

“The Mission Comes First”: Representations and Expectations of Labor in *Travelers*

KATHLEEN W. TAYLOR KOLLMAN

The Netflix/Showcase Canadian television series *Travelers* (2016-2018) is a somewhat unique take on the traditional time travel narrative, one that highlights problems with worker exploitation. The characters in the series manifest conflicted feelings about the set of protocols to which they must adhere, and how the rules placed on them reify worker exploitation.¹ In particular, I will focus on the ways in which the show sets up higher emotional labor expectations for its female characters, predominantly Marcy Warton (MacKenzie Porter), the team’s medic. Marcy’s story arcs through seasons one, two, and three detail her ongoing neurological problems and lack of autonomy over her own body, providing an allegory of female worker exploitation.

This piece will draw on labor theories, Marxism, and feminist theories to explore whether the series advocates for more team cohesion in the form of greater adherence to mission protocols or a better sense of self through lessened restrictions and humane expectations of operative behavior. While I will define these terms in greater detail below, I first want to address the concept of “feminist theory” and “feminism” as used in this article. Many different ways exist to understand these terms. bell hooks defined “feminism” as “the struggle to end sexist oppression,” and Cathia Jenainati and Judy Groves augment this to include the idea that feminists fight “to dispel [...] myths about gender,” including the idea that gender is essential, biological, and comes with it prescribed roles to

¹ I use the term “narrative” here in a general sense to discuss any fictional text regardless of medium. As applied to “traditional time travel narratives,” I would point to a useful infographic by Karl Tate “How Time Travel Works in Science Fiction (Infographic).”

Kathleen W. Taylor Kollman served as a lecturer of English at Wright State University for nearly a decade. Her scholarship focuses on feminist criticism of popular fiction and media. Kollman has two novels published, as well as multiple pieces of short fiction. She holds an MFA in Writing Popular Fiction from Seton Hill University, an MA in literature, and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in American Culture Studies at Bowling Green State University. Her dissertation is on twentieth-century representations of fictional female U.S. presidents. She can be reached at kkollma@bgsu.edu.

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which people must adhere (ch. 4). Feminist theory turns these ideas into a set of lenses through which we can explore topics, and because feminism is not a monolithic, unchanging concept, its theory is plural, interdisciplinary, and layered. In this piece, for instance, I overlay feminism with Marxism, which is just one way to apply feminist theory and allow it to intersect with a theory related to labor, economics, and philosophy, and I will discuss this intersection in more detail shortly.

To return to *Travelers*, the series involves teams of operatives who send their consciousness back in time to the twenty-first century to correct things in history that led to a dystopian future. Dystopia as a concept in fiction is the depiction of a society—usually one set in a future at some distance from the era in which the piece is written—which has become incredibly damaged and detrimental to the health and well-being of humanity (“Dystopias”). This damage might be environmental, political, or some combination thereof, as of a world damaged by nuclear war. Dystopian fiction has a long history in literature, television, film, and other media (“Dystopias”).

Though these recruits in *Travelers* embark upon their missions as willing volunteers, a series of protocols dictate the labor expectations of their new lives, the first of which is that, no matter what, “the mission comes first.” By expecting blind loyalty and constant adherence to the dictates of a world to which they will never be allowed to return, the travelers are held to a standard of labor that feels not so much like correcting the problems of a dystopian future but instead perpetuating them. In improving the lives of others, the team members no longer have full autonomy as individuated persons and, when they inevitably deviate in even small ways from the primacy of the mission, they are forced to lie and keep secrets about their personal lives.

In the next section, I proceed on this subject with a look at Marxist feminism as a possible theoretical lens through which to examine elements of women’s labor and specific subtypes relevant to *Travelers*.

