

The Cyborg Re-Manifested: *Black Mirror*, Cyberfeminism, and Genre Hybridity

Corey Martin and Joanna McIntyre

Charlie Brooker's science fiction television series *Black Mirror* has engendered intense audience responses, from discomfort to abjection, since the popular series first aired in 2011. While the majority of this anthology series' episodes grapple with disaster arising from the oppressive technology-driven social regimes, a notable exception is Season 3's Emmy Award-winning episode 'San Junipero'. This episode follows two distinct female protagonists who fall in love with each other while experiencing redemptive possibilities of future technologies – their romance is facilitated by a simulated reality destination for human consciousnesses called San Junipero, accessible only to the elderly and deceased. 'San Junipero' is transgressive in its depiction of a liberating technologised future unconstrained by patriarchal power structures. We argue here 'San Junipero' re-manifests the hopeful, egalitarian vision Donna Haraway explicated in her influential 1984 work 'A Cyborg Manifesto', and that it does so via its hybridisation of codes and conventions of science fiction – traditionally a masculine genre – with those of melodrama – traditionally a 'women's genre'. The cutting edge ideas Haraway elucidated in 'A Cyborg Manifesto' have since been developed within the discourse of cyberfeminism, which analyses illustrations of technologised feminist potentialities in the face of oppressive technologies, as well as critiquing the misogynistic frameworks that could/do underpin technologised social structures. Applying a cyberfeminist lens, we find *Black Mirror* explores the subjugating possibilities of future technologies – in its representations of what we term the 'tech-symbolic' – as well as, in 'San Junipero', the liberating power and potential of technology Haraway predicted. We contend 'San Junipero' offers a unique textual rupturing even within the context of its own series, as it evokes tropes of science fiction as well as melodrama to reconceptualise the masculinist nature of *Black Mirror* and the science fiction genre more broadly, giving light to a vision of a unified, queer technological future.

Introduction

Charlie Brooker's science fiction television series *Black Mirror* has

Corresponding author:

Corey Martin, University of the Sunshine Coast

Email: cmartin9@usc.edu.au

engendered intense audience responses, from discomfort to abjection, since the popular series first aired in 2011 (Bartolone, 2018). An anthology series of cautionary tales examining not-so-distant futures, *Black Mirror* presents a different and complete narrative in each episode but all address the future possibilities of current technology. Since subscription video on demand service Netflix funded its third season, *Black Mirror* has become a critically acclaimed social phenomenon (Howard, 2017). Whilst much high quality television is currently being produced, *Black Mirror* is unique in its disproportionately large fan following, especially given the program is renowned for offering audiences a psychologically displeasing experience, simultaneously invoking an often upsetting combination of realisation, revulsion and denial (Tartaglione, 2017). An episode of particular note in this season is the acclaimed 'San Junipero', which won two Emmy awards in 2017. Disrupting the expectations of the *Black Mirror* series, this episode explores a fantastical utopian future and offers an unexpectedly happy ending. 'San Junipero' follows two different female protagonists who fall in love with each other while experiencing the redemptive possibilities of futuristic technologies – they meet and fall in love within a simulated networked reality destination for human consciousness called 'San Junipero', accessible only to the elderly and deceased. Through the representation of complex female characters, this episode brings together issues of womanhood, queer love, age, race and physical and mental ability. In doing so, it thematically addresses the multifaceted and overlapping identities that can determine a woman's social positioning, giving rise to a science-fictional exploration of the complexities of intersectionality (see hooks, 1984). This episode illuminates oppressive forces that can hinder a woman's agency and negatively impact their sense of selfhood, but also illustrates a technologised alternative to these oppressions in its depiction of a utopian (virtual) reality experience free of subjugation called San Junipero. We argue that in its illustration of a technologised future unconstrained by patriarchal power structures, the episode 'San Junipero' re-manifests the hopeful, egalitarian vision Donna Haraway explicated in her influential 1984 essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto', offering audiences an alternative ethos and a refreshing vision of a technologically-driven future. The cutting-edge ideas Haraway elucidated in 'A Cyborg Manifesto' have been developed within the discourse of cyberfeminism, which analyses illustrations of technologised feminist potentialities in the face of oppressive technologies and also critiques misogynistic frameworks that could/do underpin technologised social structures. Reading through a cyberfeminist lens, we contend Season 3 of *Black Mirror* explores both the subjugating as well as liberating possibilities

of future technologies.

