

## *Altered Carbon*, streaming and the breakdown of Spirit

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We transfer our minds into new sleeves, but what if the spirit degrades as well? We can't quantify the change, but we are not the same. I'm not the person I once was.

(*Altered Carbon* 2.1:0.35.21)

This paper is a consideration of the Netflix SF serial *Altered Carbon* that ran for two seasons and eighteen episodes between 2018-2020. The concept at the heart of *Altered Carbon* is that individual human memories and consciousness have become digitizable and storable in a disk-shaped device called a cortical stack. This device is implanted in vertebrae at the back of the neck of every human at the age of one-year. A consequence of this is that bodies no longer serve as part of a unified mind-body but have become 'sleeves' into which any stack can be inserted. Bodies become essentially transferable and are stored or cloned until they can become the housing for the consciousness recorded in the stack. The focus of the paper is thinking through the idea of a degradation of spirit as exemplified by the production itself in its narrative and aesthetic techniques. Here, the body is taken out of its temporal flow, is storable and cloneable, whilst consciousness becomes an intensified stream in a way that exemplifies the ambitions of the streaming platforms to lock-in user's attention. The collapsing of the distinctions between past and present produces an endless, recyclable 'now' without any sense of a future that is different. Reference is made in the serial to the dangers of psychosis that can entail from being 'spun-up' too many times resulting in trauma where the surgical implantation and extraction of the consciousness device brings into existence a deep spiritual wound that is built into being. The removal of the horizon of death within the scenario of *Altered Carbon* destabilizes the fundamental grounding of selfhood and the necessity for the founding relation to others, thus, the suspension of mortality sees the abandonment of morality as manifest within the show itself.