



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA
TRABALLO DE FIN DE GRAO

**Science Fiction, Satire and Postmodern Nostalgia: Arctic
*Monkeys' Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino***

Natalia Suárez Muiños

Titor: Jorge Sacido Romero

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

CURSO ACADÉMICO: 2021/2022

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FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA



CUBRIR ESTE FORMULARIO ELECTRONICAMENTE

Formulario de delimitación do título e resumo
Traballo de Fin de Grao curso 2020/2021

APELIDOS E NOME:	Suárez Muiños Natalia
GRAO EN:	Lingua e Literatura Inglesas
(NO CASO DE MODERNAS) MENCIÓN EN:	
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LIÑA TEMÁTICA ASIGNADA:	Literatura Inglesa, sociedade y cultura popular

SOLICITO a aprobación do seguinte título e resumo:

<p>Título: Science Fiction, Satire and Postmodern Nostalgia: Arctic Monkeys' <i>Tranquillity Base Hotel & Casino</i>.</p>
<p>Resumo [na lingua en que se vai redacta-lo TFG; entre 1000 e 2000 caracteres]:</p> <p>This dissertation will analyse an album titled '<i>Tranquillity Base Hotel & Casino</i>', released in 2018 by the British band Arctic Monkeys as a postmodernist cultural manifestation. The lyrics, imagery, topics and making of this LP exhibit some features normally identified as postmodernist. The album is a satire of contemporary society, and that was generically articulated as a work of science fiction. It has been labelled as a concept album whose action is located in a hotel with a casino on the moon. In order to carry out a postmodernist reading of the work, I will have recourse to theoretician of postmodernism such as Zygmunt Bauman and Fredric Jameson, among others.</p> <p>Common postmodernist topics such as the fluidity of the truth, globalization, technological advances, the power of media, the blurring lines between the private and the public, or the real and the fake, are to be found in this record. Alex Turner, the band's singer and songwriter, composed <i>Tranquillity Base Hotel & Casino</i> while he was living in California, with the more or less implicit intention of criticizing contemporary society at the times Donald Trump was elected for Office. He criticizes the fact that people's lives, along with politics, seemed to have become, in a way, similar to a show. Reality seems distorted and individuals tend to isolate themselves. In <i>Tranquillity Base Hotel & Casino</i>, we come across with recognizable postmodernist concepts, such as <i>hyperreality</i> (J. Baudrillard), <i>mcdonaldization</i> (G. Ritzer) and '<i>non-place</i>' (Marc Augé).</p> <p>One of the most recurrent themes of this record is nostalgia, which is another postmodernist concern. Linked to temporality, the album revisits the past with a nostalgic tone and presents the present in a way that looks more like a dystopian future. It contains many literary and cinematographic references (such as <i>1984</i>, by G. Orwell),</p>

SR. DECANO DA FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA (Presidente da Comisión de Títulos de Grao)

which also makes it interesting from the point of view of intertextuality.

Santiago de Compostela, 23 de Noviembre de 2020.

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SR. DECANO DA FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA (Presidente da Comisión de Títulos de Grao)

Introduction

Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino (2018) is the sixth studio album of the popular British band from Sheffield Arctic Monkeys. Many consider this album a drastic change in direction (artistically speaking) in their career and possibly their most experimental album so far. Alex Turner, the leading member and main composer of the band, is well-known for being a very prolific songwriter and probably one of the best lyricists of current English popular music. He is a highly ironic, mysterious and, we could say, cinematic storyteller. His use of language is exceptionally complex, witty and striking. This album has been labelled on many occasions by the press and the fans as a “concept album”, being a collection of songs that revolves around the topic of an imaginary hotel and casino located on the moon. However, since not all the songs exactly allude to this imaginary location, looking at the album this perspective alone could be somehow misleading. That is why in an interview (RadioX, 2018), Turner pointed out that he preferred to conceive it as a collection of eleven short-stories which are thematically related, and that the title of one of those stories also gives the title to the whole piece.

I find the lyrics of this album very interesting for several reasons: firstly, because Turner’s lyrics are qualitatively deeper and more complex than those of the average pop culture artist. Also, in *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino (TBHC)* one can find a critique of many different aspects of our current postmodern society, and, due to its complexity, it has been sometimes misunderstood (or not understood at all) and underrated by the public. The central aim of this BA thesis is to demonstrate why *TBHC* can be described or classified as a postmodernist work of art, by focusing particularly on the postmodernist features of its lyrics.

This thesis is divided into two chapters with different sections. The first chapter is dedicated to discussing the concepts of postmodernity and postmodernism, two terms which

do not designate the exact same phenomenon, but which are intimately connected. Since there is not a single and clear definition for these concepts, this chapter revises the approaches of some of the main theoreticians of postmodernity and postmodernism such as Fredric Jameson, Gianni Vattimo, Zygmunt Bauman, Linda Hutcheon and Neil Postman. It starts with an overview of the concept of postmodernity laying the ground for the ensuing discussion of postmodernism's main features as an artistic style, focusing on those that are more relevant for a reading of this album's lyrics. The theories of Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon are given pre-eminence. Therefore, this chapter establishes the theoretical framework for a reading of the album's lyrics and unravelling its somewhat cryptic meaning for listeners and readers.

The second chapter includes an in-depth analysis of five of the most representative songs in *TBHC*. The first section discusses two key songs that frame the album being the first and the last track, "Star Treatment" and "The Ultracheese". These songs are remarkably autobiographical and share some similarities in terms of the postmodernist features they exhibit. Both are at once highly nostalgic and ironic, in part because they deal with the author's personal identity crisis, a typical postmodern attitude caused by the dissatisfaction with the present and the idealisation of the past. Finally, the second section of this chapter includes the analysis of other three key songs, "Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino", "Four out of Five" and "Science Fiction". These songs have an affinity with the science fiction genre, arguably another postmodernist feature here adapted to a musical/lyrical format. Also, these songs are probably the most satirical ones on this album. Other postmodernist features will also be discussed in the analysis of all these songs, features such as intertextuality, metapoetic lines, and what Fredric Jameson calls 'schizophrenic' features. The discussion, in my view, substantiates what the title of this BA Thesis announces: *Science Fiction, Satire and Postmodern Nostalgia: Arctic Monkeys' Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino*.

Chapter 1: Postmodernism in Theory

1.1 The Context of 'Postmodernity'

Many critics, sociologists and historians have labelled the era we are living in as postmodernity, a period of transformation in many different spheres. Most of them seem to agree with the idea that Western society has undergone many radical changes which have impacted on the way we live, consume, socialise and create art, among other things. One of the most influential theoreticians of Postmodernism is the American philosopher, literary critic and Marxist political theorist Fredric Jameson. He has written many books and articles on the topic. His most influential work, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, started as an article published in 1984 in the *New Left Review*, which he expanded into a much larger text which was published as a book with the same title in 1991. Jameson's ideas on postmodernism are still relevant today. His theory mainly aims to analyse the connection between, on the one hand, art and culture and, on the other, politics and the economy. Some of his ideas that will be discussed here were also extracted from a complementary text published more recently, *El postmodernismo revisado (2012)*, translated and edited by David Sánchez Usanos.

Jameson (2012) clarified that his first intention in the 80s was to describe 'postmodernity' as a systematic cultural shift that corresponds with the third phase of capitalism, whereas with the term 'postmodernism' he was trying to identify a particular artistic style that was the symptom of this systematic shift which took place globally during the 20th century (20). He also considers globalisation and postmodernity to be basically the same, the two sides of a coin that represent our present historical moment: "Globalisation is

the base and postmodernity the superstructure of this third phase of capitalism” (2012, 23).¹ He later on specifies that the term globalisation is used more often when one contemplates this period from an economic point of view, whereas postmodernity is more frequent when contemplating this period from a cultural point of view (2012, 79). However, separating culture from economy is practically impossible when one is talking about postmodernity, because both spheres are deeply intertwined in late capitalism. Given this correlation between economy and culture in a capitalist system, Jameson (2012) defines postmodernity as a whole ‘mode of production’ in itself also (20), since “all works of art are to be sold in the art market, and that the commodity-form dominates art and culture as much as material goods” (22).² This means that when looking at any cultural or artistic object, the way it has been produced and the place it occupies in the market is highly relevant when describing or analysing this particular object. In other words, it is not just about the content of such artwork, its form and the place it occupies in the cultural industry also helps one to fully understand such an object.

According to Jameson (2012), and in reference to its connection with postmodernity, the outcome of globalisation was only possible after the process of decolonisation and liberation that took place during the sixties on a global scale (44). In the first chapter of his book *A Transparent Society* (1992), Gianni Vattimo agrees with Jameson when he claims that the end of imperialism and colonialism, as well as the dissolution of the idea of history as a unilinear process and the advent of the mass media, lead to the constitution of the society of globalised communication, marking both the death of modernity and the birth of postmodernity (4-5). This claim highlights two important factors which are interconnected

¹ “La globalización es la base y la postmodernidad la superestructura de esta tercera etapa del capitalismo” (Jameson 2012, 23)

² “todas las obras de arte están para ser vendidas en el mercado del arte, y que la forma-mercancía domina el arte y la cultura tanto como los bienes materiales” (Jameson 2012, 22)

when talking about postmodernity: on the one hand, the dissolution of the modern idea of history as a unilinear process and, on the other hand, the eruption of the mass media society.

As the term “postmodern” itself implies that modernity is over, Vattimo (1992) explains which changes have taken place for us to think that modernity is in fact dead. Vattimo points out that “in the Enlightenment, human history is seen as an ongoing process of emancipation as if it were the perfection of the human ideal” (2), meaning that they sought to progressively achieve the most ideal version of the European modern man. However, in postmodernity, the possibility of talking about history as a unilinear process or narrative has disappeared, and history is no longer seen as objective, but ideological, it is seen as constructed by specific dominant groups and social classes (1992, 3).

Regarding the idea of history as a constructed narrative, Jameson (2012) also points out that postmodern philosophy has usually been associated with constructivism, “that is, the feeling that nothing is natural, that all human feelings and institutions are social and historical constructions” (26)³. This is why he claims postmodern philosophy to be characterised by anti-foundationalism and anti-essentialism, and that, although postmodern philosophy has been accused of being too relativist, Jameson still sees this perspective as a positive one, in the sense that postmodern philosophy or ideology “it is supposed to be a relativism that complacently delights in the end of truth and transcendent values [...] It is felt as a positive liberation and as getting rid of some universals that we no longer need” (2012, 25)⁴. The way these authors put it implies that the postmodern subject has gained a kind of awareness about the ‘unnatural’ nature of institutions and certain ideals, which is actually rather positive.

³ “esto es, la sensación de que nada es natural, de que todos los sentimientos humanos y las instituciones son construcciones sociales e históricas” (Jameson 2012, 26)

⁴ “se supone que es un relativismo que complacientemente se deleita con el final de la verdad y de los valores trascendentes [...] Es sentido como una liberación positiva y como el desprenderse de unos universales que ya no necesitamos” (Jameson 2012, 25)

Because of this, the idea or notion of singularity is also associated with the postmodern way of thinking that goes against universal ideas:

La lucha contra los universales inherente en el propio concepto de singularidad es una lucha contra las normas hegemónicas y los valores institucionales, ya sean culturales o jurídicos. Los universales son experimentados como normativos y, por tanto, como opresivos y constringentes respecto a las minorías e individuos. (Jameson, 2012, 61).

