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Death, Subjectivity, and Ideology in Adam Silvera's Young Adult Novel *They Both Die at the End*

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In this thesis I examine American author Adam Silvera's Young Adult (YA) novel *They Both Die at The End* (2017). I analyse the role of death in the narrative, for it is represented as profoundly defining and affecting the American society and its people. I analyse the representation of death and its presence in the society of the narrative through a Marxist methodology, especially Louis Althusser's critique of capitalism and theory on ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA). I also refer to other scholars utilising Althusser's theory in relevant contexts.

Another method for analysing death in this thesis is through YA literary theory, referring to death's relevancy in YA literature. For the YA component of this thesis the work of YA literary scholar Roberta Trites is particularly important, but I also refer to several other YA literary scholars. Relevant for the analysis is the concept of subjectivity, to which I largely refer in the context of YA literature, but mainly define according to the works of Judith Butler and Paul Smith. The analysis focuses on the subjectivities of the two main characters Mateo and Rufus.

The analysis demonstrates that in the novel the representations of death are utilised as an ideology in the society by the ruling power Death-Cast and the various ISAs I have been able to identify, which function according to capitalist conventions. Death-Cast and the ISAs interpellate the people into the death ethos of the society. Additionally, the analysis of death and YA subjectivities shows that the novel is analogous to representations of death in the larger YA framework, especially regarding how the protagonists respond to their mortality. Similarly analogous with established YA themes are the representations of subjectivities configured within institutions, and the favourable attitudes towards romantic relationships over sexual ones.

The analysis also shows that death is adjacent with queer subjectivities and queer relationships in the narrative. I believe further research regarding death's role in contemporary queer YA literature would be beneficial.

Key words: death, subjectivity, ideology, Ideological State Apparatus, Marxism, young adult literature, Adam Silvera, *They Both Die at the End*.

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1   Introduction: *They Both Die at the End* by Adam Silvera

The novel *They Both Die at the End* (hence *The End*) is a Young Adult (hence YA) novel originally published in 2017 by American author Adam Silvera. The novel is set in New York and depicts the 24-hour period of September 5, 2017, and follows two young protagonists, Mateo and Rufus (ages 18 and 17, respectively). In the novel's narrative reality, a company called Death-Cast has emerged few years prior to the events of the narrative and gained significant power and status within the society. The main mission of the company is to inform citizens of the novel's American society of their dying day, which is stylised as End Day in the novel. The company does this by having their operatives, called heralds, telephone the dying individual and inform them of their demise within the designated day. The dying are identified as "Deckers" on their End Day, and the phone call they receive is called "the alert" (see e.g. *The End*, 74). Both protagonists receive their alert at the start of the narrative, thus becoming Deckers, and the rest of the narrative follows how the boys get to know each other, their activities throughout New York, and how they eventually develop a romantic relationship, all in the course of the one final day in their lives, their End Day.

1.1   Mateo, Rufus, and Other Central Characters

The narrative is presented mainly from the perspective of the two protagonists, Mateo and Rufus, with chapters alternating between first-person narration by either boy, indicated by the name in the beginning of each chapter, which also discloses the time of day. The narration is highly personal and direct, and even includes direct addresses to the reader. The personal differences between the boys are marked even in the style of writing, mimicking the boys' own voices, where Mateo's chapters are more formal, and Rufus's flow in a more vernacular style with slangy expressions. There are few chapters focalising other characters, interspersed throughout the novel with titles marked similarly by the name of the particular character and the time of day. These chapters are never told from the first-person perspective, but by an omniscient third-person narrator. The first-person narration focused on the personal feelings and experiences of the two boys are thus fruitful material for an analysis of representations of personal subjectivities, and associated feelings and values.

Mateo is the first character to be introduced. Before he even answers the initial call from Death-Cast, the reader finds out that his father is in intensive care and his mother died giving birth to him (*The End*, 4). He figures there are only two people in his life, his father and his

best friend Lidia (*The End*, 8), whose boyfriend and the father of her child is also dead (*The End*, 143). Mateo describes how his anxiety and fear of death has limited him from getting to know people and experiencing new things in life (*The End*, 9). Thus, on his End Day he concludes that he needs to go out into the world and appreciate and experience it (*The End*, 13). However, he is too anxious to leave the apartment (ibid.). Instead, he downloads the *Last Friend* app (*The End*, 44), through which he gets to know Rufus (*The End*, 72–79), who comes to retrieve him from the apartment (*The End*, 90). Together with Rufus, Mateo is able to visit his comatose father in hospital (*The End*, 109–118) and Lidia at her place (*The End*, 146–153), and experience various activities, often related to the death ideology of the society. Ultimately the boys return to Mateo's apartment where he dies (*The End*, 347) soon after they have confessed their love for each other (*The End*, 343–344).

When the reader first meets Rufus, as he is receiving his alert, he is in the middle of violently assaulting Peck, the current boyfriend of Rufus's ex-girlfriend Aimee, cheered on by his friends Malcolm and Tagoe (*The End*, 14). Together with Aimee, the three friends form a group called the Plutos (*The End*, 178), named after the foster home where the boys live (*The End*, 28) and Aimee used to live (*The End*, 39). Rufus's family died only four months before the start of the narrative (*The End*, 28), after the car where the family were all travelling in crashed into the Hudson River (*The End*, 177), leaving him with a fear of bodies of water (*The End*, 181). He is anxious about how his violent behaviour might define him (*The End*, 32), and struggles with preventing himself from lashing out his frustrations physically (*The End*, 165). A definitive moment in his narrative is when Mateo takes him to confront the death of his family by the riverside of the Hudson (*The End*, 228–232). He survives longer than Mateo, forcing him to witness another and final death of a loved one in his life (*The End*, 348–351). The narrative ends at 10:36 pm, as Rufus is about to cross the street carelessly while watching a video of Mateo: "I cross the street without an arm to hold me back" (*The End*, 368). The next page, which would be page 369, is simply a blank page in full black.

1.2   Death-Cast and the Death Ethos

Background information on the Death-Cast company is given scarcely throughout the course of the novel, and the reader is not provided any details of the owners, investors, or top executives of the company, only the heralds receive any kind of representation in the narrative. Besides the heralds' appearances as representatives of the company, Death-Cast is present as a singular corporate entity and referred to as a unified agent. It is established that

the Death-Cast company emerged seven years prior to the events of the narrative (*The End*, 83). This changed the society so completely that the time before Death-Cast's introduction is referred to as "BDC days" (which, I presume, means Before Death-Cast, similar to BC = Before Christ, or BCE = Before Common Era) (*The End*, 172). This shows the impact of Death-Cast on the society as a whole. The novel portrays the profound influence of Death-Cast's operation on all levels of society; personal, institutional, cultural, economic and state. Since the emergence of the company, central societal institutions such as the church and hospitals, have modified their operation in accordance to Death-Cast; many other businesses, services and corporations have emerged to operate on the death-driven market; and media, especially social media, are pushing content and applications accommodating the death-driven culture. Due to all of these changes in society, the personal experiences and the subjectivity of the individuals have also altered. Since the emphatic presence of death in many forms in the novel and the analysis of these phenomena makes up the body of this thesis, I shall now explain my use of the term "death ethos" to refer to the representation of the permeative death in the narrative.

To give an example of the term "ethos" used in a relevant context, I refer to Anthony Elliot and Charles Lemert (2009, 65–66) as they discuss new individualism, the constant making and haste of reinventing selves, for which they have identified two sociological factors: globalization and rapid consumerism. They attribute consumerism to the market-driven constant urge of fast self-improvement of sex lives, careers, homes, bodies, and so on (Elliot & Lemert 2009, 66). According to Elliot and Lemert (2009, 67), the social force generating this ideology is the *corporate ethos* (my emphasis) within the culture, which suggests "that flexible and ceaseless reinvention is the only adequate response to globalization." In a similar manner, the death ethos ideology permeating the society in *The End* is influenced, and was instigated, by the Death-Cast company, and it is further maintained and determined by the many other corporate entities operating on the death ethos market, representing an economy largely dependent on the ethos and the subjected Deckers. This discussion is continued in my analysis, and the relevant businesses, media platforms, and societal institutions will be introduced in detail when they become relevant for the discussion. Nevertheless, I use the term *death ethos* to refer to the specific characteristic of the society regarding death, the attitudes and feelings of its people, and the ideology driving its operation throughout the culture and economy, as dominated by Death-Cast. Next, I shall situate my primary source material in the context of YA literature.

1.3   Adolescence and Young Adult Literature

Adolescence, as understood as a developmental period in a person's life between childhood and adulthood, is a modern construct. When discussing the emergence of adolescence as a concept, and adolescent culture, Roberta Trites paraphrases the book *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America* (1977) by American scholar and historian Joseph F. Kett. Kett explains how G. Stanley Hall's book Adolescence (1905) motivated adults to create social programme for teenagers (Kett in Trites 2000, 8). Kett further traces the roots of the concept of adolescence to industrialisation, as teenagers became ever less needed on farms and at home, and subsequently enrolled in high schools in growing numbers (ibid.). Similarly, Michael Cart ascribes the emergence of adolescence to societal changes akin to Kett. Cart (2016, 4–5) mentions how pre-20th century children entered the work force and were gradually viewed as adults, without such a stage as *adolescence* in between. This changed as an increasing amount of youth spent more time in school, and enrolled in high schools due to increased social and educational focus on them in early 20th century.

The institutionalisation of adolescence in the beginning of century, helped by the booming economy after WWII, subsequently led to books marketed at this demographic (Trites 2000, 8–9). Early works of adolescent literature were arguably already published in the 19th century, exemplified by books such as Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) (see e.g. Hilton & Nikolajeva 2012, 2–3). Cart (2016, 8) explains how similar successful early novels for adolescents gave further momentum to series fiction being published for children, boys and girls, books which affirmed traditional values regarding behaviour and interests considered appropriate to each gender: boys' books being rowdy and adventurous, and girls' books being centred around domestic life.

YA literature as we understand it today came into being in the post-World War II era. Trites (2000, 9) foregrounds three novels as formative for YA literature: Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth Summer* (1942), J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), and S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967). Typical to early YA literature, which all the aforementioned novels belong to, is that they are rooted in literary realism. Although incorporating fanciful elements, *The End* also complies with the realistic tradition in YA literature in its portrayal of the personal struggles of its adolescent protagonists, for example dealing with social issues such as coming-out (of the closet), and by incorporating many facets of the real-world in its narrative. The novel is set in a realistic depiction of contemporary New York, with several

real locations in the city mentioned, such as the Alice in Wonderland statue in Central Park (*The End*, 171), and The Evergreens Cemetery (*The End*, 214).

Realism suggests that the YA novels that adhere to this genre aim to reflect reality as it is for the teenagers, to have a quality of verisimilitude. A significant facet of contemporary society that informs and gives shape to youth culture is social media, the representation of which is highly significant in *The End*, and includes both real-world and fictional social media. The novel's relationship with social media is further multifaceted, as *The End* famously received renewed attention in the TikTok social media, which lead to it becoming a *New York Times* bestseller three years after its initial publication, as reported by *TIME* online (Mendez II, 2022). Although my initial interest in the book had nothing do with social media, as I was drawn to the book by its apparent emphatic preoccupation with death, I believe this social media interest surrounding the book makes it an ever more important object of study. Considering that the novel offers a representation of social media on both levels of personal experience and society, as will be demonstrated in this thesis, it is intriguing to consider the circular relationship between the intended youth audience finding out about the book on social media, reading the representations of social media from the book, and then further sharing their thoughts on the novel on social media, and thus compelling the author to write more books on the subject matter (ibid.). This circular relationship could make an adequate subject for another thesis or study.

Social media platforms can be argued to form institutions in society and examined as such (McKenna III 2023, 93). Besides representing adolescent experiences in realistic methods, what came to largely define YA literature is how it places its protagonists in conflict with the larger (social) institutions governing, informing or subjugating them. According to John Stephens (1992, 120–121), from the 1960s onwards started the appearance of books for children "which interrogate the normal subject positions created for children within socially dominant ideological frames" (Stephens 1992, 120). Trites (2000, 36) argues that the narratives allow growth for their protagonist(s) through their rebellious behaviour towards the dominant institutions. Often, regardless of the rebellious acts of the protagonist(s), the YA narrative affirms a "status quo" within these institutions, and the conforming of the protagonist to that state (ibid.). Trites (2000, 36–37) illustrates this in her study with several other early canonical YA novels, such as John Knowles' *A Separate Peace* (1958) and Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War* (1974). In her analysis of Robert Cormier's The Chocolate War (1974), she illustrates how in this novel, although the protagonist Jerry is ultimately

destroyed, his rebellious acts against the dominant menacing powers at his school imbalance the social order and shifts power dynamics within the institution, which allows it to be preserved (Trites 2000, 37–38).

Accordingly, in a later book Trites (2014, 1) summarises one of her main arguments from the 2000 book by saying that "adolescent literature […] is about teaching adolescents either to conform to societal pressures or die." I have chosen the central thematic focus of my examination, death, based on my interest in how YA novels treat, define and portray sources of formation, development and growth; when an individual during the course of adolescence transforms from a child to a teenager to an adult. More specifically, how the individual develops during adolescence in regard to issues like institutions, sexuality and death – a development which implies more than just physical growth. To discuss the phenomena which construct and represent persons in relation to larger institutions and their role within them, an analysis of their subjectivity is convenient.

1.4 The Aim of This Thesis

In my thesis, I argue that *The End* complies with the traditional conventions of the YA novel when depicting the institutionalised death and the associated subjectivities of the two protagonists. Faced with their death, the boys gain power and agency previously inaccessible to them. However, the boys' agency is severely dependent on the discourse within the established institutions in the death ethos. Through the novel's representation of the institutions and the ideology driving them, as well as the subjectivities of the characters, certain values are surfaced. I argue that the representation of the Death-Cast company, the ideology which drive them and the other institutions, function through a capitalistic system, which is evident in the "status quo" affirmed within the institutions of the narrative due to the boys' inability to escape death, their successful conforming to the death ethos, and their usage and participation in the many services operating within the death ethos market. The powerful act of subordination by Death-Cast, which performs the death of the characters in the novel, is paradoxically also the force which further enables agency to them to live, although still largely confined within the death ethos.

I argue that *The End* depicts a society predominantly defined by its death ethos, where the societal, cultural and personal functions and meaning of death have been powerfully ideologized, institutionalised, and especially related to the personal sphere, subjugated. This overall phenomenon I refer to as the *death ethos*. Furthermore, I argue that this death ethos

largely functions as a capitalist system. This further resonates with the representations of adolescent subjectivities, and surfaces the ideologies and values operating in the narrative. I shall analyse the structure of the death ethos in the novel, the power that especially the Death-Cast company has within it, and the different institutions that contribute and operate within the ethos, primarily through a Marxist methodology implementing philosopher Louis Althusser's (1918–1990) concepts of ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (hence ISA), with theoretical support from other scholars discussing and using similar methodology in social sciences, technology, and literary fields. Furthermore, I shall analyse the subjectivities represented in the novel, mainly focusing on the two protagonists, and I shall tie this analysis to the wider YA context. For subjectivity, my theoretical background is multidisciplinary, and I shall refer to several scholar's defining and discussing subjectivity in sociological, psychoanalytical, and literary terms, primarily scholars Paul Smith and Judith Butler, as well as YA literary scholars, especially Roberta Trites, but also incorporating works by Kathryn James, Robyn McCallum, Maria Nikolajeva, and others. Further support is offered by scholars researching (YA) literature in similar methodologies, and will be introduced, along with my other references, in the next chapter, where I explain and discuss my theoretical background in more detail.

2   Theoretical Background

The theoretical background and methodology in this thesis are multidisciplinary. It is largely based on Young Adult literary theory, which is not perhaps a widely recognised school of literary theory, but as Maria Nikolajeva (2010, 7) argues, one of children's literature's (which here refers to all literature written for non-adults) main functions is the interrogation of power, which it has in common with women's, gay and indigenous literature, all of which have their corresponding schools of literary theory. There are multiple academic books, doctoral theses, articles, academic reviews, and so on that are focused solely on studying and discussing literature written for adolescents, like the many significant sources for this thesis. In addition to YA literary theory, this thesis is largely based on the (Althusserian) theory on ideology and Ideological State Apparatus, and theory on subjectivity also in other schools of theory than literary. This chapter is divided into three sections, section 2.1. explains how death occurs and is represented in YA literature, section 2.2 introduces theories and concepts related to subjectivity in many schools of theory, section 2.3, then, explains Althusser's theory and refers both to Althusser's original work as well as other scholars discussing it.

2.1   Young Adult Literature and Death

Most likely the initial observation a reader makes when encountering the book *They Both Die at the End* is that it involves death, as it is implied by the title, the cover illustration depicting the intertwined shadow of two boys forming the silhouette of the Grim Reaper (the copy used for this thesis is the first paperback edition published by HarperCollins in 2018, cover art by Simon Prades; other editions' covers are thematically similar), and the blurb in the back cover, which begins by invoking the motif of the discourse surrounding the death ethos of the novel and the fictional company Last Friend Inc.: "We here at Last Friend Inc. are collectively sorry for this loss of you" (*The End*, n.p.; back cover). Although this might seem like an abnormal preoccupation with death in the features of the book which traditionally offer first impressions on it, thematically it should not come as much of a shock to the implied young adult reader, who has likely encountered many popular YA novels in which death holds a central thematic role, such as the dystopian gladiator-like fights to the death of adolescents in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008–2010), or in intimate portrayals of adolescent terminal illness, such as John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) or Jenny Downham's *Before I Die* (2007). Indeed, Kathryn James (2009, 3) notes that death as a subject matter has proliferated adolescent literature (including children's literature) in the last

thirty years. James's study was published over ten years ago, but this trend has continued, as all the examples given before were all published either approximately during late noughties or after it, as was the primary refence material of this thesis.

In fact, Trites (2000, 18) argues that it is precisely how death is addressed which separates adolescent literature from children's literature and other literature (for adults). According to Trites (2000, 118–119), children's literature primarily discusses death symbolically, as the child's separation from their parents. Adult literature, on the other hand, discusses death in such various methods that no deductions about precise recurring methods of representation or portrayal can be formulated (Trites 2000, 119). In adolescent literature, however, it is the maturation and transformation afforded to the protagonists by coming to face with and accepting mortality, which is one of the genre's principal defining characteristics (Trites 2000, 118–119). Understanding and accepting the mortality of their own selves leads to transformation and growth in the characters, and they learn about the power they hold in their lives (Trites 2000, 119). Furthermore, unlike in children's literature, death in YA novels is often narrated directly, and it does not only affect older people, but YA novels often portray deaths of (other) adolescents (Trites 2000, 120). Accordingly, James (2009, 96) has noticed that literature which represents adolescent subjectivities in conjunction to death and dying "frame mortality through themes of growth." Furthermore, what the character learns about death and dying has an impact in the formulation of their (gendered) selfhood (ibid.; brackets in the original). Thus, death is connected to subjectivity in its capacity to confer awareness of power, and to portray transformation and growth.

