



A toast to the damned waiting for tomorrow: hauntology and mourning for a future that never comes

Um brinde aos malditos que esperam pelo amanhã: assombrologia e luto por um futuro que não chega

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Abstract: Drawing on Berardi (2011), and Häggglund (2008), Mark Fisher (2009; 2014; 2021) posits two pillars upon which his thoughts on history and philosophy are built; the first, what is called a slow cancellation of the future, or in a general sense, how the XX century more than simply casting its shadows over the XXIst, it never really ended. For Fisher, this is due to an ongoing deflation of people's expectations regarding what is yet to come and a cultural nostalgic turn. Here, nostalgia as Jameson proposed it should be seen more as an attachment to old techniques and formulas than to a psychological state. The second pillar reads Derrida's hauntology as a failed morning which in Fisher's work appears linked to the ghosts of a future that never took place. A future of possibilities dreamt during labor and civil rights movements but that ended up being crushed by neoliberal policies. Thus, hauntology and the cancellation of the future as seen in Fisher, and Berardi will be the tools through which this article will analyze Hideo Kojima's 2019 game *Death Stranding*, as well as its homonymous novelization (2021) by Hitori Nojima.

Keywords: Hauntology; neoliberalism; Mark Fisher; Franco Berardi; Death Stranding; Hideo Kojima.

Resumo: Mark Fisher (2009; 2014; 2021), a partir de sua leitura de Franco Berardi (2011), e Martin Häggglund (2008) propõe dois temas centrais ao seu pensamento histórico e filosófico: o primeiro, relacionado ao que o autor entende por lento cancelamento do futuro, ou como de uma maneira geral, o século XX, não apenas projeta suas sombras sobre o século XXI, mas não teria, de fato, acabado. Pois a ausência da possibilidade de um futuro se manifesta através da deflação das expectativas do sujeito contemporâneo e de uma virada nostálgica, aos moldes de Jameson que falava não sobre uma nostalgia psicológica, mas

uma que é, “*better understood in terms of formal attachment to techniques and old formulas of the past*” (JAMESON apud FISHER, 2014). O segundo tema, por sua vez, entende a *fantologia* proposta por Derrida em seu livro *Specters of Marx* como um luto nunca completamente processado; o que em Fisher aparece como o fantasma de um futuro, que apesar de sonhado durante os movimentos trabalhistas e de direitos civis, após a consolidação da ideologia neoliberal - no autor, especificamente se referindo à Inglaterra de Margaret Thatcher e a sequente precarização do trabalho e dismantelamento de políticas públicas- nunca chegou a acontecer. Sendo assim, as noções de *fantologia* e cancelamento do futuro como aparecem em Fisher e Berardi serão analisadas tendo como objeto de estudo para este artigo o jogo multiplataforma de Hideo Kojima, *Death Stranding* (2019), assim como sua novelização escrita por Hitori Nojima (2021).

Palavras-chave: fantologia; neoliberalismo; Mark Fisher, Franco Berardi; death stranding; Hideo Kojima.

Introduction

Let's make a toast to the damned
Waiting for tomorrow
When we're played out by the band
Drowning out our sorrows
What will become of us now, at the end of
time?
“Death Stranding” by CHVRCHES¹

Let me first ground what I call slow cancellation of the future by acknowledging that the expression was borrowed from two thinkers whose works will be the pillars upon which this article is written; Franco Berardi, who originally proposed the idea, and Mark Fisher who read it through Derrida's hauntology lenses. In his book *After the Future* (2011), Berardi, commenting on the 1977 Bologna and Rome protests, a political movement that grew mostly out of a so-called extra-parliamentary left that opposed to not only conservative policies but also to the very institutional left, stated that everything those students and political activists fought against came true. Still relying on the thought of the 70s being the turning point to how the future was perceived, or the end of the utopias, Berardi also comments on the fact that “1977 was the year of mass youth suicide in Japan: the official figure being 784. What caused an outcry was the fast succession [...] of suicides by children: thirteen, to be exact, all amongst primary school children” (BERARDI; 2011, p. 38). The point here is not that, or not

¹ Lyrics by Iain Andrew Cook / Lauren Eve Mayberry / Martin Doherty from the soundtrack of the homonymous game.

just that, utopia turned into dystopia, but that what the author calls “the future of the moderns” and its two reassuring characteristics - the possibility of knowing the future by following trends and the possibility of transforming it by human agency- is long-gone. In a sense that “the 20th century trusted in the future because it trusted in scientists who foretold it, and in policymakers able to make rational decisions” (BERARDI; 2011, p. 39). Thus, the future has “escaped the grasp of political technique” (BERARDI; 2011, p. 40) as past G8 and G20 meetings, and the lack of solutions presented by world leaders in such events, especially for environmental issues, show us.

