Queering Time, Questioning Ageism Through Speculative Siction

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Abstract: *Speculative narratives offer particularly rich and complex explorations of time and aging, exhibiting a tendency to play with 'queer temporalities' and imagine the lifecourse and human chronology in alternative ways. In this article, we employ an ageing studies perspective in our analysis of time, the lifecourse and aging in four visual speculative narratives. We focus on recent film/TV about increased longevity/immortality. "San Junipero" (in TV Series Black Mirror, 2016), Mr Nobody (2009) and In Time (2011) imagine societies in which forms of technologically enabled extended longevity have been achieved. The Age of Adaline (2015), on the other hand, follows the tradition of speculative fiction about exclusive immortality, achieved only by one or a small number of persons. All four texts play with linear and chronological aging and juxtapose youth and age in provocative ways, exploiting the possibilities of the visual mode. In Time and Adaline seem to yearn for normative social order and present extended longevity as the source of unhappiness and social crisis. San Junipero and Mr Nobody, on the other hand, focus on the possibilities of temporal disorder as a way of escaping normative expectations. They draw attention to the constricting nature of normative times and combine utopian and dystopian elements to explore the tension between normative and queer temporal orders.*

Keywords: *speculative film/TV; queering time; aging; longevity; immortality*

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Introduction

The potential of literary gerontology to question ageist conceptions and identify alternative visions of aging in contemporary society has been proved in recent years. Literary gerontology offers different perspectives on the complexity of growing old (Chivers 2003: x), at the same time as it looks at the contradictions around the experience of aging (Falcus, 2015: 53). The richness in perspectives and possibilities of literary gerontology then intersects with other traditional literary approaches, such as gender, class, race and ethnicity. The already well-accepted perspective of the lifecourse within aging studies recognises that aging is lifelong and that stages of life cannot be considered in isolation. Literary gerontology reminds us of the fact that life is lived in and across time and that narrative is the mode through which we explain, and relate to, our own experiences. As Margaret Morganroth Gullette states in *Agewise*, "Whatever happens in the body, and even if nothing happens in the body, aging is a narrative. Each of us tells her own story." (2010: 5) Narrative gerontologists Jan-Erik Ruth and Gary Kenyon highlight the importance of narrative in making sense of our life trajectories and in discerning how the stories of our individual lives fit into "cultures, subcultures, or family patterns" to either conform to such patterns or to expand "the possibilities and limits set by the historical time period in which we live" (Ruth and Kenyon 1996: 2). Narrative imbues life with meaning and this meaning can change and expand as one grows older.

Moreover, in the same way as we live in time, we narrate our or others' stories in time; as Ruth and Kenyon state: "as we grow, mature and age in time, we gradually form and reform ourselves and the stories we tell about ourselves" (1996: 7). Thus, there is a difference between "inner time" and "outer time" (Kenyon 1996), terms corresponding to Jan Baars' "chronological time" and "lived time" (2012: 143). Whereas Kenyon considers that "the time in which we live includes both physical (outer) and psychological (inner time)" (1996: 30), for Baars "we are always already living in time, and in some sense, we are always already living time"; in other words, chronological time does not usually coincide with lived time and, moreover, lived time may be modified by memory and

perspective. As Kenyon states: "there are individual experiences and perspectives of time, and those time perspectives may change over the lifespan" (1996: 30). Narrative is key in relating these two dimensions of time within human beings: "Not only are narratives needed to relate chronometric time to the world, they are also crucial to interrelate the dimensions of lived time: the past, the present and the future." (2012: 143) However, even though narrative relates us to the world, Kenyon considers that the narrative we construct is essentially "storytime" and adds "Where clock time epitomizes objective time, storytime epitomizes subjective time, the time of our lives." (Randall and Kenyon 2004: 334)

