



The Techno-Digital Mirror and the Dispersed Identities: A Lacanian Analysis of Lisa Ko's Memory Piece

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ABSTRACT

The present research focused on the connection between techno-digital mediation, externalized memory and fragmented subjectivity in Lisa Ko's Memory Piece (2024) using the theoretical approach of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis. The research was conducted in a qualitative hermeneutic manner, in which digital archives, surveillance and algorithmic structures were examined in the way in which memory has become an externalized technological phenomenon. This study used the Lacanian concepts of the Mirror Stage, the Big Other, the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and repetition compulsion to discuss the experiences of the main characters of the novel. The results indicated that digital systems served as symbolic authorities which shaped identity, memory and emotional experience in the context of digital capitalism. The analysis also revealed an increased fragmentation of subjectivity, emotional alienation and repetitive uses of digital technology. In addition, the study revealed the way surveillance capitalism made memory, desire and human interaction into commodities of the algorithmic control and extraction. The findings indicate that Memory Piece provided a much needed literary portrayal of the psychological effects of digital capitalism and also the potential for resistance through the bodily, human relationship and collective solidarity.

1. Introduction

Human memory that was previously grounded in personal experience and bodily memory is now outsourced to technological systems which are keeping, structuring and reproducing information for the subject. The changes say it all about the twenty-first century relationship between memory, identity and subjectivity. Zuboff (2019) states that in the digital world human experience has turned into behavioural data that can be gathered, stored and sold by digital companies.

The use of digital media has created new ways to externalise memory and to form identities. Individuals now rely on technological devices, archives and other methods to preserve memories that they previously would have held in mind. Photographs, voices, feelings, relationships – even desires – are now digitally captured, continuously reproduced as part of programmed prompts, suggestions and archival protocols. It is difficult to distinguish between the true memory and the reconstructed with technology. Accordingly, memory is no longer seen as a subjective and emotional process but rather as a technologically manipulated phenomenon, which is beyond the subject

Digital mediation and a fragmented selfhood is a relevant issue in current literary research. Technology dependency, surveillance, digital alienation and the commercialization of memory are subjects of increasing exploration in contemporary fiction. Literature is an important site that can be used to critically explore the emotional and unconscious aspects of

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technological life. In this sense, the modern novel about digital culture frequently portrays people who are isolated, inauthentic, and misled by the technocentric societies in which they live.

The study will be taken from the theoretical approach of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis theory and will be utilized in *Memory Piece*. Lacanian psychoanalysis can be helpful in understanding the emergence of subjectivity, the desire/configuration of structures of the symptom, and the definitions of human subjectivity in relation to symbolic systems. The Lacanian subject is a broken and unfinished subject, that has been built, and is built through language and symbolic constructions and identification processes. His theories on the Mirror Stage, the Symbolic Order, the Big Other and the fragmented self are of great importance, providing insights into the psychological effects of digital mediation.

Lacan's Mirror Stage is an idea which is ideally suited to the study of digital identity. In the process of identifying with an outside image, the subject first experiences self-awareness, as Lacan (1977) indicates. This identification, however, is done from a false consciousness because the image, in its seeming coherence and unity, conceals its fragmentation. In the digital culture, the profile on social media is a new version of the mirror image, as is the representation of data and the curated online identity. Individuals are recognized by images generated by technology which appear logical and make sense in themselves, but also produce psychological alienation and fragmentation.

Likewise, Lacan's notion of the Big Other is a noteworthy tool to analyse digital systems' authority. The Big Other is a symbolic body of language, law and social order that constructs subjectivity and directs desire. Today, the algorithmic systems and digital archives are becoming the Big Other that shapes social behavior, regulates individual action and sets the parameters for recognition and visibility. Digital technologies also help to shape the perception of individuals and society of themselves and others. The idea of repetition is also important in the understanding of the compulsive nature of digital interaction.

First, it considers memory as an externalised digital phenomenon through a consideration of how technological systems are redefining memory and personal history. Second, it examines the fractured subjectivity and distorted vision in digital capitalism as it reveals how digital mediation affects coherent identity and true vision. These concerns are closely linked as the characters' experiences of emotional alienation and fragmentation of their selves are connected to the externalisation of memory in technological systems. This research is significant because it is an effort to connect the literary criticism of the psychoanalytical theory and digital culture studies.

The concerns of *Memory Piece* become particularly pertinent in our present society, where people are relying more and more upon digital technologies to encode, transmit, and build their identity. The book highlights the psychological impacts of relationships being mediated, human subjectivity fractured and memory being commodified in a data-driven society. This research investigates these issues by analyzing them from a Lacanian psychoanalytical perspective, in order to gain greater insight into the interplay between digital culture, memory and the fragmented modern self.

