question how we establish contexts at individual and societal levels within relevant concepts. Furthermore, it offers a reality check on the agenda-setting phenomena attributed to various types of art in the science fiction genre. Will humanity's current choices really lead future generations to such a point? Is it possible that this speculative future, which is open to debate by different disciplines, might not be so fictional after all? Could the final destination of these technologies, which are being prepared and will be available for use in the near future, be the *Altered Carbon* universe? In this depicted future, it will be examined how different these personal concepts are handled from the way they are today, and the answer to the question of why and how they are commodified will be sought. The factors that make these concepts 'expendable' elements, both separately and together, will also accompany the question to be answered. Seeking answers to these questions is very important in terms of shedding light on the relationships within the context of technology and society and our future in this universe. The difference of this study from other studies on similar themes or the same television series is that it discusses an example from different perspectives that talks about an alternative universe, a technologically advanced dystopian future, where physical, cultural, and moral values are subject to exchange. Examination of the work will be done not only on the body phenomenon that is the prominent subject of the work but also on beliefs and social values. The discussed elements are so intricately interconnected within a cause-and-

effect relationship that they cannot be independently assessed. Furthermore, the events portrayed in the series are predicated upon the interwoven nature of these concepts. As the name of the work suggests, *'Altered'* Carbon, that is, carbon-based human life as we know it, is replaced by alternative life forms made possible by alien technology, bringing the end of an era and major changes in known values to the agenda. In this context, this series, as a sample, is a compatible example in terms of creating an in-depth pattern with the topics to be examined.

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: BIOPOLITICS THROUGH BODY AND FAITH

One of the patterns frequently seen in productions in the cyberpunk subgenre –regardless of its production type–, where depictions of the future are the subject, is the problematic of being human. Details such as the limits of being human, the elements that make a person human, self, consciousness, individuality, sociality, memory, and order are often discussed altogether. The mentioned elements each constitute complex subjects deserving focused discussion, as they are interrelated and collectively form a sophisticated system defining the essence of being human. Analyzing these elements in conjunction facilitates a comprehensive understanding of human existence. In addition, the material and spiritual consequences of being an individual, that is, a 'human', are among the elements included in this pattern. In this context, when examining a production designed in the cyberpunk subgenre, it is possible to talk about a conceptual clustering around certain topics and an intertwined structure. However, as Ersümer (2013) states that the dominant element within them remains the defining element of the relevant production and in order to distinguish it from other genres, it is necessary to distinguish common points. This process of differentiation takes place through the common themes that flow between productions.

In *Altered Carbon*, the theme of individuality and existence is reflected through the interplay of body and belief, illustrating the characters' connection to the space they inhabit. Cyberpunk productions often focus on body-mind duality and disembodiment, placing the body phenomenon at the center of the theme. In *RoboCop* (Verhoeven, 1987), a police officer is transformed into a cyborg without his consent and

has problems with his new body; in *Akira* (Otomo, 1988), children are exploited by changing their bodies for military purposes and individuals are dehumanized due to extreme body deformation; or as in *eXistenZ* (Cronenberg, 1999), there are many examples that blur the boundaries between the body and the machine, focus on the invasion of technology on the body, and put the human-body relationship at its center. Or there are examples, such as *Alita*: *Battle Angel* (Rodriguez, 2019) film and *Upgrade* (Whannell, 2018), that criticize the deformation of the body for technological development within an ethical framework. The same ethical framework appears in the *Transcendence* (Pfister, 2014) movie, when a person's consciousness is separated from the body, that is, after physical death, he continues his life with a virtual embodiment in a completely digital environment, and when all human characteristics are deformed one by one, by combining and strengthening human being with artificial intelligence. When it comes to the body and ethics, belief systems and traditions are among the topics that are explored, in fact, these concepts are so intertwined that, although this issue is not specifically touched upon in most productions, there are absolute connotations in the subtexts. Cyberpunk often challenges established norms and social structures, including traditional belief systems. Dystopian settings and heroes' struggles against oppressive forces can be seen as a metaphor for questioning established beliefs and authority figures. Some cyberpunk films, such as *Blade Runner* sequels (Scott, 1982 & Villeneuve, 2017), and *Ghost in the Shell* (Oshii, 1995), raise questions about the nature of consciousness and the possibility of artificial beings developing their own bodies, beliefs, or spiritual systems. In this example, we see that the imaginary future has an order that does not consist only of the forgotten ruins of the past civilization and that some people still prefer to remain attached to spiritual elements such as faith, family, and community.

While existence can only be taken with its physical or spiritual dimension, as seen in the example of the study, it can also find a place in the story within the framework of the integral relationship of both dimensions with each other. According to Küngerü (Küngerü, 2022, p.4), who conducted a study on the same sample in the context of transhumanism and biopolitics, "The series carries the scenarios of human healing and immortality in the future into a political

framework". But the extent of this political framework is not just limited to regulating relevant topics which are only related to the body. Both the phenomena of body and belief are functioning cogs of the biopolitics implemented by the power in charge. Additionally, the theme of faith takes place in this fictional reality, where the transhumanist elements mentioned in the relevant article take place, as a mediated result of these technological developments. Therefore, the evaluation of this political system in the universe of the series separately from the 'belief' dimension by concentrating on body and enhancement technologies, means that the conflicts with the ruling class experienced by various minority groups such as Neo Catholics[2] (Neo-C), Muslims, etc. -who are individuals with belief codes in their DHFs[3] (Digital Human Freight)-, remain substantially pointless in the plot of the production and this will cause bridge connections in the storyline to fail. In the absence of the component of faith, would the content of the regulations enacted by legislators regarding the body and death, be as complex? Within the narrative structure of the series, conflicts that are inherent solely in a world where only the body is commodified could easily become simple narratives leading to straightforward resolutions, likewise watching the same event over and over again.

