

San Junipero: The Postmodern Dream of Immortality and the End of Utopia

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Abstract

This article analyses 'San Junipero', which is an episode of the popular tv series, Black Mirror, from the perspective of Utopian Studies and the History of Science. This particular episode deals with the issue of immortality and the desideratum of a manmade paradise and in my view offers an opportunity to observe how new technologies that are still under development are presented in the popular culture of our day and how they are linked with the very old human desire for immortality and return to the prelapsarian Garden. In this article, I make use of the sporadic evidence about the 'nature' of 'San Junipero' and its 'miraculous technology' and I make the attempt to examine how this utopian fantasy encapsulates our contemporary anxieties about a virtual life that slowly consumes our real one, changing through the use of technology our very character as human beings but also our utopian dreams that seem to regress more and more into the realm of the personal.

*San Junipero, the fourth episode of the third season of the popular sci-fi series Black mirror ends with the following scene: a woman stands in the beach bathed in sunlight and she looks somewhere behind the camera. Then the angle widens in a way that allows us to see another female figure moving towards her and joining her company. Up next we see the heroines happy in a characterless, indiscernible environment full of sun, light breeze and blue waves. The characterless environment has a name, *San Junipero*, a small Californian sea resort town. More accurately, it is a heavily edited simulation of what a Californian sea-side beach-town should look like. As for the two heroines, what they are is much more complicated. . .*

The tall blond girl in her mid-twenties is named Yorkie and seems to be out of place in an 80s dance party. The second one is called Kelly, an African American party girl that seems to enjoy herself too much in this party, being well acquainted with the barman and chased by a former lover. As the plot of the episode unfurls we learn that our episode's young and beautiful

29 heroines are in reality avatars of two much older women that connect to the simulation of San
30 Juniper for a few hours every weekend. Kelly enjoys herself, avoiding forming long and
31 meaningful relationships with other visitors or the 'locals' while Yorkie is checking if this
32 paradisiacal place can be a suitable afterlife for her. Their different approaches to San Junipero
33 foreshadow the divergent aims of the visitors and the inhabitants of the city. In the
34 background of the love story between Yorkie and Kelly, we find out that *San Junipero* is
35 peopled by two types of residents: a) dead people who have uploaded there their
36 consciousness in order to stay eternally in this paradise and b) old and infirm people who visit
37 it every weekend for a few hours as part of 'a nostalgia therapy'; the latest weapon against
38 anxiety and memory loss developed by this world's geriatrics research. The rest of the episode
39 is focused on the love story of the two heroines and the obstacles they are called to overcome
40 in order to be together. However, in a subtle way this 'love story' with its telenovela elements
41 is linked with the ethical issues that arise with the conquest of immortality by humankind and
42 with complications caused by the dominant religious doctrines about afterlife and the fear
43 that our species face with regards to the unknown territory of 'eternity.'

44 The 'pulp technology' of immortality seems to play a dominant role in these fantasies that
45 describe the hypothesis of mind upload as our path to immortality.¹ The idea, of course, is
46 quite old. The biogerontologist George M. Martin is credit as the father of the idea of mind
47 uploading described in an article of 1971 but contemporary science fictional works and
48 futurists seem to return more frequently to this idea emphasizing its viability as technology.²
49 Yet, it must be emphasized that from its conception as an idea from Martin to its current pulp
50 and pop uses in our mass media and collective hopes and fears there is much distance. For
51 Martin and other gerontologists, technologies like cryonics and mind-uploading were seen as
52 potential tools in our species fight against aging and death that were worthy of further
53 research and funding.³ The initial idea was adopted by neuroscientists and computer
54 programmers and engineers who occupied themselves with the practical aspects of this

¹ M. Bould, S. Vint, *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction* (2011).

² G. M. Martin, *Brif Proposal on Immortality: An Interim Solution*, 14 (2) *Perspect Biol Med.* (1971), 339.

³ P. Nicholls, *The Science in Science Fiction* (Knopf 1983); N. Vitamore, D. Barranco, *Persistence of Long-Term Memory in Vitrified and Revived Caenorhabditis elegans*, 18 *Rejuvenation Research* (2015).

