Maya is restless. She woke up too early and is ready for the community meeting hours in advance. She never sleeps well before giving a speech and this is a particularly important one. She hears the singing of the gurgling river and decides to walk off her anxiety. Her community makes her feel calm; this is one of few places that managed to form a peaceful society after the crash. The crash, the thing predicted by scientists now long dead (Meadows, 2005).

She reads through her speech as she walks.

“Imagine a world where people have enough to eat, where they have electronic devices, called smart phones, in their pockets which mean they can talk to their loved ones from 100s of miles away. A world where those same devices give them access to information about everything in the world. People can travel in the sky or over land at vast speeds and visit buildings full of food all wrapped in plastic, there are so many options, such huge quantities, people are overwhelmed by choice. Who could be unhappy in such a world? This world was upheld by a decaying system – that of capitalism and neoliberalism. A world built on slavery and exploitation, where the few got the luxury of choice and abundance; the poor are vilified, the rich adored.

How did this happen? Life started to change dramatically for people in the mid-1900s due to the industrial revolution and early 2000s, there were new risks and uncertainties to do with a changing labour market, an increase in white collar work, and information related jobs and a move away from manual labour. The UK and many other western countries stopped producing manufactured goods and started dealing with intangible goods.
such as education and information (Webster, 2006). The world was operating under a state of neo-liberalism, there was mass reliance on interconnected global markets that benefited the richest of the world, mainly living in the ‘global north’ (Birch & Mykhnenko, 2010). Countries were locked into the process of privatisation and marketization, all of them bound by capitalisms need for consumption and competition (Ibid). Everyday objects and processes were commodified and turned into capitalist enterprises, the people themselves were turned into nothing more than consumption machines.

In the western hemisphere, the people were extremely wealthy but dissatisfied; they suffered what Marx called commodity fetishism, they became disconnected with other human beings and thought only of themselves and their objects (Marx cited in Birch & Mykhnenko, 2010). Eventually, Western countries destroyed their industries by sending their, highly polluting, factories overseas to other countries where they could produce the same products for more profit by exploiting the workers and paying them less, producing what they called ‘personal’ electronics and iPhones.

Many people were living in a state which was described by Baudrillard (cited in Webster, 2006) as ‘hyper-reality’; the rise of social media and the pressure to create an online presence worked in parallel with capitalism and encouraged the creation of personal identity and identity politics, achieved by the continual consumption of cultural items, such as clothing and accessories. This resulted in the created image becoming as real, or more real, than the original subject (Webster, 2006). Life was so oversaturated with diverse signs and different meanings that restlessness and discontent left people searching for something which was actually unattainable through material consumption... connection (Ibid). Raw, messy, chaotic, yet joyful, real and deep human connection, to each other and to the earth.

Some utopian theorists believed that due to the abundance of goods available, that there would be a mass redistribution of wealth and the world would be free from poverty (Levitas,
However, this was optimistic, and led instead to poverty of a different kind... The gap between the richest and poorest only grew larger and the deeply ingrained social inequalities were not overthrown. The Western world continued to exploit developing countries along with people in their own countries in order to create the goods now ‘required’ in western capitalist society (Cartmel, 2007). There was huge consumer choice but it was used alongside the encouragement to place individual image as imperative in people’s lives, self-expression became more important than collective conscience, communities and people grew detached from the processes involved in providing and maintaining their consumer lifestyle (Ibid). This turned the individual against themselves leading to individual and group socio-political conflict where people blamed one another for issues in their life rather than challenging the political structures that made up neoliberal society (Ibid).