When Trites (2000, 119) explains the empowerment adolescent characters come to experience through the presence of death in their lives, she refers to it as Being-towards-death (Sein-zum-Tode), a concept originally devised by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976; Trites refers to Being-towards-death and Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1927), published in English in 1962). I believe Heidegger's concept is relevant to highlight the effect mortality has on the subject, but I shall refer to his original work only briefly, as I find it more concise and relevant to explain it as it is understood by Trites (and Jacob N. Graham [2009], who bases his explanation and discussion on the same edition of Heidegger's *Being and Time* as Trites does). Trites's understanding of the concept's relevancy for YA literature is primarily relevant for this thesis, and the original work by Heidegger is famously extensive and complex (see e.g. Graham 2009, 79–80), and this thesis does not offer enough space for a comprehensive first-hand explanation.

Heidegger ([1962] 2008, 293–294) writes about death and existence as follows (translation by Macquarrie & Robinson):

> Death is not something not yet present-at-hand, nor is it that which is ultimately still outstanding but which has been reduced to a minimum. *Death is something that stands before us–something impending.* […] Death is a possibility-of-Being which Dasein itself has to take over in every case. With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being.

Heidegger's *Dasein* (Being) signifies a certain totality of existence/being, a term very specific to Heidegger, and for a detailed explanation of the term I refer the reader to Heidegger's original work. However, what this quotation essentially means is that according to Heidegger, the potentiality of a person's being, their selfhood, becomes most clear in death, in the understanding of death's ever-present nature, instead of assigning it as something 'out there, not yet relevant' (my words). As Graham (2009, 81) summarises the essence of Heidegger's thought: "In coming face to face with the end of who I am, I am most able to see who I am and who I am able to be."

The term is thus intrinsically involved in the formation of the self and its potential. Indeed, Trites (2000, 117–119) uses the concept to illustrate how adolescents in literature come to understand death as finality, which informs the discussion on many self-formative experiences like maturation, life-decisions and values, and healing. She gives brief examples in two canonical YA books, the already mentioned Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* and Alcott's *Little Women*. She summarises one of the central epiphanies in Salinger's book: "If my brother Allie is dead, then I, Holden, will also be dead some day" (Trites 2000, 119), and explains how Holden only begins to heal after realising this mortality of himself and others (especially his younger sister), his powerlessness over it, and the need to accept this reality (Trites 2000, 117 & 119). Similarly, according to Trites (2000, 119) in *Little Women* the character Jo makes important decisions and definitions of her life against the backdrop of her sister Beth's death. Through the experience, Jo understands her own mortality and subsequently arranges her life according to that awareness (ibid.).

Trites (2000, 123–124) traces Being-towards-death in YA literature both thematically, as in the examples above, and in the narrative structure, how the novels explore agency, death and discourse, through the split between agency and passivity in language: "[T]he relationship between subject and object creates narrative instances of Being-towards-death so that the narrative itself becomes implicated in the exploration of what it means to die." One recurring

trope for this exploration of the themes and structures of (Being-towards-)death, and related subjectivity, is through photography (Trites 2000, 124). Photography will be further discussed in relation to *The End* and subjectivity in my analysis in section 3.3.3.

However, death is not the only determining theme and discourse involving YA literature. Trites (2000, 122) argues that death occurs in YA literature together with two other frequent discourses, "the establishment of an identity independent from one's parents and the exploration of sexuality." Furthermore, representations of power (and subsequently, growth) are shared by these discourses (Trites 2000, ix–x). Altogether these three discourses either themselves form institutions or are part of a discourse within institutions (one or several), and according to Trites (2000, x), the adolescent character must negotiate their capacity in relation to the power dynamics within these institutions "because of and despite such biological imperatives as sex and death."

In general, sex's function in a YA narrative is as a rite of passage into adulthood (Trites 2000, 84), or as an "adult temptation" (Hilton & Nikolajeva 2012, 7). In *The End* sexuality plays a vital role, and it does it in two ways. First, both of the two protagonists belong to sexual minorities, and their sexual identities, or anxieties surrounding said identities have a vital function in the narrative. Mary Hilton and Maria Nikolajeva (2012, 12) point out how "for most young people, the quest for fully adult identity becomes, in the first place, an attempt to discover and accept their sexuality." James (2009, 91) argues that adolescent literature tends to associate same-sex relationships with identity crisis, and how these tensions become especially pronounced in texts that connect them to death. In fact, James indicates several adolescent novels where regardless of the literature's intention to question normativity, the representations of queerness are connected to secrecy and grief (ibid.). In *The End*, despite the relationship between the boys' deepening as the narrative develops, and culminating in tender intimacy, it all takes place, from their meeting to the acknowledgment of their mutual attraction, in the context of their impending death. The narrative represents especially Mateo's sexual identity as clearly confused, and I shall analyse the associated subjectivities and values.

The second way sexuality plays a vital role in *The End* are the occasions, when the narrator(s) offers commentary which is inscribed with value judgments on the nature of sexual and romantic relationships. In fact, Trites (2000, 92–93) has recognized that throughout the decades of 1960s to early 1990s, many novels in the YA canon favour ideological depictions of sexual relationships between individuals in a romantic relationship, and other kind of

sexual activity is often treated problematically. Indeed, although written several decades after the novels Trites discusses, *The End* concurs with these ideological depictions, as I shall demonstrate in chapter 3.3.3.

2.2 Subjectivity and Agency

I find the concept of subjectivity a compelling one for literary analysis, and for the analysis of YA literature especially, due to YA literature's distinct preoccupation with the (trans)formative experiences of individual adolescents (/young adults). Theories of subjectivity function as an adept tool to identify the methods adolescent selfhoods and personal experiences are represented in literature, and to analyse the relationship between (inter)subjective selves and the wider (institutional) contexts portrayed within narratives. James (2009, 2) determines adolescent literature as a literature of *becoming*. As will soon be discussed in this section, Judith Butler (1997b, 10–16) calls the process of subject formation *becoming* as well (my emphasis); the process in which the subject comes to be through the superimposed activity of power operating externally to the subject and as the power assumed and afforded to the subject. According to James (2009, 2), adolescent literature is the literature of becoming because it "is predominantly focused on personal identity, the individual psyche, subjective development, and social- and self-awareness."

In order to define and discuss subjectivity, it is necessary to include in the discussion several concepts vital to its understanding: *subject*, *individual*, and *agency*. As Paul Smith (1988, xxviii) explains, the use of the term *subject* varies depending on the (theoretical) context where it is used, and that in some situations it might be understood as *individual* or *person*. The term *subject* is always dependent on the social context and discourse where it is formulated. Smith continues by stating how the term "enters a dialectic with [the phenomenal] world as either its product or its source, or both" (ibid.). Ruth Robbins (2005, 2) ruminates on the relationship between *subject* and *object*, and questions the existence of an *objective* reality (my emphasis), and indicates how it depends on a person judging it. It is clear that the term *subject* can be extremely elusive, but from these definitions it is already possible to deduce that the subject in this context refers to an individual's connection to the discernible reality, and their subjective experience of it. Robbins explains how persons are both subjective selves and objective selves (Robbins 2005, 8), and thus are both "*subject to* actions and forces that [they] cannot control," meaning that they are also "*objects* of the actions and desires […] of others." (Robbins 2005, 9). Seemingly, the human subject has the ability, or power, to make

objects of others (human, non-human, abstract etc.). Additionally, if a human subject is also both *subject to* and *object of* (other) forces, there must be a multiplicity of discourses surrounding the subject.

Indeed, Smith (1988, xxxiv) configures subjects as "partial"; for example, a subject can be a British subject, meaning that they are subject to certain norms and laws within the United Kingdom, but within that same context, or in addition to it, the same subject is subject to other discourses like regional discourses (such as Scotland or Wales), gendered division, positions within their own family, or even within marketing, where they are placed as consumer. As Smith explains, when a subject is being subject *to* something, that something is never static, instead it is always changing, and therefore so is the subject/object (ibid.). The individual occupies different kinds of subject positions depending on the active discourse and context where they are engaged.

Steph Lawler's explanation for identity categories is similar to Smith's view on the partiality of subjects. Lawler ([2008] 2014, 7) explains how identities consist of multiple intersecting categories, e.g., gender, race, sexuality, – and how no one is defined according to only one category. These categories Lawler defines as the "public manifestation" of identity, but identity also includes the personal reflexive idea people have of themselves, and even within the "public" identity categories, the lived experiences, manners of self-recognition, and the realisation of self and others vary significantly (ibid.). Lawler ([2008] 2014, 9) recognises a distinction between identity and subjectivity, although in her book she herself subsumes the definitions of subjectivity under her use of the term identity. Nevertheless, according to her distinction, identity stands for the discourse on normative and ideological social categories, and subjectivity for the more intricate cross-category processes of self-production (Lawler [2008] 2014, 8).

In this thesis, I focus on the concept of *subjectivity*, especially because of my interest in social forces; ideology and dynamics operating in the formation of subjects and selves. Additionally, a lot of my references are more involved in the discussion surrounding subjectivity: Althusser's concepts deal with ideology and the interpellation of subjects, discussed in the next section, and many of the YA scholars I refer to also focus on issues of subjectivity. I recognise that in my discussion of the different subjectivities apparent in the novel *The End*, the discussion could easily be focussed on the concept of *identity* as well, although I choose to approach it specifically from the perspective of subjectivity. However, I find a short

discussion on identity categories especially relevant here, for they adequately apply to the formation of new identity categories within the narrative of my primary source – identity categories which have emerged through the narrative's distinct death ethos. These categories are further examined in my analysis and discussion. The categories in *The End*, the monikers used to signify the different types of being related to the death ethos, are further connected to the concept of interpellation, which will be discussed in the next section. Butler (1997a, 2) discusses injurious speech and interpellation, and notes that the act of name-calling is not only a limiting injury on the addressee, but the subject may come to adapt the language ascribed with the name, the category they have been called into, utilise it with agency, and respond. Zeynet Gambetti (2005, 427) paraphrases this same passage from Butler as "the subject is bound to seek its own identity and existence in categories, relations, and terms that are not of its own making."

Butler (1997b, 10–11) connects the essence of the concepts of the individual and the subject, within linguistics. According to her, the subject is a linguistic category, which the individual comes to occupy (ibid.). Furthermore, the linguistic category is not stable, instead it is "a placeholder, a structure in formation" (Butler 1997b, 10). The individual becomes intelligible only through the presupposed establishment of the subject position, the linguistic category, in language (Butler 1997b, 10–11). From Butler's explanation it is possible to deduce that the individual is a term indicating the totality of selfhood as it is formulated and transformed through its occupation of (imprecisely delineated and ephemeral) subject positions. In addition, Smith (1988, xxxiv) configures the connection between individual and subject as dialectic, for according to him "the interplay of differing subject-positions will make some appear pleasurable and others less so; thus a tension is produced which compels a person to legislate among them." Smith emphasises that the individual is never omnipotent or cohesive, neither are they completely determined by the ideological discourses they are subsumed in, for they are capable of *discernment* (ibid.). In other words, the individual has *agency*. Robyn McCallum (1999, 78) defines agency simply as "a person's sense of themselves as capable of conscious action or meaning."

Butler (1997b, 11) considers the process of the formation of the subject circular in two ways. The subject narrating its formation must always do so by changing perspective from the first person to the third person, "dispossessing its own perspective" (ibid.). Thus, in order for the first person subject to distinguish itself, it must be able take on a perspective outside itself, which in turn determines the experience of the subject in the first person. Additionally, Butler

points out, that the narration of the subject must always come after the fact of the subject formation itself, for any formation of the subject must always presuppose the subordination, being subject to something (ibid.). From this analogy it would seem that the subject in fact cannot possess agency, for if the linguistic formation and narration of the subject must always come after the fact of the formation itself (being subject to something), how can the subject ever have an effect on the formation itself? This disempowering of the subject is a central argument postulated in poststructuralist criticism (see, e.g., McCallum 1999, 5–6).

Indeed, Butler acknowledges this paradox. She asks, if the subject is the progenitor of agency, "how can it be that the subject […] is at the same time the effect of subordination, understood as the deprivation of agency?" (Butler 1997b, 10). Butler demonstrates the connection between power exercised on a subject, its subordination – which is also "the becoming of the subject" (1997b, 13) – and the power, or agency, that is assumed by the subject being subordinated, and ruminates on the relationship between these conditions (Butler 1997b, 11–12). She suggests that "the power that initiates the subject fails to remain continuous with the power that is the subject's agency" (Butler 1997b, 12). She attributes the subject's condition of assuming the power exerted over it with ambivalence, both retention and resistance (Butler 1997b, 13). This sentiment echoes Smith's *discernment* discussed before. Accordingly, James (2009, 176) uses Butler (1997b, 13) to support her similar claim: "[P]ower does not solely work to repress or control people. [It] is also a productive and positive force that produces resistance to itself, and thus 'grants' individuality to people and other agencies."

Butler's (1997b, 15–16) argument continues that instead of the power of subordination merely transitively forming the subject, they exist in a certain interdependence: "[N]o subject comes into being without power, but that its coming into being involves dissimulation of power, metaleptic reversal in which the subject produced by the power becomes heralded as the subject who *founds* power." Furthermore, neither power or subject exists without the other, and neither can also be reduced to be fully congruent with the other (Butler 1997b, 16). In fact, in order for power to persevere, it must constantly be reiterated (ibid.). This suggests that this reiteration of power requires both constant production and (human) action, but it also suggests that it is temporal, and this temporality allows for a change of perspective on power "from what is always working on us from the outside […] to what constitutes the agency at work in our present acts and the futural expanse of their effects" (Butler 1997b, 16). Smith (1988, 37) offers a similar analogy, and argues that specific subject-positions cannot be thought of as a direct outcome of a specific discourse, because the position that the subject is

initially called to in (Althusserian) interpellation is not always congruent with the position the subject comes to inhabit, due to the history of subject-positions that have come before any single interpellation. These histories are embodied in single persons, who through living further develop beyond any single temporal subject-position, and the person is able to mediate the power of ideologies through this accrued personal history (ibid.).

The preceding explanation of subjectivity is largely focused on the subject and its interrelation to larger institutions of power acting on it, and the adjacent repression and resistance which further leads to potential agency for the subject. Still important for the construction of subjectivities and their agency is the idea of recognition from others, which is to say *intersubjectivity*. Jessica Benjamin (1988, 20–21) explains intersubjectivity as the subject recognizing their own capabilities for power and agency by being recognized as a subject by another subject, instead of focusing on the relation of the subject and the object. According to her, this is not supposed to be contradictory to intrapsychic theories on subjectivity, instead they should be regarded as complementary (Benjamin 1988, 21). Intersubjectivity functions on recognition and assertion: "The subject declares, 'I am, I do,' and then waits for the response, 'You are, you have done'." (ibid.). It is not only the assertion that is important for subject-formation, but the subject's reflexive recognition: how the subject finds itself in the response given (ibid.)

Next, I shall briefly discuss subjectivity in the context of YA literature. Trites (1997, 26–27), like the scholars mentioned before in this thesis, primarily bases the term subjectivity in language, and that it is language which socially constructs humans, and manipulates them. She states that discourse is what dictates social institutions (Trites 2000, 22), and that it is "the socially constructed limitations of power, and the adolescent's interactions with Ideological State Apparatuses as social institutions" that are definitive for YA literature (Trites 2000, 20). Furthermore, part of adolescence is maturation through discourses within institutions functioning as ISAs such as school, family, religion, and identity and government politics (Trites 2000, 22).

Regarding development and growth, Trites (2000, 10) divides YA novels into two categories. Novels with temporally long narratives, where a protagonist comes of age and matures into adulthood, she terms *Bildungsroman* (Trites 2000, 1). Novels that portray development in a shorter narrative timeframe or the resolution of fewer problems, a narrative which ends before the protagonist reaches adulthood, she terms *Entwicklungsroman* (Trites 2000, 14),

development novel. Both of these terms have existed before her take on their definition, and indeed her categorisation is both historical and related to literary theory: she traces the development of the *Bildungsroman* pattern to "the romantic belief in the individual" (Trites 2000, 11), and argues that especially within postmodernism it is important to position YA literature accordingly with these terms, as *Bildungsroman* has been overapplied (Trites 2000, 10).

The *Bildungsroman* are narratives of transcendence where the individual reaches "an adulthood of autonomy and self-determination" (Trites 2000, 18), and they offer the protagonist more social power in the end due to overcoming their adolescent conditions in adulthood (Trites 2000, 19). She describes *Entwicklungsroman* as "the novel of development" (Trites 2000, 17), as growth which is different from transcendent maturation (Trites 2000, 18). The *Entwicklungsroman* are occupied with an individual's conflict with authority and institutions (Trites 2000, 15). Trites (2000, 18) argues that the contemporary *Entwicklungsroman* emerged from postmodernism. Furthermore, it is postmodernism which made possible YA narratives which explore the construction of social institutions and their effect on the adolescent, "what it means if we define people as socially constructed subjects rather than as self-contained individuals" (Trites 2000, 16). I argue that *The End* is decidedly *Entwicklungsroman*, not only because the narrative timeline is only 24 hours and the issue of reaching adulthood thus pointless, but also because the narrative indeed portrays the protagonists struggling with and negotiating their place within several institutions, which are informed and involved in the death ethos.

In her study, McCallum (1999, 6) argues for an understanding of subjectivity where neither humanist presuppositions of universal essential selfhood, nor the (post-)structuralist notions which claim subjectivity as completely defined by social forces are viewed as dominant – instead, they should be understood as complementary. McCallum states that "mainstream children's and adolescent fiction has been dominated by liberal humanist conceptions of the individual, the self and the child" (ibid.). Stephens explains "the tenets" of humanism in simple terms and describe them as the qualities which underlie all human nature, and only change in "surface appearance" of social context, qualities such as "Reason, Love, Honour, Loyalty, Courage, etc." (Stephens 1992, 203). However, McCallum (1999, 6) explains, how modern humanism does not approach the concept of selfhood through a homogenous ideology, and the many adolescent novels she examines in her study, although operating within the context of humanist ethic, nevertheless display a scope of ideological positions,

which emerge from their representations of selfhood and its relations to others and society, and the influences which languages and social and cultural practices have on their formation. According to McCallum (1999, 7), the adolescent novel's preoccupation with portrayal of maturation is usually represented as a move from solipsism to intersubjectivity throughout childhood and adolescence. Thus, these narratives "entail more or less implicit concepts of selfhood, identity, and agency" (McCallum 1999, 9). As discussed previously, McCallum's position echoes that of Trites' (2000, 36–38): the individual is represented in conflict within the larger social forces, institutions, paradigms, and these representations are thus intrinsically tied to concepts of power, identity, subjectivity, selfhood, and agency.

