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Info Technology and Mental Health: A Study of Jonathan Franzen's *Purity* in the Scope of Berardi's Theory

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Abstract

In the contemporary era, information technology and mental health are complexly intertwined and the capitalist system plays a significant role in shaping this relationship. The current study argues that most mental diseases like depression, insomnia, schizophrenia, and other diseases of the contemporary era are occurring as a result of being exposed to a huge amount of information technologies. The main aim of this study is to explore and argue that these mental diseases are not a biological state but it comes as a reaction of the mind against the accumulation and acceleration of information in

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people's minds. The paper uses the observations and opinions of the Italian communist philosopher Franco Berardi to understand the significance of such figurations in Jonathan Franzen's *Purity* and it will reflect the idea that developing an understanding of how the capitalist system is blamed for these mental diseases by exposing people to an unlimited amount of information that the human mind is unable to access or deal with. Focusing on a depressed woman who is mentally exhausted as a result of the pressure of the new life and wants to change it, *Purity* uncovers the evils at the heart of our contemporary information technology society.

Keywords: info technology, Berardi, semio capitalism, acceleration, Consumerism, depression.

تكنولوجيا المعلومات والصحة النفسية: دراسة رواية جوناثان فرانز بيورتي في إطار نظرية
بييراردي

لقاء سعيد فاضل

جامعة تكريت

و

ا.د. لمياء احمد رشيد

جامعة تكريت

المستخلص

في العصر الحديث، تتشابك تكنولوجيا المعلومات والصحة العقلية بشكل معقد، ويلعب النظام الرأسمالي دوراً مهماً في تشكيل هذه العلاقة. تجادل الدراسة الحالية بأن معظم الأمراض العقلية مثل الاكتئاب والهوس والهوس وغيرها من الأمراض في العصر الحديث تحدث نتيجة التعرض لكمية هائلة من تقنيات المعلومات. الهدف الرئيسي من هذه الدراسة هو استكشاف وإثبات أن هذه الأمراض العقلية ليست حالة بيولوجية ولكنها تأتي كرد فعل للعقل ضد تراكم وتسارع المعلومات في أذهان الناس. تستخدم الدراسة ملاحظات وآراء الفيلسوف الشيوعي الإيطالي فرانكو بييراردي لفهم أهمية هذه التصورات في رواية "النقاء" لجوناثان فرانزن، وسوف تعكس فكرة تطوير فهم لكيف أن النظام الرأسمالي هو المسؤول عن هذه الأمراض العقلية من خلال تعريف الناس لكمية غير محدودة من المعلومات التي لا يستطيع العقل البشري الوصول إليها أو التعامل معها. من خلال التركيز على امرأة مكتئبة منهكة عقلياً نتيجة ضغوط الحياة الجديدة وتريد تغييرها، تكشف رواية "النقاء" عن الشروع في قلب مجتمع تكنولوجيا المعلومات المعاصر.

الكلمات الدالة: تكنولوجيا المعلومات، التسارع، الاستهلاكية، العولمة، الاكتئاب، السيميوراسمالية

Psycho-media Epidemic and the Sense of Loneliness in Jonathan Franzen's Purity

4.1 Introduction

Jonathan Franzen was born in 1959 in Western Springs. He is a renowned American novelist and essayist known for his intricate and character-driven narratives. His father, Earl T. Franzen, was a native of Sweden, and his mother, Irene Franzen, was of Polish descent. Franzen's childhood has significantly impacted his writing, especially in exploring the complexities of family dynamics and societal expectations (Allardice, 2021). He had been a prominent figure in contemporary literature and was lauded for his literary achievements and profound insights into the human condition. His novels were always best-selling. At the same time, he attracted a wider following and was featured as a "Great American Novelist" on the Time Magazine cover. He might be a very prominent figure because of his controversial incident involving Oprah in 2001, his regular contributions to the New Yorker, and his three volumes of autobiographical essays, *How to Be Alone* (2002), *The Discomfort Zone* (2006), and *Farther Away* (2012) (Wineston, 2015). In an interview with Christopher Lydon (2021), Franzen says that:

I had the idea that the novel can change things. If you help make people see the injustice in the world and the corruption in the world, the world will become a better place. And my life, and also my novels, got a lot better when I let go of that idea and came around to a notion of a community of readers and writers, and that the service was not to Society with a capital S, but service to that community".(Lydon, 2021, n.p.)

So it becomes obvious that, for Franzen, the main goal of writing novels is to improve the world. He believes that criticizing the negative side of our world will improve it and lead it to the safe side. He writes that a novel only deserves attention if the author maintains the reader's trust. Every writer is initially a member of a community of readers, and the primary reason for reading and producing fiction is to keep a sense of togetherness to avoid feelings of isolation. Franzen mentioned when he was in college, he'd idolized Derrida, a Marxist, and feminist critic, whose job was to point out problems with contemporary society. He reasoned that perhaps now, too, he might contribute to society by producing fault-finding fiction (Franzen, 2007).

