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Zoë Shacklock

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## **Riding in Cars with Girls: Driving Desire on Television**

### **Zoë Shacklock**

The open road is popularly imagined as both cinematic and male, a space suited to the scope afforded by the cinema and the breadth demanded by the male psyche. However, while these connotations are ingrained within the aesthetics of driving, its kinaesthetics – the articulations between bodies, movement, and space - have more in common with television and with stories of women's desire. Drawing from Iris Marion Young's theories of gendered embodiment, this essay argues that driving, television, and female desire are all marked by the same contradictions between movement and stability, and between public and private. It analyses two recent television programmes concerned with women behind the wheel - *Black Mirror's* 'San Junipero' (Netflix, 2016) and the first two seasons of *Big Little Lies* (HBO, 2017-present) - to argue that driving on television affords a space through which to negotiate feminine embodiment, agency, and desire.

**Keywords:** automobility; driving; gender; kinaesthesia; television; women.

The opening credits for the 2017 HBO miniseries *Big Little Lies* begin with Michael Kiwanuka's plaintive question from his track 'Cold Little Heart': 'Did you ever want it? Did you want it bad?' Kiwanuka's cries of longing and desire are taken up by the images, which depict sensual shots of waves crashing and falling, and silhouettes of naked bodies moving together. Yet these erotic movements are interspersed by a much more ordinary kind of movement – the movement of cars driving down roads. We see shots of the landscape from passenger windows: the open sea, a rugged coastline, lines of Monterey Cypresses. We see children sitting in

backseats, headphones in their ears, gazing out the window with distracted contemplation. And we see the drivers of the cars, all of whom are women. Each of the women are shot from the backseat of the car, allowing us to see only the backs of their heads, or a glimpse of their eyes in the rear-view mirror. While the names presented in the credits belong to instantly recognisable actresses – Reese Witherspoon, Nicole Kidman, Shailene Woodley, Zoë Kravitz, and Laura Dern – their famous faces are hidden from us in these credits. Instead, these characters are introduced to us first and foremost as *drivers* – as bodies behind the wheel of a moving vehicle. Like all good opening credits, the sequence effectively sets up the tone and the content of the programme: this is a story about women, embodiment, and desire. Yet the credits also suggest that this is a story about driving, implying that to tell a story of women's desire and embodiment, we need to hit the road.

*Big Little Lies* revolves around a group of wealthy women whose children all attend the same public school in Monterey, California. The programme is a melodrama invested in exploring schoolyard scandals and complicated love affairs, but it is also a murder mystery, revolving around a central 'whodunnit' that is set up at the beginning of the first episode, when someone is murdered at a trivia night. Neither victim nor perpetrator are revealed until the final episode, and the season explores the events leading up to the doomed trivia night, interspersed with brief snippets of the police interrogations of fellow parents at the school. In combining serial melodrama with detective fiction – and in particular, their twin economies of sex and violence – the programme can be situated as part of what has come to be known as 'quality television'.<sup>1</sup> In the American context, quality television is the result of a series of industrial and distributional changes in the late 1990s, in which the rise of cable television and

the fragmentation of the market led to what John Ellis refers to as an 'era of plenty'.<sup>2</sup> In order to appeal to paying subscribers, cable channels must distinguish their content from free-to-air television, most notably through targeting niche audiences and employing discourses of quality. As Robert J. Thompson recognised in 1996, quality television is 'thought...better, more sophisticated, and more artistic than the usual network fare.'<sup>3</sup> While Thompson was writing more than two decades ago, these signifiers of quality are still the key way in which programmes differentiate themselves in a crowded television landscape. These programmes aim to appeal to a highly educated and affluent audience by drawing from the features of cinema and literature as a source of distinction: visual spectacle, narrative complexity, the presence of an auteur, longform seriality, and controversial content (such as sex, violence, and coarse language), all things that 'mass' television can seemingly not achieve.