Nikolajeva (2010, 6) explains how, especially in the context of children's literature, theoretical examinations have recognized a divide in the approaches to children's literature: whether it should be considered art or education. This is what Nikolajeva and other scholars of children's literature criticism, according to her, call the "literary-didactic split" (ibid.). She further positions that children's literature is always a representation of an adult author's perspective on childhood and adolescence, and thus didactic, or ideological (Nikolajeva 2010, 7). However, Nikolajeva argues that this aspect is not limited to children's literature, but is instead apparent in all literature, and that the difference in ideology between children's and other literature "is a matter of grade, not of nature" (ibid.). One of my aims in this thesis is to find the Ideological State Apparatuses operating in the narrative of *The End.* Furthermore, this inherent ideology in fictional narratives is an aspect relevant for my examination of *The End,* as part of my examination is the function of subjectivity and agency within the institutions that diffuse this ideology, and the devices and implied values which surface through the novel's representation of these processes. Although my focus is not necessarily the authorial intentions of Silvera, a compelling example of the placated life-affirming meaning of the novel is its dedication, which reads: "For those who need a reminder to make every day count" (*The End*, n. pag.). This is further emphasised by the life-concerned quotes from real world writers and historical figures at the beginning of each of the four parts of the book.

As the plot of *The End* demands the death of the two protagonists within a very limited timeline, large parts of the characters are built though their imagined hopes and dreams for the future, a future they will never attain. I shall analyse this particularly through the character of Mateo, who negotiates his mortality early in the narrative through an imagined future subjectivity and identity. The representation of subjectivities and their construction reveals the

narrative's ideologies and values regarding how certain formative experiences define those subjectivities, what agency those subjectivities afford, and what value is attached to them.

The next section focuses on ideology, interpellation and institutions. There are multiple theories about the methods institutions, discourses and ideologies inflict their power on the subject. In this thesis, I have decided to use Marxist philosopher and structuralist Louis Althusser's theory on ideology and Ideological State Apparatus, not only because it is a theory on the operation of institutions within societies, but because I believe it illustrates the function of the Death-Cast company and the complete amalgamation of death institutions, the death ethos of the society portrayed in *The End*.

2.3 Althusser, Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus

Althusser proposes the concept of ISA through capitalist critique, which is partially rooted in traditional Marxism (see, e.g., Wolff 2005, 224): social formation through means of production within a state, how this creates social classes, and how these social classes are subjugated through ideology operating through institutions such as the Church (Althusser [1971] 2001, 85–89). Althusser explains how in Marxist theory, the State Apparatus (which he calls Repressive State Apparatus, hence RSA) contains those institutions which hold public (and violent and repressive) power within states, such as the Government and the Police, while the Ideological State Apparatuses are, for example, the religious, educational, family, political, communicational, and cultural ISAs, constituents which can belong to the private domain, and function through ideology (as opposed to repression/violence) (Althusser [1971] 2001, 95–97). However, ideology and repression are present in both, and it is only a matter of degree which distinguishes them in that aspect (Althusser [1971] 2001, 98). The different ISAs are unified, although contradictive, in the ideology of the ruling class (Althusser [1971] 2001, 100). According to Richard Wolff (2005, 225), Althusser viewed the ISAs functioning on a parallel purpose to the RSAs: they upheld the capitalist class structures.

How individuals become subjects in Althusser's ([1971] 2001, 118) theory then is through what he calls *interpellation*. Individuals are interpellated (or hailed) as subjects, which Althusser exemplifies through a simplified and concrete example of a police officer's spontaneous hail directed towards a specific individual on the street (ibid.). The individual, the target of the hail, turns around and comes to recognise themselves as the subject of that hail, yielding to the ideological position inherent in the action of the hail (ibid.). In Althusser's examples, the subject positions are thus linguistically transmitted and inherently

ideologically coded into the (inter)actions of social relations; the subject is inclined to inhabit their position according to recognition of oneself as the referent within the contextual discourse. For example through utterances, like the already mentioned hail, or through what Althusser ([1971] 2001, 117) calls "the practical rituals of […] everyday life," such as calling someone by their name, or even a hand-shake, which are all part of "ideological recognition." For Althusser these were all functions of how individuals are under the influence of ideology (of the ruling class), or as Smith (1988, 16) explains, how "people become the bearers or supports of the relations which constitute social formations." Wolff's (2005, 225; formulations as in the original) explanation for interpellation further describes how the institutions functioning as ISAs affect the individual as "institutions […] prescribe and enforce (*a*) thinking in specific ways about their identities, their relationships with other individuals, and their connections to social institutions, and (*b*) acting accordingly." In the latter part of my analysis, I shall examine the subjectivities of the two protagonists in relation to the social institutions, the ISAs they are part of. Now I shall move on to discuss how Althusser's ISAs and theory on ideology can be interpreted in the context of modern capitalism, consumerism, marketing, and (social) media.

Wolff (2005) discusses Althusser's ISAs and ideology in the context of contemporary American capitalism and consumerism. According to Wolff (2005, 226), in modern capitalism individuals are interpellated, or are made subjects, through ISAs that serve its ideology. Individuals are interpellated within meaning systems which define the ways the individual can form the identities of their own and others, and that make the individual accept or even revere capitalist exploitation (ibid.). In other words, the institutions functioning as ISAs create meaning systems, which have a determining impact on for example what individuals hold valuable, in addition to creating specific discourse, which defines the individual's subjectivity and means to formulate it and their identity. This all happens under the umbrella of the dominant ideology. Wolff (2005, 229) continues by explaining the Marxist thought how the disparity between surplus value generated in the economic system, compared with the value paid to the working-class, leads to exploitation. According to Wolff, the success of U.S. capitalism is based on the exploitation system: how in addition to the rising surplus values, the level of consumption allowed to the working-class is also increased (ibid.). Furthermore, "the workers had to *accept such consumption as an adequate compensation.* They had to value rising consumption levels as more positive than rising exploitation was negative" (Wolff 2005, 230). This is where the ISAs and interpellation

become especially relevant, as Wolff explains, the workers have to be systematically interpellated into this ideology of consumption, including identifying as "consumers" participating on the free-market who value and aim to maximize the utilities enabled to them through consumption, and who measure their individual worth according to the level of consumption they have achieved (ibid.). As Wolff argues, "the neoclassical economics that so totally dominates academia, the media, and politics in the United States theoretically formalizes this interpellation," in addition to being popularised through advertisement, which permeates all aspects of life (ibid.). The role of media and advertisement as ISAs will be discussed next.

Before discussing the role of media according to other scholars, I still refer to Wolff for his explanation of capitalism in the media and advertisement, and how they function to affirm the capitalist ideology, especially consumerism, and interpellate subjects as ISAs. He states that mass media plays a vital role in this interpellation into capitalist consumerism; a process which is both interpellation and partaking in the capitalist market as private enterprises themselves, as they sell the advertisement space for other enterprises (Wolff 2005, 232). Thus, the mass media and its advertisements "colonize," as Wolff calls it, the working-class's free time by influencing how and what they should consume and enjoy (ibid.).

In their article regarding ideology in "New Media" (examined through Althusser's ideas on ideology), Mostafa Goodarzi, Ali Ashgar Fahimifar, and Elahe Shakeri Daryani (2021, 142–143) mention how differences between media such as newspapers or television are disappearing since they all contain internet-based and multimedial elements. They define new media as "comprised of websites, online video/audio streams, email, online social platforms, online communities, online forums, blogs, Internet telephony, Web advertisements, online education and many more," and they include social media under this term (Goodarzi, Fahimifar, and Daryani 2021, 138). Social media they further define as "a collective term for websites and applications which focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration" (Goodarzi, Fahimifar, and Daryani 2021, 139). Thus, the mass media referred to by Wolff in his discussion, are in the current time, and in the narrative time of 2017 in the novel *The End,* ever more largely online based, and the new media, especially social media, has become dominant. For simplicity and coherence, I refer to all the interactive online-based services, websites, blogs, (dating) applications, and so on, in my analysis of the novel as social media, because as my analysis and discussion will show, they all include some type of communicative or interactive element, and thus fit rather well

under the definition of social media as given by, for example, Goodarzi, Fahimifar, and Daryani, although some elements of the "new media" are also present.

Peter McKenna III (2023) has studied Dave Eggers's dystopian novel *The Circle* (2013) through an Althusserian lens on ideology and ISAs. He argues that social media platforms and online interaction repeats the capitalist interpellation of subjects akin to Althusser's theory (McKenna III 2023, 93). According to McKenna III (2023, 93), social media platforms function as ISAs, and they interpellate subjects (users) through various methods, for example surveillance by tracking users' activities. Users are placed within the discourse dominated and moderated by media companies through their demand for users to identify themselves through methods like logging in, which is further interpellation (ibid.). Similarly, Goodarzi, Fahimifar, and Daryani (2021, 151) argue that creating a profile on social media is interpellation when the platform requires the subjects to identify themselves through names and images on the platform, and how the different functions the user is able to modify on devices create a (false) sense of agency for the subject. They compare the analogy to a person feeling agentic when selecting and buying a product, ignorant of the influence of advertisement on their choices and their limitation (Goodarzi, Fahimifar, and Daryani 2021, 151–152).

Presenting his arguments similarly to the earlier discussed Wolff's thoughts, McKenna III (2023, 92) adapts the role of the users and the corporations owning the online platforms into Marxist and capitalist terms when he explains how the users participating in these online platforms, and the data that the corporations gather from these users and the governing of their interactions, make the users into exploited digital labour, to whom the "corporations act as attention 'employers'." The platforms depend on these user interactions, and further reward them by allowing continued use of and interaction on the platform (ibid.). McKenna III (2023, 97) calls the data gathered by corporations "a new digital material," which together with new conditions fundamental to social media, i.e., sharing, are the "productive forces powering digital relations" which further inform the entirety of digital discourse on these platforms. Sharing is one of many user-functions of social media which define how information is communicated, and who and what is valuable. In her critical history of social media, José van Dijck (2013, 16) explains how the biggest social media platforms are run by corporations who think of them mainly as market-places, where the connectivity of the user – meaning the connections: friends, followers, likes, shares, views that they accumulate (see van Dijck 2013, 6) – accumulates social capital to the user, and even more, economic capital to the corporation. McKenna III (2023, 101) associates the connectivity and entailed functions to

how *The Circle* represents subjectivities in the digital context where "consumers […] consume each other's content and […] interpret each other […], while the Circle reaps the rewards of information at every point of exchange." Furthermore, he states that this reflects class domination, the Circle company's exploitation of the digital labour (ibid.).

Smith (1988, 17) continues his discussion on Althusser by pointing out the lack of agency that the individual has in Althusser's theory: always dominated by a unified ideology, to which it cannot offer resistance (agency) because it is "always-already a subject" (Althusser [1971] 2001, 119), meaning that it is always predetermined and preconditioned as a subject by the (eternal) ideology (ibid.). Thus, the ideology constructs a unified subjectivity for the person, and seemingly conflates the individual with the subject (Smith 1988, 17). McCallum (1999, 102) formulates the same thought in simpler terms: "It leaves no room for either agency or resistance, nor for a conception of a person as occupying multiple or contradictory subject positions." Smith (1988, 18) questions Althusser's argument concerning ideologically unified ISAs, whether the interpellations acting through the multiple ISAs could ever form a social ideological unity, and thus whether it corresponds to a unifiable subjectivity. Nevertheless, Smith (1988, 21) emphasises the import of Althusser's theory, especially that of interpellation, in describing how subjects are formed in ideology and discourse. This discussion about agency in Althusser is relevant because it is evident in my examination that while the novel can be analysed through the concept of ISA, it is lacking for the examination of the subjects and their agency, which the novel also portrays. For the analysis of the subject and agency, further theory is provided and implemented, such as Butler's and Smith's as discussed in section 2.2. The discussion on Althusser will continue in my analysis in chapter 3, where I apply these concepts to my primary source and analyse what can be subsequently deduced from the function of the Death-Cast company and the death ethos permeating the society within the novel.

3   Analysis and Discussion of *The End*

This chapter consists of my analysis and discussion of the ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses represented in the novel, the constructions and representations of subjectivity and by extension agency and identity of the two protagonists within these ISAs, and how these representations connect to the larger themes apparent in YA literature. Section 3.1 briefly defines how the Death-Cast company can be viewed as the Marxist/Althusserian State and ruling class, how it is their ideology which informs the entire society depicted, their emergence leading to the total death ethos being born. Section 3.2, then, demonstrates how the alert functions as what I call the initial interpellation due to it creating the most definitive subject position and identity category, the Decker. Furthermore, I discuss how this initial part of the narrative also functions as the formative Being-towards-death. The final section 3.3 is the most exhaustive as it includes the analysis and discussion both of the central ISAs that I have identified in the novel, and the relevant subjectivities that I have identified being represented within their discourse, as well as some of the values which emerge from these representations.

3.1   Death-Cast and the Death Ethos as the Ruling Class and Ideology

The death ethos of the society, and the Death-Cast company holding significant power within it, together form an institution and discourse, which can be examined through Althusser's theory of ideology and Ideological State Apparatus. In this thesis I view the Death-Cast company as The Marxist/Althusserian State, the ruling class holding power over the novel's portrayal of a fictional version of the USA. However, as Althusser ([1971] 2001, 100) explains in regard to the Repressive State Apparatuses, which hold their power through "the representatives of the classes in power" directly executing their dominion, and while Death-Cast functions similar to the representative of the classes in power, their methods and the operation of the death ethos coincides more to Althusser's concept of the ISAs forming a unity through the ideology of the ruling class (ibid.). In *The End,* the ruling class are represented by the Death-Cast company, however, as was already mentioned in the introduction, the death ethos is the ideology, which initially came to be through the emergence of the Death-Cast company and is further maintained by the other institutions: corporations, societal establishments, and media, functioning as the ISAs of the society.

The ideology driving and sustaining this ethos corresponds to how Smith (1988, 14) explains ideology in Althusserian terms, mentioning "ideology-in-general" as separate from particular, historical ideologies with subjective effects. Ideology-in-general is the general condition for the cohesion of social formations, which the particular ideologies overdetermine, and further "ensure the continuance of a particular regime or ethos" (ibid.). The novel's death-ideology is thus a particular ideology emerging from the death-driven corporations, particularly Death-Cast, and implemented onto the pre-existing capitalist society of the USA, still utilising some its functions, while also providing new means of production and affecting the culture. All this further leads to the interpellation and subjugation of the people into the death ethos. This preoccupation with death maintains the relevancy of the Death-Cast company, keep them in power, and ensure the continuance of the ethos.

The novel does not offer insight on the directors of Death-Cast, nor other higher status employees or administrators working for them, instead their activities and presence are only portrayed as a uniform corporate entity. Their faceless presence as a corporate entity highlights their ideological omnipresence. In the sections that follow, I shall illustrate how the passages which portray the ISAs operating within the death ethos represent the characters attitudes as mostly amenable towards them. Additionally, I shall show how their status as an adequate representation as the State is supported by their power over other persons and institutions in high positions of governmental and cultural power.

My purpose is not to claim that the death ethos of the novel or its portrayal of the fictional company is a deliberate representation of Althusser's theory, instead Althusser's theory can be used to analyse how they are constructed and what purpose they serve in the novel. Althusser's theory is used here to allow my initial discussion of subjectivity as it is the dominant institution and initiative discourse in the novel. My examination alternates between the wider dominant institution working on the level of society and state enacting subjects through subordination of people through their system (Death-Cast and the death ethos as dominant ideology and the ISAs operating within it), to the more interpersonal forms of subjectivity operating within the identified ISAs and their discourses; especially as they relate to subjectivities and discourses dominant in YA literature as defined by Trites (2000) and other scholars.

Death-Cast holds its power and subordination of the people in place and maintains its necessity through the functional and discoursal invasion of essential state, administrative and

cultural institutions: hospitals, the church, the school system, media and entertainment, as well as its influence on the economic system, each representing a power structure within society. Through these methods, Death-Cast is able to withhold its hegemonic power over the society and the people's complacency over its necessity and benefit. Death-Cast's hegemonic dominion has already been studied by N.F.N. Masnuah and Erika Hartanto (2022, 192), where they conclude that Death-Cast holds dominance within the society and power over several subordinate groups: the president, the heralds, and the Deckers. Furthermore, the death ethos of the society allows for many adjacent capitalist services and commodities to flourish, commodities that depend on the consumerism of the persons interpellated as subjects within the death ethos initially by the Death-Cast company, and further by other institutions. As my analysis will show, there are night clubs, virtual reality and fake-travel businesses, social media sites and applications, and restaurants, that specifically operate or cater for the Deckers. The Death-Cast company exerts their control over the means of production.

Butler (1997b, 15–16) explained the interdependence between power and subject, and how in order for power to persevere, it must constantly be reiterated (1997b, 16). Death-Cast would not exist without the people, the subjects, to constantly "alert." In their subjugation of the people as Deckers, Death-Cast is thus repeating the "reproduction of labour power" (Althusser [1971] 2001, 87), and although Deckers are not given wages to sustain their condition like in Althusser's theory (ibid.), they are prepared for their eventual subjection through the ruling ideology operating within other societal institutions (Althusser [1971] 2001, 88-89), and are exploited by the capitalist appropriation of the "surplus value" generated by them (Wolff 2005, 224), when they are compelled to spend their ephemeral time and money in associated businesses. Although the money a Decker holds is not "surplus value" in the traditional Marxist conception, it is surplus in the sense of being left behind after the individual's death.

The power of Death-Cast is constantly reiterated through the ISAs' additional interpellations, how they come to remind the dying of their dying, influence their values, and repeat the discourse in subject positions and categories like "Decker" and "Last Friend," and the means available for sociality, self-determination, and consumption, as I will demonstrate in this chapter. First, I shall explain how the initial interpellation of the alert functions. Second, I shall identify and analyse the means how Death-Cast and the death ethos have infiltrated the functioning of the institutions, and how these institutions can be viewed as Ideological State Apparatuses. Finally, I shall analyse the ISAs and associated subjectivities.

