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The *Beau Idéal* Has Been Disconnected: A Technology-Capitalist Realism Perspective on *Immediate Modernity*'s Anxiety Pandemic

By
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Abstract

Within *immediate modernity*, increases in the multitude of psychological, social, emotional and behavioural disruptions affecting human actors, categorised under the (reductive) label of 'anxiety' are reaching an apex. This peak can be conceptualised both by frequency of disruptions, which may be defined as ever-present, and by the volume of negative effects over humans' ability to exist in present reality. Some scholars have argued the permanence of contemporary anxiety represents rebound, a 'hangover' from prolonged technological social change and innovation, which alongside positive advances has heralded unintended, unavoidable and unpredictable uncertainties. Others have focussed on impacts arising from impermeable associations between evolving modern life and accelerated capitalist agenda, associated sensemaking, and the intensified embedding of capitalist principles within macro and micro social interactions. Associations occur within and between actors *and* the technological connective mediums utilised by humans in routine modern life. Despite some existing scholarship in the above domains, few efforts attempt to deconstruct and apply theories holistically as a mechanism of interrogating and contextualising a contemporary anxiety pandemic. To react to a gap in social sensemaking, this transdisciplinary scholarship approaches this task: firstly, by conceptualising contemporary reality using the term *immediate modernity*, giving language and definition to the unique pro-anxiety social landscape within which human actors are presently situated; secondly, by evaluating and distilling selected theoretical fragments salient for comprehending rapid technological societal advances and their human effects; thirdly, Mark Fisher's notions of capitalist realism are reconfigured using the synthesised perspectives and applied to interrogate the theme of technological-mediated anxiety in *immediate modernity*. Drawing theoretical synthesis together, some novel perspectives are presented on *immediate modernity*'s anxiety pandemic as *the beau idéal disconnect* theory, describing the hegemonic culture within *immediate modernity* where anxiety is ever-present and inexorably interlinked with technology-capitalism, yet enduringly and reductively defined as 'progress'. Applications for theory to further interrogate, visualise and give language to linkages between anxiety and technology-capitalism within contemporary and rapidly accelerating society are put forward.

Keywords: Anxiety pandemic, anxiety, capitalist realism, immediate modernity, social theory, Mark Fisher

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Introduction

Within the contemporary reality of *immediate modernity*, human anxiety has increased to become an almost ever-present burden (Giffort, 2022). While framing of 'anxiety' has shifted in understandings and sensemaking over time, from the late modernity of the 1960s concepts have centralised on individualist clinical and linked psychological, neurological and biochemical theories of human anxiety (Horwitz, 2013; Kenwood et al., 2022). Reactive to this thinking, some cultural scholars have approached examination of societal shifts and lifestyle occurrences that may provide explanations for rapid macro-level societal anxiety increases that interconnect on a more socially encompassing level than psychological-biological theories alone (Crombez, 2021; Nigmatullina, & Rodossky, 2022; Rafter, 2001; Rosa, 2010, 2013; Shri, 2010; Suarez-Villa, 2012, 2013). However, critical to progress investigations further is to acknowledge that much existing psychological scholarship still defines anxiety per individualistic clinical sensemaking, often eschewing interrogation of changes to the complex macro-behavioural and social components of wider human life that can reveal markers of collective 'anxious change'. Such markers often link with accepted micro-focussed clinical definitions, such as: "a feeling of unease […] worry or fear, […] mild or severe" (NHS, 2022). As opposed to conceptualising these negative shifts on an individual, psychological level, such 'unease' and dissonant discomforts frequently occur collectively, and may be examined more readily by interrogating broader social trends; human and technology interactions and narratives (Crombez, 2021; Rosa, 2010, 2013, Rosa et al., 2017; Suarez-Villa, 2012). This valuable realist perspective is a complement to conceptualising and tracking human anxiety through micro-level metrics and measurement scales, which while typically constructed at a macro level, are routinely applied at a micro-individualistic level to define, measure and diagnose 'anxiety' prevalence, severity and social trend, and conceptualise anxiety as an individual disorder (Bagby et al., 2004; Beck et al., 1988; 1993; Fullana & Shackman, 2023; Lee & Stein, 2023; Tanaka & Chen, 2023). This dichotomic stance, alongside valuable progress already made by the above scholars begs the question**: if anxiety in** *immediate modernity* **occurs primarily as a collective social experience, why does society continue to treat anxiety as an individual psychological problem?**

Notably, the above quandary should not be presented as entirely novel thinking. Fisher's work on capitalist realism and the spectre of technological shifts that permeate late modernity does a masterful job of deconstructing linkages between specific movements in media, politics and technology, and exploring how such alterations are felt on a collective societal level in the West (Fisher, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2022). Additionally, Fisher's theorising explores notions of mental anguish, and trends for conceptualising such experiences in late modernity (Fisher, 2014, 2017, 2018). Fisher suggests that social trends for framing negative

mental experience as individual, privately experienced 'damage' precludes understandings of the true scale and impacts of depression and the related ability to understand depression as a negative collective experience (Fisher, 2017, 2022).

Some select scholarship has made forward progress aligning with this perspective. Crombez's (2018, 2021) works explore the exponentially increasing logical structuring of modern society as constructing manifold anxious notions in human actors; akin to Fisher (2017, 2022), emphasising the psychological dichotomy of framing collectively experienced anxiety as a product of individualistic biomedical disruptions alone. Reactive to this, Crombez highlights a sociological-biopsychosocial approach, networking a critical method into linkages between ongoing evolutions in modern and postmodern societies, new forms of technology-mediated existence and associated social and identity (re) configurations. As an output, Crombez proposes a new method for the diagnosis and treatment of anxiety: critical socioanalysis (Crombez, 2018, 2021).

Like Crombez, Suarez-Villa, (2012, 2013) develops interconnections between modern capitalist accelerations as both a paradoxical output—and a product—of late capitalistic technological and scientific advances. Akin to Crombez, Suarez-Villa links these accelerations to an overarching *logicalisation* of social existence, where creativity and personal expression are commodified, bending to conform to the structuring architecture of a capitalist apex (Suarez-Villa, 2012). While Crombez reacts to this by providing a framework of socioanalysis, Suarez-Villa introduces the post-industrial descriptor *Technocapitalism*, arguing that future macro-level technological advances are so interconnected with capitalist structures as to near-universally de facto program new technologies, advances, and relational threads of power to propagate and replicate key capitalist structuring principles as a proxy of their proposed intentions. This carries knock-on effects over the meso-social and individual-micro 'cognitive' levels of human actors. As such, corporations embodying, (re)producing and developing new technologies operate as a locus of production for linked *Technocapitalsm*: the practice of advancing science and technology so interconnected with capitalist structures that any advances logically replicate these structures near-automatically. Capitalism operates akin to a corporate DNA: intrinsic and identifiable as a blueprint within each new technological production.

