Grieving over Data: Shifting perspectives on grief and mourning in a digital world through mind-upload and digital immortality

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Master Media Studies: Film and Photographic Studies

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To my supervisors Dr. Isabel Hoving and Dr. Ilios Willemars, and to my partner Thiemo, for their support, guidance, and patience throughout the years.

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Introduction

In the spring of 2020, I stumbled across a video on my social media feeds that caught my attention. The video in question was a 9-minute segment of a Korean television documentary named *Meeting You* (2020), in which a mother who lost her 7-year old child in 2016 to blood cancer was able to, as the documentary describes, 'reunite' with her deceased daughter via virtual reality. The deceased daughter was reconstructed as a 3d model by a virtual reality studio through data provided via interviews with the family.[1] As the mother became emotional during the meeting between her and the reconstructed daughter my feelings were mixed. On the one hand, I can fully understand one's need or desire to be reunited with someone one has lost. On the other hand, I am also skeptical of being reunited with someone who is deceased via virtual reality or other digital means. In my opinion, this will keep someone alive only virtually when their physical presence is no longer there. This can put one into a new cycle of grief and mourning while they might have already processed it in the past and it might create new memories that can change the way one remembers the deceased. Debra Bassett, in a 2015 article *Who Wants to Live Forever? Living, Dying and Grieving in Our Digital Society*, ascribes this dualism of being both dead and virtually alive to the concept 'digital zombie'(1134). The deceased is being digitally resurrected and made to look socially active. In *Meeting You*, the deceased daughter is digitally revived and through interaction with the mother, seems to respond to social interaction. The concept of digital zombie would suffice in today's age of technology where, as Bassett argues, the new technologies that are available in the digital age give one perhaps the greatest opportunity to explore the possibilities of reaching immortality (1133), and the deceased would need to be recreated through data via interviews, memories of others or social media sites.

   This thesis will move on from the present and instead focus on a speculative future in which science fiction stories pertaining to the concept of digital immortality reside. It is a future in which emerging transhumanist concepts have become reality and have shaped society. I will confront the concepts of afterlife, digital immortality, grief, grievability, idols, mind-upload, mourning, and social constitution among others with the episode "San Junipero" of the science fiction series *Black Mirror*, the first season of the science fiction series *Altered Carbon* and the video game *Transference* in order to contribute to a better

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[1] For more information about the creation of the 3D model and the documentary, I would suggest the following interview: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2020/04/688_287372.html

understanding of the objects discussed and also in order to expand and nuance our understanding of the concepts discussed. This thesis will explore the changes and the nuances through these concepts and aims to answer the question of what happens when the process of grief and mourning becomes entangled with the transhumanist theory of digital immortality.

The object of study of the first chapter of this thesis is the British science fiction series *Black Mirror* (2011-), where I will be specifically focusing on one particular episode, the fourth episode of the third season named "San Junipero" (2016). I will engage with Judith Butler's writing on the process of grief and othering of lives, while I will engage with Stefan Lorenz Sorgner and Roberto Manzocco to define transhumanism and the differences within the movement, the concept of mind-upload and what form of immortality is being discussed in transhumanist theory. I will also engage with Jenny Huberman on mind cloning, lifelogging and the digital avatar, while also examining the dilemmas of mind-upload via David N. Whitney and Steven Michels to further illustrate how the possibility of an immortal life can influence one's life. I will be nuancing the skepticism by engaging Judith Halberstam on a different interpretation of grief through queer death and queer failure. Through the use of the concepts of mind-upload, digital immortality, mind cloning, mind transferring, lifelogging, digital avatar, grief, mourning, queer death and queer failure I will provide a close reading analysis of the episode in order to illustrate the nuances of grief and moving on in a digitized world and how this affects the traditional grieving process via the relation between mind upload and digital immortality.

The second chapter of this thesis will focus on the first season of the science fiction series *Altered Carbon* (Netflix, 2018-2020), a television series adapted from the 2002 eponymous novel by Richard K. Morgan, and the futurist, transhumanist society depicted throughout the first season. I will engage with Markus Lipowicz and Friedrich Nietzsche on religion and the creation of new idols. I will engage with Jenny Huberman, Robert Lifton and Eric Olson on the concepts of immortality and symbolic immortality that are apparent in *Altered Carbon*. By confronting the concepts and ideas of capitalism, death, grief, idols, immortality, mind-upload, mourning, religion, symbolic immortality and transhumanism, I will closely analyze *Altered Carbon* in order to examine and gain a better understanding of the dynamics of grief and mourning in relation to mind-upload when physical bodies become interchangeable between one another and examine if transhumanism and religious beliefs might not be opposed to each other, but can instead be parallel to or an extension of one another.

The third chapter will focus on a 2018 virtual reality video game, *Transference*, to develop a better understanding of how a refusal to mourn and grief influences the people around the one refusing to grief by moving from a societal level that was examined in the second chapter to a personal level in the form of a family of three. I will be engaging with Michael Hauskeller on the concept of virtual spaces. I will engage with Judith Butler on the concepts of the loss of oneself and the loss and fragility through grief. By engaging with Jesper Juul and Timothy Crick I will examine the concepts of complicity in video games and the game body. I will provide a close reading of the video game *Transference* by confronting the concepts of complicity, fragility and loss through grief, the game body, loss of oneself, player interaction, perspectives, trauma, and virtual spaces in order to develop a better understanding of how one's refusal to mourn and grief can influence the people around them through the use of mind-upload, trauma and complicity.

As I analyze transhumanist theory and their related concepts of mind-upload, mind transfer, mind cloning and digital immortality among others through the medium of film and video games, I approach these concepts via the genre of science fiction. Science fiction provides us with possibilities to examine how theoretical concepts can function within a society when they are made into a reality. More so, the genre of science fiction is rooted in contemporary fears and anxieties. Through the combination of both speculative concepts made real and contemporary fears and anxieties, science fiction can provide an answer for issues that are happening in the present by providing a look into the future. Thus, my approach to selecting the objects of study is to look exclusively at the genre of science fiction. I want to try and have a broad selection of objects that explicitly showcase different aspects of my main research question. In this selection, the order in which the objects are presented is a combination of the concepts used by each object of study, what each object shows, and how it relates to the main research question.

In the *Black Mirror* episode "San Junipero", I find a possibility to introduce the concepts of mind-upload and immortality via transhumanist theory. The series *Black Mirror* in itself always combines new, unknown technological possibilities with the real world. As such, I present this object in the first chapter as it is the most connected to the present. *Altered Carbon* is set in a distant future and a world in which a physical body is no longer of the utmost importance and one is able to obtain a new body. By building on the concept of mind-upload and analyzing it further through a society in which it has become commonplace, *Altered Carbon* is presented as the second object. Whereas "San Junipero" and *Altered*

Carbon still use the real world prominently, the video game *Transference* takes place entirely in a virtual space. As a culmination of the concepts provided via the previous objects, *Transference* is presented as the third object of study. Through the introduction of the three objects of study and their respective chapters, I hope to embark the reader on an informative journey through the shifting nuances of grief and mourning when transhumanist theory and technology, specifically the theoretical technology of mind-upload, come into play.

Chapter 1: Failure of Death in "San Junipero"

The concept and discussion of immortality pervades throughout history in various ways for centuries; from the historical myths of the philosopher's stone or the fountain of youth, to religious concepts of the afterlife, to medical breakthroughs in living longer or curing what were once fatal diseases, humankind always desires to either extend their life as long as possible or to be able to avoid the final phase in life altogether: death and grief. Judith Butler describes the process of grief in her book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Justice* as one in which, while one may feel as though this is something temporary to undergo, it may in fact reveal something about oneself and the ties that one has between others (22). In order to avoid the possibility of losing control over oneself through grief, one turns to removing the possibility of death to avoid grief altogether. Avoiding death, and thus grief, would fundamentally change a core aspect of death: the mourning process. One such response to this desire of avoiding death and grief via immortality is the transhumanist movement. The movement is not singular, but several movements all trying to find possibilities to prolong life either temporarily or indefinitely by enhancing the human body with technological innovations, as described by philosopher and transhumanist proponent Stefan Lorenz Sorgner in his book *On Transhumanism*:

> Transhumanists accept the premise that humans emerged from evolutionary processes and could die out if the ongoing adaptation to ever-changing environmental conditions is unsuccessful. Constant self-overcoming is thus in our principal interest. It follows from this premise that most transhumanists adopt a naturalistic, non dualist, or relational theory of the human, which means that they consider it implausible to view human beings as consisting of an immaterial soul grafted onto a material body. (...) Serious-minded transhumanists consider it unthinkable that humans could achieve personal immortality (1-2).

Sorgner points out that, as humans have emerged from evolutionary processes, the transhumanist movement is focused on the idea that humankind has to keep evolving in order to keep itself alive by constantly self-overcoming their flaws and either fixing them or removing them altogether or risk the chance of going extinct. However, while Sorgner tries to divide the transhumanist movement into two sides, the serious-minded[2] and the less

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[2] Sorgner uses the term 'strong-minded' to refer to a naturalistic view of human existence that does not allow personal immortality as a possibility to be considered (Sorgner 2).

serious-minded transhumanists, I do not see this movement as two different sides. In my view, both sides of Sorgner's divide all have the same consideration that he only ascribes to only to the serious-minded part of the movement: people have to be helped and guided into achieving a communal form of immortality as the discourse shifts from the death of the individual to the death of the species. This immortality is rather vague however, and Sorgner does not explain what happens when this version of immortality is achieved. Philosopher Roberto Manzocco seems to find an answer to this question in his book *Transhumanism - Engineering the Human Condition*, he argues that the transhumanists actually want to abolish involuntary death; meaning, instead of not being able to know when we will die (as it can happen in an accident, or by illness for example), we would be given the choice if we actually want to die, and if so, we will be able to decide for ourselves how and when we die (34).