3.2   Interpellation into the Death Ethos

In this section, I shall focus on the interpellation of the initial alert, an especially marked motif in the novel; besides the narrative starting with the boys' receiving their alerts, every chapter introducing a new character starts with a mention whether that character received their alert that day. There are multiple examples of additional interpellation in the novel, and those are mentioned separately when relevant in the analysis. The initial alert, as received by the people occupying the fictional American society in *The End*, performs a similar function of subordination and subject formation as that of Althusser's concept of interpellation. The alert, like the police officer's hail, enacts the subject into being through the inadvertent recognition of the subject of themselves in the hail. As Mateo first receives the alert on the first page of the book (*The End,* 3), he already knows what it means from the sound of the ringtone, which is distinct to the Death-Cast alert: "Death-Cast is calling with the warning of a lifetime—I'm going to die today. […] The alert […] is blasting from my phone on the other side of the room" (ibid.). The alert alone is enough to make him realise that he is going to die. Furthermore, Death-Cast has appropriated and instrumentalised a symbol of the church (one of the ISAs, as I shall demonstrate shortly) in the alert interpellation: the death-knell. The Death-Cast alert ringtone is described as "a distinctive and endless gong, like a church bell one block away" (ibid.). This functions according to Althusser's idea of the practical rituals like the name-calling or handshake that operate as ideological recognition (Althusser [1971] 2001, 117), as the alert powerfully subjugates the subject through a re-occuring and recognisable signifier integrated into society, the church bell. Althusser's individuals are always prone to practice this ideological recognition due to being preconditioned to it (ibid.).

As the narrative begins from the moment Mateo receives the alert, as does the first chapter narrated by Rufus (*The End,* 14), the reader does not have access to the pre-interpellation subjectivities of the two protagonists. In the narrative, the boys are always already within the discourse and subjugation of the death ethos, and their actions informed and motivated by the position they have been put in. However, as in Althusser's ([1971] 2001, 119) interpellation, where "the individual is always-already a subject," so are the boys, and arguably everyone, always already subject to death, because it is a natural imperative, and something that every living person is always-already subject to from the first conception of them as a living being.

As the society of *The End* is markedly preoccupied with death, as will be further demonstrated in my analysis of the different ISAs, the always-already subjectivity is further

pronounced. This is exemplified in the following passage portraying Mateo's thoughts as he watches Penny, Lidia's daughter, playing on the floor. Mateo connects his current first-person experience to the third-person future of the child and the essence of the society defining the entire subjugation of a collective plural "we" as the object of the agentless action of "being raised": "This is Penny's beginning. And one day she'll find herself on the terrible end of a Death-Cast call and it sucks how we're all being raised to die" (*The End*, 150). Here, Mateo exemplifies an ability to apply his personal situation to different grammatical persons and temporalities, which he does in other situations as well, as I shall expand upon shortly. Francis Jacques (1991, xv) argues that the subject's agency over their self-construction is dependent on their ability to act in all three grammatical persons: I, you, he/she. This analogy about being surrounded by death is continued at the end of the narrative, after Mateo is already dead, and the narrative focalises Lidia: "Tomorrow she'll build the bookcase Mateo bought for Penny and put his pictures all around her room. Lidia will keep Mateo alive the only way she can" (*The End,* 356). Thus, the preoccupation with death, and the "being raised to die" (*The End*, 150) comes full circle when Penny will be growing up without a father and pictures of a dead friend around her room.

What the interpellation of the Death-Cast herald then performs is not only the pronounced awareness of impending mortality of the individual, but more precisely, the placement of that individual into the death ethos ideology and discourse, the subject position(s) which exists in the death ethos of the society, powerfully dominated by the Death-Cast company. The interpellation routine of the herald aims to make the subject "live this day to the fullest," a sentiment that is repeated in the heralds' routines and implemented as a phrase into the larger culture by its use in entertainment and media (*The End*, 20). Combined with the herald's suggestions to Rufus to attend festivals, yoga classes, or eat in restaurants with Decker discounts (*The End*, 18; similar but more brief suggestion was also present in Mateo's alert, *The End*, 6), this interpellation suggests that there are certain preferred and postulated ways to be and live one's day to the fullest. Further combined with the many businesses and services operating in the death ethos market, the subject position of the Decker is definitely consumerist in nature, and these commercial themes are discussed later in section 3.3.2.

The alert-interpellation is thus profoundly ideological in nature, as it places, subjugates, the individual as subject within the capitalist, death-market driven discourse of the death ethos society. In connection with the *Entwicklungsroman*, Trites (2000, 18) writes that especially in postmodernism, growth is marked as "the individual's increased participation in capitalism,"

and that the discourse which constructs the subject restricts, even makes obsolete, its self-determination. She adds that in postmodernity, growth is often depicted as awareness of one's construction within social institutions (Trites 2000, 19). While the example of Mateo's recognition of his subjectivity being raised in the death ethos mindset from the previous paragraph signals a certain maturity in his awareness, the construction and definition of the subjectivities of the protagonists often follows the established discourse and patterns of the society and its institutions.

Indeed, the subjects Mateo and Rufus come to refer to themselves as Deckers, the identity category which they are also interpellated into through their new position as the dying; for example, after a near-death experience involving a bombing, Rufus narrates: "Deckers need to start wearing special collars or jackets, something that'll clue us in on not flocking in one place" (*The End*, 241). Mateo especially comes to identify with the other Deckers online through the social media *CountDowners*, discussed in section 3.3.3. It is unclear whether the term "Decker" is directly used by the heralds during the alert, as for example the recent reference to page 18 is delivered in reported speech by Rufus, not as direct dialogue. Besides a consumerist subjectivity, the Decker identity places the boys into further subject positions as well. The narrative offers examples of situations where the boys or Deckers in general are treated as already dead in the discourse. For example, when Mateo is chatting with a girl, Wendy Mae, on the Last Friend app, she unintentionally offends Mateo, and after Mateo dismisses her, writes: "wat did I say? y do u dead guys always stop talking 2 me?" (*The End*, 53). Similarly, one of the two focalised heralds in the novel, Andrea (who acts as Mateo's herald), in the chapter focalising her explains how she is efficient in her job precisely because she thinks of the people she is calling as already dead, or at least not people: "[T]he only job she's ever been great at because of one major life hack she discovered […]. Rule number one of one: Deckers are no longer people" (*The End,* 84).

Furthermore, as the boys are visiting Mateo's mother's grave at Evergreens Cemetery, they witness a gravedigger digging Mateo's grave and installing a temporary tombstone for him with the date of his death (*The End*, 217), demonstrating how the institution handling the burials are also considering his death certain, and thus further interpellating him into that subject position. The subjectivities the boys are placed in as Deckers thus involve situations where they are posited as already dead, which they themselves also ruminate on, although not from the perspective of the discourse they are placed in because of it, but from what action this enables them to take. As they are arriving at the cemetery, they share their thoughts on the

possibility of afterlife, and Rufus explains: "I think we're already dead, dude. Not everyone, just Deckers. […] The first afterlife kicks off when Death-Cast tells us to live out our day knowing it's our last; that way we'll take full advantage of it, thinking we're still alive" (*The End*, 215). Narratively, this works to establish the explicit motivation of the characters. It illustrates how the boys act within the death ethos, and affirms how they aligned themselves after their initial interpellation according to Being-towards-death, as I shall demonstrate shortly. It also concurs with the supposed life-affirming message, the authorial intention in the novel, as pointed out earlier by the dedication and quotes at the beginning of the book and its parts.

Thus, I argue that both protagonists experience two types of deaths. The first death is *the alert* which they both receive at the beginning of the narrative. The function of the alert is a symbolic death. The alert and the linguistic performance given by the herald places the subject firmly and permanently in the discourse of the highly institutionalised death ethos. The person receives a new identity category, *Decker*, and participates in several rituals, for example, their own funeral, and (social) media made available especially to the Deckers. The second death is the actual end-of-life physical death, which the protagonists experience near (Mateo) or at the novel's conclusion (Rufus). This former process was illustrated in my theoretical background not only by Althusser's interpellation, but by two other scholars: Butler and Lawler.

Butler (1997b, 10–11) explains how the process of subjectivation functions through the subject's occupation of a linguistic category, and how this does not mean that the category leads strictly to the identification of the individual. While Lawler ([2008] 2014, 10) is primarily occupied with identification with categories, she also rejects the notions of singular, complete identities, and explains how their formation is active and processual, including "tensions within and between identities" and "engagements with the social world." Unlike the physical death, which strips the person from all potentiality, temporality and agency, the first symbolic death, paradoxically as it powerfully subordinates the subject, also affords the subjects, Mateo and Rufus, who are placed within it an extent of possibilities for agency, although still largely confined within the context and discourse of the ethos, akin to Butler's (1997b, 15) explanation of the emergence of subjects as "the *condition of possibility* for a radically conditioned form of agency," and as in her examination of the Althusserian interpellation, always within the terms of its language (Butler 1997b, 106).

Thus, during the progress of the novel, the boys come to implement the discourse and established terminology within the death ethos, such as the already mentioned *alert* or *Decker*, but also for example *Last Friend*. These are corporate terms and thus profoundly capitalist, consistent with Trites's (2000, 18) argument regarding *Entwicklungsromane* and postmodernism explained earlier in this section. The boys repeat the rituals, actions, and activities that exist in and have emerged through the death ethos, which I shall analyse through the functioning of ISAs in the novel. Still, a certain agency and even resistance is afforded to them, for example Rufus is not as willing to take up all the activities pushed on the Deckers and to build his identity and subjectivity in their exact methods on social media. The ISAs also allow them to explore further subjectivities, such as identification with their cultural and familial heritages in World Travel Arena. All these points will be argued, demonstrated, and supported in my analysis and discussion in section 3.3. Before I move on to the last section, I shall still further tie this recent discussion into the YA narratives: how the alert interpellation and subsequent subjectivity narratively functions akin to Heidegger' Being-towards-death as identified in YA fiction by Trites.

As I explained before, in her discussion on death in YA literature Trites (2000, 117–119 & 123–124) establishes how the experience of the death of friends or loved ones is often represented as a moment of self-realisation for the adolescent protagonist, how the finality of death is an epiphany for them which is narratively configured akin to Heidegger's Being-towards-death. Soon after being interpellated into the death ethos as imminently dying, the narrative establishes some goals which both boys set for themselves in the light of their death. For Rufus, this is the hope that his friends and loved ones are able to see beyond his violent nature and remember him as he believes he truly is, as he narrates on his way to his foster home Pluto after receiving his alert: "I just wanna get to Aimee and say goodbye to the Plutos as the friend they know I am, not the monster I was tonight" (*The End*, 32). This dichotomy between the pre-interpellation self, who acted on his violent impulses, and the dying-self no more defined by his anger, is the central inner conflict Rufus struggles with and which recurs throughout the narrative. How he comes to configure his subjectivity in connection with his violent nature is apparent in the ISA of social media and his use of photography, which will be discussed in section 3.3.3.

As was already briefly illustrated in the introduction, Mateo's initial conflict is his need to be bold and experience life, which he has been anxious to do until his imminent death put things in perspective. In the following long passage from the narrative, the text establishes some of

Mateo's goals and hopes, but also the anxieties and fears limiting him, after the initial alert interpellation:

> The number one person I will miss the most is Future Mateo, who maybe loosened up and lived. It's hard to picture him clearly, but I imagine Future Mateo trying out new things, like smoking pot with friends, getting a driver's license, and hopping on a plane to Puerto Rico to learn more about his roots. Maybe he's dating someone, and maybe he likes that company. He probably plays piano for his friends, sings in front of them, and he would definitely have a crowded funeral service […] where the room is packed with new people who didn't get a chance to hug him one last time.
> (*The End,* 9)

Within this passage, Mateo imagines a subjectivity as Future Mateo and narratively constructs a potential life story for himself in the third-person, which simultaneously defines his current being, since it implies that this is how he would be if his anxiety and fear would not limit him, and if he had the time. Essentially, he creates a totality of selfhood through the imagined future subjectivity, the positions and identities that would make him up: he could be transgressive (smoking pot), fulfil rites of passages (driver's license, sexuality, and relationships), explore and define his cultural heritage (Puerto Rican identity, cultural subject position), and be musical. He knows that none of this imagined future will happen, and this realisation initially overwhelms him, and he collapses to the floor (*The End*, 9–10). Nikolajeva (2010, 114) has recognized a similar trope in Sara Kadefors's novel *Sandor slash Ida* (2001) where two main characters Sandor and Ida, being dissatisfied with their situations in life, have created false identities for themselves on the Internet, which Nikolajeva argues "reflect young people's frequent wish to be something more grand and glamorous than they are" (ibid.). Mateo in his unfortunate state uses the imagined future to find agency.

Although Mateo is overwhelmed, the procession empowers him, and on the floor, he narrates: "Do, and then die" (*The End,* 10). The passage is an example of Mateo's realisation of the (limited) agency he is able to have over his subjectivity that is afforded to him in the death-interpellation. However, because Mateo is still alone at home, he has not yet fulfilled all the interlocutive roles as explained by Jacques (1991, xvi), which although binary, consist of three agencies (the persons), and importantly, requires empirical practice. Mateo is unable to embark on his adventure without someone to be in direct relation with: "What I need is a coach who can double as a friend for me" (*The End,* 42). Mateo is finally able to leave after Rufus comes to pick him up, and in the ensuing dialogue Mateo must assert himself twice in

the emphatic second-person address of Rufus, additionally including another plural "we," the recognition that they are both dying:

> "I'm on *your* turf, dude," Rufus says. "If anyone should be suspicious, it's me. This better not be some fake sheltered-kid act, yo."
> "It's no act," I promise. "I'm sorry, I'm just… on edge."
> "We're in the same boat." He holds out his hand and I shake it. […] "You ready to bounce? […]"
> "I'm ready-ish," I answer.
> (*The End*, 90)

Akin to a reversal of the intersubjective recognition and assertion by Benjamin (1988, 21), instead of the subject first declaring its state, Rufus indicates Mateo second person positions, the former which Mateo rejects (no, he is not deceitful) and the latter asserts (yes, he is ready), but only after a mutual recognition of their shared subjectivity: we are dying and thus similar. According to McCallum (1999, 7), adolescent fiction connects maturation to a move from solipsism to intersubjectivity, and one form that the solipsism takes is the inability to recognise oneself as an agent. It is only through the intersubjective recognition and subsequently allowed agency from Rufus, which enables Mateo to actually embark in search of those activities he deemed important in Being-towards-death.

Regarding the subjectivities outlined for "Future Mateo," although the narrative does not explicitly state a connection between this imagined subjectivity and the activities of the rest of the narrative, a lot of them do come true, albeit in a limited manner, and in the context of the death ethos ISAs. Both boys explore and are empowered by their cultural subjectivity in the World Travel Arena (*The End*, 281–286), Mateo dances and sings both in Clint's Graveyard (*The End*, 307–309 & 320–322) and later at home plays the piano for Rufus (*The End*, 339–340), and throughout the narrative they develop a romantic relationship.

The discourse of Mateo configuring his subjectivity in temporal selves is returned to when Mateo contemplates "Past Mateo": "Twelve hours ago I received the phone call telling me I'm going to die today. […] I've said tons of goodbyes already […] but the most important goodbye is the one I said to Past Mateo, who I left behind at home […], and I'm more alive now than I was then" (*The End*, 227). The alert has symbolically already killed Past Mateo, and there is a clear divide made between "Past Mateo" and "Now Mateo" (my term). Here, Mateo complies with the discourse of being already dead (Past Mateo), as was demonstrated to be a quality of the ideology surrounding the Death-Cast interpellation and Deckers. Mateo talks about Past Mateo in the past tense, occupying a subject position in the present which is

free from his past. Through death he still connects to the moment in first-person, for it is the first-person "I" who received the alert. The alert was the moment that released him from Past Mateo, the object of the interpellation, but he is able to assert himself back into the subject position of agency, performing the paradoxical Butlerian reversal, as he shifts from the object position to agency over living.

It is certainly obvious that Past Mateo, Future Mateo, and Now Mateo are all the same person, which is precisely why it is the importance of the personal-narrative feature, the basis of this procession in language, which is demonstrated here. All the different Mateos are placeholders, "a structure in formation" (Butler 1997b, 10), which the individual (Mateo) occupies, "and they enjoy intelligibility only to the extent that they are, as it were, first established in language" (Butler 1997b, 11). Mateo is able to narrate his preferred subjectivity by creating these positions which he can linguistically occupy and abandon, to indicate development and recognition of his own achievements, as at this point in the narrative he has already been able to experience life as he set out to do. Graham writes in his exploration of Being-towards-death: "Our understanding peers into the darkness of this mystery, so that the light it does shed is shed on our very being; because it is only through and in our very being that we are able to think death at all. [...] It is death, which, by its very nature, grants us a limit by which to live" (Graham 2009, 85). Mateo demonstrates the ability to analyse in depth and complexity his own subjectivity regarding how death affects it, dividing it temporally and recognising the positions, values and identities that give him meaning and make up that subjectivity and subsequently his selfhood.

As Butler (1997b, 16) argued, the recognition of the reiteration of power makes the subject aware of its temporality, which allows for a change of perspective and thus agency, the recognition of "the futural expanse and […] effects" of the subject's actions. Accordingly, the initial interpellation forces Mateo and Rufus to understand the temporality of their current situation and its implications, with the change of perspective from not-dying to dying, and allows them the agency to align their motivations according to Being-towards-death.

The purpose of section 3.2 was to demonstrate how the boys align themselves according to their imminent death, akin to the Being-towards-death. Their subjectivities are further analysed in particular contexts and situations as they are represented within the ISAs operating in the narrative. In section 3.3 I shall establish how the narrative portrays Death-Cast's involvement in the functions of the church, school, hospitals, media and other

businesses, and analyse the agency and subjectivity afforded to the protagonists within the discourse of these institutions.