One of the negative things, or faults of the society that Franzen explored in his novels to bring attention to is technology and its dangers. In 2001, he famously expressed concerns about the rise of Technology and its potential impact on literature and culture in an essay titled “Why Bother?”. Franzen discusses his views on technology, social media, and its impact on contemporary society. He expresses concerns about the addictive nature of smartphones and social media platforms, which he believes leads to a lack of meaningful human connection and distracts people from engaging in essential activities like reading and contemplation. In this essay, Franzen also reflects on the challenges of being a writer in a world saturated with distractions and technological advancements. He laments the difficulty of finding meaningful solitude and focus in an age of constant connectivity and digital entertainment (Franzen, 2002). Franzen hates Technology and always talks about its dangers and worries about its effects on people in the future; he was known as a technophobic author. Furthermore, since technology is simply a more advanced version of ourselves, we do not need to see its manipulability with the same contempt that we might find with real humans. It’s all a single, never-ending cycle. Both the mirror and we enjoy each other’s company. Adding someone as a buddy only adds them to our hall of attractive reflections. He explains how innovation in Technology has become highly adept at producing goods that match our idealized fantasy of a sensual connection, in which the loved object asks for nothing in return and gives everything swiftly, which makes us feel entirely powerful. It also explains how this relationship fails to produce terrible scenes if the object is replaced by an even more attractive object and is put in a drawer (Franzen, 2011).

Additionally, Franzen’s novels shed light on his viewpoint on technology. He portrays people whose lives are entwined with technology in “Freedom” (2010) and “Purity” (2015), frequently emphasizing its alienating impacts. Franzen contends that emotional detachment and a lack of genuine human connection are two consequences of technology overuse. In addition to his concerns, Franzen has supported legislation restricting internet companies’ influence. He has advocated for more stringent laws to limit social media’s impact on democracy and public debate. He reiterates these appeals in his writings and interviews, stressing the significance of preserving human values in the face of the astonishing advances in Technology of the twenty-first century. He writes

several devious, alienating books based on the notion that America is unaware of the harm caused by its soulless Society and economic avarice. Filled with annoyance and dissatisfaction, he asks himself, “Why is everyone else so stupid”? With his back to the wall, he sees that his foolishness stems from his relationship with the outside world and himself.

In his article *Technology and Political Education*, Bradshaw (2005) discusses Franzen’s thoughts about technology, linking it with the thinkers George Grant and Hannah Arendt’s thoughts. Throughout these talks, Grant emphasizes that “knowledge was used to create things, as evidenced by the fact that techne was a sort of poetic, or production. Franzen writes:

How could I have thought that I needed to cure myself in order to fit into the ‘real’ world? I didn’t need curing, and the world didn’t either; the only thing that needed curing was my understanding of my place in it. Without that understanding—without a sense of belonging to the real world—it was impossible to thrive in an imagined one” (as cited in Bradshaw,2005)

Franzen’s *Purity* (2015) delves into American families’ modern lives, exploring themes of politics, mental illness, love, and personal freedom. *Purity* is a multilayered narrative that intertwines the lives of several characters, exploring the consequences of their actions (The Washington Post, 2015). It can be read and reviewed through different lenses. The present chapter tries to study this novel focusing on mental diseases caused by information technology. The novel also talks about the contemporary life of the American people and how they deal with new changes in the contemporary era. James Annesley talks about globalization in Franzen’s novels and clarifies the features of the fiction of globalization in several places. Annesley (2005) argues that:

Debate about Jonathan Franzen’s complicated connection with Technology is still going strong. Although some consider his opinions alarmist or outdated, others agree with his assessment of the risks associated with unchecked technological advancement. We are able to comprehend Franzen’s changing views on Technology and its significant influence on modern Society by closely examining original materials,

including his articles, interviews, and fictional works. Whatever one's point of view, Franzen's observations remain a stimulating and pertinent part of the current conversation about the role that Technology plays in our lives. (Annesley, 2005)

The Internet and social media are more crucial for navigating daily life as technology rapidly develops and society adapts to them. More people are embracing the shift and accepting it as a part of their lives as more businesses move to online stores and bookings, more financial transactions are conducted online, and more daily tasks can be completed with just a few clicks of a mouse or touchpad. Numerous factors contribute to these changes, but they also alter society profoundly as a whole and have unintended repercussions, which is the subject of Franzen's *Purity*.