Marxism, Feminism, and Emotional Labor

Charles Lemert defines Marxism as a philosophy of “intellectual and political force,” focusing on workers (28). Karl Marx created the basic tenets in the 1800s, along with his occasional collaborator Friedrich Engels; these Western European philosophers whose works frequently criticized “bourgeois civilization,” “capital”

attempted to draw a clear connection “between labor and economic value” (Lemert 28). Engels’s work on the family serves as a “source for the outlines of a materialist feminism” (Lemert 28). Marx and Engels fundamentally argued against capitalism, stating that “the oppression of women began with the institution of private property,” and “[t]he end of common possession of the earth’s goods” resulted in “the heavy regulation of women’s sexuality so that there could be legitimate heirs to a father’s property” (Smith 15). These practices resulted in women’s behavior being regulated, “and their inequality began” (Smith 15). Marx and Engels advocated for a “return to a more communal or communist ownership by all people” that “would provide liberation,” and their “analysis influenced initial Women’s Studies debates and often it still does in China, India, and Latin America” (Smith 15).

People working in a variety of identity studies disciplines “analyze the responsibility of global capitalism in which there are extremely wealthy owners of factories, financial institutions, and land for women’s poverty, and they see the present-day flows of capital around the world as particularly oppressive to women” (Smith 15). Some of these scholars look at how “Marxist materialist concerns” can be applied to examine “the conditions under which women lived and worked” (Smith 15). According to Bonnie G. Smith:

In particular, [identity studies scholars] demanded that the conditions not just of work and production be considered important but the conditions of reproduction, including the birthing and raising of children. That the conditions of birthing and nurturing needed to be investigated as fundamental structures of life, just as work was, proved revolutionary in the university globally. Motherhood became a rich field for Women’s Studies scholarship because of Marxist theorists and their new concerns. (15)

However, even as Marxism can be applied to feminist scholarship and activism, people like Canadian radical feminist activist and writer Shulamith Firestone felt that Marx and Engels’ theories as stated “overlooked women’s exclusion from society,” and therefore it was important to overhaul Marxism for feminist purposes (Jenainati and Groves ch. 77). Thus, it was “important to integrate women into Marxist theory in a more up-to-date way,” as the way “Marx and Engels had described women’s condition under capitalism” in the nineteenth

century was no longer applicable to the twentieth (Smith 16).

[W]omen’s situation had changed drastically since then. Women’s strikes, their situation in the workforce, their political activism, and their poverty were thus crucial to an understanding of how to make society more just, and continue to be so. As some in Women’s Studies saw the field’s mission to study oppression, Marxist insights into the conditions of poor women came to underpin investigations that would become increasingly complex. (Smith 16)

Many feminists—not merely Marxist feminists—are concerned with the wage gap, which “historians have shown” has been “the same roughly 70 percent” gap “at least since the Middle Ages, when working women earned 70 percent of what men did for the same work” (Smith 53). The problem of labor exploitation (in the form of wages and equity) is necessarily recognized by classical Marxism per se: “that gender and class work together in ways that need study and understanding in order to right wrongs,” which is something that an intersectional feminist intervention into Marxism seeks to redress and encourage “a true understanding of women and class” (Smith 53).

One of the tenets of Marxist feminism is an emphasis on revealing and dismantling the emphasis capitalist economic systems place on the use of women’s free domestic labor to raise children who will then serve as members of a proletariat workforce. According to Jenainati and Groves, “For Marxist feminists, the division of labour and lack of support for working mothers defines women by their domestic responsibilities and excludes them from productive labour” (918). Shulamith Firestone advocated, in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), for “a biological revolution” (Jenainati and Groves ch. 69). Firestone wanted an egalitarian society enacted via a system in which “who possesses the womb” would no longer be significant, and family gender roles would be eradicated (Jenainati and Groves ch. 69). Firestone also encouraged women to “seize control over the means of reproduction in order to eliminate sex class discrimination,” which she saw as necessitating “wider access to contraception, sterilization and abortion” (Jenainati and Groves ch. 69).