In a manner, men were destitute from their god-like position of being able to change the course of things to the tragic position of whom Berardi called the cursed prophets, Cassandra and Thyressias, whose fates were tragic because the responsibility of being able to see the future is necessarily a curse when put on human’s shoulders. Still, following the myths of Cassandra and Thyressias, it is important to highlight that the tragic structure of an oracle story relies on the impossibility of changing the future; no wonder why for Aristotle it was from the action that moves the plot forwards and not from the characters - “a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty (αμαρτία)” (ARISTOTLE, 1998)- that the catharsis would come. Yet, for Berardi, the modern man placed their hopes upon the idea of progress and its constant movement forward. Something that in itself more than an allegorical rupture with classical stories about those who foresaw the future, also meant a separation from the very Christian ontology that sees the past, or the genesis, as the time when God created everything and the future that time of the fall.

Hauntology and the mourning for a future that never comes

Miguel Benasayag, and Gérard Schmit in their groundbreaking study of depression and exhaustion on the Parisian youth, *Les Passions Tristes*, argued that young people, responding to a more precarious way of living, and the need for their family members to work more and more, are growing without symbolics rites of passage of time such as receiving an education, going to work, having workweek days and off weekends, in order to eventually retire which is for many not even a possibility anymore. Therefore, as Berardi has argued, “the intensity and precariousness of late capitalist work culture leaves people in a state where they

are simultaneously exhausted and overstimulated. The combination of precarious work and digital communications leads to a besieging of attention" (apud FISHER, 2014, p16). Making use of that, one can see how some things that affect even specific psychological development stages, as seen in "le trasgressioni e i conseguenti richiami all'ordine sono normali nel corso dell'educazione, e costituiscono una sorta di gioco tra desiderio e principio di realtà"²; are transported to the public sphere, "le trasgressioni perdono la loro dimensione simbolica e ludica e diventano semplicemente dei reati, punibili dalla società"³; and the harrowing consequence being that "In questo senso, la scena dove si svolgono i riti di passaggio non è quella giusta: i giovani che non hanno altra scelta che quella di "fare il loro Edipo con la polizia"⁴ (BENASAYAG, SCHMIT, 2004).

In such a context, when real life is nothing but violence, environmental problems, and now, a pandemic; the virtualization of daily-life acts as a final blow on the possibility of a community-oriented future and consolidates the conditions that led to the possibility of depression becoming an epidemic event. Nowadays, "una tristezza diffusa caratterizza la nostra società contemporanea, percorsa da un sentimento permanente di insicurezza e di precarietà. Meglio star bene e gratificarsi oggi se il domani è senza prospettiva"⁵ (BENASAYAG, SCHMIT, 2004); so, people live now, as aforementioned, in a constant state of boredom and hyperstimulation, what Berardi calls "the physical and psychical solitude of the infospheric individual" (BERARDI; 2011, p. 49), which prevents solidarity and community to take form:

nessuna forma di solidarietà viene percepita positivamente perché, in questa visione utilitaristica del mondo, l'umanità appare costituita da una serie di individui isolati che intrattengono tra loro innanzitutto delle relazioni contrattuali e competitive, facendo passare in secondo piano le affinità elettive e le solidarietà di ogni tipo. Se l'estirpazione radicale dell'insicurezza appartiene ancora all'utopia modernista dell'onnipotenza umana, c'è ancora una strada da seguire, e precisamente quella della costruzione dei legami affettivi e di solidarietà, capaci di spingere le persone fuori dall'isolamento

² "transgressions and the consequent calls to order are normal in the course of education, and constitute a sort of game between desire and the principle of reality."

³ "the transgressions lose their symbolic and playful dimension and simply become crimes, punishable by society"

⁴ "In this sense, the scene where the rites of passage take place is not the right one: young people who have no choice but to "do their Oedipus" with the police".

⁵ "a widespread sadness characterizes our contemporary society, traversed by a permanent feeling of insecurity and precariousness. Better to feel good and be rewarded today if tomorrow is without perspective "

nel quale la società tende a rinchiudersi, in nome degli ideali individualistici". (BENASAYAG, SCHMIT, 2004)⁶.

