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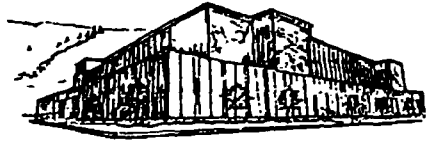
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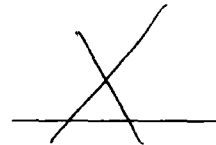
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**POSTHUMANIST ARTIFICER:  
SHIFTING ONTOLOGIES IN CYBERPUNK LITERATURE**

by

Kyle A. Wiggins

B.A. University of Oregon, 2003

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

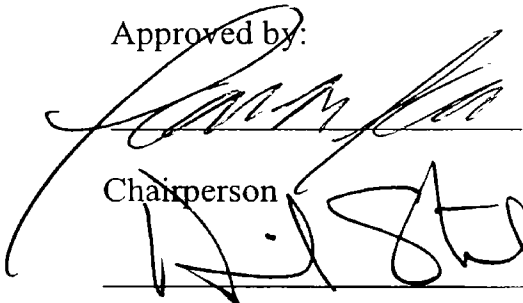
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Chairperson

Dean, Graduate School

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**Posthumanist Artificer: Shifting Ontologies in Cyberpunk Literature**Chairperson: Katie Kane <sup>KK</sup>

One of the fundamental philosophies of ‘early’ cyberpunk literature written in the 1980s until the mid 1990s was the belief that human consciousness was trapped in the prison of the body. Building on the articulation in William Gibson’s seminal novel *Neuromancer* (1984) that the human body is “meat”, early cyberpunk authors theorized in their fiction the mind breaking free from the trammels of the flesh by mapping itself onto a virtual realm, or, cyberspace. By interfacing with a computer, humans transplant a digitized mind into the non-physical space of a cyber-system, escaping from the limitations of the body and achieving ultimate flexibility of identity in the mutable world of cyberspace. The result of this postulation was a cyberpunk ontology that excised the importance of the body for subjectivity and humanness, leaving the mind as the lone signifier of humanity. Theorists diagnose this ontology as ‘posthuman’- a divergence from embodiment towards network of consciousness with computational machine. This philosophy is problematic, however, as it elides the practical, material, and epistemological significances of the human body. This thesis analyzes the responses amongst ‘post’ cyberpunk authors (1995-current) to the bedrock philosophies of disembodiment and digital mind existence made by ‘early’ cyberpunk authors. I argue that post-cyberpunk authors such as Richard K. Morgan, Pat Cadigan, and William Gibson (revising claims made in his early work) reintegrate corporeality into the ontologies posited in the literary genre, elucidating a new posthuman subjectivity that allows for embodied social agency in the material realm and embraces the body as an indelible site of human identity in the cyberpunk schema.

The first chapter gives a history of the evolution of the cyberpunk genre and situates the particular political and postmodern cultural occurrences that the literary form was/is responding to. Additionally, the first chapter explores the various ontologies posited by both early and post-cyberpunk. The second chapter examines the concept of the ‘posthumanist artificer’, or self-authored embodied subjectivity, in Richard Morgan’s *Altered Carbon*. The third chapter engages Pat Cadigan’s *Tea from an Empty Cup* as an example of virtual existence impacting corporeality and the impossibility of full immersion into cyberspace. Finally, the fourth chapter argues that William Gibson’s post-cyberpunk novel *All Tomorrow’s Parties* is a treatise on the return of posthuman users from cyberspace escapism into embodiment, and the concurrent emergence of digital entities into physicality.