Linda Carty's 2014 article, "A Genealogy of Marxist Feminism in Canada,"² discusses the fact that Canadian Marxist feminism makes a point to include and speak to issues specific to women of color, particularly First Nations women, and how their labor and exploitation is often ignored by both mainstream and academic feminism and Marxists who may not be explicitly feminist.³ As Carty asserts, "the Canadian working class has always been raced" (180). She also states that it is antithetical to Marxist feminism to not integrate intersectionality since Kimberlé Crenshaw's original point about intersectionality was its relationship to labor, exploitation, and legal rights (181-2).⁴

Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild pioneered the concept of emotional labor. Hochschild spoke with people in several industries that deal with the public, most notably flight attendants, and coined the term which today indicates work done in the service of managing others' experience of a situation. Such situations can range from medical care to customer service to education and safety. Hochschild's findings include the idea that those performing a high degree of emotional labor must hide their natural emotional responses to situations and perform for the benefit of the client, patient, or customer, creating stress and, often, burnout. Since Hochschild's work, many others have contributed to the scholarship on emotional labor (see Györfy et al, Edward et al, El-Alayi et al, Elliott, Santin and Kelly, Sloan, Sollie et al, and Tuna and Baykal). In each of these studies, there are several common factors. The studies find that work requiring emotional labor increases stress in workers. This increased work stress leads to burnout and often a complete departure from the field. Furthermore, the work is gendered. Jobs requiring a high degree of emotional labor are often part of the "pink collar proletariat" of careers with a high number of female workers in positions somewhere between blue- and white-collar employment and which are not as lucrative as white-collar, male-centric career fields with less emotional labor requirement. And while not all jobs adhere to the above—including doctors

² Itself a response to Meg Luxton's article "Marxist Feminism and Anticapitalism: Reclaiming Our History, Reanimating Our Politics," which argues many of the same points but urges a greater focus on people of color, under the assumption that Canadian Marxist feminism has heretofore ignored that issue.

³ Given that *Travelers* is a Canadian series, a specific look at Canadian Marxist feminism is warranted.

⁴ For more on Marxist feminism and labor, see Kathi Weeks' *The Problem with Work* and Ros Hague's "Between the Waves: Currents in Contemporary Feminist Thought."

and professors—women in these fields were expected to perform more emotional labor than men.

Though he does not discuss it explicitly on its own, Paolo Virno hints at the idea of emotional labor in his discussion of social cooperation as a natural result of labor activity that directly produces an object being diminished in post-industrial economies. Virno describes this as a phenomenon even Marx foresaw: “[T]he tasks of a worker or of a clerk no longer involve the completion of a single particular assignment,” Virno writes, “but the changing and intensifying of social cooperation” (62). Virno goes on to describe the condition of material-less production involving a complex system of social hierarchies, interactions, and negotiations in order to justify itself, “solutions which ameliorate the organization of labor” (62). However, if labor must overcomplicate, expand, redefine, and rely on permutations of itself that require ever-increasing degrees of emotional expenditure, this raises the question of whether the particular labor practice or industry is ethical or justified in its continued existence at all. While these practices could describe minor industries whose existence may not be socially necessary, if describing more vital industries and services, perhaps a better system of social cooperation could be found.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri discuss a related concept in *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, the idea of “affective labor.” This term, as they define it, spins off from Virno’s concept but gets more specific and describes “immaterial labor” that is not precisely performed via emotions per se, which, as they define it, “are mental phenomenon” but instead use “affects,” which “refer equally to body and mind” (Hardt and Negri 108). These affects “reveal the present state of life in the entire organization, expressing a certain state of the body along with a certain mode of thinking” (Hardt and Negri 108). To perfect affective labor, according to Hardt and Negri, is to do work “that produces or manipulates affects such as a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion,” and they go on to cite similar professions as Hochschild does (“legal assistants, flight attendants, and fast food workers”) as examples of this labor (108). They also point out that in countries with high economic standing, jobs that require affective labor often desire workers to have higher levels of education (108). Hardt and Negri argue, though, that despite this educational emphasis, industrial hegemony subordinates affective labor due to its immaterial “product” (109-10) as well as its similarity to “women’s work” (110). Furthermore, affective labor itself is directly feminized:

[W]hen affective labor becomes central to many productive tasks [...] it is still most often performed by women in subordinate positions. Indeed labor with a high affective component is generally feminized, given less authority, and paid less. Women employed as paralegals and nurses, for example, not only do the affective labor of constructing relationships with patients and clients and that of managing office dynamics, but they are also caregivers for their bosses, the lawyers and doctors, who are largely male. (Hardt and Negri 111)

Hardt and Negri assert that exploitative affective labor creates alienation for the worker and profits for those not directly performing the labor themselves (111, 150).