3.3 The Ideological State Apparatuses in the Death Ethos

3.3.1 ISAs of Religion, Education, and Health

The church is discussed in connection to Death-Cast when Rufus happens to come across a church soon after receiving his alert (the chapter starts at 1:18 am; *The End*, 28–29). He witnesses a crying woman being escorted out of the church by a priest, and comments: "The graveyard shift here is no joke. Malcolm and Tagoe are always mocking the churches that shun Death-Cast and their 'unholy visions from Satan', but it's dope how some nuns and priests keep busy way past midnight for Deckers trying to repent, get baptized, and all that good stuff" (*The End*, 30). Although it seems that not all churches take a positive perspective to Death-Cast, and it is not established in the narrative that Death-Cast would have a direct control over any church, it is evident from this passage that churches have been influenced by Death-Cast and adapted to the altered society: they stay open and their officials operate throughout the night to accommodate the Deckers and to benefit from them, as people getting baptised increases the amount of members in a parish. This functions rather similarly to how Wolff (2005, 232) recognizes the church's function as an ISA in capitalist America: although the church does not promote consumerism, instead they tap into the frustration of workers and offer them spirituality, kept separate from actual criticism or resolution to the problems faced by the working class in the capitalist system, such as the exploitation of the workers and how to achieve any alternate system. Although the church in *The End* does evidently criticise the Death-Cast company, the church, a religious and spiritual power structure, participates in the new power dynamic afforded by Death-Cast, and although they might not preach the 'gospel' of Death-Cast, they still contribute to the death ethos of the society, and thus affirm the ideology inherent in it, ideology dominated by Death-Cast. Also, regardless of the church protesting Death-Cast's operation, Rufus's narration suggests that the interpellation of Malcolm and Tagoe into the death ethos by other means is so successful, the church's protests seem ridiculous to the characters.

It is established later in the narrative that Rufus does not consider himself religious, although this is semantically ambiguous, since he does also express belief in supernatural celestial entities, but seemingly rejects at least (Christian) organised religion: "I'm not religious. I

believe there's some alien creator and somewhere for dead people to hang out, but I don't credit all that as God and heaven" (*The End*, 216). However, in the former example at the church, Rufus clearly expresses a positive value judgment of the operation of the church regarding their services for Deckers. Evidently, how Rufus feels about the spiritual teachings of the Christian religion does not translate to opposition towards their involvement with Deckers. The rejection of religiousness is thus alike rejecting the identity category (as defined by Lawler) of a religious person and a certain divided attitude towards religion as an institution, but still holding on to a certain subjectivity within religiousness as a belief in *something*. This belief still functions akin to the configuration of the institution as a belief in a greater being, but which he refuses to refer to or identify with in the dominant institution's terms. This conforms with the limited agency and ambivalence as explained by Butler (1997b, 17) that the ambivalence in the formation of the subject comes from the subject exceeding that power which forms it, and yet is still bound to it and is not living "in some free zone of its own making." Thus, Rufus rejects the subjugation of the church institution, yet is not completely disassociated from it.

The cemetery's compliance and collaboration with Death-Cast was already briefly mentioned in the previous section, but I shall elaborate on their operation as an institution here. As the boys are visiting Evergreens Cemetery they come upon a couple employees, and Mateo says that "in the space beside my mother's plot there's a man digging another grave while a caretaker installs a headstone with my name and dates of birth and death. I'm not even dead yet" (*The End*, 217). Earlier in the narrative, as Mateo is speaking with his herald, it is established that Death-Cast is able to manage funerals, and also takes care of inscriptions for tombstones through their website death-cast.com, and the herald instructs Mateo to: "fill out any special requests you may have for your funeral in addition to the inscription you'd like engraved on your headstone" (*The End*, 7). It is evident from these two passages that the cemetery is involved with Death-Cast, and to an extent with other institutions that arrange funerals like the church, as they receive the information regarding a person's death and final wishes. The gravediggers and caretakers then comply with the information received from Death-Cast even before any confirmation of the person's actual death.

The funeral is a concrete example of how since the introduction of Death-Cast the cultural tradition, ritual, of the funeral has changed massively, now actually affording the subject agency over the ritual, changed from a position that pre-Death-Cast used to be absolutely devoid of agency (due to the death of the subject), and exemplifying the impact their

emergence had on the mundane rituals of life and even language itself. The word "funeral" in the narrative's present is used to refer to a custom now performed while the subject is still alive, eulogies given to the still living addressee; in the following passage it is Rufus's funeral, and his foster parent Jenn Lori is about to share emotional memories: "This is my first Decker funeral, since my family didn't care about throwing one for themselves[.] […] Maybe if I'd gone to others I'd be ready for the way Jenn Lori speaks directly to me" (*The End*, 59).

The brief passage where school is discussed offers compelling illustration of its connection to Death-Cast, and even more it is another example of the function of a person or official in power performing a linguistic interpellation similar to Althusser's original hail and police officer. In the following passage, Mateo's inquiries regarding Rufus's past actions initially makes Rufus respond with silence. This makes Mateo reminisce his past history classes. The passage illustrates the schools function as an ISA particularly well:

> His silence is an awkward one, like those times in history class when we reviewed monumental events from the BDC days. My teacher […] would tell us "how good we got it" for having Death-Cast's services. He'd assign us reports where we reimagined periods of significant deaths—the plague, the world wars, 9/11, et cetera—and how people would've behaved had Death-Cast been around to deliver the warning. The assignments, quite honestly, made me feel guilty for growing up in a time with a life-changing advancement, sort of like how we have medicine to cure common diseases that killed others in the past.
> (*The End*, 172)

Furthermore, Althusser argued that schools function as ISA and this passage clearly illustrates exactly that. The teacher, holding a powerful position in the power structure of the institution, has an ideological motivation which is evident from his positive value judgment of Death-Cast. His perspective affirms the hegemony of the death ethos and the benefit of Death-Cast on society. This ideology he intends to affirm in his students with a task which urges them to imagine a subject position of a person existing before Death-Cast during a time of extreme crisis and death. Evidently, the change of subject position as a means of empathising with the fates of people of the past is a successful exercise in instilling subjection to the dominant Death-Cast because Mateo expresses feeling guilt for not understanding the value of this "life-changing advancement" (ibid.). This exercise functions as a method of interpellation, as the exercise happens in the social discourse of the classroom, where the shift between the subject positions of pre- and post-Death-Cast eras affirms the position of the individual into the post-Death-Cast subjectivity. Jessi Snider's (2016, 53) examination of the interpellation of the

character of Sissy in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) happens similarly in a school and classroom environment, and she writes how "ISAs […] including […] the school […] have the power to influence and define the way in which an individual situates herself in the world." To further conform to Althusser's original concept of interpellation with its lack of agency afforded to the subject, the fact that Mateo connects the awkward silence to this classroom memory seems to further suggest that he did not offer any resistance to this interpellation, instead complying in silence.

Like the cemetery, the hospital's involvement with Death-Cast is a direct collaboration and sharing of information: "Doctors work closely with Death-Cast, obviously, receiving instant updates about their terminal patients who've signed off on this agreement. When the alerts come in, nurses dial back on life support for their patients, prepping them for a 'comfortable death' instead" (*The End*, 112–113). On top of the direct involvement of Death-Cast in the operation of the hospital, what this passage illustrates is that also the hospitals function as an ISA; the doctors' and nurses' relation of subjection to Death-Cast. Instead of holding the executive power over their patients' treatment, the doctors are now following Death-Cast's orders, tailoring their patients' treatment according to their information. Keeping in mind that the interpellation of the alert is completely discoursal, and that the heralds do not offer any information about the cause of death of the individual, the narrative seems to suggest that the doctors and nurses are simply following the linguistic instruction received from Death-Cast, and in addition to their general terminal state, no prior physiological changes need be apparent on the patient. Mateo's reference to the obviousness of this collaboration suggests how deeply ingrained the ideology of Death-Cast's involvement in the societal institutions is, and how the hospital further interpellates their patients and their family.

3.3.2 Businesses in the Death Ethos and Consumerism

The clearest examples of consumerist activities that function within the death ethos, and flourish through the subjection of Deckers by the ISAs, are the Make-A-Moment, World Travel Arena, and Clint's Graveyard businesses, in addition to the discounts that are specifically offered to Deckers which I have discussed earlier. These services are the clearest examples of capitalist consumerism in the novel, because the narrative establishes a monetary exchange to access the services, or encourages spending money via discounts, and their services are marketed through the other ISAs, especially the social media in the death ethos, as I shall demonstrate in the next section.

Although non-Deckers are welcome to partake in their services as well, it is established in the narrative that all services aim precisely to provide to the Deckers, for example through direct notifications to Deckers' phones, or through marketing in the death ethos social media. Clint's Graveyard is described early in the narrative by Rufus as "Decker-friendly" (*The End*, 36). Two of the services also function through the medium of simulation: Make-A-Moment offers Deckers the possibility to experience otherwise dangerous extreme sports or similar exhilarating activities through safe rooms combining virtual reality and contraptions further simulating a certain activity (*The End*, 181–186), and World Travel Arena offers simulations of world travelling, with rooms within the arena complex decorated and made to resemble different countries and their cultural and natural landscapes (*The End*, 281–290).

Make-A-Moment and World Travel Arena both have clear representations of interpellation, but all three businesses partake in some way in the monetary exchange interpellation and consumerism. In Make-A-Moment, as the boys are at the front desk, they pay 240 \$ each (*The End*, 182), and Mateo narrates it is a "price you can get away with charging people whose savings accounts would go to waste otherwise" (ibid.). Before this they must first sign "a six-page long waiver, which isn't uncommon for businesses serving Deckers" (ibid.). Although McKenna III (2023, 93) discusses Althusser in the sphere of social media, when he mentions the practice of logging in as interpellation, he also mentions the act of "agreeing to the terms and conditions." Although the sphere is different the practice is similar, and by signing their name, the boys comply and are further interpellated as Deckers, who must agree to certain conditions prepared for people in their situation.

In World Travel Arena there is a further representation of interpellation which is exceptionally marked. As the boys are preparing to go inside the complex and wait for Lidia to arrive, they must first stand in one of three lines "organized by urgency, as in, those with sicknesses versus those of us dying today by some unknown force versus bored visitors" (*The End*, 277). As Mateo has taken his place in line, thus accepting and projecting to others his own status, he gazes at the different lines and the interpellated subjects that make them up, which he further typifies according to the status their place in line is supposed to signify: "The line to our right is full of laughter, selfies, texting. The line to our left has none of that. There's a young woman with a scarf wrapped around her head […]; some are disfigured or badly burned" (ibid.). Moreover, the Arena itself further partakes in this typification by making everyone wear wristbands with colours signifying their subjectivity according to their

status: "Rufus and I receive yellow wristbands (for healthy Deckers) and Lidia an orange one (visitor), and we proceed in" (*The End*, 281).

Unlike Make-A-Moment, the World Travel Arena does not directly require Deckers to pay for their services, instead an employee tells the boys: "Suggested donation is one dollar for Deckers" (*The End*, 281), while "[c]ost for guests is going to be one hundred dollars" (ibid.). Mateo, however, chooses to give more: "I pay for all our tickets, donating an extra couple hundred dollars in the hope that the arena remains open for many, many years. What the arena provides for Deckers seems incomparable, way better than the Make-A-Moment station" (ibid.). Similarly, Mateo pays extra at Clint's Graveyard's entrance as well: "I drop some cash into a plastic donations container and wait for Rufus to pay his way in" (*The End*, 301). They also order drinks when inside (*The End,* 305). Considering that the narrative does not establish that Mateo would have visited these places before, only that he has read about them on social media, it suggests that the marketing and interpellation for these private businesses is strong enough to compel him to give them more money than necessary. Since the services are heavily involved in the death ethos, the experiences offered by these services clearly suggest a perceived absolute value inherent in these experiences: they are worthy of money and more importantly, worthy of the person's extremely limited time (this applies to social media as well, discussed in the next section): they are implicated in the experience of selfhood so integrally that pursuing them as you are about to die is appropriate. With this I do not only refer to the fictional services themselves, but the experience they claim to provide: the thrills of extreme sports, the experiences of travelling, and boldly singing and dancing at a club. As I explained in the chapter on my theoretical background, the meaning systems created by the ISAs have a determining impact on what individuals hold valuable and the discourse which define their subjectivity, which is precisely what these businesses represent.

However, the interpellation is not only for the death ethos market, but before the passage where Mateo donates money at the arena, he is described in the arena recognizing the other Deckers and their subjective but familiar situations, and empathising with them: "The sadness chokes me, not only for them [sick people on the line], and not even for myself, but for the others ahead of us in our line who were woken up from their safe lives and will hurtle into danger in the next few hours" (*The End*, 277; my clarification). This makes him ponder the lack of agency the individual has over their death, and how if he had his way, he would go in his sleep (ibid.). This entire procession is connected to his initial drive from his original interpellation, the alert, after which he aligned himself according to his own Being-towards-

death – to how he hoped to be active and experience things in the light of his death — and reiterates it here: "I would only go to sleep after I lived bravely, as the kind of person someone would want to wrap their arm around" (*The End*, 277–278). Altogether, I argue that this scene represents both the interpellation into the capitalist death ethos market and how that affects the behaviour of the characters, but also the donation motif includes Mateo configuring his subjectivity in reflection of the other Deckers, and further connecting it to the YA theme of Being-towards-death.

3.3.3 Social Media ISAs

Death-Cast and the death ethos represent a capitalist ideology most clearly in their involvement with the media and advertisement. Death-Cast has influenced entertainment in the culture of the novel, as it is mentioned how TV shows and the news incorporate the sound of the alert ringtone for dramatic effect (*The End,* 14) and how the lines from the heralds' interpellation routine are part of characters' storylines in TV shows and movies (*The End,* 20). Real-world media companies are also utilised to spread Death-Cast's ideology, as it is mentioned that Mateo has watched a documentary on Netflix about how much hospitals have changed post-Death-Cast (*The End*, 112). Significant ISAs in the novel are thus the media, like the news already mentioned, but especially social media. There are several examples of social media involved with the death ethos or made especially for the Deckers or about Deckers. There is for example *DumbDeaths*, a blog that accounts stories about dumb ways to die (*The End*, 12), and *Bangers*, a service which gathers Decker's online feeds for a challenge on who kills themselves most creatively, the most popular ones earning prizes for the Decker's family (*The End,* 292).

Treading the line between social media and generally social internet culture, dating apps are also represented in the narrative. The death ethos has given rise to two different dating apps: *Necro* and *Last Friend,* the latter playing a significant role functionally and identity-wise. The Last Friend application makes appearances in several instances, and the narrative even includes a chapter where the creator of the app is focalised. On Last Friend, the user creates a detailed profile either as dying or not dying (*The End*, 44), and is then able to modify which other users can communicate with them by adjusting certain parameters (*The End*, 72), and connect via chatting and video calls (*The End*, 75). Unlike Necro, the Last Friend app is free of charge (*The End*, 42). Creating a profile on Last Friend functions according to McKenna III's argument for social media features as interpellation, and further demonstrates capitalist

functions in the digital realm. After downloading the app, Mateo is first prompted to choose from a drop-down menu whether he is "Dying Today" or "Not Dying Today" (*The End*, 44). After choosing "Dying Today," the app conveys the collective condolences of the Last Friend corporation: "We here at Last Friend Inc. are collectively sorry for this loss of you," and asks to "fill out the profile for best results" (ibid.).

Significantly, the term "Last Friend" has also entered the common vernacular to define a person one has made friends with on the last day of their lives. The boys use this term to define their relationship on many occasions. Mateo uses it to introduce Rufus to his father's nurse Elizabeth: "Elizabeth, this is Rufus, he's my… he's my Last Friend" (*The End,* 116), and similarly Rufus introduces Mateo to his ex-girlfriend Aimee: "'This is Mateo,' I say. 'He's my Last Friend',," to which Mateo reacts by waving (*The End*, 164–165). In their recognition of each other as "Last Friends," and their repeated usage of the term, the boys exhibit the recognition similar to the Althusserian hail, where the subject in turning around positions themselves as the subject. Last Friend is thus a similar identity category used in the context of the death ethos as Decker. Both categories are marked in the context of the dead and the dying, either to mark the death of the subject, or their relation to a dying individual. Moreover, both identity categories have been instilled on the society through the emergence of an enterprise (Death-Cast for Decker, Last Friend Inc. for Last Friend) functioning on the market of the death ethos. Thus, besides simply marking the subject in the death ethos, both of these identity categories are examples of interpellation into the capitalistic structure within the death ethos, as they have emerged from the discourse of these powerful corporations.

Further representing the operations of especially digital capitalism, the Last Friend app collects detailed information from the user, information which is curiously thorough considering that according to Mateo the app is "designed for lonely Deckers and for any good soul who wants to keep a Decker company in their final hours" (*The End*, 42). The app asks the user to disclose their name, age, gender, height, weight, ethnicity, sexual orientation and occupation (*The End*, 44–45). Furthermore, the user can share information like interests and favourite movies, briefly describe "who they were in life," and provide their bucket list and final thoughts (ibid.). The company does not exist in isolation from other companies, as comes clear later in the narrative, in a chapter which focalises the creator of the app, Dalma Young, and describes how the company is looking to establish a collaboration with Facebook and Twitter through "a new Last Message feature that will allow respective users to prepare their final tweets/statuses" (*The End*, 329). As mentioned before, it is established that the Last

Friend app is free to use, but as McKenna III argues, social media companies provide free services in exchange for consumer data (2023, 93), data which he terms new digital material (2023, 97). Similarly, van Dijck (2013, 65) argues that online companies offer free service as an exchange for user data to sell advertising based on them, a model which, according to her, most companies modelled after Facebook.

Although it is not directly mentioned which of the companies sell or share user data to whom, it still clearly happens in the narrative in the manner of sharing consumer data as described by McKenna III and van Dijck. How companies share digital data and use it for marketing, further capital gain, and reinforcing "the digital means of production" (McKenna III 2023, 97) is explicit in the passage where it is established that data such as Decker status and location of both boys are tracked and used for advertisement purposes: "Mateo checks his phone and gets the same notification–another message we both got today: Make-A-Moment location nearby: 1.2 miles" (*The End,* 162). This proves to be a successful strategy, as the boys visit the business later in the narrative (*The End*, 179–186). McKenna III (2023, 102) identifies representations of digital labour in *The Circle*, one of which is the already mentioned data collection. He writes how "this data is tracked, analyzed, and then sold to third parties, typically without consent or awareness by the original users of that data" (ibid.). This is further evidence that the Decker interpellation routine does not merely exist to set the individual on a path to their death, but the Deckers are also their own consumer identity, with services and discounts aimed at them to spend their last living moments spending money and consuming what the enterprises and businesses in the death ethos market offers them, whether online or offline.