Nevertheless, this new postmodern perspective also has had negative consequences for understanding postmodern society. This is why Vattimo (1992) warns that with this crisis of the idea of history comes the crisis of the idea of progress (3). By not taking progress for granted, this second crisis is in part responsible for this tendency towards hopelessness in postmodern individuals, who struggle to imagine a prosperous future free from ecological disasters or reckless capitalism. Thus, the postmodern subject feels lost and insecure, and does not know what to hold on to in a society characterised by uncertainty and unreliability.

Vattimo claims that the impossibility of thinking history as unilinear is not only caused by the end of imperialism and colonialism, it is also the result of the proliferation of means of mass communication (1992, 5). The importance of the mass media is another crucial factor for understanding postmodernity, for it evidences the intrinsic link between technology and postmodernity. Moreover, Jameson (2012) also pointed out that the adjective 'postmodern' is often used to simply designate the technological aspect of new things (25). The technologies of communication (and also of transportation) have had a massive impact on our society and prompted many radical changes in daily life:

La nueva tecnología de la comunicación resulta central para la experiencia cotidiana de la postmodernidad por parte de la gente, y, a menudo, ha sido aislada como una de sus principales causas. [...H]oy en día no sólo usamos la tecnología, la consumimos, y consumimos su valor de cambio al mismo tiempo que el resto de su esencia más simbólica. (Jameson 2012, 68)

Vattimo (1992) similarly believes that the term postmodern is closely linked “to the fact that the society in which we live is a society of generalised communication”, also known as the society of the mass media (1). He argues, in accordance with Jean-François Lyotard, that with the deployment of these means comes an explosive proliferation of different and pluralized world views that affect the way in which we conceive a single reality: “These means –newspapers, radio, television, what is now called telematics– have been decisive in bringing about the dissolution of centralised perspectives, of what the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard calls the grand narratives” (1992, 5). This pluralization caused by the mass media makes it even more difficult to understand the world or the history from a unilinear or central perspective. Our perception of reality, of the present and the past, is distorted due to the saturation of random information and images one sees on the mass media. Vattimo argues that the very logic of the information market can turn anything into an object of communication, therefore the consequences are that “[f]or us, reality is rather the result of the intersection and ‘contamination’ (in the Latin sense) of a multiplicity of images, interpretations and reconstructions circulated by the media in competition with one another and without any central coordination” (1992, 7). In his book, Vattimo (1992) calls postmodern society “the transparent society” because the access to many different means of information may lead one to mistakenly think this is a more-transparent society, one that is more aware of itself, whereas, in reality, Vattimo considers we live in a much more complex

and chaotic society, and “that it is precisely in this relative ‘chaos’ where our hopes for emancipation lie” (4).

Zygmunt Bauman, a Polish sociologist and philosopher, is another relevant author for this study. Although in his famous book *Liquid Modernity* (2000) he does not specifically use the term postmodernity, what he means with this title alludes to the same reality other authors tried to describe. He considers we are living in the liquid or fluid stage of modernity, and uses the term fluidity “as the leading metaphor for the present stage of modern era” (2) because he thinks that, in many different aspects, our society resembles the qualities and characteristics of liquids. He points out that “[f]luids neither fix space nor bind time [...] fluids do not keep any shape for long and are constantly and ready (and prone) to change it” (2). With this metaphor, Bauman wants to highlight that our society is characterised by this constant proclivity to change, nothing is seen as predictable, fixed or stable anymore, bereft of safe patterns to follow. Change has become the permanent state, and this turns our lives into an experience characterised by uncertainty and indetermination:

These days patterns and configurations are no longer ‘given’, let alone ‘self-evident’, there are just too many of them, clashing with one another and contradicting one another’s commandments [...] Ours is, as a result, an individualized, privatized version of modernity, with the burden of pattern-weaving and the responsibility for failure falling primarily on the individual’s shoulders. (Bauman 2000, 7-8)

Since the postmodern individual can no longer find any answers nor trust on the traditional values and institutions which are now being deconstructed and problematised, postmodern individuals have to deal with a sort of existential crisis, anxiety, disenchantment and the burden of constructing their lives with no examples or evident pathways to follow.

Furthermore, according to Bauman (2000), the feature of postmodernity that stands out the most is the changing relationship between space and time, because it is a crucial attribute that is somehow linked with all other features (8-9). He even dedicates chapter three of his book (“Time/Space”) to reflect upon this shift. He argues that this change is dependent on the evolution of technology and artificial means of transportation and communication, so there is again this emphasis on the power of technology to drastically change the possibilities of our lives. In liquid modernity (or, we may say, postmodern times), time and space have become independent categories (8). According to Bauman, the ideas of speed and acceleration derived from technological advancements constitute the evidence of this variability in the relationship between space and time: “once the distance passed in a unit of time came to be dependent on technology, on artificial means of transportation, all extant, inherited limits to the speed of movement could be in principle transgressed” (2000, 9). The expansiveness and flexibility derived from this new relationship between space and time, along with the process of globalisation and the increase of mobility in a universal scale is possible thanks to this acceleration. Bauman (2000) argues that space can be conquered and controlled through the control of time, thus “[v]elocity of movement and access to faster means of mobility steadily rose in modern times to the position of the principal tool of power and domination:” (9). Moreover, Bauman even claims that “[t]he near instantaneity of software time augurs the devaluation of space:” (2000, 118), which according to him would mean that, since all parts of space can be reached at any moment, no space has ‘special value’. This is representative of the contemporary obsession with conquering outer space. Nowadays, the wealthiest and most powerful people on the planet are investing vast amounts of money in space technology. Thus, with each passing day, the idea of the human colonisation of Mars seems less dystopic and more like a plausible reality. Nonetheless, there are many who are very sceptical towards this future, in the sense that they do not see this as a sign of human progress (evidencing the

crisis of progress discussed above). That is why many others reckon that saving our planet from imminent ecological disaster rather than expanding this damage outside the Earth is a more progressive idea.

Finally, we must ponder the effects of this acceleration. This speed of circulation, in terms of how fast people and goods can travel from one place to another in almost no time, has had an effect also on the way all types of products are produced and consumed in our capitalist and globalised society. From this also follows the idea that, in postmodern times, durability is no longer as relevant or desirable as it was in the previous stage of modernity (the solid or heavy modernity, as Bauman calls it). This is one of those effects of the change in relation of space and time: “It is the mind-boggling speed of circulation, of recycling, ageing, dumping and replacement which brings profit today –not the durability and lasting reliability of the product” (Bauman 2000, 14). This same logic applies to many spheres of postmodern life, for example, the arts. For instance, in the music industry, the songs that make the highest profits, known as ‘hits’, are always part of rapid changing fashions of culture. This type of songs tends to be shorter in form and simple in terms of content, thus it is a good way of making high profit. However, some ‘hits’ are essentially songs that are written to be forgotten with the passage of time. So, the rule of the less durable, the most profitable, applies also to this section of the market. Therefore, an immense part of the postmodern audience, influenced by this consumer ideology, has become addicted to instantaneity, so they lack patience and get bored very quickly, holding them back from diving into the close reading that certain artistic manifestations require. Still, in this context, one can find artists that rebel against this fashion and try to write something that is ‘timeless’, more durable, it is an effort to go against this accelerating tendency.

1.2 Postmodernism/ Postmodern Art

After examining some of the relevant characteristics of postmodernity in the previous section, I now turn to discussing postmodernism with the help of theorists like Fredric Jameson (again) and Neil Postman. The purpose here is to define postmodernism and outline some fundamental features of postmodern art, by putting the main focus on those features which are also to be found in the lyrics of *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* (2018) by Arctic Monkeys. This discussion is necessary in order to prove the main thesis of this TFG: namely, that this album is a very interesting and contemporary example of postmodern art.

In “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” (1983), Jameson attempted to describe the term postmodernism (a term originally used in architecture) when he wrote:

It is not just another word for the description of a particular style. It is also [...] a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order –what is often euphemistically called modernization, postindustrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism. (Jameson 1983, 112-113)

So, although Jameson does consider postmodernism to be an artistic style (as he tried to clarify in 2012 in *El Postmodernismo Revisado*), in 1983 he placed the emphasis on the fact that this artistic style was particularly and deeply linked with the emergence of postwar society and the new cultural and economic paradigm. In other words, he characterises this style for being a symptom of this socio-economic and cultural change. As he put it in 2012, this style “ofrecía una serie de claves respecto a los cambios sociales y globales.” (Jameson

20). And this is precisely one of the main features of postmodern art, that it “in many ways expresses the deeper logic of this particular social system.” (1983, 125). According to Jameson, that new society that began to emerge after World War II was characterised by, and differed from, the previous society in:

New types of consumption; planned obsolescence; an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes; the penetration of advertising, television and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society; [...] the growth of the great networks of superhighways and the arrival of automobile culture. (Jameson 1983, 124-125)

Thus, it makes sense to think that postmodern art would somehow reflect and become influenced by these changes in capitalist society. Jameson even claims that the postmodernist formal features “expresses the inner truth of that newly emergent social order of late capitalism” (1983, 113).

Postmodernism, as the term itself indicates, needs to be understood also from its correlation with earlier modernism. Jameson (1983) claims that these new postmodernist art forms emerged as “specific reactions against the established forms of high modernism” (111). However, it should be clarified that they are not at all opposites or contrary to each other, in fact, the prefix post implies that it is in some way a continuation or reformulation of the previous phenomenon. As Jameson (1983) puts it: “radical breaks between periods do not generally involve complete changes of content but rather the restructuration of a certain number of elements already given: features that in an earlier period or system were subordinate now become dominant” (123) and vice versa. Therefore, postmodernist artists

were then the ones who sought to displace those central and canonical art forms in favour of the marginal or peripheric art forms.

However, Jameson (1983) also warns that postmodernist artists and writers do not really have a clear idea of what they are supposed to be doing since they no longer get inspired by the old models and canons (115). Regarding this, Jameson claims that “[t]here is another sense in which the writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds” (1983, 115). Since there is this idea among postmodern artists that there is no space for individual originality or innovation open, postmodern art is mostly going to be the art of recycling and recreating forms and styles of the past which evidences the nostalgic nature of this type of art. Thus, many postmodernisms, according to Jameson, started to look for inspiration in what he calls paraliterature (which designates written works that are dismissed as subliterary or with less artistic value or interest), and incorporating some of its characteristic elements:

Many of the new postmodernisms have been fascinated precisely by the whole landscape of advertising and motels, of the Las Vegas strip, of the late show and Grade-B Hollywood films, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the popular biography, the murder mystery and the science fiction or fantasy novel. They no longer ‘quote’ such ‘texts’ [...], they incorporate them to the point where the line between high art and commercial forms seems increasingly difficult to draw. (Jameson 1983, 112)

Postmodernism, then, will make it more difficult to draw a line between what is considered to be high culture and mass or popular culture (Jameson 1983, 112). This is not the only blurred boundary in postmodernism, since Jameson and other authors seem to point out that

postmodernism is also characterised by the effacement or dissolution of the boundaries between what is considered private and public life, as well as the older categories of genre and discourse.

In the case of *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* (TBHC), there are clear resemblance with some of these elements listed above in the quote by Jameson: the title of the album itself seems to allude to a similar landscape to that of Las Vegas, a city entirely devoted to entertainment, the hyperbolic version of postmodern metropolis. Also, the influence of science fiction is crucial in this album (something that will be discussed more deeply later) since science fiction is a genre that for several reasons is deeply connected with postmodernism. Also, the concepts of high and popular or low art are quite controversial today because, on the one hand, that very distinction is no longer clear, and, on the other hand, because such concepts seem to carry some connotations about the value of certain art forms.

