

Split Selves, Alienated Subjects: *Mr. Robot* and *Severance* Against Corporate Capitalism



JULIETTE DEVAUX

Université Paris Sorbonne Nouvelle

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-3910-7058>



Abstract: *Mr. Robot* (Sam Esmail, 2015-2019) and *Severance* (Dan Erickson, 2022-) portray corporations as a capitalist structure that is simultaneously formative, dehumanizing, and antagonistic. Rather than reducing capitalism to an external structure, these series also present it as an internalized force that shapes and divides the self. In *Mr. Robot*, Elliot, suffering from Dissociative Identity Disorder, is split between his roles as a corporate employee and a hacker; in *Severance*, Mark undergoes a medical intervention to separate his professional and personal identities. Drawing on Marxist theories of alienation and post-Fordist approaches to subject formation, this article demonstrates how these crises of subjectivity reflect the subsumption of the self by capitalism as a productive resource. While such representations risk neutralizing the critique of capitalism by being overly individualizing, they nonetheless provide an inventive entry point for revealing—and critiquing—the social pathologies and power dynamics inherent to capitalism.

Keywords: *Severance*, *Mr. Robot*, Television, Capitalism, Corporation, Alienation.

Résumé : *Mr. Robot* (Sam Esmail, 2015-2019) et *Severance* (Dan Erickson, 2022-) mettent en scène l'entreprise corporatiste comme une structure capitaliste à la fois matricielle, déshumanisante et antagoniste. Plutôt que de réduire le capitalisme à une structure extérieure, ces séries en font aussi une force internalisée qui façonne et divise le sujet. Dans *Mr. Robot*, Elliot, souffrant de trouble dissociatif de l'identité, est partagé entre ses rôles de salarié et de *hacker* ; Mark, dans *Severance*, a accepté de scinder, par le biais d'une intervention médicale, ses identités personnelle et professionnelle. S'appuyant sur les théories marxistes de l'aliénation et sur les approches post-fordistes de construction du sujet, cet article montre comment ces crises reflètent la subsumption du sujet par le capitalisme en tant que ressource productive. Si de telles représentations risquent

de neutraliser la critique du capitalisme en étant trop individualisantes, elles constituent néanmoins un point d'entrée inventif vers le dévoilement – et la critique – des pathologies sociales et des rapports de domination inhérents au capitalisme.

Mots-clés : *Severance*, *Mr. Robot*, séries télévisées, capitalisme, entreprise, aliénation.

Introduction

“F— Wall St.,” read *Mr. Robot*’s striking first ads ahead of its 2015 premiere. The show emerged at a moment of transformation for USA Network: a shift from the bright optimism of the “Blue Sky” era to the darker, more defiant ethos of “We the Bold,” a turn toward stories of “unlikely heroes who defy the status quo,” per NBCUniversal CEO Chris McCumber.¹ Sam Esmail’s series introduces Elliot Alderson (Rami Malek), a corporate cybersecurity engineer at Allsafe Security by day and vigilante hacker by night, driven by a “deep, visceral hatred of modern-day capitalism” (Cook, 2015). Nearly a decade later, Dan Erickson’s dystopian drama *Severance* (Apple TV, 2022–) follows Mark Scout (Adam Scott), a mid-level employee at Lumon Industries, whose labor is divided using “severance”, a surgical procedure that splits “work” and “life” selves into separate entities sharing the same body: the “innie”, the worker inside the corporation, and the “outie”, the person outside the workplace. Initially integrating into the company, Mark, along with other severed workers, gradually becomes aware of Lumon’s coercive labor regime.

At first glance, both series appear to critique corporate capitalism. Yet their entanglement with the very institutions they seem to criticize complicates this reading. Produced by Apple TV, *Severance* depicts Lumon as a sinister mega-corporation whose sleek, minimalist design, corporate mystique, and technology-based control bear a curious resemblance to Apple’s own branding. Whether this resemblance functions as a self-reflexive critique or merely reflects the show’s institutional embeddedness remains an open question. Consequently, the series’ capacity to critically examine the corporate structures that finance, produce, and distribute it appears limited, with its institutional context possibly shaping the limits of its critique. *Mr. Robot* presents an adjacent issue: the show premiered with provocative “F— Wall St.” advertisements, positioning it as openly antagonistic towards financial capital. However, this tagline was censored

1. PETSKE, Denise, “USA Network Unveils Revamped Brand Image, Tagline”, *Deadline*, 2016, <https://deadline.com/print-article/1201737705/> (last accessed November 25, 2025). Full quote: “‘We The Bold’ reflects the kind of stories we want to tell—rich, captivating stories about unlikely heroes who defy the status quo, push boundaries and are willing to risk everything for what they believe in.”

from its original profanity, pointing to potential efforts by USA Network to contain political ideas within marketable boundaries. Both Esmail and Erickson have voiced early concerns that overt criticism of capitalism could jeopardize their projects' greenlighting prospects (Alter, 2025; Marcos, 2025), indicating potential industry pressures to temper political messaging. These productions thus reflect a long-standing question about mainstream culture: whether anticapitalist or leftist critique can meaningfully survive within high-profile, corporate-backed media, or whether such critique is inevitably absorbed and repurposed by the system it purports to challenge (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1947; Debord, 1994 [1967]; Jameson, 1991; Fisher, 2009).

I shall extend this concern to the corpus's narratives and representational strategies. In both series, corporations—understood as the primary sites through which capitalism operates today—form the protagonists' immediate environment, but in the overall narratives, capitalism does not predominantly manifest itself as an external structure against which the protagonists push back, but rather as an internalized force besieging the characters. As such, one may question the extent to which concentrating the critique of capitalism on internal struggles neutralizes its political charge.

This apparent limitation, however, may reflect broader transformations in contemporary capitalism, as labor, now largely immaterial, extends beyond the factory or office to permeate subjectivity. As Lazzarato observes, new management techniques under capitalism involve “the worker's subjectivity within the production of value” (1996: 135). Post-industrial paradigms of capitalism have shifted toward “prescription of subjectivities”, encouraging workers to “become subjects” by actively mobilizing their creativity, affect, and sense of self within the labor process. Subjectivation—the process through which individuals are constituted as subjects—may initially appear to expand autonomy and self-expression, but post-Fordist theorists contend that these capacities are increasingly harnessed by capital, as workers are called upon to produce not only goods and services but also forms of subjectivity that themselves generate value. From this perspective, subjectivity becomes both the product and the “raw material” of immaterial labor (1996: 142). Going back to industrial capitalism, this apparent contradiction reflects Marx's assessment that capitalist production creates “not only an object for the subject but also a subject for the object” (Marx, 1993 [1859]: 92). To sustain itself, capitalism absorbs human creativity, desire, and drives for self-realization (Berardi, 2009: 96), while mainstream culture manufactures the assumption that human existence is bound to the market (Haber, 2013: 286). Film and television often perpetuate this alignment, portraying heroic figures whose relations to themselves, to others, and to the world are seamlessly

integrated into capitalism (Haber, 2013: 286). Unlike these heroes, the protagonists of *Mr. Robot* and *Severance* fail to achieve such integration.

In *Mr. Robot*, Elliot is overtly cynical and seeks to reject the E Corp ecosystem even though he works for the conglomerate. In contrast, *Severance* presents Mark's "employee" self as initially compliant and idealistic, eager to succeed within Lumon, only gradually recognizing that he cannot find fulfillment in this environment. In both cases, corporate power demands a paradoxical subject: workers are expected to be servile and "perfect employees" but also authentic. Caught in these paradoxical injunctions, the protagonists struggle with fractured identities and conflicted purposes. While both series depict capitalism as an oppressive structural force shaping labor and subjectivity, these dynamics are often displaced onto the motif of the split self. Dissociation, first introduced as the characters' coping mechanism, thus becomes the central narrative conflict, staging the tension between external structures and lived subjective experience.

From a classical Marxist perspective, this division can be read as a dramatization of alienation: the problematic separation of self from labor, from others, and from oneself in capitalist society (Leopold, 2018). In this sense, the protagonists' fractured identities may challenge the naturalization of capitalist norms, by rendering their violence visible and felt. This interpretation, however, presupposes the existence of a coherent self from which one can be estranged. As David Harvey argues, contemporary capitalism increasingly fragments subjectivity, extending alienation beyond the sphere of production and into virtually all aspects of life (Harvey, 1990). If fragmented subjectivity has itself become the norm, alienation can no longer be understood simply as a departure from an otherwise unified self. Rather than confronting subjects as an external force, capitalist social relations participate in the production of subjectivity itself. Under these conditions, alienation becomes more difficult to identify as a distinct condition and, consequently, may appear a less secure basis for critique, no longer providing a clear vantage point from which to contest the system that produces it. Consequently, the distinction between resistance and complicity, between the margins of the system and its center, becomes increasingly difficult to maintain, as subjects can no longer position themselves wholly outside the structures they seek to oppose.

This paper contends that in *Mr. Robot* and *Severance*, the crisis of subjectivity serves simultaneously as a symptom of alienation under post-industrial capitalism and as a potential locus for revealing, critiquing, and resisting the social pathologies and power dynamics inherent to capitalism. While the model of corporate capitalism depicted in the shows retains structural features such as wealth accumulation, hierarchical control,

and domination over a vulnerable working class, conflict arises less from overt class struggle and more from the protagonists' troubled incorporation into the corporation. Capitalist power is therefore both imposed from above and internalized, shaping workers' identities while estranging them from themselves. Beginning with the corporation as a central institution, this discussion focuses on how the series portray alienated workers who exist in a liminal space—neither fully integrated nor entirely detached from these structures—caught between enmeshment and separation. Contemporary capitalist production mobilizes subjectivity as a productive resource, turning workers into hybrid entities torn between human agency and machinic function (Lazzarato, 1996), and engendering alienation manifested as psychobiological suffering (Marx, 1844; Haber, 2006). Through these dynamics, the shows depict capitalism as a totalizing system that, in generating alienation, simultaneously produces the conditions for collective resistance and contestation.