Quality television has been criticised for being a masculinised genre. Michael Newman and Elana Levine argue that the cultural legitimisation of television is 'as much a masculinisation as it is a refinement of the medium's class status', in which the separation of quality programmes from mass television stands as a rejection of the medium's long history as a feminised (and hence devalued) medium.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, most of the famed programmes of American 'quality' TV – *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008), *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015), *Deadwood* (HBO, 2006-2008), and *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013) – are programmes produced by 'difficult men',<sup>5</sup> about troubled men, and, arguably, for men. Yet there has been a rise in female-led 'quality' dramas in the last decade, such as *Homeland* (Showtime, 2011–), *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013–); *Top of the Lake* (SundanceTV/BBC Two 2013; 2017), and *The Handmaid's Tale* (Hulu 2017–). Yet what links these programmes,

beyond simply a question of the gender of the protagonist, is a deep interest in the body, particularly questions of embodied agency, trauma, and desire. In this sense, these programmes take the emphasis on the controversial body in male-dominated quality television (which tends to emphasise violent action and sex), and transform it in order to tell a story of specifically female desire. This is not to say that this is something entirely new, for television has always been interested in telling stories of women's desire and women's experiences – that is, of course, the very definition of the soap opera. What is significant is that in the age of masculinised 'quality' television, women's melodrama is transformed into a story of desire and agency that explicitly plays out across the body.

Yet if, like other female-led quality television programmes, *Big Little Lies* is interested in exploring female embodiment, desire and agency, why does it choose to focus its opening credits on the road? Jonathan Gray, in his work on media paratexts, describes opening credit sequences as offering a preferred interpretation of the plot, characters, and genre, suggesting that their weekly repetition works to 'reaffirm what a show is about, how its characters are related, and how we "should" make sense of them.'<sup>6</sup> Gray goes on to explore how paratexts act as thresholds, zones of transition and transaction between intra- and extratextual elements.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, as well as telling us something about the specific programmes to which they are attached, paratexts also reveal something the wider cultural environment in which they are situated. Kathleen McHugh takes up this idea in her analysis of the opening credits of *Top of the Lake* and *Orange is the New Black*, coining the term 'parafeminist' to argue that these sequences gesture towards a broader range of cultural, aesthetic and feminist discourses.<sup>8</sup> If we follow McHugh and read *Big Little Lies*'s opening credits as possessing a similar 'parafeminist'

strategy, there must be something worth exploring about why a drama such as this, which very clearly presents itself as being about women's embodiment and desire, might choose to anchor itself around driving. Driving, it seems, might hold the key to unlocking bigger questions surrounding women, desire, embodiment, agency, and, perhaps, television.

In this article, I take up the following questions posed by *Big Little Lies*: Why is there such a strong connection between women, driving, and desire? What is the significance of placing women's bodies behind the wheel? And why might we see these stories on television? The open road is popularly imagined as both cinematic and male, a space suited to the scope afforded by the cinema and the breadth and power demanded by the male psyche. Yet if we look across the medium, we can find multiple examples of television programmes that prominently feature women behind the wheel. For instance, in the opening credits of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS, 1970-1977), a crucial programme for the second-wave feminism movement for its representation of an independent, unmarried young woman, depict Moore driving her car while shots from the series are superimposed across her face. The famous final montage of *Six Feet Under* (NBC, 2001-2005), in which Claire Fisher's drive across the country from Los Angeles to New York is intercut with sequences depicting the future deaths of all the characters, similarly foregrounds a woman's experience of driving, using it as shorthand for the programme's themes of desire, identity, temporality, and hope. Finally, 'San Junipero' (3.4), the Emmy award winning 2016 episode of anthology series *Black Mirror* (Channel 4, 2011-2014; Netflix 2016–), prominently uses cars and driving as a way to tell a story of unfolding desire between women. Women and cars seem to converge on the small screen as a repeated expression of women's agency and power.