Due to this semiotic crisis that shaped postmodernism, many postmodern artists (according to Jameson) have sought for artistic inspiration in postmodern theory (2012, 71), evidencing the close relationship between this particular art and art theory itself. In *El Postmodernismo Revisado*, Jameson (2012) reports a conversation he had with a young artist in which Jameson was wondering if any contemporary artist was still influenced by the old masters, and was struck when the young artist replied negating so, and claiming that they got their ideas from reading theory, such as Baudrillard and Deleuze (71). Here It is relevant to point out in this connection that *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), one of the theoretical works included and discussed in this paper, was actually one of the many inspirations for Alex Turner when writing the lyrics for *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino*.

In an interview (Sopitas.com, 2018), Turner said that despite the fact that the book was written three decades ago, many of the reflections and criticisms made by Postman in this work are still more than applicable today. He was particularly interested in the phrase “information-action ratio” coined by Postman in his book. With this phrase, Postman reflected on the idea that TV has exacerbated the situation of living surrounded by “an abundance of irrelevant information”, due to the fact that “our daily news is inert, consisting of information that gives us something to talk about but cannot lead to any meaningful action.” (Postman 1985, 79) Regarding this, Turner confessed that the phrase seemed to him to completely reflect this present era. That is why he decided to incorporate it in the lyrics of the song “Four out of Five”, making it one of the many examples of intertextuality in this record.

1.3 Jameson and the Postmodern Concept of *Schizophrenia*

There is a key concept proposed by Jameson as one of the basic features of postmodernism, which is the concept of schizophrenia. He took this concept from Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, which originally considered schizophrenia to be essentially a language disorder that “emerges from the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language”, so he understood schizophrenia as “the breakdown of the relationship between signifiers” which are linguistically intertwined in utterance or meaning (Jameson 1983, 118-119). However, Jameson did not use this concept in a clinical sense: as J. A. Hernández Gutiérrez argues in his thesis *El papel de la nostalgia musical en la construcción de la identidad posmoderna. Un estudio en Monterrey con la generación de los ochenta*. (2011), the concept of schizophrenia proposed by Lacan served Jameson as an aesthetic model for

him to reflect on the rupture or break in postmodern culture with the idea of temporality, since Jameson identifies the crisis of the idea of history as the main characteristic of postmodernity (2011, 105).

Jameson (1983) points out that “[f]or Lacan, the experience of temporality, human time, past, present, memory, the persistence of personal identity over months and years –this existential or experiential feeling of time itself– is also an effect on language.” (119), since the idea of time is expressed in many different forms through language. Therefore, the schizophrenic, apart from not being able to build coherent sentences or discourse, is also someone incapable of dealing with the notion of time in a non-fractured or discontinuous manner. This is why Jameson (1983) claims that, since schizophrenics have become unable to unify their own past, present and future, they are “condemned to life in a perpetual present [...] for which there is no conceivable future on the horizon” (119). The latter causes them a profound personal identity crisis because their lives appear to them as fragmented or disconnected, so that they are unable to organise their own life experience from a temporal perspective. This way, the schizophrenic also ends up having trouble discerning reality, since this experience of a perpetual present is felt by the individual “as loss, as unreality” (Jameson 1983, 120).

This leads Jameson to consider that postmodern artists are, in this sense, schizophrenic, also in line with the inner logic of our late capitalist society. Cultural schizophrenia is largely an effect of the power and omnipresence of the mass media (and the format of the technologies used by them) for several reasons. One of them is that the media exhaustion of news and its logic of informational function are also responsible for this “disappearance of a sense of history” that characterises postmodernity (Jameson 1983, 125). Conversely to what many people would think, the saturation of information prompted by the media indeed helps people to forget history, making the media “the very agents and

mechanisms for our historical amnesia” (Jameson 1983, 125). The other reason would be that the media are for the most part also responsible for the prevalence of the image over language in our society and culture. Reflecting upon the theories of Jameson and Baudrillard, J. A. Hernández Gutiérrez comments that both authors agree with the fact that images have a capital importance for understanding contemporary society, since this era is marked by the dissolution of the boundary between the real and the imaginary, as well as by the absence of signifiers in messages, and the saturation of incoherent signs (Gutiérrez 2011, 40-41). Thus, this juncture is the origin of the schizophrenia of the postmodern subject.

In his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), Neil Postman also drew his attention to the negative consequences of the pre-eminence of the image and the media in postmodernism. Postman explains how the invention of photography in the middle of the 19th century had a huge impact on our symbolic environment (85). Postman (1985) claimed that photography was not meant to be simply a supplement to language, it would actually replace language as the dominant means for construing and understanding reality (86). He reckoned that, later on, TV came to exacerbate the importance of the image, “transforming our culture into one vast arena for show business.” (1985, 93). The importance of this fact is such that Postman, instead of using like other authors the term postmodernity, dubs this era *The Age of TV* or *The Age of Show Business*, arguing that in America TV has itself become its culture, turning everything (from politics to culture and education) into mere entertainment with which we are constantly amusing ourselves and causing a severe decline in public discourse.

In his book, Postman argues that any medium is always inherently biased, so it always has a certain effect on the content it conveys. In chapter 4, “The Typographic Mind”, he explains that in 18th and 19th centuries in America, culture was dominated by the medium of the printed word, which means that under these conditions “public discourse tends to be

characterized by a coherent, orderly arrangement of facts and ideas” (1985, 59), promoting a language-centred printed discourse that encouraged rationality. However, with the decline of this typographic culture and the emergence of the society of the mass media in which the image dominates culture over the printed word (not only in TV, but also in the most recent examples of social media like Twitter or Instagram), our conception of reality, history, knowledge and truth drastically changes, and Postman warns that this change is not precisely for the better. This leads Postman to declare:

I should go so far as to say that embedded in the surrealistic frame of a television news show is a theory of anticomunication, featuring a type of discourse that abandons logic, reason, sequence and rules of contradiction. In aesthetics, I believe the name given to this theory is Dadaism; in philosophy, nihilism; in psychiatry, schizophrenia. (Postman 1985, 122)

Here, Postman also uses the term schizophrenia like Jameson in order to evidence the effects of an image-centred culture dominated by TV. So, it could be said that Jameson and Postman’s theories complement each other:

Esta idea posmoderna de la temporalidad y la esquizofrenia, según Jameson, se ilustra con la imagen del espectador a quien se le exige que simultáneamente vea todas las escenas diferenciadas y aleatorias de la vida-espectáculo, a diferencia de los espectadores de la antigua estética, quienes únicamente centraban su atención en una sola pantalla. (Gutiérrez 2011, 106)

The concept of schizophrenia has been introduced here because it is very relevant for this case study, since most of the lyrics on *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* can be analysed under the lens of this concept. However, this will be further developed in the next chapter, entirely devoted to the analysis of the album's lyrics. In the record, the lyric voice speaks as a postmodern subject that is unable to unify the present and the past so as to obtain a clear sense of his identity, and who struggles to discern what is and what is not real in the present, as well as what did or did not happen in the past (both historically, but more importantly, autobiographically). For Jameson (1983), the experience of temporal discontinuity is the experience described in terms of schizophrenic language (121). Thus, in this album, there are also to be found many instances of sequences of phrases and sentences that are not coherently connected, and, on many occasions, two consecutive stanzas do not seem to have at first glance any correlation at all, making it look sometimes like a fragmented monologue or a digression without a logic order. As Jameson (1983) illustrates in his text by discussing a poem that exhibits these characteristics, the effect of this type of writing is that its meaning is more 'global', a meaning that "floats over the text or behind it." (122), and this is what is found on many occasions in *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino*.

1.4 Hutcheon on Postmodernism: Complicitous, Critical and Ambivalent Art

Linda Hutcheon is also another relevant literary theorist and critic of postmodernism. Her take on the topic is both interesting and very accurate, so some of her reflections on postmodernism will be taken into account in this section. In *Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern: A Dialogue* (1998), Hutcheon claims that not all forms of contemporary culture can be considered postmodern because not all of them are "*complicitously critical and*

deconstructing” (1998, 18). By this, she means that “postmodernism” is not synonymous with “contemporary”, for postmodernism has to be both complicitous and critical, and therefore ambivalent at its core (19). Postmodernism is complicitous because it necessarily operates in accordance with the inner logic of the capitalist system (as Jameson also reckons), and at the same time, postmodernism is characterised by a critical attitude towards it as it aims to subvert it from within, hence its ambivalent and paradoxical nature. In *A Postmodern Problematics* (1988), Hutcheon put it this way:

[Baudrillard] accepts that all culture [...] acts in accord with the political logic of the capitalist system. But postmodernism, I think, inverts the terms of that paradox. It does not pretend to operate outside that system, for it knows it cannot; it therefore overtly acknowledges its complicity, only covertly to work to subvert the system’s values from within. (Hutcheon 1988, 4)

This is why Hutcheon also highlights the paradoxical or contradictory nature of all postmodernisms: in an era in which the concept of truth is never no longer considered to be an absolute (but relative instead), and in which those grand or totalising narratives (those identified by Lyotard) no longer work as guide to understand the world around us, postmodern individuals have accepted contradiction as an inevitable thing when trying to understand the different aspects of postmodern identities, culture and society. As Hutcheon argues, this is something that should be accepted and does not have to be necessarily regarded as problematic:

That all postmodern positions are, in a sense, ex-centric (paradoxically both inside and outside the dominant they contest) is no cause for despair or apocalyptic wailing.

The postmodern view is that contradictions are inevitable and, indeed, the condition of social as well as cultural experience. (Hutcheon 1988, 7)

This is why some postmodern artists, like Alex Turner, embrace contradiction at the same time they worry about it, and, instead of trying to give answers, they prefer to ask rhetorical questions that they already know cannot be answered. The purpose of this type of art is not to provide totalizing answers (for that would go against postmodern ideology framework), but to problematize aspects of our society and culture. In this sense, Hutcheon says “this art does not ‘emit any clear signals’ but, then again, it does not try to. It tries to problematize and thereby to make us question. But it does not offer answers. It cannot, without betraying its own anti-totalizing ideology” (1988, 9). Moreover, she affirms that this interrogation manifests in itself this paradoxical (complicit and critical at the same time) attitude of postmodern art: “The very form of interrogation enacts the postmodern paradox of being both complicitous with and critical of the prevailing norms -which it has inscribed by its very questioning.” (1988, 4).

Hutcheon has also argued on many occasions that the postmodern is inherently both ironic and nostalgic. She claimed that “it was postmodernism that brought the conjunction of irony and nostalgia quite literally into the public eye through the forms of its architecture.” (1998, 18). Although this conjunction could have been confusing at first, Hutcheon (1998) argues that both irony and nostalgia have a hermeneutic affinity (22) because they are concepts with a double-coding, something that make them very powerful concepts because of their ability to awake different affections: “the power of nostalgia [...] comes in part from its structural doubling-up of two different times, an inadequate present and an idealized past [...] irony too is doubled: two meanings, the ‘said’ and the ‘unsaid’, rub together to create irony” (21). Due to this structural similarity, Hutcheon (1998) also considers that both the effect of

nostalgia and irony are not achieved if there is no one to interpret it, and therefore their hermeneutic affinity: “to call something ironic or nostalgic is, in fact, less a description of the entity itself than an attribution of a quality of response” (22). In other words, irony happens if someone gets it, when one is able to interpret that unsaid meaning; similarly, nostalgia is not simply perceived, it is felt when past and present come together prompting an emotional response on the interpreter.

