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Tasting Anxieties: Food and Emotion in *Black Mirror*[*]

Smaki niepokoju: jedzenie i emocje w *Czarnym lustrze*

JOANNA ŁAPIŃSKA
Independent Scholar, Austria
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6634-1778
e-mail: joannalapinska87@gmail.com

Abstract. The article analyzes the functions of food in selected *Black Mirror* episodes as an affective body and a matrix that organizes emotions, social relations, and power structures. Its aim is to show how food in science fiction can reveal mechanisms of power and shape affective relations. The starting point is Sara Ahmed's affect theory, which describes emotions as forces circulating between bodies. The article also draws on Lauren Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism," arguing that food functions as a vehicle for unfulfilled promises. Analyzing the episodes "Fifteen Million Merits," "Nosedive," and "Be Right Back," the article shows that eating – or the lack of it – becomes a figure of social norms and emotional alienation, contributing to research on food in science fiction narratives.

Keywords: *Black Mirror*, affect, food as affective body, food in science fiction, cruel optimism

Abstrakt. Artykuł analizuje funkcje jedzenia w wybranych odcinkach serialu *Czarne lustro* jako ciała afektywnego i matrycy organizującej emocje, relacje społeczne i struktury władzy. Celem jest pokazanie, jak jedzenie w science fiction może ujawniać mechanizmy władzy i kształtować relacje afektywne. Punktem wyjścia jest teoria afektu Sary Ahmed, która opisuje emocje jako siły krążące między ciałami. Artykuł wykorzystuje także koncepcję „okrutnego optymizmu" Lauren Berlant, wskazując, że jedzenie funkcjonuje jako nośnik niespełnionych obietnic. Analiza odcinków „Piętnaście milionów",

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„Na łeb, na szyję" i „Zaraz wracam" pokazuje, że jedzenie – lub jego brak – staje się figurą społecznych norm i emocjonalnej alienacji, wpisując się w badania nad jedzeniem w narracjach science fiction.

Słowa kluczowe: *Czarne lustro*, afekt, jedzenie jako ciało afektywne, jedzenie w science fiction, okrutny optymizm

1. INTRODUCTION: SCIENCE FICTION, FOOD, AND AFFECT

Food has long been recognized as a crucial lens through which to examine cultural texts, including science fiction ones, and the interdisciplinary field of food studies has developed a rich vocabulary for exploring its roles and meanings. Food is never merely sustenance: it is a powerful cultural signifier that embodies social values, traditions, and hierarchies, and thus offers a key to understanding the dynamics of identity, race, class, and belonging (Niewiadomska-Flis, 2022). Gian-Paolo Biasin (1993) in his seminal study *The Flavors of Modernity: Food and the Novel* identifies three primary functions of food in literature: "realism," where food anchors the text in everyday material reality; "narrativity," where food drivesor structures the plot; and "figures and meanings," where food operates as a symbolic or philosophical device. Building on Biasin, Anke Klitzing (2023) proposes an expanded model that outlines five fundamental functions of food in texts: as part of the setting, as part of the narrative mechanics, as a source of figurative and philosophical meaning, as a link between author and reader, and as a transtextual reference connecting the text to other works or genres. These perspectives provide a foundation for examining the functions of food in cultural texts, including its diverse roles in science fiction.

As Laurel Forster (2004) notes in her essay "Futuristic Foodways: The Metaphorical Meaning of Food in Science Fiction Film," both food and science fiction have become central to cultural analysis in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This did not occur without reason. As cultural forms, they both reflect and refract broader societal anxieties, desires, and transformations – whether related to identity, power, consumption, or technological advancement. Both domains are capable of revealing the structures, (dis)orders, and agencies – social, national, and global – that shape our reality. What is more, both food and science fiction can illuminate "the link between the individual and the controlling powers" (Forster, 2004, p. 251) surrounding them – whether by concentrating on the body, technology, or both.