Travelers: Premise and Ramifications for Labor Exploitation

Travelers is a Canadian television series that first premiered in the U.S. on Netflix in 2016. The show consists of three seasons thus far; as of this writing, a fourth has not yet been commissioned. The show (set in Seattle) is about a five-person team of time travelers sent from a dystopian future to the twenty-first century. The travelers arrive via the implantation of their consciousness into the body of a host who would otherwise die in the original history (usually via suicide, drug overdose, murder, or an accident). The five travelers the show focuses on have specific roles within the team and include a member designed as the leader (Grant MacLaren/Traveler 3468, played by Eric McCormack), the medic (the aforementioned Marcy Warton/Traveler 3569, played by MacKenzie Porter), the tactician (Carly Shannon/Traveler 3465, played by Nesta Cooper), the engineer (Trevor Holden/Traveler 0115, played by Jared Abrahamson), and the historian (Philip Pearson/Traveler 3326, played by Reilly Dolman). The team is given instructions from the Director, an AI computer programmed to adjust events in the past to help influence and heal problems suffered in the future, and they are not permitted to deviate from the Director's instructions or the program's protocols,⁵ regardless of any negative effect to themselves or their team. Most of

⁵ 1) The mission comes first. 2) Never jeopardize your cover. Do not call each other by future names—"leave the future in the past." Do not use future knowledge for personal gain. 3) Don't take a life; don't save a life, unless otherwise directed. 4) Do not reproduce. 5) In the absence of

the show’s storylines deal with the team’s attempts to change historical events that the Director calculates will lead to the dystopian future. As the series progresses, plots deal more extensively with the traveler program overall, the attempts by warring factions to subvert the authority of the Director, and the personal toll that being a traveler takes on each member of the team.

The Director functions as both a revered political leader and religious deity, but one who is itself absent from the text, save in brief glimpses in the final season. The Director is reminiscent of the titular machine in E.M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops.” In that piece, a nebulous internet/AI prototype controls all of human society, which has been driven underground into voluntary isolation. When the Machine begins to cease proper function, said society breaks down into chaos. As in *Travelers*, there is a faction of individuals who attempt to resist the Machine, but humanity’s reliance on it may be insurmountable. Similarly, the travelers who continue to follow the Director’s objectives seem emotionally incapable of not doing so. To deviate from the Director’s instructions to them would perhaps sign their death warrant, even if its orders are arguably abusive or dismissive of the humanity of travelers.

Travelers’ work affects each team member in dramatically negative ways, from extreme stress and interpersonal relationship conflict to adverse medical and mental health effects.⁶ The damaged affective state of each member of the central team may reveal that life in the future is indeed dystopian, lacks respect for individuals’ intrinsic worth, exploits labor, and induces and exacerbates mental health stressors. Of all the main characters, Marcy is given the most debilitating set of circumstances, and her storylines now constitute the primary focus of my work. While she is a doctor, men perform all her supervision, and her healthcare administration is much more in the fashion of that performed by nurses and emergency medical technicians. For most of the series, Marcy believes she was mistakenly given a host body whose mind had a developmental or neurological disability manifesting as perceived low intelligence and impaired verbal and

direction, maintain your host’s life. 6) No inter-team/deep web communication except in extreme emergencies. 7) Protocol Omega: The Director will no longer be intervening in this timeline. Travelers may live out their days as they see fit.