In this paper, Franzen's *Purity* will be analyzed according to the post-Marxist thinker Franco Bifo Berardi and adapted his thoughts about mental diseases that flourish in contemporary society. Berardi (2010) believes that people are frustrated and depressed as a result of the huge effect of info technology on their minds which in turn threatens their mental stability. In the contemporary period, information technology has completely transformed the way we work, live, and communicate by changing our lives into virtual ones. Berardi observed an increase in psychological conditions in this new life, and he provided a political and clinical diagnosis of Western society's modern mental disorders. He contends that mental illnesses that we are encountering today are not exclusively the consequence of biological factors, but rather a defensive condition that the mind employs to relieve the pressures of rapid life and that it is caused by the capitalist domination over technology.

Beardi (2017) asserts that "the events of economic and psychic depression have to be understood in the same context because they are interrelated"(191), he developed the term semiocapitalism, which refers to a system that capitalizes on people mentally and treats their minds as an object that can be made money from, without taking into account the massive consequences, whether social or mental, that this may have. Berardi (2009) writes on his book:

Semio-capital is in a crisis of overproduction, but the form of this crisis is not only economic but also psychopathic. Semio-capital, in fact, is not about the production of material goods, but about the

production of psychic stimulation. The mental environment is saturated by signs that create a sort of continuous excitation, a permanent electrocution, which leads the individual mind as well as the collective mind to a state of collapse.” (p. 45)

Where mental disease historically referred to a problematic situation of change or turning point, Berardi contends, it is characterized instead as a product of the “panic” induced by the sensory overload of digital capitalism, a condition of withdrawal, a disinvestment of energy from the competitive and narcissistic structures of the enterprise. It is also a result of the loss of political composition and antagonism, “depression is born out of the dispersion of the community’s immediacy. Autonomous and desiring politics was a proliferating community. When the proliferating power is lost, the society becomes the place of depression” (Berardi 2008, p.13). Depression is a genuine historical experience in both forms, one that has to be actively addressed. According to Berardi, depression means a condition of the mind, neither of the heart nor the body. Desperation (the lack of hope) does not deprive anyone’s energies as depression does”. (Berardi, 2017, para 2). He further states that it is a special kind of mental suffering, but also the general shape of the global crisis that is darkening the historical horizon of our times. We are not dealing here with a linguistic trick; we are not dealing only with a metaphor, but with the interweaving and interacting of psychic flows and economic processes; how to heal depression due to the "antipsychiatry" viewpoint, which contends that mental illness is a tactical, political term rather than a scientific one, and here Marxist interpretations coexist (Szasz, 2010).

4.2 Purity in the Scope of Berardi’s After the Future

Purity explores themes of identity, Technology, and the complexities of modern relationships. By applying Franco Berardi’s philosophical framework outlined in *After the Future*, we can better understand the novel’s critique of contemporary society and its portrayal of characters striving for authenticity in an increasingly fragmented world. Berardi’s *After the Future* examines the consequences of hyper-connectivity and the acceleration of information in the digital age. He demonstrates that the relentless pursuit of progress and constant connectivity has led to an overwhelming sense of disorientation, alienation, and loss of agency. Wise (2016) writes that Berardi considers the network a

“symbol of runaway capitalism and global mobility” (Wise, 2016, n.p.). He also writes that anxiety over the expansion of the global network has grown due to the nation-state’s quick transition into a networked society. It is increasingly understood that this network serves as more than just a medium for information transmission and that growing concerns about data surveillance have contributed to widespread paranoia. These ideas align with Franzen’s exploration of Technology’s impact on human relationships and the erosion of privacy. Berardi described Franzen’s goal and states that he:

“digs deep into the folds of the American psyche and describes in minute details the palpitation of the American brain: the depression and dementia resulting from a prolonged exposure to the psychic bombardment of stress from work; the apathy, paranoia, puritan hypocrisy and the pharmaceutical industry around them; the psychic unmaking of men who are encapsulated in the claustrophobic shell of economic hyper-protection; the infantilism of a people who pretend to believe, or perhaps really believes, in the fulsome Christmas fairy tale of compassionately liberalist cruelty. By the end of the long awaited Christmas dinner, as the psychopathic family happily gathers together, the father tries to commit suicide by shooting himself in the mouth. He is not successful. (Berardi, 2010, p.32)

Franzen’s novel *Purity* can serve as a gateway to exploring various aspects of American society and psychology. It is a complex and multilayered narrative that delves into the lives of its characters and offers insights into contemporary American culture and the human psyche, especially in using Technology. The constant bombardment of information and distractions from Technology can decrease our ability to focus and sustain attention on tasks. This can result in reduced productivity and increased mental fatigue (Mark, etal, 2019). Technology, internet media, and communication tools have increased privacy invasion and surveillance. However, the romantic attitude that preceded the digital revolution hasn’t yet been replaced. The plain appearance conceals a reality that Franzen’s critical eye is evident throughout the novel’s pages. His understanding of

psychoanalysis, post-future ideas, and the emergence of an extended conception of ourselves as consumerists have all impacted his viewpoint.