Jean P. Retzinger (2008, p. 370), writing about food in post-apocalyptic science fiction films, argues that food "places us in the world, both through its materiality and its meanings" – and, in doing so, exposes fault lines of "gender, class, ethnicity, power, and community." Food often functions in science fiction as a point of connection between the body, technology, and the external world: it enters and traverses our

bodies while also bearing the marks of technological processing – washed, packaged, preserved, genetically modified, or synthetically produced – before it reaches our plates. In many narratives, it ceases to be a source of comfort and instead becomes "the locus of fear" (Retzinger, 2008, p. 383), signalling anxiety, estrangement, and coercion. It can also reveal how far future societies may diverge from the world we know today (Watters, 2022, p. 64), as seen in selected episodes of *Black Mirror*, a British science fiction anthology series produced between 2011 and 2025.

Before turning to specific examples from *Black Mirror*, let us first recall, after Forster (2004), several key functions assigned to food in science fiction film.One of its primary functionscan be described as "worldbuilding," where food contributes to the construction of the fictional world and its distinctive milieu. Here, its role is "to ground" the audience in "familiar scenes of commensality" (Watters, 2022, p. 64), aligning with the "realism" function of food discussed by Biasin (1993) and Klitzing (2023). In this context, food becomes part of the futuristic *mise-en-scène* and the "extrapolated representation" of reality (Forster, 2004, p. 252). For example, in television shows like *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994), food contributes to the creation of a fictional universe without necessarily advancing the plot. It often appears in scenes of leisure, such as those set in the recreational zones of the starship *Enterprise* (e.g., in the cafeteria), where it helps introduce the dietary preferences of the ship's inhabitants. In such cases, food remains largely peripheral to the story's narrative structure. Rather than driving the plot forward, it functions merely as an intriguing feature of the on-screen reality that allows viewers to glimpse the favorite culinary choices or dining customs of future societies.

Another prominent function of food in science fiction film, identified by Forster (2004), centers on the theme of consumption – often framed critically, particularly in dystopian contexts. In such narratives, consumption is no longer portrayed as a simple biological necessity but rather as a cultural pathology or a symptom of societal dysfunction. Films like *Soylent Green* (dir. Richard Fleischer, 1973) and *Dune* (dir. David Lynch, 1984) foreground this shift in emphasis. *Soylent Green* presents a future where environmental degradation and overpopulation have led to a food crisis so severe that people unknowingly consume processed human remains – turning food into a chilling symbol of state control, dehumanization, and moral collapse. *Dune*, on the other hand, revolves around the obsessive pursuit of two scarce resources: "the mind-enhancing spice »melange«" (Forster, 2004, p. 252) and water, both of which structure political hierarchies and survival on the desert planet. Here, the idea of consumption is a lens through which to comment on systems of power, resource distribution, and ecological crisis.

Food can also appear in science fiction as a source of humor, particularly in comedies. In this genre, it often serves as "a buffer zone in which one can suspend disbelief"

(Forster, 2004, p. 252) in relation to the on-screen world. Scenes featuring malfunctioning futuristic kitchen gadgets or funny culinary outcomes frequently appear in such films, providing comic relief while reinforcing the strangeness of speculative futures. A classic example can be found in Woody Allen's *Sleeper* (1973), where the protagonist struggles to contain an ever-expanding blob of dough produced by an out-of-control machine. Within this comedic register, we can also place the depiction of bizarre or gross alien foods – such as gagh, the favorite dish of the Klingons in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (1987–1994), presented as a pile of wiggling worms, usually served in a bowl. These playful representations of food not only entertain but also underscore the imaginative elasticity of science fiction's engagement with everyday practices like eating.