Significantly, direct parallels between both Crombez's and Suarez-Villa's later theorising are evident in the earlier scholarship of Rosa (Rosa, 2010, 2013, Rosa et al., 2017). Crucially, Rosa describes modern societies akin to that of Crombez and Suarez-Villa. However, Rosa revisits the historic conditions underpinning continued capitalist grown and barriers to emancipation, suggesting societies require specific intrinsic and social conditions for replication. Rosa describes this condition-set as *dynamic stabilisation*, this consisting of linked

forms of modern valued capital: material growth, technological innovations, and high volumes of cultural innovation. Interpreting this work against Crombez and Suarex-Villa, and drawing on Gramscian theory (Gramsci, 2011), nexuses of collective growth in these domains constructs foundational *hegemonic* conditions that operate as a bedrock for continued capitalist growth. However, as Rosa (2017) later argues, this paradigm (or hegemony vis-à-vis Gramscian theory) is supported and propagated by three further conditions of *dynamism*: socio-economic appropriation, socio-cultural-acceleration, and socio-political activation. Similar to some foundational notions and interpretations of L/Acc – left accelerationism[1] (Gardiner, 2017; Haynes, 2021; Turner, 2019) which suggest a fractious relationship between ongoing rapid socio-technological-capitalist accelerations and the sustainability of these, Rosa (2017) argues that this present structural dynamic stabilisation model both maintains the integrity of existing capitalism and linked technological progression via its accelerating nature, while also ultimately (re)producing a compound accelerating timeline of events which threatens to eventually overwhelm and destabilise itself as a paradoxical product of its mechanisms of integrity and perpetuation. Beyond L/Acc theory, these perspectives have been shared by others (Redhead, 2006, 2007) and within select notions of Paul Virilio. This suggests an inescapable link between difficulties defining late modernity, and this moment's obsession with speed (Hauer, 2013; Virilio, 1995, 2006; Virilio & Bratton, 2006). Such tensions present a paradox of modernity for which, drawing parallels to Beck's work on risk-modernity, (Beck, 2009, 2014) Rosa argues signs are readily visible in the multifarious tensions: financial, political, environmental, psychosocial that exist within contemporary society (Rosa, 2017).

Despite the development of Fisher's key concepts nearly a decade ago, and the theorising of the above works, few studies beyond these have focussed on progressing thinking to bolster and build structuring language defining the modern intersection of capitalism-technology-anxiety. Saliently, this scholarship approaches the task of refining linked insights and language by interrogating and integrating theories, and by providing additional perspectives that deal with and lend to clarifying the subject of collective anxiety and its possible causes. This work amalgamates threads together to synthesise a lens for framing anxiety in collective terms as a product of *immediate modernity*.

The following sections begin by framing contemporary society through the introduction of *immediate modernity.* This clarifying term is used to depict the present temporal-social field within which the connected contents of this manuscript play-out: capitalism, technology and anxiety. The concept of anxiety is then examined in relational terms to this notion. Then follows a discussion of selected perspectives that explore anxiety as a reaction to sociotechnical

accelerations: rapid increases in technological and social changes occurring through late modernity and accelerating towards the present *immediate* moment. These combined perspectives are then situated within Mark Fisher's notions of capitalist realism, and trans-disciplinary linkages between capitalist realism, technology, and anxiety are deconstructed. Resultantly, and applying the now-established lens of *immediate modernity* to the above synthesised scholarships, a new concept is theorised: *the beau idéal disconnect*. Theory is then applied as a lens to develop explanatory perspectives with regards to *immediate modernity*'s anxiety pandemic, inclusive of a discussion for how developed theory can benefit future sociological investigations and progress further sensemaking.

Immediate Modernity

I employ the term *immediate modernity* to refer to the present -**this**- moment in contemporary western society; a collective zeitgeist or *contemporary culture ghost*. Despite existing scholarships presenting a foundational framework for acknowledging linkages between capitalism-technology-anxiety, no clear unified definition of a collective temporal reality is presented to contextualise research of the present cultural moment.

This moment: *immediate modernity* is defined by the rapid rise and parallel—triangular—occurrence of three cultural objects: **One/** The interconnected and enduring presence of a pervasive form of *hypernormalised* capitalism linked to technology; the term *hypernormalised* is employed to frame capitalism as cultural hegemony: an unquestioned, accepted and ruling construct that operates as a primary structuring principle over lived existence (Gramsci, 2011). **Two/** Accelerated, ongoing and increasing, technological advances, manifesting primarily in digitally heightened and novel ways of connecting human actors together, and connecting single actors to wider social, local and macro-global events from which they are geographically distanced, but for which significance is conjured explicitly via these digital forms of connection. **Three/** A near all-pervasive and heightened form of collective and normalised anxiety, operating as a disruptive and dysfunctional construct to human functioning. Anxiety is positioned both as a natural product of capitalism-technology engagements and accelerations, *and* as a de facto baseline for functional existence in contemporary reality. Just as capitalism and technology are *hypernormalised* as a product of this *immediate modernity*, so is attached the inexorably inescapable construct of collective anxiety, this representing a marker of cultural engagement and hegemonic subscription from which (drawing on notions of Beck's risk society) responsibility is increasingly placed on the individual to deal with (Beck, 2009).

Together these constructs represent an unparalleled *immediacy*: interconnecting a de facto *accelerationist* advancement of capitalism, technology and anxiety via complicit hegemonic consent. As such, the moniker of *immediate modernity* takes cue from two interconnected threads of lived reality experience: the normalised, ongoing and increasingly speedy advancement of the above three inexorably linked constructs, which are **all** accelerating, *and* the temporality paradox of situating these in current, *immediately localised* reality. To clarify, the realist context of this containing culture of *immediate modernity* is *itself* reactively accelerating with such speed that **this moment** will inevitably be historic as soon as the attachment is coined as *immediate.* Thus, the ability to orient *this moment* in history becomes problematic; cultural context and its components accelerating too fast to accurately place a marker, pause and reflect, or accurately plot (or orient) forward trajectory. As such, while *immediate modernity* refers to the immediate present temporality, it now also refers to the past: the present temporality and its associated linked capitalist, technological and anxiety agendas have now already accelerated beyond this given timestamp at the point of the term being conjured. *Immediate modernity* is employed to describe a social reality in such flux and functional accelerationist state that the *immediate modernity* descriptor, while useful in terms of giving language to this unique temporality, becomes also a paradoxical product of obsolescence as soon as it is attached as a descriptor. This is the unique and specific nature of *immediate modernity*, for *immediate modernity* is both **immediately contemporary** and **immediately obsolete**.

The following sections explore each of the above discussed separate cultural objects one-by-one, then draw these together as a collective theory to interlink each object as a resultant theory: *the beau idéal disconnect*.

Anxiety

In immediate western modernity, anxiety is typically charachterised in individualist terms; an experiential emotion of inner turmoil and discomfort linked to uncertainty, rumination, dread and unease (APA, 2015; Crocq, 2022). While presentations of anxiety usually involve modifications to individual social behaviours, anxiety is depicted largely as a disorder, with 'excessive' presentations linked to negative experience, psychological ruminations and individualist mental processing of past, present or future situations (APA, 2015). However, anxiety, when divorced from its disordered label, also represents an evolutionary construct. This manifests as a functional—beneficial—trait, representing a base human emotion, necessary for survival, and framed historically as reactive processing and assessment of an actor's immediate environment and objects within (Bateson et al., 2011; Price, 2013).

Despite contemporary clinical framing, most current theorising with regards to conceptualising anxiety 'disorders' acknowledges anxiety as a relatively commonplace experience for many social actors in modern society (e.g. Fullana & Shackman, 2023; Lee & Stein, 2023; Tanaka & Chen, 2023). However, conceptions are rarely linked in literatures to grouped social change, reactive coping or maladjustments triggered by wider rapid macro societal and technical advances and shifts.

Instead, anxiety is problematised as an 'unnatural disorder' and suggested as a deviation from normal experiential thinking, processing and reacting. This stance is understandable in part. To clarify: the individualistic labelling of anxiety allows for (theoretically) each individual case to be assessed and treated with a degree of individual-centred thinking; the treatment of each human actor as a complex individual with intersecting, manifold social experiences, cognition, and understandings. However, this stance sits somewhat dichotomic with the approved treatments for anxiety. While counselling and psychological therapies are suggested as individualised treatments, these typically follow standardised frameworks for behavioural and cognitive modifications (Heimberg, 2002). Saliently, this standardisation is also seen in diagnostic metrics for anxiety, namely the prevalence of standardised scales such as the Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck et al., 1993). While scares are administered individually, to measure individual anxiety experience, scales are scored per centrally set questions and scales, these standardised per established population 'norms'. This standardisation extends to approved anxiety medications, which while undoubtedly are essential, life-saving and important, function by initiating neurological chemical alterations that approximate anxiety reductions decided by the prevalence of success in clinical trials. Such compounds are not synthesised to illicit anxiety-mitigating success bespoke to the individual sufferer, but instead, to achieve this goal within the widest possible demographic, to ensure prescriptions represent a functionally normalised offering, with the highest overall success potential and least side effect prevalence (Allgulander, 1999; Bandelow et al., 2022; Blanco et al., 2003; Fullana & Shackman, 2023).