While posthumanism is a concept derived from the understanding of postmodernism, the roots of transhumanism are sought in the dialectics of enlightenment (Ferrando, 2019), therefore the understanding of transhumanism does not aim to displace the idea of humanism, on the contrary, it can also be defined as ultrahumanism (Onishi, 2011). Transhumanism should not only focus on physical and cognitive enhancements but also consider the potential impact on social justice, human equality, and the meaning of being human, regardless of the characteristics of their bodies (Hughes, 2004). Accordingly, development should take place in two directions simultaneously. Most of the results of

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[2] Neo-Catholics are a future version of Catholicism who believe in the sanctity of the original human body. They reject 'stacking', considering it a violation of the soul, or they stamp their belief code into their DHF.

[3] DHF (Digital Human Freight): This new technology is a biomemory in disk form, encoded and stored as DHF, which allows the pure human mind to be stored in it. It is a technology that allows consciousness to be transferred to any memory, to any body and to virtual spaces.

the studies on the Netflix-produced *Altered Carbon* television series in the academic index search consist of various studies examining the events and structures in the universe of the series in terms of transhumanist elements. This result is not surprising, because the understanding of transhumanism and the basic components of the series correspond exactly to each other. Technologies that make human life easier and remove the limitations of physical diseases and the short life of the body, as well as elements such as mind uploading and digital identity, are transhumanist elements in the series. Although transhumanism is actually a secular movement in theory, in practice its ideas and goals have certain implications in terms of ethical and religious elements. While traditional religious systems assume the supreme existence of a divine power, the physical and intellectual developments that transhumanism promises to provide to humans envisage a process in which humans can take an active role in their evolution, which contradicts God's attribute of 'one and mighty'. The problematic use of technology, digital immortality, morphological freedom and the idea of the separation of human consciousness from the body are diametrically opposed to the propositions of the Abrahamic religions regarding the nature of life, death, and the soul. Morphological freedom defends the concept of personal sovereignty over one's body, allowing individuals to transcend biological limitations and pursue self-determined transformations (Sandberg, 2013). This is consistent with biopolitical discourses that emphasize individual agency and choice in shaping one's life trajectory.

Michel Foucault (2008, 2014) and Giorgio Agamben's (1998, 2000, 2005, 2016) discussions on biopolitics include situations that can shed light on the discourse built in the universe of the series accompanied by visual arrangements. The introduction of stack technology to society and the existence of regulations regarding in what situations, when, and in which way body changes can be carried out are the exact equivalent of the concept that Foucault calls disciplinary power, and the existence of biopower is introduced to prevent technology-induced social order confusion. An armed uprising by certain segments of the population against the existing order and the control of those in power over access to immortality constitute the practical equivalent of biopower. Even though this biopower formation is at the top of an irregular and

unequal social hierarchy in the territories it manages throughout the two seasons of the series, as explained in detail in the first episodes of the first season of the series, the situation is different on paper, that is, in the legal texts that are the official contract made by the biopower with the public. According to Küngerü (2022, p.4), "the availability of technologies that enable life extension or death postponement is not available to everyone", which is one of the elements discussed within the framework of transhumanism ideals. However, on contrary to this suggestion, in S1E1 (Season 1/ Episode 1) *Out of the Past* (Kalogridis, et al., 2018), when the main character Takeshi Kovacs is released from Alcatraz prison, in the orientation program organized specifically for those released ones, the hologram of announcer woman's sentences "This is a cortical stack. As Protectorate citizens, we each have one implanted when we are one year old..." are included in the dialogue.

Image 1. Announcing the Orientation

Source: https://www.netflix.com/watch/80097693?trackId=250375463/, Access Date: 08.01.2024

Therefore, here, biopower has provided this opportunity to every citizen, even if they are religious –except for a very minority group who refuse to be registered– and has handed over the rights of use to individuals themselves. Therefore, the disciplinary elements regulated by law are mainly focused on the law of survival, not death, as Foucault stated. The corporate structures and characters whose discourses are examined in both seasons of the series bear traces from both periods of Foucault, where his thoughts on power extend in different directions. "While the first period covers the processes where the power is oppressive and panoptic surveillance is widespread, it is seen that the second-period studies use concepts such as 'governmentality', 'biopower', 'biopolitics' instead of

the term power" (Sejfula, 2023, p.18). While in the first season there was a more normal relationship between the individual and biopower, in the second season it is seen that the pressure of biopower on individuals and society has increased considerably. In addition to the binding contracts of biopower, the existence of a social order in which the state of exception, where normal rules are suspended and state of exception becomes the new norm and constitutes a "point of imbalance between public law and political fact" (Saint-Bonnet, 2001, p.28), as mentioned by Agamben (2005), is reflected in both the dialogues and the general discourse style of the series. The dominant power is also in a position of power that indirectly, 'through Methuselahs (shortly Meths) and law enforcement officials', some of whom take bribes, decides who can attain eternal life and who will be left to die. However, Agamben's (1998) concept of 'homo sacer' describes people who are outside the protection of the law, who can be killed but not sacrificed. In this context, there is an upper class with a discourse that classifies people who cannot afford to buy a new sleeve as potential homo sacer and portrays them as disposable products.

The panopticon is a conceptual prison design proposed by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. It's a circular building with cells arranged around a central observation tower. Prisoners are constantly seen by a guard in the center, but they have no knowledge of whether they are being watched, which is the constant surveillance theme of the panopticon. This constant surveillance situation turns into a self-control mechanism over time. By design, the panopticon causes an imbalance of power because it holds all the power of the guard. "It is obvious that, in all these instances, the more constantly the persons to be inspected are under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them, the more perfectly will the purpose X of the establishment have been attained" (Bentham, 1995, p.34). This model has subsequently been used to describe many social situations and power dynamics. Here too, there is an endless control and supervision mechanism that the U.N. (United Nations) and the Protectorate have achieved through technology. The Settled Worlds in the Altered Carbon universe function as a massive panopticon prison, with every digitized movement and transaction occurring with the knowledge and control of the guardian at the top. There is involvement, not

just oversight. For example, when Danica Harlan wants to make an announcement to the people of Harlan's World as governor, a giant hologram of her appears in the square, further reinforcing the fact that surveillance and control are carried out predominantly through technological means. This surveillance also intersects with Foucault's concept of 'governmentality'. "General surveillance of the population… it is the eye of the government ceaselessly open and watching without distinction over all citizens, yet without subjecting them to any measure of coercion whatever" (Bonneville, 1847, as cited in Foucault, 1995, p.280). It is the consideration of how power can be used to shape people's behavior and desires, as opposed to the coercive aspect of power. Its most important source is information, it is a govermental way of thinking that reinforces its power through information sources flowing from everywhere (in that case, big data sets, cameras and AI).