It is in the consideration that Sorgner points out and in the definition of voluntary death of Manzocco that technological enhancements are born: as the human body cannot erase death on its own or decide for themselves when they want to die, it is up to new, yet to be invented technologies to enhance or transform the human body physically or digitally, merging the flesh with machines and providing opportunities in the physical and digital world. These enhancements can already be observed in the world we live in today: medical breakthroughs such as hearing aids, pacemakers, and vaccines can also be seen as transhumanist advancements while already being available in the real world.

I want to focus on the genre of science fiction, specifically on one television science fiction show where one can see society dealing with a transhumanist concept applied in the real world: the British television series *Black Mirror*. Created by Charlie Booker, the series deals with capitalism, social media, and the increased dependency of technology in dystopian fiction. One episode, however, fluctuates between the outright rejection and dystopia and the positive aspects of technology in society: the fourth episode of season three, "San Junipero". This episode, released in 2016, focuses on two elderly women, Yorkie and Kelly, visiting and falling in love with each other in a simulated world named San Junipero, in which they can inhabit the digital bodies of their younger selves for five hours per week as a weekly trial. To become a permanent resident of this virtual world, the elderly patient has to give or obtain consent before their death to have their mind uploaded to the server of the simulated world when their physical bodies die.[3] As this has become more common in the world of "San

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[3] In the world of San Junipero, consent is given or obtained via a consent form. The patient either has to sign this form or, if one is unable to sign the form themself for various reasons, the next of kin has to sign the form instead.

Junipero", people are feeling pressure from their family, friends and society to either participate or not in this upload to a virtual world so they can stay together even in this new world. Through the use of the concepts of mind-upload, digital immortality, mind cloning, mind transferring, lifelogging, digital avatar, grief, mourning, queer death and queer failure I will provide a close reading analysis of the episode in order to illustrate the nuances of grief and moving on in a digitized world and how this affects the traditional grieving process via the relation between mind upload and digital immortality.

       The immortality promised in "San Junipero" creates both excitement and unease. While it can be good that we could live forever, it would be in a simulated world that is under government or corporate control. Still, it is portrayed in the show with vibrant neon-like colors combined with an eighties aesthetic that is in stark contrast to the later scenes in the real world, where everything looks bland, with no bright colors or anything similar to the virtual world, and the facilities have a sterile look and feel. In this contrast between the real world and the virtual simulation the thought of immortality seems promising to the people depicted in the episode. It might even feel like an utopia to them. Immortality would be regarded as a utopia in transhumanist theory, as the permanent residents in the virtual world are free of the eventuality of their physical body dying (as this has already happened.) However, Sorgner describes the differences between transhumanists in how they think about prolonging life by dividing between a strong version and a weak version of transhumanism:

> A strong version of transhumanism posits there are moral but not legal obligations to use certain enhancement techniques. (...) Another strong version of transhumanism argues that enhancement techniques necessarily promote the good life and that this insight must bear legal consequences. (..) A weaker understanding of transhumanism posits that enhancement techniques only promote the likelihood of many people leading a good life without necessarily requiring that transhumanist insights entail legal and moral obligations (...) (54).

While the above description divides the transhumanist discourse, the theory of transhumanism lends itself to multiple points of view and they therefore complement each other through these differences as they are still working towards the same goal. Whereas strong transhumanist theory is working towards the vision of immortality which can be independent of the flesh not unlike the independence shown in "San Junipero", seeing the flesh as only a vessel that contains information that will be transferred into the digital body or world, weak transhumanist theory promotes the use of medicine to extend life itself,

enhancing one's own body while not overstepping already existing boundaries, like the aforementioned medical devices that enhance and extend life. While I would cautiously agree with the vision of weak transhumanism that enhancements can lead to the possibility of living a better life, and improving the life one already has, this version would still work towards the avoidance of death and grief that persists more aggressively in strong transhumanism theory. From my point of view, there would have to be a level of trust and belief in the ideal situation that everyone would be able to benefit from the possible enhancements. However, ideas and laws can change, creating new boundaries with every change. Therefore, both these divisions will ultimately come to the same conclusion, even if they take different paths to get there. With digital immortality, this trust needs to be extended to corporate entities which tend to be capitalistic entities with shareholders, profit margins, budgets and a market that they share with competitors. Whereas physical immortality implies one still has a physical body and one has a bigger sense of control over one's body even if that is not always the case, when it comes to digital immortality, one surrenders their control to the people behind the hardware they are put on through a process of either mind-upload or mind cloning.

The technology that "San Junipero" uses at its core is the transhumanist concept of mind-upload. Manzocco summarizes mind-upload as a practice in which the brain will be scanned and mapped in precise detail, which in turn will be copied or transferred to a non-organic type of storage (195-96). Manzocco is not clear on what type of storage could be functional; he only mentions that the data has to be 'loaded onto a fairly powerful computer' (196). It is an understatement, however, to call it fairly powerful. As Manzocco also points out himself, the human brain is an extremely complex organ, connected with the rest of the human body while also controlling it, processing responses the body receives and sending out commands through neurotransmitters. These neurotransmitters are what Manzocco believes produces or secretes the mind (196). However, if the brain is viewed as nothing more than a storage and operating device, the issue of the mind is non-existent as there would not be something as immaterial as a mind to consider.[4] How much space would be needed, or how much processing power, is not known, but it is not something that science fiction stories are focused on, and neither is "San Junipero".

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[4]I will not be discussing the ethics of mind-upload, whether or not there is a soul to consider, nor will I discuss whether it is an intrinsic part of what constitutes oneself in this chapter as this is not relevant to the point I am making in this chapter.

In the episode, the technology has already advanced far enough that mind-upload is not only achieved, it is operational for an unknown period of time, as evidenced by the conversation Yorkie and Kelly have when having an argument after getting married and the subject of Kelly's deceased husband comes up: it is revealed that Kelly had a daughter who died before the technology was available, giving the viewer a sliver of information of how long the technology has been around. The discussion about Kelly's daughter provides an example of one of the dilemmas surrounding the process of mind upload; for Yorkie, who became quadriplegic at a young age, the afterlife is complete freedom from her point of view, where she can live a life she never had, whereas Kelly, having had a daughter and a husband before meeting Yorkie in the simulated world sees the simulated world as a burden instead of a blessing. Herein lies a difference in how grief is shown in "San Junipero". Judith Butler argues that while people think grief is private and puts one in a solitary situation (22), grief actually displays the thrall in which one's relations with others holds the one who grieves (23). As Kelly's daughter is not in this simulated world, her husband before his death opted out of uploading his consciousness and instead believed and hoped that their daughter was waiting for them after death in a more traditional afterlife.[5] As Kelly made a promise to her husband to also opt out of uploading her consciousness in order to believe or hope that she can see her husband and daughter in a different, more traditional afterlife, the grief is shared instead of privatized. The bonds between Kelly, her husband and their daughter are intertwined strong enough that meeting Yorkie causes her to have second thoughts and forces her to choose between the two options in front of her. Yorkie however, as she has never lost someone before and lacks the relations Kelly has built in life, is unable to relate to her or share in her grief. In this scene, one can see the anguish and, later on, anger on Kelly's face when the argument happens, as she realizes that Yorkie has not thought of this and cannot empathize with her. As they argue, Kelly ultimately drives off, showing in this scene through the close-ups of her driving in the car her desperation and her inability to choose between one or the other. And this dilemma would not be uncommon in a society like in "San Junipero" where there will be a difference of opinions within families about what they would choose and if they would follow their family members or if they would follow their own path.

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[5] In the episode it is not made clear if Kelly's husband was religious or not. As such, the mention of a traditional afterlife is made as a general remark to make clear that the virtual simulation is a new form of afterlife.

Taking the concept of mind-upload earlier and continuing with the (theoretical) practicality of it, the practice of mind-upload itself can be divided into two separate processes we can divide into two different versions: the concept of mind cloning and the concept of mind transfer. Whereas mind transfer completely 'empties' the brain and transfers the scanned brain data into a different (cybernetic)brain,[6] mind cloning starts out the same, but instead of moving the data from one storage unit to another, the data is duplicated and creates a digital clone of yourself akin to a digital avatar. Through mind cloning, one can share two bodies. This can be either simultaneously or one can switch between both bodies. In the episode, both concepts of mind transfer and mind cloning come into play. While still alive, the minds of the sick and elderly patients are cloned into the simulated space. They create their own digital avatars (or mindclone) and choose what decade and age they would want to appear in the simulation. As they are connected to the device connecting them to the virtual world they appear to still have bodily functions. Their bodies do not shut down and after the trial period they wake up again and continue their lives. When the elderly patient dies after they have obtained or given consent, the actual mind transfer occurs. Jenny Huberman explains the digital avatar, or 'mindclone', in her article *Immortality transformed: mind cloning, transhumanism and the quest for digital immortality* Using a proponent of mind cloning named Martine Rothblatt:

> (...) being made up of two key components: a mindfile and mindware. A mindfile is a 'digitized database of one's life' and it consists of all of a person's thoughts, feelings, ideas and experiences. The mindware is an operating system that processes the data in the mindfile, it is akin to one's digital personality (53).