To this end, *immediate modernity*'s anxiety conceptualisations are dichotomic. While anxiety appears recognised as collective and wide-ranging in prevalence and effect, anxiety is diagnosed and made sense of as an individual malfunction, routed in individual causes linked to specific psychosocial and neurological alterations. Despite this, treatments are developed to be applicable on a macro-collective, as opposed to individualistic scale, yet readily offered as reactive—and appropriate—solutions to anxiety as an individually-labelled problem. This is despite evidence justifying the investigation of collective societal

contributions and causes (Bateson et al., 2011; Crombez, 2021; Suarez-Villa, 2012, 2013; Rosa, 2010, 2013, Rosa et al., 2013).

Anxiety as a reaction to sociotechnical accelerations

Scholarship additional to Crombez (2021), Suarez-Villa, (2012, 2013) and Rosa, (2010, 2013, Rosa et al., 2013) focusses on specific components of *immediate modernity*, synthesising linkages that also divorce from viewing anxiety in individualistic terms. Studies instead explore possible collectivist rationale and reasoning that may underpin shared societal anxiety increases as reactionary to rapid social changes. Just as total individual perspectives are inadequate, these works require exploration alongside theory that takes a total macro-level approach (e.g. Crombez 2021, Suarez-Villa, 2012, Rosa, 2010, 2013). Locating this thinking within *immediate modernity*, theorising can be broken down into three interlinked topic areas of research: one) humans coping with the unpredictable and arising risks of rapid techno-social accelerations; two) social actors processing and developing sensemaking regarding rapid technological developments and their effects on social interactions; and three) sensemaking surrounding future technological accelerations and their probable effects over humans and society.

Ulrich Beck's work on reflexivity and risk modernity is perhaps some of the most cited scholarship linking radical social change and anxiety. Collectively, Beck's notions are reactive to the ideas of post-modernity. Namely, that modernity has a natural—clarifying—end-point with regards to primary developed techno-social advances. For example, the notion that modernity concludes in the 1980-90s and postmodernity, and its associated new advances, subsequently begins with a 'clean slate' (Jameson, 1991). Reactive to this, Beck's work explores *reflexive modernity*, a concept prioritising the recognition of rising individuality and displacement of power following the achievement of modernity's ideals (Beck, 2009, 2014). Central to Beck's theories are acknowledgments for the aftereffect 'risks' unintentionally constructed by past advances. Beck labels this social temporality 'reflexive', indicating a need for society as an ever-more-growing individualistic construct to shift to a united collective reflexivity perspective. This is to approach the development of solutions to now-pre-existing risks in *immediate modernity*, for example, climate change. These notions are situated alongside a second interconnected branch of theory: Beck's work on *risk society* (Beck, 2002, 2004, 2014). This branch of theory focusses on deconstructing the ways in which immediately modern society arranges in response to risk, using risk to structure and make sense of insecurities unintentionally introduced by past modernisations, but which must now be addressed, solved, and dealt with in present *immediate modernity* alongside *immediate modernity*'s own natural

techno-social-advances and the additional risks created by these. As society remains preoccupied with solving past risk problems, while generating both new technologies and striving to mitigate any additional risks, society itself begins to become collectively preoccupied with risk; using this construct as a structuring principle for self-examination, social sensemaking, individualist cognitive processing and a template for social, financial and technological interactions (Beck, 2014; Beck et al., 1992).

Anxiety arising from digital communication technology

Numerous ghosts of Beck's 'unintended' theorising can be uncovered when interrogating a variety of modern scholarship, particularly with regards to changed interaction trends and communication technology. A fascinating study by Pierce (2009) explores modern distanced communicative change in teens linked to anxiety. Findings suggest teens readily engage in SIT (Socially Interactive Technologies), including online and mobile digital communications. Scholars present evidence for correlations between increased social anxiety: "talk[ing] face to face" (p. 1369) and increased feelings of comfort speaking with others using SIT methods.

Similar studies have also highlighted linkages, some suggesting that defining communicative 'human' interactions through digital mediums is becoming a preference, or holds anxiety mitigating properties in *immediate modernity* (Gabbiadini et al., 2020; Indwar & Mishra, 2022). However, this scales with a contrasting body of research that links increased digital communications with increased anxiety (Bartlett, 2017; Cain, 2018; Nieminen, 2016).

Rosen et al.'s work (2013) exploring Facebook use also identifies this dichotomy, highlighting linkages between social media interactions, number of online friends and symptoms of psychiatric disorders, alongside perceived positive outcomes of online social media use. Comparable studies have moved beyond communication, revealing societal interactions and their attached values as shifting in perception of importance from the tangible-physical to the virtual. Several scholars channel this point to develop fascinating insights into human actors altering their own self-perception, and relatedly self-worth, linked to volume and temporality of receiving or not receiving 'likes' on social media platforms (Di Gesto et al., 2022; Mackson et al., 2019; Mullin, 2017; Vander Dussen, 2021). Alongside self-perceptions and linked anxieties localising on physical appearance and presentations (Amoda et al., 2022; Bue, 2022; Seekis & Kennedy, 2023), recent studies also highlight virtual social media 'likes' as a key mediator of perceived 'real world' anxiety and self-esteem (Burrow & Rainone, 2017; Lee et al., 2020; Reich et al., 2023).

Synthesising the above points, much psychological and sociological scholarship upholds the notion that social actors develop their sense of self and reactively augment the stability and perception of this based on others' perceptions and commentaries regarding their social presentations (Goffman, 2002; Niedenthal et al., 2005; Scheff, 2005). Explicitly, Cooley's looking-glass-self theory provides structure for how social actors conceptualise their self-image based on both assessing and analysing responses from others, that actively incorporate their own assessments and perceptions of how others judge them (Cooley, 1902). However, social actors in *immediate modernity* are increasingly engineered to base their self-worth via limited technological presentations of their 'best selves', in addition to physical 'real world' interactions; uploading and presenting fractured snapshots to be judged by others. Such judgement presents a cyclic loop of adjustment and affirmation – yet constrained within a social microcosm constructed by ostensibly 'positive' technological advances.

Perhaps most significantly, actors often edit their own social—digital—presentations to exhibit and share spectres or shadows of their identity they feel will be most acceptably judged by a virtual social audience. This at times may prioritise judgements from individuals who are exclusively interacted with virtually – i.e. persons the social actor has never met in person, but place in high-esteem due to their own 'virtual capital' standing (i.e. have many likes or followers). This can extend to posting only selective information, photographs and 'stories' or engaging in active digital manipulation of self-representations of their own 'avatar' image via readily available digital tools. For example, camera phone filters and editing software, which are included as standard on mobile devices (Ibsen et al., 2022). On the more extreme end of this example are downloadable digital technologies such as Facetune, an application allowing the manipulation of self: skin colour, facial dimensions and contouring and placement of facial characteristics, manipulation of eyes, mouth, nose and ears, as well as teeth and hair (Bahnweg & Omar, 2023; Ellis & Destine, 2023).