Capitalism, the Corporation and its Characters

Scholars in the field of television studies have consistently characterized *Mr. Robot* and *Severance* as depicting near-future or alternate societies shaped by intensified capitalist pressures. Sherryl Vint and Jonathan Alexander describe *Mr. Robot* as resembling our present but “even more devastated by forces of neoliberal, global capitalism and disenfranchisement than ours” (2022: 169). Nathan Palmer and April M. Schueths argue that *Severance* portrays the logic of capitalism “taken to an extreme that is simultaneously shocking yet recognizable” (2024: 43). An initial consideration should involve clarifying the meaning of the term “capitalism” itself, though this task proves complex. In contemporary political debates, the modalities of capitalism are frequently conflated with discourses on inequality and injustice. Within literature, extensive theoretical discussions regarding the nature of capitalism have yet to yield a scientific consensus. Indeed, in scholarly circles, definitions of capitalism are multiple, overlapping, and at times contradictory.

Here, capitalism will be understood from a critical perspective as a system characterized by inequality. In this regard, Marx's contribution to this literature remains central. Marx describes capitalism as a mode of production rooted in class relations and economic exploitation, where private ownership of the means of production enables capitalists to extract surplus value from wage labor. As the defining dynamics of the capitalist system, profit and accumulation inevitably lead to class struggle (Marx, 1990 [1867]: 808). Conversely, Max Weber sees capitalism as a rational, bureaucratic organization linked to cultural factors (the Protestant ethic)

that promote disciplined and systematic economic behavior necessary for the pursuit of profit (Weber, 2002 [1905]). More recently, post-Fordist theories have traced a historical shift from industrial capitalism to a “post-industrial” phase characterized by immaterial labor (affective, cognitive), dispersed production, and flexible networks replacing rigid hierarchies (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Berardi, 2009; Lazzarato, 2014). French philosopher Stéphane Haber considers capitalism as a historical formation that evolves toward an organic, adaptable form, emphasizing its capacity to adapt and expand through continuous transformation and to escape human control even as it penetrates deeper into social life, thus undergoing a “vitalist revolution” (Haber, 2013: 286). Fredric Jameson and Mark Fisher draw on Ernest Mandel’s concept of “late capitalism” (Mandel, 1999 [1972]) to describe a further stage of capitalist development characterized by globalization, post-industrial economy, and accelerated expansion of market relations. In Jameson’s account, late capitalism names not only an economic configuration but also a “cultural logic”, in which circuits of commodification and consumption largely include the arts and lifestyle forms (Jameson, 1991). Fisher, building on this framework, uses the term to describe a pervasive social condition in which capitalist realism renders capitalism itself fully naturalized, and therefore difficult to imagine beyond (Fisher, 2009). Together, these perspectives reaffirm capitalism’s multifaceted nature: its complexity, which resists simple boundaries, and its pervasive influence across economic structures, social relations, and regulatory practices.

The present study draws on these theoretical perspectives as a conceptual framework for identifying capitalist dynamics within fictional narratives. Given this broad theoretical scope, it is important to note that a television series cannot fully capture the systemic complexity of capitalism, let alone offer an exhaustive critique. Still, some academic readings of fiction tacitly assume as much. This is not to dismiss the potential for social or political critique in fictional narratives; rather, it is to recalibrate the conditions under which television can meaningfully articulate such critique. Simply mapping capitalism as an undifferentiated totality is insufficient, since fiction may easily construct an identifiable “capitalist diegesis” without necessarily providing a critique. Instead, shows such as *Mr. Robot* and *Severance* are better understood as highlighting processes of power, labor exploitation, and subject formation that underpin the capitalist ethos.

Present-day television shows center on a “subject,” usually the main character, through which the “semantic and symbolic core” of the show unfolds. This core shapes not only the narrative but also its moral and

philosophical outlook (Soulez, 2011).² Since “the connection to the series is established” through the characters, they must be given some “ontological weight” and political responsibility (Chalvon-Demersay, 2015: 37).³ If capitalism in these shows is to be meaningfully critiqued rather than just depicted, that critique must operate through the experiences of characters navigating capitalist constraints. Therefore, we can find a productive entry point into the shows’ politics by examining how their characters inhabit, negotiate, and resist hegemonic structures.

Aligning with Perroux’s (1948: 18) assessment of capitalism as a “company-based economy” organized around the “cardinal institution” of the firm,⁴ both *Mr. Robot* and *Severance* situate their central conflicts within the protagonists’ relationships with the corporations that influence their work. These antagonistic relationships originate from a structural divide: the protagonists are integral to corporate systems yet pushed to their margins, each in unique ways.

In *Mr. Robot*, Elliot Alderson’s antagonistic relationship with corporate capitalism initially appears ideological rather than directly material. Working as a cybersecurity engineer at Allsafe, his job is to protect the digital infrastructure of the very conglomerate he despises, the Enron-inspired E Corp, which he pejoratively calls “Evil Corp.” However, the series mostly glosses over sustained portrayals of workplace exploitation. One rare example occurs in the pilot episode, when Elliot responds to a late-night emergency call to counter a “DDoS attack”—a malicious hack of E Corp’s servers. Even so, Elliot is treated with relative professional respect, particularly by his manager, Gideon. Yet the protagonist harbors an internal, often unexplained resistance to the company. As he manages to reboot the system and stop the hack, he discovers a file hackers embedded in E Corp’s servers: “Leave me here,” it says, and Elliot, though taken aback by his own reaction, ultimately complies: “Time to shut them down... why can’t I delete it? I don’t want to delete it. I want it to stay. What’s wrong with me?” (S1E1 [30:00]). The note, as it turns out, was left by none other than himself, *via* the “fsociety” vigilante group. Alderson forgot, because he suffers from Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), and the person—or rather persona—who planted the message was “Mr. Robot”, Elliot’s alter ego made in the image of his late father. Indeed, as a mental disorder, DID is the “disruption of identity characterized by two or more distinct

2. My translation. Original quote: “La psychanalyse comme chemin, cure, quête d’un sens, fait ici partie de la matrice sérielle, qu’on pourrait définir comme le noyau sémantique et symbolique qui commande le récit et son horizon moral ou philosophique.”

3. My translation. Original quote: “[...] c’est par [l’intermédiaire des personnes] que s’opère le lien à la série [...] Une telle démarche suppose de leur donner un peu plus de dignité ontologique pour qu’on puisse, sans trop perdre la face, envisager de dialoguer avec eux.”

4. My translation. Original quotes: le capitalisme est “une économie d’entreprise”, et “l’entreprise est le microcosme capitaliste, l’institution cardinale du capitalisme.”

personality states,”⁵ but in the show it also assumes a symbolic significance. From its inception, the show frames Elliot as divided between corporate conformity (as a model employee) and anarchist opposition (as a vigilante hacker), with these complex positions contaminating and folding into one another, as well as negotiating control within the character himself.

In contrast, *Severance* grounds its protagonist’s split identity in direct material exploitation. For Mark S., along with his colleagues—Helly R. (Britt Lower), Irving B. (John Turturro), and Dylan G. (Zach Cherry)—working within Macrodata Refinement (“MDR”) at Lumon is fundamentally coercive, as it presupposes adherence to the company’s voluntary severance procedure. This procedure involves surgically partitioning the employee’s consciousness into an “outie” (denoting the “outside” of the workplace) and an “innie” (“inside” the workplace). The innie functions as a captive employee, confined to an interminable workday and deprived of autonomy. The innie remains connected to Lumon; upon crossing the company’s spatial boundary, their consciousness is automatically deactivated and replaced by the outie persona. Conversely, the outie abstains from labor entirely and has limited, if any, access to the innie’s experience. Furthermore, as a byproduct of their outies, severed employees neither choose their condition nor retain the ability to resign. In this context, the title of the series conveys a deliberate irony: it appropriates the term “severance,” originally associated with the actual compensation packages awarded to employees involuntarily terminated. The show repurposes this term to describe an existential state in which labor is devoid of voluntary agency, and from the perspective of the individual, where abstaining from work equates to nonexistence.

Reflecting the class stratification characteristic of capitalist societies, Lumon’s labor organization is hierarchically arranged, creating a top-down control mechanism over vulnerable employees. In practical terms, this translates into an inability to resign, mass surveillance by the corporate hierarchy, as well as various strategies to hinder workers’ autonomy. Paradoxically, one of these strategies is precisely the obfuscation of control: when Harmony Cobel (Patricia Arquette), the manager of the severed floor, promotes Mark S. to the role of Macrodata Refinement department chief, she declares that she confers upon him “the freedom to serve” Kier—the founder of Lumon—and by extension the company (S1E1 [15:33]). Lumon’s very own corporate Newspeak collapses freedom and servitude into a single concept—an ideological contradiction that masks the

5. As part of the DSM-V’s diagnostic criteria; American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.), “Dissociative Identity Disorder” - F44.81, 2013, 330.

subjection of employees to the corporation while revealing, to the viewer, the logic of wage slavery.

