

The problematization of gender and the concept of 'woman' in feminist cyberpunk science fiction literature

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What is, according to Pat Cadigan's feminist cyberpunk novel *Tea from an Empty Cup* (1998), 'terminal female identity', and how does the novel accommodate new kinds of female subjectivity?

Why feminist science fiction?

- K. Hayles: our culture understands and process new modes of subjectivity through the stories it tells
- D. Haraway: feminist science fiction is an important resource in investigating techno-scientific lives

Why cyberpunk?

- investigates the possible future implications of biotechnologies and, particularly, information technologies
- identified with cyberspace
- information technologies are powerfully affecting contemporary subject formations

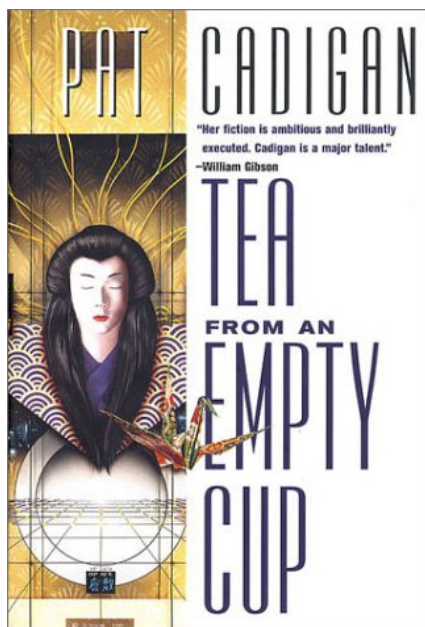
Why Pat Cadigan?

- all her novels mostly take place in the virtual reality and problematize the common notion of how psyche works, (gendered) identity and techno-bodies

‘Terminal female identity’?

- S. Bukatman *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Post-Modern Science Fiction* (1993)
- post-modern female subjectivity in the era of highly developed science and technology, in general, and the new modes of female identity realized in women’s encounter with information technologies and VR, in particular, as depicted by feminist cyberpunk writers

Plot summary (*Tea from an Empty Cup*)



- two quest stories: a homicide detective Konstantin investigating the death of a young man, found dead in a locked VR parlour; a Japanese girl Yuki searching for her missing not-quite boyfriend Tomoyuki Ignuchi
- Tom and Yuki are one and the same person, a composite personality (Tomoyuki)

Virtual reality as dream space



- S. Freud *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899): the interpretation of dreams as a royal road to the unconscious activities of the mind
- manifest vs. latent content of dreams

Freud, Cadigan and dreams

- Yuki's search for 'self' (i. e. Tom) in virtual reality
- Yuki's dream experience: condensation of time and displacement of person

Condensation of time – deceleration of time

‘Reflection? She moved one hand toward her lapel. In the filthy glass, one hand also moved toward the lapel except that it didn’t do it quite at the same moment. **It wasn’t much of a delay. Less than a second. Less than half a second, less than half a half a second, and probably even less than that. Yes, she was very sure it was less than a mere one-sixteenth of one second.** In the outside world where she would have much preferred to be at the moment, a delay so miniscule would have gone completely unnoticed’ (Cadigan 1998: 122).

Displacement of person-inhabiting a VR persona

'She turned to face the glass directly, drew herself up, and made a formal bow. The reflection did exactly the same in the fast glimpse she had as she bent forward. At the lowest point of the bow, she lifted her head very slightly and looked. The image in the window was also sneaking a look, with the difference that the face was **grinning** broadly at her.

Yuki jumped back with a cry. It was as if a giant, cold fist had clutched her stomach. Tom's reflection laughed and shook its head, moving both hands in front of itself in a negating gesture. Telling her **not to be afraid**, she supposed, feeling **foolish**, but at the same time still **shaky**' (Cadigan 1998: 122; my emphases).

Virtual reality as collective unconscious



- C. G. Jung *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1934–1954)
- the archetypal symbolism derived from myths, religions, and fairytales
- two key archetypes: animus and anima

Jung, Cadigan and the collective unconscious

- Japanese creation myth
- Buddhist religion
- mirror motif

Terminal female subject

(in Pat Cadigan's *Tea from an Empty Cup*)

- Multiple and relational (the variety of personae Yuki inhabits and encounters in VR)
- Collective (Japanese collective identity)
- 'Contrasexual' (a composite self of Tom and Yuki)
- Corporeal-metaphysical (embodied state of mind)
- Posthuman or posthumanist?