Contemporary digital interactions locate and sharpen an acute risk-perspective to virtual communications. To return to the concept of 'likes': studies reveal 'likes' as a digital signifier of approval that operate much like Cooley's looking-glass-self theory, demonstrating symbolic appraisal and approval of the virtually-shared construct (Burrow & Rainone, 2017; Di Gesto et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2020). A shared self-image may represent a modified or digitally enhanced offering which is stratified from the social actors' accurate appearance. This paradigm creates a new dichotomy for *immediate modernity* where the looking-glass framework is corrupted, digital technology representing a mediating, intermediate construct that constructs a conflating barrier that separates the genuine presence of self towards a *corrupted presentation* which is then judged virtually by others. As such,

the looking-glass no longer reflects an accurate portrayal, but a non-genuine one. Social actors may engage in an additional layer of judgement, where they compare the judged image (even if favourably judged) for differences with their genuine self. This triadic structure of looking-glass comparison is unique to digital accelerations in *immediate modernity*. Through digital manipulations individuals can present their 'idealised self' virtually for other's judgements. If the idealised self is judged harshly, then what are the implications for subsequent self-judgement over social actors' perceptions of their original unaltered, genuine and non-idealised self?

Thus, actors engage in a risk-assessment strategy whenever they communicate via social media, whether this interaction represents the posting of an image, a 'tweet', commentary text or a message-board posting. The format of these platforms encourages the judging of such communications; the material currency of interactions reduced to a social impact solely conjured via the judgment of others, encapsulated in the collective form of 'likes'.

To further deconstruct this position: while actors routinely edit and present fragments of their identity for judgement by others, they do so in the knowledge that this strategy, while normalised, is risky. Positive responses and judgement result in temporary affirmation and validation of the limited fragment shared. Conversely, negative responses cause the actor to question the social acceptability, desirability and currency of the fragment. This may lead to a suppression, of at least the external presentation of, this identity theme. Even in positive scenarios, such normalised social interaction is highly temporal, and leads to dissonance. Social actors are recurrently judged, albeit, for example, perhaps positively, for sharing only a fragment: an edit, of their social self. For all intents and purposes the fragment shared, even if non-manipulated or digitally-altered, and conforming to their 'real' presentation, may still not align or exhibit congruence with the actor's *whole self*, but rather represent an emulative motif that the actor judges will be most acceptable and positively judged by others as the virtual collective. If a display is judged positively, this may cause dissonance for the actor, clashing when compared with their *whole* offline and non-virtual sense of self. Conversely, even if such presentations *are* genuine, these still represent a spectral shadow; a condensed, minute fragment of self-presentation, linked to a tenuous and temporal virtual validation. Before long the social actor must again share another fragment and endure the same risk-intensive process of judgement: again, of a fragment that may be minimally reflective of their complete self, or as discussed earlier, an idealised presentation. Even if this fragment is a genuine reflection of an actor's sense of self, actors may experience frustration from the knowledge that they are constrained to a fragmented portrayal, representing a reductive *sliced* 'taster' of the human condition. Similarly, if an idealised virtual fragment is judged favourably, actors may strive to emulate this presentation in their 'real' lives,

bringing their 'real' appearing into congruence with their virtual 'avatar'. This may represent a challenging and high-pressure practice dependent on the distance and dichotomy between the virtually presented and the actual reality.

Conceptualising this process in macro-level terms, we may ask the question: following collective uptake in this virtual communication trend, can social actors ever be whole? - given the normalised social importance placed on the sharing and judgement of fractured spectres of social identity in the realm of the virtual and the tendency to manipulate these sharings towards self and group perceptions of a perceived virtual ideal.

Before concluding this point, it must be acknowledged that much research focusses on the negative influence of digital manipulations as affecting women (Bue, 2020; Seekis & Kennedy, 2023). However, men are highlighted as affected also (Fatt et al., 2019). The presence of many studies focussing on women and specific effects is difficult to triangulate to a specific causal factor. While it may be suggested that increased study of women and linked social media affects may be representative of trends vis-à-vis specific engagements or usage compared to men (as some research suggests: Krasnova et al., 2017), wider extrapolations from single studies actively risk gender-generalisations, and ignore vast differences within-and-between female-identifying demographic groups, post-constructivist identities and across different intersectional femininities. A further consideration is that men may be comparably negatively affected, however, under-reporting (or under-study) may be representative of social trends (or research trends), and also reflective of cultural norm execution linked to co-productions of hegemonic masculinity in western society. To clarify, men may be affected, but unlikely or unwilling to discuss negative effects relating to self-presentation, or psychological stressors due to historical conditioning regarding outdated patriarchal trends labelling discussing these social disruptions as points of weakness inverse to hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 2020). However, applying intersectional conceptions to men's multiple and overlapping notions of masculinities, differences within male-identifying groups are likely too numerous to accurately and authentically pinpoint singular reasoning, without risking generalisation or stereotyping that reduces male-identifying individuals to a single gender category.

Anxiety and exposure to 'disaster news'

Expanding on the above threads of thought, anxiety influences of the virtual transcend beyond direct communicative interaction and engagement. While social actors are often caught in a cyclic perpetuation of virtual-validation-seeking, concurrently, socially-focussed technologies also expose individuals to global risks and catastrophes continuously as a hallmark and unintended consequence of technological global connectivity. For example, akin to Beck's

work, Ian Wilkinson's scholarship *Anxiety in a risk society* draws linkages between risk-based sensemaking and the primary risk-focussed outputs of western media as maintaining a state of urgency crisis; a perpetual and unrelenting fascination with the promotion of threat and insecurity motifs (Wilkinson, 2022). Linkages between technological permanence as encouraging risk-focussed thinking is perhaps best exampled via the 'always on' newsfeeds and second-by-second global updates shared via smartphones, apps, software and almost all interactive technology. This phenomenon runs parallel to—and is connected with—the aforementioned anxieties surrounding fragmented identity sharing on social media.

Evidencing this, Dong and Zheng (2020) explore the impact of headline 'netnews' topics upon the stress levels of 1026 individuals in China in time of Covid-19 outbreak. Scholars highlight "endless reports from news media" (p. 1) can lead to both physical and mental disorders, including "anxiety disorders [and] depression disorders" (p. 1). A similar study by Zhao and Zhou (2020) explored linkages between "Disaster stressor[s]" (p. 1), mental health and social media use in time of Covid-19. Scholars found higher levels of social media use correlated with worse mental health. Relatedly, a higher degree of exposure and interaction with "disaster news" (p. 1) resulted in greater depression for participants. The authors concluded disaster stressors amplify the negative effects of social media use on depression. Perspectives shared from research conducted in other locales reveal similar findings (Fuki and Yoshida, 2015; Kelly and Ahmad, 2014; Madell, 2006; Murdock, 2010; Shabahang et al., 2021).

Undoubtedly, in *immediate modernity* social actors are increasingly and inescapably connected to an awareness of wider social problems located beyond their present sphere of existence. Considering the social symbolic motifs within 'disaster' media, many depicters of disasters, accidents, risks and societal problems focus less on how to solve such issues, and instead on amplification of the most shocking and disturbing components of such occurrences, in efforts to 'grab' the attention of social actors towards engaging further with virtual media stories; this perspective dovetailing with notions of anomie identified by Crombez (2021) and the frenetic standstill exemplified in Rosa (2010, 2013). Disaster-news normalises media to a forecast of how we have failed as a society, positioning a cautionary tale of what can go wrong, without offering any immediate solutions. This paradigm is actively inverse and antagonistic to Beck's position of reflexive *risk society* (Beck, 2002, 2009, 2014), yet highlights the unintended consequences of global connectivity. Parallel to this, the virtual presentation of 'disaster stressors' also operates as a delocalising lens. Akin to the manner by which individual identity and the symbolic self is reduced to fragmented 'bytes'; snapshots of a complete being by social media, the virtual presentation of disaster presented via the app,

tablet and smartphone medium, can unintendedly mitigate and gamify 'disaster' as a dislocation of the 'real'; this paradigm exemplifying the linked—digitalising—effects suggested of *Technocapitalism* by Suarez-Villa, (2012) and notions of technology-led cultural deteriorations and corrupted sensemaking exemplified by Fisher (1999, 2017, 2018 2022).