Purity is a multi-layered novel about the life of a young woman named Purity "Pip" Tyler. Pip is a recent college graduate with school debt and an impassioned need to learn the truth about her family's history. She is desperate to find her father, whom she has never met, and to discover the truth about her own identity. The work is split into multiple interrelated storylines that take place throughout various periods and geographical areas. One plotline focuses on Pip's journey as she becomes associated with a hacker group called The Sunlight Project founded by Andreas Wolf, a charming and interesting guy. Pip becomes involved in a web of secrets and political intrigue while working for the organization. Another story goes back in time, delving into the lives of numerous persons related to Pip. This includes her mother, who has led a secluded life and has her secrets, as well as Andreas Wolf's own story and his experiences growing up in East Germany before the Berlin Wall fell. Also, we have Tom's story, the man whom Pip worked with for a while to spy on him for Andrea's sake then she discovered that he is the father that she is looking for. The novel addresses several current themes, including the influence of technology on privacy, the nature of journalism, and the effects of personal and political decisions. Purity is a character-driven story about the difficulties of human connections and the quest for purpose and authenticity in a modern, linked society. Pip is searching for her identity and trying to uncover the truth about her family's past. Secrets burden her, and those secrets are determined to uncover the truth. Pip's quest for purity can be seen as a response to the fragmented nature of contemporary life, where relationships are often mediated through screens and social media platforms. Pip embodies the desire for a meaningful connection in an age of superficial digital connections.

The impact of the Internet on contemporary culture is one of the important subjects covered in Jonathan Franzen's novel Purity. The Internet has brought about a lot of positive sides, but Franzen emphasizes in his writing that it also has a dark side. He has increased the concerns that this negative side of the Internet could lead to depression and other mental diseases through different aspects. These aspects could be the misuse of

private information, the pervasiveness of surveillance, and the spread of misinformation, which in turn lead to escapism and addiction, as depersonalization, dehumanization, isolation, and disconnection, which are all reflected in Franzen's novel (Bankoff, 2015). However, Franzen has developed a special critical interest in the Internet and the cultural ideals it fosters, probably not least because he has utilized them to cultivate politically an unreliable reputation (Hutchinson, 2009).

Purity explores various themes, including the complex and often debilitating nature of depression with the spread and overuse of information technology; new life becomes so difficult for the human mind to deal with, especially the Internet and social media, which have since become irreplaceable parts of our lives, it does touch on societal pressures and the influence of the new Technology on individuals. The novel delves into the huge effects of the Internet on the characters' life, which in turn affects their mind and lead them to depression and causes them feelings of alienation, loss, loneliness, insomnia, and exhaustion in this post-industrial world (Berardi, 2010). The characters become increasingly dependent on it until they cannot cope with the amount of information they are given. At that point, they move to a situation of mental illness because, according to Berardi, they utilize depression to break free from the constraints of their post-industrial lifestyle. Also, panic and depression are terms used in economic terminology and psychopathology; they are indicators of the rising overlap between economic behavior and mental illness rather than having symbolic meanings (Berardi, 2014). Berardi imputed this severe use of technology to the beginning of 1977 when there was a financial crisis in New York that obliged it to declare bankruptcy. As a result, it was jilted by industry investors, leaving their factories empty to find a better city to invest in.

From the novel's first page, it is clear that Franzen wants to depict his thoughts about mental illness through his well-built characters. So, it is noticed that from the novel's beginning, Pip is the main character. Her real name is Purity, but she doesn't like it, so she prefers to be called Pip. She talked with her mother, who told her she was mentally tired and depressed. She said, "You sound sort of more depressed than usual." (Franzen, 2015, p.3), and when the mother talks about her tiredness, Pip says, "Isn't that everybody's life?" (Franzen, 2015, p.3) This indicates that the whole society that they

live in is mentally tired. In their talk, we discover that the mother is suffering from insomnia and is not sleeping enough; this certainly requires copious fibbing on her part; she decided that her mother was better off thinking about insomnia than about diseases only because, as Pip points out, “no avail, there were actual medications she could take for her insomnia” (Franzen, 2015, p.8). In *Purity*, characters’ avoidance develops from a refusal to confront the possibility that they might experience difficult or painful emotions. The avoidance helps them put off feeling hurt, but it also creates a self-fulfilling prophecy in which recalcitrance replaces active engagement with the outside world (Galow, 2023).