Death-Cast itself participates in this promotion of businesses and services during the alert. The heralds suggest activities for the Decker, first to Mateo: "The herald goes on about how life isn't always fair, then lists some events I could participate in today" (*The End,* 6), and later to Rufus: "Victor tells me […] special festivals I have zero interest in attending (especially not a yoga class on the High Line, rain or no rain), […] and restaurants with the best Decker discounts if I use today's code" (*The End*, 18–19). Not only are there businesses mainly targeting Deckers, but other businesses are also accommodating their services to Deckers and attracting them through discounts, as Mateo narrates when the boys visit a diner: "'There's a Decker discount on the back. Everything is free, if you can actually believe that.' This is a first. In all the *CountDowners* feeds I've read, the Deckers go to five-star restaurants

expecting to be treated like kings with courtesy meals, but are only ever offered discounts" (*The End*, 132–133).

The other significant application in the narrative is *Necro,* which is described as "intended for anyone who wants a one-night stand with a Decker–the ultimate no-strings-attached app" (*The End*, 42). The impressions given by Mateo regarding Necro are revealing of the values present in the narrative, and tie into the larger YA discourses surrounding sexuality and death as recognised by Trites (2000). Mateo narrates: "I've always been so disturbed by Necro, and not just because sex makes me nervous" (*The End*, 42). This is immediately juxtaposed with his characterisation of the Last Friend application: "But no, the Last Friend app was created so people can feel worthy and loved before they die" (ibid.). Regarding Necro's cost of 7.99 $ per day he comments that the cost "disturbs me because I can't help but feel as if a human is worth more than eight bucks" (ibid.). Later in the narrative, after telling Rufus he has not dated anyone, Mateo ponders on Rufus's reaction that "maybe he wants to crack a joke about how I should sign up for Necro so I don't die a virgin, as if sex and love are the same thing" (*The End*, 238). Besides in connection with Mateo, the only other time the narrative references Necro is in the chapter focalising Vin, a suicide-bomber who blows up a gym, and who is described as having used the application and getting frustrated over being rejected on it (*The End,* 234–235).

Mateo's attitude towards sex is thus rather dismissive, and he connects it, or at least the act of non-romantic sex with someone previously unknown, with callousness and degeneration, and juxtaposes it with love and worthiness. Necro is associated with unfavourable situations and emotions. The name of the application also indicates a direct correlation between sex and death. The linking of sex and death is not uncommon in YA literature, and Trites (2000, 122) claims that they are "mutually implicated" in carnality and procreation, and that knowledge of sex implicates an awareness of death. Furthermore, two users on Last Friend that Mateo feels inclined to stop chatting to, Wendy Mae (*The End*, 53) and Philly (*The End*, 55), reveal that their motivation for using the application is to find sexual partners. Although Mateo tries to justify Last Friend as the more positive of the two applications and assign the users with motives of compassion, he is subjected to the linking of sex and death either way. The manner sex and death are represented in these passages suggests, especially considering how Mateo aligns himself according to Being-towards-death as discussed in section 3.2, that romance and love are more valuable and worthy ambitions in the face of death.

It is within the Last Friend discourse that Mateo's hesitation to disclose his sexuality first becomes apparent. The text incorporates Mateo's full profile on Last Friend, and the spot for sexuality reads: "Orientation: <skip>" (*The End*, 45). In colloquial terms, he is "in the closet" (my term) regarding his sexuality, a state he himself admits to Rufus in the latter parts of the narrative, in a sentence which indirectly refers back to the original omission of the information on Last Friend: "Thanks for being the best Last Friend a closet case could ask for" (*The End*, 306). As Mateo's and Rufus's profiles on Last Friend are the only profiles disclosed in full in the narrative, they are juxtaposed. Rufus is open about his sexuality and has claimed a subject position within the discourse of sexuality, by defining himself in a public forum (Last Friend) as bisexual (*The End*, 73).

Rufus exhibits agency over this sexual subjectivity by addressing it in dialogue with Mateo, when he answers Mateo's question if he ever came out to his parents: "'On our last day together, yeah.' […] I'm really proud I spoke up to get that moment out of them. 'My mom got really sad because she'd never get a chance to meet her future daughter- or son-in-law'" (*The End*, 176). This can be contrasted with an earlier scene in the hospital, when Mateo is trying to open up to his comatose father, and based on the novel's other themes of non-heterosexuality it is arguable he is trying to come out: "You were always asking me […] to tell you more about my life […], and I always shut down. […] [S]ometimes the words don't come out until you're alone. Even that's not guaranteed. Sometimes the truth is a secret you're keeping from yourself because living a lie is easier" (*The End*, 118).

Regarding sexuality Mateo's subjectivity is limited, he is unable to have the agency in language to define who he is sexually within the ISAs of social media nor family. His anxieties about sex are limiting, as it is made clear that he values romantic relationships over sexual ones, instead of finding a positive aspect in both. He does have desire, for he is described as partaking in masturbation "because sex with an actual person scares me" (*The End*, 6). Alike Trites's (2000, 92–93) observation of the ideological preference for romantic relationships in YA fiction, James (2009, 93) observes a similar ideological position in queer YA literature, specifically in Sue Hines's *Out of the Shadows* (1998), where she claims the "politicising of homosexuality is weakened" in the favourable representations of monogamous relationships over casual sex. In four YA novels with queer characters she has analysed, the narratives simultaneously offer representations of alternative sexualities and resistance to normativity, but also portrays death in connection with normatively transgressive behaviour (James 2009, 111). I do not claim that *The End* directly politicises queerness, at

least not significantly, yet as I have demonstrated, it incorporates these ideological positions that are apparent in the other YA novels as well. Moreover, while I also do not claim that a direct didacticism can be drawn from the close proximity of representations of death and same-sex relationships in *The End*, the novel nevertheless does portray them as subsequent. The climax of the boys reciprocal feelings acknowledged at Clint's Graveyard (*The End*, 308–309) is almost directly followed by a near-death experience in the same setting when Peck and his gang are threatening to shoot Rufus (*The* End, 323–327), followed by the boys intimately confessing their love for each other while lying in Mateo's bed (*The End*, 343–344), a scene which is immediately followed by Mateo's death (*The End*, 347).

The most prevalent social media website in the novel is *CountDowners*. CountDowners is meant for Deckers and it is "where Deckers chronicle their final hours through statuses and photos via live feeds" (*The End,* 3*)*. Mateo compares it to Twitter (ibid.), and it also allows for audience engagement: "[S]he was slow to updating […] to the point where viewers in the chat room assumed she'd died" (*The End*, 43). Further evidence for how Deckers are treated as a consumer identity is how the social media platforms cross-promote and advertise each other and other enterprises within the death ethos. It is mentioned that Mateo is familiar with the Last Friend app through CountDowners: "And that's what this popular app often promoted on *CountDowners* provides. The Last Friend app is designed for lonely Deckers" (*The End,* 42). Later, he expresses a positive attitude towards World Travel Arena because he has read about it on CountDowners: "It's the best way to travel the world in a single day. CountDowners speak highly of it" (*The End,* 137). Furthermore, it is established that the Deckers share their thoughts on Death-Cast and their experiences regarding the alert: "I've read tons of feeds where Deckers admitted to asking their heralds how they would die, but it's basic knowledge that those specifics aren't available to anyone" (*The End*, 6). CountDowners is thus a social media community meant to promote content creation by those interpellated as Deckers, and the consumption of and interaction with that content by the larger public, who are further interpellated into the death ethos through it.

The content on CountDowners is ranked similarly to how many real social media sites function: there is some kind of system in place to divide it according to popularity, recentness, locality and so on: "There are five tabs on the site – Popular, New, Local, Promoted, Random" (*The End,* 33). The category system suggests that the service surveys which creator or content is popular, and the "Promoted" tab suggests that there is some further method of gaining visibility for your content through payment or other merit. Concurrently, the

"Popular" tab suggests there is a method to measure the popularity (likes, views, shares, etc.) of the content, and thus further promote it with its own section. CountDowners seemingly follows a similar system of how social capital for users leads to economic capital for the company as explained by van Dijck (2013, 16).

Thus, the personal content which includes references to the recurring discourse, applications and services within the death ethos, the affective audience engagement with it, and the effective categorisation and promotion of that content, exemplify how users and content creators on CountDowners function similar to how McKenna III (2023, 101) has recognised the representation of digital labour in *The Circle*: "Individual subjectivity is exploited by the Circle as labor-for-profit, engineered for consumers to consume each other's content and data, as individuals interpret each other within the digital context" (original spelling). He claims this has three functions for individual subjectivity: consuming, influencing, and interpellating, and that the general narrative function is to represent the influence media has on class dominance via exploitation of digital labour (ibid.). Although not as extensive of a representation, I argue that *The End* represents the social media function in a similar way: the companies*, especially CountDowners,* through the exploitation of the Deckers as labour through the sharing of their personal experiences, repeats the ideology within the death ethos, and asserts a power dynamic between company, content creator, and further Deckers and the public, to keep their media and service operating. As mentioned, there are affective personal stories shared on the platform, which leads to further personal identification and intersubjectivity, as exemplified in the character of Mateo, analysed next to discuss how within this particular ISA the subjectivity of the individual is represented.

Mateo confesses to reading CountDowners daily (*The End*, 137), and he also uses it early in the narrative to distract himself from thinking about his End Day (*The End,* 27). There are a few stories of other Deckers on CountDowners briefly shared in the narrative, and they offer an example of how the online narrative and discourse creates concise identities. The first story of "twenty-two-year-old Keith" (*The End*, 25) I shall quote at length here because the passage illustrates in a brief text a detailed personhood, although the narrative itself claims otherwise:

> His statuses didn't provide much content about his life, only that he'd been a loner who preferred runs with his golden retriever Turbo instead of social outings with his classmates. He was looking to find Turbo a new home because he was pretty sure his father would give ownership of Turbo to the first available person, which could be anyone because Turbo is so beautiful. […]. But before Keith gave up his dog, he and Turbo were running through their favorite spots one last time and the

feed stopped somewhere in Central Park.
(*The End*, 25–26)

From this passage the reader learns both what Keith has deemed important to share about himself in light of his death, and also how Mateo has interpreted it, which are the following: he is fairly young, a loner, a dog-lover, likes Central Park, and is a caring and active person. His subjectivity consists of at least him being a Decker, a son, and a student.

Two other CountDowners stories are briefly narrated, first: "Geoff received his call four minutes after midnight and is already out int the world, heading to his favorite bar, where he hopes he doesn't get carded because he's a twenty-year-old who recently lost his fake ID" (*The End*, 33). Second: "Marc is a former social media manager for a soda company, which he's mentioned twice in his profile, and he isn't sure if his daughter will reach him in time. It's almost as if this Decker is right in front of me, snapping his fingers in my face. I have to visit Dad" (*The End*, 34). Later, the boys repeat many of the activities and even narratives described here. They visit Central Park, where Mateo places personal significance on the park, like Keith before him: "[W]e've spent a lot of time in Central Park too. [Dad] loves Shakespeare in the Park. Plays aren't really my thing, but I went with him to one, and it was fun for me because the theatre reminded me of coliseums in my favorite fantasy novels and gladiator matches in Rome from movies" (*The End*, 171–172). They also visit a club, and Rufus is worried whether they let him inside due to being underage, similar to Geoff (*The End*, 295). As Marc's content compels Mateo, they also visit Mateo's father in the hospital (*The End*, 109). Although only Marc's narrative is consciously and intersubjectively connected to a personal need by Mateo, the repetition of these narrative themes and processions are clearly represented as belonging to the discourse of the death ethos and the CountDowners ISA, and aligning oneself according to Being-towards-death.

Although Mateo connects Marc's story to his personal life, and subsequently gains motivation for action through it, the narrative also offers examples of a false sense of connectivity that the social media site offers. As I have mentioned before, Mateo struggles with anxiety and his initial goal in the narrative is to overcome it and get active, and Mateo uses CountDowners to distract himself from these thoughts that the End Day invokes in him. He offers a justification for his CountDowners use: "Scrolling through *CountDowners* is a very serious downer. But I can't look away because every registered Decker has a story they want to share. […] If I'm not going outside, I can be online for others" (*The End*, 33). After a brief explanation of the features of the site, he follows this with "It could've been nice to have some company today, I

guess" (ibid.). McKenna III (2023, 108) argues that social media functions on a paradoxical loop, where people are allured to join with of a sense of community, but end up feeling more isolated, which leads to more use of social media and further isolation. Similarly, Mateo uses CountDowners to connect with the stories offered there, and regardless of justifying it as being "online for others," he simultaneously longs for company.

Mateo also uses CountDowners to limit Rufus's resistance against the Death-Cast interpellation. When Rufus expresses doubts whether there was a possibility Death-Cast was wrong when his parents died, Mateo refers to the subjective experiences of other Deckers on CountDowners to subjugate him to the powerlessness of their situation: "Don't do this to yourself. There are entire forums on *CountDowners* for Deckers confident they're special. When Death-Cast calls, that's it. Game over. There isn't anything you could've done and there isn't anything they could've done differently" (*The End*, 231). However, unlike Mateo, Rufus rejects the use of CountDowners, exemplifying an effective, but in Butlerian terms limited, agency in his rejection of the interpellation into this ISA of the death ethos.

Already when they first discuss it, when Mateo mentions how he knows World Travel Arena through CountDowners, Rufus both rejects the site and expresses a value judgement on Mateo's obsession with it:

> "I never read that stuff," Rufus says.
> "I read it daily," I admit. "It's comforting seeing other people breaking out."
> Rufus glances up […], shaking his head. "Your Last Friend is gonna make sure you go out with a bang."
> (*The End*, 137)

Later when Mateo suggests mirroring their behaviour against what he has seen on CountDowners, and repeat a ritualistic tradition he has seen done on the site, which is to part with ashes, Rufus offers further rejection:

> "The 'Parting with Ashes' forum on *CountDowners* is really popular and—"
> "The Plutos and I took care of that a month back," Rufus interrupts; I should try and rein in my stories about online strangers.
> (*The End*, 221)

While Rufus's rejection evidently makes Mateo question the appropriateness of his enthusiasm over the site, he does still further refer to the site, as exemplified in my discussion above.

As I discussed in my theoretical background, the constitution of subjectivity is not a straightforward process. Alike McKenna III's argument about the compelling of users in social media discussed in the previous chapter, Mateo later suggests that Rufus sets up his own CountDowners profile (*The End*, 157). However, Rufus reiterates his rejection: "Nah, that stuff isn't me. I never even got on board with Tumblr or Twitter. Just Instagram. The photography stuff is still pretty new, just a few months. Instagram is dope" (*The End*, 157). Rufus uses the different social media platforms as different identity categories, each signifying a certain way of presenting selfhood, which especially CountDowners he does not identify with. Concurringly, each of them offers a different kind of subjectivity based on how they limit (or allow) their user to utilise their service through certain functions and mediums, and it is with Instagram where Rufus has found it preferable to project himself through photography.

Significant to Rufus's development is his use of photography as a medium to process subjectivity. According to Trites (2000, 124), YA narratives that involve photography often represent the act of photography as a method to discuss subject–object relations, connect it to themes of Being-towards-death, and especially the character's development regarding grief over death and loss. I shall first discuss a scene in the narrative, which does not happen in the context of social media, but which illustrates how Rufus's use of photography is represented, and ties into the themes of Being-towards-death, as discussed earlier.

As the relationship between the boys develops, Rufus applies his anxiety over his violent self to Mateo as well, after witnessing Mateo bury a dead bird (*The End,* 94–98). Rufus fears what Mateo might think about him should Mateo find out about his recent behaviour, demonstrating this through imagining Mateo's subjectivity, imagining his position in the present and in childhood, which seems to allude to Rufus's realisation of his own growth and the responsibilities that come with it, for guiltiness is no longer "written off" because of youth. He further plans to escape this confrontation with Mateo, and by extension with himself, through his approaching death:

> I'll bet you anything Mateo has no idea how to make a fist and couldn't imagine
> himself getting violent, not even when he was a kid and dumb shit was forgiven
> and written off because he was young. There's no way I'm telling him about Peck.
> I'll take it to my grave today.
> (*The End*, 99)

Rufus is able to occupy Mateo through a third-person subject position, recognize him as a particular subject, understand that Mateo is by nature a non-violent person, and thus different from him. This makes Rufus worried how Mateo will respond to him and his past violent acts. As Mateo does not yet know about his past, this shows how Rufus is coming to question the justification of his violence through recognising Mateo's perspective on it. Although the actual recognition and assertion of intersubjectivity, as explained by Benjamin (1988, 21), have not yet occurred, the subject, Rufus, finds himself in the alluded and anticipated reaction from Mateo.

The act which instigates Rufus's introspection discussed in the previous paragraph is when he takes a photograph of Mateo burying the bird: "[A] flash goes off behind me. I turn to find Rufus aiming his phone's camera at me. 'Sorry,' Rufus says. 'Not every day you see someone burying a bird'" (*The End*, 98). The burial of the bird is one of Mateo's methods in the narrative to configure his own Being-towards-death, as he identifies with the bird through another encounter with a dying bird in his past (*The End*, 95), and a connection between the bird's death and Deckers: "I like the idea of a bird that died so tragically ahead of its time resting amid life here in the garden. I even imagine that this tree was once […] some Decker who was cremated" (*The End*, 97).

As Mateo is burying the bird, Rufus creates a subject-object relation between himself as the subject (photographer) and Mateo as the object (the one being photographed), while Mateo is himself in a subject–object interaction with the bird. Through the photographing, Rufus recognizes Mateo's subjectivity in this moment and perceives what he terms Mateo's goodness, as he begins his chapter immediately following the taking of the photograph: "Yo, Mateo is *too good*" (*The End*, 99). Rufus recognises Mateo's agency in the face of this witnessed death (of the bird), how he feels compelled to help. This agency, from the perspective of the viewing subject (Rufus and the camera), defines a certain quality of Mateo's selfhood, his goodness. Moreover, recognising Mateo mediate the death of the bird and symbolically of himself, compels Rufus to starts his introspection to further define himself according to his own Being-towards-death, as was discussed above. According to Trites (2000, 135), "acknowledging death is one mark of maturity," and photographs always imply the death of their subject, creating a memorial for them.