In *immediate modernity* social actors exist perpetually in proximity to disaster and associated anxieties as translated via the medium of technology, yet are concurrently and paradoxically distanced from the functional 'reality' of such disasters via the virtual. Such paradoxical framing constructs a dissonant state for actors. While actors may become preoccupied; hyper-aware of risk and risk-awareness, this occurs in a manner attaching this obsession to a recombined, filtered concept of danger and disaster; a construct appearing far off, slightly out of focus and one which, in the case of the smartphone, can be silenced by swiping news away rapidly. Although danger, disaster and risk are ever-present, their permanence is conflated. The lens of the virtual serves as the primary mechanism for the dislocation and separation of two primary narratives that Beck suggests together are key to developing risk-focussed thinking in society. While the virtual lens exemplifies how society is failing, the social actor is distanced and absolved from any consideration of how they may interact and react to this motif. Firstly, the spectacle of 'what have we done' is prioritised, operating as a social anchor to risk-awareness, yet this is combined with a second, distanced motif of 'there is nothing you can do about this' perpetrated by the distancing construct of the virtual disaster news medium. Despite social actors holding an ostensive control over their consumption of such media (i.e. the dismissive swipe), this is a token, illusionary construct of control. As with social actors sharing fragmental snapshots of their lives on social media as a mode to affirm and interact with others via virtual judgements, such interactive news parading is both addicting, normalised and ever-present. The result is for the actor to continue consuming such media, and to continue to become anxious about their manufactured and near-inescapable inertia intensified by this interaction.

Anxieties from technological failures, corruptions and possible future accelerations

An important and linked topic in the contemporary technology arena is the anxieties that social actors face when established technologies fail, resulting in the immediate truncation of attached communications, motifs, symbolic effects and ways of interacting and experiencing.

Social actors also face anxieties when technologies are 'corrupted' – either via the unintended consequences of technological accelerations, or when technologies are repurposed; accelerating to be used for applications beyond their

initial development scope. For example, research demonstrates actors experience anxiety when smartphone technology is non-functional or unavailable (Cheever et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2017; Tams et al., 2018; Van Den Elinden et al., 2017) with some actors experiencing anxieties when only the suggestion of technology unavailability is presented. Studies position distresses as linked to multiple social perceptions and experiential factors, such as feelings of a lack of connectivity and communication with others, and fear of missing out on social and global updates and events.

Within the theme of corrupted technologies, a more immediate and emerging body of scholarship deals with human dissonance, distrust and unrest surrounding increasing rapid technological advances. For example, the emergence of AI, Deepfake technologies and virtual simulations of realistic human emotions and interactions. Research suggests many social actors experience anxiety or 'unease' surrounding AI technologies and their uses (Cover, 2022; Rajaobelina et al., 2021). Primary concerns can be conceptualised as belonging to two arenas. Firstly, concerns arising from increasing 'unease' surrounding human interactions with virtual constructs; and secondly, concerns over the unintended implications continued technological accelerations may have over human actors, moving forward in time.

To address the first of these points: Fisher's work on the 'unease' surrounding 'flatline constructs' is relevant (Fisher, 1999; 2017). Fisher borrows the notion of 'the flatline' from William Gibson's cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer*. In *Neuromancer*, the character Dixie is introduced to example 'the flatline'. Dixie represents an AI construct – a copied consciousness of a human, who is now deceased. Dixie exists only as ROM (read-only-memory) in the virtual and is no longer 'alive'. However, the protagonist's interactions with Dixie give rise to a specific form of unease; an elusive *creepiness* experienced arising from Dixie's mimicry of human emotions, presentations, and mannerisms that exist dichotomous with the protagonist's knowledge that Dixie is deceased; Dixie representing now only an emulation of human consciousness. Comparable motifs are evident outside fiction, in *immediate modernity* between human interactions with AI constructs, the use of these ever-increasing—*accelerating*— in the present moment. Fisher grows these themes to explore the dichotomy of dead/undead, using the motifs of technological advances to reframe notions of 'alive and dead' and question whether these symbolic descriptors can be used accurately in modernity, given the blurring of the dead/undead divide in the wake of AI advances (Fisher, 1999, 2014, 2017).

In some emerging literatures, unease experienced when interacting with AI constructs is primarily resultant of actors' inability to immediately differentiate the AI construct from human. Further, and as Fisher alludes to 'unease' is also at

times experienced when actors perceive something 'slightly off' about the human mimicry elements of AI technology, perhaps, the notions that AI constructs are 'overly emulating' specific components of human interaction in ways real human-users perceive as unnatural, while concurrently under-emulating other human traits, vocal mannerisms and behaviours. Such 'unease' markers allow AI technologies to 'pass' for human, but at the cost of high levels of 'unease' and 'uncanny' notions experienced by the human actor interacting with the AI construct.

To interrogate the second point regarding implications of continued technological accelerations, anxieties that run concurrent to the above notions of unease can be identified as concerns linked to AI constructs threatening—or eroding—individual human identity, individuality and uniqueness. Additionally, concerns over the intelligence that AI constructs may evolve to represent, can underpin a source of anxiety for some social actors. Such thinking can be encapsulated as a sense of ambiguity regarding the technical future of society. Namely, whether a technological singularity event[2] represents a future reality, and whether this hypothetical event will result in a utopian or dystopian outcome for humanity. These points occur in parallel to wider social concerns regarding the future role of AI in society, for example, whether humans will be capable to telling apart AI 'virtual help' applications from genuine human actors. Some emerging evidence suggests this situation is beginning to occur online. Similarly, the term 'automation anxiety' has begun to be used to describe human anxiety surrounding the possibility of role, purpose or employment being replaced by computer-based technologies (Baek et al., 2022).

Summary

The above sections bring forward new considerations additional to existing literatures linking capitalism-technology-anxiety. Human actors in *immediate modernity* exist in a technological bubble. Social currency has shifted to prioritise changed presentations of self, located in the virtual. While communication technologies are positive in reducing practical distance and bringing actors together, advances come with the caveat of reconfiguring the value of human interaction and presentation to represent a fragmented construct. This can reduce actors to a snapshot of their complete self and normalise symbolic external distancing while simultaneously driving internal self-doubt, dissonance and continuous self-reflectional and validation-seeking, this mediated by presentation of 'corrupted' digitally-altered depictions of the self. Concurrently, social actors are ever-more exposed to the failings of wider society in *immediate modernity*: normalising negative components of the human condition via frequent

disaster-media. Adjacent to this, as technological accelerations continue, actors are increasingly forced to consider the 'big question' of human consciousness and re-evaluate the uniqueness of the human condition. Actors may develop fragmented and contradictory sensemaking regarding the possible technological future of society while contending with existing global risks, on a scale of uncertainty never previously experienced.

Capitalist realism and technology

Mark Fisher's work on capitalist realism presents a salient collection of ideas that can be reconfigured using the above perspectives to further interrogate and make sense of technological-mediated anxiety in *immediate modernity*.

Fisher employs the term 'capitalist realism' to refer to the notion that the capitalist principles underpinning the architecture of western economy, politics, personal sensemaking and social interactions are ever-present, impermeable, and largely appear in configurations that propagate that there is no rational or viable alternative to capitalism's formal structuring (Fisher, 2022). At times, Fisher's work draws parallels with Gramsci's notions of cultural hegemony; hegemony representing an unquestionable and subversive societal ordering structure propagating a constrained guise of a normalised reality to social actors (Gramsci, 2011). However, Fisher differs from Gramsci's macro-hegemonic constraints by adopting a flexible, and shifting macro-micro lens on social reality, at times, zooming out to discuss the capitalist structuring of politics, social policies and neoliberalist principles, only to then relocate perspectives more narrowly, to link these high-level ranging constructs to draw-out influences over mental health, workplace interactions and norms, and a range of micro-level social constructs (Fisher, 2022).