'San Junipero' offers a liberating textual rupturing and reconceptualises the often masculinist nature of *Black Mirror* as well as the science fiction genre more broadly. As Jones (2009, 488) observes, 'science fiction (like the human world) is as gendered as ever, and masculine science fiction commands the mainstream of the genre'. While 'San Junipero' demonstrates the liberating power and potential of technology Haraway predicted, the other five episodes of the season grapple with disaster arising from oppressive technologically-driven social regimes, representing what we term the 'tech-symbolic'. While *Black Mirror* is wholly recognisable as a science fiction screen text, however, each episode of Season 3 hybridises this genre with a differing alternate genre: horror, heist film, war film, police procedural, romantic comedy, and melodrama. In all episodes of the season other than 'San Junipero', formulaic conventions of these genres lure audiences into believing the resolutions of narrative arcs are implicit, yet they ultimately become twisted by self-reflexive evocations of science fiction. In contrast, 'San Junipero' gives light to a vision of a unified, queer_technological future in its hybridising of codes and conventions of melodrama with those of the science fiction genre. Through its particular fusing of melodrama, traditionally a 'women's genre', with the traditionally masculine science fiction, 'San Junipero' offers a technologised future world that escapes patriarchy to transcend gender.

***Black Mirror* and the tech-symbolic**

To fully understand the uniqueness and consequent significance of 'San Junipero', it is necessary to first position this episode in relation to the other five episodes of its season, each of which is a cautionary tale. Evoking dystopian tropes of the science fiction genre, all other episodes in Season 3 offer different but equally dismal forecasts of not-to-distant futures that are such despite, and often because of, advanced technologies. The futuristic technologies explicit and implicit within these episodes of *Black Mirror* depict for spectators disturbing worlds in which technology threatens to 'take over' rather than liberate (King & Krzywinska 2000, 15). These dystopian worlds uphold patriarchal, capitalist structures and interrogate what is understood as freedom within human society and subjectivity. The five episodes of this season of *Black Mirror* adopt science fiction conventions to explore what can be conceptualised as a technology-infused symbolic order; that is, a 'tech-symbolic'. For Julia Kristeva, a foundational theorist in cyberfeminism, the symbolic is the patriarchal and temporal order of

language, law and logic that enables unified cultural meaning and social exchange (Kristeva 1986b,101-3; Kristeva 1986a,152). As Grosz (1989, 42) observes, like Jacques Lacan, Kristeva identifies the symbolic as 'the law abiding operations of socio-linguistic systems'. The symbolic domain is an organising and ordering system that not only governs meaning, culture and social interaction, but also facilitates subjectivity (Kristeva 1986b, 101-2; Grosz 1989, 48). The individual's subjective and social identity is perpetuated through the symbolic's controlling disposition that defines that which is other to the self within the object world (Kristeva 1986b, 101-2; Morris 1998, 144-5). The symbolic is a regulating system that organises hierarchical social structures and binary oppositions. For Kristeva (1986b:98), the symbolic is 'the realm of signification ... a realm of *positions*', giving the subject positioning in relation to self and society through the establishment of difference. In the world of *Black Mirror*, the tech-symbolic manifests in science fiction adaptations of the social structures of contemporary western society and the formation of selfhood available in these regimes. Through its close assimilation to familiar, technocentric socio-cultural and industrial structures (King & Krzywinska 2000), *Black Mirror's* projection of the tech-symbolic is a timely if disconcerting exploration of contemporary social hierarchies and boundaries of self.

As is the nature of science fiction, *Black Mirror* provides 'technological explanations rather than supernatural ones' (Weiss cited in Storm 2007, 11) to account for the fantastical occurrences onscreen. However, in its illustrations of the tech-symbolic (that is, the symbolic order infused with science fiction technologies), *Black Mirror* hybridises the science fiction genre with a different genre in each episode, integrating science fiction conventions with those of alternate genres in its explorations of technology and social control. This genre-hybridity renders the series' depictions of future technologies uncannily familiar but, therefore, at the same time all the more disturbing. Like all episodes of Season 3, 'San Junipero' evokes genre hybridity; however, it does so in a manner that offers the spectator not disquiet but satisfaction. To properly position 'San Junipero' as distinct and argue for its uniqueness and significance, it is necessary to first overview the five other episodes of the season.

In demonstrating technological control, the episode 'Playtest' adopts the conventions of horror. In 'Playtest' a young male protagonist is hired as a 'guinea pig' for a large corporation's horror-themed virtual reality game and is purposefully psychologically tormented, leading to his anguished death. This episode demonstrates frightful extreme outcomes of capitalist systems