1.1. Problem Statement

The emergence of digital technologies has dramatically changed the concept of memory and subjectivity in modern society. Memory, which was once considered as an internal psychological function related to one's personal experience and emotional recollection, is now increasingly externalized in digital archives and repositories, cloud-based storage, social media, and algorithm-based systems. This shift has resulted in forms of technological dependence where people depend on other systems to maintain, structure and reproduce their personal experiences. Consequently, digital technologies have become part and parcel of shaping identity, perception, emotional life and their interconnections.

This study explores the 'externalization of memory' afforded by techno-digital components, and the subjectivity and vision impacted by digital capitalism in the novel. This study aims to explore how the unconscious can be identified by the application of Lacanian ideas in the realm of digital identity and technological alienation within the current society's context, using the concepts of the Mirror Stage, the Big Other, fragmentation and repetition.

1.2. Research Objectives

- To analyse memory as an externalised phenomenon which is digital, and what Lacanian theory reveals about the psychic consequences of the migration of memory from human minds to techno-digital devices.
- To discover fractured subjectivity and distorted vision in digital capitalism, examining how Ko's characters experience the disintegration of coherent selfhood and the perceptual and affective distortions produced by their immersion in the digital-capitalist environment.

1.3. Research Questions

- What role do techno-digital elements play in labelling memory as an externalised phenomenon in Lisa Ko's *Memory Piece*?
- What role does digital capitalism play in producing fractured subjectivity and distorted vision in the characters of *Memory Piece*?

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is important because it fills part of the emerging field of the intersection of psychoanalytical literary criticism, digital culture studies, and modern fiction. The impact of digital technologies on the social structures, communication systems and behaviour of the human species have been subjects of increasing analysis in recent years. But little academic work has yet been done on uncovering the unconscious and psychological aspects of digital mediation in literary analysis. This research uses Lacanian psychoanalytical theory to further elucidate critical debate about externalised memory, technological alienation and fragmented identity in the digital age, as evident in Lisa Ko's *Memory Piece*. This study is one of the earliest and most detailed Lacanian readings of *Memory Piece*, at the level of the text, or story. Theories of this research, on the other hand, show that Lacanian psychoanalysis remains relevant for the analysis of the technological culture of today. The Mirror Stage, the Big Other, repetition and fragmentation offers insightful frameworks for the understanding of the ways in which digital systems frame identity and emotional experience. The research reveals that digital archives, algorithmic platforms and online identities are not just technologies, but symbolic constructions that impact the unconscious processes and subjective formation. The study also has broader implications as it adds to the ongoing debate about surveillance capitalism and the commercialization of memory.

1.5. Delimitations

The study is only concerned with the analysis of the main literary text, namely *Memory Piece* (2024) by Lisa Ko. The research has a specific focus on the externalisation of memory, the disintegration of subjectivity and the distortion of vision in relation to digital capitalism. The novel has a number of social, political and cultural themes, but the present research focuses on themes directly connected to the mediation of techno-digital technologies and the Lacanian psychoanalysis. This study's theoretical approach is limited to the concepts of Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, namely the Mirror Stage, the Big Other, repetition, fragmentation and the Symbolic Order. Additional concepts proposed by digital culture theorists, like Shoshana Zuboff, Bernard Stiegler, Mark Fisher, and Jodi Dean, are also included as appropriate. Other theories, however, such as feminism, posthumanism, Marxism, affect theory, and postcolonial criticism are not dealt with extensively. Qualitative and hermeneutic approach is used in the process of textual analysis in the study. Discussions of the larger technological trends and current digital culture are present for context, the central theme of novelistic memory of the digital and subjectivity in the fragmented form is the main topic.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Subjectivity, Memory, and the Other

The psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan has been one of the most important theories used in the understanding of the human subject's fragmented structure. Taking up the subject of the unconscious, Lacan rethought it with the help of language and symbolic structures, claiming that the unconscious was "structured like a language" (Lacan, 1977). Lacan suggested that the self was fragmented and self-created, rather than perceived as coherent and unified. His theoretical perspectives on the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real were integral to the struggles of identity, desire and memory within socio-cultural systems. The Mirror Stage was one of Lacan's most important ideas in the field of psychoanalytic theory. Lacan's famous essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I" makes a claim that the baby's sense of self is the result of identification with its image in the mirror (Lacan, 1977). The mirror image looked complete and whole, but this "recognition" was essentially one based on misrecognition because the child's lived bodily experience still was disjointed and unsettled. Thus the ego has come into existence by means of illusion, and not in the process of genuine unity. This misrecognition process became particularly relevant in digital culture, where users' online identities might be actually constructed as "mirrors" to be projected and projected upon in order to gain social recognition. Others, like Fink (1995) and Ragland-Sullivan (1986), pointed to Lacan's theory of subjectivity, as proof of the never ending reliance of identity on external structures of validation. The symbolic order organized language, law, social structures and collective norms, it was this symbolic order that the Big Other referred to (Lacan, 1977). Memory was reconstructed a posteriori with the help of language, desire and symbolic interpretation, he said (Fink, 1995). Lacan proposed that repetition arises from an unfulfilled psychic need and is a subject's attempt to symbolize traumatic absences (Lacan, 1977). Repetition instead led to endless cycles of desire and deferred fulfilment, rather than to satisfaction. This psychoanalytic repetition was evident in current digital practices, including the scroll, replaying memories and compulsive interactions with digital media. In this respect, Žižek (1989) extended Lacanian theory to the field of ideology criticism, showing