55 technology, pointing out how difficult may be the task of emulating and uploading a human
56 brain and how our current hardware is far from capable of achieving this task. This
57 ‘pessimism’ has not deterred science fiction writers like Isaak Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke
58 in as early as in the 1960s to imagine worlds where this technology exists or writers like
59 William Gibson with his *Neuromancer* (1984) to popularize the idea making it part of the
60 mainstream culture. Hence, *Black Mirror’s San Junipero* is not unique in tackling this issue but
61 its different from the previous examples by focusing less on the technology itself than in its
62 ethical consequences and problems that may arise from its use asking whether this
63 technology’s existence changes our very human nature. Unlike contemporary futurists such
64 as Max Moore, Robin Hanson and Ray Kurzweil who who impatiently await the coming of
65 singularity and humankind’s liberation from its biological constraints, last decades Science
66 Fiction works have adopted a more nuanced view, more dystopian than triumphant one
67 advocated by the supporters of mind uploading and singularity.

68 *The ‘Utopian’ Character of San Junipero*

69 Despite the dark undertones that *San Junipero* has in my view, its creators have described it
70 as a utopia. Hence, it is important to understand the ‘utopian’ character of the said tv series
71 episode before proceeding to its further analysis. *Black Mirror* is a tv series that has gained a
72 cult following due to its concern with the negative/dystopian results that technology can have
73 in our lives. An anthology series that in past episodes has examined our obsession with the
74 popularity of our carefully cropped social media presence, the horrific implications that the
75 use of virtual reality technology for judicial punishment or in modern warfare may have and
76 the dehumanizing matchmaking algorithms. By tackling these issues, the series has
77 established a dark tone that contests the utopian potentials of technology and technic due to
78 humanity’s inability to utilize it in a moderate and ethical way. This established pattern,
79 Charlie Brooker, the creator and chief producer of the series, tried to disrupt in *San Junipero*.
80 According to his statements from the very beginning *San Junipero* was to be a hopeful story,
81 with a happy end. *San Junipero* was to be a utopia. But what type of utopia? A utopia is an
82 ideal society, a better society based on a different social and political organization than the

83 less than perfect contemporary society. Based on this rather skeletal definition *San Junipero*
84 hardly qualifies as utopia. Instead, is presented as a playground for adults, or to be more
85 accurate as a hedonistic memory lane trip for elderly and diseased people. It seems to have
86 no social or political organization serving only as the background for the personal fantasies
87 and adventures of its inhabitants. The secondary role that the environment has for this
88 paradise is evident by the choice that is given to the visitors to change its time period.
89 Something that may be appropriate for its use as a tool for nostalgia therapy, but it seems that
90 the simulation's geographical setting cannot be changed according to each users' preferences
91 neither are other templates of the town to choose of. Moreover, the few glimpses of the town
92 offered through the episode, reveal an unimpressive townscape without any visible landmark
93 that could be seen as the focal point of this society as many utopian cities had. As for *San*
94 *Junipero's* Californian setting initially it seems to have been chosen not so much due to the rich
95 utopian commune tradition of the area but rather for the nice weather, the telegenic beaches
96 and maybe to evoke a certain carefree Californian lifestyle. However, the choice of the town's
97 name may suggest a closer relationship with California and its utopian communities. Junipero
98 Serra (1713-1784) who seems to have given his name to the city, was a Catalan Franciscan friar
99 who funded many missions in California. The friar's canonization in 2015 raised the issue of
100 mistreatment and forced Christianization of the indigenous population in his hands and
101 tarnished his traditionally benevolent reputation as civilizer and protector of the indigenous
102 population. Could we see in this name choice a sign of the ambivalence that pertains *San*
103 *Junipero's* story and utopian character? Serra's positive legacy in many parts of Californian
104 was linked with the quasi-utopian missions he had founded around the state where
105 Amerindians were protected and taught farming by the Franciscans with streets and schools
106 named after him. In any case, as Kelly says to Yorkie when they first meet: this is a party-town
107 and nothing suggests that it was designed to be anything else or that any of its inhabitants
108 wished it to be more. This, however, reveals another issue. This simulated paradise is operated
109 and probably designed by a private corporation. Its parameters and designs may have been
110 made according to their customers orders but the horizon of expectations of this paradise was

111 from its very beginning limited and most probably was destined to remain like that as long
112 as it was operational.