In mind cloning, a digital twin is created that uses the information stored in the mindfile and processed by the mindware to become a replica that is almost equal to oneself. However, the fact that the mind clone has to rely on an operating system to function (as the mindware creates behavioral patterns through the mindfile) reinforces the idea that is, according to Huberman, prevalent in transhumanists like Rothblatt, namely the idea that our brains only act as sets of information patterns (54), and brains are reduced to a processor and calculator of the body. With two separate entities residing in different platforms, the real world and the virtual space, the experiences and thoughts of both the biological human as well as the digital avatar can change over time. This in turn can create two different personalities that would not be as connected. The five-hour weekly trial shown in the episode is a, as Sorgner calls it,

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[6] By 'empties', I refer to the data being completely removed from the brain.

less-serious minded or weak version of the mind cloning that Huberman describes. Instead of one's avatar living a separate life of their own and getting updated with memories of their physical self, one connects with their digital avatar and figuratively brings it back to life once a week, while the digital avatar is put to sleep on the days that the physical self is not connected. In this construction, there is a remedy to be found for the difference in the digital avatar and the 'real' person as mentioned earlier: to periodically backup the mindfile (or avatar) every time one uses the trial means that the data that is transmitted is synchronized and updated.[7] However, doing so would create a new conflict: the individuality of the digital clone, as their data gets overwritten, and the fact that the mindware might create new, unfamiliar patterns. This would diminish the agency the avatar might have as they are still attached to their biological twin, though one can wonder how much agency a digital avatar has when the digital body is being controlled by an operating system dictating their behavioral patterns.

This regular transfer of one's consciousness and updating and synchronizing one's digital clone raises the issues of how much freedom one can have if all their consciousness and patterns are turned into binary data and code, even if this is only periodically or, in the case of "San Junipero", forever. This does not only apply to the digital avatar. Huberman argues that this concept also requires a different approach to living life for the 'real' person:

> (...) it requires subjects to develop a very different sensibility towards the present.
> Instead of encouraging a carefree, playful, 'you only live once' attitude, the
> transhumanist path to digital immortality demands an ever-present documentary
> vigilance; recording life to preserve data for one's mindfile, becomes more important
> perhaps, than actually living and enjoying it (60).

In trying to document every single thing one does as a living human being, lifelogging, one's biological human body slowly becomes a part of the system that operates their digital avatar; instead of being carefree, they would start to focus on and document the important parts of their life, not processing or interpreting them, and becoming only the input for the data their digital avatar processes instead of an equal. This lifelogging is not uncommon as by default humans always collect data, whether it is on purpose or by unwittingly picking up and storing information within their memories. With lifelogging one has become a living storage device for their eventual transfer instead of being a person that can enjoy moments in life and

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[7] The term 'real' person refers to the physical body.

appreciate it. It is something that is not discussed in "San Junipero", but seeing the residents and visitors of the simulated world, I can not help but question whether the visitors might become too dependent on the simulated world.[8] That, instead of enjoying their lives in the real world, they hunger for the infinite possibilities that are promised in their virtual life. This would gradually turn them into these lifeless husks of storage devices as they are only 'alive' when they have become their digital selves. Whereas *Black Mirror* often portrays technology as a dystopian and dangerous future, "San Junipero" differs from this bleak outcome as it focuses its story on Yorkie and Kelly and their relationship. However, there are still dystopian undertones in play, as David N. Whitney and Steven Michels address in the chapter 'Bacon, Transhumanism , and Reflections from the Black Mirror' in *Science Fiction and Political Philosophy*, using the regulations in visiting San Junipero to criticize and question several aspects of the physical world of the episode: How involved are the governing institutions in charge of this technology? How much control do these institutions have over the content of the virtual world? Can a patient really opt out of the program without succumbing to peer pressure? And most importantly: is there a way out for the permanent residents (219-20)?

These critical questions are however pushed aside for the utopian vision seen through the eyes of Kelly and Yorkie. In the case of Yorkie, the virtual world of San Junipero is a literal utopia. This is made clear further in the episode. When Kelly decides to visit her in the real world, Yorkie is revealed to both Kelly and the viewer as a quadriplegic elderly woman who had been in a car accident when she was 21 years of age after coming out to her parents and has been in this state ever since, with no possibility of recovering. To Yorkie, San Junipero is a world in which she is no longer limited by either her family or her body, and it makes sense for her to become a permanent resident. Whitney and Michels argue that in Yorkie's case, it is easy to imagine that her longing to be relieved from pain and the ability to do ordinary activities is what she would want most. Whitney and Michels counter the position Yorkie is in with Kelly's position (219). Kelly's position is more precarious than Yorkie's and she is uncertain whether she truly accepts this as an utopian vision: due to the death of her daughter before San Junipero was conceived and her husbands' subsequent refusal to be uploaded to San Junipero, she too has objections to being a permanent resident and has to decide whether to join Yorkie, or honor the promise she made to her husband and not choose the upload, letting Yorkie mourn her instead as a love lost. At the end of the

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[8] The premise of the series *Black Mirror*, as most episodes reflect on the dangers of technology, invites for these questions to arise and be pondered on.

episode, Yorkie has persuaded her to also become a permanent resident and join her. The final shot of the two of them together enjoying their time suggests that she is happy about her choice, however, as the choice is permanent, the possibility of Kelly becoming displeased and regretting her choice is a realistic outcome, as in contrast to Yorkie, she has lived a full life and would still mourn the loss of her husband and daughter, who aren't in this simulated world with her. A different darker undertone is the shot right before the one described previously, in which the data center that houses San Junipero is displayed. Ending it with the contrast of this center with a host of servers and Yorkie and Kelly dancing together leaves the implicit suggestion that even in the virtual world, their life might not be forever or immortal and the digital afterlife is not in the control of the residents but the corporate entities that maintain it, thereby invoking the dystopian viewpoint of *Black Mirror*. However, given the prominent investment in the episode on the romantic relationship and centering the storytelling on this aspect, and the limited leeway to question the more critical undertones, the utopian vision that is presented as San Junipero and the happiness experienced there by both Yorkie and Kelly makes the utopian vision of immortality more prominent or overwhelming, defying the negative aspects of this form of digital immortality.

It is in this defiance of the dystopian view of digital immortality that "San Junipero" complicates the position I put myself in in regard to a dystopian future. Instead of the usual dark and nihilistic undertones that are present in episodes of *Black Mirror*, "San Junipero" feels like an oddity,[9] as it brings to the foreground a love story that, while presenting drama, also presents happiness, love and sadness. These emotions come from the plot elements of the story and the cinematography of the episode, as the episode is colorful and vibrant with recognizable eighties songs, furniture etc. However, most of the positive emotions come specifically from the central storyline between Yorkie and Kelly even though they both physically die in the end. As storylines containing non-straight characters in film and television are often stories containing hardships and heartbreak, eventually giving these plotlines a sad ending in breakups, infidelity, or the overused trope of killing non-straight characters as they seem easily disposable. The cisgendered straight main character in films and television, who is often male, while also being able to experience similar relationship issues, always seem to overcome the issues they are faced with and end their stories on a successful note. In television and commercial film, queer characters are usually relegated to

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[9] As I have stated earlier, *Black Mirror* usually warns the viewer about the dangers of technology. As such, the characters in the episodes more often than not do not have a happy ending. By providing "San Junipero" with one, it breaks with the familiarity of the storylines that viewers have come to expect.

being stereotypes, and are used as only supporting characters in drama shows/films, someone to make fun of in comedies, or being either the victim or the perpetrator in crime shows. Judith Halberstam describes this tension between not-straight and straight while putting it in context not of television, but of western society itself: "If, (...), all desire is impossible, impossible becomes unsustainable, then the queer body and queer social worlds become the evidence of that failure" (94). Anything not conforming to the straight character stereotype is cast as inauthentic and unreal, as heterosexuality is viewed as the evidence for success in a capitalist logic (95). It is in this logic that we find a reason for the general darker endings for non-straight characters: being seen as lesser than someone else makes them disposable. Taking this further into the argument of this chapter, if someone is being seen as lesser, would they even deserve immortality? In this othering of lives Judith Butler sees a derealization of the Other (33). As one is seen as someone who is not real or invisible, these lives cannot be mourned because they are already lost (33). In "San Junipero", Yorkie is being refused this digital afterlife, as her parents are religious and give no consent to euthanizing her so can become a permanent resident, thus denying her a chance of immortality. Yorkie is forced to stay in the coma she is in, and this symbolizes the hardship and trauma that usually happens to non-straight characters. However, due to Kelly marrying Yorkie, the consent is transferred to Kelly, who consents to the euthanization of Yorkie. It is surprising to see two non-straight characters who do not conform to these stereotypes finding each other and both getting, in terms of plot, a happy ending. How is this ending achieved? While Yorkie and Kelly dying seems like it would fit in this pattern of failure and could have resulted in a different ending, it did the opposite, bringing them even closer together in the digital afterlife. Halberstam argues that failure can allow us to escape from society, more specifically the punishing norms that shape both the capitalist society and the way we grow up and learn as humans (3). In "San Junipero", the failure of death that is associated with non-straight characters is repurposed as a positive development for the two main characters and both are rewarded for their failure by becoming residents of the simulated world.

"San Junipero" produces two opposite readings of queer death and failure in relation to transhumanism. While transhumanism can be seen as countering this approach to failure due to their search for immortality and the avoidance of death, it can also be used to enhance this form of queer failure: By escaping the physical body and entering a simulated world, one can reshape oneself and, in theory, be no longer restrained from the norms and pressure of the society as the non-straight person grew up in. Yorkie is an example of this, being shunned by

her parents when she came out at a young age, becoming paralyzed after a car crash and unable to have lived her own life as she would have wanted, uploading her mind would give her a new opportunity, a do-over, and she can use what she has learned when living in the real world in her new life. Even though this life seems to be eternal, as far as Yorkie is concerned, she is free from any societal bonds she had that restricted her. While the episode does not make it clear if it would be the same liberation for Kelly as she had a full life before the simulated world, ending it on the two women being together does suggest that for her it is a new opportunity and reward as well. This way, the combination of queer failure and digital immortality can theoretically open up new options to a positive ending.