At first, Pip is burdened with \$130,000 in debt for her college. So she was working in Renewable Solutions as a glorified telemarketer. Her job creates a realization of consumerism. She was working on marketing things by phone. She didn’t feel comfortable in this job. “Her problem at Renewable Solutions was that she could never quite figure out what she was selling, even when she was finding people to buy it, and no sooner had she finally begun to figure it out than she was asked to sell something else” (Franzen, 2015, p.29). This illustrates that it is not important what to consume as much as to consume. As mentioned, the new life is different from the ancient one; a hundred years ago, the slogan was Hamlet’s famous word “To Be Or Not To Be”. It was about identity, about how people are defined by themselves. Now, life is different, and its slogan is “To Buy Or Not To Be” (Bendib, 1996). This means that buying or consuming goods becomes the main target for people in contemporary life due to capitalism that unconsciously made them obsess with buying things; things one wants to have must be like what others have. In one of his speeches about Pip, Franzen describes this matter as a dominant motif; he says:

"Control pee, she told herself. Control-P. As a teenager, when she was living in Felton and going to school in Santa Cruz, all her friends had owned Apple computers, but the laptop her mother had bought her was a cheap, generic P.C. from OfficeMax, and what she’d typed on it when she needed to print, was Control-P. Printing, like peeing, was evidently a thing you needed to do. “I need to print,” the people at Renewable Solutions were always

saying. This exact, strange phrase: I need to print. Need to P. Need to controller. (Franzen, 2015, p.64)

From this quotation, Franzen marked his thought that using technology becomes a need for people, and increases their desire to consume as much as possible. New technologies like smartphones, Laptops, and other devices are renewable. When these devices are updated, it is a need for humans in this life to buy them again and use them, just like any innate need essential for humans. She says that she needs to buy a Laptop to be like others in her school because everyone has a P.C. to print on. Though everyone has an Apple P.C., her mother bought her Office Max, which is considered cheap. Franzen's main goal is to illustrate how American society is a techno-consumer. Manning described the new life and said,

The conversation of most middle-class Americans, we are told, revolves around consumption: what to buy, what was just bought, where to eat, the price of the neighbor's house, what's on sale this week, our clothes or someone else's, the best car on the market this year, where to spend a vacation. We can't stop eating, shopping, or consuming. Success is measured not by love, wisdom, and maturity but by the size of one's pile of possessions. (Manning, 2011, p.45.)

Technology creates a feeling of alienation for people. Social media platforms often promote unrealistic standards and encourage users to compare themselves to others. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy, jealousy, alienation, and anxiety, negatively impacting mental health (Fardouly, et al., 2015). Franzen states, "Pip wasn't much of a Facebook user, partly because she felt bludgeoned by happier people's photographs" (Franzen, 2015, p.48). Zuckerberg said that Facebook's stated goal is to "make the world more open and connected." This was the main goal of Facebook and other social media platforms, but instead, it takes a different scope. It makes people mentally tired of too much information and too much comparison with others' lives. Yoon (2019) announced that higher degrees of depression were linked to stronger upward social comparisons on social networking sites. So, as much as people increase their use of social media, they will be depressed and feel isolated. (Yoon et al., 2019)

The sense of alienation that people currently feel in a capitalist society may become more intense due to mass surveillance. People who are continuously aware that their actions are being observed and maybe manipulated may feel alienated from their own lives and decisions. This constant surveillance produces a sense of helplessness and might result in depressive and anxious thoughts. Zima (2010) suggests that the replaceable qualities of today's global industry are the root cause of the very genuine psychopathologies of neurosis and psychosis. Zima also claimed that psychopathologies are becoming increasingly common in our society. The truth is that psychopathologies such as depression are spreading more widely. This demonstrates a causal relationship between the independently observable verified psychopathology rise and the heightened demands of flexible, post-Fordist capitalism. (Zima, 2010 as cited in Geef, 2015) From a different point of view, artificial milieus, like technology itself, according to Jameson, also stand for "that enormous properly human and anti-natural power of dead human labor stored up in our machinery". (Jameson, 1991, p.35)

Pip's desperation pushes her to accept an internship with a global group called Sunlight Project in Bolivia, a fictitious WikiLeaks rival working on secrets trading makes news leaks about public and political people, as well as the unethical business practices of huge organizations. Andreas Wolf is the founder and director of this project. Although Julian Assange is frequently referred to as his opponent, Wolf served as the character's primary source of inspiration because he is a smart, cold-eyed, blonde womanizer in charge of a digital secret-leaking operation and has an exaggerated ego. Wolf is from East Germany, and he is a murderer. On his journey to fame, Wolf begins to believe that his online image represents him more accurately, which feeds his narcissism:

He was so immersed and implicated in the Internet, so enmeshed in its totalitarianism, that his online existence was becoming more real than his physical self [...] Private thoughts didn't exist in the retrievable, disseminable, and readable way that data did. And since a person couldn't exist in two places at once, the more he existed as the Internet's image of him, the less he felt like he existed as a flesh-and-blood person. (Franzen, 2015, p.498)