When it comes to such slow cancellation of the future as a promise, Mark Fisher finds that the 2006 feature film *Children of Men*, directed by Alfonso Cuarón and based on the P. D. James' homonymous dystopian novel about a future with no new life being born is the perfect allegory for his concept of capitalist realism or the inability to even imagine a future different from what we already have at hand, let alone any actual change.

Heavily influenced by Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, for Fisher, capitalist realism is "more like a pervasive atmosphere, conditioning not only the production of culture but also the regulation of work and education and acting as a kind of invisible barrier constraining thought and action" (FISHER, 2009, p. 16). Such a system is supported by two pillars: on the one hand, we have an increase of mental health problems as a direct consequence of being overworked, and underpaid; alongside with the certainty of the erosion of the public space. A quick search on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website shows that in the US alone "9.4% of children aged 2-17 years (approximately 6.1 million) have received an ADHD diagnosis"⁷; while "in 2019, just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 19.86% of adults experienced a mental illness, equivalent to nearly 50 million Americans", and "Suicidal ideation continues to increase among adults in the U.S. 4.58% of adults report having serious thoughts of suicide, an increase of 664,000 people from last year's dataset"⁸. On the other hand, bureaucracy creates a diffuse and yet all present surveillance system that controls every moment of people's lives and makes it almost impossible to impute the blame and responsibility for global scale events such as climate change.

Who is to blame, then? Still drawing on the subject of climate change, for instance, Fisher engages with Wendy Brown's article "American Nightmare: Neoliberalism, Neoconservatism, and De-Democratization" (2006) and Judith Butler's *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (2009) to show how the current conditions have created a subject that buys

⁶ "No form of solidarity is perceived positively because, in this utilitarian vision of the world, humanity appears to be made up of a series of isolated individuals who entertain first of all contractual and competitive relationships among themselves, overshadowing the elective affinities and solidarity of every type. If the radical eradication of insecurity still belongs to the modernist utopia of human omnipotence, there is still a way to go, and precisely that of building emotional bonds and solidarity, capable of pushing people out of isolation into which society tends to lock them up in the name of individualistic ideals".

⁷ Data retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.htm>

⁸ Data retrieved from: <https://www.mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america>

a solution instead of engaging in political process and accepting that everyone is to blame when it comes to the planet becoming inhabitable, when in fact, no one is to blame because capital is an impersonal structure. Returning to Berardi, now in his book *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry* (2018), "Money and language have something in common: they are nothing and yet affect everything. They are nothing but symbols, conventions, flatus vocis, yet they have the power to persuade human beings to act, to work, and to transform physical things" (BERARDI, 2019, p. 29).

Henceforth, for Fisher, even fiction appears to have been affected by "shallow exercises of imagination" (FISHER, 2009, p. 8) in which the acceleration of time helps reality to catch up with fiction faster and faster, for the "The world that it projects", fictions like P. D. James' *Children of Men*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), "seems more like an extrapolation or exacerbation of ours than an alternative to it. In these worlds, as in ours, ultra-authoritarianism and Capital are by no means incompatible: internment camps and franchise coffee bars co-exist" (FISHER, 2009, p. 8). Then, when the news reports a text by Larry Virden, father of four, to his girlfriend, minutes before dying while working, saying that "Amazon won't let us leave"⁹ despite a tornado warning ; or a TV broadcast shows teachers scrambling to snatch one-dollar bills from the floor to buy working supplies as the half-time entertainment of a hockey game¹⁰ ; it is impossible not to see this as what a couple of decades ago would be an imaginative dystopian future, now presented as the new normal.

Although critical of deconstructivism, Fisher borrows from Derrida the idea of the haunt, or in a broader sense, a deconstruction of the metaphysics of the presence (FISHER, 2014) that much like Derrida's *trace* that "is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself", while having "no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace" (DERRIDA, 1973, P. 156); it is that which, as Hägglund (2008) proposed, brings Derrida closer to the concept of broken time; something central to the experience of the haunt. For the haunt is always set in a time that is "no longer" and "not yet" at the same time. It is both a traumatic compulsion to repeat and an agency of the virtual (FISHER, 2014, p. 18; Hägglund, 2008, p. 82). Thoughts akin to what Derrida

⁹ For more information on the tragedy: <https://perfectunion.us/amazon-worker-killed-in-deadly-tornado-wasnt-allowed-to-leave/>

¹⁰ For more information, visit:

<https://www.today.com/parents/parents/teachers-fight-cash-game-raise-funds-supplies-rcna86o6>

posited in *Specters of Marx* to understand how “Capitalist societies [...] can always heave a sigh of relief and say to themselves: communism is finished, but it did not take place, it was only a ghost. They do no more than disavow the undeniable itself: a ghost never dies; it remains always to come and to come-back.” (*Specters of Marx*, p.123)” (FISHER, 2014, p. 19).