Kyle A. Wiggins

## Introduction

Social doomsayers and cynical prognosticators pronounced shortly after literary cyberpunk burst onto the sub-cultural scene in the early 1980s that the genre was already dead. Andrew M. Butler declares in his study of the genre that “cyberpunk died in about 1986, if not before” (16).<sup>1</sup> In a sense, those critics were right. Cyberpunk has always been a terminal vehicle. The genre has a penchant for skepticism towards popular culture and ‘high’ art as mediums that quickly appropriate subversive practices and ideas, rendering them gutted and listless commodities. Once cyberpunk became popularized in the mainstream (in the same way punk music was absconded with in the middle of the night), then it was doomed to smolder out. By the late 1980s, cyberpunk was seen as a genre that was formulaic and oft imitated in other science fiction sects, and effectively labeled by critics and its progenitors as lifeless. The cutting edge social philosophies of cyberpunk (those that viewed humans as machine counterparts to industry, marginalized hacker groups as the revolutionary scribes of the postmodern, and cyberspace as the alternative to reality where autonomy could be restored) became peddled in mass consumerism markets. The sheer popularity of cyberpunk literature and ethos was faddish shortly after its zenith in 1985 and blasé by 1986. Some vestigial artists continued to produce cyberpunk literature utilizing the core positions well into the 1990s, though discussions of the genre’s relevancy to society died out. In a way, cyberpunk played out its own trope in even the most sympathetic of underground discourse communities: the screeching cyberpunk body (of literature) had flat-lined and the mind (the philosophies) had moved on to better things in cyberspace. The transplantation of humanity from

physical space to cyberspace was one of the most important stances of cyberpunk at its peak, and remained so even into the 1990s literature. The real battle for representation of liminal, oppressed, and disenfranchised 'punks' wouldn't happen in reality, but would take place in virtual reality (cyberspace). By this token, critics charged cyberpunk from both decades with disengaging with material issues, essentially turning tail and running. Thus, the continued insistence on cyberspace as a viable alternative to reality actually substantiated one of the major critiques of cyberpunk and legitimized the obituary of the genre: where does the human body fit into this?

Interpretive work charting the mortality of the literary genre of cyberpunk must take note of another kind of murder that took place in the pages of individual cyberpunk texts, which explored and privileged a disembodied human consciousness. In fact, literary cyberpunk participated in and even helped to generate a critical fear of the body in late twentieth century discourse. For example, the cyberpunk of the 1980s and 1990s, henceforth referred to as 'early' cyberpunk, made aesthetic ideological distinctions between embodied identity and the virtual extension of a mind that could roam unimpeded in cyberspace. Little concern was paid in the texts of early cyberpunk to the flesh, with the result that tacit contempt for the body was elevated to the level of theme and rejection of the human form's contribution to identity became a standard of the genre's aesthetic ideological philosophies. If cyberpunk fiction cultivated a body in the works of its New Wave antecedents, then with the arrival of William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, and Greg Bear, that body was laid out upon the morgue table as a cadaver. Cyberpunk pressed on, exploring the transplant of the mind into cyberspace, constituting individuality as a series of digitized components. When cyberpunk suffered its 'passing'



in critical and publishing circles by the end of the 1980s, rather than abandon the form, a handful of steadfast loyalists continued to push the philosophies of the genre, standing by their art as the ontological expression of information age subjectivity. Artists like Neal Stephenson and Paul J. McAuley carried cyberpunk well into the 1990s, both writers operating under the ideological standard that the human body did not influence identity, and that the future of humanity lay in the versatile cybernetic mind.

It is certain that contemporary criticism has embraced modes of thinking that destabilize fixed boundaries of the body. Interrogations into materiality have produced scholarship including Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Claudia Springer, Chris Gray, and most notably Judith Butler's, which resists static categorization of the body as completely epidermal. Butler notes in *Bodies That Matter* that her inquiries into the demarcations of the human form led her to incorporate the abject and peripheral into definitions of the body: "Not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies 'are'" (ix). Butler theorizes the flexibility of somatic borders by recognizing that the flesh is vital for human subjectivity. This is not the same project of possibility that the cyberpunks undertook. Rather than concerning themselves with delimiting the body, the early cyberpunks sought to shed it like a burdensome weight. They endorsed a mind/body dualism that Butler does not, taking postmodern positionality into, as Bruce Sterling notes, the visceral realm of technology.<sup>2</sup>