⁶ Grant experiences extreme marital stress throughout the series; Carly is in an ongoing custody battle with her host’s son’s abusive father; Trevor learns his host had been sexually assaulted and he later experiences brain damage from his consciousness being uploaded to so many hosts over the course of the program; and Philip’s host had a heroin addiction that he must physically overcome.

motor function. Due to problems with sustaining her mind within a disabled brain, Marcy begins to develop seizures and other life-threatening conditions that result in her attempts to perform tests and surgical procedures on herself. Ultimately, a traveler programmer is given the mission of re-uploading Marcy's mind into her host's body in a different way, which would avoid the damaged areas of the host's brain and would no longer endanger her life. This process, however, would overwrite the current mind of Traveler 3569—in effect, the current version of Marcy would be erased, and a new “previous save” of her would be uploaded in its place. Everything she had experienced in the intervening months spent in her host body would be lost to her. This prospect bothers her immensely, and Marcy seems to be on the precipice of turning the process down, preferring to die of the physical problems resulting from her host body than to be erased and rewritten, albeit with a different version of her mind.

Before Marcy can articulate her preference fully, she is rebooted (“Marcy”). Over the next few episodes, her teammates interact with her as usual, but some note that she seems less sensitive, less invested in the missions, and less connected to the rest of them. Her teammates can brief her on everything they had done together that Marcy had missed, but they cannot brief her on how those things affected her emotionally, privately, and personally. Thus, in essence, she is not entirely herself. Eventually, “Marcy 2.0” realizes this disconnect more and more and feels an emotional absence and distance from herself. She theorizes that simulating a near-death experience might allow her to physically re-connect to the memories lost to her.

Consequently, Marcy instigates a procedure that would bring her very close to death, a point during which a traveler might occasionally be able to capture the memories of their host body. This procedure is effective, giving Marcy not only her “version 1.0” memories but also some of her host body, which leads her to the realization that the host was not born with a clinical disability at all (“21C”). This original Marcy host had been a nurse who stumbled upon an illicit experiment program and, in order to keep her quiet, was subjected to a memory-erasing procedure resulting in the symptoms of developmental disability.

Aside from the medical necessity of Marcy's reboot, there is an emotional reason for her desire to recapture her memories. In her first “version,” Marcy had become romantically involved with David, a social worker who is unconnected to the traveler program. When Marcy is rebooted, this fledgling relationship stalls back into a mode of friendship and does not resume its romantic trajectory until

Marcy regains her lost memories. Season three culminates in David dying of radiation exposure after helping stop a nuclear detonation. Marcy, convinced that the Director would observe David’s heroics and provide advanced medical technology to save his life, clings to this hope until David dies. At that point, Marcy exhibits the effects of severe emotional trauma and seems to wish to resign the program. Unfortunately, a rogue traveler kidnaps her to retrieve data in her mental upload and, unwilling to have it compromised, Marcy shoots herself in the head. Her method of death is important to note here, both literally and symbolically, as it means no one will have access to her brain’s biological or electrical contents. Furthermore, this means of suicide echoes the severe physical and emotional stress that Marcy’s brain and consciousness have had to endure during the entire series. Though she dies a hero, to a certain extent, she was manifesting such extreme damage that it is difficult to know if she acted more out of grief and depression or desire to protect intellectual assets from an enemy (“Protocol Omega”). In the last few moments of the third season, Grant creates a new timeline in which Marcy’s host is never taken over by a traveler, and she and David experience a “meet cute” on a city bus. It is implied that this version of the characters will fall in love and avoid the deaths endured by their counterparts (“Protocol Omega”).

Despite her trajectory being effectively subjected to a reset button, there are still problematic elements to all of Marcy’s major storylines that are worthy of discussion. First, there are consent- and power-based issues in Marcy and David’s romantic relationship. Secondly, there are issues of bodily autonomy and consent in her reboot storyline. And, finally, there are multiple layers of ableist issues present in her host’s status as a woman with diminished intellectual capacity. By having this disability then be retroactively positioned as non-congenital and, like Traveler 3569’s reboot, caused by a technologically-based procedure to which informed consent was not provided constitutes a troubling trend in speculative fiction wherein formerly-disabled characters are “healed” somehow (see Batgirl in the DC comics and Hawkeye in the Marvel comics). The same program victimizes both host and traveler, and it is deeply telling that both are female members of the medical profession. The exploitation of women’s labor—especially women in helping professions, such as medicine, education, criminal justice, and service work—is a worrying trend, particularly in capitalist economies.