The question I am concerned with in this article is whether television might offer a way forward for women behind the wheel, a different road to the masculinised aesthetics of speed and scale. Driving is not simply an experience of unfettered progression towards a horizon, but is also repetitive and mundane. To drive is to be both mobile and stationary, a seated body moving through space. It is to be both public and private, negotiating common space within a private bubble. It is also to look both forwards and backwards, to keep your eyes on the road ahead and, as the *Big Little Lies* credits demonstrate, on what you can see in the rear-view mirror. In this sense, the *kinaesthetics* of driving – or the embodied experience of moving through space – are far more paradoxical than the dominant aesthetics of driving on screen allow. Television is particularly well-placed to articulate such paradoxical kinaesthetics, for it is a medium of multiple temporalities, of interruptions and repetitions, and, like driving itself, a means of accessing public culture within a private space. Using *Big Little Lies* and *Black Mirror's* 'San Junipero' as case studies, I argue that television, in emphasising paradoxical kinaesthetics of driving, redirects us away from masculinised connotations of space, speed, and progression and towards alternative routes and temporalities, thus opening up a space to explore women's desire on the road.

### **Driving on the Small Screen**

When we think about driving on screen, we tend to think about very specific types of driving: the open road, the cross-country journey, the daring escape, the thrilling joyride. Such exciting, progressive forms of movement are strongly coded as cinematic. Iain Borden, in his monograph on driving in cinema, claims that 'cinema, more than any other representational

form, provides the most direct sense of what it actually feels like to drive.<sup>9</sup> Through formal elements such as montage, he argues, cinema embodies the very same articulation between movement, bodies, emotion, vision, and sound as the experience of being behind the wheel. Yet Borden misses the fact that such feelings are not neutral, but are wrapped up in questions of power and identity. Richard Dyer, in his discussion of the film *Speed*, more usefully suggests that the cinema fulfils our desire for 'an underlying pattern of feeling, to do with freedom of movement...that is coded as male (and straight and white, too).'<sup>10</sup> In its cinematic spectacle, driving is associated with a sense of freedom and agency that is not accessible to everyone. Indeed, the experience of being on the road has traditionally been the province of men; as Virginia Scharff notes in her work on female drivers, the car industry has always placed a 'concept of rough-hewn, muscle-bound masculinity central to the industry's self-image.'<sup>11</sup> The connection between the road and masculinity emerges across a range of cultural texts, but particularly the cinema, in which the road movie emerges out of the similarly masculine-coded Western. Timothy Corrigan recognises that the road movie can be understood as a story of male 'hysteria', in which the man's journey on the road is a rejection of the stasis of feminine domesticity.<sup>12</sup> If, as Borden suggests, cinema and driving share a mutual affinity, this remains entirely a gendered relationship.

The overwhelming masculinity of the road movie has been questioned both on screen and in the scholarly literature. The 1990s saw a rise of a number of films that could be categorised as queer road films – *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991), *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (Stephan Elliott, 1994), *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992), and to a lesser extent, *Happy Together* (Wong Kar-wai, 1997). Robert Lang argues that there is a



certain affinity between the road movie and what he calls the 'contemporary homosexual imaginary': a desire for freedom from conformity, a mobile eroticism, and a transient temporality.<sup>13</sup> Katie Mills makes a similar point in her discussion *The Living End*, arguing that the road story offers a 'ready narratological structure to represent rebellion and collective transformation', something that is particularly powerful for queer communities.<sup>14</sup> Yet it is noteworthy that most of this scholarship, and most of the queer road films they celebrate, continue to focus around men. While there are some road films that feature female protagonists – most famously *Thelma and Louise* (Ridley Scott, 1991) – the question remains as to the extent to which these act as a critique of the gendered qualities of the genre. In her work on female-led road movies, Shari Roberts argues that women in road movies seek to escape patriarchy yet are constantly reinscribed into masculine generic codes. 'While male protagonists use the road to flee femininity,' she argues, 'women cannot similarly flee the masculine because of the gendered assumptions of the genre.'<sup>15</sup> Even on the open highway, then, driving seems to move us in a closed loop between the cinematic and the masculine.