Whether through mind cloning or mind-upload, both forms of digital immortality allow someone to continue living after their physical body disappears. While the uncertainty of control in transhumanist theory put into practice does create, in my view, a dystopian outlook we should be careful not to head towards, "San Junipero" both offers a look at this future while also nuancing it. By creating a story about two non-straight women being able to live their lives inside the simulated world, it uses the tropes of dying non-straight characters to reward them with becoming free of any societal pressure they experienced. It also gives a different view on the way we can mourn by providing the option to join their loved ones in a simulated afterlife and knowing that one might see them, transforming the way we mourn in sadness into hope and expectations, with the knowledge that one can actually join the deceased in the afterlife. This afterlife can also be the opposite of mourning: as people can mourn the hardships they have endured and mourn the life that they might not have led, the mourning and grief disappears with the prospect of being able to start over and live a different life forever. However, as you can choose, there will also be a part of society like Kelly's husband and Kelly herself, who have doubts or opt not to join. There are issues with how this choice can eventually turn into societal pressure, being forced to join the digital afterlife instead of passing away, in turn defeating the idea of freedom of choice that is presented in transhumanist theory. While "San Junipero" doesn't focus on these aspects, they are subtly present in the episode and serves as a warning that even if we can envision an utopian future like the world of "San Junipero", it is good to take a critical look and remember that society as a whole is filled with different opinions and is ever changing, and thus, the future is always uncertain.

Chapter 2: Mourning over data in *Altered Carbon*

  Whereas the *Black Mirror* episode "San Junipero" imagines a future in which we are uploaded onto a hard drive and living our lives in a digital landscape, the science fiction television series *Altered Carbon* (Netflix, 2018-2020) takes a different approach towards a future in which the concept of mind-upload is put into practice. In this adaptation of the eponymous novel by Richard K. Morgan, one's consciousness and memories are stored onto a small disc called a stack. The body has become nothing more than a vessel for these stacks. When one's body dies but their stack and the stored data stay intact, one can dispose of the old body and receive a new one. An example of a dystopian vision when transhumanist theory and technology is made possible and integrated into a capitalist technocratic society can be seen in *Altered Carbon*. However, when mind-upload is possible, what is the use of the body in this process of data transfer when the digital file becomes the most important part of a person? What kind of care or nurture will be given to the physical body when people can just live life when their data is digitized and stored and no longer bound to a vessel of flesh and blood? What would happen to the traditional dynamics of grief and mourning? "San Junipero" shows a change in grief and mourning as lives shift from the physical world to a simulated world. *Altered Carbon* uses a different approach to the concept of mind-upload where there is no virtual world; one's data stack stays the same, but one's body is able to change. The world of *Altered Carbon* is torn between those who are proponents of a changing body and revere the people making it possible, while others hark back to old Christian beliefs of heaven and hell and adjust it to this modern world, in which a changed body means going to hell.[10] Through a close reading of the first season of *Altered Carbon* in relation to the concepts and ideas of capitalism, death, grief, idols, immortality, mind-upload, mourning, religion, symbolic immortality and transhumanism, I will develop a better understanding of the dynamics of grief and mourning in relation to mind-upload when one's body is interchangeable between one another, and I will examine how transhumanism, rather than being opposed to religious belief can be seen as an extension or a parallel to one another.

  Instead of a society in which there is an option to live forever via mind-upload but not enforced by a government or society, *Altered Carbon* shows a society in which mind-upload is almost obligatory, envisioning a more explicit darker side to the utopian vision that

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[10] While every religion grieves differently and has different processes of mourning, this chapter will focus on Christianity and their grieving and mourning beliefs and rituals.

transhumanists associate to the concept of digital immortality. The stacks that are necessary for this immortality are implanted at a young age, after which the stacks record the memories and consciousness throughout one's life. When switching over to a new body, also known as 'sleeves', all of the data from the life one has led before sleeving is still stored onto the stack, ensuring that one's personality stays intact. The series follows a convict, Takeshi Kovacs,[11] as he is released from prison by a wealthy family in order to investigate a murder that occurred within the family. In the ten episodes that follow in the first season, the world in which *Altered Carbon* resides is shown as a capitalist dystopia. The first episode of the first season, "Out of the Past", opens with an introduction of the world and in particular of Kovacs, where his physical death and subsequent reawakening in a different body are interpolated with each other. The introduction uses cross-cuts between Kovac's new body being brought to life and what he experienced in his final moments in his previous body ("Out of the Past" 01:42-20:00). In the final moments of his previous body, Kovacs is in a slightly rundown room with a woman, discussing their latest job when an unnamed elite military force blasts through the wall and a shootout occurs. The subsequent shootout is cross-cut with his reawakening, in which he assaults the medical staff assisting the procedure and becomes shocked when he sees his new appearance. As Kovacs is being processed for release, the viewer follows him and gains a brief introduction into the world of *Altered Carbon*. At the same time a seven year old girl gets released who was in a hit and run accident, and through both we are immediately informed in this introduction how life and death and the system of what is called resleeving in the show works: As Kovacs' previous body is shot to pieces, this body is no longer usable. However, his stack remains undamaged and thus we see him reawakened in a new body, though not one of his own choosing. As part of his release, he is informed that his body is paid for and owned by the wealthy Bancroft family. His release thus comes at a price: he is now indebted to the family that set him free in a body that he did not choose. Sleeves in perfect shape are sold to the rich to use for themselves or, in the case of Kovacs, to put others in the particular body, while the less wealthy have to make do with whatever is available. Due to the fact that the girl's parents do not have enough money to select a specific sleeve, or as it is called in the series, 'an upgrade', the girl is put in a sleeve that is available at the moment; it turns out that the sleeve is a sleeve of an elderly woman ("Out of the Past" 17:20). Kovacs' perspective shows how technology in a capitalist system creates a divide in society by how much one can afford even though the technology is made

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[11] The name of the protagonist, Takeshi Kovacs, will be shortened to Kovacs throughout this chapter.

available for everyone. What stands out in this introduction is the lack of choice for people without the necessary funds to pick a body of their choosing. Neither Kovacs nor the young girl have control over which sleeves they inhabit. It is decided for them either by a wealthy buyer of the prisoner (in Kovac's case) or by the government (in the girl's case).

Throughout the series this lack of choice is shown explicitly; for example, in the second episode 'Fallen Angel', Kovacs is given a tour through a facility where clones are created and maintained for those who can afford it. The vault looks gray and small; however, as the camera pans and show a more top down view, the vault begins to look more like a silo instead and seems to have endless higher rows, and the amount of clones that are stored in this vault tells the viewer that the Bancroft family is wealthy enough to be able to have this many clones of themselves ("Fallen Angel" 08:00-09:00). As the rich can create clones and are therefore able to look exactly the same throughout centuries, the less fortunate who cannot afford a clone of themselves only have access to whatever is still available at the moment they need a new body. The discrepancy in available technology is another example of this wealth divide: In essence, if one's stack is destroyed, the data is also gone. It can no longer be accessed, meaning that one can still die permanently. As such, the elite society has a countermeasure in place: they upload their data periodically on their own servers, so that they can continue living if their cortical stack is destroyed. This is illustrated in the first episode as Kovacs is hired by the patriarch of the Bancroft family to investigate the patriarch's own murder. As there is no more need for them to rely on their stacks due to the satellite uplink, they can be reborn anew even if the stack is destroyed. The loop shown here of leaving and re-entering a physical body can be seen as an opportunity to learn from previous mistakes to improve oneself.

Another central theme to *Altered Carbon* is the right to die without being 'reborn'. In the society presented in *Altered Carbon*, a permanent death has become less common. While there are still deaths occurring (given that there is a homicide department within the justice system), humans are much more likely to survive and live on for a longer period of time. However, not everyone thinks of death the same way. Due to technological advancements such as the creation of the stacks, the storing of data onto the stacks, and sleeves that one can inhabit, the duality of ideologies between technology and religion is deepened. On the one hand, there are the transhumanists who believe that life should be eternal and death should be eliminated. This is made possible in *Altered Carbon* by means such as the cortical stack, satellite uplinks that create a periodic back-up of the data stored on the stack, and body

cloning. On the other hand, a different part of society has distanced themselves from the idea of eternal life and have turned towards religion (often fanatically) named NeoCatholicism, which is based on Catholicism but updated for the present in *Altered Carbon*. To Catholics, death is not the end; it is a new phase in life, in which one is judged for one's actions on earth and either sent for eternal salvation to heaven, for eternal damnation to hell or in some cases purgatory, the state in between heaven and hell. This coping mechanism will let followers of this faith believe that there is something or someone waiting for them after death, and that they can grieve but also look forward to 'meeting' the deceased in the afterlife when the time comes that they themselves will die. When it comes to the body (and the soul), they believe that it is given by God and thus it is sacred and should not be tempered with. The NeoCatholics in *Altered Carbon* follow this belief as well, but they infuse it with the new technological advancements that have occurred in the history of the series' world. As stacks are compulsory in the world of *Altered Carbon*, the followers of NeoCatholicism instead use religious coding on the cortical stack as soon as one is implanted in a new body to enforce the belief that one is only meant for the one life that God or a higher deity has intended.[12] The followers refuse to be put into a new sleeve after death as they fear resleeving will send them to hell for living on inside a different body than their own and are of the opinion that the dead should be left in peace as the deceased has moved on to a different plane of existence. The religious coding enforces this by altering the data in the stack in such a way that, when put in a new sleeve, the stack does not respond. As such, they have 'died'. Transhumanist theory argues the opposite of embracing death: via technological and scientific breakthroughs, medical applications or procedures, they try to extend life as much as possible, whether the body has been improved and adjusted or not, or to overcome death completely. As Markus Lipowicz describes transhumanist thought regarding religion in his essay 'Overcoming Transhumanism: Education or Enhancement Towards the Overhuman?':

> The vast majority of transhumanists declare their attachment to the values of secular humanism (...) and their disdain for religious authority: 'No more gods, no more faith, no more timid holding back. Let us blast out of our old forms, our ignorance, our weakness, and our mortality. The future is ours' (...). Despite some theistic or even quasi-Christian concepts that aim at legitimizing a transhumanist agenda at a theological and biblical level (...) the vast majority of techno-progressive thinkers, as Thomas Damberger and Estella Hebert (2017) indicate, 'are generally opposed to the

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[12] The term religious coding refers to programming code that is in line with the beliefs of the NeoCatholics.

idea of the existence of supernatural forces and regard faith as a narrative of pre-enlightenment' (202-203).