Finally, as Forster (2004, p. 253) argues, food in science fiction narratives sometimes carries metaphorical meaning, in line with the "figures and meanings" function described by Biasin (1993) and Klitzing (2021). It often reflects both anxieties and critiques of contemporary society. It may also symbolize a longing for a lost, more authentic, "better" past, concerns about artificial or overly processed food, or serve as an indicator of social inequality. In dystopian settings, these fears manifest as a deficiency of "real," "good," healthy food, and an overwhelming presence of "bad," "unnatural," processed, and potentially harmful products. Moreover, food is used in science fiction film to expose social hierarchies – for instance, by portraying a world in which the wealthy have access to high-quality, fresh food, while the poor are left with synthetic or nutritionally poor alternatives.

In approaching food in *Black Mirror*, we propose in this article to frame it not only as a symbolic or narrative device but also as an *affective body* – a material presence charged with the capacity to affect and be affected. Drawing on the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza, we understand *the body* not as a fixed entity, but as a dynamic assemblage of forces, intensities, and capacities for interaction. As Spinoza claims, bodies are distinguished by "motion and rest, speed and slowness" rather than by their substance (Bennett, 1984, p. 109). A body is defined not by what it is, but by what it can do. In this framework, food itself can be treated as a non-human body that enters into affective relations with other bodies. This relationality is not merely metaphorical: food interacts with the human body on a visceral and sensory level. In this sense, we explore food in selected *Black Mirror* episodes as an affective force – not merely a narrative motif or cultural metaphor, but a material presence that shapes the affective dynamics between characters and their environments.

To further develop this perspective, we also turn to Sara Ahmed's theory of the cultural politics of emotion. Her idea states that emotions and affects are not purely private or internal – instead, they move between people and objects, shaping how we relate to each other (Ahmed, 2014). Affects can "stick" to certain objects and "slide over others," creating patterns of closeness and distance (Ahmed, 2014, p. 8).

Building on this, we see food-related elements in *Black Mirror* as a medium through which emotions circulate. Food carries emotional weight and places characters within specific social and technological settings. In this way, it becomes part of a wider network of affects that shapes relationships and hierarchies in these fictional worlds.

And finally: the affective body of food can be an object of *cruel attachment* in the science fiction narratives of *Black Mirror*. In our view, Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism offers a framework for understanding food in science fiction as an object of unfulfilled affective investment. Cruel optimism is defined as "the condition of maintaining an attachment to a significantly problematic object," or "a relation of attachment to compromised conditions of possibility whose realization is discovered either to be *im*possible, sheer fantasy, or *too* possible, and toxic" (Berlant, 2011, p. 24, emphasis in the original). This problematic object of desire is something that people hope will improve their lives, but that ultimately prevents this improvement. In *Black Mirror*, food often promises comfort, authenticity, or connection, but ends up reinforcing isolation and despair. The emotional hopes attached to food turn out to be fragile and unfulfilled.

2. PROPER APPLE, CUPPLIANCE DRINK, AND FAKE FODDER ("FIFTEEN MILLION MERITS")

Although food has not received much scholarly attention in analyses of *Black Mirror* – including the episode "Fifteen Million Merits" from the season 1 of the series – it is a significant, if understated, element in the construction of the series' dystopian worlds. Most studies of this particular episode focus on broader themes such as gamified labor (Johnson, 2019; Kim, 2021), media spectacle (Pagnoni Berns, 2018), the technological instrumentalization of (post)human bodies (Hüsing, 2020), and critiques of capitalism and commodification (Conway, 2019; Draney, 2019; McKenna, 2019; Byron and Brake, 2020). The saturation of screens and mediated affect in the context of cyber-subjectivity is another recurring motif (Radovanović, 2018). Others examine the absorption of resistance into spectacle (Conley and Burroughs, 2019) by surveillance capitalism (Novák, 2020) or explore theological-philosophical critiques of technocratic society (Bowen, 2022). The episode has also been interpreted as part of a post-apocalyptic, post-media condition (Mazurek, 2021), where reality and simulation blend into each other.