In order to escape this circular route, we perhaps need to take a theoretical exit: to get off the highway of cinematic masculinity and onto a smaller side road. For while theorists have been interested in interrogating the connection between masculinity, driving, and the cinema through the lens of gender and/or sexuality, the more productive point of critique might be the other end of this equation – cinema itself. Borden is wrong to claim that cinema is the only medium that gives us access to the feeling of driving – in the 1930s, Rudolf Arnheim suggested that it was *television* that was the 'relative of the motorcar...[it] gives us a feeling for the multiplicity of what happens simultaneously in different places.'<sup>16</sup> And while Roberts rightly

points out that women in the road movie cannot escape the gendered logics of the genre, I would argue that they may have more luck in escaping the gendered logics of the cinema itself. For most of its history, television has been understood as a feminised medium, for its key features – its domestic viewing context, its distracted audience, and its association with mass consumption – are all historically associated with women.<sup>17</sup> Television's narrative forms have also been theorised as feminine, particularly the seriality of the soap opera. Tania Modleski argues that the soap opera is opposed to what she refers to as the 'classic (male) film narrative', for its emphasis on routine familiarity, deferred closure, and an investment in circuitous relationships resists the goal-oriented teleology of male-dominated narratives.<sup>18</sup> Television, it seems might have more to offer the presentation of female embodiment and desire, and thus more space for exploring women's desire on the road.

If television provides a space to interrogate the gendered logics of the cinematic car story, it equally, I believe, allows us to challenge the cinematic aesthetics of the car and the road. As I suggested earlier, the culturally dominant ideas of driving on screen involve wide open roads and sweeping frontiers, or high-speed chases and spectacular stunts. Yet this is a very limited selection of the experience of driving. Driving can be an experience of freedom, of progressive movement through space, or even of dangerous thrill-seeking, yet it is more commonly experienced as a repetitive, ordinary, mundane activity. In this sense, while cinematic scholarship might be more interested in the exciting aesthetics of driving, the kinaesthetics of mundane, urban/suburban driving seem to suggest something different. Kinaesthesia refers to the embodied experience of moving through space, an experience that is, of course, central to the pleasures (and pains) of driving. Borden does discuss the kinaesthetics

of driving, but again, argues that these are specifically cinematic, focusing on questions of speed and of the visual pleasures of montage. Yet if, as I have suggested, television *can* give us access to experiences of driving, it might be particularly placed to open up this to other kinds of more ordinary experiences; as Margaret Morse suggests, watching television and driving are both 'performed semiautomatically in a distracted state', the 'ground of everyday experience'.<sup>19</sup> And if, as Nigel Thrift notes, the 'the identity of person and car kinaesthetically intertwine' when driving,<sup>20</sup> it is crucial that we interrogate the identity politics of the kinaesthetic pleasures we see on our screens. Looking at television, a medium organised by different gendered, aesthetic, and, perhaps, kinaesthetic discourses, might allow us to challenge the normative politics of driving on screen.

The kinaesthetics of driving involve a set of peculiar contradictions. Firstly, the driving body is simultaneously stationary and mobile: it moves through space while remaining seated, and the mobility of the journey is always hampered by interruptions, of stopping and starting and reversing. The kinaesthetic experience of driving exists at the intersection between stasis and motion, and cannot simply be understood through ideas of speed, thrill-seeking, and rebellion. Secondly, the space of driving is both private and public. In his famous work on automobile cultures, Raymond Williams argues that driving creates what he calls a condition of 'mobile privatisation', in which drivers experience a feeling of being at home while moving through public space.<sup>21</sup> Mimi Sheller and John Urry gesture to both of these contradictions in their description of automobility as 'a rolling private-in-public space', one which 'affords dwelling inside a mobile capsule that involves punctuated movement "on the road."' <sup>22</sup> These same paradoxes structure television itself. Television has always occupied a space between the

public and the private, between the intimate personal space of the home and the public sphere. And it has also always existed in the tension between movement and stasis, promising an experience of armchair travel. As the quintessential 'window on the world', television both brings the public sphere into the private living room and invites the audience to travel beyond that domestic space – it is as much a space of 'mobilisation privatisation' as the car itself. Television and driving, then, both exist in the same paradox: between movement and stasis, between travelling and dwelling, between the public sphere and one's own private bubble.