113 The individualistic character of San Junipero serves the plot of a love story that ends with a
114 promise of forever together realized. Yet, the fact that this fantasy is presented as a utopia
115 raises questions about the meaning of the word and its transformation today. If utopia was an
116 imaginary better society, then Junipero is not a utopia because it is not a society, it is a garden
117 of earthly delights for individuals or a classical paradise similar to the Fortunate Islands where
118 a few blessed individuals were enjoying immortality and an island with temperate climate
119 and abundant fruits. In its updated version paradise is a playground in a virtual environment
120 designed to accommodate the needs and wishes of the avatars that log into it. Therefore, the
121 'utopia' that Brooker refers to is nothing more than a video game where people adopted their
122 desired avatars. Still, this simplistic paradise seems to be an accurate reflection of our age's
123 utopian hopes, encapsulating our age's limited interest for the commons and the shift of our
124 hopes towards our personal happiness and welfare.

125 *Homo Virtualis, Cyborgs and Immortality.*

126 The rejection of the old grand narratives and the radical visions of transforming society does
127 not mean that the paradise of *San Junipero* is alien to utopia. On the contrary, we have to bare
128 in mind that utopianism has many expressions and its origins are as old as our species. It is
129 no coincidence that Ernst Bloch traces in every culture and religion of the world, a memory or
130 a dream for a better world that haunted our desires for millennia and forces us to
131 systematically scrutinize the present conditions of ours and to compare them with a not yet
132 realized ideal. Yet, in *San Junipero*, humanity's struggle for a better world and the always
133 present 'not-yet' that forces us to question our current state and search for new solutions and
134 paradigms of social and political organization are absent. The focus of episode is on the two
135 heroines' relationship and in my view, this is not just for the plot's sake or due to the medium's
136 and format's restraints. The concern of the writers with the personal relationship and welfare
137 of the heroines is not as narrow as it may appear, rather it encapsulates the form that the
138 utopian desire of our era has taken and how this utopian dream has shaped the public

139 perception of the scientific research in the field of informatics and cryonics. The focus now is
140 immortality, a very private and very old dream. A dream that the 21st century technology was
141 going to make a reality, according to many futurists like Robin Hanson.

142 This lead us to the concept of mind uploading as in Martin's article where it was seen as a
143 remedy against the ultimate disease of death and offers us the opportunity to observe how
144 these hypothetical technologies were either inspired or appropriated by Science Fiction and
145 through it were popularized. In a world that the fountain of youth was not found despite the
146 efforts of Alexander the Great and Ponce de Leon, science is seen as the only way to conquer
147 immortality. The first such technology that seems to have been inspired by pulp science fiction
148 and was suggested that could help us in our effort to defeat death was cryonics.⁴ Robert
149 Ettinger a mathematician who is considered as the founder of cryonics movement due to his
150 book *The Prospect of Immortality* (1962) was quite clear about his early inspiration by SF
151 stories in combination with the work of Jean Rostand in cryopreservation for his idea of deep
152 freezing bodies. Ettinger who also founded and became the president of the Cryonics Institute
153 saw cryopreservation as a technique through which humans could win time until science has
154 advanced enough to cure all the diseases and unlock the secrets of immortality. Ettinger's
155 view in the utility of this method is clearly expressed in his death announcement where his
156 son Dan Ettinger noted that his father will have a second chance because his body was frozen.⁵
157 Cryonics seem to be today a staple in our immortality fantasies and the movement has
158 magazines like the *Long Life: Longevity through Technology* (a bi-monthly magazine published
159 by the American Cryonics Society and many companies that attract funding from the US
160 government and private customers to further research the practical applications of the
161 cryopreservation technologies. It is not an accident that California is among the major hubs of
162 cryonics companies and societies that it is also the hub of the transhumanist movement, the
163 place where thinkers associated with transhumanism like F. M. Esfandiary known as FM 2030
164 and Max More first organized around themselves a cycle of intellectuals that espoused the
165 principles of transhumanism. These futurists imagined a new concept of humanity and

⁴ P. Nicholls, *The Science in Science Fiction* (Knopf 1983).