Although nostalgia has existed for centuries, what Hutcheon wants to say is that postmodern nostalgia is precisely an ‘ironized nostalgia’, and she sees this as a good tool or method to reflect upon the present and the past, and therefore upon the individual’s identity:

The postmodern does indeed recall the past, but always with the kind of ironic double vision that acknowledges the final impossibility of indulging in nostalgia, even as it consciously evokes nostalgia’s affective power. In the postmodern, in other words, [...] nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited, and ironized. (Hutcheon 1998, 23)

Hutcheon’s perspective is relevant here because both irony and nostalgia are found in *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* as postmodern features. In fact, as it will be argued at length below, there are many parts of the lyrics that seem to correspond with this ironized nostalgia that Hutcheon considers to be the type of postmodern nostalgia. That is why nostalgia and irony are also two key postmodern concepts that will also be explored in the analysis of the lyrics of this album carried out in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: A Close Reading of the Postmodernist Lyrics of *Tranquility Base Hotel &*

Casino

2.1 Postmodern Identity Crisis, Nostalgia, Irony and the Autobiographical in *TBHC*

This case study's starting point will be the analysis of the first and last songs of *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* (2018). Due to their position inside the album and the topics they cover, these two songs share some interesting similarities. As the introductory and closing tracks, "Star Treatment" and "The Ultracheese" are both songs that stand out because they are perhaps the most obviously autobiographical ones, and they deal mostly with the typical postmodern identity crisis discussed in the previous section from Turner's perspective. Consequently, nostalgia is also one of the main topics of these songs.

As has been argued in the previous section, nostalgia is an inherent symptom of postmodernity for many different reasons: it is symptomatic of the postmodern disenchantment with the present times and with contemporary consumer society, of the crisis of the ideas of history and progress, of the saturation and acceleration of images and information derived from the omnipresence of the mass media, and also, of the inability of imagining a prosperous future. This often results in a personal identity crisis to which nostalgia becomes a symptom to confer continuity on one's sense of identity. Since nostalgia is deeply related to memory, experience, dreams and desires, by reassessing the idealised past and the bleak present, the postmodern nostalgic, in this case exemplified by Alex Turner, tries to unify and restore his current fragmented identity. In accordance with this, Gutiérrez (2011) argues that many authors support the idea that in the present, nostalgia emerges as a symptom at work in the field of cultural production that indicates the need of the postmodern individual to remember and understand his/her past, not the historical but the biographical one (3-4).

The presence of this in Turner's song lyrics is a good case of this. Nevertheless, not all instances of nostalgia in these lyrics express exactly the same type of nostalgia, therefore, by using different categorisations proposed by several theorists, this section aims to identify and unwrap the different types of postmodern nostalgia to be found in these lyrics.

It should, however, be pointed out at the start that Turner is a very ironic songwriter. It seems to be part of his personality, and those who have seen him performing or in interviews are probably aware of this. This album is probably the most ironic and, at once, the most nostalgic of his works up to now. As Hutcheon (1998) has argued, the postmodern is inherently both ironic and nostalgic, and she considers ironic nostalgia as the best example of postmodern nostalgia (21-23). Her claim that "our contemporary culture is indeed nostalgic; some parts of it –postmodern parts– are aware of the risks and lures of nostalgia, and seek to expose these through irony" (1998, 23) resonates a lot with the lyrics Turner wrote for this album, especially in the case of the two songs analysed below. Irony is also a complex trope because, as it has been explained in the previous section, it requires the active participation of the interpreter to decode it and make irony happen. This is why Hutcheon encourages to think of irony "in terms of a dynamic relationship, a communicative process" (1992, 220), and argues that irony can have different functions in discourse. Thus, in order to not fail in interpreting postmodern irony, she thinks that it is important to bear in mind the following:

Different attitudes generate different reasons for seeing (interpreting) irony or using (encoding) it, and the lack of distinction between these different functions is one of the causes of the confusion and disagreement about the appropriateness and even the value of the trope. (Hutcheon 1992, 220)

Therefore, the attitude of the ironist (which in the case of music can sometimes be sensed through the tone of the singer's voice among other devices), and the different ways of using irony are important aspects to carry out a more accurate interpretation of the irony in these lyrics.

2.1.1 Track 1. "Star Treatment"

This song works perfectly as the introduction to the album, it was the first one Turner wrote and it served him as a starting point to continue developing his ideas. It is a song in which he is having a monologue with himself that contains a mixture of different glimpses into Turner's mind. He is wondering about his current state, one which is defined by nostalgia, lack of inspiration, a personal identity crisis, and dissatisfaction with the present. The first stanza already conveys all these ideas: the first lines "I just wanted to be one of The Strokes, now look at the mess you made me make" evoke this idea of how seemingly fast time has passed for him. The Strokes is a New York rock band from the 2000s that Turner has always been a fan of, especially in his beginnings with Arctic Monkeys, to the point that he has claimed that maybe his band would not exist if The Strokes had not existed (RadioX, 2018). That is why these lines connect him with his past: in the present, Turner is struggling to understand at which moment he turned, from a teenage boy who dreamt of having a rock band with his friends, into a 'rockstar', a famous, wealthy and successful musician. This is a sign that he is struggling with his own identity, and looking back in time is sometimes an exercise of looking for continuity, for those things that have defined you from very early on.

The nostalgia evoked by these first lines corresponds with a type of nostalgia observed by Fred Davis in *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (1979), one that he labelled *reflexive nostalgia*. This author considers that the nostalgic evocation of past

events always occurs in the context of fear, discontent, anxiety and uncertainty in the present (Davis, 1979 quoted in Gutiérrez 2011, 61). This is why Davis sees that the rise of nostalgia is directly connected with this era of crisis and social agitation characteristic of postmodern society, and that this is precisely the main difference between postmodern nostalgia and other types of nostalgia (Davis, 1981 quoted in Gutiérrez 2011, 61). In his typology, Davis considers that reflexive nostalgia involves a self-analysis of the individual's own experiences and memories so that he/she can understand the relationship between his/her past and the person he/she became. Thus, this type of nostalgia helps to self-reinforce one's identity and works as a tool of adaptation that provides the subject with a certain degree of emotional stability against the threats of discontinuity (Davis 1979 quoted in Gutiérrez 2011, 61-62). Reflexive nostalgia is scattered all around this album, and it seems to indicate that Turner was going through a personal identity crisis at the time he was writing this album, possibly derived from the difficulty in coming to terms with his success as a musician.

Another important topic in this song is the lack of inspiration. Prior to composing these songs, Turner was suffering from what is known as 'writer's block' (Apple Music interview, 2018). Lines 3-6 contain several clever metaphors expressing that he is having trouble finding inspiration. The line "but golden boy's in bad shape" (6) is an echo of a Leonard Cohen's song, "Dress Rehearsal Rag" (1970). In that song, Cohen also wonders where his "golden touch" is (his ability and inspiration to write music). Turner is dealing with the same problem. Cohen and Turner have trouble finding inspiration and understanding who they are or have become, and express their concerns in songwriting. Therefore, this song contains two typical elements of postmodern aesthetics: on the one hand, the echo of Cohen in Turner's song is an example of the intertextuality found frequently in the lyrics of this album, and, on the other hand, both songs are metapoetic since they reflect on the process and hardships of creating a poem. As pointed out in the previous section, according to Jameson

(1983, 2012), it is very typical of postmodern artists not to have a clear idea of which direction to take (artistically speaking) inside this new cultural panorama. Thus, lines like “Everybody is on a barge floating down the endless stream of great TV/1984, 2019” (10-11) seem to indicate that Turner was perhaps indirectly blaming or criticising this new socio-cultural context for being rather uninspiring. These lines resonate a lot with Neil Postman’s criticisms on postmodern society: one in which TV and entertainment dominate culture, and one in which the majority of people are completely enthralled by it. Again, with another intertextual reference, Turner is here comparing contemporary society to that depicted in George Orwell’s dystopian novel *1984* (1949). Paradoxically, it seems that he eventually found inspiration writing precisely about this struggle and uninspiring context.

Another line that immediately calls the attention is “Maybe I was a little too wild in the seventies” (12), considering that Turner never lived this decade because he was born in 1986. This is the first line of the stanzas that work inside the song as pre-choruses. This is an instance of what Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large* (1996) called *imagined nostalgia*, a type of nostalgia that is also deeply linked with postmodernism. Appadurai argues that in postmodernity, the cultural and entertainment industries have focused on exploiting and capitalising decontextualized fragments that evoke a past without any social or political implications, thus idealising it (Appadurai 1996, quoted in Gutiérrez 2011, 68). In fact, the seventies are a decade that is constantly idealised and whose aesthetics are being brought back to life today: in postmodernity, retro and vintage objects and symbols are a trending fashion among the newer generations. This is why Gutiérrez (2011, 68), recurring to Appadurai’s theory, claims that this is a type of nostalgia with no memory, it is simply a desire to recover from a loss that the subject never experienced. It is based on collective memory instead of the individual’s memory, and it is symptomatic of mass-media society, hence its connection with postmodernism. As Gutiérrez (2011, 74) argues, one of the

consequences of the massification of popular culture through the media and the entertainment industry was the gestation of a media-type collective memory. Therefore, postmodern individuals live surrounded by images, videos and objects of past eras to the point that they stored this information as if they had actually lived the seventies. The music and aesthetics of the seventies is a very clear influence on Turner's music. Also, this media-type memory encourages intertextuality. In fact, this album, and especially this song, contain many intertextual references to cultural manifestations of the seventies and eighties, increasing with the tone of nostalgia also promoted by the postmodern cultural industry.

Nonetheless, this imagined nostalgia is also ironic because Turner is not expecting the audience to take this seriously. He wants to recall an un-lived and idealised past with an ironic twist. As argued, according to Hutcheon (1998), the ironized nostalgia is also characteristic of postmodernism. This ironized and imagined nostalgia also denotes the problem the postmodern subject has in discerning reality (of the past and the present) linked to a personal identity crisis. In the pre-choruses of this song, Turner portrays himself as a character who is a singer with a mixture of recognisable elements of the seventies aesthetic: long hair and big moustache, futuristic elements and fashion inspired by the science fiction films of the times. This way, he creates a caricature of himself, giving the feeling that he is incapable of conceiving himself as a real human being instead of a fictional character. This may be also a consequence of becoming famous and not knowing how to deal with fame: in the second pre-chorus, Turner paints himself as a lounge singer from the seventies that comes down to Earth from an imaginary residency on the moon to perform his shows –an idea that will be developed further on in the rest of the songs and that is represented in the very title of the album).

The lines “Two shows a day, for nights a week /Easy money” (40-41) acknowledge this inner logic of consumer society, particularly, the capitalist logic of the art market, outside which Turner cannot operate. Thus, it coincides with Hutcheon’s view that postmodernism inverts that paradox because “it does not pretend to operate outside that system, for it knows it cannot; it therefore overtly acknowledges its complicity, only covertly to work to subvert the system’s values from within” (1988, 4). Turner seems to invert this paradox by using irony: since his attitude towards his present status as a “rockstar” is a negative one due to this personal crisis. These lines seem ironic in the sense that, although rock stars earn a lot of money, the job is not necessarily easy or fulfilling in spite of what many people would think. Especially in the case of artists like Turner who put a lot of effort into creating complex, original and interesting albums such as this one, and who have to be constantly away from home travelling from one place to another to play several shows in a week. By his use of irony, Turner seems to be trying to subvert the system from within.