In terms of academic Marxism, Marxist feminism, and emotional labor, the

team in *Travelers* is exploited in several concrete ways, and this exploitation reveals that the series' brand of science fiction is not post- or anticapitalist. Dan Hassler-Forest, discussing postcapitalist speculative media, posits that one tenet of a postcapitalist theme is to open up binaries into more fluid interpretations and to honestly critique existing power structures—neither of which *Travelers* does, even in discussing the future (154). There is also no recognition in the series that humanity and nature are linked and therefore both deserve protection although we could argue that the travelers' inhabitation of new bodies and the existence of their essences as computer data is a form of posthumanist radical interpretation of humanity (Hassler-Forest 154). However, this interpretation still fails to protect them from very human stressors and still manages to enact exploitation.

This exploitation is enacted, first, by the very nature of the program. Travelers will never reap the benefits of their labor. They are perennially cut off from the future/their home time, and protocol 5 (assuming your host's life) means they are perpetually at work/on call. There is no rest or leisure time, not unless you are informed of your release from the program (the Omega protocol, revealed toward the end of season three). If a traveler is informed of an Omega protocol, they are deemed no longer essential to the program, but they are not retrieved; this is not the same as full autonomy, however, since they must still adhere to protocol 5 and live out their assumed identity.

It seems on the surface as if protocol 4—the mandate to not reproduce—is in a sense aligned with Marxist feminism asking for the distribution of reproductive labor to be removed from only the realm of women. However, its edict removes the option of choice for travelers of all genders and, once again, means they are unable to have a full personal life separate from their work.⁷

Emotional labor is performed by all travelers at all times, forcing them to maintain façades to such a degree that, when the non-travelers in their lives learn of their true identities, their covers are completely blown and they are unable to continue their missions, thereby jeopardizing their very existences. There is no opportunity to resign or change careers, however, which are available to real-life humans in emotionally demanding career paths. Even in the case of Protocol

⁷ As an example of this being problematic, Grant's host's wife Kat becomes pregnant. Because Kat had a previous traumatic miscarriage (and because he has fallen in love with her), Grant does not recommend an abortion, but he must keep the pregnancy secret from his team. Kat later has a miscarriage and, because she has learned of Grant's identity as a traveler, leaves him. The stress of the secrecy of the pregnancy is harmful to Grant, and he knows that, even as his team's leader, he is flagrantly disobeying one of the protocols.

Omega, declaring a traveler out of the program is an option available only to the Director (employer), not the traveler (worker). In essence, a worker can be fired but cannot resign.

While all of the members of the travelers team are being exploited, Marcy Warton’s exploitation is perhaps the most extensive. Serving as the team’s sole source of medical care, she is responsible for acting as a one-person field hospital unit, as well as the provider of more routine care, such as helping Philip’s drug addiction (“Travelers”), Grant’s near-deadly injuries suffered in the field (“Bishop” and “Kathryn”), and various team members’ exposure to an influenza-like disease (“Jenny”). She is also David’s primary source of medical care after his radiation exposure, until a medic from another team joins in to support (“David”). In season two, Marcy obtains a cover job as a hospital orderly, which means not only must she still provide medical care to her travelers team, but she must now also provide medical care as her host identity, adding two extra layers of performance skills to her emotional labor (“Jacob”). Furthermore, by having her original identity wiped and rebooted without full consent, and by being placed in a neurologically-compromised host to begin with, Marcy has had to battle what essentially manifests itself as a comorbid physical and mental illness with symptoms ranging from seizures to memory loss to lack of affect. That she has to perform procedures on her own body to ameliorate her condition is also telling and troubling; in real life, at least medical professionals tend to be able to receive medical care from other providers, but in Marcy’s case, she usually has to be her own physician.