⁵ Body of Cryonic Pioneer Robert Ettinger Frozen, *The Telegraph* (26 July 2011).

166 searched for a way to guide humanity to evolve by employing all the available technologies
167 and scientific achievements in order to overcome our biological limitations. More who became
168 in the 90s among the most vocal proponents of the movement and is considered the inventor
169 of the term transhumanism in a series of articles delineated the movement's ideology as one
170 of personal undeterred advancement based on reason, intelligence and critical thought.⁶
171 According to some of its critics' transhumanism was nothing more than a combination of
172 Nietzsche's philosophy, libertarianism and neoliberalism whose scientific base was at best
173 questionable and founded upon SF and not hard science.⁷ To return to San Junipero's name
174 and its ambivalent legacy, it becomes evident that the choice of California as its setting may
175 echo the contemporary transhumanist movement whose aspirations San Junipero's
176 simulation and brain emulated avatars seem to realize.

177 The heroines and the San Junipero's virtual paradise are the pinnacle of the transhumanist
178 movements aspirations. The deceased people that inhabit it permanently and the 'tourists'
179 both have transcended their human nature, becoming what contemporary futurists have
180 described as 'homo virtualis'. A transhumanist evolution in which we have been liberated
181 from the prosthesis of our material bodies transferring our consciousness in the virtual/digital
182 realm of internet. But, in my view San Junipero's heroines are much closer to Donna
183 Haraway's definition of cyborgs.⁸ Creatures that had severed their links with the real world
184 and any kind of relations may had with it, achieving an individuation that frees them from
185 the constructed labels of the 'real' world and as a result from the racism and oppression that
186 were subjected in it. The heroines form an interracial, homosexual couple which may seem in
187 today's climate as a mascot of identity politics and west coast liberalism but in reality, is a
188 much more transgressive and revolutionary act that underlines their 'cyborg nature', their
189 rejection of the clear-cut categories that western civilization imposed to humanity for
190 centuries. Yorkie and Kelly, inhabit a virtual paradise that is far from innocent as the visit of

⁶ J. Raulerson, *Singularities: Technoculture, Transhumanism, and Science Fiction in the 21st Century*, 45 *Liverpool Science Fiction Texts and Studies* (2003).

⁷ E. Graham, *Nietzsche Gets a Modem: Transhumanism and the Technological Sublime*, 16 (1) *Literature and Technology* (2002), 65- 80.

⁸ D. Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1984).

191 Yorkie to Quagmire, a sex club that both tourists and locals visit in search of pleasure proves.
192 The symbolisms of this place are hard to ignore, a garden of earthly delights rendered in
193 similar dark colors with the homonymous painting of Hieronymus Bosch is a place of
194 mindless carnality, the outcome of a world where no God and as a result morality and fear of
195 retribution exists. In a parallel level, this immoral, hellish environment and the journey there
196 of Yorkie to reunite with Katie reminds us Orpheus journey to Hades to retrieve Euridice. The
197 irony of this imagery and the shocking realization by Yorkie of Kelly's orgiastic lifestyle
198 shatter any illusions that Yorkie and, we as audience, may have about the character of this
199 virtual paradise. It is a pleasure-land designed to offer an exodus from the misery of real life.
200 A refuge for infirm and sick elderly citizens who revisit their lost golden years.

201 Moreover, the transgressive nature of both heroines is underlined by the fact that are expelled
202 or have decided to sever their connections to their families. Yorkie has been disowned by her
203 religious conservative family after she came out to them while Kelly has lost her daughter
204 before *San Junipero's* simulation had been developed and her husband had decided not to join
205 it in the hope that afterlife may exist, and he could be reunited with his daughter in it. The
206 main conflict that Kelly has to deal with is whether she should try to reunite with her loved
207 ones reforming a nuclear, 'normal' family in an improbable afterlife or if she should stay with
208 Yorkie in San Junipero for 'eternity'. Her final, choice to ignore the promise she had given to
209 her husband, negating thus the established version of natural whole is a major disruptive act
210 of rebellion. Kelly and Yorkie are cyborgs and not Frankenstein's creatures because they
211 actively reject the notion of the Garden. They don't ask their creator to make a heterosexual
212 mate for them. They don't care about joining a restored perfect world. *San Junipero* for them
213 is just the background. No meaningful relationship with other characters is seen on screen,
214 like video game NPCs the barman or the random teenager next to the game consoles who has
215 a brief exchange with Yorkie in the episode's opening have rather minimal interactions with
216 her that advance the plot and help her to find her mate. The only other character that is
217 somewhat developed in the episode is Wes, another visitor in *San Junipero* who pursues Kelly
218 claiming that he is in love with her, while she rejects him pointing out that she does not seek
219 anything serious, just attachment-free fun, showing how reluctant she is to join this virtual