Yet within this rich interpretive field, food in this episode – appearing in various forms such as the "proper apple," the "cuppliance drink," and the notion of "fake fodder" – remains an overlooked element. Here, the edible and drinkable objects serve not only as nourishment but also as affective bodies: devices of behavioral control,

symbols of synthetic abundance, and expressions of nostalgia for a lost, perhaps imagined, authenticity. In what follows, we suggest rereading "Fifteen Million Merits" through the lens of affect, focusing on how food-related elements are represented in this episode and how they contribute to the episode's portrayal of longing and control.

Set in a claustrophobic, media-dominated world where people must continuously pedal on stationary bikes to earn "merits," the episode follows Bing – a quiet and disillusioned man trapped in this monotonous cycle. Every aspect of daily life in this world is strictly controlled by a system of digital avatars and interactive screens, leaving individuals with little space for reflection or resistance. When Bing meets Abi, whose singing briefly evokes a sense of sincerity, he decides to spend all the credits he has patiently accumulated to help her appear on a televised talent show. However, instead of becoming a singer, Abi is recruited into the adult entertainment industry – an offer she reluctantly accepts. Devastated by her objectification, Bing finds his own way onto the same stage, where he threatens suicide and delivers a searing critique of the system. To his surprise, the judges applaud his "authenticity" and offer him a regular spot on the show. He accepts, and the episode ends with Bing living in apparent comfort, his once-defiant message now safely packaged as part of mainstream entertainment.

Food-related elements appear throughout the story on several occasions. When Bing talks to Abi for the first time, she buys a green apple from a vending machine in the cafeteria, which she refers to as a "proper apple." The characters briefly comment on how "real" the fruit looks, though they immediately suspect it is lab-grown – an artificial reconstruction of something that once existed in organic form. Throughout their conversation, Abi keeps interacting with the apple: she bites into it, sets it down, picks it up again. The fruit remains present between the protagonists – not just a snack, but a material companion to the unfolding scene. The moment is tender and emotionally charged. As they speak, Abi reveals that the song she sang earlier in the bathroom was taught to her by her mother. This passing remark anchors the scene in a shared affective register: both the apple and the song act as conduits to a lost past, to familial connection, and to a world that feels more "real" than the synthetic environment they now inhabit.

In this moment, the "proper apple" performs a worldbuilding function as defined by Forster (2004), briefly grounding the scene in a gesture of commensality that contrasts with the hypermediated surroundings. Yet it also pushes beyond this function: while worldbuilding food in science fiction usually remains emotionally neutral, here it becomes saturated with longing and affect, carrying a particular intensity. In Spinozian terms, the apple enters a relational network of intensities: it touches Abi's body not only materially but affectively, evoking an attachment to something absent but still deeply desired. Through Ahmed's lens (2014), the apple functions as a "sticky

object," accumulating affect – particularly nostalgia – and circulating it across bodies. It carries the trace of "realness," even as it exists in synthetic form. But this affective transmission is not without consequences. It is precisely this nostalgic pull – this fragile comfort – that sustains the illusion of meaning in an otherwise hollow system. As Berlant (2011) would argue, the apple becomes an object of cruel attachment: it offers a taste of the authentic, while quietly reinforcing the characters' entrapment in a system that deprives them of any real alternative.

The "cuppliance drink" functions differently, but no less powerfully, as an affective body. Primarily, it resonates with Forster's (2004) category of consumption, embodying the dystopian logic in a science fiction text where food becomes a vehicle of control rather than nourishment. Administered to Abi before her performance in the talent show, the drink appears as a substance of compliance – its very name linking the act of consumption to submission. While the composition of the liquid is never disclosed, its function is affective and disciplinary: it is designed to calm, to soothe, and most importantly, to suppress resistance. If the apple promises a connection to an imagined past, the "cuppliance drink" secures the subject within the machinery of the present, lubricating the smooth operation of spectacle. From Ahmed's perspective, the drink also facilitates a circulation of power: it moves affectively across Abi's body, not to generate intimacy or connection, but to neutralize friction, to produce a body that will perform acceptably under observation. In doing so, it reveals how food and drink in this world are not benign supplements to life, but integral tools of affective governance.