Photography is implemented again in a scene which both further establishes the boys' intersubjectivity, and flips the previous subject–object dynamic, which further constructs

Rufus's selfhood, and ties into the theme of social media. When Mateo asks to see Rufus's Instagram account (*The End*, 157), Rufus feels exposed as the target of Mateo's attention and scrutiny: "My profile is public because I don't care if some stranger stumbles onto it. But it's crazy different watching a stranger scroll through my photos. I feel exposed, like I'm stepping out of the shower and someone is watching me wrap a towel around my boys" (*The End*, 157). Rufus initially feels self-conscious as the directness of the interaction makes it more intimate, juxtaposed to the faceless stranger stumbling on his profile without him witnessing it, suggesting that such an act is almost agentless. While the passage discussed in the previous paragraph had Rufus only imagining the intersubjective recognition and assertion, now he is firmly placed in interaction with another subject determining him. The passage describes how he posts his photos in black and white as a method to project his grief after his family died: "I keep my photos in black and white because my life lost color after they died" (*The End,* 158). After Mateo contemplates that he thought people used Instagram just to use Instagram (ibid.), Rufus responds with "Old school" (ibid.), indicating he thinks of himself as "old school." He receives the assertion for his identification with the romanticised past, photography and grieving method from Mateo: "'Your photos look old school,' Mateo says. He shifts, looking at me with wide eyes. He smiles at me for the first time and yo, this is not the face you see on a Decker" (*The End*, 159).

However, as Mateo inspires Rufus to further agency, he is actually also interpellating him into repeating the practices of the death ethos social media. After Rufus rejects his initial suggestion of setting up a CountDowners profile, Mateo suggests Instagram for posting about his final day instead: "[Y]ou can post everything here. […] But I think you should post your life in color…. Let that be how the Plutos remember you" (ibid.). Rufus agrees: "I actually really like this. The Plutos can revisit the times I lived with them in black and white, […] and my End Day will have its own unfiltered contrast" (ibid.). Thus, a juxtaposition is created between the pre-interpellation self and the Decker self as Rufus aligns the way he projects himself according to Being-towards-death, his End Day. The way the phrase "unfiltered contrast" is juxtaposed with the black and white suggests a certain authenticity or realness now projected by the photos, as if by removing the filter, the obscuring layer indicating his grief is removed as well, akin to the clarity of personal being in Heidegger's Being-towards-death.

The reversal in the subject–object dynamic follows directly from this, as Rufus wants his picture taken by Mateo. Unlike in the previously discussed photography scene, now Mateo is

the subject with the camera and Rufus the object being photographed. As Rufus views the final photograph, occupying Mateo's perspective and looking at himself as the object of Mateo's photographing, the subject of the photo, the passage reiterates the many themes regarding Rufus's development established hitherto from the family baggage to contempt for perceived fakeness:

> The photo is surprisingly dope […]. Mateo caught me looking sad and proud all at once, like my parents looked the day Olivia graduated high school. And the front wheel of my bike makes a cameo too. […] I upload the picture, unfiltered. I consider captioning it with #EndDay, but I don't need fake sympathetic […] comments[.] […] I hope they remember me as I was and not as the guy who punched in someone's face earlier for no real good reason.
> (*The End*, 159–160)

Like Rufus recognised Mateo's perspective and agency earlier, recognising Mateo's will to do good and how it determined his selfhood, through a third-person view Rufus is now able to recognise himself as the object of other people's remembering (the guy who punched someone), and understands his capacity for agency, through his uploading of the photograph, to overwrite any negative views his friends may have of him. Trites (2000, 125) states that a photograph is able to represent both an "individual's subjectivity and objectivity," and like language, it depends on the fluidity between them, which allows the adolescent to explore agency and be empowered. Trites (2000, 129) mentions that a way the subject–object relation is fluid in the YA literature depicting maturation, is that in order for the subject to understand their agency within subject positions, they must be able to hold object positions, to understand the larger cultural forces' influences on them. The reversal of the subject–object position allows Rufus access to other people's positions and their recognition of him as violent, which he hopes to erase, understanding how the photography coupled with social media gives him agency.

Overall, Rufus is able to resist Mateo's initial suggestion to use CountDowners, due to not recognising himself in the subjectivity offered by it. He demonstrates having a definite perspective on which of the available social medias (Twitter, Tumblr, CountDowners, Instagram) offer him preferable identification and tools to project his individuality, similar to Smith's (1988, 37) idea on the historical subjectivities and the personal history affecting the formation of any single subjectivity, and how it is not the direct result of any single discourse. Indeed, Rufus's decision to use Instagram is actually implementing the methods and discourse from CountDowners as well, as is evident in the former quoted passage. Rufus's content-

creating on Instagram is juxtaposed with the use of CountDowners, and for the rest of the narrative he continues this practice further, when he photographs and posts about his experiences during his End Day, the experiences themselves often connected to services and businesses operating in the sphere of the death ethos. Although he initially rejects using the #EndDay hashtag, he soon after uses a very similar hashtag #LastFriend (*The End*, 186), signifying almost the same thing as the former hashtag, and which signifies the theme of his content. It also promotes the Last Friend app, and since his page is public, as was established earlier, makes it thus easier for further users to find and consume. Furthermore, the photo with the hashtag is of Rufus and Mateo visiting another ISA, the Make-A-Moment business (ibid.). Just before, he already uploaded a photo of the entrance to Make-A-Moment (*The End,* 180). Later, he also uploads a photo of the sign outside Clint's Graveyard (*The End,* 297), and takes photos outside World Travel Arena as well (*The End*, 277), although it is not mentioned whether he uploads them.

Rufus thus appropriates the discourse and personal narrative-construction from CountDowners and applies it to his Instagram use, and further promotes the businesses in the death ethos. Smith (1988, xxxiv) explains how the individual's dialectic configuration of subjectivities make some subject-positions more preferable, and similarly Rufus is able to legislate among the different subjectivities offered in social media. However, the social media ISAs are interpellating the individuals as subjects within the death ethos regardless of the direct or non-direct affiliation of the platform with the death ethos, and both Mateo's and Rufus's utilisation of them functions akin to Wolff's explanation of how mass media colonizes the free time (here: dying time, although Mateo is described using CountDowners before the Death-Cast interpellation) of the working class (here: the Deckers) and influences what they should consume and enjoy (Wolff 2005, 232). Furthermore, the social media ISAs dictate the ways of "thinking in specific ways about their identities" (Wolff 2005, 225) and Rufus and Mateo act accordingly (ibid.). Ultimately, it is this documentation within the social media ISA Instagram that is purposefully left behind by Rufus to define the subjectivities and identities of both boys, alike the idea of photography as memorial (Trites 2000, 135), when he leaves his Instagram handle on a note by the bedside for Mateo's father to discover if he wakes up from his coma: "*I took photos all day on Instagram. You gotta see how he lived. My username is @RufusonPluto*" (*The End*, 366; italics in original signify hand-writing).

4   Conclusion

I had two key aims in this thesis. I started with the argument that in *The End* the societal, cultural, and personal functions and meanings of death have been powerfully ideologised, institutionalised, and subjugated. I have demonstrated how the Death-Cast company and their power hegemony in the society can be analysed according to Louis Althusser's theory on ideology and Ideological State Apparatus. The Death-Cast company represents the Althusserian State and their power functions akin to the ruling class in Althusser's theory: it is their ideology that is definitive in the society because they are able to interpellate anyone as Deckers, and they constantly reiterate this power and interpellation. I have demonstrated how the Death-Cast alert functions as an act of interpellation. From the representation of the ideology in the novel it is evident that the ideology was imposed on the pre-existing capitalist ideology and further implements its conventions. Death-Cast is a corporate entity holding hegemonic power within the state, and I have demonstrated how their interpellation, the subjugation of the individuals, leads to specific discourse and subject positions like Decker, who are further coaxed to take part in the services and commodities involved in the death ethos akin to capitalist appropriation.

I have also identified several institutions represented in the novel that instigate the ideology. I have demonstrated how these institutions function akin to Ideological State Apparatuses. These ISAs that I have identified in *The End* are the school, the church, the hospital, and the cemetery; the businesses *World Travel Arena*, *Make-A-Moment* and *Clint's Graveyard*; and the social media *Necro, Last Friend*, and *CountDowners*. I have demonstrated how the novel represents the ways in which all of these institutions, whether central organisations of society like hospitals, part of culture like social media, or part of economy like the World Travel Arena, have adapted to the altered society, and actually further interpellate individuals into the death ethos, and even benefit from the situation. They interpellate for example by placing the protagonists in subject positions of already-dead (the cemetery), by requiring identification as dying and further logging in (Last Friend), and by making them navigate and display their death- and sickness-related subjectivities and identities by queues and wristbands (World Travel Arena). The representations of the institutions repeat the capitalist conventions explained by the various scholars I have referred to, for example the church is represented as taking the opportunity to offer spiritual consolation and thus affirming the ideology, the Last Friend application gathers information, Necro and all the businesses involve money and

profit, and Death-Cast and CountDowners promote other businesses, CountDowners doing it through digital labour, as it is the users that promote the businesses on the platform.

My second argument was that *The End* follows the conventions of YA literature in its representations of the subjectivities of the two protagonists, Mateo and Rufus. Alike the characteristic features of *Entwicklungsroman* defined by Roberta Trites (2000), *The End* portrays its characters in conflict with authorities and institutions. As I have identified, several scenes represent the protagonists configuring their subjectivities through various perspectives, linguistic persons and subject–object relations within the institutional constraints, which concurs with Robyn McCallum's (1999) complementary view of humanist and post-structuralist approaches to subjectivity. Especially regarding death, *The End* is analogous with the representations of Martin Heidegger's Being-towards-death as identified in YA fiction by Trites (2000), and I have indicated multiple scenes where the narrative represents the connection of death to the protagonists aligning their subjectivity according to their pronounced awareness of their own mortality. I have demonstrated how the narrative displays the values of the characters within these death ethos ISAs, like Rufus's views on the church and spirituality, and Mateo's preference for romantic relationships over sex. The narrative linking of death and sex, and the displayed attitudes regarding sex, further concur with YA literature's dominant discourses, as defined by Trites (2000) and Kathryn James (2009).

In this thesis I have shown that the novel *They Both Die at the End* is profoundly concerned with death. The subject matter is approached from the perspective of subjectivity, especially YA subjectivity, combined with the analysis of death as ideology and ethos permeating the represented society and its institutions. Still, the approach and methodology of this thesis is fairly limited concerning the amount of material available for analysis in this particular novel. Further research could be done using especially a queer literary methodology, as I have only touched on the representations of queer identities and relationships and subsequent implications present in the novel. There is also a significant further institution, the institution of family, which I decided not to analyse due to the limitations of length on this thesis. The theme of family alone could likely fill another thesis, approached for example with a similar ISA methodology as I have used here and incorporating a methodology for the representations of personal selfhoods, such as the already mentioned queer methodology. Especially the masculinist aspects of Rufus's character could be analysed through a feminist methodology, since it is deeper than the inner conflict with violence discussed in this thesis, for example the narrative describes him as "the alpha dog" in the company of Malcolm and Tagoe (*The End*,

16). Current YA literature, especially queer-themed, could be analysed from the perspective of death and subjectivity, whether the tradition of narratively linking identity crisis, death, and sexual minorities as argued by James (2009) occurs, as it does in *The End*.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Finnish Summary

Tutkielmani käsittelee amerikkalaisen kirjailijan Adam Silveran kirjaa *They Both Die at the End* (2017; jatkossa *The End*). Kirja sijoittuu nuortenkirjallisuuden kategoriaan (engl. Young Adult literature), ja kertoo kahden nuoren pojan, Mateon (18-vuotta) ja Rufuksen (17-vuotta), viimeisestä elinpäivästä. Kirja sijoittuu New Yorkiin, syyskuun 5. päivään vuonna 2017. Kirjan maailmassa jokainen ihminen saa kuolinpäivänään ("End Day") puhelun Death-Cast nimisen yrityksen edustajalta, joka kertoo henkilölle tämän kuolevan kyseisen vuorokauden aikana. Kuolevia kutsutaan nimityksellä Decker. Kummatkin päähenkilöistä saavat kertomuksen alussa puhelun Death-Castilta, ja tarina seuraa poikien tutustumista toisiinsa, heidän kehittyvää romanttista suhdettaan, ja sitä mitä he päätyvät tekemään viimeisenä päivänään, kunnes molemmat lopulta kuolevat.

Itse Death-Cast-yrityksestä paljastetaan kirjassa varsin vähän, ja ainoa edustus narratiivissa yritykseen liittyvistä henkilöistä ovat puhelinsoittoja tekevät työntekijät, sanansaattajat ("herald"). Death-Castin perustaminen seitsemän vuotta ennen tarinan alkua johti suureen yhteiskunnalliseen muutokseen, ja edeltävää aikaa kutsutaankin nimityksellä "ennen Death-Castia" ("BDC"). Kirjassa kuvataan Death-Castin toiminnan vaikuttavan yhteiskunnan jokaisella tasolla: henkilökohtaisessa elämässä, instituutioissa, kulttuurissa, taloudessa ja valtiollisella tasolla. Monia muita yrityksiä ja palveluita on perustettu Death-Castin toiminnan aloittamisen myötä, ja nämä palvelut toimivat nimenomaan Death-Castin mahdollistamalla, kuolemaan kytkeytyvällä toimialalla. Myös sosiaalisella medialla on kirjassa suuri rooli, ja sen kuvataan toimivan toimialallaan myötävaikuttaen kuolemaan liittyvän ilmapiirin levittämiseen. Kutsun tutkielmassani tätä kuoleman toimintaa ja sen käyttöä eri yritysten ja instituutioiden toimesta ideologiaksi, ja analysoin sitä sen mukaisesti. Tätä kaiken läpileikkaavaa yhteiskunnan kuolemakeskeisyyttä kutsun tutkielmassani kuoleman eetokseksi.

Tutkielmani keskittyy osittain marxilaisen filosofin Louis Althusserin teoriaan koskien ideologian toimintaa kapitalistisessa yhteiskunnassa ja sen ideologisiin valtiokoneistoihin (engl. *Ideological State Apparatus*, jatkossa ISA), ja osittain nuortenkirjallisuuden tutkimukseen (engl. *Young Adult literary theory* tai *adolescent literary theory*). Keskeisimmät väitteet tutkielmassani ovat, että *The End* mukailee nuortenkirjallisuuden perinteisiä

konventioita kuvatessaan kuolemaa, instituutioita ja niihin kytkeytyvää päähenkilöiden subjektiivisuutta, ja että *The End* kuvaa yhteiskuntaa, jonka pääasiallinen määrittävä tekijä on sen kuoleman eetos, joka toimii kapitalistisin menetelmin, ja jossa kuoleman yhteiskunnalliset, kulttuuriset ja henkilökohtaiset toiminnat ja merkitykset ovat vahvasti ideologisoituja, institutionalisoituja ja alistettuja. Ideologian ja ISA-instituutioiden analysoimiseen käytän Althusserin lisäksi useita hänen teoriaansa hyödyntäviä tutkijoita. Subjektiivisuuden käsitteen selitän pääasiassa Paul Smithin ja Judith Butlerin teorioiden avulla. Analyysini nuortenkirjallisuuden tyypillisistä teemoista ja konventioista perustuu suurelta osin Roberta Tritesin työhön, mutta viittaan myös useisiin muihin nuortenkirjallisuutta käsitteleviin tutkijoihin.

Kuoleman vahva läsnäolo nuortenkirjassa ei ole mitenkään poikkeavaa. Trites (2000, 18) väittää, että juuri nuortenkirjallisuuden tapa käsitellä kuolemaa on tekijä, mikä erottaa sen lastenkirjallisuudesta ja niin sanotusta aikuisten kirjallisuudesta. Nuortenkirjallisuus kytkee kuoleman ja henkilöhahmon ymmärryksen omasta kuolevaisuudestaan siihen, miten hahmo kasvaa ja kehittyy, ja tulee oppineeksi, miten valta (engl. *power*) toimii, mikä onkin yksi nuortenkirjallisuuden merkittävimmistä määritelmistä (Trites 2000, 118-119). Käsitellessään kuoleman temaattista ja narratiivista roolia nuortenkirjallisuudessa, Trites (2000, 119) viittaa saksalaisen filosofin Martin Heideggerin ajatukseen Olla-kohti-kuolemaa (Sein-zum-Tode, engl. *Being-towards-death*), joka lyhyesti ilmaistuna tarkoittaa sitä, että yksilön kohdatessa suoraan oman kuolevaisuutensa ja loppunsa, voi hän ymmärtää oman olemuksensa ja potentiaalinsa kaikkein parhaimmin (Graham 2009, 81). Trites (2000, 117–119) käyttää tätä Heideggerin käsitettä kuvaamaan väittämäänsä siitä, miten nuortenkirjallisuudessa nuoret ymmärtävät kuoleman lopullisuuden, mikä vaikuttaa heidän kasvuunsa, päätöksiinsä, arvoihinsa ja toipumiseensa. Myös seksuaalisuudella on merkittävä rooli nuortenkirjallisuudessa, ja nuortenkirjallisuuden diskurssissa se esiintyy usein kytköksissä kuolemaan (Trites 2000, 122). Kuolema kytkeytyy myös nuortenkirjallisuuden tapaan kuvata samansukupuolisia seksuaalisia suhteita ja niihin liittyviä identiteettikriisejä (James 2009, 91).

Subjektin käsite on riippuvainen sosiaalisesta kontekstista ja diskurssista. Termin tarkoite voidaan ymmärtää joko havainnoitavan maailman tuotoksena, lähteenä, tai molempina (Smith 1988, xxviii). Subjekti voi tarkoittaa ja sisältää monenlaisia erilaisia tarkoitteita, esim. britannian kansalainen (joka itsessään on subjekti) on osa myös muunlaisia subjektiivisuuden diskursseja, kuten sukupuolijakoa, roolia omassa perheessään, tai kuluttajuutta, eikä koskaan ole täysin staattinen. (Smith 1988, xxxiv). Butlerin (1997b, 10) mukaan subjektin olemus on

kieleen pohjautuva, lingvistinen kategoria, johon yksilö tulee asettuneeksi hetkellisesti. Smithin (1988, xxxiv) mukaan yksilö on kykenevä jossain määrin vaikuttamaan siihen, millaisiin subjektipositioihin (engl. *subject position*) tulee asettuneeksi. Yksilöllä on siis kyky toimijuuteen (engl. *agency*). Butlerin (1997b, 15–16) mukaan vallan ja subjektin suhde on toisistaan riippuvainen, ja tästä syystä vallan synnyttämä subjekti on kykenevä myös itse vallankäyttöön. Vallan ylläpito vaatii sen jatkuvaa toistoa (ibid.). On olemassa myös muita käsityksiä subjektiivisuuden muodostumisesta, jotka eivät liity vain esimerkiksi instituutioiden vallankäyttöön. Intersubjektiivisuus (engl. *intersubjectivity*) viittaa subjektien muodostumiseen vuorovaikutuksessa toistensa kanssa, jolloin subjekti saa vahvistuksen olemukselleen toisen subjektin reaktiosta ja tunnustuksesta, ja siitä miten tunnistaa itsensä saamastaan vastareaktiosta (Benjamin 1988, 2021).