220 community. Throughout the episode the only meaningful relationship is that of the two
221 heroines, that reminds us Harraway's above observation in her *Cyborg Manifesto* that
222 cyborgs are wary of holism, but needy of connection.

223 The similarities of these figures with Harraway's definition of cyborg are striking and to me
224 this does not seem to be accidental. The 19th and early 20th century technological utopianism
225 with its visions of a rational society were technological innovations and a scientifically
226 organized production would have solved the issues that the period's societies had to deal with
227 seem to have been transformed. Appropriating the technology that the digital and
228 information revolutions of the 50s and 60s bequeathed to us utopian and science fictional
229 narratives gradually abandoned the positive, celebratory tone of late 19th century technological
230 utopianism focusing instead on the negative consequences that technology may have in our
231 future. *San Junipero* while initially seems to describe a utopian community, a hedonistic
232 paradise, a deeper analysis of its hidden symbols and ambivalence reveals a much darker
233 vision that is built around the question of the desirability of this virtual paradise and the gift
234 of immortality that it offers.

235 The dystopian undertone may be the result of the series' general character that questions the
236 way humans use technology, usually depriving it from its utopian potential. But in this case
237 technology is almost absent for the story. The utopian setting of the virtual paradise has a
238 retro 80s technology and the few scenes where we see the heroines in their true form and we
239 visit the 'reality' we see a technology that is hidden, miniaturized, hard to be seen. The gadgets
240 small size covers their true capabilities, actually this miniaturization exposes and emphasizes
241 our present hardware's inability to sustain a simulation like *San Junipero* and even less to
242 successfully achieve Whole Brain Emulation the concept upon the achievement of immortality
243 is based. It is well known that today we do not have the necessary required technologies for
244 achieving it. Futurists and transhumanists appear optimistic pointing out how the majority of
245 these technologies are being developed by free market forces like the gaming industry which
246 is investing in the virtual reality research and the medical industry that explores the practical
247 applications of scanning and simulation for operations and prognostic medicine. Still as a 2007

248 report by the Oxford institute for the future of humanity has underlined WBE specific fields
249 like: 'Largescale neuroscience, physical handling of large amounts of tissue books, achieving
250 high scanning volumes, measuring functional information from the images, automated
251 identification of cell types, synapses, connectivity and parameters' have limited practical
252 applications to other industries and as a result funding in their research is limited.⁹

253 Thus, the slick, bug sized device that Kelly and other patients of the nursing home use seems
254 way too distant for a field that today lacks any web specific developed hardware. Another
255 glimpse of this reality's futuristic technology is offered to us in Kelly's visit to the hospital
256 where Yorkie's body is paralyzed. There Yorkie is able to communicate with the medical staff
257 through a device and to have a limited contact with her environment despite her condition.
258 Due to this technology she is able to express her desire to get euthanized and join permanently
259 *San Junipero* also through the same device she is able to marry with her caretaker to free herself
260 from her family's legal guardianship. These cases reveal the problem that *Black Mirror* has in
261 general with its depiction of technology, focusing heavily on its social consequences tends to
262 avoid any explanation of how these semi-miraculous technologies came to existence or even
263 how their application came to be as general as *San Junipero* in this reality seems to be. A
264 virtual eternal life would have caused significant debates in any society, especially in relation
265 with religious teachings about the afterlife. The only piece of information we are given is that
266 in its original incarnation was a form of nostalgia therapy, an already existing and applied for
267 the treatment of anxiety and dementia therapy where music, old pictures, videos and personal
268 items are used to trigger past memories offering to patients a way to unearth previous
269 memories or to give meaning to disjointed ones.¹⁰ If the capabilities of this virtual technology
270 changed through time or if it was redesigned to accommodate a 'permanent population' by
271 its creators is not addressed. The only thing we learn is that alive elder people are limited to
272 five hours every weekend while younger ones have no access to it. Once more, *Black mirror*
273 offers us a glimpse of the dystopian potentials of technology and the propensity of humanity

⁹ A. Sandberg, N. Bostrom, *Whole Brain Emulation (A Roadmap)*, Technical Report (2008), Oxford University.