Issues such as social inequalities and the use of technology to serve as surveillance mechanisms of authority are also ethical elements that transhumanist thinkers frequently discuss. In this context, it became necessary to criticize the commodification of bodies, belief systems, and the domination of authority –in this case, the United Nations and the Protectora– over believer individuals and bodies, by making use of certain theories on related issues. Because, the political and body-related themes are dominant and the lines of social hierarchy boldly emphasized by faith, are clearly present. This study, which will be carried out on the axis of body, faith, and biopolitics, is thought to bring a different perspective to the literature in terms of examining the intertwined integrity of these elements in the work. The realization of this study is significant as it is one of the few to focus on this specific area, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis of the literature.

2. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study, which focuses on the commodification of body and faith phenomena in the *Altered Carbon* TV series, aims to reveal the reflections of the relevant elements on the constructed discourse. For this purpose, the critical discourse analysis method is applied, and the ideological figures of biopower that penetrate the subtexts of written, spoken, and visual discourses are examined with examples from the

episodes of both seasons of the series. The reason for choosing this method in the research is, as Fairclough (Fairclough, 1995) points out, it is important to show how the order of data extracts and interactions depends on the taken-for-granted 'background knowledge' and how this background knowledge includes 'naturalized' ideological representation. Embracing critical objectives entails elucidating these naturalizations and, more broadly, clarifying the often opaque societal determinants and the impact of discourse on 'general' participants, in that case, the general audience. The theoretical underpinnings of the critical approach involve perspectives on the relationship between 'micro' events, including verbal interactions, and 'macro' structures. These perspectives consider the latter as both the conditions and the outcomes of the former and therefore reject rigid barriers between them. Social institutions or social structures contain various ideological-discursive formations associated with different groups within them. Although there is generally a dominant IDF (ideological-discursive formation) the IDFs of institutional structures are created by the individual, the smallest building block of which the institution is not even aware of their existence, because a subjective perception is being mentioned. In this context, instead of a general discourse analysis, it is necessary to examine the micro and macro dimensions and simultaneous realization of the discourse in detail, to look closely at how the discourses of the elements that are confronted and coded as 'sides' build an integrated structure, in order to ensure the reliability of the results of the study.

More generally, and unlike critical analysis, "critical discourse analysis is problem-oriented, it does not primarily focus on discourse and its properties, but on social issues and problems, such as racism and sexism or other forms of domination and power abuse, and then examines whether and how text and talk are involved in its reproduction" (Van Dijk, 2009, p.111). Specifically, the Altered Carbon example is chosen, because as it was mentioned in the introduction, general transhumanist works tend to have futuristic elements not only as visual elements but as a social system. Here in that regard, this layered structure was detailed through belief systems too, and those systems are used as tools to maintain surveillance. The data to be used in the study will be taken solely and entirely from the series universe, and information related to

the adaptation source mentioned in the introduction will not be included in the study.

The series also bears the basic characteristics of the cyberpunk subgenre in terms of genre. In cyberpunk narratives, characters generally experience processes of integration of technology with their bodies and minds. Again, cyberpunk stories feature political situations where powerful corporations and individuals dominate governments and governing systems through money and influence. Technological innovations and "altered" realities such as Virtual Reality/Augmented Reality/ Simulation create situations such as self-confusion and existential concerns in individuals. Although Cyberpunk does not specifically emphasize religious institutions, it can include techno-world problems that develop around religious elements in a dystopian context. Giant skyscrapers and companies that divinely wield cutting-edge technology can be characterized as semi-divine religious entities. They contain issues discussed around ethical problems arising from institutional powers and technology. If we evaluate it in this context, the series we will examine covers the features offered and the subject of the study. It is an example of the successful implementation of the narrative of an order in which the body is commodified.

In examining this universe, where this commodification mechanism operates without a hitch, an attempt will be made to reveal a ground of thought that overlaps with the theme of the series, by making use of Michel Foucault and Agamben's thoughts on biopolitics and observation under the light of theological theories. In the section where the commodification of the body and its relationship with the concept of "death" are touched upon, what kind of social formation takes place in the universe of the series and its political connections will be examined within visual, written, and spoken discourses and the framework of the perspectives of thinkers who contribute to the biopolitical philosophy by using explanatory scenes and dialogues.

3. BIOPOLITICAL CONTROL, REGULATION, AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF BODIES

In the 17th century, which Foucault calls the period of classical power, sovereignty is a power established through law and holds the rights to kill and sustentation. Since the sovereign expects individuals to obey it, the contract of order between it and the society, that is, the control of the law, prevails (Foucault, 2008). The model of power we encounter in the *Altered Carbon* universe is the biopower mentioned by Foucault. Laws

and rules exist to ensure the continuation of life and to preserve the order between bodies. Factors such as the prohibition of double resleeving the fact that the penalty is real death4, and the fact that the organic body damage inflicted on stack users is less severe than the damage inflicted on the stacks of faithful citizens are indications that they aim to keep people alive.