how social systems manipulated fantasy and desire in the process of keeping ideological control. He claimed that people would still engage in oppressive systems even though they knew they were oppressive, as this was organised at the unconscious level through “ideological fantasies.” Such an argument gained in significance as a way of understanding digital capitalism in which the users of platforms were still emotionally involved with platforms that exploited them for data, attention, and psychological vulnerabilities. Lacanian psychoanalysis was also a focus of scholars within literary analysis. According to Felman (1982) literary texts were places where unconscious structures could be made visible via the fragmentation of the narrative, symbolic elements, and linguistic instability. In a similar fashion, MacCannell (1986) showed how the subjectivity was divided and the functioning of the ideology of fantasy was presented in literary narratives. These theoretical evolutions laid the foundations for the methodological legitimacy of using Lacanian psychoanalysis for analyzing the literary representations of digital culture and fragmented identity. Lacanian theory was also apt for considering the externalization of memory and the breakup of selfhood in the context of Lisa Ko's project *Memory Piece* (2024), which examines the fragmentation of memory and selfhood in the era of digital capitalism. Ko's characters lived in a perpetual process of negotiating between unstable identities, and between technology and memory, technology and visibility, and technology and emotional connectivity. The novel thus contained numerous traits of the psychic dynamics found within Lacanian psychoanalysis, such as alienation, repetitions, fragmentalized identity, and reliance on symbolized structures of recognition.

2.2. Digital Capitalism, Technological Mediation, and Externalised Memory

Within the field of contemporary cultural theory, the nexus of technology, capitalism and memory was a key field of study. Digital infrastructures brought about a shift from memory as an internal psychological process to an externalised technological phenomenon. Stiegler (1998) stated in *Technics and Time* that since the beginning of humanity, humans have relied on technological aids, like writing, photography, and recording systems, in order to remember things. Digital technologies were thus powerful tools to control attention, desire and social behaviour. The arguments he put forward were very resonant in the context of the issues of surveillance capitalism, algorithmic governance, and the commodification of experience. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019) by Shoshana Zuboff played a critical role in the debates on digital capitalism and data extraction. Today's corporations, according to Zuboff, had turned personal experience into behavioural data, making it possible to monetise, predict and control it. Her analysis suggests that surveillance capitalism is not just about the production of goods and services anymore but increasingly about gathering emotional, psychological and behavioral data from users. Mark Fisher (2009) further explores the psychological impacts of digital capitalism in *Capitalist Realism*. Fisher said that the dominant ideology of neoliberal capitalism created emotional exhaustion, anxiety and ideology paralysis at the level of the mass consciousness. The term “depressive hedonia” was especially relevant to the understanding of digital subjectivity in the context of Fisher. He spoke of a state in which people were searching for both stimulation and pleasure, as well as emotional emptiness and exhaustion (Fisher, 2009). Jodi Dean (2009) broadened the critiques with the notion of “communicative capitalism.” She said that digital technology facilitated political participation, emotion and social interaction became “endless rounds of circulation and repetition. Digital platforms did not lead to meaningful democratic engagement but rather to compulsive engagement without any substantial change. One of the significant components of her methodology was the Lacanian approach she applied to digital communication, where she linked it with the psychoanalytical structure of drive. Hoskins (2018) argued that the digital archive was a “radical transformation in the engagement of memory in history” that encompassed “networked memory” as a technological system that was part of the personal memory. Digital memory was not part of memory operations and did not exist in fixed infrastructures but in algorithms, commerce and surveillance which were always changing. Median memories also increasingly replaced embodied memories as Van Dijck (2007) claimed. The novel depicted the reconfiguration of memory, sociality, and selfhood under a capitalist template which was based on data extraction and surveillance.