Yet as much as there is an affinity between television and driving, there might also be an affinity between women and driving – namely, between driving and the kinaesthetic experience of normative femininity. I am using the phrase 'normative femininity' here to recognise that while there is no such thing as a single, or essential, experience belonging to women, or a single, 'correct' type of female body, there is a highly normative, or dominant, construction of these ideas. Despite the fact that driving tends to be associated with men and with masculine qualities, its paradoxical nature has a particular affinity with how we talk about normative femininity. Many feminist scholars have argued that the experience of embodying femininity is overwhelmingly one of contradiction: Teresa de Lauretis suggests that feminine experience is defined by the 'tension of contradiction',<sup>23</sup> and Elizabeth Grosz argues that 'womanhood, whatever else it may mean...[is] a paradoxical entity.'<sup>24</sup> In her essay 'Throwing Like a Girl', Iris Marion Young asserts that women's embodied experience is a contradiction between immanence and transcendence – or between understanding the body as a thing, something to be policed and maintained and potentially the object of another person's gaze, and the body as an experience, as a lived mode of being.<sup>25</sup> Young argues that what she calls 'feminine bodily

existence' is structured by a constant vacillation between being a moving body in the world, and the constant doubt of stopping and restricting that body under the potential gaze of others; as she says, 'the body is often lived as a thing that is other than it, a thing like other things in the world.'<sup>26</sup> If we follow Young's work, then, normative feminine embodiment seems to be determined by the same sorts of paradoxes that structure both television and driving – stasis and motion, presence and absence, agency and control, public and private.

At the beginning of this essay I wondered why *Big Little Lies* chooses to set up a story about women's desire and embodied trauma through the structure of driving – the answer might just be because there is a certain kinaesthetic compatibility between them. To some extent, it may seem that I have constructed another closed loop as problematic as the one between cinema, men, and the open road: a roundabout in which television, driving, and women's bodies feed constantly into one another, a kinaesthetic circuit from which there is no escape. I am not attempting to erect a prescriptive taxonomy between these three elements. Rather, I simply want to illustrate how shifting our attention to television rather than cinema, to the kinaesthetics of driving rather than the aesthetics of the road, might open up a space to challenge the cultural associations between motorways and masculinity.

### **Female Desire on the Road**

To illustrate these ideas in more detail, I now turn to *Big Little Lies* and the 'San Junipero' episode of *Black Mirror*. Both of these programmes fit within the 'quality television' paradigm I outlined at the beginning of this article: they are both high budget dramas concerned with exploring embodiment, identity, and desire. Both were released within four

months of one another in late 2016-early 2017, and both are explicitly interested in the car as a space for women. While *Big Little Lies* is a serialised drama concerned with exploring the lives of multiple women over the course of the narrative, *Black Mirror* is an anthology series in which the episodes are connected by theme, but not by character or narrative. Part black comedy, part science fiction, *Black Mirror* is known for its bleak depictions of the effects of new technology, particularly social media. 'San Junipero', however, is something of an oddity: it is one of the few episodes to have a fairly happy ending. The episode is set in the beachside town of San Junipero in 1987, and tells the story of the developing romantic relationship between two women, Yorkie and Kelly. But being *Black Mirror*, of course, nothing is quite what it seems, and we eventually learn that the town is a virtual reality in which the consciousnesses of the dying visit and can eventually choose to remain, granted a kind of eternal life after death. As discussed earlier, *Big Little Lies* is a melodrama that focuses on the lives of a group of wealthy Californian women, and the complicated webs of desire and intrigue that surround them. While the first season is organised around a murder, the second season, currently airing at the time of writing, is more interested in tracing the lasting effects of trauma on desire and identity. As well as sharing an interest in the space of the car, the body, and female desire, the two programmes reflect the way that television is often invested in ideas of multiplicity - multiple temporalities, multiple selves, multiple characters, and fluid, unfolding modes of desire - making them a useful site to explore how television might offer more options for the presentation of driving on screen.