Biopower continues with the production of the lives of subjects, giving them the right to speak instead of silencing and intimidating them. In this context, it has changed its connections with death and transformed the scope of the right to kill and the power to kill into the purpose of keeping alive, adding new missions such as enlarging, multiplying, producing, and developing. The Protectorate government's offer to apply cortical stack technology to every citizen who has turned one year old is to increase the efficiency of the newly born body and ensure the continuity of the power it produces, in case of acceptance. There is no obligation in the Cortical stack application, families of people from various faith groups, especially Neo-Catholics, have the right to refuse this application. However, the prevalence of the practice is so intense that every individual who is outside the scope of this dense network actually seems to be outside of society, and their access to most opportunities is restricted. This can be given as an example of the hidden social domination of biopower. Biopower individualizes individuals with the definitions it places within the body, categorizes and separates them into classes, and subjects them to hierarchically testing them. In this context, Altered Carbon's social hierarchical structure can be listed from largest to smallest as the government, Meths, Envoys, soldiers and police, and the local people.

Figure 1. Hierarchical Order Diagram

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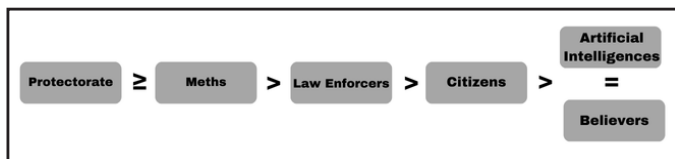
[4] Real Death: Unlike the resleeving of the organic body or sleeve with a stack attached to it after physical death, real death is when the cortical stack in which the person's consciousness is recorded is damaged physically or destroyed by an energy weapon, causing the recording to become irrecoverably corrupted.

The body functions mechanically under the control of biopower, and the aim is to obtain more power, resources, and energy from bodies in a short time. In this sense, the Protectorate's policy on imprisoned bodies can be exemplified. For example, the rights over the body of a prisoner who has already been sentenced to fifty years are transferred to the government and offered to other users with options such as rental and purchase during this process. Rather than waiting for the owner's return for fifty years in an incubator, the body continues to exist within the production chain. The government demands a certain amount of payment every month to ensure that the bodies of people sentenced to prison are not sold. An example of this is Kristin Ortega's ex-boyfriend, police officer Elias Ryker, who paid a monthly bond so that his body would not be given to anyone else when he was sent to cortical storage prison. In the other possibility, prisons make huge profits by selling organic bodies and sleeves that will fetch good money. In the biopolitics of the population, birth and death rates, health level, life expectancy and all conditions that may affect them have gained importance and governments have resorted to making regulations in this direction (Foucault, 2008). Individuals have been pacified because they constantly control each other within the society they belong to within the framework of the biopower relationship.

Agamben (2005) points to a concept that does not deviate from the rule in terms of being a situation where the state of exception, where the normal is determined, emerges and the law suspends its validity, but is formed by the rule suspending itself. Thus, ambiguity is created in the process, and it seems that in the case of exception, the ambiguity of the decision transforms itself into a lawless law, becoming an ordinary and normal process. In this context, Captain Tanaka, the director of the Fell St. PD (Fell St. Police Department), has developed an auto-control mechanism at the police station to meet the endless legal demands of the Meths, who have made a habit of exploiting their weakness of influence in the system. Although there is a legal right to intervene, in certain practices, in particular, the requests of the Bancroft family's lawyer, Oumou Prescott, is seen to be requested not through written documents approved by the sovereign after a while, but through verbal demands and threats to cause

diplomatic problems. This is the manifestation of a lawless law, 'The wishes of the Meths will be dealt with without question and as soon as possible'.

In this context, Agamben (1998) questions the legitimacy of the political field on legal grounds. Contrary to Foucault, according to Agamben (1998), biopolitics is not the politics of life, but the politics of death, considering the fact that the human being, whose biological life is surrounded by various dominations by the sovereign, faces the threat of death at any moment. However, when we look at it within the framework of the series, characters such as Takeshi Kovacs' sister Reileen Kawahara, and Laurens Bancroft's wife Miriam Bancroft, who violate the rules and laws, get what they want as a result of systemic connivance. Still, they do not feel the threat of 'real death', which is the legal punishment for the crimes they commit, like ordinary people. Despite this, throughout the two seasons of the series, real death, which is the biggest death threat, is constantly mentioned, but it is not shown that this kind of punishment is given by the authority to either the main characters or the side characters – no matter what crime they commit. The characters are punished by 'people', the gears of the social self-control mechanism that Foucault (2008) mentioned. In this context, I think that the biopolitics in Altered Carbon's universe is closer to a Foucauldian biopolitics of life, rather than a "death-centered" Agambenian view. Considering the endless queues of so-called free hospitals and the useless inventory bodies offered free of charge to local people called 'grounders5' who have no money or influence, the government is at least 'ostensibly' prescriptive in encouraging the continuity of life.

However, the politicization of death and the transformation of life into a politics of death, which Agamben (2005) defines as an exception, is a valid concept throughout the series. If the individual comes from a politically 'expendable' socio-political level, even if his death occurs as a 'certain death', the validity of the lawless law that Agamben mentioned is still in question, depending on the socio-political situation of the perpetrator. Examples of this include legal documents that are too important to be signed in one

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5 Grounders: Local people who live in ground-surface buildings unlike the Meths in skyscrapers.

day, closed case files, and prostitute cases that were closed by changing the belief code to the believer.