¹⁰ F. Jameson, *Nostalgia for the Present in Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1992).

274 to abuse it but insight on these technologies principles. This may be expected by a tv show
275 but the same lack of serious insight about the necessary technologies and scientific knowledge
276 to achieve its vision of eternal life seems to pervade the whole transhumanist movement
277 which like Ettinger seems to be inspired more from works of SF and less from real research in
278 the fields of neuroscience and informatics. For all the enthusiastic TEDx appearances of
279 Kurzweil and Morrow who predict the achievement of singularity and WBE technology in
280 the next 30 or 50 years there are neuroscientists like Kenneth D. Miller and Sten Linnarsson
281 who explain how difficult and complex is the task of mapping the human brain, who far we
282 are from achieving this task and how the promises of cryonics companies to resuscitate our
283 frozen bodies or to map our brains and upload our consciousness are misleading, unethical
284 and false.

285 However, in my view this seemingly secondary comment offers a much wider critique on our
286 age's utopian potentials and hopes as these have been summarized by the transhumanist and
287 futurism movements. The retro paradise of *San Junipero* with its promise of eternal life and
288 endless hedonism seems an enticing alternative to a bleak world. The fast, video game-like
289 life in it, is safe (it has a no-pain setting) but is also pointless. The nostalgic setting offers a
290 familiar environment to the visitors but as we learn the program has many time settings and
291 Yorkie is encouraged to search Kelly in the 90s and early 2000s, yet no future or at least present
292 setting exists. Something that could be justified by the simulations origins as nostalgia therapy
293 tool but it also encapsulates a deeper crisis in the utopian hopes of our ages. The decline of
294 the 20th century grand narratives and mix of pessimism and concern about a future that seems
295 to be worse than the past led to a retreat into a safe past. The neoliberal individualistic ideas
296 of transhumanists despite their obsession with the future are lacking a concrete idea about it.
297 They only offer dreams of personal fulfillment. The upgrade of the human species through
298 science and reason and technology say nothing about our planets or societies future problems.
299 A newly conquered longevity or immortality will not provide answers to pressing issues that
300 humanity will have to deal with in the future. Hence, the retro style of *San Junipero* in all its
301 incarnations is not simple nostalgia but a symptom of the deep crisis of the utopian visions of
302 our age. In some respects, the writers were not able to imagine a genuinely utopian future.

303 Something that becomes even more concerning if we recall Brookes claim that from the very
304 beginning he wished to create an episode with a utopian content. As Bloch was warning us
305 seven decades ago in his *The Principle of Hope* (1954), the most depilating condition that
306 humanity may have to deal with it is the inability to imagine a different society. Today we are
307 unable to imagine a positive future, maybe our cynicism is justifiable, yet the fact remains all
308 the major visions of the future that characterize both our popular and high culture are
309 distinctly dystopian and the only alternative to this dystopia is a regression into the past or
310 the personal as *San Junipero* demonstrates. In the end the paradise in not *San Junipero* but
311 Yorkie's and Kelly's relationship. Cultural critics like Fredrik Jameson have questioned the
312 nature of this prevalent in our age nostalgia. An expression in his view of our late capitalism
313 age postmodern nostalgia is a pastiche that imitates past styles but is devoid of any meaning.
314 *San Junipero* with its retro nostalgia is for Jameson a 'blank parody'. It is not hard to see
315 behind the big wigs, colorful clothes and catchy disco songs of *San Junipero* the same blank
316 devoid of meaning parody. Moreover, its equally easy to see how this pastiche also cancels
317 any meaningful categorizations of utopian and messianic time as we have been taught of them
318 in the Classical and Judeo-Christian theology and philosophy. The barriers of past, present
319 and future, with the varying promises of Apocalyptic disaster and Kingdom on Earth are
320 abandoned for a present that is indistinguishable from past memories or future hopes. Our
321 heroines are indifferent but also unable to experience history even if they retreat into past
322 because this past is taken out of fashion magazines and old billboards. No real consideration
323 is given to the period and the events of it, the awkwardness of Yorkie when she first visits *San*
324 *Junipero* suggests that even the nostalgia that the visitors bath themselves in is fake. The old
325 people who log into *San Junipero* are not revisiting their past selves, they create ideal versions
326 of themselves just like we do today in our virtual presence in social media.

