
Cervantes's Black Mirror

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MIGUEL DE CERVANTES INTERROGATED the media practices of early seventeenth-century Spain's "guided culture" (Maravall, *Culture*) with a similarly dark comic style to today's British series *Black Mirror*, if perhaps in his case more explicitly comic than dark. In this essay I examine a few parallels between how Cervantes explored the comically dark potential of the theatrical and fictive juggernaut that was rapidly changing early modern Spanish sociopolitical dynamics, and how *Black Mirror* pries open our own current media saturation. Where the cable TV series turns, for example, our captivation by the fleeting popularity of "likes" on social media into a dystopic vision of socio-digital domination, Cervantes's takes the early-modern obsession with the world as appearance as a platform for displaying how easily subjects can be coaxed to violating their own self interests. In what follows I present a kind of transhistorical and transcultural conversation between three episodes of *Black Mirror* and three concrete works or moments in Cervantes's *oeuvre*: "Playtest," in which a man experiences multiple virtual reality environments before it is revealed that basically no time has gone by at all and that the environment was fatally compromised from the outset, helps elucidate the "Cueva de Montesinos" episode in *Don Quixote*, in which the Don returns from an hour-long descent into the cave, telling of a fantastical three-day adventure; "Nosedive," in which people's socioeconomic standing depends on their social media ratings, is paired with the interlude *El retablo de las maravillas*, in which townspeople allow themselves to be fleeced by conmen in order to demonstrate their racial, religious, and sexual purity; and finally, "The National Anthem," in which a Prime

Minister is forced to have sex with a pig on live television when pressured by public reaction on social media to a kidnapper's threats on the life of a princess, is juxtaposed with the famous plot turn in *Don Quixote* where the Don and the Duke and Duchess pressure Sancho to administer corporeal punishment to himself to disenchant the imaginary Dulcinea. What the three cases studies ultimately show is how Cervantes used fiction to critically interrogate the logical underpinnings of his media environment in ways that closely parallel those of a contemporary critical "science fiction" television show and, likewise, how much the appealing and thought-provoking narrative strategies of Black Mirror in turn owe to the cripple of Lepanto and his acid pen.

REALITY TEST

In "Playtest," Cooper, an American adventure seeker, makes a stop-over in London, where he has a one-night stand with Sonja. When he finds himself stranded and unable to return to the States, Sonja suggests he use his phone and an odd-jobs app to find some temporary work. Attracted by an ad posted by a cutting-edge gaming company looking for test subjects for their latest products, Cooper finds himself in a castle converted into high-tech headquarters for a company run by a young, mysterious Japanese inventor called Shou—but only after Sonja advises him to try to take some pics while he's there, as they will likely be much more valuable than any salary he is paid.

Once inside he is met by Shou's chief of staff, Katie, who orders him to turn off his phone and then proceeds to have him sign some waivers. When she leaves the room for a moment, Cooper quickly turns on the phone to take some pictures. When Katie returns, she installs a small device in the back of his neck, a "mushroom," she calls it, which will enable his virtual reality experience. As she is testing it, the phone rings, interrupting the procedure momentarily until she can turn it off.

With the mushroom in place, Katie initiates a test in which Cooper sees and hears, but cannot otherwise feel, a cute animated rodent that emerges from newly appeared holes on the table in front of him for a game of whack-a-mole. Amazed by the graphics, Cooper agrees to stay

on to test an even more top-secret game. Katie takes him into Shou's office, where Shou explains to him that the game he will be testing is the most realistic and frightening horror game ever created. Cooper laughs it off and agrees to play, and he is taken to another mansion on the company's campus. There Katie installs him in an ornate room, torn from the pages of a nineteenth-century ghost story, and they agree upon a safe word in case the experience becomes too extreme.

Once Katie has left, Cooper descends into a series of more and more frightening visions: first a spider crawls across the floor; then a grim man appears in the hallway who Cooper says is the spitting image of a bully he was scared of in school; then, even more alarmingly, a gigantic mash-up of the spider with the bully's face shows up. Eventually, Sonja appears at the door, trying to convince Cooper that he's in danger and needs to leave. At first Cooper doesn't believe she's real, but then is surprised to be able to touch and feel her. He then decides she was hired by the company, and he tells her he doesn't believe her, at which point she picks up a knife and stabs him.