Chronological time and the specific social expectations related to each life stage may, then, differ from lived time. Depending on the social and cultural organisation in which we live, "people judge themselves to be on-time or off-time in their life course" (Kenyon 1996: 30). This idea of the dominance of clock time and its juxtaposition with lived time was further developed by Judith Halberstam in *In a Queer Time and Place*, where she defines "queer time" as living and organizing one's life outside "the conventions of family, inheritance and child rearing" (2005: 5) and highlights the potentiality of "queerness" to "open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space" (2005: 5). Halberstam understands "queer time" as moving away from the ordering of the lifecourse by strict "bourgeois rules" (2005: 5) that are seen as "natural". For Halberstam: "[q]ueer uses of time and place develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (2005: 1), so that alternative ways of organizing and establishing relationships are brought centre-stage. Halberstam defines queer as "non-normative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time" (2005: 6). Within literary and cinematic analysis, Cynthia Port (2012) and Eva Krainitzki (2014) have applied Halberstam's concept of queer temporalities to Amis's novel *Time's Arrow* and Fincher's film *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, and the character of M in the Bond films respectively. Whereas Port suggests that disruptive representations of youthing and aging contribute to disorienting the viewers' internalized sense of cultural temporality, Krainitzki argues that "M's disruption of chrono-temporal-

ity […] allow viewers to imagine an ageing process outside paradigmatic markers" (2014: 34). These analyses make clear the ways in which literary narratives may engage with the "queering" of time to allow us to reimagine age and aging across the lifecourse.

Speculative narratives are a particularly important genre in relation to time and aging. Considering speculative narratives of rejuvenation, for example, Teresa Mangum argues that they "lead[…] us far from varicose veins and shrinking bone mass; often these fantasies turn outward and become embroiled in larger concerns about time" (2002: 80). Speculative fiction and film exhibit a tendency to play with 'queer temporalities', addressing, for example, immortality, rejuvenation, longevity, and demographic change, and imagining the lifecourse and human chronology in alternative ways, on both macro and micro scales. Addressing hopes and fears around aging and death, speculative narratives explore specific cultural conceptions attached to youth and old age as well as the value attributed to different life stages. In this paper, then, we analyse four visual speculative narratives to explore the ways in which they offer us alternative, not always straightforward, visions of time, the lifecourse and aging. We focus on film/TV that explores longevity, whether that be achieved through accident or – as is more often the case – technological innovation. "San Junipero" (in TV Series *Black Mirror*, directed by Owen Harris, 2016), *Mr Nobody* (directed by Jaco Van Dormael, 2009) and *In Time* (directed by Andrew Niccol, 2011) imagine societies in which forms of technologically enabled longevity have been achieved, whether through biomedical or virtual means. *The Age of Adaline* (directed by Lee Toland Krieger, 2015), on the other hand, follows the tradition of speculative fiction about exclusive immortality, achieved only by one or a small number of persons. All four texts play with linear and chronological aging and juxtapose youth and age in provocative ways, exploiting the possibilities of the visual mode. *In Time* and *Adaline* seem to yearn for normative social order, and follow the idea that longevity will always lead to unhappiness and social crisis. *San Junipero* and *Mr Nobody*, on the other hand, focus on the possibilities of temporal disorder as a way of escaping normative expectations. They draw attention to the constricting nature of normative times and com-

bine utopian and dystopian elements to explore the tension between normative and queer temporal orders.

Superposition of Young and Old in Speculative Visual Texts

Speculative visual texts offer especially rich presentations of disruptions of time and the lifecourse through the recurrent superimposition of younger and older versions of characters. The plots that prompt this superimposition often centre around extended longevity/immortality and physical agelessness, but may also include what Peter Goggin and Ulla Kriebernegg (2023) call 'youthing' (where older characters suddenly experience temporal reversal that makes them physically young again) and even multiple and alternative memories that destabilise the linear lifecourse. These longstanding speculative tropes are now part of a wider interest in temporal and narrative experimentation in mainstream television and film, as Melissa Ames (2012) argues. For Ames, "the co-existence of these competing experiences of time allows new conceptions of history and posthistory to emerge" (2012, 6) often through non-normative narrative structures. Ames's research on temporal narrative in film and TV establishes a dialogue with Halberstam's theories on queer time and place as well as with Mangum's, Port's and Krainitzi's readings of temporal disruption in relation to aging and the lifecourse. The visual management – or rather dismantling – of normative time in speculative visual texts is a powerful way to explore and challenge our sense of time, the lifecourse and memory.