Finally, another instance of reflexive nostalgia is found in the lines of the chorus “Baby that isn’t how they look tonight,/It took the light forever to get to your eyes” (20-21). In interviews, Turner confessed these lines are based on something his father said to him about the stars when he was a child (OOR magazine, 2018). This way, inspired by a nostalgic memory, Turner creates an analogy between the long time it takes the light of the stars to reach his eyes (though this seems an instantaneous process), and the seemingly sudden passing of time in which he became a “star” (that is actually more than a decade). This part of the chorus connects with the last stanza in which he rhetorically asks himself: “And as we gaze skyward, ain’t it dark early?” (48), reinforcing the idea that time has gone by so quickly with the metaphor of it getting dark. At the same time, this darkness suggests that becoming successful and famous (the star treatment) has also its downsides. He is disenchanted with the

present, as if he were worried that he is in the “dawn” of his life as a person and or as an artist.

2.1.2 Track 11. “The Ultracheese”

“The Ultracheese” is the closing track of the album. It starts with a powerfully nostalgic stanza that at first sounds very honest. Looking at old pictures of his friends hanging on the walls of his house, Turner wonders about these past friends, saying that maybe he was wrong to think that those relationships were true friendships. In a way, in this song it feels as if Turner is talking also about his mistakes along the way. It makes sense that, when revisiting the past, the individual may regret some past events or decisions. Therefore, in most of the songs of this album there is also the subtopic of regrets. In this song, the topic of regrets is quite important because it frames the song, as the picture's motifs which are found at the beginning and end.

In the following lines (4-9), Turner recalls memories from his youth with his friends. He misses those daily and spontaneous social activities of the past he does not enjoy anymore in the present for different reasons. The subject may miss things like knocking at somebody's door unexpectedly, since nowadays it is far more common trying to contact that person firstly through the phone or any other medium. Since our society today is very hectic (or in the words of Bauman, ‘accelerated’) individuals have the necessity of doing a lot of planning and scheduling before meeting someone, and this makes people more and more dependent on technology. It is a society with less time for spontaneity, something that Turner seems to be missing, thus he seeks refuge in nostalgic and idealised versions of a seemingly distant past to remember that old way of socialising. He wonders: “Didn't that used to be part of the fun once upon a time?” (6). He goes on and depicts a scene of him and his friends, very likely

referring to his bandmates whom Turner has been friends with since they all were children, in a bar on a special occasion, like to see “a rocket launch” on TV. This way, Turner decorates his memories with vocabulary related to outer space to be aesthetically and thematically coherent with the rest of the album. As evident in this first stanza, nostalgia (as a double entity), on the one hand, evokes a positive and sweet feeling that comes along with remembering and recreating an idealised version of the past (in this case, the biographical) that brings comfort to the postmodern subject, and, on the other hand, it evokes a negative feeling of loss that can be painful, like being homesick.

In the next lines (10-13), Turner changes the topic and writes a metapoetic stanza, because he is writing a song about writing a song. He also used this technique writing the first verses of the album in “Star Treatment”, as almost a way of breaking the spell of writer’s block, and in interviews he shared that he got this idea from Fellini’s film *8½* (1963) (RadioX, 2018). It could be argued that this is also a film about making a film, and it also explores the past and the dreams of the protagonist, who is based on Fellini himself, thus the influence is quite clear. In the second stanza of “The Ultracheese”, this is depicted as an ironic intimate moment with his Steinway piano, which has been present throughout the whole process of writing. There are many signs of irony in this song: the title hints an ironic undertone to it, in the sense that this song does not sound as over-sentimental as to name it “the ultracheese”. It is an ironic and hyperbolic title. Hutcheon pointed out that irony can be judged in a double way as positive or negative (1992, 221). In line with this duplicity, the irony of the title can be interpreted (in a positive way) as *playful* because it contains wit and humour, and at the same time (in a more negative way) it can be seen as “a sign of the *trivializing* of the essential seriousness of art” (1992, 222-223). It is true that this title does not sound very serious, however, it does not intend to. With this title, Turner seems to be warning the audience that, if one does not get the irony, the song may in fact seem very

“cheesy”, too emotional or romantic, and even embarrassing. Therefore, this irony also has the function of being *self-deprecating* and *self-protective* at the same time (Hutcheon 1992, 225) in the sense that he is attempting to make himself invulnerable to criticisms by acknowledging that he is actually trying not to sound too serious.

The next lines (14-20) are a reflection not on the past, but on the present, and it seems to deal again with Turner’s postmodern identity crisis. As in a monologue, he suggests to himself to go for a walk, maybe to ponder or to break with habits of isolation. However, it seems he feels out of place in America, and so concludes that perhaps it would be more appropriate to “dress like a fictional character” (15) to fit in a place like Los Angeles, where Turner was living for several years, including the time in which he was composing this album. This pessimistic attitude towards pre-Trump postmodern America is found in many other parts of the album. In the following four lines, he expresses his tiredness towards the topic of politics being constantly brought up probably in conversations and very intensely in the media. Nevertheless, if one pays attention to Turner’s lyrics and his attitude throughout the album, it does not make sense to interpret this as indifference towards politics: on the contrary, he is in fact highlighting the fact that there seems to be a political crisis related to postmodernity in the whole album. In postmodern society, the polarisation caused by the mass media, and the pluralization and de-centralisation of perspectives result in constant and heated debates, controversies and fracture. In this scenario, politics have become basically a game in which you recklessly have to defeat your opponent as a true enemy. Therefore, with these lines Turner seems to be trying to warn the audience that postmodern society is becoming less kind and increasingly contentious, to the point that this can have serious negative effects on us.

Finally, there is a more clearly ironic shift in the song’s climatic point which may leave the audience quite confused. Connecting the final lines with the first lines of the song,

he says “I’ve still got pictures of friends on the wall I might look as if I’m deep in thought” (21-22), but after an intriguing pause, he goes on to say: “but the truth is I’m probably not, if I ever was” (23-24). This is an excellent example of what Hutcheon calls postmodern ironized nostalgia. Turner, as a postmodern writer, is trying here to sound ambiguous. He ironizes this nostalgia because he is aware of its risks as he could be exposing himself and his emotions to the point of making him uncomfortable. These lines are paradoxical in the sense that- Turner seems to undermine the attitude of being “deep in thought” all throughout the record. His denial at the end sounds ironic (as if he had been pretending to be above this nostalgic feeling, joking or amnesic), especially if one pays attention to final lines of the album.

The last lines give an ambiguous and mysterious conclusion to the record that calls for different interpretations: “Oh the dawn won’t stop weighing a tonne/ I’ve done some things that I shouldn’t have done” (25-26). Be it as it may, what is clear is that these lines are about regrets, an important topic in this song as previously explained. These regrets are a heavy weight on his shoulders in the present, and, although he has made some mistakes, he eventually confesses: “But I haven’t stopped loving you once” (27). The addressee of this final line is not clear, and this is part of the mystery and ambivalence of this song which makes it very interesting when trying to come up with different possible interpretations. However, what is even clearer now is that he was being ironic before, in the sense that he actually was deep in thought, self-analysing his past and finding some bittersweet truths about himself.

2.2 Postmodern Science Fiction, Schizophrenic Language and Satire in Music Form

Science Fiction is another important concept explored in this album. As argued before, Jameson (1983, 112) considered that postmodernists were fascinated and influenced by popular literature, and consequently by the genre of science fiction. In his thesis, *Late Capitalism and its Fictitious Future(s): The Postmodern, Science Fiction, and the Contemporary Dystopia*, Dennis Geef (2015) also argues that “SF is thus symptomatic of a certain postmodern sensibility which holds that we already live science-fictional lives due to the immersion of technology in quotidian life in the West and due to the distinct dystopian leanings of our contemporary reality” (175). Thus, science fiction, like nostalgia and irony, also contains a double aspect, since the fictitious and dystopian worlds portrayed in these films and books are often a representation of our postmodern society dominated by technology and capitalism. This is why Geef (2015) argues that “SF nowadays is more than a literary genre among others. It is *the* postmodern literary genre per se” (176). It is true that SF is present today in many postmodernist cultural manifestations, most commonly in films and literature. As a genre, Geef (2015, 176) explains that SF’s close affinity to the marketplace has to do with the fact it has its roots in the pulp fiction market of the first half of the twentieth century, so it has been a marketable commodity since its beginnings. Moreover, Geef sees that “SF has long since transcended the confines of literature” (2015, 176), probably due to its relevance today. This is why it is interesting to see how Turner has been able to reinterpret and adapt this genre to a musical format.

This album, and particularly the songs that will be discussed in this section (tracks 4,6 and 8), explore the idea of a hotel complex with a casino on the moon, a symbolic and imaginary place inspired by the imagery and themes encountered in SF’s films. Apart from also conveying an ironic and satirical critique against some problematic aspects of our current

society, this idea of an imaginary hotel complex on the moon also serves Turner (and the audience) as another way to evade himself from the bleak postmodern reality of the present. This is one of the reasons that Turner felt attracted to the idea of naming the album after the song *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino*. As he stated in an interview: “I think of some of my favourite records as places that you can go and stay for a while, and sort of spurred me on to give this record the name of a place” (iHeartRadio, 2018). He wanted the album to have a title that alludes to a space where you can metaphorically travel to while listening to it.

2.2.1 Track 4: “Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino”

“Tranquility Base” was the name given to the site of the moon where humans first landed in 1969. Turner imagines this as a futuristic human colony on the moon. There, Turner envisions a hotel and a casino, as well as other spaces dedicated to leisure, entertainment and consumption. The aim of this, like in science fiction, is to create a fictional world that bears a resemblance with our postmodern society in order to problematise different aspects of postmodernity. Discussing how he began the process of creating the song that later on gave title to the album, Turner said that: “Tranquillity Base Hotel & Casino really all started with Mark, I think. I saw this person picking the phone up, and I had to figure out where he was. And, it turns out he was in Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino” (iHeartRadio, 2018). He imagined this character as the receptionist of this imaginary place picking up the phone, and then started developing his idea. This character utters the chorus of the song: “Good afternoon,/Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino,/Mark speaking,/please tell me how may I direct your call?”. It is fair to say that this is a quite unusual chorus for a song, because it is basically a formal or standard way in English to speak to a customer through the phone. In fact, in this album, Turner uses a lot of pattern-like language, like the type of language of

advertisements, combining this with sharp irony. This is very remarkable in the case of “Four out of Five”, as discussed below, since these two songs clearly have a strong connection. Turner confirmed this when he said that: “Four Out of Five is the other end of the tunnel to Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino, so to speak. If there are two songs that are joined together on this, it’s those two” (iHeartRadio, 2018).

It could also be argued that this song also has schizophrenic features: on the one hand, a coherent chain of sentences is hard to find, so the relationship between stanzas seems discontinuous or fractured. Therefore, the song resembles a collage of things that do not apparently have a specific meaning. Instead, there seems to be a more general or global meaning behind the text. For instance, the chorus constantly interrupts the continuation of stanzas, emphasising this fragmented aspect of the song. One can draw the analogy here of how often today our lives are constantly interrupted by the phone’s beeping. The hyperdependence postmodern individuals have on their phones and on technology in general, along with the negative consequences of this new reality, are precisely some of the many topics covered by the album as a whole.

On the other hand, there is also the issue of how the postmodern/schizophrenic subject discerns reality. In this song, Turner struggles to understand the outside reality – postmodern society. It is this crisis which leads him to imagine what Baudrillard would call a hyperreal place that this hotel complex on the moon seems to be. According to Nasrullah Mambrol (2016):

Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality is closely linked to his idea of Simulacrum, which he defines as something which replaces reality with its representations. Baudrillard observes that the contemporary world is a simulacrum, where reality has been replaced by false images, to such an extent that one cannot distinguish between the real and the unreal.