that enable corporations, via their consumable technology products, to infiltrate and fracture individual psyches. The episode 'Shut Up and Dance' demonstrates moral paradoxes of surveillance; that is, the 'always-on, ubiquitous, opportunistic ever-expanding forms of data capture', which pave way for recalibrations of notions of privacy (Andrejevic, Burdon, 2014:1). Following the story of an apparently sympathetic young male protagonist who is blackmailed after his computer is hacked and he is filmed masturbating. Using the genre conventions of a heist film, the episode questions the stability of social selves in the tech-symbolic as it unveils how far he will go to ensure the footage is not released. It is then revealed in a shocking and disconcerting ending that he had only been working so hard to avoid exposure because he had actually been filmed masturbating to child pornography. 'Men Against Fire' adopts the conventions of a war film to present military technology that physically changes how soldiers see and hear their human targets to ensure they do not hesitate in killing them, as they appear to be nonhuman monsters. This episode draws attention to ethical issues relating to the power and precision of new generations of military technologies (see Mayer, 2015:765). The revelation the young male protagonist soldier had been unknowingly killing innocent people throughout the episode pulls focus to the power of a technologised repressive state apparatus to corrupt individual ethics and identity, and presents the tech-symbolic as efficient and methodical in advancing those in power. 'Hated in the Nation' explores the collapse of social order due to technology being flawed and unstable when a swarm of Automated Drone Insects are hacked and used to murder individuals identified on a social media platform. Following the conventions of a police procedural, the episode demonstrates the fallibility of social and personal borders within the tech-symbolic in relation to a deadly integration of drone technology and social media culture. Despite the good detectives' best efforts, this dystopic integration cannot be subdued or controlled to maintain the sanctity of social order (for discussion of feminist implications of drone technologies please see Parks, 2015:227).

Finally, 'Nosedive' is the only episode in the season other than 'San Junipero' that closely follows a woman's experience of the tech-symbolic and hybridises science fiction with a 'women's genre' – yet like the majority of the season's episodes, it too paints a bleak picture of technologised social systems. Adopting conventions of a romantic comedy, 'Nosedive' explores the particular difficulty of retaining a stable place and sense of self as a woman within the patriarchal, capitalist tech-symbolic. This episode depicts a future in which humans have devices planted in their eyes with which they rate those they meet out of five stars. Social interactions require both

parties to give each other a rating. Following Lacie (Bryce Dallas Howard) and her desperate attempts to gain a high rating and consequential high social status, 'Nosedive' centres on a conventional romantic comedy plotline; its narrative takes up issues of 'the self' (Grindon, 2011) and explores the personal development of Lacie as a woman. With the integration of science fiction conventions, it illustrates the pressures associated with a restrictive technologised future governed by social media. After a series of unfortunate interactions, Lacie's rating begins to plummet. As she becomes further trapped in a cycle of bad luck she is correspondingly rated lower and lower. This circumstance causes her much distress and to lose social mobility and social standing – ultimately causing her to descend into 'madness' (psychosis). Lacie's ultimate downfall occurs in the classic romantic comedy setting of a wedding. Drunk and covered in mud she nonsensically interrupts the toasts and her 'madness' is affirmed as she pulls a knife on the groom. Intersecting humour and disaster, Lacie's apparent loss of self still adheres to common romantic comedy tropes, causing her to remain a sympathetic figure to the television audience. Nevertheless, we also see that unmoored from the socio-technological structures in which her subjectivity had been embedded, her boundaries of self unravel. No longer concerned about her social ranking, Lacie has abandoned the regimented maintenance of her subjectivity within the tech-symbolic. In this experience her selfhood is dissolved but she also is liberated from the oppressive obligations of this patriarchal regime.

Lacie's fraught yet freeing rejection of the tech-symbolic is usefully understood in relation to Kristeva's conception of the semiotic. For Kristeva, the semiotic is initially the pre-symbolic realm of rhythm, light and the mother's body the infant experiences before identifying as a separate signifying subject (Kristeva 1986b, 94-5). The semiotic not only consists of the drives and their inscriptions upon the infantile body, but also involves the return of these energies and their traces within adulthood (Kristeva 1986b, 102, 118; Grosz 1989, 44). The semiotic disorders the symbolic, as semiotic energies are those that can 'burst through policed borders of the symbolic, harrying its sense of order' (Moor, 2012, 189). Due to the subordination patriarchy demands of women, the symbolic is especially 'sacrificial and frustrating' for women and the opportunity to reengage with the semiotic is particularly enticing (Kristeva 1986a, 156-7; Kristeva 1986c, 202). However, Kristeva (1986a, 150) argues that although the pleasure to be found in a collapse of the symbolic order is more alluring for women, it is also more dangerous; taken too far, an invasion of the semiotic – 'far from soothing her, or making her laugh' – actually 'destroys her symbolic armour and makes her ecstatic, nostalgic or mad'. This liberating collapse

of self is represented in the final scene of 'Nosedive', which offers Lacie to the at-home audience weathered and depleted in a prison cell. Despite being locked up and stripped of her rating device, she is finally free to express semiotic energies. She and another other prisoner stand opposite each other and yell absurd insults back and forth, the episode ending with Lacie nonsensically shouting, 'Fuck you'. This narrative suggests the freeing yet potentially annihilating nature of semiotic energies when systems of order are not keeping them at bay.