Image 2-3. Kristin Ortega's Aerium Assignment, S1E3.
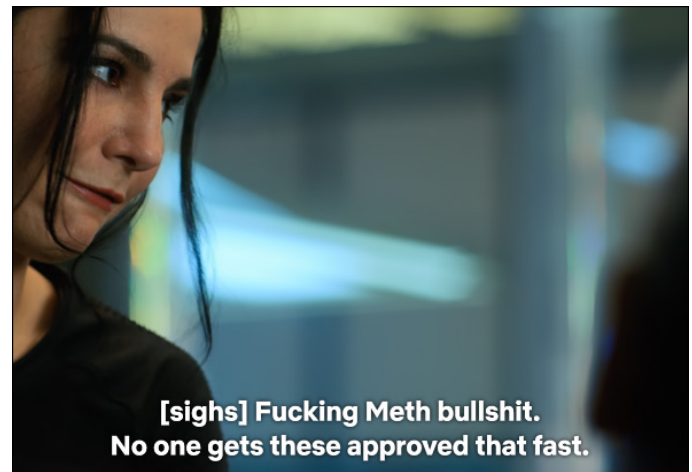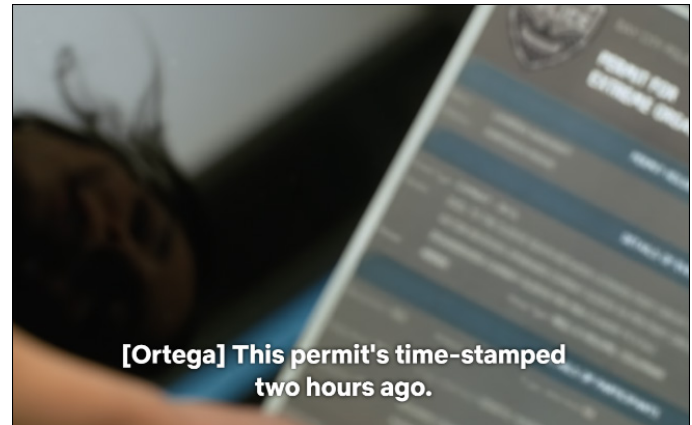
At this point, an example can be given in the series, where Kristin Ortega abused her position and cut off the cortical stack of a young girl named Mary Lou Henchy in order to uncover the mystery behind her murder, even though her belief code was committed in a 'faithful' manner. In targeted action, the opportunities provided by the system to certain segments, in this case, the police, resulting in the systematic abuse of the relevant advantage.

3.1. Commodification of Bodies and Digital Identity

According to Foucault (2014) the body is a biopolitical reality and medicine is a biopolitical strategy. In this context, the series' handling of the concept of "body" and the commodification of the body through

technology is a strategic application of the power held by the government. Commodification refers to the process of turning something into a commodity, which is a good or service that can be bought and sold in a market. The renowned French thinker and activist, Guy Debord (2014) positions the commodity as a longstanding adversary in his famous concept of the 'society of the spectacle'. He contends that within this framework, everything, including our bodies, emotions, and experiences, becomes commodified and subsequently sold back to us. In the universe of the series, the practice of technological determinism shows its presence in almost all scenes. If evaluated in terms of internal logic, the technological possibilities offered in the field of "body" have a consistent structure in terms of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. It is also autonomous; even though there are masses of people who try to stay away from what is offered as much as possible, we see that some members of their families cannot help but join the rest of society. Ortega herself and her grandmother are the most important examples of this, and in the first season, her mother Alazne stated in a dialogue that she was uncomfortable with Ortega bringing various technological devices home such as her ONI (Online Network Interface6). And some technological advances were inevitable; newly discovered metals would be used in important projects one way or another. According to Falconer's memoirs, she wanted to travel interstellar very much, but the existing technology the limited lifespan of the human body, and the risk of disease were the biggest obstacles to this. When designing the cortical stack technology, the design was created with an emphasis on its beneficial aspects. In the statements in her memories, which she also mentions in flashbacks, the design process aimed to save the human being from the inefficient position of the body in situations such as intergalactic travel, from a transhumanist perspective. She could not think of the possibility of a group of elitist demigod billionaires obsessed with immortality and

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6 Online Network Interface: It is basically a lens technology that reflects information onto the person's retina, creating an AR (Augmented Reality) layer on top of the real world view. It has an interface that provides access to communication, information access, navigation, entertainment, data processing, video and photo capture, and other wearable equipment such as watches, wristbands, etc., and a battery that charges naturally through the body's heat.
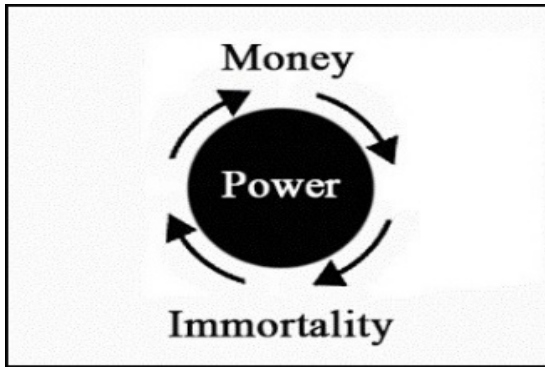
technological domination in the first place. Also, the fact that a hackable device was attached to everyone's spinal cord hit her hard during the Resistance days. Almost everyone had stack eventually, and everyone was potentially a ticking time bomb. With sleeve and clone technology, diseases were completely reduced or eliminated, but they were replaced by a parasitic software, the Rawling virus, and hacking, which corrupted the person's stack codes and forced them to harm themselves physically.

Stack is a unification of a consciousness and a soul in practice. That causes digital identity and digital memory because the software (consciousness) and hardware (human body – organism) are separated. As an example, we can give the married couple who were hired and brought by Bancroft himself to the party to reveal the murderer, held by the Bancrofts at Suntouch Mansions and were made to fight to the death in a zero-gravity environment. Even though they have two young children, every evening they go to work they return with different bodies that the renter promised at the end of the night. In fact, while the winner gets the new body, the loser gets into the other's sleeve. In this context, their gender and visual parental roles pose a very complex and unethical problem. Or Lizzie Elliot, who was tortured by the Meths, and Ava, the hacker mother of Lizzie, who works in a group called Dipper, who steals private memories from the Meths' stack records and sells them to the black market. After being released from prison by Kovacs for a job, it takes time for her husband to accept her when she is given a male body from the inventory. The person is still the same person but different in body appearance, so the identity is a digital identity based on the consciousness recorded in the stack.