Since, as Fredric Jameson has famously noted, the postmodern condition disallowed individuals an ability to precisely situate themselves spatially within urban totality, thereby divesting them of the ability to see how they fit into economic and social

systems, cyberpunks retreated into virtual spaces that purportedly held possibilities for location and agency. For instance, the protagonist of Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* lives in the sarcophagus-like confines of a storage vestibule in wasteland Los Angeles, with only enough room for his bed and computer. Yet, when he jacks into the "Metaverse" (Stephenson's cyberspace), he escapes the reality of his shrunken domestic funhouse and is transported into the spacious confines of the virtual-club he owns and operates. Stephenson's character theorizes a better consumer and proprietary life, and is able to enact it in virtual reality.

Subjectivity in cyberpunk literature was contingent upon the expansion of the mind, free from corporeal incarceration. But this emotovistic utopianism does not reconcile the implications of leaving the body behind to exercise the mind. My reading of cyberpunk literature does not hinge upon an analysis of bodily extension, but is concerned predominantly with the process of bodily erasure. Why did the cyberpunks seek to elide the flesh, casting off as a shackle the corporeal anchor to reality? More importantly, can the human form be rethought into cyberpunk discourse as an integral element of subjectivity?

The aim of this project is, in effect, a resuscitation of the cyberpunk body that died, a death that itself prefigured the demise of the genre. I argue that, through a charting of shifts in the genre's understanding of the ontology of human embodiment, contemporary cyberpunk artists have begun to explore a new technological philosophy that explodes reductionist views of corporeality and reconstructs the human body as a tool for reclaiming an agency previously unavailable to the fractured postmodern subject. In my analysis of cyberpunk's return to the body, I theorize that individual sovereignty is

a theme explored and made possible in the genre by utilizing cybernetic and informatic technology to engender versatility in the corporeal site, rather than deploying the same technology towards the eradication of the body, and ultimately humanity.

Varieties of rogue shifts away from the ontology of disembodiment in cyberpunk have taken place within the last few years. The immense popularity of *The Matrix* films speaks to a philosophical re-emergence of bodily importance. The films depict a hallucinatory virtual world (the eponymous 'Matrix') that has blinded individuals to their social and economic reality. Subversive movements liberate individuals from the virtual lie by 'unplugging' them and replanting their consciousness back into the body. The veil lifts, and cognizance of their nightmarish existence dawns on subjects as they awaken from the cyberspace dream of freedom from the body. When Morpheus awakens him to "the real world," Neo is shocked to learn that the whole of humanity exists cocooned in fluid sacks while their energy is siphoned away for use in an unseen machine world. The body had been utilized as a fuel mechanism for the disenfranchising machine rulers, making humans into slaves, distancing them from their bodies; they have, in essence, been placed under the spell of virtual space that inoculates and insulates the individual from the horror of their bodily reality. Only when it has been reclaimed does corporeality's importance for ontologies of subjectivity become clear.<sup>3</sup>

While *The Matrix* films have carved out a place in popular culture in which ideas of the computer-mediated cognition have superceded notions of the bodily inscription of identity might be rethought, multiple cyberpunk authors have crafted a dissenting literature within the genre. The concerned texts represent a resistance to the dominant cyberpunk trope that AR Stone describes as the "decoupling of the body and the

subject.”<sup>4</sup> The thesis is organized around analyses of Richard K. Morgan, Pat Cadigan, and William Gibson’s representations of somatic importance within the cyberpunk field, and the seditious philosophical transition that is underway in contemporary cyberpunk texts.