Subjektiivisuuden käsite liittyy vahvasti myös Althusseriin. Althusserin ([1971] 2001, 96) mukaan ISAt ovat ideologista valtaa käyttäviä yhteiskunnan instituutioita, kuten perhe, ja uskonnolliset, koulutukselliset, poliittiset, viestinnälliset ja kulttuurelliset instituutiot. Nämä instituutiot toteuttavat, osittain ristiriitaisesti, valtaa pitävän luokan ideologiaa (Althusser [1971], 100). Nämä ISAt muodostavat subjekteja niin sanotuilla kutsuhuudoilla, eli interpellaatioilla (engl. *interpellation*), kielillisesti välitetyillä ideologisilla positioilla, joihin yksilö kokee taipumusta asettua valtasuhteen vuoksi – Althusserin esimerkissä poliisi ja siviilihenkilö (Althusser [1971] 2001, 118). Amerikkalaisen kapitalismin ja konsumerismin kontekstissa yksilöt interpelloidaan hyväksymään ja arvostamaan kapitalistista hyväksikäyttöä (Wolff 2005, 226), ja tähän interpellaatioon osallistuvat muun muassa joukkotiedotusvälineet ja niissä esiintyvät mainokset, jotka määrittävät kulutustottumuksia (Wolff 2005, 232). Hieman samaan tapaan toimii myös sosiaalinen media, myös oma ISAnsa, jonka käyttäjistä sosiaalisen median yhtiöt keräävät dataa, ja ohjaavat heidän vuorovaikutustaan alustoillaan (McKenna III 2023, 92).

Näkemykseni mukaan *The End* -teoksessa Death-Cast yritys edustaa tätä Althusserin teorian mukaista valtaa pitävää luokkaa, joka käyttää kuolemaa yhteiskunnan ideologisena alistamis- ja vaikutuskeinona yhdessä yhteiskunnan ISA-instituutioiden avulla. Tutkielmassani analyysini näkökulma vaihtelee laajempien yhteiskunnallisten instituutioiden toiminnan ja yksilöllisen subjektiivisuuden analyysin välillä. Death-Cast ylläpitää valtaansa yhteiskunnan oleellisten instituutioiden toiminnan ja diskurssin ohjaamisella, sekä vaikuttamalla talouden toimintaan, mahdollistaen monien kapitalististen palveluiden ja hyödykkeiden toiminnan. Death-Cast ylläpitää valtaansa sen jatkuvalla toistolla, eli sillä miten he päivittäin

puhelinsoitoillaan alistavat ihmiset kuolemaansa. Ilman tätä toimintaa ja alistettavia ihmisiä, Death-Castilla ei olisi mitään merkitystä yhteiskunnalle. Tämä puhelinsoitto toimii siis interpellaationa yhteiskunnan kuoleman eetokseen, ja muistuttaa Althusserin ([1971] 2001, 118) esimerkin poliisin huudahdusta, jonka kohteeksi subjekti tunnistaa itsensä tahattomasti, kuten Mateo ymmärtää puhelinsoiton tarkoituksen, oman kuolevaisuutensa, jo pelkästä soittoäänestä. Lisäksi tämä soittoääni jo itsessään hyödyntää Althusserin ([1971] 2001, 117) tunnistamia käytännön rituaaleja, jotka toimivat ideologisina tunnuksina, sillä soittoäänen kuvataan muistuttavan kirkonkelloa. Tämä kuvaus Death-Castin interpellaatiosta mukailee Althusserin ([1971] 2001, 87) teorian työvoiman uusintamista (engl. *reproduction of labour power*), ja heidän niin sanotun ylijäämänsä (engl. *surplus value*) kapitalistista omimista (Wolff 2005, 224). Kirjassa näitä kuolevia, Deckereitä, houkutellaan viettämään vähiin käyvä aikansa ja käyttämään rahansa (joka jäisi eräällä tavalla "ylijääväksi" heidän kuoltuaan) erilaisissa kuoleman eetoksen kentällä toimivissa yrityksissä ja palveluissa.

Kuvaukset siitä, miten Mateo ja Rufus suhteuttavat omat tavoitteensa saamansa puhelinsoiton jälkeen, mukailevat Tritesin näkemystä nuortenkirjallisuuden tavasta käsitellä Olla-kohti-kuolemaa. Rufus, joka ensimmäisen kerran kohdataan narratiivissa pahoinpitelemässä entisen tyttöystävänsä Aimeen nykyistä poikaystävää, toivoo interpellaationsa jälkeen, etteivät Aimee ja muut hänen ystävänsä pitäisi häntä hirviönä. Tämä motiivi Rufuksen sisäisestä konfliktista ulkoisesti määrittävän väkivaltaisuuden ja sen sisäisen torjunnan välillä, ja siitä miten hänet tullaan muistamaan, toistuu useassa kohtaa narratiivia, ja analysoin sitä tutkielmassa erityisesti sosiaalisen median ISAn yhteydessä. Mateo puolestaan toivoo kykenevänsä poistua kotoaan ulos maailmaan kokemaan asioita, joita hänen kuolemanpelkonsa ja ahdistuksensa on tähän asti estänyt häntä tekemästä. Narratiivi kuvaa, miten Mateo käsittelee toiveitaan ja tavoitteitaan, kuvittelemalla itselleen tulevaisuuden subjektiivisuuden, "tulevaisuuden Mateon", jolle kuvitellut erilaiset subjektipositiot (kuten kulttuuri-identiteetti, seurustelusuhteet, transgressiivisuus) yhdessä luovat kokonaiskuvan siitä, millainen Mateo haluaisi olla. Tämän oivalluksen, ja Rufukselta saamansa intersubjektiivisen, vertaisen aseman tunnustamisen myötä Mateo löytää toimijuutta lähteä tavoittelemaan kokemuksia ulkomaailmaan. Nuortenkirjallisuuden representaatioissa kasvu liitetään intersubjektiivisuuteen, kun taas yksi solipsismin muoto on vaikeus tunnistaa oma toimijuutensa (McCallum 1999, 7). Myöhemmin narratiivissa Mateo viittaa takaisin hetkeen jolloin sai tietää kuolevansa, ja silloiseen "menneisyyden Mateoon", jonka on jättänyt taakseen, ja on nyt enemmän elossa kuin koskaan. Mateo osoittaa kykenevänsä hahmottamaan

omaa muutostaan näillä kuvitelluilla ajassa liikkuvilla subjektiivisuuksilla, joihin hän voi asettua, mutta joista hän pääsee myös irti.

Analyysissani tunnistan kirjasta instituutiot, jotka myötäilevät ideologisten valtakoneistojen (ISA) toimintaa: yhteiskunnan organisaatiot: kirkko, hautausmaa, koulu ja sairaala; kaupalliset toimijat: Make-A-Moment (virtuaalitodellisuus-elämyksiä tarjoava yritys), World Travel Arena (matkustamista simuloiva yritys) ja Clint's Graveyard (erityisesti kuoleville suunnattu yökerho); sosiaalinen media: Last Friend ja Necro -mobiilisovellukset sekä CountDowners-sivusto. Näistä kirkko on mukauttanut toimintaansa niin, että voi öisin tarjota palvelujaan Deckereille, vahvistaen näin kuoleman eetosta ja hyötyen siitä. Hautausmaan kuvataan saavan tiedon henkilön kuolemasta ennen kuin tämä on kuollut, ja Mateo tulee näin nähneeksi oman hautansa ja haudankaivajansa. Death-Cast hallinoi myös hautajaisia ja hautakiviä. Koulussa Mateo on oppinut Death-Castia myötäilevän kuolema-ideologian, joka hyödyntää myös ajallisia subjektiivisuuksia ja niihin samaistumista, jotta Mateo on saatu suhtautumaan positiivisesti Death-Castin toimintaan, ja näin interpelloitu jo ennen kuolinpäiväänsä osaksi kuoleman eetosta. Sairaalan kuvataan tekevän yhteistyötä Death-Castin kanssa, ja lääkärien ja hoitajien vähentävän potilaan hoitoa Death-Castilta saamien tiedonantojen mukaisesti, joka osaltaan kuvaa myös lääkärien ja hoitajien (ja vastaavasti myös aiemmin mainitun haudankaivajan) alisteista asemaa suhteessa Death-Castiin.

Make-A-Moment veloittaa päähenkilöitä palvelustaan, kun taas World Travel Arena tarjoaa palvelujaan Deckereille suositeltua yhden dollarin lahjoitusta vastaan, mutta veloittaa enemmän ei-kuolevilta kävijöiltä. Make-A-Moment interpelloi kävijöitä laittamalla heidät allekirjoittamaan pitkän vastuuvapaussopimuksen, kun taas World Travel Arena laittaa asiakkaansa jonottamaan oman kuolemisstatuksensa mukaisessa jonossa: kuolemansairaat (joita narratiivi vielä kuvaa Mateon perspektiivistä tyypillistävin ulkoisin merkein, kuten päähuivilla), Deckerit ja terveet, sekä antaa näille vielä rannekkeet tätä statusta merkitsemään. World Travel Arenan interpellaatio ja muiden kuolevien subjektiivisuuden tunnistaminen saa Mateon pohtimaan kuolemaan liittyvää toimijuutta, joka toisintaa alussa määriteltyä Olla-kohti-kuolemaa. Mateo lahjoittaa World Travel Arenalle usean sadan dollarin summan, ja lahjoittaa myös Clint's Graveyardin sisäänkäynnillä. Vaikka Mateon ei kuvata käyneen näissä yrityksissä ennen, vain kuulleen niistä sosiaalisessa mediassa, vaikuttaisi näiden yritysten markkinoinnin ja interpellaation olevan niin onnistunutta, että Mateo kokee tarpeelliseksi lahjoittaa niille rahansa. Näiden kokemusten ja niihin pyrkimisen representaatio luo merkityksen niiden tarjoamien palveluiden itseisarvosta; ne ovat rahan arvoisia ja erityisen

merkittävästi arvokkaita paikkoja viettää elämänsä viimeisiä minuutteja. Kirjan representaatio poikien pyrkimyksestä näihin paikkoihin antaakin ymmärtää, että niiden näennäisesti tarjoamat aktiviteetit: extreme-lajit, matkustaminen ja yökerhossa tanssiminen ja laulaminen, ovat arvokkaita tavoiteltavia asioita.

Kirja kuvaa Death-Castin liittyvän monella tapaa median toimintaan niin TV-sarjojen, uutisten, kuin jopa Netflix-dokumenttien muodossa, mutta erityinen asema on sosiaalisella medialla, joka kytkeytyy myös digitaaliseen kapitalismiin. Last Friend on sovellus, jolla Deckerit voivat etsiä itselleen viimeistä ystävää, Last Friend, jota käytetään identiteettiä kuvaavana terminä ja subjekti positiona narratiivissa, samaan tapaan kuin Decker, ollen näin myös merkittävä osa interpellaatiota. Molemmat ovat siis kuoleman eetoksen diskurssiin oleellisesti kuuluvia ja sen synnyttämiä, yritysyhteydestä alkunsa saaneita termejä. Last Friend interpelloi sisäänkirjautumisella, jonka yhteydessä käyttäjän tulee valita onko kuolemassa tänään vai ei, ja vaatimalla käyttäjää jakamaan itsestään tarkkoja tietoja kuten nimi, ikä, pituus, paino, seksuaalinen suuntautuminen jne. Van Dijck (2013, 65) väittää, että sosiaalisen median yhtiöt tarjoavat ilmaisia palveluita vastineena käyttäjien datalle, jota käytetään mainosten myymiseen. Molemmat päähenkilöt saavat puhelimeensa ilmoitusmuotoisen mainoksen Make-A-Moment-yrityksen läheisestä sijainnista, mikä osoittaa kaupallisten toimijoiden yhteydessä väittämäni mukaisesti, että yksi kuoleman eetoksen tarkoituksista on indikoida näiden palvelujen rahan- ja ajanarvoisuudesta. Myös Death-Cast-puhelun yhteydessä sanansaattajat mainostavat erilaisia palveluita.

Necro, joka on erityisesti Deckereille ja heiltä seksiä haluaville tarkoitettu seuranhakusovellus, yhdistää temaattisesti kuoleman ja seksin. Mateon kuvataan häiriintyvän Necron toimintamallista, ja hänen suhteensa seksiin on rajoittunut ja varauksellinen, kun taas Last Friendiin ja sen tarjoamiin suhdemuotoihin hän suhtautuu positiivisesti. Narratiivi kuvaa Mateon asenteita niin, että niissä asettuu seksi ja rakkaus vastakkaiseen vertailuun. Seksi yhdistyy tässä vertailussa ikäviin konnotaatioihin, kun taas rakkaus liitetään arvokkuuteen, ja on tavoiteltavampaa. Romanttisten suhteiden suosiminen ja seksuaalisuuden problematisointi ei ole nuortenkirjallisuudelle epätyypillistä (Trites 2000, 92–93). Mateon seksuaalisuuden problematiikka nousee myös esiin Last Friendin diskurssissa, sillä Mateo ei halua tai kykene paljastamaan seksuaalista suuntautumistaan sovelluksessa, toisin kuin Rufus, joka kykenee käsittelemään seksuaalista identiteettiään ja siihen liittyvää subjektiivisuutta, kuten niin sanottua kaapista ulostuloa, toisin kuin Mateo. James (2009, 111) on tutkinut seksuaalivähemmistöjen representaatioita nuortenkirjallisuudessa, ja tunnistanut esimerkkejä

siitä, miten niissä kuolema liitetään normeja rikkovaan käyttäytymiseen. Vaikken väitä *The End* -kirjan representoivan tätä millään tavoin tarkoituksellisesti tai ohjaavasti, myös sen narratiivissa toistuu päähenkilöiden romanttisten tunteiden ja seksuaalisuuden kehityksen läheinen yhteys kuolemanvaaraan ja kuolemaan.

CountDowners-sivustolla Deckerit voivat jakaa sosiaalisen median tavoin viimeisen päivänsä tapahtumia. Sen käyttäjät toimivat digitaalisen työvoiman (McKenna III 2023, 101) tavoin toisintaessaan ja levittäessään kuoleman eetoksen ideologiaa, mainostaessaan muita palveluja, vahvistaen näin valtadynamiikkaa yrityksen, sisällöntuottajan ja muiden Deckereiden ja yleisön välillä. Sivustolla jaetut henkilökohtaiset tarinat ja niissä esiintyvät subjektiivisuudet saavat erityisesti Mateon samaistumaan niihin, erityisesti isä-suhteen osalta. Narratiivissa päähenkilöt toisintavat joitain niistä aktiviteeteista, mitä Mateo on CountDownersista nähnyt. Mateo myös viittaa näihin CountDownersin subjektiivisiin kertomuksiin rajoittaakseen Rufuksen vastustusta Death-Castin interpellaatioon hänen epäillessään, että Death-Cast voisi joskus olla väärässä. Rufus osoittaa toimijuuttaan myös vastustaessaan CountDownersin interpellaatiota, johon Mateo intersubjektiivisesti myötävaikuttaa. Rufus useasti tyrmää tai ohittaa Mateon viittaukset kyseiseen sivustoon, kieltäytyen myös Mateon ehdotuksesta perustaa käyttäjäprofiili sivustolle.

Rufuksen toimijuus ja vastustus on kuitenkin rajallista, sillä hän päätyy mukailemaan kuolemaideologiaan kytkeytyvän sosiaalisen median diskurssia ja konventioita omalla Instagram-profiilillaan, johon hän jakaa muun muassa useita kuvia kuoleman eetokseen liittyvistä yrityksistä, ja käyttää eetoksen kuuluvaa sanastoa. Narratiivi representoi Rufuksen subjektiivisuuden käsittelyä valokuvauksen keinoin. Valokuvausta käsittelevät nuortenkirjat kuvaavat valokuvauksen keinona käsitellä subjektin ja objektin suhdetta, joka liittyy Olla-kohti-kuolemaa-ajatukseen (Trites 2000, 124). Analysoin Rufuksen subjekti–objekti-asetelmaa kahdessa kohtauksessa, ensin Rufuksen ottaessa kuvaa Mateosta hautaamassa lintua, jossa on itse subjektin (tässä erit. lauseenjäsenmäinen tekijä) asemassa, ja Mateo objektin (kohde). Kuvan ottajan perspektiivistä Rufus tunnistaa Mateon hyvää tekevän luonteenpiirteen, jonka perusteella linjaa itseään suhteessa Olla-kohti-kuolemaa. Myöhemmin, tämä subjekti–objekti-dynamiikka kuvataan toisinpäin, kun Mateo ottaa kuvan Rufuksesta. Näin Rufuksen on mahdollista tarkastella itseään kolmannessa persoonassa, muiden asenteiden kohteena, mikä saa hänet ymmärtämään mahdollisuutensa toimijuuteen, ja hän pyrkii vaikuttamaan muihin valokuvallaan ja Instagramin käytöllään.

Tutkielmassani osoitan, että *The End* representoi Death-Cast-yrityksen toimintaa Althusserin teorian mukaisesti: heidän toimintansa ja ideologiansa on yhteiskunnan pääasiallinen määrittävä tekijä, ja he kykenevät alistamaan kenet tahansa osaksi kuoleman eetosta interpellaatiollaan. Lisäksi kirjassa kuvataan usean instituution toimivan ISA-teorian mukaisesti, ja yhdessä Death-Castin kanssa luovan yhteiskuntaan kuoleman eetoksen, joka toimii kapitalismin mukaisesti. Nämä ISAt harjoittavat monenlaista interpellaatiota. Tutkielmani osoittaa myös kirjan erittäin monisyisen yhteyden kuolemaan, ja että se monin tavoin mukailee nuortenkirjallisuudelle tyypillisiä tapoja käsitellä kuolemaa, instituutioita ja subjektiivisuutta. Osoitan myös millaisia arvoja esimerkiksi ihmissuhteisiin ja seksiin liittyen narratiivi nostaa esiin yhteydessä kuolemaan. Kirjassa riittäisi materiaalia lisätutkimukseen henkilöhahmojen minuuden analyysiin, esimerkiksi queer-metodologiaa hyödyntäen. Rufuksen hahmon maskuliinista representaatiota voisi puolestaan analysoida feministisellä metodologialla. Yleisesti ottaen erityisesti seksuaalivähemmistöjä käsittelevää nykynuortenkirjallisuutta voisi analysoida kuoleman ja subjektiivisuuden näkökulmasta, joka voisi osoittaa, ovatko Jamesin (2009) tunnistamat kuoleman ja identiteettikriisin konventiot niissä läsnä.