The Age of Adaline and *In Time* focus on the dystopian possibilities of temporal disorder and provide a way in to our analysis of speculative visual texts and queering age. Following a long trend in science and speculative fiction, they point to the negative social and personal repercussions of extended lifespans (see Lebow 2012; Mangum 2002). *The Age of Adaline* is a sci-fi romance by director Lee Toland Krieger. It focuses on one character, Adaline Bowman, who despite being 107 years old looks 29 due to an accident that provoked her heart to stop for a few seconds and made her "immune to the ravages of time". What the film makes clear is

that living out of normative, chronological time like this ultimately leads to isolation, alienation and unhappiness. Adaline increasingly lives disconnected from others in a peripatetic existence forced on her by the need to disguise her posthuman condition. Every few years she moves to a new city and changes her identity completely in order to make sure that no one recognises her and becomes aware of the fact that she has not aged at all. This isolation is also generational: she cannot share her life experiences with a birth cohort or take her place in a genealogical order (see Falcus and Oró-Piqueras 2023). More specifically, in a film focussed on heterosexual romance, she cannot follow her desires and take her place in a heterosexual order, presumably also giving birth to the next generation. The utopian possibilities of life extension are, as Mark Brand argues about narratives of longevity more broadly, increasingly dystopian (2016: 3).

In Time, on the other hand, extends longevity to the whole society. In this future dystopian world everyone is designed to live 'freely' for twenty-five years, but at that point, they have to earn their time in order to continue living. As the main protagonist says: "Time is now the currency. We earn it and spend it. The rich can live forever. And the others? I just want to wake up with more time in my hand and hours a day." Thus, the society in *In Time* is divided into time zones based on wealth, making explicit Frederic Jameson's argument that the longevity narrative is about class and wealth disparity (2005). Again, a dystopian world is fashioned on the premise that life extension will lead to inequality, alienation and boredom.

Despite what might be seen as the conservative narrative propulsion of both of these films, they nevertheless offer themselves to fruitful analysis from an age-studies perspective, working to introduce our discussion of queering time in speculative, visual texts. Whilst both films ultimately work to restore a (heteronormative) sense of social order and history, their effects on the viewer do exceed this. In both films, a sense of visual anachronism is exploited through characters who look, often significantly, younger than their chronological age, complicating the dichotomy old/young. Undeniably, *The Age of Adaline* relies for its visual effects upon the youthful and attractive appearance of its star, Blake

Lively, something enhanced by the frequent and striking changes of costume and hairstyle across the decades of the storyline. Nevertheless, this youthful appearance is at odds with the increasing chronological age of the character, something we are forced to confront at specific moments of the film. For example, Adaline meets her daughter and whereas Adaline looks like a young woman in her twenties, her daughter is an old woman with white hair. The daughter tells Adaline that she is thinking of moving to a retirement community where she can be taken care of as she gets older. On one level, this conversation emphasises the film's central message about normative temporal structures and generational order: Adaline is out of time here and not succumbing to generational succession and to age itself (she should presumably have been in a nursing home before her daughter). At the same time, as a viewer, we are forced into an uncomfortable double vision that makes us reflect on normative temporal structures: Adaline both is and is not old and young. We are made aware of the signifiers we use to determine age (largely physical in a visual text) and may question what age, then, actually means. In a further example of this double vision, in one of the first scenes of the film, the camera goes around Adaline's apartment and shows a sepia photo of her looking exactly as she does in the present of the film. In the next scene, Adaline is in her job checking films from the beginning of the century; in one of them she sees images of the construction of the Golden Gate that takes her back to memories of walking with her mother and observing the construction of the Gate. Once again, Adaline looks exactly the same in the 1920s as in the present moment of the film, the 2010s.