In many ways there were new freedoms, sexual expression and the fight for women’s rights had challenged heteronormative and patriarchal societal norms (Collins, 2000). However, the system was firmly in place so it was not possible to achieve true liberation, for instance, while white women had gained considerable freedoms, many women of colour were still subject to intersecting oppressions of racism and sexism (Ibid). Not only did people feel disempowered and helpless to make changes to the society they were in, they also felt an exhaustive disconnection from the world around them (Ibid). They depended on societal structures which relied on oppression and enslavement of other people in their own countries and abroad, but it was important for their created image and self-expression not to acknowledge the evidence of this and allow themselves to be distracted and apathetic by buying into capitalism. There were of course a few groups of people who were trying to fight for change but they were outnumbered.

This time period was labelled as post-modern (Kumar, 2005). Life in postmodernism can be understood by dissecting the smartphone, this is the device that enabled the user
to; update social media, shop online for; food, clothes, servants, sex, love, bamboo toothbrushes, or, research anything in the world, read stories, share photos, be tracked by companies who sold personal data to advertising companies, organise fundraising events, watch the news, get directions to a friend’s house, blog about an illness and the list goes on. Apple iPhones were manufactured in China, they were made in factories which used safety nets hung underneath dorm rooms to prevent workers jumping from the balconies and killing themselves because the working conditions were so dire; they were paid per month about a quarter of what an iPhone was worth and were humiliated and punished if any mistakes were made (Chakrabortty, 2013). This was published knowledge, and yet people still invested in the brand. It was said that ignorance equals bliss; that not knowing about oppression through capitalism, for example, means that you could be happy. However, even if you did not know your oppressor, you still felt the repercussions of being oppressed, the dread of going to work on Monday, to a job which you did not enjoy but which paid the rent, to a landlord who was over charging you, so you could just about get through and buy the next thing to try and make yourself happy. Ultimately, all this consumption led to ‘overshooting’, the population and economy grew beyond the supportable capacities the earth could offer and this led to the crash (Meadows, 2003). Transport systems which relied on oil were used heavily and released mass amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere (Ibid). This could not be processed due to deforestation, which took place in part to support the mass consumption of meat and dairy (Ibid). The meat and dairy industry also contributed to the huge amounts of toxic waste being produced, which was often shipped to other countries and polluted the water systems (Cowspiracy, n.d). The oceans were overfished to support food demands, reaching the point of mass species extinction... Despite all this, 7 million tonnes of food was wasted per year in the UK alone (Love Food Hate Waste, 2016). Overcrowding due to a vast and ageing
population also became a problem, as the earth had fewer and fewer resources available which led to the resource wars (Meadows, 2003). Although some renewable energy sources were invested in, there was not enough and not in good time (Ibid).

Maya, lost in her speech, trips on something. She stops and stares at it, it is dirt coloured and solid, but it is not a stone. Her breath catches in her chest as she bends down to touch it and feels goose bumps run up her arms and the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. It is a tree root. For as long as Maya can remember the trees have been struggling to grow, yet here is a thick root, pushing up through the dirt path. The sight of it fills her with a fierce joy and hope as she looks around her to share the excitement of what she has found.

The community is starting to wake and she can see an elderly man in the distance with a small group of children, they are heading towards the land school to learn how to manage the local allotments which supply the community with food. She smiles thinking about how far this community has come, how this vision of a small society based on agriculture had been imagined by utopian theorists and was now her reality (Levitas, 2011). Yet, there is sadness still amongst her thoughts and a nagging feeling that something would go wrong. As a group they still had so far to go, they hadn’t been able to find anything out about the rest of the country, let alone the world. She wished she could go back in time and show people the mess they were creating, she thought that if they only changed their behaviour this would not have happened. She would tell them to trust in the teachings of indigenous cultures and ideas of eco-feminism and Marxism to develop a way of living which would provide for all in the community whilst protecting and sustaining the earth’s resources (Shiva, 2006). Private property could be abolished, connecting with each other and the earth should be centralised and diversity should always be celebrated and respected (Ibid). But Maya knew she could not go back, instead she must work with her community to construct a humanity who cared and respected each other and the world. As Maya walks towards the meeting she thinks to herself of the importance of remembering the past so the same to not make the same mistakes again.
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