After Cooper gruesomely kills Sonja while trying to fend her off, her body disappears, confirming for Cooper that he is still in a simulation, just one much more real than he had expected. After calling out his safe word, he is led by Katie to an escape room, and finally emerges from the game to find he never left his chair in Shou's office, where only a second has passed since they initiated the game. They apologize to him for having caused him such distress, and he travels back home to his mother, who, in the throes of dementia, doesn't recognize him, and begins calling his phone—at which point Cooper wakes up again, this time at the very moment of the initial meeting with Katie when this very phone call has interrupted her testing of the newly inserted mushroom. The entire, multi-leveled virtual reality in fact lasted less than a second, and Cooper dies from the shock to his brain.

In some ways this nightmarish sequence couldn't be farther from the lighthearted fare served up by Cervantes; and yet the extent to which the temporal and representational structures borrow from the Spanish author is extraordinary. Indeed, while in some ways the entirety of *Don Quixote* can be understood as a kind of pre-technological

experiment in virtual reality, even within that framework there is a specific episode in which Cervantes rehearses some of the same paradoxes that play out in “Playtest.”

In this episode of the second volume of the novel, Don Quixote has discovered the existence of a cave that he decides is the famous Cave of Montesinos, an enchanted cavern into which he, intrepid knight-errant that he is, must descend. The entire “objective” sequence of his descent and return lasts a mere three sentences:

Iba don Quijote dando voces que le diesen sogas y más sogas, y ellos se la daban poco a poco; y cuando las voces, que acanaladas por la cueva salían, dejaron de oírse, ya ellos tenían descolgadas las cien brazas de sogas, y fueron de parecer de volver a subir a don Quijote, pues no le podían dar más cuerda. Con todo eso, se detuvieron como media hora, al cabo del cual espacio volvieron a recoger la sogas con mucha facilidad y sin peso alguno, señal que les hizo imaginar que don Quijote se quedaba dentro, y creyéndolo así Sancho, lloraba amargamente y tiraba con mucha priesa por desengañarse; pero, llegando, a su parecer, a poco más de las ochenta brazas, sintieron peso, de que en extremo se alegraron. Finalmente, a las diez vieron distintamente a don Quijote [...]. (2.22:217)

Upon his return to the surface, Don Quixote first appears to be in a trance, from which he soon awakens and recounts in vivid detail the most amazing tales of where he has been and what he has experienced, at the end of which account his guide, known as the cousin, remarks:

—Yo no sé, señor Don Quijote, cómo vuestra merced en tan poco espacio de tiempo como ha que está allá bajo, haya visto tantas cosas y hablado y respondido tanto.

—¿Cuánto ha que bajé? —preguntó don Quijote.

—Poco más de una hora —respondió Sancho.

—Eso no puede ser —replicó don Quijote—, porque allá me anocheché y amaneció, y tornó a anochecer y amanecer tres veces; de

modo que, a mi cuenta, tres días he estado en aquellas partes remotas y escondidas a la vista nuestra.

—Verdad debe de decir mi señor —dijo Sancho—; que como todas las cosas que le han sucedido son por encantamento, quizá lo que a nosotros nos parece un hora, debe de parecer allá tres días con sus noches.

—Así será —respondió Don Quijote. (2.23:226-27)

In a similar way to Cooper, Quixote's reported experience of time while in the cave differs fundamentally from the "objective" or external experience of it by Sancho and the cousin, who had lowered him into the cave and awaited his return. But more to the point, the episode is in many ways an encapsulation of the very abyssal structure the entire novel is experimenting with. For not only does Don Quixote import into an external reality one that has taken place "on another stage," to use Freud's famous description of the unconscious (Freud 535), by first firmly separating those stages and then blurring the border between them, or what I have elsewhere called a "reality bleed" (Egginton, "Reality"), Cervantes both creates a sense of a shared external or objective reality, while at the same time managing to show how manipulatable that reality is.

As with Cooper, the experience within the cave is marked as fictional or imaginative, implying that the performativity of statements taking place inside it is suspended.¹ In Cooper's case this would mean that he cannot feel what his brain tricks him into seeing or hearing. In Quixote's it would mean he is lying about, inventing, or even hallucinating his experiences in the cave. Insecurity about this begins to creep in in the form of tactile sensations, in Cooper's case, and the suspicion that, as the cousin asserts, "¿había de mentir el señor don Quijote, que, aunque quisiera, no ha tenido lugar para componer e imaginar tanto millón de mentiras?" (2.23:227). The full breakdown or bleed only occurs at a later step: in Cooper's case when the experience not only turns out to have taken only a fraction of a second, but also to have overrid-

¹ For the full theoretical apparatus referenced in this note, see Egginton (*How the World Became a Stage*); Derrida (321-23); and Goffman.

den his brain and killed him; and in Quixote's case when, as we will see below, revelations in the outer world seem to confirm the truth of the stories concerning Dulcinea's enchantment that he has reported from Montesino's cave.