2.3. Research Gap

A literature search was conducted, which revealed that studies had been undertaken regarding Lacanian psychoanalysis, the digital capitalism, technological mediation, and the digital subjectivity. Theories of the psychological and ideological frameworks of technologically mediated life were provided by researchers like Lacan (1977), Fink (1995), Žižek (1989), Stiegler (1998), Dean (2009), Fisher (2009), and Zuboff (2019). Similarly, Lisa Ko's scholarship piece on *Memory* worked with the themes of memory, community, urban transformation, and technological alienation. Most of the novel, however, it is in the psychoanalytical dimension of the externalization of digital memory that has been under-researched. There was no study that has thoroughly examined *Memory Piece* in a Lacanian psychoanalytical lens that takes into consideration externalised memory, broken subjectivity, and digital capitalism. The criticism so far has been one that fails to engage in a sustained discussion about the concepts of the Big Other, the Mirror Stage, repetition compulsion, and ideological fantasy as they pertain to the digital archives and algorithmic systems. In addition, there was no academic studies on the psychical implications of technologically mediated memory in today's fiction. The theorists of digital culture focused on the study of surveillance capitalism and data being extracted from users, but not much research focused on how these configurations remediated the unconscious desire, formation of identity, and emotional experience. Thus, this study is directed towards the areas of lacan's psychoanalytic theory, which could provide further insight into the work, *Memory Piece*, by Lisa Ko, in order to fill in these critical gaps. This study

focussed on how memory assimilation is externalized, on the disintegration of self and on the emotions and perceptual aberrations that result from the externalization of memory through digital technologies in the modern capitalist systems.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed qualitative research design that was based on hermeneutic textual analysis and the Lacanian psychoanalytic criticism of literature. As this research task was interpreted, constructed, symbolized and experienced in the qualitative manner, rather than measured numerically and investigated statistically, the suitable methodological approach to this research is determined as qualitative research. Qualitative research allows the researcher to investigate the meanings, concepts, and human experiences in their social and cultural context (Creswell, 2014). The present study adopted a qualitative text analysis approach using externalised memory, fragmented subjectivity and digital mediation as the key concepts in studying the psychological and symbolic contents that emerge in the novel *Memory Piece* (2024) by Lisa Ko. Hermeneutic interpretive approach was adopted in the study. Hermeneutics Definition: The theory and method of interpretation, particularly in literature or philosophy. Ricoeur (1981) suggested that hermeneutic inquiry is a process of interpretation in which the researcher is able to go back and forth between the particular parts of the text and the theme of the text. This approach was particularly well suited to the non-linear narrative, the historical organization, the temporal shifts and multiple layers of identity interpretation found in the novel, *Memory Piece*. This imaginative complexity required a way to comprehend the significance of symbols, meaning more than just a literal reading of text. To interpret the psychologic and symbolic aspect of the techno-digital mediation in the text, the hermeneutic method was also applied in the analysis. The study did not only see the novel as a representation of the society of its time but also as a literary image of unconscious structures, as a symbol system and as a fragmented subjectivity. The process of interpretation was akin to the Lacanian psychoanalytical criticism, which viewed literary text as a site where the unconscious tensions, ideological structures and symbolic conflicts would be manifested in the language and manifested in the shape of the story (Felman, 1982). • Psychoanalytical literary criticism was also incorporated in the research design in the theoretical approach of Jacques Lacan. Psychoanalysis made it its goal to analyze the role Literary texts played in the representation of unconscious wishes, fears, fantasies and identity configurations. The Lacanian psychoanalysis was particularly suitable because it provided concepts that could be used to analyse the fragmented identity, the external symbols of recognition, the symbolic alienation and the repetitive structures of behaviour in digital culture. • The concepts of Lacan with respect to the Mirror Stage, the Big Other, the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real and the repetition compulsion were the specific concepts that were studied. These concepts helped the researcher to grasp the creation of the digital archive and algorithmic systems as symbolic structures in the novel that mediate memory and identity. This approach to the research design, consequently, rendered a combination between qualitative interpretation, hermeneutic analysis and psychoanalytic theory as a method to follow the psychoanalytical effects of digital capitalism in *Memory Piece*. Furthermore, it allowed for the flexibility of the interpretation of the texts in the qualitative design and ensured theoretical consistency. The researcher used a close reading method to analyze each specific sentence, focusing on the ways in which imagery, symbolism, story, dialogue, character action, and the role of technology in the representations were used. In this manner, the analysis was set within the text, and at the same time related to the broader theoretical field of digital culture, memory and subjectivity. In addition, the methodological design recognized the ambiguity, contradiction and symbolism of the literary text in its production of meaning. The research did not engage in the attempt to set any interpretation or generalisation. Instead, it wanted to offer a novel theoretically informed means of understanding the novel which would examine how the novel, and the techno-digital systems which underpinned it, were remodelling memory and the self in the present conditions of digital capitalism.