The sociologist Avery F. Gordon asks in her studies of the connections between history, horrors, and the haunt, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (2008, p. 18); “How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly?”. Whilst commenting on Patricia Williams’ collection of biographical essays *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, in which Williams searches for the history of her own family; her great-great grandfather was a slave owner who raped her great-great grandmother, an enslaved person. For Gordon, it is precisely what is missing that makes itself more visible, or as in the words of Williams herself, “I see her shape and his hand in the vast networking of our society, and in the evils and oversights that plague our lives and laws. The control he had over her body. The force he was in her life, in the shape of my life today” (WILLIAMS, 1991, p. 19). Here, finding a shape is finding an absence that haunts, or as Fisher stated, it is “that which acts without (physically) existing” (2014, p. 18).

Thus, hauntology plays a vital role in how people perceive time, not as something necessarily moving forward in a historical sense but how as seen in Jameson, the postmodernist inability to focus on the present; something that creates the condition that allows Fisher to elaborate the haunt as a failed mourning, for it is “about refusing to give up the ghost or – and this can sometimes amount to the same thing – the refusal of the ghost to give up on us” (FISHER, 2014, p. 19). Capitalism realism, as assessed in the introduction section of this paper, has at its core the inability to even consider a future that differs from the present, an alternative path - something that for Fisher and Berardi is marked even in how fiction stopped offering “distant futures” and even fantasy books seem to offer a version of the present’s dire conditions. Again, the future stopped being a modernist promise to become a threat and now haunts us as a ghost of what it could have been, but it never was.

“The past just won’t let go” and the (im)possibility of a future on Hideo Kojima’s *Death Stranding*

As referred to earlier, both the 2019 game *Death Stranding* and its novelization published in 2021 will be used together as the central case of study of this article, in search of how fiction and the social possibility of imagining a future can walk alongside each other. However, a small detour towards Franco Berardi's 2021 *The Third Unconscious* makes itself necessary. In the book, the Italian philosopher is exploring "the ongoing mutation of the social Unconscious. My point of observation is that which we inhabit at present: the historical threshold marked by the viral pandemic and by the catastrophic collapse of capitalism" (BERARDI, 2021, p. 10) as the historical context that ensures that a future of chaos and exhaustion consolidates itself.

Such a future, for Berardi, should be the point of departure of any philosophical and psychological analysis of society for "the Unconscious is a realm without history, with no sequentiality, no before and after [...]" but "it is possible to describe a history of the psychosphere of a society, and [...] it is possible to speak of a 'third' Unconscious: the third form taken by the Unconscious within the late modern mental environment" (BERARDI, 2021, p. 11). Following this argument, one would consider this historical project of the Unconscious divided between a first movement; or the Unconscious as "the dark side of the well-ordered framework of Rational Progress" (BERARDI, 2021, p. 11) as posited by Freud. The second, the negation of the Unconscious as a depository over its perception as "the magmatic force that ceaselessly brings about new possibilities of imagination and experience" (BERARDI, 2021, p. 12) as seen in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. Speaking of which, it is to *Anti-Oedipus* that Berardi owes his idea of semiocapitalism as a way to think about the contemporary. For the author, it is not enough anymore to understand how schizophrenic the relation between the celebration of desire and the constant postponement of its fulfillment within a neoliberal capitalist system is; it is crucial, then, to highlight that, both what is being produced and accumulated does not have physical materiality anymore. In a semiocapitalist system, one hoards semiotic production. Money is a sign, the work is virtual, relationships are online as well. For Berardi, now we deal with inflation not only of money but also of signs, and in such a reality, more signs produce less and less meaning.

As called attention to before, anxiety, depression, lessening of one's attention span, and other psychological disorders are symptoms of semiocapitalism; all of which were aggravated by the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, Berardi attempts to think of what he calls a third Unconscious, or "an open future that will be shaped by our consciousness, by

our political action, by our poetic imagination, and by the therapeutic activity that we'll be able to develop during this transition" (BERARDI, 2021, p. 13).