The concept of hyperreality therefore strongly resonates with this science-fictional space made up by Turner. With it, he is probably trying to express that reality felt unreal to him, so that the actual postmodern society may not be that different from this imagined lunar colony where we can evade ourselves from the bleak and strange reality.

Thus, this song contains this typical awareness and a tendency towards scepticism that is truly postmodern, in the sense that this imaginary place is actually a metaphor for a mental space inside Turner's mind in which he can enter to ponder and express his doubts. This is reflected in very clever lines like "I've been on a bender back to that prophetic esplanade/Where I ponder all the questions but just manage to miss the mark" (3-4): by creating a metaphor, he equates this mental space to a "prophetic esplanade", a space where he is able to ask himself a lot of questions. By saying he has been there on a bender, he is implying that he has been intoxicated and trapped in this mental space for a long period of time, thus evoking a strong sense of existentialist anxiety. Moreover, this metaphor is continued at the beginning of the next stanza after the chorus: "This magical thinking feels as if it really might catch on" (9). Here, he also describes this state of mind as a magical way of thinking because it seems to be creatively productive in the sense that he is arriving at new, catchy ideas, but also allows him to gain a certain perspective in order to, perhaps, ask the right questions. In fact, if one looks at the whole track, there are things that seem to point out that the global meaning behind the track is perhaps the search for answers, for something meaningful and authentic that may bring stability and hope back to the postmodern individual in crisis. Here, Turner seems to be implying that it is difficult to find something "prophetic" or "magical" in these dark times. Thus, in this song Turner is also talking about the loss of essence, of sacred things that used to provide answers and truths, like love and religion, but which have been corrupted by the inner logic of the capitalist system. This is something that is reflected in the lyrics of this song, but also in many other parts of the album.

For instance, in the first line of the song there is a reference to Jesus. Here, Jesus is pictured in a quotidian scenario at the spa of this imaginary hotel on the moon filling an information form as if he were a regular customer. Jesus was a revolutionary figure, and his stay at the hotel may be a sign that even Him has lost faith in what he believed. As Lyotard argued in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), Christianity was one of those grand narratives towards which postmodern thinking is very sceptical because, as argued in the theoretical section, postmodernism is characterised by this doubt about, if not open rejection of, unarguable and universal truths and narratives that claim to bring emancipation to the individual. Thus, with this line, Turner is portraying the loss of sacredness in postmodern times. It is also an ironic way of saying that, in postmodernism, religion seems completely anachronistic because, from a postmodern perspective, religion cannot provide universal truths or answers either. Moreover, religion has also lost its essence because it also has been corrupted by the inner logic of the capitalist system and mass media society. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), Neil Postman analyses the decline of religion in the postmodern era. Postman claimed that around 1984 in America there were “thirty-five television stations owned and operated by religious organizations” (135), thus claiming that religion, as culture in general, has been transfigured into something else, into mere entertainment due to the bias inherent to the television medium. He concludes that:

On television, religion, like everything else, is presented [...] as an entertainment. Everything that makes religion an historic, profound and sacred human activity is stripped away; there is no dogma, no tradition, no theology, and above all, no sense of spiritual transcendence. (Postman 1985, 135)

So, presented through the different formats of mass media, religion and its most iconic figures have lost their essence and *raison d'être*. As the purpose of these religious

programmes follow the same logic of attracting an audience using modern methods of marketing (Postman 1985, 140), faith becomes mere entertainment. Also, if, as Postman has argued, “[t]he aesthetic dimension to religion is the source of its attraction to many people” (1985, 141), then, in an era of images and surfaces, religion is reduced to its mere and commodified aesthetic dimension. This idea seems to be conveyed in the first lines of “Science Fiction”: “Religious Iconography giving you the creeps” (1). The essence and the history of religion is lost in postmodernity, and that is why the subject can only observe in this iconography simply a spine-chilling image. There is also a line in “American Sports” that is very satirical towards this conjunction of technology and religion: “Emergency battery pack, just in time for my weekly chat/With God on video call” (10-11).

Regarding the topic of love in postmodern times, there are many instances throughout the album in which Turner seems to be implying that love is also being corrupted by the inner logic of the capitalist system and technological advancements. The logic of the marketplace applies to the way many people experience love and sexual relationships nowadays. For instance, through dating apps, people become both consumers and products constituted by the very format of that medium. In this *hookup culture*, love, like religion, loses its authenticity and its essence, and becomes casual entertainment as well. Through his use of irony, Turner seems to be putting into question and criticising this postmodern perspective on love. This can be observed in lines like “Love came in a bottle with a twist off cap,/Let’s all have a swig and do a hot lap” (16-17 in “Star Treatment”), or, in “Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino”, “Technological advances really bloody get me in the mood / Pull me in close on a crisp eve, baby / Kiss me underneath the moon’s side boob” (12-14), in which he seems to be trying to ridicule or mock this attitude towards sex and love through his use of irony. This will also be discussed later in the analysis of “Four out of Five”.

Finally, the last stanza (bridge) emphasises this idea of being in search of answers by asking himself certain questions that seem to deal again with his regrets: “And do you celebrate your dark side / Then wish you’d never left the house?/ Have you ever spent a generation trying to figure that one out?” (19-21). Again, Turner does not get any answer to what he has been trying to understand for a whole generation. These lines sound really honest and powerful, they highlight his personal crisis. They also in a way break the fourth wall -by using the second person to the point that it feels as if Turner were trying to make the listeners ask themselves these questions. Perhaps, the answer to these questions is another question, the one Mark asks through the phone in the chorus. It feels as if this character, as Turner’s alter ego, were implying that the solution is actually to come to the Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino.

2.2.2 Track 6. “Four out of Five”

This is one of the most satiric songs in the album. It provides the listener with a deeper insight of what may be going on in this fictitious colony on the moon that resembles our postmodern society. One of the most remarkable characteristics of this song is that the language in which is written imitates and ironizes the type of language used in advertisements and the mass media. In sum, it satirises by parodying. This becomes evident already in the first lines of the song “Advertise in imaginative ways, start your free trial today”. As argued in the theoretical section, since the technologies of mass communication are responsible for this cultural schizophrenia, the use of this type of language evidences the schizophrenic nature of these lyrics. Moreover, like in other songs, some lines and stanzas do not seem to form a coherent sequence, and it is also obvious here that the artist is having trouble distinguishing reality from a science-fictional world. This can be observed in the line “Lunar

surface on a Saturday night, dressed up in silver and white” (5): the lunar surface is where, hypothetically, this hotel complex is situated. However, Turner has claimed that “Lunar Surface” is the name he gave to his home studio in LA (iHeart, 2018). This line relates what he was actually doing while creating the lyrics, so that the lyrics are somewhat metapoetic. He features himself as someone on the science-fictional space of the moon and also as his actual self at his own house, enhancing his schizophrenic state through this spatial duplicity, through this dis-location.

Furthermore, this parody of the type of schizophrenic language found in advertisements is carried out all throughout the song to the point it sounds as if it was made with the purpose of publicising this hotel complex on the moon full of opportunities for leisure and entertainment. This is quite representative of the chorus in particular. The structure of the language is written according to this market logic. According to Postman (1985), “the television commercial empties itself of authentic product information so that it can do its psychological work” (157). In other words, nowadays adverts, instead of focusing on the details of a product, aim to be entertaining, and they emphasise more the potential of the product to make the consumer feel good (hence, its powerful psychological effect), to the point that experiences and sensations are also sold as products in late capitalism. Since advertisements today try (subtly or crudely) to appeal to customer’s emotions and feelings, publicising this lunar resort by implying it is a good place to meet someone or find romance quickly is a common and effective market strategy: “Look, you could meet someone you like / During the meteor strike, it is that easy [...] The only time that we stop laughing is to breathe or steal a kiss” (3-4, 28). Thus, as in the previous song, Turner criticises the corruption and commodification of love and sex by the inner logic of the capitalist system.

Therefore, in order to appeal to the consumer’s passions instead of their rationality, Turner chose to use very persuasive and repetitive language like advertisements do, as in the

inviting first lines of the chorus: “Take it easy for a little while / Come and stay with us, it’s such an easy flight”, which sound as if they were addressing an audience of potential customers. In fact, this is repeated many times at the end of the song, a very catchy line similar to a publicity slogan which aims to tap and sink into the minds of the listeners. However, this invitation to this imaginary hotel complex could also be interpreted as an invitation to buy and listen to this album. This is also another evidence that this work is postmodern in the sense that it is, as Hutcheon put it, “complicitously critical and deconstructing” (1998, 18): paradoxically, at the same time it criticises the logic of consumer society, it also acknowledges its complicity with the system; as the album is going to be sold in the market as a commodity for profit.

Through the use of irony, Turner seems to be warning the audience about the negative consequences that the schizophrenic language used today in the mass media can have on our lives. It distorts the way we perceive reality and upsets the balance of Western culture. In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman insists on the dangers that come with these new media in regards with language and epistemologies:

We know enough about language to understand that variations in the structures of languages will result in variations in what may be called ‘world view’ [...] Each medium, like language itself, makes possible a unique mode of discourse by providing a new orientation for thought, for expression, for sensibility. (1985, 11)

By writing this song in this form, Turner is probably expecting the postmodern audience, who live surrounded by advertisements, to recognise this language as not his own, and to realise that what he is trying to do here is basically to attack negative aspects of postmodern society and culture. It aims at awakening an awareness of how this type of language is a construct

created by the mass media and the consumer society that can change the individual's own use of language, his/her view of the world and of him/herself. This also matches with Hutcheon's view of the fact that postmodern art aims to problematize aspects of our society and our culture instead of offering answers or alternatives.

Furthermore, listening to or reading these lyrics, ideas like globalisation and colonialism come to mind. These are concepts not unrelated to postmodernism and science fiction. As Geef argues, "SF, thus, at the beginning, was immersed in a colonial discourse and propagated a galactic imperialism akin to the one going on on Earth" (2015, 177). In this song, Turner says that this fictional moon colony is undergoing gentrification, a phenomenon that is a real problem in today's globalised and capitalist society. Turner also mentions that this is happening "since the exodus" (10), as if he were imagining a near future in which a large amount of the population had decided to move to the moon. He also depicts a taco shop on the roof of the hotel complex which is called "The Information-Action Ratio" based on the term coined by Postman in his famous book, being this another good example of intertextuality in this album. Thus, through humour, metaphors and irony, Turner tries to problematize some aspects of globalisation and of Western civilization.

By so doing, Turner, from a very postmodern perspective, seems to be putting into question what counts as progress today. As explained in the theoretical section, postmodernity is characterised by the crisis of the idea of history and, consequently, of progress, which makes it very difficult for postmodern individuals to envision a non-catastrophic future. Today, there is a tendency towards seeing technological advancements as a sign of progress, and it seems that some people who hold very powerful positions in our society plan to conquer outer space to exploit its resources. However, Turner seems to oppose this type of ideology. In accordance with this, Postman (1985) had also claimed that "Public consciousness has not yet assimilated the point that technology is

ideology” (182), and warns that for this new ideology to succeed, all that is required is “a population that devoutly believes in the inevitability of progress” (183). Therefore, both Turner and Postman share the view that rising awareness of the problematic aspects of this ideology is the best tool to fight against it. And one of the best ways for doing so is through parodic satire.