In 'San Junipero', Kelly and Yorkie first meet in a club when Kelly pulls Yorkie onto the dancefloor. Yorkie is awkward and self-conscious, and her movements are hesitant and tightly

contained, particularly when compared with the more confident ways in which Kelly occupies space. Yorkie eventually flees the dancefloor, and later tells Kelly that she felt uncomfortable because ‘everyone was looking.’ In this sequence, Yorkie demonstrates a particularly normative mode of feminine embodiment – hesitancy, an unwillingness to take up space, and a constant recognition of her body as being an image for others as much as something she owns herself. In their second meeting, Yorkie struggles to find the courage to articulate her attraction to Kelly.

Yorkie: I don’t know how to do this.

Kelly: Do what?

Yorkie: Just help me. Can you just...just make this easy for me?

Kelly: You wanna get in my car?

Kelly’s car is a Jeep, a vehicle that carries masculine connotations of militarised, off-road driving. Yet here, the Jeep becomes re-imagined as a space for exploring women’s desire – a way of making things ‘easy’ for Yorkie, making both her body and her desire easier to experience. In the car, she is relaxed and smiling, and at the end of the journey, the two women arrive at Kelly’s house and have sex for the first time. In this sense, the experience of being in the car allows her to feel and embody the desire she cannot on the dance floor – the kinaesthetics of driving seem to open up a space for women in which their bodies and their desires might be easier to bear.

In *Big Little Lies*, the car functions as a similar conduit for the experience of women’s desire – particularly desire that cannot be expressed within the normative bounds of society. The second episode of the second season, ‘Tell-Tale Hearts’ (Season 2 Episode 2), begins with a point-of-view shot of Celeste driving down a highway. The shot is blurred and out of focus,

preventing the audience from clearly seeing the surrounding scenery. Yet the shot is still recognisable as one taken from behind the wheel of a car, precisely through the presentation of movement – the way in which the blurred outlines of lights and objects drifting beyond the frame evoke the sensation of being within a moving object. The overwhelming impact of the shot is thus the *sensation* of movement, or the kinaesthetics of driving. After this opening shot, we see a shot of a disoriented Celeste at the wheel, and then brief flashbacks of Celeste in the back seat of her car having sex with an unidentified man. Again, this sequence draws a connection between the experience of driving and the expression of women's sexual desire, for it presents the car as a space for sex, and the feeling of driving as the catalyst for its expression.

Yet at the end of this sequence Celeste crashes her car, running off the side of the highway and colliding with a tree. While she is unharmed, this raises an important question about the extent to which women may be able to fully access the power and freedom of the road. It is too simple to see the transposition of masculine qualities onto feminine experience as entirely revolutionary and empowering, for it leaves those gendered binaries intact. And as I suggested earlier, one of the values of exploring driving on television is its capacity to highlight a different set of kinaesthetics, ones that go beyond simply the masculinised connection between speed and power. If we look more closely at the examples I am discussing, we can see that such empowering moments of driving do often end in disaster. In 'San Junipero', Kelly takes her eyes off the road to exchange a long smile with Yorkie, meaning that she misses an oncoming car and must swerve into a ditch to avoid a crash. Similarly, in the first season of *Big Little Lies*, Madeline leaves a café to 'go for a drive' with Joseph to discuss their affair, yet the conversation is cut short when a truck smashes into the side of their car. For Madeline, the



space of the car is the only safe space in which she can discuss her illicit desire, once again drawing a link between driving and women's desire. Yet like Celeste and Yorkie and Kelly, such an expression immediately invites disaster. For women, it seems, driving is an interrupted experience rather than a smooth one, and the agency associated with driving remains limited by the constant reminder of the dangers of speed.