This mode of corporate governance is a fundamental aspect of what Boltanski and Chiapello identify as the “new spirit” of capitalism. This evolution shifts away from overt hierarchies toward a rhetoric focused on autonomy and flexibility, without the firm relinquishing power or altering the relations of domination (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2011 [1999]: 126). Both *E Corp* and *Lumon* are multinational, all-encompassing entities operating through the “system” to gain power, ultimately governed by a small cadre of influential executives. This dynamic epitomizes capitalism’s fundamental principle of concentrating benefits among a select few at the expense of many. Although the corporate hierarchy remains formally intact, the figures of power within capitalism tend to recede from direct, everyday interactions, appearing only through distant, abstract imagery. From its opening moments, *Mr. Robot* exemplifies this spatial and symbolic detachment of corporate authority, depicting shadowy figures of *E Corp* executives congregated in a busy conference room atop a New York skyscraper while the protagonist’s voice-over narration introduces them as “the top 1% of the top 1%—the ones that play God without permission” (S1E1 [00:35]). Similarly, in *Severance*, *Lumon*’s authority resides within “The Board”, a mysterious governing body whose influence is reduced to indirect commands, and whose only known member within the diegetic timeline is Jame Eagan, the company’s current CEO.

The power of this wealth-hoarding class is undeniable; however, it remains as abstract as their transient appearances. The shows provide limited insight into their operations, instead alluding to an indistinct notion of absolute control, which risks devolving into a conspiratorial fantasy of “puppet mastery.” To prevent this from undermining structural critique, Vint and Alexander suggest we understand such groups as “an aesthetic shorthand to capture the larger structural forces of financialized capital”, which prove difficult to depict if not by way of figuration (2022: 174). Viewing *Severance*’s Board and *Mr. Robot*’s “DEUS Group” as allegorical representations of a broader capitalist ruling class makes for a compelling interpretation; in turn, it may enable us to view Mark S. and Elliot Alderson as embodied manifestations of a working class suffering under the unjust regime of capitalism. Nonetheless, allegory functions here as both a solution and a symptom. On one hand, it grants some visibility to the diffuse and abstract structures of contemporary capitalism, providing a conceptual and visual understanding of otherwise intangible forms of power. On the other hand, it may create the illusion that 21st century capital is embodied rather than operating through dispersed, networked, and often immaterial processes—such that the overthrow of a handful of individuals appears sufficient to right the system, effectively obscuring the

structural dimensions of exploitation and rendering traditional avenues of class confrontation progressively obsolete. This allegorical opacity is mirrored at the diegetic level: the protagonists themselves are similarly unable to identify the apex of corporate power. This displacement may cause a significant shift in the shows: when the ruling class cannot be directly challenged, conflict moves inward and laterally, targeting the self and fellow workers.

Structurally, this power is omnipresent yet unreachable, creating a pronounced divide between the workers and those in power. *Severance* makes this divide literal: outies retain control over their innies while remaining shielded from the realities of the severed floor. But this is taken to an extreme through the character of Helly. First introduced as a confused and expendable new hire, she is revealed as the alter of Helena Eagan, the CEO's daughter, who, by all means, is the "face of the company", Lumon using her severed status as a publicity stunt to boost the company's image. Worker and corporate power are here both literally and figuratively divided. Yet by inscribing this division within a shared body, the series underscores their mutual implication in the same overarching structure. A similar conflation is made in *Mr. Robot*: the first time we see Elliot work at Allsafe, he is shown examining the log files of a recent cyberattack on E Corp, which he audibly calls "awesome." Gideon (Michel Gill)—the CEO of Allsafe and Elliot's boss—immediately responds: "You think this is awesome? This is killing us, Elliot" (S1E1, [08:22]). Gideon's choice of language draws Elliot—and, by extension, the rest of the employees—into a manufactured sense of solidarity with management. Suddenly, Elliot is incorporated within the corporate "we," even though moments earlier, he had nearly expressed satisfaction regarding attacks toward E Corp. This linguistic strategy obscures the fundamental divide between those who possess ownership of the enterprise and those whose labor sustains it.

The implications extend beyond rhetorical flourish. When Gideon employs the term "we," he personifies the company, treating it as a living subject, as though the company's survival were a shared bodily concern in which employees are organically implicated. Etymologically, the term "corporation" derives from the Latin *corpus*, meaning "body" or "person". Under U.S. law, a corporation is an "artificial person or legal entity [...] which is regarded in law as having a personality and existence distinct from that of its several members."⁶ In the shows, corporate power appears not just as an external structure but, symbolically, as a collective body which individuals are expected to belong to. Conflict does not take the form of a confrontation between two clearly opposed classes but emerges

6. *Black's Law Dictionary*, 11th ed. (St. Paul, MN: Thomson Reuters, 2019), s.v. "corporation."

from the protagonists' uneasy incorporation into the corporate "person" itself. Capitalist power, therefore, is not solely exerted from above; it is internalized and experienced from within.

Machinic Labor and the Production of Subjectivity

Mark's first on-screen appearance within the workplace is depicted as a sequence of mechanical thresholds (S1E1). Set against a subdued, ominous extradiegetic score, the protagonist proceeds silently across the lobby towards the reception desk at its center. Without uttering a word, he presents his identification badge; the secretary, equally silent, places a call to confirm his clearance. He scans his badge once to pass through the gates and again to access a secure room; subsequently, a guard conducts a routine scan with a handheld device. Mark then enters the elevator and turns around, now facing the viewer. After a brief interval, the musical score diminishes, and a bell chime signifies the elevator's arrival at his designated office level [09:07]. Suddenly, Mark's eyelids flutter. A high-pitched whine emits a screech, the camera dolly-zooms in—the split is complete. The elevator doors open, and upbeat, groovy music starts playing. Innie Mark navigates the brightly lit, minimalistic corridors of the severed floor in a manner reminiscent of a programmed agent: each step is deliberate, each turn precise. The transition from outie to innie is portrayed as an automatic procedure, a machine-like switch, which subjugates "human gestures to mechanical rhythms" (Berardi, 2009: 111), transforming the individual into a compliant employee.

Upon first observing Elliot enter the workplace, we see him operate a personality transition. As he crosses the office threshold, he pulls back the hood of his hoodie and reflects in a voice-over: "But I'm only a vigilante hacker by night; by day, just a regular cybersecurity engineer, employee number ER28-0652" (S1E1 [07:38]). Later in the episode, he introduces himself to E Corp's Senior Vice President of Technology, Tyrell Wellick (Martin Wallström), as "just a tech" [18:45]. Concerning Allsafe and E Corp-related matters, the protagonist consistently diminishes his own subjectivity, affirming that he is merely a number, a "cog in the machine". Far from simply representing a strategy to distance himself personally or ideologically from the corporation, such self-dehumanization points to a broader logic of 21st century capitalism, wherein labor, identity, and value are mediated through technological systems. As Mr. Robot, Elliot's alter ego, observes in the pilot episode, "Money hasn't been real since we got off the gold standard. It's become virtual. Software, the operating system of our world" (S1E1 [45:32]). Despite Elliot's professed efforts to disengage from capitalism—rejecting mainstream culture and

conspicuous consumption—he remains constrained by its structures. His social anxiety drives him to seek connection predominantly through digital interfaces. Rather than engaging directly with others, he hacks into their lives, watching their online presence and reconstructing their identities from their digital footprint. Social relations, much like capital, have become virtualized, as have identities. Elliot laments that nothing appears to be genuine anymore; nonetheless, his vigilantism, his principal form of opposition, is mediated by technology. Confronting someone equates to confronting his virtuality, and vice versa: in the series’ opening scene, when he exposes a cybercriminal and facilitates his arrest, Elliot claims to have “deleted him”: “In three short minutes I destroyed a man’s business, life, existence” (S1E1 [06:45]). The protagonist presents hacking as a way to contest corporate authority: “The higher-ups don’t like someone with my power,” he declares. Yet this resistance remains deeply entangled with the system it opposes. Elliot relies on the same technological infrastructures and techniques through which corporate power operates, making hacker culture in *Mr. Robot* less an external challenge to capitalism than one of its internal contradictions; a form of resistance that inevitably reproduces aspects of the structures it seeks to contest because it shares their technological and economic foundations. In brief, the main characters in both series are caught in a liminal space where the principles pertaining to the corporate structure and capitalism at large have converged with their existence. As Lazzarato contends, post-industrial capitalism reconfigures the relations between “subject/object, human/machine, or agent/instrument” into heterogeneous forces that are variously “animated” (2014: 27). It thus uses and produces “ontologically ambiguous,” hybrid entities (Lazzarato, 2014: 30). In both *Mr. Robot* and *Severance*, this condition manifests as a crisis of subjectivity whereby the characters’ internal lives become inextricably linked to the technological systems that organize their work, such that subjectivity itself is both mobilized by and tethered to “the machine.” This duality is already encapsulated by the oxymoronic title of “Mr. Robot,” which bridges (and separates) human and machine, or by the technologically mediated existence of the severed workers. With regard to labor, this duality is evident at Lumon: the Macrodata Refinement process, although digital in nature, depends heavily on the subjective judgment of the employees. Seated before an outdated computer interface, the refiners are tasked with sorting grids of seemingly arbitrary numbers—not according to any explicit logical criteria, but based on the emotional responses they evoke: “how the numbers feel”. In “Half-Loop” (S1E2), Helly, who is still a novice, encounters difficulties in refining her first set of numbers. After unsuccessful attempts to skim through the interface, she ultimately hovers over a specific set of numbers [48:33]. The camera eerily zooms in on the computer screen, honing in on the digits. When she sorts them, the action visibly leaves her shaken and breathless. “They were scary,” she says; an admission that demonstrates that subjectivity is not excluded by

Lumon's machinery, but rather integrated as a fundamental aspect of the labor process.