Hutcheon (1992) argued that, historically, the irony inherent to the satirical genre has been associated with its corrective function, in the sense that “it frequently turns to irony as one way of ridiculing and implicitly correcting the vices and follies of humankind” (226). However, since postmodernism holds a sceptical attitude towards authority and truth, she also argues that “maybe the moral categories in which we usually have thought of irony have been recoded, in our postmodern times, into political ones” (227). Therefore, since the satire in this album revolves around criticising through irony and parody certain aspects of consumer ideology (its political, social and psychological effects), this postmodernist satire is more an attack on or an opposition to a political ideology rather than an attack on morals.

2.2.3 Track 8. “Science Fiction”

This is a key song in the album as, in it, Turner finally and explicitly acknowledges his original purpose and intention. Instead of carrying on writing ironic and ambiguous lines, it feels as if he had given up and tries now to explain why this album has this strong connection with science fiction, and what is the purpose behind it. In addition, like in many science fiction films and literature, in this album there is also a romantic subplot. As a songwriter, Turner has written extensively on the topic of love. As it has been shown, there are parts in this album where Turner criticises through satire the fact that even love is turned into a commodity in late capitalism, however, there are also parts where he reflects on the ability

true love has to bring hope and comfort to individuals during hard times. There are certain moments on the album where he uses the pronoun “you” not to address himself (in the form of a monologue) or the listeners, but another person/character that is or could well be a lover object. This is quite obvious in the case of the song “Golden Trunks”, which is, alongside “Batphone”, probably the most romantic song in the album. Often here, what is highlighted is the ability of true romance to make two individuals disconnect and evade themselves from the bleak outside reality and feel fulfilled inside their love bubble. For instance, the lyrics of “Golden Trunks” seem to be inspired by a conversation between him and his lover about politics and desires, two topics that at first may look to be far apart. However, this song also seems to be saying that sharing with a partner political affinities, a sense of humour, and an awareness of how postmodern society works, actually has the power to help postmodern individuals (who often feel isolated and disenchanting with today’s world) find some hope.

This is something that is reflected in lines of the first stanza of “Science Fiction”: here, Turner speaks to the lover, confessing that “I must admit you gave me something, momentarily, in which I could believe” (4-5). Here, Turner, in spite of showing a nihilistic and postmodern perspective towards the world that evidences he is aware that there is no absolute truth nor any prophetic narrative worth believing in postmodern times, claims that he still believes in the ability of real love to bring individuals momentaneous solace and existential comfort. However, he complains that “the hand of harsh reality is ungloved” (6), meaning that, eventually, it is actually impossible to escape from reality. However, he continues to say that he will not let that happen and claims: “I wanna stay with you my love, the way some science fiction does” (9-10). Here, he is also saying that he wants to remain with his lover like the moral behind SF remains in people’s mind for a long time. Therefore, he acknowledges the power of SF to remain in the minds of the audience, since it requires some time to discover the covert message behind it.

In terms of structure, this song is peculiar in the sense that it does not really have a chorus. What confers some unity on the song is the repetition of the line “the way some science fiction does” at the end of each stanza. In this song (which is closer to the end of the album), it seems as if Turner were making his last attempt to find metaphors inspired in science-fictional imagery like “Reflections in the silver screen of strange societies” (11). For him, it seems clear that this society dominated by consumption and technology is very similar to those strange societies frequently found in science fiction films. Unlike the more utopian version of this lunar colony found in “Four Out of Five”, here the depiction is scarier and dystopian- The latter can be found in lines like “Mass panic on a not-to-distant future colony, quantitative easing” (14-15).

The darker tone the lyrics acquire is also accompanied by the darker and ominous sound of the music. Suddenly, in the song, as if Turner could no longer carry on trying to find more clever metaphors to compare postmodern society with a society taken out of science fiction, he reveals what he wanted to achieve writing the lyrics for this album:

I want to make a simple point about peace and love

But in a sexy way where it's not obvious

Highlight dangers and send out hidden messages

The way some science fiction does

The way some science fiction does **20**

This is an unexpected shift in terms of the tone and attitude of the lyrical voice. Also, the vocabulary of those first two lines, compared with the previous ones, becomes more accessible and simpler to understand on purpose, but it still has a humorous underside. However, it is quite straight-forward and self-explanatory. It is precisely this combination of

irony and honesty that makes Turner's lyrics ambiguous. Furthermore, he explicitly says he wanted to write these songs by "highlighting dangers" of our current postmodern society, and "send out hidden messages" (18) to make listeners problematise different aspects of themselves as individuals and as members of society.

In the following lines: "I've got the world on a wire in my little mirror mirror on the wall in the pocket of my raincoat" (21-23) he seems to be precisely highlighting the power and the danger of a technological device like a smartphone that can be so easily carried and reached inside a pocket, and which people take with them everywhere as an extension of themselves and a device that filter reality. In fact, by calling the phone "my little mirror mirror", he seems to be implying that one of the dangers that may come with this technology is that it pushes you to be also more aware of your self-image (in the negative sense that it may lead to narcissistic attitudes), and also to be more worried about the image people project of themselves on social media. Interestingly, this is probably one of the main topics of the song that comes after this one, "She looks like Fun". Moreover, those lines (21-23) also contain an echo of a SF film called *Word on a Wire* (2010) directed by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, being this another example of intertextuality. In fact, Turner said in an interview (Billboard interview, 2018) that this film also pushed him to write about science fiction. Similarly, in line 3, "the rise of the machines" seems to be another example of intertextuality that echoes the title of another famous SF film, *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003) directed by Jonathan Mostow.

Finally, in the last stanza, Turner takes his confessions to the next level making a very interesting claim:

So I tried to write a song to make you blush

But I've a feeling that the whole thing 25

May well just end up too clever, for its own good

The way some science fiction does

With these last lines, Turner recognizes that, although his purpose was to write a song to generate in the listener a response or lead him/her to some revelation, he suspects that this may not necessarily be the case due to the complexity and wit of his writing. Nevertheless, this is the way he thinks it ought to be because that is the modus operandi of science fiction (since this form is convenient so that the subliminal message stays with the listener), and also, because as a postmodernist artist, Turner likes (or cannot help but) to be ambiguous, paradoxical and ironic. In these final lines, even though he might sound a bit arrogant, Turner is making a very interesting point: he is aware that irony requires the active participation of an interpreter to decode the irony and make it work. However, he is also aware of the fact that the mass audience of postmodern society is so accustomed to plain entertainment, instantaneity and superficiality that Turner reasonably suspects that the messages in his songs will not become evident to the audience not just because of his ambiguity and complexity, but because the postmodern audience will very likely receive this as passive spectators and will only enjoy it on a superficial level. And, in fact, Turner was to some extent right on this suspicion, because when the album came out, the audience was in fact exceptionally divided in terms of opinion.

Conclusions

By analysing the features found in its lyrics, this thesis aimed to demonstrate that *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino* can be described as a postmodernist work of art. For this purpose, the first chapter of this dissertation explored some of the most representative aspects of Western postmodern society, as well as some of the formal features of postmodernism in particular those artistic style characteristics which articulate what is symptomatic of the new socio-economic and cultural paradigm on a global scale. As shown in the thesis, many of the characteristics of postmodernist art pointed out by, particularly, Fredric Jameson and Linda Hutcheon are to be found in the lyrics of this Arctic Monkeys album.

In postmodern times, along with the unstoppable development of capitalism in its later phase, the crisis of the ideas (the Grand Narratives) of history and progress, the instability of the present, the uncertainty about the (near) future, and, as a result, the inability of setting a stable notion of temporality, have caused on contemporary subjects and artists an existential and identitary crisis of which ‘schizophrenia’ (Jameson) and nostalgia (Hutcheon) are its main cultural symptoms or ‘pathologies’. Turner fits Jameson’s description of a postmodernist schizophrenic writer, something that has been discussed in the first chapter and exemplified in the analysis of Turner’s lyrics in chapter two. Turner portrays himself in his lyrics as an individual who has difficulty in discerning the differences between the real and the fake as well as in dealing with temporality and identity in a non-fragmented way.

Related to this, another important postmodernist feature found in these lyrics is the conjunction of nostalgia and irony, something that Hutcheon considers representative of postmodern art. These features are discussed in relation to the lyrics of “Star Treatment” and “The Ultracheese”. In fact, maybe this sceptic and nihilistic attitude, derived from the postmodern disbelief about absolute truths and coherent narratives, has led postmodern artists

to face and represent reality with a more ironic attitude. That is why postmodernist art rarely conveys a direct and blunt attack on postmodernity itself. Rather, taking into account Hutcheon's theses, postmodernist art works complicitously within the system and tries to find different and more ambivalent ways to question, problematise and, perhaps, subvert those unpalatable aspects of postmodernity. Along with his use of irony and parody, Turner also reinterprets science fiction, a popular genre in postmodernism, adapting it to musical/lyrical form. Thus, by re-creating a science-fictional world in the lyrics of *TBHC*, Turner criticises the fact that our society and culture is dominated by consumer ideology, technological advancements and the omnipresence of the mass media.

Through this satire of postmodern society, Turner seems to be warning the audience, (and also himself) of some of the negative consequences it can have on us if we remain unaware of its risks. Therefore, it could be argued that perhaps one of the main intentions behind these lyrics is to problematise some aspects of postmodern society and culture, in order to raise awareness of these rapid and continuous changes to which people get used so quickly that they fail to realise their impact. Due to this acceleration and historical amnesia that characterises postmodernity, people today may have naturalised certain aspects of our postmodern lives to the point that they do not recognise them as the result of a capitalist system that never stops. Therefore, with songs like "Science Fiction", Turner is most likely attempting to evidence how we are able to construct our own realities. This attempt promotes an attitude and a sensibility which in philosophical terms, according to Jameson, is associated with constructivism. With his lyrics, Turner is trying to make the audience, but also himself, aware of and reflect on the fact that our society is like this because it is the historical result of late capitalist logic.

This thesis has dealt with the postmodernist features found in the lyrics of *Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino*. However, further research on this album could be carried out in terms

of the postmodernist features found in its music, its production and, even, retro aesthetics. Also, since Turner is a very prolific and talented songwriter, further research could be carried out in order to study how his writing has evolved in time. Apart from the six albums he has produced with Arctic Monkeys (and a seventh album coming up soon), Turner has also composed a solo album which he created as a soundtrack for the movie *Submarine* (2010) directed by Richard Ayoade. He also has two more albums with The Last Shadow Puppets, a side-band he leads along with musician Miles Kane, and he also has co-written and co-produced the first studio album of the American singer and songwriter Alexandra Saviour. Finally, further research could also be carried out by doing a comparative study between this album and previous rock songs that also deal with space travelling and the isolating nature of fame, like, for instance David Bowie's "Space Oddity" (1969) and Elton John's "Rocket Man" (1972).

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APPENDIX

1. “Star Treatment”

I just wanted to be one of The Strokes

Now look at the mess you made me make

Hitchhiking with a monogrammed suitcase

Miles away from any half-useful imaginary highway

I'm a big name in deep space **5**

Ask your mates but golden boy's in bad shape

I found out the hard way

That here ain't no place for dolls like you and me

Everybody's on a barge

Floating down the endless stream of great TV **10**

1984, 2019

Maybe I was a little too wild in the 70s

Rocket-ship grease down the cracks of my knuckles

Karate bandana, warp speed chic

Hair down to there, impressive moustache **15**

Love came in a bottle with a twist off cap

Let's all have a swig and do a hot lap

So who you gonna call?