To return to Iris Marion Young's definition of feminine bodily experience, she argues that women's agency is always bounded by fear, and their smooth progression through space is always marked by hesitation and interruption. Young goes on to suggest that due to that paradoxical tension between immanence and transcendence – between *being* a body and *possessing* a body as an object – women are more likely to doubt their own embodied strength. If the body is seen as a 'fragile encumbrance, rather than the medium for the enactment of our aims', women necessarily act with hesitancy and fear rather than with confidence.<sup>27</sup> We can see this clearly in public discourse: women are always reminded that certain spaces and times are unsafe, and that to move their bodies within these spaces and times is to be at high risk of assault. The presentation of driving as dangerous in these episodes thus continues to articulate dominant understandings of women's bodies, in which embodied action is always interrupted by a sense of fear. For Yorkie, Madeline, and Celeste, driving may open up a space for the expression of desire, but this remains bounded by the threat of physical injury, harm, or restriction if the body tries to move (or to desire) in ways outside of its normative configurations. In this sense, driving in these programmes still reiterates normative gendered economies of movement and agency, in which women might still have less access to the 'freedom of movement' which Dyer sees as a basic human right.

Yet it is important to note that the privilege of mobility is not simply determined by gender. Paul Gilroy argues that automobility highlights the racial and class tensions in American society, in which cars offer freedom to black communities yet simultaneously champion privatised consumption over collective action.<sup>28</sup> The problem of mobility is thus always an intersectional issue, for the ability to move freely through the world is determined by overlapping categories of gender, race, class, sexuality, and able-bodiedness. Most of the characters in these episodes are white – although Kelly is a black woman and is the one behind the wheel, the narrative is much more concerned with white Yorkie’s interiority. Bonnie, the only black main character in *Big Little Lies*, is also the one who is most often depicted walking or running rather than driving. In the episode ‘Tell-Tale Hearts’, Madeline collects Celeste from the wreck of her car and drives her home, and the two pass Bonnie walking along the side of the highway, returning from a hike. While Bonnie does find pleasure and self-assurance in walking, it is significant that there is a racial split here between who is empowered by vehicular agency and who is not. This is also a question of class – the other main character more likely to resolve her identity and desire through the moving body itself is Jane, who is often depicted running or dancing on the beach. Jane, as a single mother, obviously belongs to different class than the other women, who are all extremely affluent. Borden notes that the relationship between driving and freedom is based in a sense of social mobility: ‘automobilities let people get on in life’, he says, ‘furthering their economic, cultural and personal achievement.’<sup>29</sup> In emphasising the ways in which the agency of driving may be differently accessible to different people, these programmes demonstrate that there are multiple intersections between driving, power, and privilege, and multiple experiences of being on the road.

As well as emphasising the layers of privilege that structure the road, these programmes also draw attention to the multiple temporalities of driving, ones that go beyond a straightforward, linear progression towards the horizon. Earlier I suggested that television has a particular propensity to articulate ideas of multiplicity – multiple characters, multiple storylines, multiple texts, genres and forms. This is particularly a product of its characteristic form of narration: serial narration. A serial narrative is a continuous story released in smaller units over a period of time, meaning that the narrative unfolds through a pattern of progression marked with enforced interruptions, both ongoing and segmented, both extensive and repetitive. The temporal pattern of seriality evokes the set of driving kinaesthetics that I identified in relation to women's fear – a feeling of progression that is constantly interrupted by stoppages, interruptions, and starting over again. Yet women's desire and experience might possess a similar pattern: it is fitting, after all, that the most emblematic example of seriality is the highly feminised form of the soap opera. In Julia Kristeva's work on what she calls 'women's time', she argues that female subjectivity is divided into cyclical time - or repetition - and monumental time - or eternity, both of which are opposed to the time of linear history.<sup>30</sup> 'Female subjectivity...becomes a problem with respect to a certain conception of time', she argues, 'time as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival – in other words, the time of history.'<sup>31</sup> For Kristeva, then, female subjectivity cannot fit within the masculine structures of linear time and logical temporal progress, for it a paradoxical mix of cyclicity and eternity. In other words, female subjectivity is structured by both repetition and a resistance to conclusion – those two features central to television's serial narration.

Once again, this is why television might be so important for representing female subjectivity, for it also possesses a temporality that exists between repetition and extension. Yet once again, this is equally why driving might be so productive a site for the articulation of female desire. Driving is a journey through time as much as it is through space, but it is not simply a journey through *linear* time – it is an experience in which you must attend equally to what lies ahead and what you can see in your rear-view mirror. Lynn Pearce suggests that driving creates an ‘emotional palimpsest of past and future’,<sup>32</sup> in which the liminal space of the car encourages the mind to bring together different temporal moments. In this sense, the paradoxical kinaesthetics of driving are mirrored in the temporal experience of being on the road.