The first chapter, “Vacationing in Virtual,” is meant to provide an overview of the cyberpunk genre: history, trajectory, and the major tenets of the genre. My desire to situate the economic underpinnings that catalyzed the cyberpunk movement as a literary and social philosophy necessitates some discussion of the cultural conditions present at the genre’s genesis and at the moments when ontological shifts occur within the discourse. I will show how William Gibson’s introduction of contempt for the body as a prison in *Neuromancer* constructed the groundwork for projects of corporeal escapism in cyberpunk. Ultimately, those breaks with the body were scuttled by egregious manufacture of utopian cyberspace and political and social realities that undercut the idealisms of the early cyberpunks. Also, the chapter aims at exploring a reintegration of discarded liberal humanist theories alongside existential theories of the posthuman. Drawing on Katherine Hayles work on digital identities, the ontologically interested textual amalgam that I call ‘posthumanist cyberpunk’ represents a shift within a literature that once elided possible agency in the vehicle located in the human body toward a new subjectivity capable of rearticulating the self via corporeality.

In the second chapter, “‘Resleeving’ the Body in Cyberpunk,” through my analysis of Richard Morgan’s *Altered Carbon* (2002) I argue that cyberpunk has formed a new epistemic relationship with cyberspace that casts virtual technology as a ‘purgatory’ rather than emancipatory forum. As a reflection of political factors characteristic of late

capital, theories of digitizable consciousness that might engender social motility have been redeployed as effective and utilitarian only when located within the context of the body. Virtual technologies have been implanted within the flesh, conceptualizing the human form as a privileged element of humanity, and one capable of participating within subversive practices. Morgan's work signals a death of essentialist theories perpetrated in cyberpunk literature, namely, the Cartesian mind/body duality. *Altered Carbon* reflects a new posthuman subjectivity that reinstates agency in the form of personal sovereignty. Further, Morgan's text is evidence of new cyberpunk ontology of human embodiment dedicated to a philosophical hybrid of post human and liberal human tenets. The hybrid ontology grants choice in subjectivity to the subject, offering the possibility of corporeal (and subjective) reconstruction capable of voicing resistance. *Altered Carbon* introduces us to a new philosophical and literary character, the re-animating artist of the body in cyberpunk: the posthumanist artificer.

Chapter three, "Clothing Lost Souls," moves beyond discussions of individual subjectivity in cyberpunk to examine cyberpunk's representations of late capital's use of information technologies. Through an analysis of Pat Cadigan's *Tea from an Empty Cup* (1998), I posit that hazards of the alienated worker in the information age are represented in posthumanist cyberpunk as a disembodied specter. Also, the Baudrillardian 'simulacra' technologies that jeopardize tangible human contributions to labor in the digital age are potentially remedied through 'semi'-autonomy. Through implantation of virtual technologies, cybernetic augmentations, and digitizable consciousness, the human laborer expands the possibility of his or her control in the labor force, increasing the 'value' of corporeal workers and destabilizing the myths that humanity is an inferior laboring vessel

to machine. The purportedly empowering ‘metanarratives’ that Lyotard sees as defining markers of postmodernism, collapsed in the form of cyberspace mythologies, are called into question by revealing the instability of the economic system.<sup>5</sup> This revelation is carried out by questioning the ramifications of internet/virtuality-driven work, and the impact on human subjectivity. By ‘owning’ the flesh and the cybernetic components, workers in posthumanist cyberpunk can exact fiscal agency upon the Ideological State Apparatuses that earnest employees towards disembodiment. The chapter explores how virtual existence actually impacts reality-based elements of identity, most importantly that of nationhood. Cadigan’s characters employ cyberspace to stoke questions of national boundaries and corporeally-signified nationalities while engaged in a trans-national, boundary-less, digital setting.

The fourth chapter, “The ‘flesh-ghost in Market Street’”, re-examines the philosophies of William Gibson’s cyberpunk visions, as they maps ontological shifts in notions of human embodiment from corporeal decadence and escapism in his early work to the embrace of the flesh as subversive tool in his novel *All Tomorrow’s Parties* (1999). Gibson’s revision of his theories on the body’s role in modern subjectivity exemplifies cyberpunk’s breaking from escapist or virtual-centric camps, and shift towards embodied discourses. I will show how Gibson’s novel destabilizes his earlier, fundamental posture of an informational humanity that is instantiated in the global network as pure code, and turns the position about face towards informational instantiation in the material world. Dissidents no longer flee hermit-like into cyberspace in defiance of world systems, but rebel against oppressive ideologies by realizing a new self, drawn in virtual space, in the tangible realm. Gibson understands that disruption of a Deleuzian network of control can

be carried out by a subject in ownership of his/her subjectivity. He speculates that modern informational technology can be used as a causeway towards greater individual elasticity, resulting in what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a 'body-without-organs': a body free from social discipline and organization.