The Martini Police

Baby, that isn't how they look tonight, oh no **20**

It took the light forever to get to your eyes

I just wanted to be one of those ghosts

You thought that you could forget

And then I haunt you via the rear view mirror

On a long drive from the back seat **25**

But it's alright 'cause you love me

And you recognize that it ain't how it should be

Your eyes are heavy and the weather's getting ugly

So pull over, I know the place

Don't you know an apparition is a cheap date? **30**

What exactly is it you've been drinking these days?

Jukebox in the corner

Long hot summer

They've got a film up on the wall, and it's dark enough to dance

What do you mean you've never seen Blade Runner? **35**

Oh, maybe I was a little too wild in the 70s

Back down to earth with a lounge singer shimmer

Elevator down to my make believe residency

From the honeymoon suite

Two shows a day, four nights a week **40**

Easy money

So who you gonna call?

The Martini Police

So who you gonna call?

The Martini Police **45**

Oh, baby, that isn't how they look tonight

It took the light absolutely forever to get to your eyes

And as we gaze skyward, ain't it dark early?

It's the star treatment, yeah

It's the star treatment **50**

It's the star treatment

It's the star treatment

2. "One Point Perspective"

Dancing in my underpants

I'm gonna run for government

I'm gonna form a covers band anorl (Stop)

Back there by the baby grand

Did Mr. Winter Wonderland **5**

Say, "Come 'ere, kid, we really need to talk"?

Bear with me, man, I lost my train of thought

I fantasise, I call it quits

I swim with the economists
And I get to the bottom of it for good **10**
By the time reality hits
The chimes of freedom fell to bits
The shining city on the fritz
They come out of the cracks, thirsty for blood (Stop)

Oh, just as the apocalypse finally gets prioritised **15**
And you cry some of the hottest tears you ever cried
Multiplied by five
I suppose a singer must die

"Singsong 'Round the Money Tree"

This stunning documentary **20**
That no one else unfortunately saw
Such beautiful photography
It's worth it for the opening scene
I've been driving 'round listening to the score
Or maybe I just imagined it all **25**
I've played to quiet rooms like this before
Bear with me, man, I lost my train of thought

3. "American Sports"

So when you gaze at planet Earth from outer space

Does it wipe that stupid look off of your face?

I saw this aura over the battleground states

I lost the money, lost the keys

But I'm still handcuffed to the briefcase **5**

And I never thought, not in a million year

That I'd meet so many Lolas

Can I please have my money back?

My virtual reality mask is stuck on Parliament Brawl

Emergency battery pack, just in time for my weekly chat **10**

With God on video call

Breaking news, they take the truth and make it fluid

The trainer's explanation was accepted by the steward

A montage of the latest ancient ruins

Soundtracked by a chorus of "You don't know what you're doing" **15**

And I never thought, not in a million years

That I'd meet so many Lolas

And all of my most muscular regrets

Explode behind my eyes like American sports

And I never thought, not in a million year **20**

That I'd meet so many Lolas

4. "Tranquility Base Hotel & Casino"

Jesus in the day spa, filling out the information form

Mama got her hair done, just popping out to sing a protest song

I've been on a bender back to that prophetic esplanade

Where I ponder all the questions but just manage to miss the mark

Good afternoon **5**

Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino

Mark speaking

Please, tell me, how may I direct your call?

This magical thinking feels as if it really might catch on

Mama wants some answers **10**

Do you remember where it all went wrong?

Technological advances really bloody get me in the mood

Pull me in close on a crisp eve, baby

Kiss me underneath the moon's side boob

Good afternoon **15**

Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino

Mark speaking

Please, tell me, how may I direct your call?

And do you celebrate your dark side

Then wish you'd never left the house? **20**

Have you ever spent a generation trying to figure that one out?

Good afternoon

Tranquility Base Hotel and Casino

Mark speaking

Please, tell me, how may I direct your call? **25**

5. "Golden Trunks"

Last night when my psyche's

Subcommittee sang to me in its scary voice

You slowly dropped your eyelids

When true love takes a grip, it leaves you without a choice

And in response to what you whispered in my ear **5**

I must admit, sometimes I fantasise about you too

The leader of the free world

Reminds you of a wrestler wearing tight golden trunks

He's got him sen a theme tune

They play it for him as he makes his way to the ring **10**

And in response to what you whispered in my ear

I must admit, sometimes I fantasise about you too

In the daytime

Bendable figures with a fresh new pack of lies

Summat else to publicise **15**

I'm sure you've heard about enough

So in response to what you whispered in my ear

I'll be upfront, sometimes I fantasise about you too

6. "Four out of Five"

Advertise in imaginative ways, start your free trial today

Come on in, the water's lovely

Look, you could meet someone you like

During the meteor strike, it is that easy

Lunar surface on a Saturday night, dressed up in silver and white **5**

With coloured Old Grey Whistle Test lights

Take it easy for a little while

Come and stay with us, it's such an easy flight

Cute new places keep on popping up

Since the exodus, it's all getting gentrified **10**

I put a taqueria on the roof, it was well reviewed

Four stars out of five

And that's unheard of

Mr. Bridge and Tunnel on the Starlight Express

The head of special effects in my mind's eye **15**

Hokey Cokey with the opposite sex

The things you try to forget, doesn't time fly?

I'm in no position to give advice, I don't want to be nice

And you know that

Take it easy for a little while **20**

Come and stay with us, it's such an easy flight

Cute new places keep on popping up

Around Clavius, it's all getting gentrified

The Information-Action Ratio is the place to go

And you will not recognise the old headquarters **25**

All the nights that never happened and the days that don't exist

At the Information-Action Ratio

The only time that we stop laughing is to breathe or steal a kiss

I can get you on the list for all the clubs

I can lift you up another semitone **30**

Take it easy for a little while (Take it easy for a little while)

Come and stay with us, it's such an easy flight

Cute new places keep on popping up

(Cute new places keep on popping up)

Since the exodus, it's all getting gentrified **35**

The Information-Action Ratio (The Information-Action Ratio)

Is the place to go, four stars out of five

Take it easy for a little while (Take it easy for a little while)

Come and stay with us, now, it's such an easy flight

Cute new places keep on popping up **40**

(Cute new places keep on popping up)

Around Clavius, it's all getting gentrified

I put a taqueria on the moon (The Information-Action Ratio)

It got rave reviews, four stars out of five

Take it easy for a little while (Take it easy for a little while) **45**

Come and stay with us, four stars out of five

Take it easy for a little while (Take it easy for a little while)

Come and stay with us, four stars out of five

Take it easy for a little while (Take it easy for a little while)

Come and stay with us, four stars out of five **50**

Take it easy for a little while (Take it easy for a little while)

Come and stay with us, four stars out of five

(Take it easy for a little while)

Four stars out of five

7. "The World's First Ever Monster Truck Front Flip"

You push the button and we'll do the rest

The exotic sound of data storage

Nothing like it, first thing in the morning

You push the button and we'll do the rest

Bastard Latin, that's the best thing for it **5**

You push the button and we'll do the rest

You and Lizzy in the summertime

Wrapping my tiny mind around a lullaby

There are things that I just cannot explain to you

And those that I hope I don't ever have to **10**

Pattern language, in the mood for love

You push the button and we'll do the rest

You and Jeanie wearing Stetson hats

Trying to gain access to my lily pad

There are things that I just cannot explain to you **15**

And those that I hope I don't ever have to

The world's first ever monster truck front flip

I'm just a bad girl trying to be good

I've got a laser guiding my love that I cannot adjust

Forward-thinking model villages **20**

More brain shrinking moving images

You push the button and we'll do the rest

8. "Science Fiction"

Religious iconography giving you the creeps?

I feel rougher than a disco lizard tongue along your cheek

The rise of the machines

I must admit you gave me something momentarily

In which I could believe **5**

But the hand of harsh reality's un-gloved

And it's on its way back here to scoop you up

But not on my watch

I want to stay with you, my love

The way some science fiction does **10**

Reflections in the silver screen of strange societies

Swamp monster with a hard-on for connectivity

The ascension of the C.R.E.A.M

Mass panic on a not too distant future colony

Quantitative easing **15**

I want to make a simple point about peace and love

But in a sexy way where it's not obvious

Highlight dangers and send out hidden messages

The way some science fiction does

The way some science fiction does **20**

Got the world on a wire

In my little mirror, mirror on the wall

In the pocket of my raincoat

So I tried to write a song to make you blush

But I've a feeling that the whole thing **25**

May well just end up too clever for its own good

The way some science fiction does

9. "She looks like fun"

(She looks like fun)

(She looks like fun)

(She looks like fun)

(She looks like)

Smile like you've got a straw in something tropical **5**

I've got the party plugged right into my skull

Wayne Manor, what a memorable NYE

(She looks like fun) Good morning

(She looks like fun) Cheeseburger

(She looks like fun) Snowboarding **10**

(She looks like)

Finally, I can share with you through cloudy skies

Every whimsical thought that enters my mind

There's no limit to the length of the dickheads we can be

(She looks like fun) Bukowski **15**

(She looks like fun) Dogsitting

(She looks like fun) Screwballing

(She looks like)

Finally, there's a place where you can wag your tongue

Baby, but why can't we all just get along? **20**

Dance as if somebody's watching, 'cause they are

No one's on the streets

We moved it all online as of March

I'm so full of shite

I need to spend less time stood around in bars **25**

Waffling on to strangers all about martial arts

And how much I respect them

(She looks like fun) Key changes

(She looks like fun) Re-thinking

(She looks like fun) New order **30**

(She looks like fun)

10. “Batphone”

I want an interesting synonym

To describe this thing

That you say we're all grandfathered in

I'll use the search engine

(We've got much to discuss) **5**

Too much to discuss over a bucket of balls

I can recall the glow of your low beams

It's the big night in Tinsel City

Life became a spectator sport

I launch my fragrance called 'Integrity' **10**

I sell the fact that I can't be bought

Have I told you all about the time that I got sucked into a hole

Through a handheld device?

I will flashback now and again, but I'm usually alright

Thankfully, the process has been simplified **15**

Since the last time you tried

I've recognised the glow of your low beams numerous times

I'll be by the Batphone if you need to get a hold

Making a selection, opening credits roll

Panoramic windows looking out across your soul **20**

You go in through the door

Vengeance Trilogy wallpaper walls

They have re-decorated it all

They've changed all the lights and the bar's down the side

I've recognised the glow of your low beams numerous times **25**

Through fairly opaque blinds in the sitting room

Vehicles will pass by, but I know when it's you

I'll be in a nose dive in my flying shoes

Right behind your closed eyes like a memory from your youth

I'll be by the Batphone if you need to get a hold **30**

Making a selection, opening credits roll

Killer Pink Flamingos, computer controlled

Panoramic windows looking out across your soul

11. "The Ultracheese"

Still got pictures of friends on the wall
I suppose we aren't really friends anymore
Maybe I shouldn't ever have called that thing friendly at all
Get freaked out from a knock at the door
When I haven't been expecting one **5**
And didn't that used to be part of the fun, once upon a time?
We'll be there at the back of the bar
In a booth like we usually were
Every time there was a rocket launch or some big event

What a death I died writing that song **10**
Start to finish, with you looking on
It stays between us, Steinway, and his sons
'Cause it's the ultracheese

Perhaps it's time that you went for a walk
Dressed like a fictional character **15**
From a place they called America in the golden age
Trust the politics to come along
When you were just trying to orbit the sun
When you were just about to be kind to someone
Because you had the chance **20**

I still got pictures of friends on the wall
I might look as if I'm deep in thought

But the truth is I'm probably not

If I ever was

Oh, the dawn won't stop weighing a tonne **25**

I've done some things that I shouldn't have done

But I haven't stopped loving you once