In each case the structure of the narrative is alerting the viewers or readers to a basic function of representational spaces: namely, by cordoning off supposedly safe diegetic frames for fictional play, we open up the possibility of fictionalizing our own lived space. Such fictionalization, insofar as it occurs unbeknownst to us, can have the effect of allowing our desires and behavior to be guided in specific ways. It can become, in other words, a potent ideological tool.

THE TABLET OF MARVELS

The scene is near constant. People walking down the street, riding in elevators, even sitting behind the steering wheel, their eyes fixated on portable screens. Are we seeking entertainment, news, or, perhaps more and more, social validation through the reactions our social media posts and profiles are garnering among the hordes of virtual, and in many cases unknown, friends and followers we are assiduously cultivating? Those of us who have amassed enough of such a portable audience become influencers; our broadly cast taste choices earn us likes as well as, in some cases, hard cash. Far from a dystopian fiction, this scenario, naturally, is 100 percent common to the world we live in. Thus, for *Black Mirror* only a minor fictional twist is needed to reveal the dystopian heart of that *nonfiction*.

In the episode titled "Nosedive," Lacie is a social-climbing hopeful in a world where one's ratings translate into real social and economic influence if high enough, and potentially catastrophic consequences if they fall too low. She spends her days emoting plastic warmth and doling out five-star ratings for insignificant interactions with vendors who do the same, if she's lucky, or in some cases dis her and damage her coveted number because they can sense her insincerity. Hovering in the low-four range but inspired by an invitation that will give her exposure to a high-status crowd, Lacie puts a down payment on a house she can only afford if she can raise her score in an improbably short

time. As she tries to make her way to the wedding where she will be maid-of-honor to an old school friend turned social media influencer, it becomes clear that her investment in the social hierarchy's invisible code of values benefits only those at the top, with devastating consequences for those who, like her, exist merely as fodder for the rankings.

For the key to Lacie's social-capitalist society is that apparently symbolic rankings confer *real* social and economic benefits. As she strives to complete her travel to her former friend's wedding to place a sycophantic sacrifice on the altar of the in-crowd's likes, Lacie is beset by a series of unfortunate interactions, all caused or exacerbated by her own middling social media ranking, and all resulting in that ranking ultimately tanking by the time she arrives at the wedding, late, unwashed, and in every way an eyesore. As her consciousness of her predicament dawns, her speech turns from self-abasement in the service of social capital to raging indictment of it, at which point the force of the law kicks in, and she is dragged off to prison, where she and a fellow cellmate, suddenly free of the media's panoptic social straightjacketing, revel in screaming insults at one another.

While phones and the instant rankings they enable were obviously lacking in Cervantes's time, social status built on adherence to an invisible and inviolable code certainly was not, even if the values of that code were indeed propagated by the age's most popular and extensive medium. In his theatrical interlude *El retablo de las maravillas*, Cervantes describes a traveling theater troupe of the kind he witnessed in his childhood, for whom "el adorno del teatro era una manta vieja, tirada con dos cordeles de una parte a otra, que hacía lo que llaman vestuario, detrás de la cual estaban los músicos, cantando sin guitarra algún romance antiguo" (Cervantes, *Entremeses*, Prólogo). Unlike the performances of Lope de Rueda that he so admired as a child, however, this troupe consists of three cons, Chanfalla, Chirinos, and the supposed musician Rabelín, and their stage will remain as empty as Rabelín's hands are devoid of musical instruments. Rather, it will be up to the townspeople who gather around the boards and blanket they have hastily assembled to see, or claim to see, the spectacles Chanfalla proudly narrates.

The coin for which the town people strain to outdo one another in self-abasing pretense is the realm's symbolic capital, honor. As Chanfalla advises Chirinos upon their approach to the village, "date un filo a la lengua en la piedra de la adulación" (218), and indeed, she pulls out all stops in this regard, treating a crowd of what are essentially country bumpkins as if they were the highest nobility: "Honrados días viva vuestra merced, que así nos honra. En fin, la encina da bellotas; el pero, peras; la parra, uvas, y el honrado, honra, sin poder hacer otra cosa" (219). Just as Lacie desires the approval bestowed by the universal app's five-star rating system, the villagers desire the identification of honor, even if it means accepting a world full of social inequities and daily humiliations to get it. Chanfalla, knowing well his society's rules, and being a master of the theatrical medium that is those rules' most fluent conveyor, simply has to activate the prejudices already latent in his audience, namely, that "ninguno puede ver las cosas que en [el retablo] se muestran, que tenga alguna raza de confeso, o no sea habido y procreado de sus padres de legítimo matrimonio; y el que fuere contagiado destas dos tan usadas enfermedades, despídase de ver las cosas, jamás vistas ni oídas, de mi retablo" (220).