In Time relies on a fairly conservative vision of temporal social orders, one based upon generational, class conflict: an older gerontocratic elite is quite literally stealing the time (and the lifeblood, in a pseudo-vampiric way) of the young. The text is again driven by a heterosexual romance plot, this time underpinned by a battle between young and old, rich and poor. Like *The Age of Adaline*, it relies upon the visual pleasure given by youthful, active, attractive bodies – in this case, contrasted with the sculpted, artificial youthfulness of those who have achieved extended mortality. Nevertheless, as in *The Age of Adaline*, the status of some of the

characters as youthful and yet long lived presents the viewer with a dialogic and palimpsestic vision of age itself. In one scene in the film, protagonist Will Salas enters zone one, where rich people live – that is, the people who have lived for a long time and still have a great amount of time on their 'watches' – and is introduced to the family of a woman he meets there. The three women of the family appear to be in their twenties and yet it is clear that they are daughter, mother and grandmother, unsettling generational and chronological aging and order. The father of the family draws attention to this when he asks Will, "Is she my sister, my mother or my daughter? Colluding times. They say it was easy in the past." *In Time* is unsettling precisely because it is impossible to use embodied, visual markers as a determinant of age, experience and generational location. Age becomes a performative construct that echoes what Judith Butler argues about drag and gender. In drawing attention to the markers of age, our assumptions about aging are interrogated.

"San Junipero" and *Mr Nobody* go further than *The Age of Adaline* and *In Time* in their exploration of age, embodiment and temporal orders, though they also rely upon the visual juxtaposition of age and youth for specific effects. "San Junipero" is the fourth episode in season three of anthology TV Series *Black Mirror*, created by Charlie Brooker.[3] As Duarte and Battin (2021) argue in their recently published volume on the series, it questions the uses, limitations and ethics of new technologies in a time in which humanity seems to accept them almost blindly. The episode interrogates chronological conceptions of time, life and death by offering an alternative to dying; namely, life in the virtual seaside resort of San Junipero after one's memories are uploaded to the system on the death of the body. However, before death, clients can visit San Junipero for a maximum of five hours a week as a form of elder care called 'immersive therapy'. This is when the two protagonists of the episode meet: Yorkie, a 61-year-old woman who has been paralysed for forty years, and Kelly, a woman of the same age who is suffering from a terminal cancer. The

3 *Black Mirror* was initially aired on UK's Channel 4, moving to Netflix in later series. It ran for five series (2011–19) and attracted significant viewer and critical response.

episode offers a vision of queered and palimpsestic time at the same time as it indicates the drawbacks of living a digital eternal life.

Initially, the episode immerses the viewer in a very nostalgic 1980s world – clothing, computer games, music, cars. As it progresses, we become aware that all is not as it seems – something we are prepared for as viewers of *Black Mirror*, where nothing is ever straightforward and various nova disrupt any kind of contemporary realist setting. Once the episode begins to move between real and simulated worlds – making clear the premise on which it is based – we experience human time and aging as palimpsestic, in just the way that Brand explains our experience of time and the lifecourse: "one might not be young or old at any given moment, but barring premature death one could expect to be both of those things, and every other stage in between, in his or her lifetime" (2016: 1). As Isra Daraiseh and Keith Booker point out, the emphasis upon popular culture of the eighties (film, TV, music, video games) in San Junipero functions to emphasise the "sort of heavily mediated environment in which we all live, immersed in a constant stream of manufactured images that makes the distinction between 'real' and 'virtual,' on which the episode apparently hinges, extremely blurry and unstable" (2019: 156). That blurring of real and virtual in the episode extends to its treatment of old and young, which are no longer stable binaries based on memory and retrospect. We see Kelly and Yorkie in their twenties and in their sixties and are encouraged to read these representations as a palimpsest. Of course, this is not unusual in TV and film: characters are frequently aged or youthed (through chronology or through flashback and memory, see Goggin and Kriebernegg 2023), but this episode takes that further by making Kelly and Yorkie both ages at the same time. This works on a number of levels. The plot obviously connects the characters in the time of the film – they move between worlds (and ostensibly between times), but once we know that they are older, we are aware as viewers that even when we see the young characters, we are reading the lives of older people. This creates a sense of dissonance as we move between older and younger bodies. That productive dissonance is fuelled in other ways, too. In particular, we become increasingly aware that the inhabitants of San Junipero remember and are very aware of