327 *Conclusions*

328 Yet, all these surround the very core of the utopian vision of *San Junipero* which is nothing
329 else except from our achievement of immortality and eternal youth, the most basic human
330 desires from the moment we realized our mortality and probably our most selfish one. Past

331 utopian genres offered similar ideal worlds where its inhabitants had achieved immortality.
332 The sources of this immortality however were supernatural. Fountains of youth, or magical
333 lands created by Gods to house a few elect ones, brave heroes or the resurrected Just are
334 probably the earliest versions of utopian/paradisiacal lands we have in human history.
335 Utopia however, with its emergence in the sixteenth century denied these metaphysical
336 dreams focusing instead to communal visions of a better social and political organization. The
337 immortal heroes gave their space to mortal citizens occupied with practical issues like the
338 availability of better nutrition and healthcare or the building of a more just and equal society
339 than the contemporary ones. Thus, the focus on personal immortality shows once more how
340 the personal came to dominate our age but also how this quest despite the much-advertised
341 belief in science and reason has a metaphysical origin. In the end, our postmodern utopia of
342 immortality is only superficially linked to past century's technological utopianism and its
343 focus on futuristic sciences is closer to Science fiction's wild dreams than to real scientific
344 concepts and technologies that are discussed and researched today. Even, if the whole brain
345 emulation technology is our best chance of achieving immortality and even if some
346 neuroscientists are open to explore this idea, the position of this idea in our contemporary
347 media and public debates is the result of pulp science and collective anxieties about the impact
348 of technology in our lives and less a sign of its imminent realization.¹¹ *San Junipero* with its
349 carefully hidden pessimism and ambivalence expressed how deeply ingrained in our present
350 culture these futuristic hypothetical technologies have become and how they entice us due to
351 our collective fear of death. Utopias and SF expresses wide social and cultural anxieties and
352 hopes that have been disseminated in wider audiences through pulp science. Miraculous and
353 potential dangerous science that will deliver to us the promise for eternal life and youth but
354 the cost of it seems to haunt equally the collective consciousness of our age and to monopolize
355 this literature. In the end *San Junipero* is unsettling because of its happy end. A couple that
356 will live together for the eternity seems to be a dream coming true, but can we withstand
357 eternity and if you remove the mortality out of our species will we still be humans? In other

¹¹ K. D. Miller, Will you Ever Be Able to Upload Your Brain? (The New York Times 2015).

358 words, homo virtualis, the evolution of humanity that we aspire to achieve will be human?
359 And how logical is this dream that rejects our natural limitations? Maybe we need to
360 emphasize the religious origins of the promise of immortality that we purposefully hide
361 behind pulp science in order to recall John's Apocalypse warning:

362 *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when*
363 *he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*

364 *John 3:2*

365 The paradise has been promised to us before, but we have been warned, when we will access
366 it we will stop being humans. The restored garden of San Junipero inhabited by genderless,
367 ageless, cyborgs who ignore past categorizations and typologies may be the fulfilled Promise
368 but the inhabitants of this cyberspace won't be humans and this eternal Paradise will have
369 robbed us from both past and future, history and utopia.

Preprint

Reviews for 'San Junipero: The Postmodern Dream of Immortality and the End of Utopia' by Sotirios Triantafyllos (STAAR 8 - 2018)

Review 1 - Christos Kypraios – Minor revision

1. Is the subject matter of the article suitable for an interdisciplinary audience?: I would definitely say yes. The article uses the example of a popular TV series to discuss philosophical and historical questions on developing technologies in a very comprehensive manner and with language that will not confuse an interdisciplinary audience.