If we consider it within the scope of body as a property, while the ultra-rich Meths have exact copies of their bodies and have the opportunity to infinitely resleeving in the same appearance, most of the local people are satisfied with resleeving as much as they can afford. A situation where a room full of clone bodies is waiting to be used is an important detail in associating the body with property. In this context, an endless cycle is provided between power, money, and immortality, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Power Relations Diagram

The only property of those who is faithful is their innate organic bodies. People who, although they are not believers, cannot afford to constantly buy a new and young body even if they work throughout their lives, can only buy a new body financially after they get older, and they can choose to end their lives there rather than experiencing the difficulties of this natural aging process again. Meths have an auto backup system that transfers the data that has been recorded every 48 hours to a facility or a satellite. In this sense, they are similar to vampire families. Age is fixed, the body is fixed, and the body is not progressive (in the context of aging). In this case, these stacked bodies are not like an organic life form, they are just bleeding and dying, that is, they are thrown aside like a technological device that has broken down and no longer works. Physical upgrades are also property elements. Resistance to most diseases, increased physical strength, and improved sexual modeling can be evaluated in this context. In the universe of the series, the advertisements of the giant companies that sell clones to Meths and the discourses placed between the texts about "better bodies are deserved" confirm this theme. Image 4, a section taken from the Psychasecs Company scene where Kovacs goes for investigation is a visual example of this discourse.

Image 4. Psychasecs Company Scene, S1E2.

Source: https://www.netflix.com/watch/80097695?trackId=200257858/, Access Date: 12.01.2024

Also, there are crews stealing bodies to sell and there are many prostitution services available. In connection with this, the body has been fetishized as a sex tool (Kristeva, 1982). It refers to prostitutes who were beaten to death and thrown down from the sky in exchange for providing a new body during sexual advances.

In the scene where Kovacs first awakens and in the party scene afterward, there are clear discourses of viewing the body as property. Kovacs was told by the authorities that he was Bancroft's property from then on. While everyone had to bring a unique 'something' to the Meth party held afterward, Laurens Bancroft states that the item he brought was 'Kovacs'. Again, in the party scene, Clarissa Severin's statement that she bought a stack, a mind, from prison illegally and placed it inside a snake is also an example. This is a bad thing even by the standards of a society that sees "existence" as something that can be bought and sold.

Image 5. Suntouch Mansions, Aerium. S1E3.

Source: https://www.netflix.com/watch/80097695?trackId=200257859/, Access Date: 11.01.2024

In the Envoys' case, they are super soldiers taught to use their bodies as weapons thus body is weaponized, and adapted easily to high tech, and thus body is also mechanized and digitalized. In a plane where minds are recorded in cortical stacks and eyes charge the technologies attached to them, the body and soul have been transformed into electricity, in Foucault's words, an energy source. As Agamben mentioned, the body has changed its use as both a tool and property at the center of production and consumption. "… as with a transformation in the use of bodies and objects, of which originary paradigm is to be found in the 'animate instrument' who is the slave, which is to say, the human being who in using his body is actually used by others" (Agamben, 2016, p. 73), and assuming one

can afford these expensive embodiment procedures, a person's consciousness can be stored in a cortical stack at the base of the brain and easily transferred into a new sleeve; so death is nothing more than a small image on the screen and a brief malfunction.

4. COMMODIFICATION OF FAITH: EXISTENTIAL DILEMMAS AND RELIGIOUS CONTRADICTIONS

Altered Carbon depicts a world where death is no longer the ultimate end and can potentially lead to feelings of meaninglessness. The endless process of resleeving and the commodification of life as a whole creates an existential crisis for the characters as they grapple to exist in a world where there is no clear concept of an afterlife. The anxiety brought about by this ambiguity proceeds in parallel for the non-believer and believer characters in the series universe. On the one hand, there is the belief in a future full of torment in which the gates of heaven will be closed forever in case of resleeving, on the other hand, there is the anxiety of the end of the lifeline since there is nothing after real death. Both concerns are based on confrontation, suggesting that confronting our mortality can lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place in the world. Death itself is a problematic element as well as life after death, because the concept of death has been undermined by the government strengthened by technology. Death itself is divided into two: physical and spiritual death, depending on the use of stack technology. "…when the enchantment of illusion is over…and what would you call this condition if you did not call it death, and how would you describe 'except as darkness'?" (Kierkegaard, 1980). In this case, which is especially true for the character of Kovacs, he has done many things as resleeved in different bodies, experienced death more than once, and has even been dragged into a complex mental state accompanied by the feelings and habits left over from the bodies' previous lives, as a result of the embodiment technology, such as Ryker's body's addiction to nicotine and his sexual attraction to Ortega. Hence, we see that the constant shifting of characters within their bodies leads to a kind of alienation and identity quest. This quest is also characterized by the artificial intelligence characters in the series, such as Poe and Mrs. Dig. It creates a vagueness as to whether they acquire clues about who they are from their consciousness or their physical bodies, and this identity issue also infiltrates the realm of personal beliefs.

The *Altered Carbon* universe has masterfully managed to reflect the tension between established religious beliefs and new post-technology belief systems audiovisually in every sequence. While some religions emphasize predetermined fate, the new understanding of religion in this universe emphasizes free will with the influence of technology. This change bears the traces of technological determinism because these technological developments stand out as inevitable forces that shape societies, cultures, and even human values. According to Kierkegaard (2014) we are free to choose our paths, but this freedom also comes with the burden of responsibility and the fear of making the wrong choice. What is wrong for communities with religious individuals, led by neo-Catholics, starts with resleeving technology. They see this as challenging the natural order of life and death, potentially damaging to the soul. The religious codings in the stacks further emphasize this belief. In the series, data regarding these views are conveyed to the audience both in the dialogues and through scenes featuring opposing demonstrations.

Image 6-7. Halloween Celebration with Family at Alazne Ortega's Home. S1E4.