who they were/are and the experiences they had in their 'real' lives. Kelly, for example, converses with a man at a bar who is telling her about his failing knees, something that we inevitably relate to the fact that he is either older or dead, though he is living in a young body in San Junipero. That kind of dissonance – between the young body and the life experiences that appear to exceed this – is developed as Kelly and Yorkie talk (and argue) about their real lives, particularly Kelly's marriage and the loss of her daughter. In an argument about the lack of understanding Yorkie has of that life, we come closest to bridging the gap between younger body and long life as we begin to see younger Kelly both as older and young. Through dissonance and palimpsestic aging, then, "San Junipero" forces us to recognise the complexity of aging itself and the ways in which it exceeds – and cannot be limited to – the chronological.

This juxtaposition of young and old is in many ways similar in *Mr Nobody*. The protagonist is Nemo, a 118-year-old man who is presented as "the last man on Earth to die of old age" in a time where quasi-immortality has been achieved through the endless replication of cells. The older Nemo is depicted in a sterile, white room (disassociated from the wider world) where a scientist/doctor and a journalist visit him to try to learn more about his story and help him to recover his seemingly lost memories. The treatment of past and present is more complicated than in "San Junipero", however, as *Mr Nobody* offers a number of alternative pasts/lives for Nemo. Nemo remembers and narrates his life to the doctor and journalist, but there is not just one version of the past; instead, he seems to have lived many different lives. Specifically, he offers two versions of what happened after his parents divorced: in one he stayed with his father and in the other, with his mother. Moreover, he seems to have had three adult lives in which he married three different women, with each of whom he had a different fate. The experience of viewing this film is one of disorientation and confusion, as the viewer tries to make sense of seemingly contradictory narratives and constantly revises assumptions in the face of additional evidence. Viewing the film, then, echoes the process of remembering and making sense of unstable and multiple pasts. These complicated alternative pasts undermine the idea of memory as reliable and based solely on recall. Instead, memory becomes a

series of possibilities and multiple rather than singular. The lifecourse is then not a linear trajectory, but a series of intersections and overlapping, sometimes contradictory, narratives.

As in "San Junipero", *Mr Nobody* juxtaposes scenes of characters in older and younger age. Here, we see older Nemo and Nemo as a child, as a teenager and as an adult man. This again creates a palimpsestic vision of aging that interrogates a chronological, linear model. The older, infirm Nemo is also, at the same time, a younger man and even a child. On one level, this challenges a reductive, ageist view, something Nemo articulates when he confronts the journalist and insists that he is not simply a grumpy old man who can't remember, but is also a boy of nine and a teenager of fifteen. Multiple possible lifecourse trajectories and the relation between young and old selves destabilise a linear model that reinforces aging as decline.

At the same time, the film relies for its effects and affects on the juxtaposition of age and youth, something we also see in "San Junipero". Eszter Ureczky argues that despite its seeming challenges to stereotypical ideas about aging and the life course, "San Junipero" still devotes significantly more screen time to younger bodies (and actors), offering relatively limited representations of older bodies on screen (2023). The same could be said of *Mr Nobody*, in which the scenes from Nemo's earlier life take up much more screen time than his 'present' older self. Like other science and speculative fiction, the film also relies upon images of age which verge on the grotesque in order to achieve its effects. Here, the older Nemo is seen in a sterile, static environment; he is significantly aged, with all of the usual tropes of older age very prominent: wrinkles, sparse hair etc. When he looks at his older self in a mirror, the sense of shock and repulsion is evident (and felt by both character and viewer). The film also exploits other common tropes in representations of older characters, with Nemo a grumpy, even angry, old man and increasingly forgetful.