Core to Fisher's concepts is the acknowledgment that capitalism does not necessarily represent the most desirable, or even the most positive, structuring construct for modern society. However, concurrent to this, Fisher posits that the evolution (including technological evolution) of the society system and its attached norms, rules and laws centre capitalist principles in the fabric of their frameworks to the extent that capitalism has become the only rational structuring principle compatible with contemporary enactments of human nature. In contrast to Gramsci's subversive notions of political and social hegemony, Fisher positions capitalist realism as a *hypervisible* construct (i.e. highly visible and recognisable), permeating every interaction in society. The overt success and subscription to capitalism principles in majority forms of social interactions are resultant of the promotion—the growing acknowledgment and complicacy to the idea—that modern human desires are *only* compatible with capitalism. Alternative social

structuring principles that align against the personal accumulation of capital are perceived fundamentally incompatible with human nature. Thus, the ability of such systems to rise to governing structures for social interactions, transactions and ordering is made impossible by this manufactured hegemony quelling dissonance (Fisher, 2022; Shonkwiler and La Berge, 2014).

A key example of this is Fisher's framing of the bank bailouts during the financial crisis of 2007-2008. Fisher argues the bailouts occurred principally due to the notion that allowing the banking system to collapse was an unimaginable political and social scenario. Because of the interconnected practical and symbolic value of banks to the capitalist system, and despite the serious financial losses within the banking systems, allowing these ordering constructs to fail was never considered a viable option for society. While an alternative to the imagined capitalist financial growth of the banking sector may have been presented via a public acknowledgment of unsustainability, this was eschewed in favour of a rapid propping up of these constructs. Fisher argues the consequence of such upholding actions is the solidification, legitimisation and amplification of capitalist realism, co-occurring with normalised devaluing of workers and an erosion of any remaining power of the majority labour-force as society moves to a new tier of amplified capitalist reality (Fisher, 2022).

Theorising from this perspective is useful when recontextualised in the context of anxieties, particularly with regards to anxiety and sociotechnical accelerations. Adopting a Gramscian perspective on Fisher's thinking: the example of the banking bailouts evidence less a *hypervisible* framing of capitalist realism in action, as it does more a subversive execution of the further interlaying of capitalist principles within social transactions. Notably, while the 'spectacle' displayed in the 2007-2008 financial crisis was the supposed peril of the capitalist banking system, similar capitalist-led structures underpinning everyday interactions and operating as more *immediate* micro-social structuring constructs were unaffected, and in fact were centred in importance: enjoying capital growth at an otherwise defined point of financial collapse. For example, the first iPhone was released in the mid-2007, becoming widely available in 2008 at a cost of $599 (equivalent of $780 in 2021). The iPhone sold over eleven million units in 2008. This was despite the product launch occurring at a peak time of global financial uncertainty. Interestingly, that year, sales of Apple products were highlighted as experiencing growth sales of nine percent, Apple experiencing a single-quarter revenue record in the last three months of 2008. Similarly, quarter four 2008 Apple iPhone sales statistics record iPhone sale revenue at $806 million (Apple, 2022).

(Re)interlinking technology and capitalism: some constructs, like banking institutions, appear to be immune from capitalist meltdown. While distinctly different from banking institutions, some different technologies appear to share

this immunity, at times even paradoxically profiting at times of global uncertainty that could (or should) threaten the pervasiveness and apparent hegemony of capitalist structuring. This is likely due to two interlinked perspectives: Firstly; and like the banking bailouts, the hegemony of capitalism propagates the notion that the only way out of capitalism is to 'spend our way out'. This is visible in numerous media examples encouraging motifs of heightened transactual commerce at times of great financial difficulty, which it has been argued generates 'necessary' public economic confidence (Akyuz, 2008; Schanzenbach et al., 2016; Singh & LaBrosse, 2011). Secondly; technological capitalism is especially successful because technological systems inherently propagate capitalist ideals, principles and transactions, as a naturalised and hidden product of their function as facilitators of social interactions. While this thinking is approached in other works positioning capitalism as a visible construct, this scholarship contends that propagations occur both overtly *and* subversively. Purchasing a technology item itself represents an overt process of capitalistic symbolism, a fulfilment of a commercial desire, which translates a largely invisible financial transaction—the purchase—to the visible act of owning and operating the object of technological commerce. The financial capital transfer to purchase the item is largely obscured, for example occurring as a 'closed' commercial mutuality between a purchaser and the purchasing institution. However, when the social actor utilises the purchased technology in a public space, demonstrating to others visibly their interactions with the technology object, they become a receiver of a translated social capital and a magnet for cultural capital, through societal recognition of the symbolic value of owning said technology.

Adjacent to the above, technologies also propagate capitalism subversively. Technologies *simplify* and make possible the processes of 'knock-on' capitalism-based interactions as an *associated* function of their principal purpose. However, at times this is framed as a secondary, unintended function. For example, perhaps one of the greatest technological inventions in *immediate modernity* represents Apple's App store. While the Apple iPhone was sold (and named) primarily as a mobile telephone, at launch, the product connected users to commercial music, gaming and lifestyle stores where users were encouraged via adverts and other means to purchase virtual content, and physical products. Similarly, in the UK the Amazon shopping app was launched for the iPhone during the 2008 holiday season (BizJournal, 2009), again, co-occurring at the peak of the global financial crash. Such virtual shopping constructs: undoubtedly highly successful, demonstrate the technological product of, for example, an iPhone as having significant capitalist transfer capital. This allows an object sold ostensibly as a communication device to immediately traverse this label, instead, becoming a multi-tool capable of opening the user to a world of capitalist commercial

pleasures, available at their fingertips, any place, any time. While the iPhone is recurrently lauded as a marvel of technological innovation, achieving such an accolade cannot be ascribed to simply its communication functionality, its basic communicative functions are the same as many other devices. This label instead refers to the interconnections the device forms for the user in terms of ease at which operators can immediately engage in commerce, with only a few clicks and gestures. Likely due to the iPhone operating as an interconnecting conduit—a technological bridge—between human capitalist desire and the functional process of attaining capitalist engagements, the object is viewed as near-indispensable in present day.

The salience of this argument has only amplified in *immediate modernity*, where communications practices have traversed beyond the—now considered simple—voice and text-based principles of the 1990s. The advent of social media and the prevalence at which social media permeates interactions, social perceptions, and shapes global norms and values surrounding behaviours, social capital and numerous other factors is significant. Modern social media applications are now almost exclusively developed to be used on mobile devices. Such occurrence further entrenches mobile devices as indispensable objects in society, as well as portable status symbols. As such, capitalist ideals are inherently interlinked with technologies that promote capitalism *and* many of the functions actors perform in *immediate modernity* as a dialectical product of 'natural' social interactions mediated by technology. However, and despite this shift, inseparable entrenchments between the above motifs also serve to attach the anxieties deconstructed earlier in this work: fragmented sensemaking regarding social media and the self, constant exposure to disaster news and its commodification. Attachments make anxieties largely inescapable; positioned as a natural product of 'normal' indispensable technological interactions. While communications technologies may be essential, desired, and their absence may be propagated as incompatible with 'normal' modern living, they undeniably connect human users to systems of interaction and social sensemaking in anxious ways, that subversively propagate such interactions—and arising negative feelings—as routine.

Interlinking with the earlier motif surrounding anxieties from technological withdrawal and absence, the collection of these normalising factors surrounding technology-anxieties further solidifies societal notions that to be without technology is, itself, an immediate source of, and reason for anxiety. As such, communication technologies in *immediate modernity* operate as a catch-33: the objects themselves are highly desired and generate social capital, but their presence functionally constructs anxiety via several subversive pathways, yet their absence manufactures anxiety as a product of the absence of the immediate anxiety source.