The other team members do not fare well, either. Grant’s wife leaves him (“David”), Trevor’s consciousness is overwritten due to his brain disorder (“Trevor”), and although Philip recovers from his heroin addiction, he is at risk of cerebral overload due to the nature of historian duties (“Philip”). Ultimately, Grant goes back in time to September 11, 2001 to change a pivotal point in history, with the result that his entire team’s efforts during all three seasons of the show are reset.

Comparative Texts and Conclusion

A similarity exists between *Travelers*’ labor exploitation and Ridley Scott’s *Alien*, in which a corporation and its associated computer directive have a secret protocol that deems its workers expendable. As Robert Torrey writes in his

examination of feminism in *Alien*, “this expenditure of the worker crew in the ‘production’ of the alien envisions the continuation into the future of capitalist exploitation of labor” (347). Hypothetically, a dystopian view of the future is still predicated on capitalism, which could be a means of criticizing that as a viable economic system.

Another comparative text can be seen in Kurt Vonnegut’s 1952 novel *Player Piano*. In *Four Futures: Life After Capitalism*, Peter Frase discusses the novel’s supposed utopian state as still perpetuating capitalistic exploitation. This similarity is true particularly insofar as “[t]he women in the book continue to perform unpaid caring and emotional labor that has always been expected of them,” a state that “Vonnegut seems not to care whether this is important or a source of meaning for them,” thereby perpetuating the idea that even in an idealized society, women’s feelings about their labor neither matters nor should deviate away from this realm of the emotional support of others (ch. 1).

Several other dystopian works discuss labor exploitation to varying degrees, from the children forced to kill each other for entertainment in Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* series to the oppressed female AI in *Blade Runner 2049* (dir. Denis Villeneuve, 2017). But due to *Travelers* being so directly entrenched in essentially an ensemble of workers carrying out specific tasks, it is uniquely suited to illustrate the consequences of systems willing to treat human beings as highly disposable.

It is possible that the entire point of labor exploitation in *Travelers* is to indicate that the future society, which the team seeks to prevent, is damaged and dystopian. Either it is damaged to the point of finding labor exploitation acceptable, or labor exploitation is the only feasible way to repair a society this damaged. Regardless, the outcome of extreme exploitation of traveler team members is the same: most of the team, by the end of season three, is either dead or experiencing extreme emotional trauma or medical crises. Perhaps the series is advocating for the heroic nature of self-exploitation in the name of service to one’s government, even if that service goes far beyond what could be considered humane. However, the reboot in the final episode of season three seems to beg for a happy resolution to characters who have been overtly exploited, which hints that this exploitation is indeed not ideal.

One labor issue that is not hypothesized in the future world of *Travelers*, but that is discussed widely in our current culture, is automation. Peter Frase discusses a potential post-capitalist society in which automation has the

possibility of indeed reducing labor needs, but this could be postulated as either having a positive or negative effect on how we perform and perceive labor:

Care work like nursing is predominantly performed by women and is not coincidentally undervalued and underpaid. So perhaps the danger is less that such work will be automated, but that it *won't*, and that an underpaid, feminized workforce will be all that's left of wage labor. (ch. 1, italics in original)

Again, one could argue that the apparent lack of automation in *Travelers* future timeline indicates its status as a dystopian society, but the advanced use of AI and time travel technology would argue otherwise. Thus, Frase's pessimistic prediction is applicable here, that all that's left of wage labor in this fictional future is that which expects a high degree of emotional labor and is unduly exploitative. In this way, the entire traveler team is feminized and undervalued, as high expectations are placed on their ability to sublimate their own needs above those of the team, the Director, and a future they will never enjoy. However, with Marcy in particular having two endings, neither of which coalesces into something like a happy resolution, she in particular remains even more exploited. Her suicide renders her a hero, but she is still dead; and in Grant's reboot that allows her host and David to live happily ever after, her consciousness presumably remains in a dystopian future. The series means viewers to read the reset ending as happy for her, but only because we see her physical form, not her actual self, which further indicates that women's safety is positioned primarily in the body, not the psyche. And it is the psyche that is more damaged by exploitative emotional labor.

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