Because Lumon's operations derive value directly from subjectivity, the innies are sometimes compelled to cultivate authentic aspects of their personalities, rather than merely performing rote tasks. This includes sharing "something about themselves" during welcome parties or expressing preferences for one of the company's nine core principles (S1E2 [13:45]). However, most of the time, what appears personal becomes entangled in the Lumon mythos or in Lumon-branded commodities. Mark possesses a crystal head cube of himself; Dylan proudly boasts to Helly about the several caricature portraits of himself he has acquired—Lumon's fifth-tier incentive reward for completing 100% of a work file [09:51]. Subjectivity itself becomes both the raw material and the product of labor, shaped through rituals, rewards, and narratives that align personal meaning with corporate value. So much so that Dylan reacts to Helly's suicide attempt—an extreme effort to escape the corporation—by attributing it, without much sarcastic tone, to her lack of material possessions: "She needs to start earning perks; I'd end my life if I didn't have any finger traps yet." (S1E5 [20:55]). This reflects the idea, prevailing since the advent of capitalism, that mass consumption serializes "behaviors in relation to existing merchandises" (Berardi, 2009: 111). Furthermore, according to Hardt and Negri, "the great industrial and financial powers [...] produce not only commodities but also subjectivities" (2009: 32). In the third episode of *Severance* (S1E3, "In Perpetuity"), Irving (John Turturro) informs Helly that "he was shapeless" upon awakening on the severed floor for the first time. "It's an unnatural state for a person to have no history," he elucidates; "History makes us someone. Gives us a context. A shape" [37:30]. He further states, "But then I learned that I work for a company that has been actively caring for mankind since 1866," thereby framing Lumon's assignment of an identity to the severed employees as a providential act.

The second season's "Cold Harbor" episode (S2E10) reveals the function of Macrodata Refinement—at least as it pertains to Mark's duties—as the systematic depletion of other severed individuals' psyches, turning their bodies and minds into neutralized vessels prepared for the implantation of new consciousness. This process relies on the engagement of human emotion: effective refinement necessitates that the data operator is acquainted with the individual whose psyche is being eroded; what might appear as mindless labor actually involves the effort to diminish the mind. A complex triangulation emerges here: the labor performed by an employee, whose subjectivity (or rather their outie's) is essential for the task, acts upon another individual whose subjectivity is being systematically extracted, all mediated through computer interfaces and biomedical technologies. Once again, the paradoxical logic inherent in corporate

capitalism is laid bare, as it simultaneously demands and exhausts subjectivity, forging connections between minds and bodies only to tear them apart. Lumon ultimately functions as a capitalist grinding machine in which individual suffering is neither alleviated nor eradicated but recycled into productive force. Mark's trajectory is ironic: although he chose to utilize severance technology to escape the grief associated with his wife's death, it is ultimately revealed that Lumon bears culpability in that loss, and by continuing to serve the corporation, Mark does not suspend his suffering but unwittingly reproduces it.

Capitalist powers, Hardt and Negri argue, “produce agentic subjectivities within the biopolitical context: they produce needs, social relations, bodies, and minds—which is to say, they produce producers” (2009: 32). Lumon generates workers who will, in turn, sustain the corporation by training others to do so. The ubiquity of this recursive model is evident from *Severance*'s opening scene, which shows the “orientation procedure”—a protocol that new hires undergo to acclimate them to their life at Lumon. The opening scene begins with a black frame accompanied by an asynchronous diegetic voice of unknown origin, asking, “Who are you?” through a vintage speaker. After a delay, the first image appears: a God's eye view of a newly severed worker, unconscious and laid out on a conference table. As she awakens, the show cuts to a close-up shot of the vintage speaker, now emitting static feedback. A reverse close shot reveals Helly's face. Visibly disoriented, she can only respond with “Hello”. The character first introduced to the viewer is Helly rather than Mark, who is the unequivocal main character of the show, whose voice the viewer has already heard without yet knowing it. He now requests Helly to participate in a “brief survey.” Her unsuccessful attempts to leave the room compel her to comply, yet she is unable to remember answers to simple questions about her name or her date of birth. Tension escalates as Mark remotely identifies all the “Unknown” responses; by not knowing herself, Helly seems to have failed the assessment. The door opens, ultimately revealing Mark; he stands in the doorway, his figure dressed in an office suit, shrouded in darkness and faintly illuminated by a dim green glow behind him. The anxiety-inducing nature of this mise-en-scene is instantly contrasted by Mark's enthusiasm as he cheerfully announces, “That's a perfect score!”. A reverse close-up lingers slightly on Helly, who is now panting with fear. Her fear, confusion, and dispossession are reclassified as success, because from Lumon's perspective she has been cleared of history, attachments, and autonomy. Although the show does not specify the exact duration of Mark's tenure at the corporation, it is implied that he has been employed there for at least one or two years by this point. Having become fully acquainted with his role, he is now assigned the responsibility of training Helly, to serve as the “producer” of her new corporate identity, mirroring the assistance once provided by his former friend Petey when

he initially joined the company. Helly's lack of self is not a disadvantage but an asset: she is prepared to be shaped into whatever Lumon requires of her. In accordance with Hardt and Negri's framework, *Severance* portrays capitalism not merely as an exploitative system but as one that sustains itself by generating the very forms of subjectivity it necessitates.

In this context, Mark embodies capitalist incentives whereas Helly, as a frightened newcomer, conveys the distressing experience of being dehumanized within the workforce. The subsequent cut—accompanied by glitching sounds—transitions seamlessly into the opening titles, only to be interrupted by an image of Mark weeping alone in his vehicle in the company parking lot. This temporal, spatial and formal cut not only repositions Mark as the “true” protagonist but also delineates and interconnects (inward and outward; Helly and Mark; inner and outer), thereby highlighting the duality and hybridity inherent in such states through juxtaposition. Furthermore, this “technologically mediated” cut aligned with electronic sounds is reminiscent of the switch between innie and outie, of the fusion of human and machine, corroborated by the rhetorical ambiguity of the term “speaker” (denoting both a human speaker and electronic apparatus). An additional significant element in this introductory scene is the suffering endured by both Mark and Helly. Within this framework, subjectivity is more indicative of corporate control than a promise of humanization; instead, subjectivity exists solely “for the machine,” and “subjective components are functions of enslavement” (Lazzarato, 2014: 29). One of Lumon's key selling points for the severance procedure is the appealing prospect of achieving a “work-life balance,” which Mark references during his interview with Helly: “I understand you're confused about the severance procedure. Before we hop on that, let's chat about something I bet you have heard of, the work-life balance.”

Historically, this concept rests on the premise that the “ideal capitalist workplace was ruthlessly concerned with efficiency and did not care at all about the well-being of their workers,” leading “the idealized home” as “the space where one was loved and nurtured regardless of their output” (Palmer & Schueths, 2022: 50). *Severance* introduces an ironic dimension to this myth: since the innie and the outie possess separate consciousnesses, no “balance” exists, rendering each side absolute, with perpetual work for the innie and no work whatsoever for the outie. Moreover, the notion of “work-life balance” implies that work is not equivalent to life, and consequently, that workers are not “living,” thus perpetuating their exploitation as dehumanized individuals. This is further complicated by Mark's own motivation for undergoing severance: an attempt to escape the burdens of his personal life. This central paradox finds an articulation in the lyrics of Styx's “Mr. Roboto” song, featured in the penultimate episode of *Mr. Robot* (S4E12, “whoami”): “Machines to save our lives /

Machines dehumanize.” Ultimately, the mechanisms intended to save the characters undermine the very essence of human subjectivity.

The traditional dichotomy between human and machine, or authentic self and professional persona, grows increasingly indistinct. While capitalism incorporates subjectivity and fosters hybridity, this does not mean that the self is seamlessly integrated. Instead, this fusion generates instability. The self is caught between conflicting demands: to demonstrate authenticity and to satisfy the corporation’s expectations of an ideal worker; to act human and to perform mechanically. Capitalism exploits this discrepancy, manipulating the division to generate greater value, yielding not seamless adaptation but crisis. Consequently, the crisis of subjectivity directly translates into alienation, experienced as lived suffering.

Fractured Subjectivity and the Experience of Alienation

According to Stéphane Haber, alienation is the “concept par excellence of social pathology *as experience*—more *precisely, as first-person lived experience*” (2006; the author’s italics).⁷ While the previous section examined how subjects become fused with machines and corporate systems, alienation signifies the experiential toll of such fusion: the suffering that ensues when subjectivity is both demanded and depleted by capital. Alienation no longer remains confined to power structures or mere identity; it now pertains to embodied suffering—a “concrete diminishment of the self, a vital limitation, that is originally psychobiological,” as well as the “pathology of a life diverted from itself and gone astray” (Haber, 2006).⁸ This psychobiological dimension is instrumental in understanding how the machinic labor conditions discussed earlier translate into visceral, lived distress.

Both *Mr. Robot* and *Severance* dramatize this suffering through their protagonists’ fractured subjectivities. As we know, in *Mr. Robot*, Elliot suffers from “DID”, a psychological ailment that manifests visually as a multiplication of selves on screen. This is particularly salient in “eps1.7_ wh1ter0se.m4v” (S1E8): the distressed protagonist stares at his reflection in front of a mirror [41:12], and “glitches”, a myriad characters taking his place in rapid succession while he utters, *via* voice-over, “Do I even exist?”. The scene’s frantic editing narrows the distance between mental experience and bodily reality, presenting them as inseparable dimensions

7. My translation. Original quote: “En effet, au-delà des formes grossières par la fiction, l’aliénation nous paraît finalement être le concept par excellence de la pathologie sociale comme expérience et, plus précisément, comme expérience vécue en première personne.”