Therefore, Franzen, an active opponent of social media and a self-described Luddite, portrays the Internet as a controlled version of the Wild West. Anything goes on the Internet as long as its users are content to continue becoming the target of widespread surveillance. Wolf later warns us that the Internet is looming over us and has become as normal as oxygen in our daily lives. “Honesty, truth, transparency, freedom ... The fantastic thing about Andreas is that he knows the Internet is the greatest truth device ever”. Andreas asserts that it is hard to “opt-out” of the Internet system, whether one is “sitting in prison” or not (Franzen, 2015, p.59). He continues describing the Internet as a totalitarian regime. He said:

"The old Republic had certainly excelled at surveillance and parades, but the essence of its totalitarianism had been more everyday and subtle. You could cooperate with the system, or you could oppose it, but the one thing you could never do, whether you were enjoying a secure and pleasant life or sitting in a prison, was not in relation to it. The answer to every question, large or small, was socialism. If you substituted networks for socialism, you got the Internet. Its competing platforms were united in their ambition to define every term of your existence” (Franzen, 2015, p.498).

The purpose of the sunlight project was to unveil the secret of people and show the truth to everyone, but when Wolf had a secret, he was so afraid of it. He was afraid of losing his fame and distorting his reputation. This shows that he cares for his fame more than anything else, and the main goal of establishing his project is to be famous. So, when Wolff told Pip about the project, she stated that she was not convinced of their project and there was a hidden goal for this project. Their benefits don't just come from leaking secrets; there is something bigger than that to benefit from. Pip told Wolf that his project reminded her of Moonglow Dairy. She said, “There was this place,” Pip said. “This dairy called Moonglow Dairy, near where I lived growing up. I guess it was a real dairy because they had a lot of cows, but their real money didn't come from selling milk. It came from selling high-quality manure to organic farmers. It was a shit factory pretending to be a milk factory” (Franzen, 2015, p.257). These projects, which show something but hide different things, are a source of stress for people. It belongs to the

elite or, more precisely, the capitalist system that controls everything. According to Berardi, capitalist consumerism mainly relies on renaming or rebranding goods and services to provide the impression that they are unique and essential. This technique, also referred to as “branding,” is a persuasion that persuades customers to buy into a way of life or identity connected to a certain product. For people to make wise judgments and avoid manipulation, they must be able to recognize and critically analyze various language strategies.

Instead of being used as a weapon for exploitation, the power of words should be used responsibly, honestly, and openly, and that’s what Pip told Wolf about. She faces him with the reality of his project, which is getting as many benefits as possible without caring about others or the source of this benefit. Franzen wants to convey that secrets distinguish things from others and play an important role in establishing social relationships that aim to go beyond the narcissistic side of social media. Andreas Wolf adopts various pseudonyms and identities throughout the story, reflecting his elusive and enigmatic nature. His constant renaming suggests a sense of fluidity and a desire to distance himself from his past actions. Renaming can also be seen in the context of Technology and privacy, as characters grapple with issues related to online anonymity and the power to control one’s digital identity. Berardi asserts that the media regularly uses renaming to affect how people view events and topics and that media is a significant factor in forming public opinion. He contends that renaming political movements, such as neoliberalism, might hide the negative effects of certain policies. (Berardi, 2015)

This is what Berardi calls the dystopian period, which means an imagined world where the dream has turned into a nightmare after it was thought that the development of Technology would produce a utopian society. That means an imagined ideal society that predicts a future when the present social, political, and economic issues have been resolved (Booker, 2005). Berardi also remarked on this idea in his book *After the Future* when he writes, “In the last three decades of the century, the utopian imagination was slowly overturned, and has been replaced by the dystopian imagination” (Berardi, 2010, p.12). He continued that the final ten years of the twentieth century saw the emergence of

a new utopia that had faith in the future: cyberculture, which has made way for the hyperconnected, limitless power of a global mind.

In his book *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry* (2019), Berardi writes a chapter called *Purity*; starting it with a quotation from Franzen's *Purity*:

The terrors of technocracy sought to liberate humanity from its humanness through the efficiency of markets and the rationality of machines. This was the truly eternal fixture of illegitimate revolution, this impatience with irrationality, this wish to be clean of it once and for all (Franzen, as cited in Berardi, 2019, p.69).

Andreas Wolf is one of the people who were out of humanity. Franzen didn't describe him as a good man and didn't justify his deeds. He wants to show us the real personality of people working with Technology. They are mentally unstable and out of nobility and humanity. Even in one of the chapters, Franzen talks about Andrea's story. He calls this chapter *The Killer* (Franzen, 2015, p. 45). When Wolf meets Annagret, he falls in love with her. She told him that her stepfather harassed her, and she couldn't tell her mother because he threatened her. Wolf suggested killing him with her assistance. He kills the stepfather, and he can hide this secret. Tom was the only one who knew about the crime. So when Wolf works on leaking other's secrets and becoming famous, he fears that Tom could reveal his secret. He didn't want to lose his name, leading him to commit suicide. He couldn't bear the overthinking.