By the end of the film, older Nemo appears on a screen in front of young Nemo and tells him: "What you are living now is the past. I'm 70 years younger. […] To me, life is inverted", showing a disruption of lived time which also underlines the complexity of the aging experience. What

is not clear in the film is its position on aging and (im)mortality: if the fact that people will not die deprives them of such complex life experience and whether that is a loss for them. In any case, Nemo is presented as a rarity: someone who has lived a long life, making many choices as he ages across the lifecourse.

Queering Time, Questioning Ageism?

By erasing the constraints of chronological and lifecourse time as described in Baar's and Halberstam's work, these four texts explore and foreground questions related to contemporary conceptions of age and, in the case of "San Junipero", gender and sexuality. Yet, they ultimately differ in their openness to temporal disruption and its relationship to normative lifecourse models.

In *The Age of Adaline*, the immortality of Adaline does not question the heterosexual system but it alters the order of generations, if only for a short time, while Adaline's immortality lasts. Adaline's avoidance of commitment and stasis is the obstacle to satisfactory heterosexual (and narrative) fulfilment in this popular romance film. The plot sees her try to overcome this obstacle in her relationship with Ellis. However, on meeting his parents, she realises that she had had a relationship with Ellis's father, William, when he was a young man, decades ago. Adaline introduces herself to William as Adaline's daughter; however, William feels impressed by the resemblance between the supposed Adaline's mother and herself and confesses to his wife: "I'm remembering things that I don't even know I remembered." In this sense, the appearance of Adaline in William's life after all this time alters the sense of the linearity of his own life, at the same time as it alters the generational logic of William and Ellis's family, since both William and Ellis have fallen in love with the same, physically unchanged woman. This creates conflict within the family since Ellis feels disoriented and William's wife feels she was only his second choice. In the film, this disruption of time and generation is symbolised through William's research on the orbit of a specific comet, which comes back to Earth fifty years later than his research had pre-

dicted, thus proving that time is not linear. By the end of the film, Adaline has – conveniently – suffered another car accident, one that reverses her immortal condition. The film then finishes with Adaline finding her first white hair in front of the mirror, a rather stereotypical sign of her physical aging. Thus, the disruption provoked by Adaline's longevity is solved by the end of film, restoring the heterosexual order. The film, however, despite ending with the restoration of the heterosexual family and bourgeoisie time – as defined by Halberstam –, points to the possibility of immortality and time disruption being scientifically plausible, highlighting, thus, the constructed nature of human time and generational division based on heterosexual normativity.

In Time is similarly driven by a heterosexual romance plot: that of Will and Sylvia. Unlike *The Age of Adaline*, *In Time* presents a society fundamentally altered by extreme longevity. This is not, then, the story of a protagonist trying to reconcile her own non-normative condition, but the much more common dystopian narrative of a (young) protagonist fighting the system. A thriller narrative, the film is driven by action and pursuit, as the young couple battles against the gerontocracy and the forces that uphold this state of affairs. Significantly, this takes a genealogical form as Sylvia's father represents all that they fight against. Youth is, then, prioritised and the plot of the film is premised upon the necessity of generational succession and the redundancy of older people. The disruptive potential of the visual juxtaposition of age and youth in this film, and the ways in which it draws attention to our conceptions of aging and the life-course, are firmly located within a narrative that works to restore social and generational order, and with it the dominance of chronometric and normative time.

"San Junipero" offers a much more subversive vision of temporal disorder in its queer love story, whilst at the same time drawing attention to the way this is framed by a dystopian system of (temporal) control. On one level, San Junipero offers the characters a heterotopic space (see Ureczky 2023) in a parallel time to that of their lives: they can move between decades at will; they are young and not in their limiting older bodies. Importantly, they can live a story that is different from the one that they have lived in the real world. Primarily, they can explore sexual prefer-

ences that they were unable to act on in the real world: Kelly because she stayed in a long marriage; Yorkie because she becomes disabled, seemingly quadriplegic, after the accident, something which is used as prosthesis in the episode. Their love story – the primary narrative drive in the text – offers what can be read as a queer time, in the Halberstam sense, since San Junipero opens up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space for Kelly and Yorkie. In San Junipero they can choose to live the way they want and do not have to fulfil specific objectives related to life stages. Explicitly juxtaposed to the narratives of their real lives, San Junipero is a space where they apparently escape social and cultural constraints.