It goes without saying that the villagers fall quickly into line, not only claiming to see everything that Chanfalla narrates on the stage, but enthusiastically embellishing his creations in a frantic effort to seem *more* honorable, *less* potentially besmirched by sexual or religious impurities than their fellows. As Michael Gerli has pointed out, all of the efforts come so naturally because the villagers are in essence already trained to act this way:

[t]he dialogue between Teresa Repolla and Juana Castrada is a burlesque of the *de rigueur* female declarations of happiness, honor, modesty and chastity which saturate the *comedias villanescas*. Indeed, their exchange recalls similar feminine dialogues in works like *Fuenteovejuna* (act one, Laurencia and Pascuala) and *Peribáñez* (act one, Casilda and Inés), though here, rather than make affirmative protestations of womanly virtue in the context of the rustic life,

Teresa and Juana admonish each other about commonly shared sexual and genealogical secrets, hence highlighting the need to guard against carelessness during the production. (Gerli, "Retablo" 485)

Explicit in both Cervantes's interlude and the *Black Mirror* episode is how the villagers and Lacie are all performing their roles for a panoptic, virtual big Other, in Lacanian terms—in both cases everyone in question understands perfectly that their behavior and that of their fellows is inauthentic, but they all continue doing it for the benefit of the collective gaze that is assumed to be somehow stupider than the individual parts of which it is composed. In Slavoj Žižek's description, "The big Other is fragile, insubstantial, properly virtual, in the sense that its status is that of a subjective presupposition. It exists only insofar as subjects act as if it exists" (Žižek 279). This is why people in turn react so violently when someone undermines their commitment to the rules of the social game: the result of failing is ostracism, social death. When one of Lacie's coworkers tries to buy himself back into good graces after being on the wrong side of a breakup, Lacie is demoted for failing to toe the line and join in the shaming.

Indeed, we see a similar pressure baked into the rules of Cervantes's magic retablo as structure the tablets on which Lacie and her peers relentlessly police each other. Take this snatch of dialogue between Chanfalla and two of the town's principal men:

CHANFALLA: Vamos, y no se les pase de las mientes las calidades que han de tener los que se atrevieren a mirar el maravilloso Retablo.

BENITO: A mi cargo queda eso, y séle decir que, por mi parte, puedo ir seguro a juicio, pues tengo el padre alcalde; cuatro dedos de envidia de cristiano viejo rancioso tengo sobre los cuatro costados de mi linaje: ¡miren si verá el tal Retablo!

CAPACHO: Todos le pensamos ver, señor Benito Repollo.
(Cervantes, *Entremeses* 225)

Notice that in response to Chanfalla's thinly veiled threat, Benito Repollo feels forced to reassure him of his blood purity, while Capacho simply and baldly asserts his intention to see what he is told to see.

However, while the social control here is properly panoptic in Foucault's biopolitical sense, whereby subjects actively assume their subjugation through roles they affirmatively play, when normal, i.e., non-high-status individuals try to break ranks and assert some of the power they falsely believe they have a right to, they quickly see how the decks are stacked against them. In Lacie's case her attempts to enter the higher status tiers ultimately reveal that her real purpose was always as a structural support for the system. As she says during her meltdown wedding speech to her former friend, "I always wished I was you, and I guess that's why you kept me around so long." For their part, the villagers make the mistake of assuming that their vaunted pureblood status, which they have "proven" by all claiming to see the marvels of the *retablo*, will now grant them the privileges enjoyed by the gentry, for example of not having their homes invaded by the kings' troops as they pass through the village—an assumption sadly (and sorely) debunked when they try it out on the officer who arrives at the end of the play. As José-Antonio Maravall argued, there was never two parallel systems of privileges (*Poder* 118-19); rather, only nobility mattered in the end, and blood purity, like Lacie's forced smiles, plastic laugh, and her futile hopes to raise the score on her tablet of marvels, is no more real than phantoms dancing on an empty stage.