Berardi's theories were not born as a new form of criticism but as a new way to investigate society's complexions and contradictions through ethic debates on what he calls "futurability", and in fact, much of it had already been anticipated by Deleuze and Guattari, and it seems to be centered around two major arguments; one being an almost complete separation of desire from pleasure, in a way that the neoliberal capitalism celebrates desire and it is powered by it; however, pleasure needs to be constantly postponed, so capitalism itself never runs out of fuel. The other argument deals with massive virtualization of all aspects of human life in which: "Real life is now this: burning florists, melting ices, air pollution, pandemic. Therefore, real life is replaced by digital networking, and bodily conjunction is replaced by machine connection" (BERARDI, 2021, p. 33), a process that worsens the already existing system of exclusion, as pointed out by Eira and Guigou in their essay "De virus" (*apud* BERARDI, 2021, p. 34) for "Those unable to smoothly enter in the communicational matrix, those unable to comply with the digital work transformation will be superfluous". That is not to say that one should aim to return to a previous state of things, or even the that current pandemic of COVID-19 created something new when it comes to these conditions; once that "years of precariousness, impoverishment, and humiliation have prepared the ground for the mental breakdown that the pandemic is catalyzing now" (BERARDI, 2021, p. 38).

Berardi goes even further in *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry* arguing that when it comes to isolation, fear of and lack of bodily contact that is not something that appears as a result of any sanitary measure against the current pandemic but a natural path within a *semiocapitalist* system that needs to ensure that there no space left for union and communities anymore. Berardi, then, argues that:

I don't mean to suggest that the overall cultural involution that marked the eighties and paved the way to privatization and precarity can be reduced to the AIDS crisis, but the crisis's identification of pleasure with disease did slowly turn social life into a desert. Decades of social solidarity and free love came to an end, and the digital mutation followed, replacing conjunction with connection when digital technology pervaded the sphere of human communication. Even if it was transmitted by sexual contact, AIDS was mainly a psycho-media epidemic. It was based on the communication of a retrovirus, but it resulted in the communication of fear. When contact with the Other's body came to be perceived as a danger—and when this sense of danger took root in the social unconscious—language transmigrated from

the conjunctive to the connective sphere. At that point, sadness settled in the social soul. (2019, p. 71)

In a sense, what was made clear this time was that every time there were not enough hospital beds in an intensive care unit, it was due to cuts on public health budgets made before the pandemic, or even when money was not an issue, there were not enough protective masks or oxygen tanks to buy. Here, two possibilities are proposed by the author: either a total embrace of a techno-totalitarian system or emancipation of human activity from the abstractions of semiocapitalism. Accordingly, this future-oriented philosophy aims to relocate the conversation about the possibility of a future, regardless of whether for better or for worse, from the virtuality to the body, from looking back nostalgically to the past to the imagination of a future. In the most Spinozian fashion, his question “what can a body do?” should be perceived as a relationship between freedom and the space of our potency.

The laws of physics have postulated that two or more bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time; not all things are objects though, and even physics understands that waves for instance, not only occupy the same space at the same time but they do so while interfering with each other. Something similar happens when it comes to hauntology and the presence of an absence as seen in both Fisher and Gordon, and accordingly, the conflict between two things that should not occupy the same space and how they act upon each other is at the core of Hideo Kojima’s *Death Stranding*.

In *Death Stranding*, a post-apocalyptic, sci-fi, horror game, the world has been destroyed by a series of never fully explained explosions that had as a result the appearance of several paranormal phenomena called the death stranding in which the world of the dead and the living collided. Thus, humanity lives in small lockdown cities without a central government, or a global scale virtual connection, and the player assumes the character Sam Bridges, one of the many delivery workers that act as the only connection, or bridges, between these places.

As stated before, for Berardi there is no point in thinking of capitalism and neoliberalism without addressing the all-encompassing digitalization of work, workers, the means of production, one’s sex life, family, and friendship. Such overabundance of signs is central to understanding the small clues both the game and its novelization provides us to understand what the death stranding really is and why the borders between death and life, past, present and the future became so porous that one cannot stop contaminating the other.