8. My translation. Original quote: “Nous verrons ainsi plutôt l’aliénation comme la pathologie d’une vie détournée d’elle-même et qui se manque.”

of a single pathology. Elliot's dysfunction is irreducibly psychobiological, resulting in what Haber calls "diminishment of the self". We see here a crisis of ontological uncertainty so acute that the protagonist can no longer affirm his own existence. Per Marx's formulation, Elliot is estranged "from his own body, from nature as it exists outside him, from his spiritual essence [*Wesen*], his *human* essence" (Marx, 1992 [1844]: 329). His dissociative condition is not just a psychological issue but also a symptom of the machinic subject position; the self fragments because no clear role exists for someone who must be both subject and object, both agent and tool, both living person and machine.

In *Severance*, dissociation is also at once psychological and corporeal: it is a parting of the psyche caused by a technological chip inserted into the severed worker's body. The severed workers are ostensibly diminished, now being partial, "reduced" in their daily lives, and not knowing who they are when they first enter the workplace.

To situate this crisis within a longer genealogy of capitalist exploitation, we must return to Marx's foundational analysis of alienation. Tracing back to the Latin *alienare*, alienation means to "cause a separation to occur", to "take away", or to "remove". In its broader usage, alienation denotes a condition in which "living human beings are controlled by a force that exists outside of them but that is in reality their own combined force" (Ross, 2020: 535). At face value, this definition echoes the shows' motif of split self: the characters struggle against entities—the corporation, their colleagues, their "alter"—that are simultaneously external antagonists and emanations of their own labor and desire. The split self, in both texts, is already literal: workers fight for control against forces that are both Other and intrinsically part of themselves.

Quoting Marx's *Capital: Vol. 1* (1990 [1867]: 175), Ross argues that alienation, within the context of capitalism, means belonging "to a social formation in which the process of production has mastery over man, instead of the opposite" (Ross, 2020: 536). Workers lose control over their labor, adapting to an external, impersonal system rather than directing it according to their needs and purposes. The alienated worker's labor exists outside him, "*as something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer" (Marx, 1992 [1844]: 324). More precisely, Marx situates the alienated worker within industrial manufacturing, transforming raw materials into tangible commodities through a combination of manual and machine labor. This sheds light on Marx's "primary grievance with capitalism" (Ross, 2020: 537): that alienation is "broadly speaking, the living being ruled by the dead, producers being ruled by products". The *Manuscripts*, in particular, support a dialectical inversion of Capital development and worker self-realization.

The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he produces. The *devaluation* of the human world grows in direct proportion to the *increase in value* of the world of things. Labor not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a *commodity* and it does so in the same proportion in which it produces commodities in general (Marx, 1992 [1844]: 323).

Given that workers are compelled to sell their labor power as a condition of survival, they enter the market as commodities alongside the goods they produce. In a system in which the means of production are owned by capital rather than by the workers themselves, workers become disposable, valued only insofar as their labor can be profitably exploited. Consequently, the value of the worker diminishes directly in proportion to the increase in the value of the commodities they produce: heightened productivity increases their replaceability. Initially, the more workers contribute to expanding the realm of “things,” the more their own significance diminishes, as capitalist production prioritizes the realm of commodities over the individuals who create them.

As one might expect, this 19th century analysis does not map neatly onto the forms of corporate capitalism depicted in *Mr. Robot* and *Severance*. The protagonists’ labor model is broadly consistent with Marx’s theory insofar as their labor produces outputs that they neither fully comprehend nor exercise control over, which are immediately appropriated by corporate systems and later manifest as instruments of their own domination. However, these outputs never appear to be made “material in an object”; they never quite undergo what Marx describes as “*objectification* of labour” (1992 [1844]: 324). The product of their labor, which accrues to the capital of Lumon and E Corp, exists not as tangible matter but as digital information: “data refinement” in Mark’s work department and cybersecurity protocols for Elliot. Furthermore, as previously argued, labor is contingent not only on data but also on the subjectivity of the worker. Subjectivity constitutes the fundamental “raw material” of immaterial labor (Lazzarato, 1996: 142) in conjunction with data. But it is also the outcome of labor. Both Elliot and Mark are “subject-objects”. Mr. Robot—Elliot’s alter ego—serves as a hybrid form of subject-object upon which Elliot “has bestowed life,” but who eventually confronts him as an “hostile and alien” autonomous force (Marx, 1992 [1844]: 324), threatening to subsume Elliot despite its origin as a protective mechanism. Similarly, outie Mark has brought innie Mark into existence, yet the latter has grown independent, resisting his outie’s authority over the body they are forced to share. Both shows depict a 21st century corporate capitalism in which the transition from material to immaterial production fundamentally alters the structure of alienation. In circumstances where physical commodities are absent, and production yields code and data rather than tangible

goods, *Mr. Robot* and *Severance* figure the alienated product as inwardly directed toward the worker's own subjectivity. The alienated product is, in effect, subjectivity itself, reconfigured as a corporate asset.

The worker is not only estranged from the product of their labor but from the act of labor itself. "So if the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation [...]. The estrangement of the object of labour merely summarizes the estrangement, the alienation in the activity of labour itself," Marx surmises (1992 [1844]: 326). In the shows, this manifests in two contrasting ways: first, in the value the characters assign to their labor; and secondly, as active detachment within the workplace.

Although Lumon's Macrodata Refinement employees carry out repetitive and opaque tasks—such as sorting numbers without comprehending their purpose—their managers persuade them that their work is "mysterious and important." Mark, like other innies, initially accepts Lumon's narrative despite his complete lack of understanding regarding the overall objectives of his responsibilities. The perceived value of the work fundamentally depends on its elusiveness: ignorance becomes a blank slate upon which employees can inscribe illusions of significance within the company's operations. Lumon cultivates this sense of importance through the "secular religious fervor of capitalist workplaces" (Palmer & Schueths, 2024: 51). Founder Kier Egan is venerated as a divine figure, to the extent that the innies understand their work as serving a higher purpose in the continuation of "His project". Marx posits that devotion to a transcendent figure operates as a form of self-alienation, whereby "the more man puts into God, the less he retains within himself" (1992 [1844]: 324). Without venturing into the theological stakes of this argument, this discussion draws on the 1844 *Manuscripts* to examine how the corporation instrumentalizes faith. Indeed, beneath Lumon's religious veneer lies corporate capitalism's subjectivation of the individuals as workers (Prevas, 2024); a twofold process that deepens rather than alleviates alienation. First, Lumon's sanctifying narratives substitute the worker's need for meaningful labor with false consciousness, obstructing any impulse to understand the real nature and purpose of their work. This is so the innies remain in a state of detached, alienated labor. Second, if the innies' sense of self and significance in the workspace is inflated—and indeed, they feel part of a grand historical project—then they are less likely to quit or resist, which keeps them compliant and ever more distant from their outie counterparts.

Conversely, Elliot Alderson is acutely, even pathologically aware of his work's value—or lack thereof. Jaded and cynical, he regularly addresses the topic of his work's meaninglessness using voice-overs. Yet this consciousness offers no escape. Elliot's cybersecurity work at Allsafe is dictated by corporate protocols, forcing compliance with routines he neither

controls nor endorses, all in service of companies he despises. Because his experience of alienated labor is conscientized, it allows the protagonist to indulge in escapist fantasies; but those fantasies are superseded by a detached resignation. In *Mr. Robot*'s pilot episode [19:18], Elliot reflects:

ELLIOT (V.O.): Sometimes I dream of saving the world. Saving everyone from the invisible hand, one that brands us with an employee badge. The one that forces us to work for them. The one that controls us every day without us knowing it. But I can't stop it. I'm not that special. I'm just anonymous. I'm just alone.

Where Mark S. is unaware, Elliot is in a state of hyperawareness. Invoking Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), the protagonist recasts the "invisible hand" metaphor for market self-regulation as an apparatus of systemic domination. For Alderson, the invisible hand is shorthand to corporate capitalism: the character deplores being "branded" as an employee, and, as he told the viewer, forced to labor for "Evil Corp", the megaconglomerate that owns "70% of the global consumer credit industry" (S1E1, [46:18]).

Throughout the presentation, Elliot's heightened awareness of global issues and his dissatisfaction with his professional environment lead him to frequently "detach" from his sense of self, maintaining his role "only as a *physical subject*" (Marx, 1992 [1844]: 325) while his consciousness drifts elsewhere. In the early moments of the pilot episode, his colleague and friend Angela approaches him at his workplace to address his absence from her birthday celebration the previous evening. In response, Elliot promptly withdraws into a flashback; we observe him lingering outside the venue where the party was held, paralyzed by social anxiety, unable to commit to either entering or leaving. However, his fugue is broken by Angela's reproach [09:20]:

ANGELA: Stop thinking about something else when I'm talking to you. I hate when you do that.

ELLIOT: Sorry. I was thinking about work.

ANGELA: Maybe that's why Gideon loves you so much. He thanks me all the time for bringing you in. But for some reason, I think you secretly hate it here.

ELLIOT (V.O.): She was right. I liked most of the people, but our business, a cybersecurity firm that protects corporations—I can't think of anything I hate more.

ELLIOT (*aloof*): No, I love it here.