PUBLIC PUNISHMENTS

In the episode of *Black Mirror* titled "The National Anthem," British Prime Minister Michael Carrow is awoken in the early hours of the morning and called into a situation room with his advisers. There he is shown a harrowing video of the kidnapped Princess Susannah, tied to a chair, reading from a teleprompter. As the princess reaches the end of her script, the advisers pause the video, and Carrow asks them what he wants. The advisers are embarrassed, and finally tell him it concerns him directly, before continuing to play the rest. The kidnapper has only

one demand. If the princess is to be released unharmed, the PM must have unsimulated sexual intercourse with a live pig on national television that very afternoon.

As the day progresses and the entire nation is consumed by the unfolding event, the government tries to locate the kidnapper and princess while secretly preparing for a simulation with a porn star and a CGI specialist. Meanwhile, the PM's team avidly tracks public opinion, which they assure him is on his side, sympathetic, and will not hold him responsible for the princesses' death should that be the outcome. Buckingham palace calls, and Carrow is shocked to hear it is the Queen herself on the line. As he reports after hanging up, she has informed him that she expects him to do everything in his power to assure the safe return of the princess.

The situation takes a turn for the worse when the porn star is recognized and photographed going into the government's studio, and the picture goes viral. In response the kidnapper sends more video that appears to show him removing a finger from the princess, and a finger is delivered to the press. Panic ensues, and public opinion quickly shifts, putting responsibility on the government and creating a growing demand that the PM put aside personal embarrassment to save the life of a princess who, as an adviser notes, is adored for her beauty and goodness.

Bereft of options, the PM finds himself at four in the afternoon in front of a skeleton crew and behind a female pig. As the entire nation watches in shock and disgust, we see the princess, unharmed, released on London's iconic Millennium bridge, and the kidnapper, hanging in his studio, his own bloody and bandaged hand swinging at his side.

It's hard to imagine this dark, postmodern fable of the internet and public opinion's power to overcome personal moral barriers having any counterpart in a four-hundred-year old comic novel; yet Cervantes's predictive analytic powers yet again prevail when it comes to how media shape our sense of self and its limits. When, halfway through the second volume of *Don Quixote*, the Don and Sancho Panza fall into the hands of a mischievous Duchess and Duke who are fans of the first volume with the means at their disposal to simulate Quixote's fantasies,

the ground falls out from under Sancho's (and even Quixote's) sense of what is real or not.

Out on a boar hunt with the noble couple and their entourage, Quixote and Sancho are surprised by the sudden appearance of a devil, announcing himself with a horn and declaring that he is looking for the one known as "don Quijote de la Mancha," adding, "la gente que por aquí viene son seis tropas de encantadores, que sobre un carro triunfante traen a la sin par Dulcinea del Toboso. Encantada viene con el gallardo francés Montesinos, a dar orden a don Quijote de cómo ha de ser desencantada la tal señora" (2.34:323). As he turns to leave, the narrator informs us that "Renovóse la admiración en todos, especialmente Sancho y don Quijote: en Sancho, en ver que, a despecho de la verdad, querían que estuviese encantada Dulcinea; en don Quijote, por no poder asegurarse si era verdad o no lo que le había pasado en la cueva de Montesinos" (2.34:323).

This aside on the part of the narrator is both comical and intricately complex. For Sancho, his assurance that Dulcinea is, far from an enchanted princess, in fact a local farmer's daughter, is suddenly undermined by new evidence that a story initiated by his own deceit is in fact true; in Quixote's case, the narrator suggests that his surprise stems from the fact that he must not have believed his own account of his descent into the cave of Montesino, which is now problematically being presented to him as fact. More subtly, the narrator also lies, or misrepresents the psychological state of the others, when he states that "renovóse la admiración en todos"—unlikely given that the Duke and Duchess are not only in on the joke, they are its very authors.

This apparent slip is indicative of the entire strategy of the second volume, and in fact of its ultimate importance as a guide into how media infiltrate and manipulate consciousness. The commonplace or naïve understanding of a narrator's function would be to "objectively" share with readers a story, whether true or false. But in Cervantes's literary universe, the narrator's function has always been explicitly a site of uneasy contestation. From the identity games played out by the voice speaking to the "desocupado lector" in the opening lines of the prologue to volume one, to the revelation early in that volume that

there are at least two “authors” to the story, one whose voice we are reading now and one, Cide Hamete Benegeli, whose truthfulness, as a Moor, must always be in question—the status of the narrative voice never ceases to be troubled, infected even, by the fictional world it conveys. In other words, it never manages to establish the objective grounds that its status of narrator would seem to require.