3.2. Data Selection

Lisa Ko's novel *Memory Piece* (2024) was the main source of data for this study. The novel was chosen for its direct reflection on the issues of digital memory, technological mediation, surveillance capitalism, fragmented identity, and psychological alienation. The narrative design of the novel was very similar to research aims and research questions of the study, as were the archival documents, the digital documents, reconstructed memories and temporal gaps. Moreover, the selection of *Memory Piece* was requested, because the novel was one of the most significant literary works of the time to study the subjectivity of memory and its externalization in the digital era. The novel's main characters, Giselle, Lucia and Ellen, were explored in relation to digital systems and the ways they defined themselves, managed emotions and connected with others across a span of history from the 1990s to the speculative future of the 2030s. The novel was a source of qualitative data in the form of textual passages, dialogue, description of narratives and symbolic representations in the novel. The elements selected in the texts were based on the relevance to the research questions as follows:

- Techno-Digital elements in the work *Memory Piece* by Lisa Ko: What part did they play in marking memory as an external phenomenon?

- In the characters of Memory Piece, how did 'digital capitalism' contribute to a fractured subjective and distorted vision?

Symbols of the self in technological systems Purposive sampling was used to select data. Purposive sampling is a technique that involves the intentional selection of data of relevance to the study purpose (Patton, 2002). The researcher was unable to analyze the novel equally, but selected the portions that were appropriate for the demonstration of the phenomenon of the Lacanian concepts: the Mirror Stage, the Big Other, symbolic alienation and repetition compulsion. Close reading was used in the entire process of data analysis. Secondary sources were also used to aid the study. These included books on psychoanalysis, journal articles and theoretical texts on Lacanian psychoanalysis, digital capitalism, surveillance, technologization of subjectivity and literary criticism. Main theorists used were: Jacques Lacan, Bruce Fink, Dylan Evans, Slavoj Žižek, Shoshana Zuboff, Bernard Stiegler, Mark Fisher and Jodi Dean. Conceptual anchorage was provided by the use of these secondary sources in order to insights into the novel in different theories and cultures. All the focus was on literary interpretation in the light of psychoanalytic theory. Further, the study was limited to the book Memory Piece and attempts to make no comparison with other contemporary novels. The Harvard referencing style was used for all the text citations from the novel. To maintain accuracy and consistency in the text, page numbers were used for quotations.

3.3. Theoretical Framework

Only the Lacanian psychoanalysis theoretical approach has been used in this research. The theory used was the theorizing of Jacques Lacan because it provided full analytical tools to understand the issues of fragmented identity, symbolic alienation, constructions of memories and the unfulfilled desire in technologically mediated environment. Lacan took up Freudian psychoanalysis and translated it into his own terms, where the unconscious was organized in the modalities of a language and subjectivity arose in the form of symbols, rather than of individual consciousness (Lacan, 1977). The concept of "Mirror stage" was among the primary concepts to be employed in this study. Based on the idea of Lacan (1977), the child was able to develop their sense of self through reflected image. This image was an illusion of unity, though, as the child's lived bodily experience was still, itself, fragmented. So it is that the recognition of identity was not on a real completion of self, but on misrecognition. Mirror Stage's interpretation of the digital self and the forming of online identity was carried out in Memory Piece. Digital profiles, archives, and algorithmically-created avatars were modern mirror images in which characters sought to identify themselves. In this study, another great Lacanian term that was employed was the Big Other. The Lacanian group (Lacan, 1977) called the symbolic order that regulated language, social relations, law or systems of meaning the Big Other. It was a symbol power that was not in the person, but rather enabled him to connect with the outer world and to be recognized in it. Within Memory Piece, digital archives, surveillance systems, algorithmic networks and data infrastructures were all representations of the Big Other. Technology systems were now more and more employed to aid in remembering, structuring identity and confirming the social life. So, memory was divorced from its users and put into digital systems, beyond the person's control. The following is also a study based on Lacan's model of Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. The world of images, identification and illusion was termed "The Imaginary", the world of language, social order and cultural structures "The Symbolic" and the world of experiences that could not be symbolised and represented "The Real" (Evans, 1996). The concepts made it possible to investigate the ways in which Ko's characters dealt with technologically mediated realities. The Imaginary appeared as a selection of profiles on the web and virtual self-portraits. From the algorithmic system, the surveillance system and the technological network that formed social experience came the Symbolic. The Real was the realm of the emotional rupture, alienation, anxiety and psychological breakdown, which did not fall within the technological representation. Lacan's concept of repetition compulsion was also employed in the study. Lacan rewrote Freud's theory when he said: repetition is caused by the subject's unconscious attempt to deal with the lack that is still not resolved in him (1977). The more he repeated, the more he became entrapped in a vicious cycle of desire and dissatisfaction, rather than fulfillment. The study's focus on the singular theory of Lacanian psychoanalysis was necessary to keep the methodological clarity and analytical coherence. Other theorists (Zuboff, Fisher, Dean) offered a wider interpretation of the study, while the dominant interpretation for the study was Lacan. This theoretical consistency reinforced the methodological framework of the thesis as it allowed all textual interpretations to be based on a common psychoanalytic perspective. The framework thus allowed for a critical discussion of the externalisation of memory, and the disembodiment of selfhood, in Lisa Ko's Memory Piece.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Memory as an Externalised Phenomenon: The Digital Archive and the Lacanian Big Other