The rational result of this catch-33 is for the social actor to maintain and exist in a constant state of manufactured technology-mediated anxiety.

Discussion: *technology-capitalism* and theorising *The Beau Idéal Disconnect*

Immediate modernity is structured by a realist, ever-present and pervasive form of normalised capitalism (Crombez, 2021; Fisher, 2017, 2018, 2022; Suarez-Villa, 2012). While historically, societal structures are prone to reconfiguration per shifting social norms, disruptions and changes in the fabric of collective social sensemaking, capitalist structuring of social interactions is now a constant. As Fisher (2022) argues, capitalism represents the primary embedded ordering structure for modern life, it is not allowed to fail. Thus, capitalism could be considered the primary subscribed cultural hegemony of *immediate modernity*.

Interestingly, Crombez (2021) explores the concept of anomie, as a product of capitalist accelerations, employing this descriptor of uprooting and disintegration of structural values in late modernity and linking this to notions of social distancing, othering and fragmented cohesions, intertwined with the capitalist ideal that late modernity exudes euphoric tendencies. However, while Crombez discusses anxiety and positions a simmering, collective dissonance, this does not manifest—or accelerate—into a full anxious disconnect. Likewise, positions are present in Suarez-Villa (2012, 2013) and Rosa (2010, 2013), both exploring in their own theorising the constructs of *Technocapitalism* (Suarez-Villa) and *Social Accelerationism* (Rosa), and both contending with the structural changes that facilitate heightened interconnections between social actors, yet paradoxically, restrict these connects to form and replicate structures based on material wealth and production (Suarez-Villa, 2013). As Rosa puts it, these connections lead, ultimately to a form of *inertic* "frenetic standstill" (Rosa, 2013, p. 71) with humans struggling to comprehend or exist within a fractural stasis of accelerating change.

Using Fisher's notions of capitalist realism, combined with existing scholarships, the aforementioned developed perspective of *immediate modernity*, and the novel theorising interwoven within the previous three sections: in *immediate modernity*, technology and capitalism can be conceived as inexorably interlinked. Technological accelerations largely benefit from the same invisible protections applied to functional capitalist structures that are responsible for shaping and maintaining capitalist hegemony as normality (Fisher, 2022). This is because these structures have a symbiotic and (at times) dialectical relationship (Rosa, 2013; Suarez-Villa, 2013). Relations are particularly visible when considering accelerations in mobile technologies and the social dividend

accessible by owning and using these technologies, and how this is normalised as a naturalised component of contemporary social life. Undoubtedly, such technologies are a benefit to communications, social existence, interactions and everyday living. Benefits come from facilitating and streamlining many of the core capitalist principles governing society: in particular, commerce, and the transfer of financial capital to social capital, and as such, technologies make existence within the bubble of capitalist-structured reality simpler and easier. However, as Suarez-Villa (2012) conceptualises, this linkage is restrictive, the above mobile technology example exemplifying reproductions of social conveniences are resplendent only of interests that further duplications of capitalist structuring, rather than operate—in any way—as heterodoxic to this. Returning to Fisher's example of the banking bailouts, the failure of the banking system is perhaps an ultimate heterodox to capitalism, but despite optimal social conditions for collapse, this nexus endpoint was subverted towards a plan of rescue, again, because such structures actively uphold, maintain and reproduce capitalist hegemony, and thus uphold society as it is understood to function itself.

The impermeable strengthening of the link between **technology** and **capitalism** in *immediate modernity*, the intrinsic protections afforded to technology linked to normalised capitalist agenda, and the pervasiveness of technological interactions as a necessity to interact with modern life may be conceptualised as a solid intersect of these two social structuring objects. Linked **technology-capitalism (T-C)**, while both positive and negative, is portrayed almost universally as a natural, rational, and positive interconnection resplendent of the *beau idéal* of contemporary living. However, and concurrent to the above functional considerations, some of these interconnections between technology and different forms of capital are undeniably negative, a point explored with varying intensities and perspectives in existing literatures (Crombez, 2021; Fisher, 2014, 2017, 2022; Rosa, 2013; Suarez-Villa, 2012).

Synthesising a novel turn on this, and progressing the anomie (Crombez, 2021), restrictive (Suarez-Villa, 2012) and frenetic standstill (Rosa, 2013) perspectives of existing scholarship: by (re)applying Beck's (2002, 2009) theorising regarding *unintended risk* as a framing lens these negative occurrences, resulting in anxieties, are the product of technological accelerations linked to capitalism, yet are likely unintended and unforeseen consequences arising from T-C's impact upon society and social functioning. For example, the indispensable nature of mobile devices can be viewed as a significant facilitator for propagating commerce, technology allowing for purchases to occur near-instantly anywhere at any time, and in the current capitalist structuring of society social actors likely derive pleasure from this convenience. Over time this paradigm has evolved to interconnect technology with commerce, and associated societal functions to the point that technology

has become near-indispensable. However, the pervasiveness of this capitalist structuring principle has also been readily applied to other social constructs arising in *immediate modernity* that now emulate the 'essential' and 'always on' nature of T-C. While social actors are increasing tethered to technologies to fulfil capitalist desires, and essentially, to functionally exist in modernity, it is through this connection that social actors are also—unintendedly and inseparably—tethered to debilitating technological-mediated anxieties. Namely, self-presentation applications we now recognise as social media platforms are used habitually and routinely, linking users inexorably to these as a function, albeit an unintended one, of T-C. Similarly, actors are now inescapably linked to disaster news outputs, interactions and alerts; these now existing as *hyperreal* (i.e. luminous, amplified and cinematic) permanent constructs operating as inseparable from and often as a central part of, T-C interactions.

Considering the above theorising, *immediate modernity*'s anxiety pandemic may be understood as linked to the rise of T-C. Principally, this can be explored as three interconnected points of occurrence that can be encompassed by the new theory of *the beau idéal disconnect*.

Firstly, and as demonstrated in the above discussed works, technology and capitalism are inexorably interlinked in *immediate modernity*. If capitalism is inescapable and represents a primary macro-structuring principle in society, then anxieties arising from rapid sociotechnical accelerations are also inescapable. While these occur at the micro-social level, their permanence is constructed from and intertwined with the principal fabric upholding capitalist hegemony-as-normality; entrenched into society. However, following Gramsci's notions of cultural hegemony, this interconnection goes unnoticed or is simply accepted as normal by most social actors. This is actively inverse to the position adopted in some existing works, within which structures are eluded to or presented as *hypervisible* (Crombez, 2021; Fisher, 2022; Suarez-Villa, 2012, 2013). Opposite to this, I content that attaching Gramscian notions of cultural hegemony to T-C provides viewing of this nexus from an alternative angle; the inescapable paradox of T-C made possible in large part due to the product of its invisible, accepted and normalised nature. Thus, rather than actors operating in active hegemonic support of capitalist structuring principles (which would require total visibility), actors operate routinely in complicit support, interacting with capitalistic social norms as these govern the recognised way social normality is functionally structured. This structuring is evident and most revealed and spotlighted when considering and reinterpreting Fisher's notions: citing any heterodoxic—counter-hegemonic—deviance from capitalist ordering as unthinkable (Fisher, 2022). Thus, any attempt at heterodoxic, counter-hegemonic practices 'spotlight' the perpetrator of deviance as *othered*; existing adjunctive to the mainstream through an active rejection of

capitalist structuring and engagement, whereby they would otherwise be *complicit* (following Gramscian reasoning) in accepting and existing within these structures. Hegemony is maintained through the upholding of capitalist structuring as a rational—necessary—ordering construct, the *only* reality compatible with the human condition and the social and commercial needs of present reality (Fisher, 2022), revealed here to be *immediate modernity*. This structuring is sold to actors as the *beau idéal* of *immediate modernity*. Social actors engage in commerce-of-convenience as the definition of attainment, content and social existence. However, while actors receive short-term dividends in the form of social transactional capital and acceptance, their thirst is left unquenched, and they strive to chase the notion of capitalist hegemony via further—calculated—commercial pursuits. Thus, capitalist hegemony is propagated via collective complicit consent, yet occurs in a way that intrinsically chains social actors to both positive and negative outcomes as a product of de facto engagement, acceptance and non-resistance.