Right at the first moments of gameplay¹¹, the player has to help deliver a body to a cremation center. In a conversation that happens during this task, Sam Bridges, the main character, and someone who is capable of sensing death talks to another worker who, like most of the remaining living people, cannot do such a thing. This is important because the very concepts of “death stranding”, stranding here, in a direct association to the phenomenon in which sickness or injury can drive an animal ashore, or BT (beached things) how the dead are referred to, are nothing but a negotiation of meaning; “Normal people like Igor couldn’t sense it [...] When they tried to explain what they were able to see, they often described the world of the dead as an ocean and the boundary that connected that world with this one as a beach¹²” (NOJIMA, 2021, p. 23)¹³.

Modernity, for Berardi, is “overshadowed by two panlogical projects, one envisioned by Leibniz and the other by Hegel” (BERARDI, 2019, p. 58), in this scenario, from the ruins of the Hegelian project of history as the bloody “and torturous events that turn the daily life of the people into History (Geschichte)” (BERARDI, 2019, p. 58); Leibniz sees the digital reason replacing the historical one and as further as the comparison allows me to go, transforming Bataille’s headless man into a virtual brainless body. Furthermore, as he argued this virtualization “does not recognize the suffering of pulsating living bodies, does not perceive the chaotic violence of exploitation, corruption, and war, but only recognizes the flow of data that gives artificial life and syntactic exchangeability to the informational units that are working” (BERARDI, 2019, p. 60).

According to this principle, the following is an attempted chronological order of the events that led *Death Stranding*’s world to end and why I see in this narrative a possibility of addressing the theoretical topics mentioned so far. A series of catastrophic events happened and destroyed most of the world’s surface and physically isolated people who were - as it is diegetically stated - emotionally isolated before. As time went by “Highways, planes, other countries, America. They only exist as words now. Concepts for things lost in the Death Stranding. It was surely only a matter of time before the words did too” (NOJIMA, 2021, p.

¹¹ In a broad sense, one can think of two larger narrative structures in video games; the first are the cinematic scenes in which the story is told and the plot advances. In literary terms, the cinematic scenes are akin to the third person narration in a novel. During the gameplay, on the other hand, the player has to actively fulfill some tasks and resolve some challenges.

¹² See image 1 in the appendix.

¹³ Although the novelization of the film uses the dialogues written for the game, in this essay I preferred to use some parts of the novelization for clarity.

22). Corporations assumed the vacuum left by countries and politicians, and the “knot cities”, the place of countries. In accordance with a new global organization, a new kind of subject appears, an army of workers who wander around making deliveries from one place to another in opposition to those in complete isolation. Amongst the workers, perhaps, it is the main character, Sam Bridges, the one who better represents the politics of exploitation and exhaustion already discussed. Sam has a condition called “DOOMS”, meaning that he has a strong connection to death and is able to feel and see the stranded things; but above all, he can’t die¹⁴ and in this scenario, the one who does not die is forced to keep on working endlessly.

Thus, “when the dead crawled out of that ocean and across the Beach to become stranded in this world, it became known as the Death Stranding” (NOJIMA, 2021, p. 24), and in an Egyptian mythology-inspired world-building, Kojima envisioned a place in which the body, or *ha*, after its death, keeps lingering in this world, getting necrotized and joining a black sea of decomposed matter that never disappear¹⁵, in a world without future, and where “the past just won’t let go” (NOJIMA, 2021, p. 16). On the other hand, the *ka*, or the soul unable to detach from this world, becomes lost and searches for their body, taking as many living things as possible in the process. That is why outside those making the deliveries, no one else is outside. Another important element to this world, and another layer of difficulty for the players, is the “timefall” or literally a rain of time that began happening after the dead crossed over.

In *Death Stranding*, the timefall fast-forwards everything it touches and as things age, they attract death, so the player must seek refuge every time it rains during the game so that they do not lose their cargo, for a perfect delivery can become dust in a matter of minutes. In such a cruel system, the player that manages to deliver a cargo in better condition gets a bonus that appears on the screen not much differently from a like on a social media post. As seen in an encounter with Fragile, also a delivery worker, when she removed her glove; “Her hand looked like it belonged to someone else entirely. They were the hands of a decrepit old woman. “Not much left of me either. Got soaked from neck to toe” (NOJIMA, 2021, p. 15).

¹⁴ People like Sam are called “repatriates”, they cannot permanently die. Their souls, unlike other people's, will always find their bodies again.

¹⁵ See image 2 in the appendix.