Lisa Ko's Memory Piece (2024) delves into the reconfiguration of memory from a psychological process to an externalised technological phenomenon under the control of digitised systems. The first few pages of the novel establish the connection from memory to technological systems of storage. Giselle's archival practices have emphasized the gradual evolution of the experience of emotion to digital infrastructure. Every object was a question she took her picture of it, wrote its name, created a record for it in the database, and then she felt like it was out of her body, out of her frame of mind, away from her. (Ko, 2024, p.17). The externalisation of memory was the main theme in the thesis as represented by this passage. Memory was tied to

technology that mediated, stored and shared the personal experience. This exodus, from a Lacanian point of view, was a type of symbolic alienation. According to Lacan, the subject became subject in the Symbolic order (Lacan, 1977), which is the order constituted by language and other systems of signification. Throughout the novel the reader was witness to the preservation and distortion of memory in a single stroke, with digital archives. There were lots of digital records of the characters' lives, but none that could convey the emotional reality of life. She had everything – all the photos, all the letters, all the documents – and she couldn't remember how she felt when she was there, Ko (2024, p.89) wrote. The splitting of recorded memory and emotional experiences highlighted the limitations of technological memory. Lacan's theory of the Real was especially useful to the discussion of this tension. Lacan had in mind that the Real was that which could not be made to signify, or be symbolized, or even be represented in language or symbolic systems (Evans, 1996). It was not only the memory that was transformed, but also its dependence on the technological systems that made of it “tertiary retention” (Stiegler 2010), a memory no longer in the body, but on the outside. Lucia began to experience this emotional volatility in her engagement with the archive of activist films, which she documents in her interactions with them. She replayed tapes on a computer of political and community events, trying to experience the emotion of the previous events. “She had seen it a hundred times, but she had to watch it again as if she could retrieve with repetition” (Ko 2024, p.167). In this sense, this tendency to come back to digital memory is a compulsive return, a repetition compulsion, as Lacan would say. Lacan (1977) hypothesized repetition as a symptom of psychic lack, and symbolization of traumatic absence on the part of the subject. Lucia's recurring presentation of re-purposed video imagery revealed how digital memory captured individuals in a web of desire and a lack of emotional fulfillment. This disintegration was evident in the dialogue with decades of captured Digital material which was encountered in person between Giselle. There were “versions of her that she had no more memory of, opinions that she didn't hold, desires that she couldn't remember having” (Ko, 244), the archive held everything but continuity. Ko applied the psychoanalytical approach to digital culture to the depiction of social media profiles, data archives and algorithmic creations as modern reflections. Characters were constantly confronted with copies made by technologies and memory and identity was structured in a legible story. This process was so clearly activated in Ellen's work with the memory platform. The company lumped users' digital tracks together into comprehensive user profiles, which would provide emotional coherence and self-recognition. Ko wrote: Rather, it was a product of a person's memory, patterns, preferences, movements and reactions, a coherence that was not natural, but was suggested by nature (Ko, 2024, p.341).

The digital Mirror Stage undermined psychological stability, rather than eroded it. Technological systems were to be coherent, to be a source of recognition, but they were to produce ever and ever again fragmentation, they were to produce several and competing imaginations of identity, on platforms and archives. The disjointed structure of the whole story was continued by Ko. The novel employed the use of the archived documents, recordings, reconstructed memories and temporal discontinuities, which disrupted the linear flow of the narrative. This formal division was a result of the psychological division between the characters. Throughout the novel the connection between a digital identity (and capitalism) and commodification was also increasingly visible. Profiles and emotional information started to be not just signifiers of identity, but also as resources of the economy. The system was centered on a personal history, emotional attachment and behavioral patterns in search for monetary benefit. Eventually Ellen realised that this was a form of commodification: They did not sell memory but attachment; they did not sell the object but the memory of the object (Ko, 2024, p.357).

This was a good illustration of how digital capitalism made emotions a commodity. The emotional value of memory was not the focus, but rather is functional: the aim was to add economic value and dependence on the user. The digital Mirror Stage was therefore a psychological mechanism and a structure of capitalism. The algorithmic regulation of identity was associated with surveillance, commodification, and identity. Alienation and fragmentation were enhanced through systems of recognition pursued by characters. Lastly, Ko demonstrated how selfhood was not replaced by digital selfhood, but how technology worked. Instead, digital systems intensified fragmentation and made individual identities unknowable, outside of their bodies, in archives and algorithmic representations. The repetition, desire, and techno-symbolic loop. The reiterative nature of digital engagement was also a big part of Memory Piece. Repeatedly encountering past memories, social networks, and digital documents seeking emotional satisfaction and self-recognition. However, they did not bring any satisfaction when they were repeated. The notion of repetition compulsion was pivotal in the understanding of this dynamic, developed by Lacan. Lacan said that repetition was born from the fact that desire never reaches its fulfilment. The same symbolic structures were always repeated over and over again until a sense of wholeness that was impossible to obtain was recovered (Lacan, 1977).