Distancing themselves from the religious viewpoints of higher beings, it appears that the transhumanist ideal society is one where no human would have to die if they do not want to, and where there are no more faith-based ideologies. While both ideologies seem radically different from each other, upon taking a closer look they are far more similar in *Altered Carbon* than they appear at first glance. As Jenny Huberman mentions in her essay *Immortality transformed: mind cloning, transhumanism and the quest for digital immortality* humanity has always been looking for meaning after death and to extend our lives, giving us a longer lifespan:

> It has often been noted that to be human is not just to be mortal; all living creatures inevitably die. What makes our species so special and interesting, what makes us in large part human, is first, that we live with an awareness that we are going to die. And second, that we also possess the capacity to overcome this inevitability through symbolic means. Throughout the history of our species, human beings have managed their knowledge and fear of death by attempting to achieve (...) 'symbolic immortality'(52).

The symbolic immortality Huberman refers to is a concept introduced by psychologists Robert Lifton and Eric Olson in their book *The Wellfleet Papers: Explorations in Psychohistory.* Lifton and Olson argue that the concept of symbolic immortality surfaces when one is faced with inevitable biological death, and faced with this a need is created inside oneself to maintain an inner sense of continuity with what has gone on before, and what will go on after his own individual physical existence is no longer (37). Lifton and Olson identify five separate ways that one can achieve symbolic immortality:

> The sense of immortality may be expressed biologically, by living on through (or in) one's sons and daughters and their sons and daughters; theologically, in the idea of a life after death, or in other forms of spiritual conquest of death; creatively, or through 'works' and influences perceived as persisting beyond biological death; through identification with nature and its infinite extension into time and space (the idea of 'eternal nature'); or experientially, through a feeling-state—one I speak of as experiential transcendence—so intense that, at least temporarily, time and death are eliminated(...) (37).

Huberman argues that the symbolic immortality as proposed by Lifton and Olsen achieves the sense that some part of oneself will live on in the great chain of being even after our bodies have decayed (52) and we therefore can always achieve immortality in some way or form. She breaks the five ways down into five modes: the biological mode; the creative mode; the theological or religious mode; the natural mode; and the experiental mode respectively (52-53).

In *Altered Carbon*, the theological or religious mode is the mode that is most present and persistent throughout the series. *Altered Carbon* shows that this mode is not only applicable to the NeoCatholicism believers; it is also applicable to the transhumanist part of society. This similarity is twofold; one similarity is in the way the soul is regarded as an intrinsic part of being human. Though both sides of society seem to differ on the nature of the human body, where one views the body as sacred and the other as a vessel, both are in agreement that what matters most is one's consciousness and memories that are stored on the cortical stack. NeoCatholics however view the stack and the body as a whole to define what makes the soul and is therefore inseparable. Thus, the cortical stack should not be passed onto a different body; combined with the religious coding implanted in the stack, both body and stack should expire and the deceased should ascend to heaven. The transhumanists are of a different opinion: only the data in the stack makes up the soul and the body is of less importance. Regarding the idea of living forever, even though both have different viewpoints, the religious afterlife versus the transhumanist resleeving, they are, again, not as different as it appears. Via the use of the stacks by both ideologies, the soul is seen as something that is continuous, whether it be by blocking the cortical stack from being able to be put inside a new body and therefore allowing the soul to rest, or by inserting the stack into a new sleeve, allowing the soul to continue their old life or begin a new one with a different appearance. From this perspective, both ideologies work towards the same concept: the elimination of death and gaining immortality. Through the concept of the cortical stack, the world of *Altered Carbon* actually has become a hybrid world of both the present life and afterlife, as people either are still in possession of their original body or have been resleeved multiple times and have lived different lives.[13]

The similarities between the NeoCatholic community and the transhumanist society do not end with just the soul. Whereas the religious part of *Altered Carbon*'s society still

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[13] Whether this hybrid world of *Altered Carbon* could be compared to purgatory as a state between living and death or not is not relevant to my point.

worships a higher being as their creator, the transhumanist society relies instead on science and technology to create new clones and vessels and prolong their lives themselves and therefore there is no need for a higher being. However, while there seems to be no need for a higher being, having no need does not eliminate its presence or desire for it. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche criticizes this desire in his book *Twilight of the Idols*:

> What is the only teaching we can have? - That no one gives people their qualities, not God or society, parents or ancestors, not even people themselves (...). Nobody is responsible for people existing in the first place, or for the state or circumstances or environment they are in. (...) People are not the products of some special design, will, or purpose, they do not represent an attempt to achieve an ideal of humanity, (...) - it is absurd to want to devolve human existence onto some purpose or another. We have invented the concept of purpose (...) (182).

As Nietzsche rejects a higher being, he also rejects the term purpose as a man-made concept, one that is not intrinsic to people. He sees the concept of purpose in tandem with the concept of God as the biggest objection to existence so far (182), as they both serve to instill a desire in someone by either wanting them to achieve an unreachable ideal. He states three different ideals: that of humanity, happiness and morality (182), which he claims all three belong to the concept of imaginary cause (180) and does not belong in the real world. He argues that when we reject the concept of God, we also reject the responsibility people put in it and that this rejection is a first step in changing the world (182). Markus Lipowicz analyzes Nietzsche in regard to the religious desire for a higher being and purpose in relation to transhumanist theory in his essay *Overcoming Transhumanism: Education or Enhancement Towards the Overhuman?*:

> However, Nietzsche (...) did not identify this desire as a necessary characteristic of human nature in general, but criticized it as a culturally obtained feature. In other words: overcoming humanity would also imply the liberation from this human, all-too human desire for metaphysical meaning (204).

Nietzsche's argument and Lipowicz analysis reach the same point: by liberating oneself from the desire and purpose and not placing responsibility in a higher being, the world can be liberated from societal or religious pressure and place a bigger emphasis on the individual. However, as *Altered Carbon* argues in its episodes, while society can liberate itself from religious pressure, this desire and purpose is still very much present and allows for society to replace old desires for new ones. With the introduction of the sleeves and the subsequent

dystopian capitalistic view of society in the series, *Altered Carbon* shows that by eliminating the traditional concepts of desire, purpose and God, the elite society has gradually been stepping in as new idols. They have the means and possibilities to make exact clones of themselves and live much longer while looking the same age due to this, making it appear like they can and will never age. In the first episode, Kovacs is flown to the home of the Bancroft family. As it takes him up above the clouds, the scene cuts back and forth between the look on Kovacs face as he sees high towers and the view he experiences, where the dark, moody city has been replaced with sparse towers and bright sunlight. As Kovacs looks amazed as he sees the towers for the first town, it is explained to him that this level of the city is called the Aerium where the wealthier residents live ('Out of the Past' 20:30-21:40). As only the wealthy reside here and the view is obscured due to the clouds, there is a likeness to different mythologies that describe high places where Gods of their respective mythologies reside; for example, the world of Asgard in Norse mythology where Odin, the highest being resides, or the mountain Olympus where, according to Greek mythology, the gods reside.[14] Via charity work or creating events in which the lower class is able to earn a new sleeve, they position themselves as these new idols that the rest of society reveres and idolizes.

That the elite society are revered as gods is explicitly shown in a scene in episode five, "The Wrong Man", in which Bancroft and Kovacs are visiting an unnamed colony where a part of society is infected with an unnamed plague disease that wiped out a huge part of civilization in the past. Some survived and remained as carriers of the virus, and their descendants all carry the same virus with them. This is another example in the series of how segmented society is: while new technologies and breakthroughs have occurred through the centuries, instead of treating people inside this colony, they are segregated and quarantined with little to no future to look towards besides remaining in the same gated colony from birth until death. Bancroft visits this colony regularly and goes here, unprotected, donating food and toys to the people. The people in the internment camp call him 'the city father' giving Bancroft a godlike status as he provides for them and these people are dependent on him, given that they cannot leave the colony. As Kovacs notices someone filming the interaction between Bancroft and the colony, Kovacs claims that this is theater and asks Bancroft why he does not buy the inhabitants of the colony new sleeves if he cares so much about them ("The Wrong Man"15:56). Bancroft responds to Kovacs with an accusation of sorts: "You are

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[14] The likeness to different mythologies is used as a generalized comparison between the wealthy society and the old mythological gods, as both can be seen as unreachable and residing far from the general population.

saying because I cannot fix everything, I should fix nothing at all" (Bancroft, "The Wrong Man" 16:00-16:15). While this might be a valid accusation at first glance given the charitable acts seen in this scene, Kovacs' question and Bancroft's reply illustrates two things. First, it shows the arrogance of Bancroft as the wealth he holds onto could easily be used to improve the conditions of the camp, giving the people there decent housing and making them self-sustainable or even helping them get rid of the disease. However, by choosing to hand out small gifts, he can keep them dependent and claim that he is doing good, giving back to the communities he visits while it actually costs him next to nothing. Second, it is this refusal and generated dependency that Bancroft needs and craves in order to sustain his god-like status. As he is regarded as 'the city father' to them and the infected colonies worship him, it can seem like he is the center of a cultus that is completely based around his person. And this is not by accident; earlier in this scene, Kovacs asks Bancroft why he chose this specific middle-age sleeve body to duplicate and return into instead of a younger, more virile body. Bancroft answers as follows: "Oh yes. No doubt. But then a young man sees himself as a fighting and fucking machine, huh? But the truth is, it is at this age that a man achieves real respect, for he has battled many times and clearly triumphed. Who are the most potent gods after all, huh? Odin. Jupiter. Zeus. A colossus is rarely a young man. He is father. With many children" (Bancroft, "The Wrong Man" 14:15-15:05).