In 'Nosedive', romantic comedy conventions are mutated to show up the tech-symbolic as especially 'sacrificial and frustrating' for its woman protagonist. The experiences of Lacie in 'Nosedive' juxtapose those of the women protagonists in 'San Junipero', as the two episodes demonstrate differing conceptions and potentialities of technology's relationship with empowerment and boundaries of the (female) self. 'San Junipero' plays to the generic traits of science fiction in its offerings of futuristic wonders explained in terms of science and technology but also relies on conventions of melodrama. Like the romantic comedy, melodrama is traditionally understood as a 'women's genre'. Like 'Nosedive', 'San Junipero' utilises science fiction conventions in combination with the sentimentality and visceral intensity of a 'woman's genre' to explore social pressures clashing with internal emotional struggles within the tech-symbolic. However, in stark contrast to 'Nosedive', it moves its female protagonists towards a happy, fulfilling ending in their rejection of 'respectability'. Applying Haraway's conceptions of the cyborg to 'San Junipero', we will now examine the ways in which this narrative presents an alternative to *Black Mirror's* usually dystopian science fiction tales to envision a socialist feminist future that warmly embraces new technologies.

Girl meets girl, and science fiction meets melodrama

Cyberfeminism identifies and critiques pessimistic as well as optimistic forecasts for our future world. For example, working within cyberfeminism, Judy Wajcman asserts 'technologies are ideologically shaped by the operation of gender interest and consequentially serve to reinforce patterns of power and authority' (Wajcman, Balsamo, 1996, 10). In other words, so long as power structures are already in place, technologies will correspond and develop in accordance with them, reinforcing traditional gendered patterns and hierarchies. Similarly, in considering the internet through a cyberfeminist lens, Milford (2015) identifies its failure to transgress beyond traditional binaries and argues that it, in fact, holds them in play. 'San

Junipero' does in some ways illuminate the negative, oppressive potentials of technology, which we will discuss below. Nevertheless, via its evocations of both science fiction and melodrama, 'San Junipero' most pointedly evokes Haraway's foundational cyberfeminist vision of technology working to alleviate divisions and binaries. Audiences discover San Junipero is a virtual destination, a futuristic technology that can capture the consciousness of elderly and dead to give them ongoing 'life' in a simulated reality. In the episode, this science fiction technology facilitates not destruction but a utopia, a world where people can relive their youth without the divisions and inhibitions of the 'real' world. However, as a technological product, San Junipero is shown to be controlled by gatekeepers of the tech-symbolic that constitutes the 'real' world. Therefore, in keeping with the scope of cyberfeminism, this episode manifests Haraway's vision of a technology-infused utopia yet also brings to light the technological and social structures that could impede this future. Through melodramatic conventions in particular, the episode incites a yearning for Kelly and Yorkie to overcome the obstacles that hinder their relationship and choose to live in San Junipero, to be happy together in a technological simulation rather than to die as elderly women in the tech-symbolic. Despite the subjugations of the tech-symbolic remaining present within the narrative, this episode illustrates an optimistic cyborg evolution where an alleviation of borders and social regimes is a possible and privileged option. Because the tech-symbolic is projected as dauntingly oppressive in other episodes, 'San Junipero' unexpectedly demonstrates a 'new vision of the relationship between society and culture, between people and machines' (Kirkup, Hovenden, Janes, Woodward, 2013, xiii).

In 'San Junipero', when the two protagonists, Kelly and Yorkie, meet in a 1980s nightclub and are romantically interested in each other, the spectator is enticed by a narrative that seems to be a 'ticking-time-bomb', especially for those audience members familiar with the series' tendency to move its characters towards misery. The episode opens with a tracking shot of a white woman in her twenties, Yorkie, as she awkwardly manoeuvres her way across the street toward a nightclub. She has auburn hair and pale skin, and wears glasses and 1980s fashion in muted colours. When she enters the nightclub, Kelly approaches her. Kelly is a confident black woman who looks about the same age but wears bold colours. Throughout the episode, the purposeful colour contrast between the characters will evoke melodrama's use of metaphor and colour symbolism (Price 2012, 167). The clear opposition set up between the two signposts the beginning of a melodramatic narrative arc in which Kelly's attributes will synthesise with Yorkie's, allowing her to gain the confidence and pizzazz that Kelly

possesses. Foreshadowing this dialectical synthesis, these binary opposites converse at the bar while a light source at the centre of the frame creates an opacity between them, fusing and downplaying their differences as they engage in conversation. The spectator's initial understanding of the narrative is that the tech-symbolic is absent, as the episode is apparently set in a pre-digital era and technology only appears in the form of arcade games inside the nightclub. Because the season's other episodes (including 'Nosedive') explore technology's control over human emotion, the emotional freedom in 'San Junipero' at first appears to be a result of freedom from the tech-symbolic.