This culminates in Bing's final monologue, delivered during the infamous "fodder and shit" scene at the talent show. After watching Abi's transformation into a pornographic performer, and having spent weeks accumulating the required merits, Bing returns to the same stage, to showcase a talent of his own. Instead, he pulls out a shard of glass, threatens to harm himself, and launches into a passionate denunciation of the system that exploits, pacifies, and consumes its citizens.

Bing's outburst draws on the metaphorical register Forster (2004) associates with food in science fiction, collapsing it into a sign of systemic decay and the toxic consumerism that structures this society. Bing's words ("All we know is fake fodder and buying shit!") merge food and media into a shared domain of affective emptiness. Fodder – food meant for livestock – becomes the emblem of what humans now consume: tasteless, affectively inert, mechanically produced, and devoid of nourishment. The metaphor also reflects Berlant's notion of a world in which people continue to invest in broken, cruel systems of sustenance – be they emotional, economic, or nutritional – despite the pain they generate. Food in "Fifteen Million Merits" is a part of the oppressive system – it promises a better world while delivering pain and disappointment.

3. BITTEN COOKIE AND TAPENADE ("NOSEDIVE")

"Nosedive," the first episode of *Black Mirror*'s third season, attracted significant attention and sparked widespread discussion. However, as in the case of "Fifteen Million Merits," existing scholarship on "Nosedive" does not focus on food. Instead, it is concerned primarily with the episode's critique of surveillance, capitalism, and social conformity. Many authors examine how the episode reflects the evolution from centralized surveillance toward participatory systems of control, where individuals self-regulate under constant visibility (Erol, 2018; Redmond, 2019; Urueña and Melikyan, 2020; Serdar, 2023). Scholars also analyze "Nosedive" through the lens of postmodernism, highlighting its depiction of hyperreality, the society of the spectacle, and ideological pressures tied to image, performance, and consumerism (Lopes, 2018; Pagnoni Berns, 2018; Yazdizadeh, 2019). A significant strand of analysis explores the role of social media in shaping emotional distress, curated identity, and symbolic capital, with users engaging in constant impression management to gain approval and avoid exclusion (Giraldo-Luque et al., 2021; Kim, 2021; Tüzün, 2021; Lata and Bhatt, 2024). While some readings emphasize its dystopian warning, others interpret the episode as a critical dystopia, allowing some space for resistance and the reclamation of agency (Lopes, 2018; Urueña and Melikyan, 2020).

Before turning to the food-related aspects of "Nosedive," let us briefly recall what this episode is about. It centers on Lacie, a young woman navigating a society governed by a ubiquitous social rating system in which individuals evaluate every interpersonal interaction using a five-star scale, facilitated through eye implants and mobile devices. These ratings carry significant social and economic consequences, determining access to housing, transportation, and other opportunities. Aspiring to move into an exclusive apartment complex, Lacie attempts to raise her personal rating from 4.2 to 4.5, the threshold required to qualify for a substantial discount on the rent. When she receives an unexpected invitation to the wedding of her childhood friend Naomi, who now has a very high rating, she sees it as a rare opportunity to boost her own score. Lacie becomes determined to attend the wedding and deliver a speech – an act that could expose her to a wider network of high-rated guests. Lacie's journey to Naomi's wedding painfully reveals the emotional toll and pressure of a world in which social approval functions as currency.

In this world, social status is also tied to food and drink. What one eats and drinks points to class distinctions and social aspirations. In the privacy of her apartment, Lacie, an upwardly mobile middle-class woman, is frequently shown consuming modest, everyday items – take-out noodles, simple breakfast cereal, and water from plastic bottle. These mundane foods serve a worldbuilding function in Forster's (2004) sense, grounding the setting in recognizable everyday eating

habits. Yet, here their simplicity also underscores class stratification and social inequality. Food choices reflect Lacie's current social position and mark moments when she does not perform for others or attempt to impress. In contrast to the refined consumption habits of the elite, Lacie's solitary eating habits underscore the gap between her actual status and the upper class she hopes to join.