Source: https://www.netflix.com/watch/80097696?trackId=200257858/, Access Date: 13.01.2024

Faithful Protectorate citizens have a post-secular view in this context, and religion has been revived in the public sphere. The increasing interconnectedness of the world has brought various religious communities into closer contact, and religion has become a powerful source of identity, especially for marginalized groups. This is especially seen in Ortega's family. Many years after the death of his father, a faithful police officer, his mother Alazne fell in love again, but this time she married Ortega's colleague, Muslim Samir Abboud. In this context, the dichotomy is structured as those who have faith and those who do not, without a conflict between different beliefs. Individuals of faith are also characterized as belonging to ethnic minority groups, and having such a religious personality is marginalized. Despite all these labels, according to them, religion is a force that affects social, political, and cultural spheres. It is especially requested to be an effective factor in political arrangements, and this isn't a goal to be achieved through Resolution 653 which is a proposed law that would change how the justice system handles murder victims. Resolution 653 proposes allowing law enforcement to 'spin up' deceased murder victims – download their cortical stacks and put them into a new sleeve for questioning. However, citizens who believe in Abrahamic religions, are strongly against this, because they believe that they will not be able to go to heaven if they are resleeved, so in the event of a possible physical death, as required by their beliefs, the authorities and their relatives are informed so that they cannot be resleeved.

This invention, led by Falconer, brought about many ethical, religious, philosophical, and moral discussions. Since super rich stack users were resleeved through this technology and lived for hundreds of years, they were called Methuselah, or shortly Meth, in reference to their long life. According to Smith (2021), Methuselah is the patriarch credited with the longest lifespan – a whopping 969 years in total. Meths can have clones of themselves thanks to the financial advantage they have, spare data, and spare body waiting ready to be resleeved when needed, and a constant data backup system connected to satellites, therefore practical immortality is an example of dehumanization. As Reileen's assistant, the character Leung, a bigoted murderer, frequently states in the dialogues, the

illogicality of worshiping the old gods is emphasized when there are gods who hear prayers, answer them, and have advantages such as immortality, instead of a god who is invisible and never answers prayers. Again, as character Bancroft points out, the themes of dehumanization and deification of humans are reinforced with statements such as "God is dead and we have taken its place".

Image 8-9. Suntouch Mansions, Aerium. S1E3.

Oh, Mr. Kovacs, haven't you heard? God is dead.

We have taken his place.
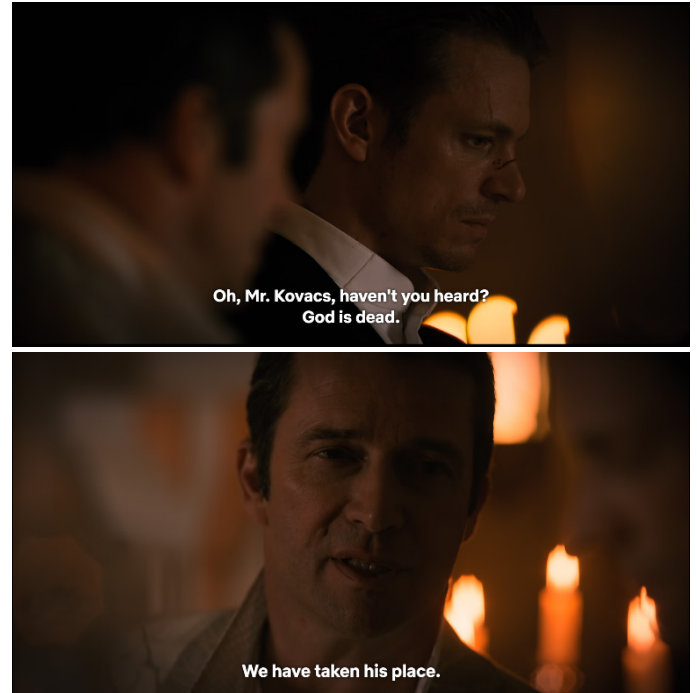
Source: https://www.netflix.com/ watch/80097695?trackId=200257859/, Access Date: 11.01.2024

This phenomenon is also reinforced through the social structures and spaces realized throughout the series. The locations of the series are divided into two: the ground level, where ordinary people live, and the high buildings -which are called Aerium- in the sky, where Meths live. While there are buildings with very futuristic architectural designs in the center, there are suburbs as we know them today in the rural areas. According to Ortega, the Meths, who were uncomfortable using the same living spaces with ordinary people, moved their living spaces away from them, to the skies. Again, this theme can be reinforced with a sentence stated by the character Leung in one of his dialogues: "The one who looks from above sees the mud on the ground". Mega corporations, with their towering skyscrapers and god-like influence, may

serve as quasi-religious entities. By that declaration, Meths might be seen as a nascent digital religion.

On the one hand, while immortality is a phenomenon mostly guaranteed by Meths, the alien who infiltrated Falconer's DHF as a code in the second season, took over Falconer's body and forced it at intervals to kill all the super-rich Meths who approved the massacre of the aliens in the pods when the UN first arrived at Harlan's World. With one touch, they are completely erased from the stage of history with the Rawling virus that she infects their stacks and backups, which puts Falconer in the position of a god with the power to kill the immortals. They revere Quellcrist Falconer, the legendary Envoy, by suggesting a shift towards a digital deity. In that regard, in the universe of the series, we can consider that the religion concept is also digitalized.

The series portrays a society where even religious practices can be bought and sold. Religious coding on stacks can be bypassed for a price, highlighting the potential corruption of faith in a world driven by wealth. In Reileen Kawahara's case (the sister of Takeshi Kovacs), Reileen wanted to become rich and influential so that the family and financial difficulties she experienced in childhood would not repeat themselves forever in this world of immortality. For this reason, she established an ultra-luxury flying brothel serving Meths and began to provide unethical services that no one could provide, secretly from everyone. Unlike the brothels on the ground, when the young girls brought here were exposed to perverted fantasies to the point of harming their bodies or bodies, thanks to Reileen's influential connections, their belief codes in the system were changed to 'believers', preventing them from being reincarnated, questioned and exposed. She also served to prevent memories of Meth's kinky pleasures from being stolen from the girls' DHFs. After Lizzie Elliot was beaten to death by Laurens Bancroft, her belief code was changed, while Mary Lou Henchy was caught by Reileen while trying to escape after being frightened by what she witnessed, and she threw herself down from the flying brothel called 'Head in the Clouds', so she could not be questioned because her belief code was also changed. Thus, the culprit would never be found. Her mother, who had been desperately knocking on the police department's door for months, was told that she had changed her faith code without informing her family.