When Yorkie proceeds to the dancefloor with trepidation, Kelly forces her to dance. A close-up of Yorkie highlights her discomfort before she runs outside into the rain. Kelly follows her. Kelly expresses her desire to 'live in the moment' as well as her sexual interest in Yorkie. Yorkie, however, conveys a reluctance and hesitation due to her religious family and fiancé outside of San Junipero. Here, 'San Junipero' begins to adopt the conventions of melodrama, 'triggering the psych' of the spectator by tugging at socio-political issues and inequalities (Gledhill cited in Stewart, 2014:3). Viewers are told a week has passed when Yorkie and Kelly see each other at the same nightclub. The two are shown facing two separate bathroom mirrors, contemplating and readjusting their individual identities so they can be together. Yorkie expresses her lack of confidence, requesting that Kelly 'make it easy' for her. The two drive to Kelly's beach house where they have sex. Afterwards, Yorkie confesses she had been a virgin, asking Kelly about when she 'knew' she liked women. Kelly says she 'always knew' but 'never acted on any of it'. As is the nature of melodrama, the episode stimulates feelings of empathy in the audience via psychologically complex characters and moral legibility (Stewart, 2014, 3). The intersection of Yorkie's insecurities and Kelly's confidence produces an anchor for the prospering melodrama, establishing what DeKoven refers to as a 'search for identity' within a social order of 'moral rules' (2001, 305). While boundaries of identity and social obstacles may be present, technology does not appear to be holding these characters in place. The melodramatic realism projected through this setting allows for 'escapist satisfactions', which Cawelti says evoke a pleasurable feeling in melodrama spectators that something important about reality will be learnt (2014, 261). Additionally, the apparent absence of the tech-symbolic expels the spectator from standard *Black Mirror* contexts, enabling them to be immersed in a refreshingly alternative narrative.

Whilst the episode's introduction launches a melodrama narrative arc, there

are still unfilled gaps in the story that become gradually more abstruse. Expectations regarding *Black Mirror* remain on the peripheral, generating an element of mystery but, as is crucial in the melodramatic mode, conflict prevails within the pathos of the central characters (x, 2014, 5). As Mulvey observes, 'the strength of the melodramatic form comes from the amount of dirt the story raises along the road, the cloud of over determined irreconcilables which put up a resistance to being neatly settled sharply – away from happy resolution' (1989, 40). 'One Week Later' titles reappear, revealing Yorkie in the same bar unable to find Kelly. Yorkie is directed to The Quagmire, a debaucherous discotheque. As she progresses up the stairs inside The Quagmire, she is confronted with a place of vice and immodesty. It is clear a disconcerted Yorkie does not belong in this place. She bumps into a man who knows Kelly who claims that she could be in a 'different time', ending his advice with, 'She's worth the shot, right?' Following the tropes of melodrama, the episode's emotional conflict 'reign[s] triumphant, controlling the structure of events and dictating the moral coordinates of reality' (Brooks, 1975, 30-31). However, with the implication of time travel, science fiction conventions are also announced. Another week passes and Yorkie is illustrated searching for Kelly back at the nightclub but it is now the 1990s, which is conveyed via the *mise en scene* with signifiers of fashion and popular culture. She finds Kelly a week later in the same nightclub but in '2002' and asks if she had hidden from her. Kelly dismisses her accusation and struts to the bathroom where the two argue about what their connection 'means'. Kelly smashes the mirror with her fist, symbolically shattering the readjusted sense of self that enabled them to be together.

Despite the violent action, there is no wounding or blood. Kelly searches for Yorkie outside, and gazes up to find her sitting on the ledge of a tall building. Kelly approaches her and states, 'Tell me you've got your pain slider set to zero'. Looking down from the building Yorkie asks Kelly, 'How many of them are dead, like what percentage?' Yorkie interrupts Kelly's explanation by passionately kissing her. Viewers now begin to realise they are very much engaged with a science fiction narrative, though they are brought back to the romantic conflict of melodrama. The emotional 'rise and fall' of Yorkie losing Kelly and finding her again exemplifies what Thomas refers to as melodrama's 'dramatic discontinuity'; that is, a 'vertiginous drop in the emotional temperature punctuating the melodrama'. Thomas further explains that this emotional rise and 'thump' generally plays out against the vertical axis of a staircase (1991, 83) – in the case of 'San Junipero', it is a ladder to the top of the building. The string of delays causes this passionate rekindling to be all the more emotionally

enthralling. Despite this emotional satisfaction, however, the episode now discloses hardships from another unknown source are borne. It becomes apparent this 'undisclosed hardship' is what had compelled Kelly to avoid Yorkie and thus suppress their affections, instigating the melodramatic narrative conflict. Constructed through melodrama conventions, the mystery is steered in the direction of a conventional ending, indicating the sympathetic characters will be 'saved' after 'undergoing much testing and difficulty' (Cawelti 2014, 265). With science fiction tropes creating gaps within narrative understanding, however, questions arise as to whether technology has created the conflict and/or whether it can resolve it.