A striking shift occurs in the famous café scene, where Lacie enters a public space. There, she takes a single bite of a cookie, spits it out, places the uneaten part next to her coffee, and carefully composes a photograph for her social media profile. This moment exemplifies the hyper-performative role of food in her world – no longer consumed for nourishment, but staged as a social signal in the economy of visibility and approval. As Ahmed (2014, p. 91) suggests, "stickiness" of certain objects "involves a transference of affect," which circulates through them and shapes social attachments. The bitten cookie becomes such an object – a charged affective body through which emotions and aspirations are mediated. In addition, the act of photographing food becomes a strategic performance designed to enhance one's social capital. It also reflects what Berlant (2011) says about cruel optimism: Lacie's attachment to the staged scene of consumption promises social elevation, yet it also reinforces the very conditions of pressure and inauthenticity that sustains a person's dissatisfaction.

Food, entangled in the system of social ranking, reappears several more times throughout the episode. When Lacie's colleague Chester, rated 3.1, offers her an organic smoothie in an attempt to improve his score, she decides to withdraw from the interaction – not out of disinterest, but fear of harming her own rating. Another time, in an elevator, Lacie offers a croissant to a highly rated elderly neighbor, hoping to gain her approval. The gesture is rejected, and Lacie is told by a ranking consultant that she is "trying too hard" and that "authentic gestures" are key – an ironic statement in a world where sincerity is manufactured and every action is a strategic performance.

One of the most striking scenes in "Nosedive" is the grotesque tapenade scene, in which Lacie prepares for a video call with Naomi. Invited to be Naomi's maid of honor, Lacie panics and rushes to stage a perfect kitchen backdrop moments before the call. In a performative frenzy, she assembles a curated still life: a bottle of olive oil, halved limes, and garlic on one side; on the other, a glass of white wine and a pastel plate with carefully arranged toasts with tapenade – a savory paste made from chopped olives. This scene exemplifies the metaphorical function of food (Forster, 2004), turning the kitchen into a stylized stage on which food becomes a key prop in Lacie's attempt to embody aspirational class identity. In addition, by exaggerating Lacie's frantic staging of the space, the sequence brushes against comic register – yet rather than offering relief, the humor sharpens its critique of aspirational performance and artificiality.

As demonstrated, "Nosedive" uses food and drink as tools of social navigation within a rigidly hierarchical society. Characters strategically engage with certain foodways to signal belonging, negotiate visibility, and pursue upward mobility. These food-related moments are not only symbolic but also affective – food becomes charged with aspirations, fears, and longings.

4. "I CAN CHEW AND SWALLOW..." ("BE RIGHT BACK")

The theme of longing is also central to "Be Right Back," the opening episode of *Black Mirror*'s second season. The story follows Martha, a young woman coping with the sudden death of her partner. In an attempt to alleviate her loss, she signs up for an online service that creates a lifelike AI agent, and then a physical android, modeled on her deceased partner – both in appearance and personality – using data collected from his social media profiles, private messages, and personal recordings. At first, the presence of the android brings Martha comfort: she can talk to it, touch it, and even have sex with it. However, as the initial euphoria fades, she becomes increasingly unsettled by the irreconcilable differences between the man she lost and the artificial substitute now living in her home.

"Be Right Back" has been the subject of several studies so far. Most of them converge around themes of grief, identity, and technological simulation, often framed by posthuman, philosophical, and ethical lenses. Studies explore the episode's engagement with digital resurrection and mourning (Richards, 2020; Rizza, 2021; Lamb and Leidenhag, 2022), particularly how the AI replicant disrupts authentic grieving process and exposes the limitations of digital memory. Others reflect on the philosophical dimensions of presence and personhood to interrogate what constitutes *otherness* in technologically mediated relationships (Lacerda and Ribeiro de Mattos, 2020). The episode's evocation of Frankensteinian creation and gendered abjection has also been addressed, revealing tensions around consent, embodiment, and the ethics of artificial life (Artt, 2018; Lamb and Leidenhag, 2022). Furthermore, scholars highlight how "Be Right Back" critiques digital consumerism and neoliberal tech culture, portraying mourning as commodified and memory as archival performance within a surveillance-driven society (Urzúa Opaza and Faure, 2018; Schopp, 2019).