In this context, we see that the phenomenon of religion, just like the phenomenon of the body, has become a commodity that can be traded, personalized, and materialized for personal interests and money. The ability to program religious beliefs directly onto cortical stacks highlights the potential for religion to be treated as a product. People can choose and purchase specific religious beliefs or bypass them entirely for a fee. This undermines the essence of faith, turning it into a customizable service. Mary Lou Henchy's investigation process held by PD exposes hypocrisy, and how religion can be used as a social marker while its core tenets are disregarded for personal gain. The state of exception through the Protectora, suggests a potential shift towards a religion tailored to the desires and anxieties of the very rich, further emphasizing the commodification of faith. The series paints a cautionary tale about the potential consequences of technology on faith. It shows how religion can be distorted, manipulated, and ultimately commodified in a world where everything, even one's soul and memories, has a price tag.

CONCLUSION

From the scope of Bay City, known as the San Francisco of old, we witness not only the meeting of neo-noir cyberpunk with dark space but also the dark possibilities of the future of the posthuman era. This is a city where bodies become interchangeable sleeves, souls become digitized data in a pile of metal, and 'certain' immortality is the privilege of a few obscenely wealthy people, like all other cities of the Protectorate. A universe where emotionality has not completely disappeared, but is surrounded by existential concerns, and is full of ethical and social problems brought about by digitalization. In the series, class distinctions are a concept that is sharply differentiated through the body and faith systems. The concept of the body is depicted like wearable technology or expensive clothing, and faith is a tool for sweeping unwanted consequences. This increases the gap between social classes, pushing inequalities to a maximum level and signaling social rupture.

Another important issue is that there are few children in the universe of the series. We cannot clearly say that the Protectorate has a population policy, but this cutting-edge technological society perhaps no longer sees the idea of being a family and the idea of having children as simultaneous. The series does not provide extensive

information about reproductive policy. However, all of the children or young characters seen either belong to Meths or are seen in families whose faith code is 'faithful'. Meth families may have a tendency to have children to relieve the feeling of loneliness brought by almost unlimited financial power and long life, as a matter of fact, it is stated that the Bancroft couple has 21 children. On the other hand, the only chance for Neo-Catholic families to continue their lineage is to have children because they can not be resleeved back. It is also among the requirements of creating a community. In this context, a community is seen as united against the domination of the world of stack users. However, since the body is a compensable situation for stack users whose belief code is entered as a non-believer, if they are not influential individuals, they are seen as 'expendable' individuals, just like religious ones. Meths at the top layer of the domination pyramid are naturally depicted as the segment least affected or unaffected by the domination over the body.

The police officers who are responsible for protecting the legal order mentioned by Foucault are also from the minority in terms of both ethnicity and social class. As can be seen in this example, the minority functions as a tool to control the minority, which refers to Foucault's auto-control mechanism. There is a huge surveillance situation by using cameras, trackers in the size and shape of a fly, tracking devices, and complete camera control of cities and individuals with the help of technolgy. However, rural areas are out of control because of the lack of technology, so the technology here becomes the tool of both surveillance and commodification just like Foucault mentioned in his writings about panopticon.

Not only the body but also the memories have become commodities that can be bought and sold. For the rich, who have been freed from the 'fear of death' in the cutting edge technology, they have forgotten over time to experience feelings such as excitement and tension, since there is no threat to their existence, and in order to taste these feelings again, they have started to buy scary memories taken from the stacks of others on the black market, by creating a new commodity sector supply.

Based on this corruption, Quellcrist Falconer, who was the chief designer but was disappointed by the ethical and moral problems caused by the technology she created, started an uprising to protect the rights of those who were oppressed by these problems and

the Protectora & U.N. collaboration. As a result of this uprising, the former Envoys, who were now declared terrorists by the Protectora, organized under the leadership of Falconer and decided to further develop their military capabilities and use them to defend the rights of the oppressed segment of the population because they are believers or poor.

The series not only leaves us with a pessimistic future but also tells the story of family ties and people who put their lives on the line to fix things. In this context, the story of the series promises hope by touching on the ability of human values to remain intact even in the understanding of a universe in which everything is digital in the future, through the characters of Kovacs, Poe, and Falconer. It also suggests a possible future where all different colors could coexist together, by symbolizing a portrayal of city design in a harmony of old buildings and super skyscrapers at the center.

The use of cortical stack technology pushes viewers to different questions about identity, ownership, and existence. If the same stack is placed on a sleeve other than the body in which he/she was born, will that person still be the same person? Do we leave traces of our consciousness on our bodies? What ethical problems arise when a body is sold to someone else is a person valued by another person? What kind of psychological problems does it cause when some members of the same family become 'dead' forever due to physical death, while others resleeved over and over again and continue to live for hundreds of years? Do you have ownership rights over your child whose body you purchased, as Bancroft did? In this context, the series directs its audience to deep philosophical thoughts and questioning.

To summarize in general, the commodification of the body, faith, and the details of biopolitics, visualized in the Altered Carbon universe and sprinkled throughout the story, are the main factors that are very effective in the social construction and control of society, as Foucault stated. As a result of this commodification of the body and faith through the discourse, the weight of control mechanisms has shifted to these areas, and there is a mutually progressive relationship. In this context, the body and faith are both labor, energy, desire, money, and fabric, it is everything and nothing, it is a commodity.

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