Donna Haraway claims that the increased role of information technology and cybernetics in the world has made "the boundary between science fiction and social reality . . . an optical illusion" (149).<sup>6</sup> We can look at the futures theorized in science fiction as the promises that invade and dictate our reality, further diluting the distinction between the "real" and the "imaginative." Steven Shaviro says it best: Science fiction "involves both the present and future, while being reducible to neither. For science fiction is about the shadow the future casts upon the present. It shows us how profoundly we are *haunted* by the ghosts of what has not yet happened" (250).<sup>7</sup> My examination of cyberpunk is not meant to predict the future, but is a meditation on the possibilities of technology to transform embodiment, providing a new treatise on the significance of the body's impact on subjectivity.

The following chapters are not meant to close tight the door on core cyberpunk philosophies that seek to transcend the human body. I am quite certain that many artistic participants in the genre still consider cyberspace to be a viable alternative condition to our present one. However, assaults upon early cyberpunk's problematic erasure of the body offer new possibilities for human identity. Cyberpunk anticipations of a self-authored subjectivity at the site of the body are important not only for new inroads swathed in postmodernism, but also for theorizing the applicability of cybernetic technology to efficacious social resistance in late capitalist/information age reality.

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<sup>1</sup> In Andrew M. Butler, *The Pocket Essential Cyberpunk*. Great Britain: Pocket Essentials, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> In Bruce Sterling, *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*. New York: Ace Books, 1986, p. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> By subjectivity, I mean the process of originating and existing in the individual mind. The subject is a product of social and historical forces that, in concordance with poststructuralist theory, decenters the subject from conceptions of completely centered unification. However, the conditioning of humans by heterogeneous market forces is not without fissures. Resistance to branding of the body and creation of technological utility allows for agency to be inserted between the gaps of corporate messaging. The subjectivity discussed in this thesis can be partially owned, making the individual a pseudo-author of her relation and place within the world.

<sup>4</sup> In A.R. Stone, "Will the Real Body Please Stand Up?: Boundary Stories About Virtual Cultures" in M. Benedikt (ed.) *Cyberspace: First Steps* (London: MIT Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> In Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.xxxiv.

<sup>6</sup> In Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> In Steven Shaviro, *Connected, or What It Means to Live in the Network Society*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.



## Chapter 1

Vacationing in Virtual:  
Cyberpunk's Prison Break from the Flesh

The postmodern<sup>1</sup> climate from which cyberpunk emerged in the early 1980s emblazoned a discernible impression upon the literary genre. The term itself, “cyberpunk,” is a locus of ostensibly disparate elements, thrust together in a merger that, by virtue of its cultural centrality, demands critical attention. By analyzing the components of the genre, semantically and thematically, cyberpunk can be situated in a way that allows us to understand why Fredric Jameson lamented over his omission of the literature from his seminal study *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.<sup>2</sup> Cyberpunk's critical standing as a quintessential postmodern literary formulation stems from not only the context in which it was conceived, but also from the fundamental commitment of the genre to functioning as a textual site wherein contemporary and discarded discourses/philosophies are refurbished and brandished as a new expression of an anti-establishment revolution. Specifically, liberationist theories and the noir exposure of corporate greed in the decadent urban space are recycled from 1930s detective fiction and early technocratic literatures grappling with mechanical reproduction. Thus, any discussion that aims at recalibrating the standing of cyberpunk within a postmodern schema needs to backtrack and map the foundational tenets of the form.