Secondly and importantly, a novel disconnect occurs when social actors recognise that the *beau idéal* of T-C they routinely negotiate to engage with modern life is not universally positive, but in fact manufactures negative, inescapable anxieties as a function of the construct's existence. This shatters the concept of T-C as a *beau idéal*, resulting in a disconnect from the belief that T-C represents fulfilment of a perfect and universally positive '*beau idéal*' capitalist existence. Further, while social actors may recognise the negatives of T-C, it is unclear how actors escape from or exist outside this structure, as simply there is no visible alternative. Social actors must accept the dichotomy that they exist in a society structured in a manner that functionally constructs anxiety as a product of the embedding of capitalist principles as the primary structuring concept of social existence, mainly through technologies and technology-productions. Actors may, at this point, erroneously believe that they can simply opt out of T-C, removing both the positives and the negative aspects from their lives. However, this is not possible, technological engagement is essential for functioning in *immediate modernity*. This realisation may be distressing and incomprehensible to some social actors; that they are inescapably tethered to technology and its consequences and operate entirely within a capitalist technological hegemony.

Thirdly, this disconnect is solidified when social actors consider their position as unchangeable, yet concurrently accelerating and uncontrollable. (Re)applying Beck's theorising: while actors may accept that the benefits of T-C have been over-sold, they now realise that the risks have been under-sold, as the unintended consequences of T-C become evident. Relating this to Fisher's thinking: capitalist principles after reaching a certain apex of acceleration and embedding, appear as if unchangeable and permanent. Resultantly, as per Fisher and contrasting with Crombez, 2021 and Suarez-Villa, 2012, the *only* option in

absence of reversal is to progress forward (Fisher, 2022), however, this time, into an unknown future, which (integrating perspectives of Suarez-Villa, 2012, 2013) is self-propagated, sustained, replicated and (re)constructed by T-C; replication allowed by product of collective Gramscian hegemonic consent. Relating this back to Beck's theorising (Beck, 2009) social actors now face amplified uncertainty in *immediate modernity*, moving forward without choice into a new future reality where the risks and consequences of T-C are immediately, and quite completely, unclear. The only solution presented to social actors to deal with this reality, is for capitalist society to reframe these uncertainties and anxieties as an acceptable and natural consequence of *immediate* existence and inevitable accelerating future. However, the naturalistic framing of such anxieties is precluded by the spectre: the 'poised and waiting' *haunting* shadows of technology-to-come *and* the present looming spectral phantom of *immediate modernity's contemporary culture ghost*, representing the dichotomic and paradoxical — uncanny and anxious — intersecting position of dissonant *immediate* progress and *immediate* obsolescence, as is the paradox of *immediate modernity's* cultural zeitgeist. The ultimate fear of the unknown is encapsulated by the question of how social actors will be affected by future technological accelerations (and their possible corruptions and failures) which, like present T-C structures are inescapable, ever-present and all pervasive and loom rapidly ever-closer on the horizon of the future. This theorising solidifies *the beau idéal disconnect* to represent a fundamental source of collective anxious uncertainty in *immediate modernity*.

Conclusion

This work has served to bring together, by deconstructing and reassembling, a selection of transdisciplinary scholarship to present some new perspectives on *immediate modernity*'s anxiety pandemic. Saliently, technology-capitalism connections are interrogated and examined, deconstructing encompassing linkages between technology; technological accelerations, and how these are inseparably connected to hegemonic capitalist structuring of society. Most significant of this work is the theory that social actors are inexorably linked to technology and tethered to future technological accelerations as a product of contemporary existence, in the clarified context of the introduced descriptor *immediate modernity*. This paradoxical descriptor gives structuring language to contemporary reality, with *immediate modernity* conjuring co-existing motifs of both the contemporary and obsolescence, this co-occurrence dictated by the velocity of rapidly accelerating structures and objects within the current social moment that prevent the binary attachment of either polar descriptor alone to this temporality.

While undoubtedly there are many benefits to the above technology-capitalism perspective, this tethering also undeniably anchors actors to unintended risk factors typically manifesting as anxieties. As social actors negotiate a process of *realisation* for this perspective, they face additional compound-anxieties arising from the knowledge that such structuring largely operates a double-edged, invisible and autosubscribed (i.e. automatically enrolled into) hegemony, from which escape is problematic and future risks are uncertain and incalculable. This process of conceptualisation is theorised as *the beau idéal disconnect* to provide an ordering perspective on the combined scholarship underpinning this theorising and to illustrate and provide language to describe the mixed reality of this socially pervasive structuring framework. Future critical and social theory scholarship may make use of this theorising and the concepts of *immediate modernity* and *the beau idéal disconnect* to further interrogate and theorise linkages between technology, capitalism and collectively experienced anxieties in *immediate modernity*.

This work serves to clearly contextualise and give structuring language to the present *immediate* moment of novel post-late-modernity as *immediate modernity*. Within this, this work has demonstrated the concept of *the beau idéal disconnect*: a real and actively occurring phenomenon that elucidates upon the anomie, restrictive and frenetic inertias spotlighted in existing works, yet now collated and added to; brought together into compound coalescence as a reactive principle—*a condition*—of *immediate modernity* that underpins collective anxiety in *this moment*. Additional research adopting the above twin perspectives is necessary for evolving scholarship of futurism, technology accelerations and their human effects. New investigations beginning from the perspective of *immediate modernity* and further investigating, adding to and growing knowledge of *the beau idéal disconnect* are essential to further make sense of, visualise and track accelerating, significant, manifold and evolving linkages between technology, capitalism and anxiety in the present likewise-accelerating moment of *immediate* reality. Above all else, such investigations now have the tools, as structuring theory and language, to normalise the notion of anxiety as a collective affect with manifold interconnected socio-cultural roots, and progress towards developing likewise oriented solutions that factor the recognitions collected, developed and theorised in this scholarship.

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Endnotes

1 It is important to be clear in the wake of increasing popular media coverage generalising 'accelerationism' that this L/Acc perspective on accelerationist thinking is distinct from linkages to R/Acc: right-wing-motivated accelerationist thinking. While R/Acc seeks to intensify capitalist structuring via numerous diabolical, exclusory and abhorrent acts to bring about negative and damaging social changes, L/Acc thinking claims—inversely—to seek to dismantle or 'repurpose' foundational structures of capitalism via temporary 'disassembling' of accelerated growth. This serves to 'overload' and 'reconfigure' existing structuring principles towards a reformulated equal, egalitarian and collectively inclusive future. While some have claimed this L/Acc perspective as 'destructive' and accelerating capitalist-structured systems towards a final collapse, others have argued this description is inverse to the goals of most L/Acc scholars. For an overview of L/Acc and its contradictions see Gordon, (2021), Haynes, (2021) and Mackay & Avanessian, (2014). Additionally, and more recently, new applications of accelerationism (that disrupt the above descriptive binaries) have evolved.

2 A hypothetical event where technological growth becomes ever-more rapid and uncontrollable, giving rise to AIs with intelligence beyond that of the humans that created AI. Specifically, the rise of AI Superinteligence and Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) are cited possible as outcomes of a singularity event. Some interpretations of L/Acc theory, and also other accelerationist notions, cite this event as heralding a reformulation of capitalist society structures.

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