As Bancroft provides this explanation to Kovacs, it becomes clear why he lives in the highest building that surpasses the clouds and uses this specific type of body: Bancroft views himself as not just a god looking down on the people on the surface. The specific mentions of Odin, Jupiter and Zeus are deliberate. As these are the respective kings of the gods of their own pantheon, Bancroft positions himself as a king of the gods as well, as a ruler of not only the lower class, but also of the new idols. He tries to attain and sustain this status by cloning and resleeving in the same middle-aged sleeve to simulate the same appearance that he ascribes to these kings. It is also in these infected communities that Bancroft uses the inhabitants to gain and preserve a godlike status as he walks around unprotected, being touched by the virus carriers as they infect him with the same disease they carry and as a result, dies surrounding by the inhabitants as they start grieving and praying in unison ("The Wrong Man" 17:25-18:05). However, when he comes back the next time, it will appear like the resurrection of Jesus Christ in Christianity, and it would reaffirm the image of him being unable to die of this disease and therefore being a god. The imagery turns into one of a self-sacrificial god, one who sacrifices himself to a deadly disease willingly to the less

fortunate while doing good deeds that improve their lives. The mourning in this scene also feels genuine, as the infected crowd actually worship their wealthy benefactor as their new god, having become dependent on him to continue living and legitimizing the new status of an idol through their grief. As Bancroft attains the new idol status and is being revered, he replaces the older, more traditional idols in favor of a new form of idolatry in which he is the center. The self-sacrifice where he succumbs to the infection ("The Wrong Man" 17:01-18:10) feels empty as he has access to multiple clones of himself and a backup of his consciousness via satellite and is able to be resurrected over and over again with no consequences for him, his stack nor his body. This creates a subtext in this scene that, even though what Bancroft does would be commendable in a world where everyone seems to care only for themselves, he only does this to verify his idol-like status and to immortalize himself in different, more traditional ways so he can be remembered and thus feed his egoism.

In a world where the digital file is of utmost importance, the body becomes a subject of different treatments in regard to mourning. *Altered Carbon* shows how a dystopian society based on the idea that one's consciousness, memories and essence can be stored and read as data creates a divide in beliefs; on one hand, old practices and beliefs remain steadfast, albeit adjusted to the new reality of a compulsory data device in every body or sleeve. On the other hand, there is the transhumanist and capitalist belief that people can have a choice and that they do not have to die. Instead, they can live multiple lives in different bodies. This belief clashes with the view of the society shown in the series where people have to hope to gain better sleeves, or where one is dependent on what remains if one does not have enough funds. While both views seem at odds with each other, *Altered Carbon* shows that they might be more similar than they appear at first sight. Both view the data stack as the 'soul' of the body; and while there is a singular god already in NeoCatholicism, the transhumanist and capitalist society gives rise to newly created gods; the select few that have enough capital to buy the best technology and are able to keep their appearance either unchanged or they can change into anyone they would like. With their position high up in the clouds, and with Laurens Bancroft exemplifying this rise of new gods and the idolization of successful people through physical death and rebirth, what appears at first glance to be a divide, might actually be an attempt to usurp old practices completely and installing a new religion: one based on capitalism and the worship of the elite.

Altered Carbon shows a world in which the most important aspect of a human being is the data they carry with them. A physical body is no longer mourned, only the data one

leaves behind. Whereas the *Black Mirror* episode "San Junipero" provides a choice in whether one's brain could be transferred to hardware and the dilemmas that accompany such a choice for not only oneself but also others, the series offers no such choice and offers a glimpse of a world in which everything and everyone is data. As the series takes the concept of mind-upload as shown in "San Junipero" and uses the concept to look towards a futuristic and speculative dystopian future, it does provide context for the world of today and how the way one can mourn a person has shifted in a time when data becomes more prevalent. The world of today has become more interconnected through social media where people might never actually see each other beyond photos, videos or just text messages and to have an online presence becomes more standard and someone can become idolized by others. When one such person dies or disappears from a platform and it is announced online in an online obituary or post via (social) media, the death or disappearance of someone one has never met (for example an actor that one has only seen on screen) already constitutes a mourning over data and does not require a physical body. This obituary, as Judith Butler argues in *Precarious Life*, is a means of one's life becoming a publicly grievable life, a life that becomes noteworthy (34). However, in an age of social media, it is not only the obituary that makes one's life noteworthy; through an active online presence and the data that they leave behind, a life is being made noteworthy already through the process of becoming idolatry. But would this mean that a life without online presence can not be grieved? that, as Butler argues, certain lives are not considered lives as they fit no dominant frame and therefore cannot be humanized (34)? While the public mourning and grieving online over one's loss might give the impression that a death that happens outside of social media is considered less grievable, both mourn the same sort of data. It is data as in memories, diary entries, photo albums or online presence that constitute the body that one mourns. While *Altered Carbon* shows the change in dynamics of grief and mourning through the divide between the NeoCatholic and transhumanist stance on death and the body and how through the creation of new idols one's life becomes more grievable than the other, there is one aspect that is equally important to all different perspectives: the memories and data that one leaves behind for others to process through grief.

Chapter 3: Abuse and complicity in *Transference*

As both the *Black Mirror* episode "San Junipero" and the series *Altered Carbon* show, one's process of mourning and grieving a loved one passing away is changed when one's mind is stored as data and there is no longer a dependency on the physical body that is left behind when we pass away. As long as the brain is replicated or converted into data, one can live on in a virtual space that functions as an afterlife as shown in "San Junipero" or, as *Altered Carbon* shows, as data discs that are inserted into physical vessels at which point one's physical appearances matter less than the stored data on the disc. The process changes from one of mourning into one of hope: hope that one can soon join the other in a digital afterlife, or hope for one to live as long as possible, unencumbered by their physical state. In turn, one can prolong the avoidance of mourning and grieving as long as it is possible. However, by not accepting the loss of a person and learning from it, one avoids the beginning of the process of mourning as this process begins when, as Judith Butler argues in her book *Precarious Life,* one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever, and that by agreeing to mourn, one agrees to undergo or submits to a transformation of which one cannot know the full outcome in advance (21). What if one does not want to accept this mourning and the resulting permanent change that might transpire? By providing a close reading of the 2018 virtual reality video game *Transference* and confronting the concepts of complicity, fragility and loss through grief, the game body, loss of oneself, player interaction, perspectives, trauma, and virtual spaces, I will develop a better understanding of how one's refusal to mourn and grief can influence and cause trauma to the people around them through the use of mind-upload, complicity and player interaction.

Transference, a 2018 virtual reality video game developed by Spectrevision and Ubisoft Montreal and published by Ubisoft, follows an unnamed protagonist controlled by the player who receives a pre-recorded video message from a former colleague,[15] in which the former colleague explains that he has found a way to take an entire cognitive system and replicate it in a virtual space. The protagonist is told by the colleague that the colleague himself, the colleague's wife and son will relocate to a virtual space and that he will see the protagonist very soon. As the player, in the body of the protagonist, enters the virtual space,[16] the simulation appears to be corrupted, and it is the player's task to reconstruct and restore

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[15] The protagonist's name is never mentioned; as this is supposed to be a blank slate, the player is not informed of anything that can identify the protagonist other than the fact that the protagonist used to be a colleague.
[16] How the protagonist enters the virtual space is not made clear in the game itself.

the replicated artificial brain data in order for the simulated world to become uncorrupted. The corruption is caused by the convergence of three distinct brain data: the former colleague, the colleague's wife and his son. The player separates these three brain data through solving various puzzles and by listening and watching in-game videos. When the player has completed their main task, they are sent to a giant hallway, flanked by a row of servers on both sides. While the player walks across the hallway, the distraught voices of both the mother and the son can be heard; it is revealed that the colleague's wife and son were leaving him, and the colleague, unable to accept the two of them leaving, murdered his wife and his son and uploaded their minds into the simulated world the player has been trying to restore and uploaded his mind as well right before he committed suicide. The trauma caused by the volatile murders created the corruption the player encountered in all three brain data, preventing them from forming one singular harmonized world until the protagonist, embodied by the player, removes the corruption, making the wife and son aware of their surroundings without any information given to them as to what happened at which point the game ends and it is unclear what happens to both the protagonist as well as to all three family members.

Transference uses the player as its focal point for its narrative: stepping into the 'body' or 'persona' of a former colleague of the father who has reached out to the protagonist, the player character explores the digital space without any prior intimate knowledge. Throughout the game the player, as well as the character they are embodying, gains more knowledge about the daily life and several significant events or memories of the family. The player is able to roam the virtual world without following a linear path in terms of time or perspective as fragments of memories are scrambled and intertwined with each other. Philosopher Michael Hauskeller describes the nonlinearity of virtual spaces in his article My Brain, My Mind, and I: Some philosophical assumptions of mind uploading:

> To upload our minds to a computer would allow us not only to transfer our existence to a more durable substrate; it would allow us to roam the world of cyberspace without any clearly marked physical constraints or time limits. We could be anywhere and everywhere, all in a blink of an eye and for all time, until the world itself ends (2).

The blink of an eye that Hauskeller describes is made physical in the game through the use of household objects or light switches. In order to gain access to different moments, parts or times of the intertwined memories the player interacts with common household objects like a fridge or microwave or by flicking a light switch in any given room. By interacting with the

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light switch or objects, the player is taken to a different time or place, with hallways shifting, changing decor, or relocating the player to a different space altogether. While navigating the different spaces, the player might notice that things do not appear exactly the same in each space. The difference is caused by how each person's brain uniquely interprets the information they receive. Hauskeller argues in regard to this difference that:

> Having a mind generally means being to some extent aware of the world and oneself, and this awareness is not itself information. Rather, it is a particular way in which information is processed (which is different from the way in which, say, information in an electronic circuit is processed), but this way does not add anything to the already existing information. It is not simply information about how to process other bits of information. That is why, theoretically, your mind can contain the same information as mine and still not be mine (7).