This narratological conundrum is epitomized in a phrase like this one, “renovóse la admiración en todos,” precisely insofar as the affect it reports, astonishment, marks a breakdown of representative frameworks in the form of another reality bleed, in which an affect that should only be experienced by characters within a given diegetic space—in this case the Duke and Duchess’s game—spreads, impossibly, to the encasing frame. I say impossible simply because, in this case, for the Duke and Duchess to actually be astonished by the devil’s appearance would imply they are not in fact who the novel’s logic demands that they be: the authors of the very *embuste* that ostensibly is surprising them.

The reality bleed is far from an innocent slip, however. Rather, it is endemic to the entire logic of contagion that *Don Quixote* exists to explore, exploit, and examine. For the slippage of affect from represented to representing framework endows it with illicit life, reality, and hence activates the performativity dormant in any for-the-time-being deactivated (etiolated) speech-act.² This affective contagion thus supports the impact that actions or decrees taken inside the diegetic space have on characters who perceive their reality to lie outside that space; in the terms of the narrative, this will have potentially adverse effects on Sancho, and specifically his backside.

For in the wake of the devil’s departure, the entourage is approached by a passion play replete with mules pulling a cart, music and fanfare, and actors dressed up as wizards and damsels in distress, at which point one of the players, calling himself Merlin, declaims some verse outlining the enchantment of Dulcinea and, pointedly, detailed instructions for her disenchantment:

² Again, see Egginton (*How the World Became a Stage*).

Para recobrar su estado primo
 La sin par Dulcinea del Toboso,
 Es menester que Sancho tu escudero
 Se dé tres mil azotes y treientos
 En ambas sus valientes posaderas,
 Al aire descubiertas, y de modo,
 Que le escuezan, le amarguen y le enfaden.
 (2.35:328)

Like Prime Minister Carrow, the release of a princess is conditioned on Sancho's public humiliation. And Like PM Carrow, Sancho is adamantly opposed to fulfilling the demand:

¡Voto a tal! —dijo a esta sazón Sancho—. No digo yo tres mil azotes; pero así me daré yo tres como tres puñaladas. ¡Válate el diablo por modo de desencantar! ¡Yo no sé qué tienen que ver mis posas con los encantos! ¡Par Dios que si el señor Merlín no ha hallado otra manera como desencantar a la señora Dulcinea del Toboso, encantada se podrá ir a la sepultura! (2.35:328)

But also like PM Carrow, soon after his principled refusal the blandishments start coming in: pressure from authority in the form of a queen or a duchess; pressure from the victim herself, whose innocence and purity is proclaimed by all; and pressure from the public, in the form of opinion polls for the PM and the gathered nobles and their courtesans in the case of Sancho.

While in contrast to Carrow's, Sancho's punishment is purely comical (not to mention not realized in any serious way), the mechanisms of their respective moments of subjecting themselves to the authority of that punishment are remarkably similar. And that mechanism clicks in at exactly the same stage, structurally-speaking: namely, at the moment the objective field of representation bleeds into their own reality. For Carrow this occurs in the blur of an early morning viewing of the kidnapper's video, right after his adviser's inform him that the demands concern him personally; and for Sancho the moment is

conveyed in the brilliantly Cervantine comic ejaculation, “¡Yo no sé qué tienen que ver mis posas con los encantos!” For at a structural level, the independence of Sancho’s backside, his *posas*, is exactly what guarantees the coherence of his frontside, that is, the scene before our eyes; and for that very reason his surprise at his interpellation is a marker of the very power representations have to inform and structure our lived reality, potentially in ways that persuade us to violate our own most powerfully felt interests and commitments. This power to structure our lived reality via its dependence on or imbrication with internal frames of representation is key to the functioning of political power in all representational regimes.

In sum, “National Anthem,” as well as “Nosedive” and “Playtest,” work on a fully Cervantine level of medial frame analysis. They are powerful examples of *Black Mirror*’s acuity in analyzing not only the role the media have in informing and structuring the experiences of lived reality as one in a series of intercalated frames of representation, but also and more urgently the instrumentalizing of this experience as a means of social control or biopower, guiding individuals and cultures toward behaviors that don’t necessarily benefit them and perhaps, at times, go against or even violate consciously held desires and values. But what representation giveth, representation also taketh away, and this double edge is what accounts for the critical power that fictions, whether of the science or early modern variety, can wield in priming us to be more astute readers of reality and its potential manipulations.

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