2. Does the title reflect the subject matter of the article?: Yes

3. Does the article make a contribution to the discussion in its field?: I am not a utopian studies specialist and I am not familiar with the literature on this field. In any case, my background in History allows me to say that the article seems to cover the topic satisfactorily and in an original way.

4. Is the article clearly written?: Some minor editing in language would make it even better. Nevertheless, the message of the author is clear.

5. Is the article well structured?: Yes.

6. Are the references relevant and satisfactory?: I am not familiar with the literature but it is evident that the author brings in a variety of references.

7. Do you feel the article appropriately uses figures, tables and appendices?: Not Applicable

8. What is your recommendation?: Minor revision

Reviewer's comments to the author: The author's argument about transhumanist immortality is fascinating. The idea of bringing together a Black Mirror's episode and utopian studies is original and inspiring. I enjoyed reading it!

Review 2 - Brandi Simpson Miller – Minor revision

- 1. Is the subject matter of the article suitable for an interdisciplinary audience?:** Absolutely. Due to its focus on developing technologies and on popular culture, the subject is accessible to a wide variety of people.
- 2. Does the title reflect the subject matter of the article?:** Yes: The author outlines how the concept of utopia now is tied into personal fantasies and a paradise of a dystopian idealized self instead of the christian ideas of life after apocalypse.
- 3. Does the article make a contribution to the discussion in its field?:** As I am not familiar with this field, my opinion would be limited use. However, the author does a great job of familiarizing us with how ideas of utopia have changed over time to reflect technological changes and the prevalence of social media and its hold upon our imaginations.
- 4. Is the article clearly written?:** Absolutely. The article was accessible due in part to the references to popular culture and its place in our current thinking about utopia.
- 5. Is the article well structured?:** Yes, the article is well structured. The reader is led through an analysis of assumptions about paradise, the retreat into personal fantasy, and changing ideas of immortality. We are led to the inevitable conclusion by the author that we currently are unable to imagine a future beyond our own personal desires.
- 6. Are the references relevant and satisfactory?:** Yes, the author pulls together an impressive array of philosophical thinking from the 1970s to the present day to help the reader understand how our thinking of utopia has changed over time and how technology has impacted our thoughts of utopia.
- 7. Do you feel the article appropriately uses figures, tables and appendices?:** n/a
- 8. What is your recommendation?:** Minor revision

Reviewer's comments to the author: This paper is a fascinating look into how our ideas of utopia have been transformed with the aid of technology from ideas of salvation via a post apocalyptic Christian future, into a static, futureless immortal life of personal pleasure. I would have liked to see more context/background for those not familiar with the concept of a prelapsarian Garden in order to understand how ideas of utopia have transformed over time into the technological creation of our immortal idealized selves. Having a context with which to compare the authors argument with a Christian historical precedent would have been most helpful. A brief paragraph that outlined what constituted a prelapsarian Garden, would have lent more validity to the author's argument about a transhumanist immortality.

Reviewer 3 - Ioannis Papadopoulos - Accept

1. Is the subject matter of the article suitable for an interdisciplinary audience?: The article offers an interdisciplinary perspective combining the fields of Utopian Studies, History of Science, Bio-ethics, Modern and Contemporary Philosophy and Religion.

2. Does the title reflect the subject matter of the article?: Absolutely yes. It is relevant to the problematic and the core of the argument which is fully encapsulated in the title.

3. Does the article make a contribution to the discussion in its field?: The article highlights a historical dilemma regarding the conquest of 'paradise' yet with the price of human condition itself since utopia eliminates past, present and future since the state of perfection and absolute serenity constitutes them as meaningless. Therefore it offers a fresh look on the ultimate human dilemma: The possibility of an equilibrium between human nature and the possible next level, that of trans-humanism. From that perspective it offers a fresh look upon some very old trans-cultural questions.

4. Is the article clearly written?: Coherent and well-articulated.

5. Is the article well structured?: Punctual and clear in form and narrative.

6. Are the references relevant and satisfactory?: Sufficient references covering a series of academic fields. Interdisciplinary approach. Excellent combination of modern bibliography and primary sources.

7. Do you feel the article appropriately uses figures, tables and appendices?:

8. What is your recommendation?: Accept

Reviewer's comments to the author: None