What Pearce calls the ‘chronotopic horizon of the motorway’<sup>33</sup> can be seen in both *Black Mirror* and *Big Little Lies*. *Big Little Lies* is a narrative deeply concerned with trauma: most of the main characters are dealing with the effects of past trauma, from Jane’s rape to Celeste’s domestic abuse, from Madeline’s affair to Bonnie’s role in the murder that marks the end of season one. Each episode of the first season fluidly weaves together past, present, and future: flashbacks to moments of trauma in the character’s lives, the present-day school politics, and future flashes of the events of the trivia night that ends the season. There is something fitting, then, that the opening credits frame the women’s faces within their rear-view mirrors, suggesting that driving is an experience of moving forward while looking back. This framing occurs throughout the series itself, most notably when conveying the irruption of past trauma into the present. At the end of ‘Once Bitten,’ (Season 1 Episode 5), Jane travels to San Luis Obispo to confront the man she believes is her rapist only to discover she was mistaken, and

Celeste has a long and fractious session with her therapist in which she resists the idea that her relationship with her husband is abusive. In the final scene, both Jane and Celeste return to their cars to express their emotions – Jane by screaming, and Celeste by crying. Like the opening credits, the women are shot from the backseat of the car, and we only see their faces in the rear-view mirror. The rear-view mirror clearly evokes Pearce's 'emotional palimpsest' of present and present, and thus gestures towards the circuitous temporality common to television, driving, and female experience alike.

San Junipero, as a virtual reconstruction of California in 1987, possesses a retro-yet-futuristic aesthetic that creates a similar palimpsest between past, present, and future. This temporal pattern is once again communicated through the kinaesthetics of driving. At the very end of the episode, both Kelly and Yorkie choose to 'pass over', dying in the 'real world' in order for their consciousnesses to remain together in the virtual world of 'San Junipero'. As the credits roll, we see shots of Yorkie getting into a car and driving away down the highway to Belinda Carlisle's 'Heaven is a Place on Earth', taking a detour to pick up Kelly before returning to the road. Here, eternal life after death is represented as driving – heaven on earth, it seems, can be found on the road. To some extent, this scene can be read as a utopian ending in which the two (literally) drive off into the sunset together. Yet at the same time, there is a certain ambivalence here, for driving here equally suggests a ceaseless returning to a prior state of youth, an endless kind of treading water in a temporally flat eternity. While the road may appear to stretch endlessly into the distance, neither woman will ever be able to leave the borders of San Junipero, and thus the road must always circle back around in the end. This means that despite the visual signifiers of the highway, the temporal and affective resonance of

the scene has more in common with the patterns of urban driving we see in *Big Little Lies*. The temporal experience of driving in these television programmes thus articulates the very narrational rhythms of the medium itself.

To end, we should perhaps follow the temporal route I have taken in the final part of this discussion and return to the beginning – to the opening credits of *Big Little Lies*. At the very end of the credits, we finally see the faces of our female protagonists, as each of the five women walk towards the camera in single-file, staring directly at the audience before turning sharply and walking away off-screen. The women strut assertively and stare with confidence, evoking a confidence in their own embodied action and an agency over their own desiring gazes. Yet this moment of power only arrives at the end of the sequence, *after* the repeated shots of driving down highways. In order to arrive at a sense of embodied power, we first have to take a drive. *Big Little Lies* and *Black Mirror* suggest that the paradoxical kinaesthetics of driving – both stationary and mobile, both past and future – can tell stories of women’s embodiment and desire, and nowhere more than on television. We all know the famous disclaimer on the mirrors of cars: objects in mirror are closer than they seem. So rather than assuming that driving on screen belongs to the men of the cinema, it seems that on television, stories of women’s embodied power and desire on the road might be closer than they first appear.

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