As Hauskeller argues about minds containing the same information but not being equal, the game shows this explicitly through the light switches around the apartment. As the process of information differs within all three uploaded brains, the brains each emit different wavelengths, which causes the virtual space that houses them to differ continually. The flicking of the light switches by the player is an example of the virtual space showing the three different brain data. As the virtual space changes wavelengths, the player traverses into a different replication of one of the family members' brains (either the father, the wife or son) and might receive information that differs from what the same space has previously shown. While the information that all three family members share is the same, the way their brains have processed this information differs depending on their own interpretations, feelings and memories: objects are either replaced or in different positions; a room can look, depending on the type of memory or recollection, either peaceful, terrifying or is completely locked off as it is either too painful for the respective brain data to access due to traumatic memories or, in the case of the son, rooms can be unavailable as he was told that he was not allowed to enter it and therefore has no memory or data of it.

From the beginning of the game, the player is lured into a false sense of heroism by the father, as instead of 'saving' the family and reaching a traditional happy or satisfactory ending where all of the game's characters and the player themself will feel happiness and closure for completing their main task, the ending transforms into a tragic ending, one where only the abusive father has reached his happy ending as he is now bound together forever with his family. The deception used by the father makes the player complicit in creating a

tragic ending as the tasks the player, embodying the protagonist, was asked to perform cemented the fate of the colleague's wife and son.[17] The results and realization of this complicity is something that is unique to video games, argues Jesper Juul in his book *The Art of Failure* (2016):

> Players suddenly realize that they have been working toward an abhorrent goal. As it turns out, this use of deception and revelation opens up a whole range of new experiences, where the discomfort of having worked for something unpleasant turns out to be a strong emotional device unique to games. The experience is not one of trivialization, but of feeling painfully involved in an event in a way we do not experience in merely fictional representations such as cinema or literature (109).

The experience described is one that is experienced often in literature and movies, when one is reading a crime novel in which the chapter describes the murder in explicit detail and the reader settles into the role of a complicit passive spectator, not preventing the murder and not feeling guilt or remorse as the reader is just passing by, turning page after page. The involvement and complicity is detached from the reader. This is not the case when it comes to video games, and virtual reality games in particular. Instead of just turning a page, or passively sitting on a couch or in a movie theater watching what happens on screen unfold while doing nothing else but looking at the screen, video games demand more of the player by requiring a physical interaction between the player and the game via an input device like a controller. By pressing buttons or using movement, the player provides the input for the game and propels the character they are inhabiting to perform an action, therefore making the player responsible for what transpires in the game. Video game perspectives, as Timothy Crick argues in his article *The Game Body: Toward a Phenomenology of Contemporary Video Gaming*, can implicate or produce what Crick calls a game body (261). Crick argues that the game body is implicated or produced when the software-simulated mobile camera that follows (in third-person perspectives) or inhabits (in first-person perspectives) a game character in a virtual world serves double duty as the perceptive organ of a game body situated within the narrative of the game world (261), which is often the body of the protagonist character. The level of responsibility that a player can feel can vary depending on the type of game and the perspective that the player is put in, for example whether in a

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[17]The word tragic is being used here because the player is unaware of the secret that lies within the tasks that the player is asked to perform and the conclusion is already pre-ordained. While the player is trying to do the right thing, their heroism becomes a tragic flaw and this results in something negative occurring in the end that affects both the protagonist and the people around them.

shooter game, a player can be put into or switch between a third-person perspective, in which one is looking from behind or over the shoulder of a character, or a first-person perspective, in which the player completely inhabits the character and is experiencing the game literally through the eyes of the avatar.

The player can feel more responsible for their actions in a first-person perspective, as the player's body and the avatar's body are figuratively merged as one and it transforms the game body into a mirror of the player. Jesper Juul argues that the mirroring between player and protagonist is an effective way to generate complicity as it lets both the player and the character share an unpleasant feeling of responsibility (112) that would otherwise be avoided. Virtual reality makes this mirroring explicit: by putting on the virtual reality headset and using gyroscopic and motion controls the player is put inside the body of the character and virtually experiences the game through their eyes.[18] The experience is one that is more up close in comparison to playing a video game when sitting and looking at a screen from a distance. The distance that regular gaming generates between player and screen is non-existent in virtual reality due to the fact that the screen is on the inside of the headset, placed right in front of the player's eyes and obscuring any other vision, providing no other distraction than the screen that completely covers their eyes.

By turning the player into the character, the game, in combination with the use of virtual reality, places the responsibilities of the character on the player's shoulders. In *Transference* the player doubles as the former colleague who goes inside the virtual space via unknown methods and has to figure out what happened and how they can reconfigure and restore the corrupted space to its previous state. How does this make the player complicit in creating or reinstating a cycle of domestic violence for the family of three when the player is only following given instructions and the true intentions of these instructions are obscured until the end? Jesper Juul argues in regard to the integration of complicity in games that:

> Complicity can furthermore be integrated with both the regular experience of a
> sympathetic protagonist unwittingly committing unsympathetic actions and the less
> common experience of an unsympathetic protagonist who willingly commits
> unsympathetic actions (112).

The game uses the sympathetic protagonist role throughout its story and gameplay. As the protagonist is asked to help out a friend and the friend's family, the protagonist appears

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[18] While not all virtual reality hardware comes with gyroscopic or motion controllers and might use a traditional controller, newer virtual reality hardware come standard with gyroscopic and motion controllers.

sympathetic. The actions the player performs as the protagonist, for example solving puzzles and restoring rooms to their original state, appear sympathetic until the true effects of the actions are revealed in the game's ending. By putting the player in the perspective of the protagonist, the game obscures the unsympathetic actions for the player, made explicit through the hidden video logs that the player can find by searching the virtual space and 'downloads' them from the virtual space to an unknown location inside the unspecified in-game hardware. These video files are only viewable when the player pauses the game at which point the pause menu appears with an option to view the video logs. The player can also quit the game, and when they return to the game, can opt to view the logs in the main menu before continuing the game. As the game provides these video logs as optional, the player can decide to ignore the video files. The game further encourages the player to ignore the videos by giving the files a generic name and therefore make them seem unrelated to the main narrative to the player. By ignoring them, the player ignores the warnings that the videos contain, as they show the violent and quickly angered persona of the father from the perspective of both the wife and the son. Through this ignorance the player is made complicit. In creating this web of complicity, the game ensnares the protagonist and the player and adds more of these unsympathetic actions on the player.

The optional video logs combined with the game's use of different spaces provide a narrative of the lives of all three family members before their move to the virtual space: the family of three lived in an apartment in San Francisco at one point of their lives when the wife was a musician building a career and the father was a starting scientist. When the father's work forces the family to move to a different town, things appear to falter; the father becomes obsessed with his work, neglecting his family as the wife is forced by the relocation to abandon her career and is the only one taking care of the son while the son starts to feel lonely. This is exemplified by their respective perspectives: the father's perspective only provides small glimpses of his family as the obsession has taken over his life and even the virtual space is adjusted to accommodate his obsession. The wife's perspective has cages as pictures on the wall and doors turn into thick metal doors that feel as if one is trapped; the son's loneliness is reflected on the walls in the son's perspective, in which the walls are scribbled with drawings and stories that the son has written in order to feel less alone. One of the video logs, shown from the perspective of the son, is a scene in which the wife is singing a lullaby to him, in which a woman is contemplating leaving her husband, but is conflicted whether to take her son along with her or leave him with the husband. As the player is seeing

this through the perspective of the son, it is a seemingly random captured moment in time. However, taking into consideration the replication of the virtual space from the perspective of the mother in which she felt trapped inside her own home, the combination of these two provide the subtext for the lullaby: the wife is contemplating leaving, but is also unsure whether to take her son with her to keep him safe from his father as she is unsure of what he will do to either of them when he will find out.

The reveal of the murder of the father's wife and son and their subsequent forced mind-upload ensures that the hidden layer of complicity comes to the foreground, forcing the player to confront their complicity with feelings of guilt and regret. *Transference* forces the player, as they walk across a hallway and hear the frightened voices of the wife and son, to confront the fact that the player was also responsible for this. In this reveal, the confrontation of the player with their own responsibility and complicity in this cycle of abuse offers the player a chance to reflect on the loss of the wife and son and the player is given the choice to accept the loss of both in order to start a process of mourning through identifying with them.[19] Judith Butler argues that when one goes through loss, a social constitution is revealed in which the self and other become indistinguishable from each other and the ties that connect them cannot be easily untied:

> It is not as if an "I" exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well. At another level, perhaps what I have lost "in" you, that for which I have no ready vocabulary, is a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of myself nor you, but is to be conceived as the tie by which those terms are differentiated and related (22).

In *Transference*, the social constitution that the player has formed while embodying the protagonist throughout the game appears in the white hallway at the end, through the reveal of domestic abuse and the murder of the colleague's wife and son and the traversal through their virtual spaces. Whereas before the game, the player did not know them and was only informed by the father, through their virtual spaces the player gets to know the three family

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[19] The choice is not explicitly shown in the game's ending; rather, it is something that the player processes internally themself.

members better and their vulnerabilities are shown.[20] The father is shown to be unable to accept that, through the loss of the social constitutions between himself and his wife and son, he will become undone and that he will lose part of what constitutes him. He views his own life as more valuable than the lives of his wife and son, and thus more grievable. As the father keeps his wife and son trapped in the virtual space, the father is able to continue to be in denial and to avoid the loss of part of himself. However, as the player in the end has knowledge from the perspectives of the father/colleague, the colleague's wife and their son, the player can consider all three family members points of view and is therefore able to look at all three lives more critically, and can use the grief that the game imposes on the player to look critically to the virtual spaces and can establish that the lives of the wife and son were also grievable.