Nevertheless, the programme constantly reminds us of the limited nature of that escape: even before we are fully aware of the exact nature of San Junipero, clock time is a dominant feature of life there. Yorkie and Kelly are limited to 5-hour visits, one per week Characters frequently refer to the time they have left in the online world. For many, their time there ends at the fairytale-esque midnight (as is the case for Kelly and Yorkie). The titles that frame the visits to San Junipero emphasise real-world temporality and chronology: one week later. Yorkie and Kelly's relationship, therefore, free as it may seem in San Junipero, is always framed by a vague, undetermined external power that controls time there. This juxtaposition of times reminds us that queer time is precariously opposed to heteronormative, linear time, and, in this episode at least, it seems that, in the tradition of dystopian scenarios, freedom from real-world time is controlled.

The end of "San Junipero" emphasises this ambivalent vision of freedom and constraint. Kelly and Yorkie choose to euphemistically 'pass over' and stay permanently in San Junipero. Ostensibly, then, they escape the power of the real world, their failing bodies and the limits on their time in the simulated world. Driving along the coast in a sports car to the sound of 'Heaven Is a Place on Earth', they appear to have achieved a blissful, queer immortality. Indeed, many popular responses to this episode see it as the most optimistic of all of *Black Mirror*'s dystopian-fuelled visions. And in their analysis of pop culture in the episode, Daraiseh and Booker argue that "Ultimately, the happy-ever-

after ending of the episode appears to be largely free of irony, so that the episode endorses the notion of uploading human consciousnesses into computer-simulated worlds, even as a replacement for biological life, which can then be removed from the equation by euthanasia." (2019: 156) Nevertheless, as Daraiseh and Booker acknowledge, the enabling queer time in "San Junipero" is shadowed by an oppressive system time – that of TCKR Systems, the presumably capitalist venture that provides the virtual reality. The very fact that the freedom Kelly and Yorkie enjoy can only be imagined in a nostalgic vision of the 1980s points to the limits of a corporate system that is itself an evolutionary outcome of 1980s capitalism. That sense of 'ustopian' (Atwood 2011: 66) limitations is reiterated at the end of the text. The scene in which Kelly and Yorkie drive off into the sunset in "San Junipero" is followed by the cut to a high-tech storage room in which a robot manages a massive, shining chrome and black bank of plugs that represents the downloaded memories of those who live in San Junipero, a visual contrast that emphasises the complexity of utopian/dystopia in this episode. 'Heaven Is a Place on Earth' continues to play in the background, an ironic and sinister set of lyrics when juxtaposed with the image. As James Cook (2020) points out, this technological forever is deeply inserted in a capitalist system.

More fundamentally disturbing are the obvious questions raised in the episode about euthanasia, care and wealth. Care here is very advanced and takes place in hi-tech, expensively designed environments. The questions of who pays for that care, how they pay and who, then, is unable to pay are left unresolved and unaddressed in the series. Euthanasia as a solution to serious disability or terminal illness is also a question that is inevitably raised in the episode, though largely passed over in the episode's emphasis upon and representation of the ease with which death is ensured.

Like "San Junipero", *Mr Nobody* draws attention to aging, time and the lifecourse, in this case playing with images in which time and space are somehow eliminated. The film includes repeated images of space and space travel. We see Nemo as a teenager typing a story about space travel and humans in suspended animation on the way to Mars. This image of travel to Mars is seen more than once in the film: early in the narra-

tive, Nemo seems to remember being one of those human travellers and later he seems to remember waking up from hibernation and arriving on Mars. Other, visual images self-reflexively comment on temporal instability, such as Nemo walking across the sand and into his own footsteps, that then disappear. Similarly, he invests in time-lapse photography in which he reverses images of decay and putrefaction. Further drawing attention to the destabilisation of time are Nemo's memories of life as a popular scientist, appearing on TV to explain string theory, dimensions and time. These images and memories function as a kind of metanarrative comment on the constant temporal reversal and even confusion that characterises the narrative of Nemo's life.