Digital memory was not just a mechanism for holding up things but a mechanism for controlling behaviour. Platforms were designed to repeat emotions to keep the users engaged and make them economically profitable. It was a repetitive structure that was highly indicative of Jodi Dean's thesis on communicative capitalism and the endless cycle of participation, none of which had any actual meaning or purpose (Dean, 2009). Memory Piece was an emotionally stimulating work that, in the context of the piece, caused characters to become more alienated as repetition itself became psychologically compulsive. An additional relation between repetition and emotional exhaustion was found by Ko. As digital systems consistently called for emotional involvement, characters gradually became tired, disconnected and numb. Giselle reflected: The archive was never quiet, no end to remembering (Ko, 2024, p.258). With an infinite amount of memory, emotional closure was avoided. The past was always

there, it was always there to interrupt the present moment. This condition was related by Fisher's concept of 'capitalist realism' whereby digital capitalism took over the attention and emotional sphere by 'endless stimulation and repetition' (2009). Characters were stuck in a system which turned memory into ceaseless consumption. However, there were also moments of opposition to the techno-symbolic loop, which Ko suggested. At times characters had physical experiences, 'community' experiences, and emotional experiences that did not involve technology.

4.2. Jouissance, Emotional Exhaustion, and the Psychic Cost of Digital Capitalism

Towards the end of *Memory Piece*, the theme of emotional exhaustion and psychological depletion under digital capitalism became more and more the focus. As technological systems took away characters' attention, memory and affective energy, characters felt tired, numb and detached. The concept of *jouissance*, as developed by Lacan, proved to be an invaluable means to comprehend this psychic state. *Jouissance* expressed their conception of an overly pleasurable enjoyment, one that often led to suffering, but not to satisfaction (Lacan, 1998). In capitalist society, *jouissance* was more and more intertwined with compulsive consumption and repetitive desire, with emotional dependency. Ko spoke of digital capitalism as a system that siphoned *jouissance* from its users by engaging them with emotion at every turn. Platforms fostered addictive engagement, sentimental sentiment, outrage and self-disclosure on the grounds that it created data that was valuable for the business. Now, Ellen slowly began to understand this process: "Emotion is the driving force of the system; its more they remembered, reacted, grieved, desired, the more valuable they became" (Ko, 2024, p.371). This emotionalization of life is one aspect of the overall form of surveillance capitalism described by Zuboff (2019). Digital systems no longer just tapped into labour, but more and more into psychological and affective experience. In the novel, it is shown that this extraction of the emotions had harsh psychic effects. Characters were unable to maintain an important relationship, emotional stability, and a genuine desire. Giselle reflected: "All things seemed to become levelled and every emotion was repeated until it became light (Ko, 2024, p.283). This emotional leveling up was a way of referring to Fisher's idea of depressive hedonia, that is, the capitalist systems provided compulsive stimulation but no real satisfaction (Fisher, 2009). Characters constantly sought out emotional connection, and at the same time found themselves feeling exhausted and empty. Ko also dramatized the change of loneliness into profitable dependency brought about by digital systems. People would come back to platforms repeatedly, yearning for a connection, recognition and intimacy, but their needs for such were being exacerbated by these systems. Lucia observed: These platforms offered community, but nobody was in any room but instead in their own with the same screen looking at them (Ko, 2024, p.209). This seems to show a disconnect, the alienating structure of digital capitalism. Technological systems were used to create emotional connection, but not emotional intimacy. According to Lacan, desire is a product of lack and can never be satisfied (Lacan, 1977). Digital capitalism has taken advantage of this arrangement to generate new desires all the time – desires for which there is no emotional absence. The system was based on constant dissatisfaction because if people were emotionally satisfied, the consumption and engagement would be halted. Ko explained this phenomenon with an endless stream of notifications, reminders, recommendations and memories that required emotional reactions. There was no emotional closure in the archive since it was based on the principle of the "return". Ellen reflected: All recovered memories were a further invitation to stay within the system (Ko, 2024, p.378). So the novel presented digital capitalism as a psychic architecture with an endless flow of emotions. There were still subject that are caught in cycles of desire, memory and technologic interaction. But there were also indications of possible resistance, via the embodied and interpersonal presence of community, that Ko offered up. The logic of the digital mediation was interrupted by moments of collective gatherings, physical contacts and emotional vulnerability. At the end of the novel, there was a moment of emotional clarity for Lucia when they were all gathered together. "No one recorded anything, no one uploaded, tagged or preserved it. The moment was there – it was there because they were there together" (Ko, 2024, p.411). This was one of the most significant Real-world encounters in the novel. This experience was not easily preserved or commodified because it was temporary, it was embodied and it was immediate. Lacan's Real had to do with experiences outside the symbolic category of captured and represented (Evans, 1996). *Memory Piece* is a work in which embodied presence and collective intimacy were realized as a form of the Real beyond the digital systems. The novel ends with a brief conclusion by Ko that challenged the idea of genuine human connection through experiences that could not be captured in technological archives or the capitalist circulation. Digital systems were externalizing memory and creating a division of self, but it remained possible to have emotional resistance via embodied community and interpersonal vulnerability. In *Memory Piece*, the fractured subjectivity and the distorted vision took to the screen, revealing the remediation of psychological experience under the auspices of a digital capitalism. The novel therefore – as a Lacanian psychoanalytical text – found the psychic burden of externalised memory and algorithmic identity and at the same time maintained the possibility of something more than a techno-symbolic loop.