The father, through his obsession with his work, is unaware of his family's underlying issues and is of the belief that there are no problems. This is, for example, shown explicitly in a video of the son's birthday as he is given a birthday cake and blows out the candles. The perspective of the father shows a happy or joyous birthday in which nothing unpleasant is happening. When he finds out that his wife and son are leaving him, he is shocked by this information. Judith Butler describes the sudden loss of the status quo through the vulnerability of The United States when it was attacked on September 11, 2001:

> Most Americans have probably experienced something like the loss of their First Worldism as a result of the events of September 11 and its aftermath. What kind of loss is this? It is the loss of the prerogative, only and always, to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never in the position of having one's own boundaries transgressed. The United States was supposed to be the place that could not be attacked, where life was safe from violence initiated from abroad, where the only violence we knew was the kind that we inflicted on ourselves. The violence that we inflict on others is only—and always—selectively brought into public view (39).

The loss of family members or the loss of safety within a family is of a different, more personal level than loss than the communal loss of safety in the United States of America. The communal loss is shared within a society and affects a larger group of people than if it would concern when the loss happens only within a family (and the people that were close to

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[20] While the player becomes more informed throughout the game about the situation of the family (as they were unaware of anything at the start of the game), the game does not make clear what the protagonist might have known about the domestic abuse nor the murders by the father.

the lost family member). However, through the description of Judith Butler regarding the loss of the prerogative I see a similarity between the loss of safety within the United States of America through September 11 and its aftermath and the video game *Transference*. If the three family members are seen as, as it were, their own sovereign 'countries', the father is similar to the United States of America before the events of September 11 if we follow Judith Butler's description; the father views himself as untouchable and that no harm can be done to him. Through the absence of his family in his virtual space and the selective memories through the video logs from his perspective, the father shows a family that, according to his point of view, has no problems and is living in harmony. While the perspectives of the wife and son show a different side of him in which he is absent or abusive towards them and position the father as the transgressor that attacks other 'states' (in this case the wife and son), the father himself is either unaware of this or is refusing to acknowledge that the family dynamic was different or that the father himself was abusive. When his wife and son are leaving him, the father experiences shock and devastation. And herein lies the second similarity: As the father is being transgressed by the wife and son as they leave him and do harm to his family image, this transgression forces the father to experience the loss of him being untouchable and the father becomes vulnerable. The experience of loss and fragility, Judith Butler argues, makes way for different possibilities to cope with the sudden loss (40). The father's response to this loss is one of violence: He views the fact that his wife and son are leaving him as if violence has been done unto him, and therefore he uses violence unto others, in particular on his wife and son. This violence is an action that can come forth out of grief, as Butler argues:

> When grieving is something to be feared, our fears can give rise to the impulse to resolve it quickly, to banish it in the name of an action invested with the power to restore the loss or return the world to a former order, or to reinvigorate a fantasy that the world formerly was orderly (29-30).

 The father is unable to deal with this sudden loss of his wife and son and through his grief he gives into the impulse to resolve it quickly by murdering both his wife and son and transferring their brain data onto hardware where he has created a virtual space for the three of them in order to return the three of them to a fantasy that he clings onto. After performing the violent actions, the father commits suicide right after transferring his own brain data. In trying to restore the loss, the father subjects the mother and son to an infinite loop of domestic abuse as they are unwillingly put into the virtual space, a vicious cycle in which

they cannot escape as they are deceased, and therefore have no option to return to their physical body or switch to a different virtual space as it is harmonized by the end of the game and they are forced to share this space with the abuser.

In the case of *Transference*, transcending the physical body and achieving digital immortality has the opposite effect than was shown in "San Junipero", where moving to a virtual space was a choice and a seemingly uneventful simulation. Instead, *Transference* puts forward a situation where one, by avoiding grief and loss, turns towards mind-upload with the intent to satisfy one's needs above others even if the outcome is not as fortunate for others. The father uses the player's character of the protagonist in order to achieve his ideal outcome. In doing this, the player is unknowingly forced to comply with the abuser and is being made complicit by solving the corruption in the virtual space. As the player has no previous information when starting this game and is only able to gather visual information from the virtual space that the player has to connect together in their own mind, the reveal of intent of the father at the end can come as a shock and the influx of emotions from this reveal can contain different emotions: guilt, remorse and grief. By forcing the player to confront it all at once at the ending and leaving the ending ambiguous, the player is given a chance to accept the loss of the wife and son and accept that the player will be changed by accepting this loss. Whether the player does this or not is up to them. However, having gained insight into all three family members, the player is able to make a different choice than the father. *Transference* shows that the digital afterlife or immortal life is not always one where one has the freedom and choice over oneself; it can also become an inescapable prison, where one is only able to either inflict more pain and suffering continuously or become the receiver of the continuous violence that will be inflicted upon them.

Conclusion

In this thesis I confronted the concepts of afterlife, digital immortality, grief, grievability, idols, mind-upload, mourning, and social constitution among others in order to contribute to a better understanding of the objects and concepts discussed. This thesis explored the changes and the nuances through these concepts and aimed to answer the question of what happens when the process of grief and mourning becomes entangled with the transhumanist theory of digital immortality. I approached three different objects through a cultural analysis in order to lay bare the changes and nuances that occur in the process of grief and mourning through technological advancements.

In the first chapter, I discussed the concepts of mind-upload, digital immortality, mind cloning, mind transferring, lifelogging, digital avatar, grief, mourning, queer death and queer failure through a close reading of "San Junipero". I argued that, while the transhumanist movement has different views on immortality, the movement works towards a shared end goal. I explored how the possibility of mind-upload and a virtual afterlife can influence one's daily life. Through mind cloning or mind-upload, both forms of digital immortality allow someone to continue living after their physical body disappears. While exploring this possibility, I also argued that if the concept of mind-upload is made a reality, it creates dilemmas for people. A form of peer pressure arises on whether or not one should become part of the virtual afterlife or not. This peer pressure opens the path for new ways of grief to be formed. Through the close reading of "San Junipero", I discovered that the existence of a digital immortality and virtual afterlife also provides a different view on the way we can grieve and mourn. One knows that there is something beyond death where one can join the deceased. This transforms the way one mourns of sadness into a way of mourning that provides hope and expectations. Thus, the concept of mind-upload and its implementation can provide new opportunities that transform our way of mourning. It is in these opportunities that one can gain a better understanding of how one can navigate the different processes of grief and mourning in the world of today.

The second chapter confronted the concepts and ideas of capitalism, death, grief, idols, immortality, mind-upload, mourning, religion, symbolic immortality and transhumanism through a close reading of *Altered Carbon*. I examined the implementation of mind-upload in *Altered Carbon* in order to understand what kind of impact a different form of mind-upload has on society. I argued that, when data becomes the most important aspect of a person, the treatment of the physical body becomes subject to differing opinions. I discovered

that a society can become even more divided as a result of technology becoming compulsory. In closely examining two separate groups within the society of *Altered Carbon*, transhumanists and religious fanatics, I argued that these two groups have more in common than appears at first glance. Through the examination, I discovered that transhumanists can exploit the duality of ideologies in order to create new idols and become objects of worship themselves. *Altered Carbon* provided an answer to what happens when the most important aspect of a human being is the data they carry with them: grief becomes solely about the data one leaves behind. In this answer, there is a context for the world of today and how the way one can mourn a person is already changing in a time when data becomes more prevalent. As today's world is more interconnected through social media where photos, videos or just text messages are dominant, an online presence becomes the standard. Mourning over data is becoming more commonplace already via public outings of mourning and grief online. However, both online mourning and grief and the grieving that occurs outside of the online space mourn the same sort of data. Memories, diary entries, photo albums, letters or one's online presence constitute the body that one mourns. It is in this constitution of the body that some of the dynamics of grief and mourning are able to stay unchanged.

In the third and final chapter, I confronted the concepts of complicity, fragility and loss through grief, the game body, loss of oneself, player interaction, perspectives, trauma, and virtual spaces to examine what the effects these concepts can have on one and the influence that one has on the people around them. Through a close reading of *Transference* I examined how the virtual space interacts with brain data once it has been uploaded. I discovered that information can be processed differently. I argued that when the concept of mind-upload is no longer theoretical but put into practice that this technology can be used for violent purposes such as those portrayed in *Transference*. It can provide one with the means to avoid their confrontation with grief while also harming others. I argued that achieving digital immortality can produce the opposite effect than I have shown in previous chapters. I argued that the digital afterlife or immortal life is not always one where one has the freedom and choice over oneself; it can also become an inescapable prison. Moving to a virtual space can be forced upon someone and can traumatize them. This forces them into a state of eternal grief. Through the use of the medium of video games, I argued that the player can produce feelings of grief by playing a game. The game makes the player complicit in the violence portrayed on screen. At the same time, the game obscures the fact that the player is doing something that has a negative outcome. *Transference* makes the player think that a positive

outcome will be reached. I discovered that the concept of complicity in video games provides the player with emotions such as guilt, remorse and grief. By forcing the player to confront it all at once at the end, the player is given a chance to choose how they will handle their emotions. This choice provides an opportunity to look critically at how technology can be implemented and to question whether it might reduce or amplify grief.

When one grieves, one grieves a physical body as well as data. In the possible futures shown in the three central objects of this thesis, I have argued that through the shift from physical body to a body of data, the processes of grief and mourning also change. New opportunities to grief and mourn arise. Certain aspects of grieving stay unchanged even when the data we use to grieve differs. Through the use of mind upload and the possibility of a virtual afterlife or being able to extend one's life indefinitely through a storage device, new possibilities open up. These possibilities make one think about one's life and what one's body actually consists of and is constituted by. I believe that both the ties with one another and the data that one collects are important to what constitutes one's body and in turn the grief that is produced when someone is lost. It is in this combination of ties and data that grief is produced and a better understanding of the process of grief and mourning is provided.

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