Unlike "San Junipero", *Mr Nobody* does not offer any kind of 'queer utopia' (see Ureczky). In fact, the emphasis seems to be on heterosexual relationships and normative familial structures. Nemo's memories centre on his parents' divorce, his mother's new relationship and his own three marriages. Suburban settings and domestic environments dominate his memories. Nevertheless, the film draws attention to the constructed nature of these environments and offers what might be seen as a knowing and ironic vision of twentieth-century American life. The combination of the real and the fantastic in the speculative mode is exploited here. For example, the childhood suburbia Nemo remembers also features as a toy in the child's bedroom. Early in the film, Nemo's memories are presented as a hyperreal version of the past reminiscent of *The Truman Show*. That sanitised version of 1970s, suburban America suggests a self-conscious presentation of the past and nostalgia that presents the dominance of the heterosexual as itself part of an imagined, unstable narrative of American life in which, at the same time, old age seems to have disappeared. Exacerbating this sense of the instability of this heterosexual ideal are the relationships themselves: Nemo's memories centre around his parents' divorce and his own story is dominated by three versions of heterosexual romance, none of which seems to be successfully realised. In these ways, then, *Mr Nobody* queers the dominance of the heterosexual lifecourse model, drawing attention to its instability and, potentially, redundancy.

Conclusion

Longevity is explored in these four narratives; however, none of them seems to unproblematically advocate for longevity and immortality as either desirable or remotely close to happiness, making them characteristic of many narratives of rejuvenation and longevity (see Mangum 2002: 70 and Lebow, 2012). In *In Time*, the dystopian consequences of extended longevity are clear in the inequality that permeates the world. The individual effects of extended life spans are made clear in characters such as Henry, who gives all of his remaining time to Will, having lived more than one hundred years and found himself simply tired and bored. That desire for mortality and finitude is also seen in *Mr Nobody* and *The Age of Adaline*. *Mr Nobody* finishes with Nemo dying and declaring that this is the happiest day of his life. In *The Age of Adaline*, the protagonist is actually happy to discover that she has her first white hair and is thus physically aging, since her life has been in a state of static isolation. In both narratives, then, aging and finitude ensure meaning in the lives of the protagonists.

"San Junipero" may be viewed as an exception amongst these narratives, since Kelly and Yorkie will stay young and happy forever in the dream-like world of San Junipero. However, the episode does subtly indicate the potential limitations of this world (not only through its dystopian system of capitalist control). As Cook, drawing on Wulandhani and Wijaya, points out, the lack of mortality in San Junipero constitutes a world without risk and goals, and therefore an existence without meaning (Cook 2020: 115), something further emphasised in San Junipero through repetition since life there is presented like a holiday in which every day is very similar to the next one. In fact, the queering of time and lack of lifecourse markers in this *Black Mirror*'s episode may lead to unhappiness rather than freedom; this is one of the arguments Yorkie initially uses in her refusal to stay in San Junipero permanently, since she believes that those who do are bored and lack affective and emotional satisfaction.

Whilst all of the narratives embrace finitude, they take differing approaches to their explorations of aging and the lifecourse. All of the texts

juxtapose older and younger ages in productive ways, often through the visual and palimpsestic presentation of older and youthful bodies. They can all be said to be texts that to some extent queer our understanding of age itself. Nevertheless, it is clear that *Mr Nobody* and "San Junipero" go further than *In Time* and *The Age of Adaline* in their explorations of temporal order and aging. Whilst the latter texts situate their representations of aging within fairly conservative narratives of heterosexual fulfilment and genealogical security, "San Junipero" and *Mr Nobody* more fundamentally disrupt our conceptions of the (heterosexual) lifecourse. Whilst the dystopian elements of both narratives offer constant reminders of the limited nature of any utopian alternatives to chronometric time, they nevertheless draw attention to the possibility of queering that time and offering alternative ways of conceptualising our progression along the lifecourse, making clear the potential of speculative fiction to contribute to the ways in which we understand aging itself.

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