The editing of this interaction draws attention to Elliot's dissociative tendency to "zone out" as a form of psychological escape, while his physical

presence remains in the workspace. Elliot seeks to justify his disengagement by asserting that he was “thinking about work”. This arches back to the idea that professional concerns take precedence over personal matters within capitalist frameworks; more notably, it indicates that the character consciously exploits this concept. Angela perceives this duplicity; for example, she senses that their manager’s admiration for Elliot is not reciprocated, and the voice-over immediately confirms her suspicion: by providing the audience with direct insight into Elliot’s internal feelings, the narrative emphasizes the tension between the protagonist’s feigned compliance to corporate norms (his blasé “No, I love it here”) and his personal disdain for the firm (“I can’t think of anything I hate more”). Here, Elliot assumes a metaphorical mask: that of the “good corporate employee.” “How do I take off a mask when it stops being a mask? When it’s as much a part of me as I am?” later ponders Elliot (S2E1 [29:10]). E Corp emerges as an antagonistic force from which Elliot cannot disentangle himself. He is estranged not only from the work he performs but also from genuine social expression: he is unable to establish an authentic connection with Angela despite his affections for her, nor can he attend her birthday celebration without overwhelming anxiety, even as he concedes that he “likes most of the people”. His alienation extends beyond the professional environment into all aspects of life, articulating a broader critique of how labor under capitalism obstructs subjectivity itself.

Both Mark and Elliot demonstrate that neither mystification nor demystification alone offers a resolution to alienation within the context of corporate technological capitalism. Mark’s adherence to Lumon’s official narrative ensures his compliance but leaves him profoundly dissatisfied; conversely, Elliot, who perceives corporate mechanisms with clarity, finds that heightened awareness only amplifies his feelings of isolation and despair, leaving him trapped within a system he fundamentally opposes. Ultimately, whether or not they are aware of their alienation is of little consequence; in either scenario, the suffering endures, and such distress is inherently unsustainable.

Overall, the insistence on dissociation lends itself to a Marxist reading, though this is not to say that Marx offered diagnostic tools to comprehend alienation in a clinical sense. Rather, the motif of split identity, in the corpus, is figurative: a way to convey personal conflict as much as it is a metaphor for social pathology. In regard to *Mr. Robot*, Vint and Alexander confer a similar meaning to Elliot’s condition of split personality, presenting it as “an internal ‘split’ that metonymically traces larger structural, economic, and political splits” (2022: 180). For the characters, the experience of being dual, of existing at the margins yet at the core of corporate systems, can generate awareness that this stems from structural dynamics of power, not from individual shortcomings.



The risk, however, is that this inward turn displaces class struggle, undermining material analysis and weakening critique, potentially reducing corporate power to a matter of infighting among subjects. The question thus arises whether this subjective turn precludes the possibility of collective action by redirecting antagonism inward and laterally—toward oneself and one’s peers—instead of toward the “system” or the ruling class. The corpus navigates this tension by staging infighting on two levels: interpersonal and intrapersonal.

Interpersonal dynamics in both *Severance* and *Mr. Robot* illustrate how capitalist structures influence relationships between colleagues, transforming peers into enforcers of corporate imperatives despite sharing similar goals or interests. As we showed before, Mark is assigned to “training duty” upon receiving his promotion, which entails the responsibility of orienting new employees so that they conform to Lumon’s labor standards. A similar dynamic unfolds in the narrative arc of Elliot’s childhood friend Angela. Following the death of her mother from leukemia caused by a toxic chemical spill at an E Corp factory in the 1990s, Angela endeavors to hold the corporation accountable. But unable to secure redress, she decides to start working for the conglomerate with the hope of enacting change from within, using a non-revolutionary approach (S1E10). Contrary to her initial ambition, by the second season, Angela has relinquished her efforts. Indeed, over the course of her tenure at E Corp (Season 2), she “begins to orient her desire toward success within the system” (Vint & Alexander, 2022: 192), soon finding herself in direct opposition to Elliot. What is especially notable is how both Mark and Angela end up as instruments of the very systems that harmed them. In both shows, capitalist institutions create “bespoke-for-capitalism” identities: selves carefully crafted to support and sustain corporate agendas. This process of forming identities ensures that employees climbing the corporate hierarchy internalize these values and reinforce them laterally among colleagues, rather than holding accountable those who hold actual authority above them. As such, workers police each other, often without recognizing that they do so. Mark disciplines Helly; Angela betrays Elliot. Corporate power does not operate solely in a top-down fashion. Instead, it is perpetuated by enlisting employees as inadvertent agents of their own and each other’s subjugation.

Perhaps most significant, however, are the internal processes depicted in these narratives. The struggle is not merely external, as workers contest the authority of management; it also manifests as an inner conflict, in which individuals are torn between competing roles, allegiances, and class

identifications. In *Mr. Robot*, from Season 2 onward, the Mr. Robot alter⁹ attempts to drive radical actions and frequently clashes with Elliot's moral hesitations, producing overt conflict. Though the protagonist tries to work independently, Mr. Robot continues to act through him. Most frequently, this manifests in narrative and formal ruptures: "the screen cuts to black and then 'jumps' to another time and place—we follow only Elliot, whose experience is disrupted by chunks of lost time during which Mr. Robot has taken over" (Vint & Alexander, 2022: 192). The struggle manifests physically as well, while remaining resolutely internal. In "eps1.9_zer0-day.avi" (S1E10), as an argument in a café escalates between the two, Mr. Robot shoves Elliot against a wall and begins to strangle him—only for the illusion to abruptly shatter, revealing that Elliot is, in fact, choking himself while other patrons look on in confusion [36:45].

Mr. Robot's motif of the split self carries multiple layers of significance. As established earlier, divided identity functions as a symptom of alienated labor and the contradictory demands on subjectivity imposed by corporate capitalism; simultaneously, it becomes a site of class struggle. For all his ideological discomfort with capitalism, Elliot's "inside the corporation" employee persona nevertheless occupies a relatively secure and privileged position as a cybersecurity engineer at Allsafe in New York City. He earns a stable salary and possesses technical skills that grant him a degree of leverage within the labor market. By contrast, Mr. Robot, the "outsider", appears as a marginal, anarchic figure who, when first encountered in a subway station, is quite literally asking for change. But there is a certain ambivalence to his class position: although visually coded as homeless and dispossessed, his outsider status does not straightforwardly amount to being working class, given his continued dependance upon Elliot's resources and social position. Elliot, notwithstanding his pervasive anger, largely retains a reformist orientation, whereas Mr. Robot—though benefiting from Elliot's material conditions—advocates for a radical break with the *status quo*, an impulse toward post-capitalist transformations. This ambiguity invites a reading of Mr. Robot's radicalism as, at least initially, performative; however, it may also operate as a narrative and aesthetic mode through which distance from the institutions and values of corporate capitalism is staged. Either way, the conflict between the two characters extends beyond Elliot's internal psyche and takes on a political dimension: reform *versus* revolution, accommodation to the system *versus* its complete dismantlement, class compromise *versus* class war. This dynamic unfolds within a single conflicted, fragmented individual. Not only can Elliot's dissociation be read as reflecting class struggle, but it also mirrors the dilemma experienced by many workers under late capitalism:

9. The word "alter" (instead of "alter ego") is used in the show to refer to the protagonist's different personas.

an aspiration for stability juxtaposed with an acute awareness of the system's inherent inequities.

Severance presents the inverse configuration, reversing the class positions occupied by its divided subjects. The earliest instance of intrapersonal foiled resistance occurs in episode four, "The You You Are." Innie Helly, struggling to adapt to the severed lifestyle, is forced to rehearse an apology for her manager, Mrs. Cobel, multiple times. She eventually retracts the apology and demands a resignation, even threatening self-harm. Although Cobel complies, Helly returns to the severed floor to find that her outie, Helena, has denied the request. In a video recording, Helena insists on Helly's subordination: "I am a person, you are not; I make the decisions, you do not" [22:34]. There is a clear dehumanization of the employee here, which we may expand to the dehumanization of the working class, as Helena—the public face of the company and a committed adherent to its capitalist ethos—denies personhood to Helly, her worker-self. The split here maps directly onto class hierarchy: Helena embodies capital; Helly embodies labor.

Mark's outie/innie dynamic is more ambiguous and therefore more revealing of intermediate class positions. In the Season 2 finale ("Cold Harbor"), Mark's innie and outie finally get a chance to communicate directly through a camcorder setup arranged by Harmony Cobel and Devon (Mark's sister) at a Lumon birthing cabin. Because of the severance procedure, the two identities cannot interact in real time, thus they communicate by leaving messages for one another, creating a back-and-forth dialogue. Initially, their interaction is polite. Outie Mark shows regret for undergoing severance, then reveals that his wife Gemma is alive, being held at Lumon, and that he needs his innie's help to rescue her. There is some mutual understanding at first. Over time, outie Mark gradually realizes the truth about Lumon's operations. He acknowledges benefiting from the arrangement, as he receives quadruple the pay for being severed, and feels guilty for sending his innie to a distressing life. The conversation soon becomes tense. When outie Mark promises to free his innie by ending his suffering, innie Mark resists. He disputes the idea that life inside Lumon is a "nightmare," arguing that innies have formed meaningful identities and connections. Outie Mark suggests that reintegration might give them a shared life outside Lumon, but innie Mark remains doubtful, fearing erasure and mistrustful of his outie's intentions. As much as outie Mark's intentions seem benevolent, his perspective remains framed by bourgeois assumptions: he pities—and thereby dehumanizes—his innie, failing to recognize the innie as a fully realized subject with distinct needs and aspirations. He wishes to ease his innie's pain, yet his solution is ending his innie's life. Positioned at an intermediary class point, outie Mark possesses

limited power and remains subject to corporate capitalism, while retaining enough stability to lack revolutionary impetus.