The episode's narrative reaches a point of liminality in uncovering the 'evil' that is dictating the structure of events. Contrasting the other episodes in the season, in 'San Junipero' technology is illustrated as that which can keep these obstacles at bay. After Yorkie and Kelly sleep together for the second time, they sit on the front patio of Kelly's beach house facing the ocean. Their conversation reveals they are both escaping problems from 'home'. Kelly explains to Yorkie she is sick and it has 'spread basically everywhere', she says that she has no desire to 'pass over' (and continue to live in San Junipero after her physical death in the 'real' world), claiming: 'When I am done, I am done...'. Like her late husband, she has no interest in an afterlife in San Junipero. The nature of San Junipero is revealed in the following scene when the colour palette turns from luminous to dull and an elderly woman is shown being escorted out of a graveyard and taken to hospital. A doctor approaches the woman and states, 'You must be Kelly'. He guides Kelly into a ward where another elderly woman (Yorkie) lies lifelessly.

A man follows Kelly out of the room and introduces himself as Greg (Raymond McAnally). As Greg and Kelly converse the ambiguities in the narrative clarify. Greg explains Yorkie has been a quadriplegic since she was twenty-one following a car accident that occurred after 'coming out' to her parents – who did not 'want a gay daughter' and told her that being gay is 'unnatural'. Yorkie has not been able to move and has been incapable of communicating other than via advanced technology systems for most of her life. Further exposition discloses San Junipero is a system assisting the elderly with alzhiemers through 'immersive nostalgia therapy' and those who are approaching death have the option to 'pass over' and stay in San Junipero permanently. Greg explains Yorkie's religious family are opposed to the idea of her 'passing over' and that he has become engaged to Yorkie as a favour so he can act as her next of kin and give permission for her consciousness to live permanently to San Junipero once she has died.

Having witnessed the duality of a youthful and liberated Kelly and Yorkie in San Junipero, and sick and debilitated versions of them, the audience is encouraged to embrace the futuristic technology presented in this episode. Indeed, Schwarze (2006) observes melodrama sharpens conflict through a 'bipolar positioning' of forces. Unlike the other episodes in the season, here technology is illustrated not as malicious but rather as freeing. Through truths demanding to be 'uncovered, registered and articulated' (Schwarze 2006, 244), the melodrama conventions give rise to moral conflicts that are assisted via technology rather than subsumed by it.

Re-manifesting the cyborg

For the characters of 'San Junipero', technology is not a source of dehumanisation. We contend here 'San Junipero' reveals the limits of the tech-symbolic and its epistemologies. From a socialist feminist position, Haraway believes the cyborg can alleviate borders and structures. In 'A Cyborg Manifesto', Haraway draws upon the notion of the cyborg to formulate an ontology of technological liberation. Haraway explores the autonomous nature of the cyborg and its potential disconnection from cultural divisions and rigid social structures. She states the cyborg 'does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust' (Haraway 1991, 151). Haraway's framework interrogates the societal structures from which the cyborg was 'born' and deems these divisional structures responsible for consequential technological fear and anxiety. Haraway states:

The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential. (1991, 151)

'San Junipero' illustrates this rebellion of the cyborg being 'unfaithful' to its 'inessential' origins. In this episode, the figure of the cyborg occurs through the technological systems that enable the elderly and dead to inhabit San Junipero, where neither borders nor divisions are enforced. The revelation that the liberating realm of San Junipero exists as offspring of the tech-symbolic opens up questions about technological possibilities that embrace autonomy and freedom and disrupt, or at least undermine, oppressive

social structures. Haraway emphasises the unifying potential of the cyborg and its ability to alleviate such borders, advocating an alignment of all living organisms, as well as human and machine. The illustration of Yorkie and Kelly within San Junipero positions them as cyborgs, aligning them with Haraway's conception of the cyborg as 'a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bi-sexuality, pre-Oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity' (1991, 84). Haraway's manifesto advocates a fluid identity that can be realised through embracing the figure of the cyborg. When connected to the system, the protagonists become Cyborg-Kelly and Cyborg-Yorkie, finding 'pleasure in the confusion of boundaries' (1991, 83) regarding their sexuality and their sense of self. For the audience, 'San Junipero' gives rise to what Williamson explains as 'the impulse to restore the existence of a larger ethical dimension [which is] dramatised in the melodramatic conflict' (2005, 46). Consequentially, spectators are compelled to embrace the cyborg world that allows Kelly's and Yorkie's identities to be fluid, transparent and liberated.

This science fiction-melodrama does not position the choice of 'passing over' to be a simple one, evoking in its genre hybridity the 'radical ambiguity attached to the melodrama' (Elsaesser cited in Joyrich, 1996, 66). There is a clear distinction between the two universes in the narrative. The 'real' world is established as the tech-symbolic. Although it spawned the San Junipero system, we discover this is a regimented world governed by religion and the state, both of which control access to technology. We learn the elderly's time in San Junipero is rationed to five hours a week and that 'the state's got a triple lockdown' on people being allowed to choose to 'pass over' into San Junipero largely because of religious concerns. Although Greg clarifies security at the hospital is 'so tight' and the San Junipero system is monitored closely, he agrees to thwart existing power structures and give Kelly an extra five minutes in San Junipero.