Food-related elements, although marginal in terms of screen time, play a crucial role in "Be Right Back" by marking the boundary between human and artificial life. The android version of Ash, unlike the human he replicates, obviously does not eat, sleep, or experience bodily fatigue. When he says to Martha, "I can chew and swallow, if that makes it easier," it becomes clear that the act of eating is not driven by hunger or desire but offered as a hollow performance, a tool of appeasement. This moment

plays against the typical worldbuilding function of food in science fiction (Forster, 2004): instead of grounding the character in familiar human routines, the absence of authentic eating marks the android as fundamentally outside the sphere of the living. In science fiction narratives, the inability to eat sometimes marks a distinction between artificial and organic embodiment; as Despina Kakoudaki (2014, p. 76) notes, artificial bodies are imagined as exempt from the "needs and processes of organicity." In "Be Right Back," Ash's simulated gestures only intensify Martha's discomfort: the body that can imitate eating without needing it becomes uncanny, emotionally unreadable.

The absence of the need for food takes on an affective charge. Rather than offering comfort, the android's passive presence becomes oppressive, even violent in its indifference. The failure to eat is not just a biological flaw but a sign that something essential – something deeply human – is missing. Martha's eventual outburst, "You're not enough of him! You are nothing!" expresses the collapse of illusion: without hunger, there is no need; without need, no vulnerability; and without vulnerability, no relationship. Martha's longing for a connection with her deceased partner simply cannot be fulfilled by the replica.

At the end of the episode, food reappears in a brief but emotionally intense scene that deepens the divide between human and non-human life. Martha's daughter, now about five or six years old, brings a piece of her birthday cake to the android, who has been kept hidden in the attic for several years. The gesture is innocent and relational – an attempt to include him in a family ritual. But the android shows no interest in the cake. This refusal, or rather indifference, once again marks the *otherness* of artificial Ash: he does not eat, does not celebrate, does not share in the rhythms of human life. Here, the cake works as a metaphor for the unbridgeable boundary between what is human and what is artificial. It also functions as a material site of affective transmission – the offering of connection – but it falls flat. It highlights not only the robot's incapacity for affective response but also his isolation – as something between a memory object and a discarded machine. What was once Martha's desperate emotional investment has now become an uncanny presence, stored away yet not fully let go. What begins as a promise of connection and authenticity – embodied first by the android, then by the piece of cake – ends in cruel disappointment.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As this article has shown, food in science fiction – and specifically in *Black Mirror* – functions not only as a narrative device or symbolic element but as an affective body: a material presence charged with emotions, memories, and desires. Drawing on the philosophies and theories of Spinoza, Ahmed, and Berlant, we have

argued that food in the selected episodes mediates relations of power, longing, and control. Whether staged as a nostalgic trace of lost authenticity ("Fifteen Million Merits"), a social performance designed to attract approval ("Nosedive"), or a failed gesture of connection ("Be Right Back"), food becomes a "sticky object" around which affect circulates.

At the same time, food-related moments in *Black Mirror* still resonate with several key functions traditionally associated with food in science fiction narratives (Forster, 2004): they contribute to worldbuilding by embedding everyday eating practices in futuristic settings; they engage in the critique of consumption, especially in dystopian contexts; and they operate metaphorically, exposing anxieties about artificiality, social hierarchy, and authenticity. Yet *Black Mirror* goes beyond simply reproducing these functions. Instead of serving as mere background props or plot devices, food objects here are saturated with affective charge: they embody the emotional economies that sustain these worlds. *Black Mirror* reveals not only how we eat in dystopian futures, but also what – and whom – we are emotionally fed by.

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