Both *Severance* and *Mr. Robot* illustrate the pervasive influence of power on individual subjectivity. The protagonists strive to resist, yet the principal conflict is internal—manifested as fractured identities and internal struggles, all intricately linked to corporate domination. But these series do more than depict class struggle; they show how experiences of dissociation and alienation can constitute the very foundation of resistance. Dissociation and alienation, in other words, are not merely symptoms to be resolved but potential sites which political consciousness can emerge from. As Stéphane Haber (2006: 65; the author's italics) contends:

The impossibility of being oneself is not merely a moral or philosophical theme—it is a *lived* experience of suffering, humiliation, powerlessness, and constrained consciousness and movement—and it is this very experience that can initiate critical reflection and political action.¹⁰

Experiencing alienation can lead to the realization that one's pain is not merely a personal shortcoming, but rather may stem from a broader structure, which in turn may foster class consciousness and the possibility of collective action.

It is this trajectory that *Mr. Robot* narrativizes. The fragmentation of the self does not remain solely an inward affliction but becomes the catalyst for the protagonists to pursue systemic change: Dissociative Identity Disorder sparks the formation of fsociety, a hacker group targeting E Corp. What begins as individual vigilantism expands, by the end of Season 1, into collective action. In turn, fsociety's influence fuels broader movements, mirroring real-world uprisings such as Occupy Wall Street (2011) and the Arab Spring (2010-2012). Near the series' conclusion, after fsociety successfully erases American consumer debt records, their actions culminate in what Elliot's sister Darlene deems "the greatest redistribution in history" (S4E10), an outcome made possible by Elliot's collaboration with Mr. Robot.

Severance presents a more intricate scenario. Should Mark choose to leave Lumon, his outie self could reclaim his life and reunite with his wife, Gemma. However, for his innie, departure from the company would mean deletion and permanent separation from Helly, as Helena would never

10. My translation. Original quote: "*L'impossibilité d'être soi-même n'est donc pas en premier lieu un thème propre à une philosophie morale surplombante, voire méprisante, puisque cette impossibilité est vécue – comme souffrance, humiliation, sentiment de décalage ou d'impuissance, restriction du champ de la conscience et de l'action – et que c'est cela qui met en marche la réflexion critique comme aussi, parfois, l'action politique.*"

accept undergoing reintegration or sharing time with Helly outside the workplace. For innie Mark, the only viable option is to remain at Lumon and resist from within. In “Cold Harbor” (S2E10), Mark, Helly, Dylan, and Irving, who are, at this stage, worn down by Lumon’s relentless exploitation, coalesce to challenge their superiors, Milchick and Drummond. Such nascent worker solidarity resistance hints at the potential for unionization. Although their struggle remains confined within the corporate environment, this does not diminish its radical nature. They refuse both absorption (continuing to comply) and escape (reintegration or resignation), instead choosing a third path: to organize collectively at the very center of the system that oppresses them.

My analysis has thus far examined the motif of the split self within corporate capitalism, following prior scholarship in treating these narratives as depictions of an intensified, dystopian and dysfunctional form of capitalism. Such framing invites a tempting inference: that, in the shows, torn subjectivity and alienated labor are pathologies of capitalism’s excess, resolvable under more moderate arrangements. But near the close of its last season, *Mr. Robot* engages with this fantasy and appears to dismantle it.

In “411 eXit”, the eleventh episode of *Mr. Robot* Season 4, Elliot is caught in a building’s explosion and loses consciousness. The scene of the incident fades to a red screen, which then dissolves into a close-up view of a smartphone: “This is your wake-up call”, the device’s digital assistant announces [35:00]. From this point, the episode stages another subjective “split”: an alternate version of the diegetic world, nested deep within Elliot’s mind, in which the protagonist experiences a realized, utopian version of capitalist success. Now Chief Executive Officer at Allsafe, Alderson has the “perfect life”. His family is loving and supportive; he is engaged to his childhood friend Angela; his career flourishes. Before starting his workday, his routine includes getting ready to cheery music. However, cracks gradually become evident. Elliot’s routine is initially disrupted when his vinyl record becomes stuck in a loop, continuously replaying “Everything is just right / Everything is blue sky” (lyrics from OK Go’s “Turn up the Radio”). While initially comforting, this cheerfulness soon takes on an uncanny, almost mechanical quality. The song becomes hollow, conveying a sense of entrapment rather than satisfaction. Subsequently, while viewing the news at work, Elliot observes F Corp’s rainbow-colored logo glitch back into the original E Corp insignia. This subtle visual disturbance disrupts the illusion, revealing that the ostensibly ethical and friendly rebranding is merely a façade concealing the corporation’s unchanged nature. A following TV report celebrates an alternate version of Chinese Minister Zhang, an influential member of the DEUS group and one of the series’ central antagonists: “Zi Zhang, the world’s richest person, continues to make news for

her philanthropic behavior” [43:00]. This constructs her as the “benevolent billionaire”, a myth which recasts concentrated wealth as moral stewardship rather than structural exploitation, and wherein social power appears as the property of enlightened individuals while the collective labor that generates this wealth remains invisible.

Even Tyrell Wellick—the Patrick Bateman-esque antagonist in the primary timeline—has become surprisingly humane. Now CEO of “F Corp”, he listens sympathetically as the protagonist confesses during a meeting that he feels stuck in “a repetitive, boring routine that feels endless” [45:00], a sentiment Tyrell immediately admits he shares. Cosmetic changes, such as ethical branding, philanthropic narratives, and inclusive aesthetics, do not conceal the fundamental contradictions of capitalism, even in its most idealized version. The motif of the loop conjures the persistence of the system itself: as long as capitalism reproduces its circuits of accumulation, as long as workers feed the machine, alienation persists and genuine fulfillment remains unattainable. But the protagonist breaks the cycle. He awakens, leaving the realm of fantasy. In doing so, he avoids indulging in “the fantasy of postwar American prosperity [...] the fantasy of capitalism in its welfare-state form, before outsourced globalization” (Vint & Alexander, 2022: 193). Ultimately, this final split from the self (from the “dream version” of Elliot who seamlessly integrated into corporate capitalism) retroactively frames the episode as critical not only of capitalism’s shortcomings, but also of one of its most alluring promises: that alienation can be fixed if one achieves success, manages wealth ethically, or trusts the wealthy to be charitable.

During one of the last major confrontations of the show, Whiterose (Zi Zhang’s alias) forces Elliot to play a computer game (S4E11). In order to win the game, the player has to find the exit and free their friend, a non-playable character. Each round presents two choices, and the protagonist must pick. In the game, Elliot tries different options but cannot escape; because his friend is wounded, he must leave them behind. Finally, when Elliot stops trying to escape and chooses to stay with his friend in the dystopian world, the game ends. On the one hand, this could be interpreted as a form of “capitalist realism”: there is no escape from the system (Fisher, 2009). “The virtual and the possible are wedded as irreducible innovation and as a revolutionary machine,” Hardt and Negri argue (2009: 369); as such, refusing the fantasy could mean rejecting the ideal of a post-capitalist system. I will not dispute that the conclusion of the show ultimately amounts to a certain resignation to the capitalist structures regulating life. On the other hand, however, one should not overlook the choice that ended the game: refusing to escape alone, and precisely, staying with a friend.

Indeed, solitary attempts to flee capitalist structures—whether through Elliot’s individual vigilantism, or Helly’s desperate suicide attempt, for instance—proves ineffective. Progress is only possible via collective resistance, not through isolated efforts. According to Boltanski and Chiapello the pursuit of individual autonomy does not yield genuine liberation unless it is integrated into the collective (2011 [1999]: 569).¹¹ *Mr. Robot*’s fourth season and *Severance*’s second season conclude with similar gestures. Rather than complying to capitalist demands or fleeing, the characters choose to resist “within the system”. Though this outcome is *a priori* reformist, their decision acknowledges that capitalist structures are now totalizing and, in this context, that resistance must emerge from within.

Conclusion

In *Mr. Robot* and *Severance*, capitalism is not a force acting upon the characters externally: it is embodied and internalized. Elliot and Mark are bound by its logic but attempt to navigate and resist its constraints. Corporate capitalism, here, is dramatized through crises of subjectivity; the dynamics of coercion and domination inherent to capitalism manifest as a split between two selves sharing a body, between labor and its value, between structure and the individual, between personal experience and collective action. This, in turn, may risk displacing antagonism away from direct class confrontation, as such representations may be too character-driven or individualized to be generalized as a broader evaluation of capitalism itself. Nonetheless, they provide an inventive entry point for revealing—and critiquing—the social pathologies and power dynamics inherent to capitalism.

Drawing on post-Fordist theories, I have argued that these crises of subjectivity reflect the subsumption of the self by capitalism as a productive resource (Lazzarato, 1996, 2014; Hardt & Negri, 2000; Berardi, 2009). Post-industrial capitalism produces and uses “ontologically ambiguous” workers, who are composites of subject and object, of human and machine (Lazzarato, 2014: 30). By portraying tech-mediated characters, *Mr. Robot* and *Severance* illustrate capitalist hybridization of self in a corporate context. In the shows, corporations such as E Corp and Lumon weave the

11. My translation. Original quote: “Selon la seconde ligne argumentative suivie par la critique de la libération que le capitalisme est censé offrir, l’exigence d’autonomie ne peut conduire à une véritable libération si elle ne rencontre pas les limites que lui impose une autre exigence : celle de constituer un collectif. Le capitalisme n’est donc pas condamné en tant qu’il imposerait aux personnes une discipline plus sévère que celle à laquelle il leur aurait permis d’échapper mais en tant que, à l’inverse, il devient impossible, sous son empire, de faire régner sur les aspirations individuelles et sur les désirs une discipline suffisante pour empêcher la société de se dissoudre.”

protagonists in the fabric of capitalism, in the “machine”, so that they can hardly separate their identities from the capitalist structures around them. This sets the ground for corporate capitalism to sustain itself. Indeed, not only do capitalist powers “produce agentic subjectivities”, but they also “produce producers” (Hardt & Negri, 2009: 32), that is, they produce subjectivities tailor-made for the imperatives of the corporation, and who will eventually contribute to the formation of more subjectivities—of other workers.