As Kelly is plugged into the system, the hospital room dissolves into a shot of Cyborg-Kelly running toward a pristine beach where Cyborg-Yorkie stands. Cyborg-Kelly proposes and Cyborg-Yorkie says yes. Back in the hospital room, a pastor marries Kelly and Yorkie as Greg happily watches on. Kelly gives permission for Yorkie to 'pass over', a euthanasia drug is administered and Yorkie dies – another dissolve and Cyborg-Yorkie 'wakes up' on the beach in San Junipero as the sounds of waves and seagulls communicate the tranquillity and experiential authenticity of the setting. The scene is juxtaposed with that of a tired and unwell Kelly in a health-care facility, coughing and wheezing.

When Cyborg-Kelly returns to San Junipero, Cyborg-Yorkie asks her to 'pass-over' and live in San Junipero eternally with her but Cyborg-Kelly retaliates with anger. She condemns San Junipero: 'You want to spend forever somewhere nothing matters?... End up like all those Lost Fucks at the Quagmire trying anything to feel something?... Go ahead! But I'm out, I'm gone'. She speeds away in her car and crashes. When Cyborg-Yorkie finds her, Cyborg-Kelly's time in San Junipero is up and the scene cuts to Kelly back in the aged-care facility. The vivid freedom and beauty suddenly collapses, creating the emotional 'thump' of melodrama that activates the spectator's urge for things to be made 'right' (Thomas 1991, 83). As is the nature of melodrama, the spectator is asked to locate morality 'in the struggle of the children of light with the children of darkness, in play with the ethical mind' (Brooks 1975, 22). In 'San Junipero' this emotional questioning of ethics is also inflected with science fiction's own ethical conundrums regarding the limits of humanity. Indeed, as Haraway acknowledges, 'our Machines are disturbingly lively and we ourselves frighteningly inert' (1991, 86). However, as a cyborg whose human sense of self is inextricably entwined with technology, Cyborg-Yorkie neutralises these limitations. This depiction illuminates Haraway's argument and the sublime essence of 'forever', induced via the myth of the cyborg, which is 'about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities' (1991, 89). As the narrative nears its end, the central part of a melodrama, the anticipation for 'moral legibility' (Williams cited in Mercer & Shingler, 2004, 93), remains ambiguous.

Kelly in her last stages of life sits with her carer. She exhales and states: 'All things considered, I guess I'm ready... for the rest of it'. We next see Kelly receiving euthanasia drugs in a hospital bed before a slow-zoom gives focus to her gravestone. At the beach in San Junipero, Cyborg-Yorkie hops into her convertible, pushes a cassette tape into the player and the 1980s hit 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' begins playing and continues throughout the closing scene. Cyborg-Yorkie pulls up at a beach house and Cyborg-Kelly runs to the car to embrace her. The two laugh and scream freely as they drive into the sunset. With 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' still playing, we see a large data storage machine integrate two new electronic buttons into its networking system. The episode thus affiliates science fiction futuristic technology with the melodramatic narrative and anticipation of a 'forever' for Cyborg-Yorkie and Cyborg-Kelly in San Junipero. This 'happy ending' illuminates the possibility of the cyborg breaking down borders rather than imposing them. In the tech-symbolic, limits were enforced upon

Yorkie by her religious family and state laws governing the care of the disabled, and Kelly wrestled with boundaries of marriage and family dictating what is morally acceptable. Becoming cyborgs, Yorkie is released from the impositions of her family and the state, and Kelly from her perceived obligation to her husband's legacy. Cyborg-Yorkie and Cyborg-Kelly are granted liberation from the structures of the tech-symbolic. In 'San Junipero', technology is embraced and consequentially evaporates division, highlighting how debilitating human borders and structures can be.

Contrasting the other episodes of Season 3 of *Black Mirror*, 'San Junipero' examines possibilities of productive engagements between humans and technology that free us from systematic subjugation rather than being mechanisms of oppressive social orders. Analysing 'San Junipero' through a cyberfeminist lens reminds us that if we use new technologies in old ways they will maintain existing power structures that subjugate and constrain. In line with Haraway's hopeful predictions, it explores the possibility of freedom through embracing an ever-expanding fluidity of human subjectivities via technology. 'San Junipero' manifests the high emotion, ethical questioning and narrative cues of melodrama along with science fiction's futuristic technologies, rational explanations, and testing of the limits of what it means to be human. Like Haraway's cyborg, this episode is itself a hybrid. Intersecting a masculine genre with that which 'belongs' to women to represent liberated cyborg subjectivities, 'San Junipero' draws upon a 'utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end' (Haraway, 1991:84). While '[t]he cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden' (Haraway 1991, 151), the conclusion of 'San Junipero' offers us a potential future in which the cyborg leads us to a technologised heaven.