5. Results and Conclusion

5.1. Summary of Findings

The project explored the correlation of the techno-digital mediation, the externalisation of memory, and the subjectivity fragmentation in Lisa Ko's *Memory Piece* (2024) by psychoanalyzing following Jacques Lacan's theory. The analysis was

particularly aimed at the externalization of memory as a technological phenomenon in digital capitalism and the fragmentation of the sense of self, the disorientation of perception and emotional alienation in algorithmic systems. The first research goal was to analyse memory as an externalised digital phenomenon and to study the psychic impacts of this externalisation by means of Lacanian theory. The results showed that *Memory Piece* represented digital archives, databases and surveillance systems as new symbolic forms that displaced memory from the body into digital technologies. The characters in the novel, like Giselle and Ellen, showed how people were increasingly relying on digital systems to ensure that personal experience was saved, organised and recognised (Ko, 2024). The analysis also showed that digital archives acted as external authorities and structured the construction of identity and memory in the form of algorithms (Lacan, 1977). Subjective memory was not as reliable as characters trusted technological systems, this indicates that memory is becoming more and more dependent on digital validation. The second objective of the research involved the fractured subjectivity and distorted vision in the context of digital capitalism. The results indicated that *Memory Piece* was about identity that is dislocated in various technologies, among online representations and archived representations. The study illustrated how, in digital culture, there was an increased instability of subjectivity due to the preservation of contradictory and discontinuous images of the self, as described by Lacan as the *corps morcelé* (1995). Another important finding of the analysis was that surveillance capitalism became a way of capturing emotional life into numbers, which can be monetized. Alienation occurred when characters' desire, memory, and socializing were controlled by algorithmically mediated systems for predicting behaviour and engaging emotions (Zuboff, 2019). Digital capitalism thus does not only impact the way people act outside themselves, but also the way they act in their unconscious. In addition, the results showed that distorted vision was a result of the ideological fantasy. Characters were aware of the exploitative potential of technological systems, but felt emotionally invested in them due to the promise of visibility, recognition, and belonging offered by the digital platforms. This contradiction is due to the fact that ideology does not operate via ignorance but instead is an unconscious emotional investment in systems that people already understand to be injurious (Žižek, 1989). Ko's portrayal of emotional fatigue was very much in line with Fisher's notion of "depressive hedonia" in which an individual repeatedly sought out stimulation, yet was emotionally discontent (Fisher, 2009). Despite all these situations of alienation and fragmentation, the novel also offered possibilities of resistance. The analysis showed that embodied interaction, collective solidarity, and unrecorded emotional experiences were moments of the Lacanian Real that were not subjected to the technology of the market and to the symbolic regulation (Evans, 1996). In this regard, Ko recommended that real relationships were still possible in experiences that could not be preserved and circulated digitally under capitalism.

5.2. Conclusion

According to this study, Lisa Ko's *Memory Piece* was a literary critique of digital capitalism and its psychological repercussions. The novel, using Lacanian psychoanalysis, uncovered the mechanisms by which memory was externalized, identity was broken up and unconscious desire remediated in the current digital culture. The study showed that memory in the digital age was not just a personal mental practice but a growing part of technological systems that were dominated by surveillance capitalism. Digital archives came to be symbolic authorities which mediated identity, emotional experience, and social recognition. These systems at the same time scaled down the alienation, however, by turning memory and subjectivity into measurable data structures. The study also found that digital capitalism has fundamentally redefined subjectivity by rendering it an atomised and performative subject which is subject to identification through visibility, categorisation by algorithms and technological mediation. These ideas such as the Mirror Stage, the Big Other, repetition compulsion, and the Real allowed for the revelation of psychological structures of technological mediation and surveillance capitalism. This research was important because of its role in developing new research on digital subjectivity, externalised memory, and the contemporary literary representations of technology. Finally, *Memory Piece* showed that digital systems were becoming more and more important in shaping memory and social life, but yet there were still some aspects that were not technologized.

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