Nevertheless, within the corpus, the protagonists do not seamlessly incorporate into capitalism. Caught in a system that both demands and denies expansive subjectivities, the characters experience capitalist structures as ultimately antagonistic and a cause of significant distress. Their dissociation of the self aligns with Marx’s conception of alienation, wherein capitalist production exerts control over the worker, the worker’s labor becoming a “hostile and alien” object, existing “*outside him*, independently of him and alien to him” (Marx, 1992 [1844]: 324). As Stéphane Haber argues, alienation is not just a theoretical condition but a structural pathology experienced firsthand (Haber, 2006). Since *Mr. Robot* and *Severance* translate capitalism into embodied suffering, the shows avoid presenting its mechanisms as natural and inevitable. Alienation is reframed not as an individualized, detached psychological failure, nor as a normal circumstance, but as a structural condition that calls for collective recognition.

However, according to David Harvey, the contemporary capitalist epoch—which he calls “postmodern”—is marked by a new condition, that of fragmentation (1990). For Harvey, postmodern individuals develop an endless array of selves. Consequently, the individual no longer maintains a coherent identity, which, as Harvey asserts, renders the classic Marxist view of alienation obsolete: one cannot be estranged from oneself if one is not whole in the first place. If, as I argue the series suggest, the crisis of subjectivity and alienation serve as foundational steps through which the individual, under capitalism, may recognize its dysfunctions and the need for collective action, then the normalization of divided identity may foster passivity rather than resistance:

We can no longer conceive of the individual as alienated in the classical Marxist sense, because to be alienated presupposes a coherent rather than a fragmented sense of self from which to be alienated [...] If, as Marx insisted, it takes the alienated individual to pursue the Enlightenment project with a tenacity and coherence sufficient to bring us to some better future, then loss of the alienated subject would seem to preclude the conscious construction of alternative social futures (Harvey, 1990: 53-54).

Harvey's assertion does not imply that alienation has ceased to exist; rather, it indicates that individuals, under postmodern capitalism, are hyper-alienated—that alienation has become normalized or naturalized. Such normalization potentially undermines the emancipatory possibilities associated with the state of being alienated. However, Harvey's assertion regarding the loss of alienation in the Marxist sense may conflate transformation with loss. In *Mr. Robot* and *Severance*, alienation has intensified and grown more sophisticated: whereas classical Marxist alienation assumed estrangement from a coherent self and its products, these shows dramatize how post-industrial capitalism both demands subjectivity and denies it. I argue that the characters' dissociative states, while indicative of an intensified form of alienation—as Harvey suggests—remain dynamic spaces of tension and negotiation with the dominant structures of capitalism.

In sum, *Mr. Robot* and *Severance* reconfigure alienation not as an individualized predicament, but as a basis for collective action. Admittedly, neither series provides a genuine emancipatory resolution: revolt remains partial and unstable, and, in the case of *Severance*—whose overarching narrative is incomplete at the time of writing—ultimately unresolved. Moreover, as cultural representations, these series should not be understood as producing political consciousness. Their significance lies instead in framing alienation as a shared social condition; political change, however, is ever contingent upon praxis beyond the screen. What is ultimately significant, therefore, is the emergence of collective resistance to capitalism in both series, whether in “intrapersonal” form (Elliot and Mr. Robot cooperating, innie Mark and outie Mark acknowledging the dysfunctions of Lumon and seeking common ground) or “interpersonal” form (fsociety, Mark organizing the innies). Subjective experience becomes politically meaningful only when individual pain is recognized as a shared condition and translated into collective action. If the search for “unity within difference” (Harvey, 1990: 359) remains elusive in these fictional narratives, their final gesture is not toward the restoration of the self to a desired coherence—the characters' struggles offer no utopian end-point—but toward something more tangible and operative: community.

Juliette Devaux is a PhD candidate at Sorbonne-Nouvelle University (IRCAV), where she is completing a dissertation under the supervision of Guillaume Soulez (Paris 3) and Sandra Laugier (Paris 1). Since 2025, she has been teaching courses on television series, the film industry, and media reception studies. Her research examines representations of relations of domination, alienation, and socioeconomic marginality in contemporary television, with a particular focus on *Mr. Robot*, *Squid Game*, *The White Lotus*, *Maid*, and *Severance*. Approaching anticapitalism as both confrontational and inventive, her work explores how contemporary serial narratives represent capitalist social relations, articulate forms of resistance, and imagine collective political

horizons. Against longstanding critiques of television as a standardized and ideologically conformist medium, she argues that it remains a significant site for contesting dominant understandings of capitalism.

Bibliography

- ALTER, Ethan, “‘Mr. Robot’ creator says he was almost hacked by a superfan of the Emmy-winning series”, *Gold Derby*, 2025, <https://www.goldderby.com/tv/2025/mr-robot-rami-malek-christian-slater-sam-esmail-nyc/> (last accessed November 25, 2025).
- ALTHUSSER, Louis, *For Marx*, London, Verso Books, 2005 [1965].
- BERARDI, Franco, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, Los Angeles, MIT Press, Semiotext(e), 2009.
- BOLTANSKI, Luc, CHIAPELLO, Ève, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 2011 [1999].
- CHALVON-DEMERSAY, Sabine, “Pour une responsabilité politique des héros de séries télévisées”, *Quaderni*, No. 88, 2015, 35-51, doi: 10.4000/quaderni.919.
- COOK, Brian, “Mr. Robot Is the Anti-Capitalist TV Show We’ve Been Waiting For”, *In These Times*, 2015, <https://inthesetimes.com/article/usas-mr-robot-is-the-anti-capitalist-tv-show-weve-been-waiting-for> (last accessed November 25, 2025).
- DEBORD, Guy, *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York, Zone Books, 1994 [1967].
- LEOPOLD, David, “Alienation”, ed. Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2022, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2022/entries/alienation/> (last accessed November 25, 2025).
- FISHER, Mark, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Winchester, Zero Books, 2009.
- GRAMSCI, Antonio, Quintin Hoare (Ed.), *Selections from Political Writings, 1910-1920*, London, Lawrence & Wishart, 1977.
- HABER, Stéphane, “Que faut-il reprocher aux Manuscrits de 1844?”, *Actuel Marx*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2006, 55-70.
- HABER, Stéphane, *Penser le néo-capitalisme : vie, capital et aliénation*, Paris, Les Prairies Ordinaires, 2013.
- HARDT, Michael, NEGRI, Antonio, *Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 2000.
- HARVEY, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1990.
- HORKHEIMER, Max, ADORNO, Theodor W., *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Stanford UP, 2002 [1947].
- JAMESON, Fredric, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, Duke UP, 1991.
- LAZZARATO, Maurizio, “Immaterial Labor”, ed. Paolo Virno & Michael Hardt, *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minnesota UP, Theory Out of Bounds 7, 1996, 133-147.
- LAZZARATO, Maurizio, *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*, Los Angeles, MIT Press, Semiotext(e), 2014.
- LUKÁCS, György, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 1972 [1923].
- MANDEL, Ernest, *Late Capitalism*, London, Verso, London, 1999 [1972].
- MARCOS, Natalia, “Dan Erickson, creator of ‘Severance’: ‘I thought Apple would discourage us from critiquing the capitalist structure, but that never happened’”, *El País*, 2025, <https://english.elpais.com/culture/2025-04-01/dan-erickson-creator-of-severance-i-thought-apple-would-discourage-us-from-critiquing-the-capitalist-structure-but-that-never-happened.html> (last accessed November 25, 2025).
- MARX, Karl, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”, *Early Writings*, London, Penguin Classics, 1992 [1844], 279-400.
- MARX, Karl, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, London, Penguin Classics, 1993 [1859].
- MARX, Karl, *Capital: Vol. 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, London, Penguin Classics, 1990 [1867].
- MUSTO, Marcello (Ed.), *Karl Marx’s Writings on Alienation*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
- PALMER, Nathan, SCHUETHS, April M., “Severed from Reality: The Irrationality of Rationality in Advanced-Stage Capitalism”, in Nora M. Isacoff & Jennifer Dawes (Ed.), *Reintegrating Severance: Interdisciplinary Insights on Apple TV’s Dystopian Thriller*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 43-59.
- PERROUX, François, *Le capitalisme*, Paris, PUF, “Que sais-je?”, 1948.
- PREVAS, Christine, “Mapping the Subject Through Severance’s Corporate Architecture and Design”, in Nora M. Isacoff & Jennifer Dawes (Ed.), *Reintegrating Severance: Interdisciplinary Insights on Apple TV’s Dystopian Thriller*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024, 81-96.
- ROSS, Lachlan, “On Disentangling Alienation, Estrangement, and Reification in Marx”, *Rethinking Marxism*, 32 (4), 2020, 521-548.
- SMITH, Adam, *Wealth of Nations*, Ware, England, Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 2012 [1776].

- SOULEZ, Guillaume, "La double répétition. Structure et matrice des séries télévisées", *Mise au point*, n° 3, 2011.
- VINT, Sherryl, ALEXANDER, Jonathan, *Programming the Future: Politics, Resistance, and Utopia in Contemporary Speculative TV*, New York City, Columbia UP, 2022.