Berardi suggests that the hyperconnected world has led to a loss of privacy and blurred boundaries between public and private spheres. Franzen explores this theme through the character of Tom Aberant, a journalist who becomes entangled in a scandal that exposes his private life. The intrusion into Tom's personal affairs highlights individuals' vulnerability and lack of control in the digital age, where personal information can be easily weaponized and circulated. Surveillance or the loss of privacy is one of the main issues that "*Purity*" has tackled. The ongoing collection and analysis of user data on the Internet has decreased personal privacy. Franzen's novel captures the rising fear of misusing personal data and the expansion of the surveillance state.

Technology actively contributes to developing a surveillance society in which information is traded like commodities, as Lyon describes it “Database marketing is now heavily involved in what I call the ‘world wide web of surveillance’. The term is metaphorical, encompassing any forms of surveillance that occur in cyberspace or computer-mediated communications. All uses of the Internet, the World Wide Web, and email systems are traceable, and this capacity is rapidly being exploited as these media are commercialized (Lyon, 2015, p.101).

According to Andreas, the Internet catalyzes spiritual death because of its wide range of information and participants’ anonymity. In addition to duplicating and remixing the existing material, a system with a lot of content always draws in new content, making it an indefinitely self-replenishing system. In Wolf’s conception, the internet is aligned with the totalitarian system that characterized the East Germany of his youth. “If — and only if — you had enough money and/or tech capability, you could control your Internet persona and, thus, your destiny and your virtual afterlife. Optimize or die. Kill or be killed.” (Franzen, 2015, p.492)

The novel, however, looks at this society from a very specific point of view, through the lens of an arguably quite removed community that, even within a very open and ‘transparent’ society, takes ‘sharing’ to a rather different level. Despite the advantages of social media, it’s crucial to think about how mass surveillance affects our privacy and how it could affect our mental health. Edward Snowden’s disclosures regarding the National Security Agency’s capacity to gather personal data prompted a heated public discussion. Losses of privacy and mental health problems are frequently related. According to research, privacy may allow a person the space to heal from trauma and forge their own distinct identity. This makes it possible for an individual to meet their basic psychological needs. It’s far too simple to continuously compare our lives and conduct to that of others when so much of our lives are online. Additionally, it has become more challenging to safeguard your personal information and manage who has access to it due to widespread surveillance.

Marxist thought frequently highlights how socioeconomic circumstances affect people and society. An argument from a Marxist perspective in the context of mass

surveillance and new technologies may be that greater surveillance could result in sentiments of alienation and disempowerment among people, possibly causing anxiety and depression. Inequalities and class divisions might be strengthened by the concentration of surveillance authority in the hands of a small number of people, intensifying the feeling of exploitation. While Marxist theory offers a framework for considering such consequences, it's crucial to recognize that elements other than economics play a complicated role in determining mental health (Zuboff, 2019). Additionally, the development of a commodified self is aided by data collection through surveillance. In this case, people are turned into interchangeable pieces of data that may be controlled, sold, and studied. Individuals' sense of agency and autonomy is undermined by this objectification of people, which intensifies emotions of powerlessness and dread (Trepte & Reinecke, 2011). Marxists argue that the owners of surveillance technology and the information they gather are the main winners. These capitalist organizations hope to preserve their power and increase profits by influencing cultural attitudes and preferences. This manipulation can result in a society serving (Witherford, 1999). Franzen criticizes the painlessness he sees the Internet allows, saying that life-based on instant satisfaction and avoiding pain weakens the ethical foundations required for fulfilling human interactions. Instead, he promotes more self-aware Internet usage, suggesting substitutes, including local modes of connection that, as his novels imply, might be just as valuable as examples of political praxis. So, the harms of the Internet could be larger than its benefits unless it is used correctly.

Purity, like *The Corrections*, displays recognizable contemporary obsessions like the strange interconnectedness of things in the complex system of the contemporary world, where the preoccupation with neuroscience and the chemical foundation of consciousness, a field where technological growth provides the way for potentially dystopian applications or the operation of mysterious, unaccountable businesses and organizations behind an irrelevant public realm involves using drugs and treatments. Franzen's *Purity* frequently uses specific approaches to deal with mental health issues. In general, Franzen describes many characters that use prescription medications and other substances to treat mental illnesses, including extreme melancholy, irritability, and boredom. He highlights that the use of new medications produces the desired behavioral

changes. The novel explores medicinal consumption and its implications for the characters. The use of medicine is noticed from the novel's first page by describing some diseases and drugs used to stop suffering. The link between mental illness and using drugs has been written perfectly. It shows that Pip's mother suffers from hallucinations of diseases that lead her to take different types of drugs. Franzen describes her as "depressed, not crazy" (Franzen, 2015) and continues describing her disease as an insomniac and "there were actual medications she could take for her insomnia" (Franzen, 2015).