Relying on the theoretical works used thus far, it is understandable how Derrida's perception of the ghosts of Marxism, here, referring to the specter that haunts Europe, as argued by Marx and Engels,

must be cried out, at a time when some have the audacity to neo-evangelise in the name of the ideal of a liberal democracy that has finally realized itself as the ideal of human history: never have violence, inequality, exclusion, famine, and thus economic oppression affected as many human beings in the history of the earth and of humanity. Instead of singing the advent of the ideal of liberal democracy and of the capitalist market in the euphoria of the end of history, instead of celebrating the 'end of ideologies' and the end of the great emancipatory discourses, let us never neglect this obvious macroscopic fact, made up of innumerable singular sites of suffering: no degree of progress allows one to ignore that never before, in absolute figures, have so many men, women and children been subjugated, starved or exterminated on the earth. (DERRIDA, 1994).

Something that is translated by Fisher into his theory of lost futures. Here, I would argue that *Death Stranding*, closer to Fisher than Derrida, adapts not only the ghost of Marxism, but the ghost of every lost future, regardless if due to wars, plagues, famine, violence, neoliberalism, individualism, disbanded communities, exile, environmental crisis into creatures that us. Into a world where nothing new can be born because the past has materialized itself. Thus, history, more than being simply determined by society's economic organization, yearns for literal materiality. It needs embodiment and while it does not have one, it assumes a haunting humanoid ghost-like figure¹⁶.

Conclusion: Sam Porter Bridges and the (im)possibility of a way out.

Circling back all the way to the feeling of inversion of the future and the epidemic of depression as approached by Berardi, Fisher, Miguel Benasayag, and Gérard Schmit; the melancholic depression described then can be understood in relation to the circulation of sense, meaning but mostly the lack thereof. For Berardi, the sense of things, of life, of one's ability to hope for a future, is constructed in shared spaces. In other words, "there is no subjective meaning ... achieved alone" (HUSTVEDT, 2017, p. 373). Henceforth, "Sense is the projection of an intellectual and emotional investment. We can say that sense is the effect of a libidinal investment in interpretation, in the construction of meaning" (BERARDI, 2011, p.

¹⁶ See figure 3 in the appendix.

49); to which the author, once again, borrowing from Deleuze and Guattari, now their book *What's philosophy?*

"Sense is not to be found in the world, but in what we are able to create. What circulates in the sphere of friendship, of love, of social solidarity is what allows us to find sense. Depression can be defined as a lack of sense, as an inability to find sense through action, through communication, through life. The inability to find sense is first of all the inability to create it. (BERARDI, 2011, p. 49)

Hence, in a reality in which time for empathy is lacking and most symbolic exchanges between humans happen in a virtual space- in *Death Stranding*, Sam only talks to holograms of those he is working for, and even amongst the one risking their lives outside, there is no time for getting to know each other because a timefall might come- perhaps the challenge is to find a way to hack this structure and even if they are virtual, insist on creating bridges, for "despite our criticism [...] the internet is also showing a potency of solidarity and sublimation" (BERARDI, 2021, p. 22).

In *Death Stranding*, the game's economy is, much like the current system of production of goods, based on excess. Everything, from cars to buildings and bridges can be built using some sort of futurist 3d printer technology; however, the necessary material and tools are scattered across a place without global communication. It must be looked after, and the player must walk to get it. In this sense, players across the globe interact in an asynchronous multiplayer system in which what is excess may be left behind for someone else who is playing the same game, anywhere in the world to use. The player can choose to hoard or to share. Roads built by someone might help another person to make their deliveries faster and escape the timefall. Signs of encouragement can be posted across the roads and by interacting with them, players can talk to each other creating an environment that shows precisely what Berardi posited: the virtualization of the bodies made people more lonely; however, this dire prediction can be turned into the certainty that there is still a space being shared.

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Appendix

Image 1: Sam Bridges and dead whales at the Beach. Picture taken from the gameplay footage.



Source: *Death Stranding*: Director's Cut – Final trailer. Youtube. 8 Set. 2021. WEB. 5 Set. 2022.

Image 2: Sam making a delivery / the black mass of death appears with the rain.



Source: *Death Stranding* – Launch trailer. Youtube. 30 Oct. 2019.

Image 3: *Death Stranding* - A BT (Beached Thing).



Source: Kojima Productions. 505 Games. 2020. Author's gameplay screenshot.

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Recebido em 06/04/2022
Avaliado em 06/08/2022



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