References

- Andrejevic, Mark. Burdon, Mark. 2015. 'Defining the Sensor Society.' *Television & New Media* 16, no. 1: 19-36.
- Balsamo, Anne Marie. 1996. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. USA: Duke University Press.
- Bartolone, Giulia. 2018. 'The Tension Between Utopia and Dystopia Under Late Capitalism: Control, Alienation and Resistance in *Mr. Robot* and *Black Mirror*.' Masters Dis. Netherlands: Leiden University.

- Brooks, Peter. 1995. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*. USA: Yale University Press.
- Cawelti, John G. 2014. *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. USA: University of Chicago Press.
- DeKoven, Marianne. ed. 2001. *Feminist Locations: Global and Local, Theory and Practice*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- Elaesser, Thomas. 1991. 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama.' In *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, edited by Marcia Landy, 68-98. USA: Wayne State University Press.
- Grindon, Leger. 2011. *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy: Conventions, History, Controversies*. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. 1989. *Sexual Subversions*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Haraway, Donna Jeanne. 1991. 'A Cyborg Manifesto' [1984]. In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, bell. 2000. 'Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center' [1984]. London: Pluto Press.
- Hovenden, Fiona. Janes Linda. Kirkup, Gill and Woodward, Kathryn. 2013. 'Introduction.' In *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*, edited by Fiona Hovenden, Linda Janes, Gill Kirkup, and Kathryn Woodward. USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Jones, Gweneth. 2009. 'Feminist SF.' In *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Mark Bould, Andrew Butler, Adam Roberts, Sherryl Vint, 485-488. London and New York: Routledge.
- Joyrich, Lynne. 1996. *Re-viewing Reception: Television, Gender, and Postmodern Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- King, Geoff, and Krzywinska, Tanya. 2000. *Science Fiction Cinema: From Outerspace to Cyberspace*. Columbia: Wallflower Press.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1986a. 'About Chinese Women.' [1974] *The Kristeva Reader*. Translated by Sean Hand, edited by Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1986b. 'Revolution in Poetic Language.' [1974] *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1986c. 'Women's Time.' [1981] *The Kristeva Reader*, edited by Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Mayer, Michael. 2015. 'The New Killer Drones: Understanding the Strategic Implications of next-Generation Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicles.' *International Affairs* 91, no. 4: 765-780.
- Mercer, John, and Martin Shingler. 2004. *Melodrama: Genre Style, Sensibility*. Columbia: Wallflower Press.
- Milford, Trevor Scott. 2015. 'Girl's Online Agency: A Cyberfeminist Exploration.' In *EGirls, ECitizens: Putting Technology, Theory and Policy into Dialogue with Girls' and Young Women's Voices*, 55-82. Ontario: University of Ottawa Press.
- Moor, Andrew. 2012. *Powell and Pressburger: A Cinema of Magic Spaces*. New York: IB Tauris.
- Mulvey, Laura. 1989. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. New York: Springer.
- Parks, Lisa. 2016. 'Everyday Militarism.' *Feminist Studies* 42, no. 1: 227-235.
- Price, Brian. 2012. 'Color, Melodrama and the Problem of Interiority.' In *Companion to Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, edited by Peucker, Brigitte, 159-181. USA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Schwarze, Steven. 2006. 'Environmental Melodrama.' *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92, no. 3: 239-261.
- Stewart, Michael. 2014. 'Introduction: Film and TV Melodrama: An Overview.' In *Melodrama in Contemporary Film and Television*, edited by Michael Stewart, 1-21. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Storm, Jo. 2007. *Frak You!: The Ultimate Unauthorized Guide to Battlestar Galactica*. Toronto: ECW Press.
- Williamson, Milly. 2005. *The Lure of the Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy*. Columbia: Wallflower Press.

Author Biographies

Corey Martin teaches in Screen and Media Studies at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia. She is embarking on a PhD, which focusses on new media culture and feminisms. Her 2017 First Class Honours thesis drew on television studies and genre studies in conjunction with psychoanalytic feminism and socialist feminism to analyse the postmodern science fiction text *Black Mirror*.

Email: cmartin9@usc.edu.au

Joanna McIntyre is a Lecturer in Screen and Media Studies at the University of the Sunshine Coast. She is the author of the forthcoming book

Transgender Celebrity (Routledge) and the co-editor of the forthcoming collection *Gender and Australian Celebrity Culture* (Routledge). She publishes work on queer and transgender representation, celebrity, film, television, and Australian culture, including in *The European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2017) and *Outskirts* (2015).

Email: JMcInty2@usc.edu.au