Berardi (2010) has examined the connection between drugs and contemporary society, particularly in light of late capitalism and the digital era. He contends that drug use might be understood as a type of self-medication or self-soothing in a culture where anxiety, depression, and alienation are all on the rise. According to this perspective, legal or illicit drugs can act as a coping technique for those having difficulty navigating modern life's intricacies. Franzen presents in this novel more than one character that is exposed to different types of info technology and depressed schizophrenic and insomniac, so we notice that they are involved in using drugs.

"You're still awake?" Leila said.

Her smile was troubled but not phony. Pip sat down across the table from her. "Can't sleep."

"Do you want an Ambien? I have a veritable cornucopia."

"Will you tell me what you found out in Washington?"

"Let me get you an Ambien." (Franzen, 2015, p.301)

Franzen blames Technology for making people tired and needing treatment that saves them, but there is no solution, as long as they are so addicted to info technology, he clarifies this in Laila's speech with the senator:

The drugs are almost all prescription stuff. Adderall, OxyContin.

Drugs to help you pass the time. Senator continues that the problem is:

“In Technology We Trust..... We put our trust in the safety of the warheads, and we neglect the human side because tech problems are easy, and human problems are hard. That’s where the whole country is right now.” (Franzen, 2015, p.219)

Drug is known to be a means of increasing the profits of the capitalist system. Bush(202) writes that there are primarily two ways that drugs and capitalism interact. First, the commercialization of pharmaceuticals is an extremely profitable business. The development and marketing of drugs directly generates cash, but there are also other, more indirect ways. In addition, medications serve as insurance that helps control and reduce the harm that capitalist processes do to people and other living things, as well as to social and ecological systems. These two themes overlap naturally since this pharmacological “insurance” aims to extend profit-making and wealth accumulation. Franzen writes:

If you’re manufacturing fake cancer drugs in Wuhan and you need to get a container of your product to the American consumer, who are you going to call? DHL Especial. The same thing applies to weapons, designer knock-offs, underage prostitutes, and, obviously, drugs of all kinds. One call serves all. The American middle-class appetite for illegal drugs provided the capital to build some of the most sophisticated and effective companies on earth. Their business is delivering the goods, and their offices aren’t far south of the border” (Franzen, 2015, p.221)

According to Mark Fisher (2009), modern capitalist institutions attribute all types of mental diseases to biological-material changes and flaws, eliminating “any possibility of a social causation of [such] illnesses” (p.37). Fisher continues by stating that the “chemical-colonization of mental illness is, of course, strictly commensurate with its de-politicization” and that even if we accept the notion that depression is caused by low serotonin levels, which has been made popular through media and popular culture, “it still needs to be explained why particular individuals have low levels of serotonin.” This “needs a social and political explanation,” says Fisher in his conclusion (p.37).

Pip's search for truth and her attempt to discover her father identity come to a climax in the novel's end. She learns startling details about her family's history and

circumstances surrounding her birth. These insights have a significant impact on her relationships as well as her sense of her own identity. Meanwhile, the plots involving Andreas Wolf and the hackers whose actual nature and objectives are revealed, providing light on his actions and the influence he has had on the lives of people around him. The implications of his decisions and their ramifications in the current day become clear. The characters struggle with their weaknesses and the implications of their actions, eventually finding resolution and closure. Franzen was fascinated by how technology is used for tracking and influencing people. He wanted to write a novel that would warn people about the risks of technology while also encouraging them to be more aware of the information they receive. While Franzen's views on technology are not uniformly negative, his thoughts demonstrate his skepticism and concerns about how Technology can disrupt human relationships, the environment, and the creative process. His perspective has been the subject of debate and discussion, with some readers and critics agreeing with his concerns while others see them as overly pessimistic or out of touch.

Conclusion

Today, info technologies offer many benefits to people; online shopping is available; educational programs can be designed; it is possible to contact and chat with people from other countries; it is possible to search for anything; and, in some cases, it is even possible to work from home without leaving it. These are some of the positive advantages of technologies, which are certainly one of the weapons capitalism uses to increase profits. Yet, the overuse and addiction to info technology like social media and other techno platforms created numerous negative effects on human mental health. There is a clear connection between the prevalence of mental illness and the widespread of info technology. Capitalists tried to justify these mental disorders that it is biological and suggested using different medicines for recovery, but Franco Berardi argued that mental illness is not a biological disease; he politicizes it as a result of acceleration and overload of information in which the human mind cannot fully comprehend or understand this huge amount of information so it resorts to create a mechanism of defense against such as challenging and critical cases. Likewise in *Purity*, the central

characters, Pip and Andreas Wolf developed the schema of insomnia, depression, anxiety, and alienation that come with permanent exposure to Information as a result of their working on the Internet web and hacking. If social media and the internet are not handled cautiously it is unavoidable among the many factors in contemporary society that are causing this mental health problem.

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