Traditionally, the ‘cyber’ elements of cyberpunk have received the majority of critical focus. The prefix ‘cyber’ is derived from ‘cybernetics’, biological, mechanical, or informational control systems governed by technology. However, the genre has come to be identified and defined mostly by an exploration of cyberspace (also called the net,

web, matrix, grid, or Virtuality, among others), thus *cyberpunk*. More specifically, cyberspace is a virtual environment generated by a computer (program) capable of integrating the human user into digital reality. Computer usage dominates the narratives, as humans transfer their consciousness on a variety of levels into (or onto) cyberspace, typically by jacking in through sockets located at the base of the neck, the spine, eye sockets, or through a VR chip implanted in the head.<sup>3</sup> I will return to this integration of machine in body momentarily; however, it is interesting to note the departures *cyberpunk* literature has taken from banal internet usage in its current state. Viewing the computer screen does not satisfy the virtual experience the populace of *cyberpunk* texts seek; instead, full immersion into the virtual environment is desired. Hence, it is understandable that discussions of cyberspace often focus on the alternate *reality* created and traversed by hackers. Purportedly, cyberspace offers a landscape that can be navigated and lived, not just observed. Tech-savvy and orthodox technophobes alike in *cyberpunk* have implemented cybernetic systems with mediums other than the computer. The body itself is a network rife with possibilities for upgrade. Pertinent texts are freckled with information gatherers and criminals seeking an exaggerated advantage by installing cameras, optical augmentations, or microbiological devices within themselves. Humans embrace cybernetics not only as tools but as holistic realities that lend another significance to the 'cyber' in *cyberpunk*.

The 'punk' element of *cyberpunk* is a surprisingly more ambiguous term, as the cultural and historical reference points that attach to the term 'punk' seem to be in constant flux. One criteria of the punk moniker comes from *cyberpunk*'s propensity to center narratives around urban youth subversives who wield computer hacking skills and

cyberspace authorship as their counterrevolutionary contributions. Unlike golden age science fiction, or even much New Wave, that focuses on stock scientists or cardboard middle-class suburban representatives, cyberpunk headlines skaters, gutter punks, musicians, jaded military AWOLs, drug users/dealers, artists, and of course, hackers. The punks represent street cultures and lower-class 'deviants' capable of articulating a legitimate critique of the status-quo and economic systems that accelerate disenfranchisement in late capitalism. To panic the limited ideals of Western society under the logic of late capital, *cyberpunks* deployed resistance through the creation of a virtual environment and the piracy of data. In this manner, cyberpunk is a relatively new project that facilitates use of technology outside the academy or scientific elite, all done within a science fiction tradition that previously focused predominantly on the initiated 'haves.'<sup>4</sup>

Yet, the 'punk' component of the genre has as much to do with a narrative style as with the characters that people the texts. While the stylistic influences have undergone repositioning in contemporary cyberpunk, the bedrock associations remain clear. Building off of the frenetic pacing and frantic angst-ridden screams of punk music in the late '70s and early '80s, cyberpunk adopted a caustic tone and jagged prose that reflected the short and loud diatribes of its musical counterpart. Further, the dialogue of authors like Pat Cadigan and Bruce Sterling was discernibly terse, often dubbed 'street-wise' in its authentic representation of punk slang and attention to movements of the urban underbelly. Influenced by bands like the Sex Pistols, The Clash, MC5, and the New York Dolls, early cyberpunk literature found permission for the welding together of fractured or distanced styles. The transposition of punk dispositions and philosophies onto a

discourse as atomized as cybernetics is evidence of the artistic project to make a progressive social statement from the aftermath of the unexpected cultural collision.<sup>5</sup> The breakdown of hierarchy that postmodernism foretold and celebrated is played out by societal misfits utilizing complex informatics or computer systems. Cyberpunk is a point of contestation where ivory tower esotericism blends with proletariat utilitarianism. As Sabine Heuser notes, it is precisely this “unusual and unprecedented clash of high-tech with ‘low life’ that accounts for the particular flavor of cyberpunk.”<sup>6</sup>

As an ongoing task, cyberpunk revamps its voice again and again by throwing different genres into the fray. Similar to The Clash drawing upon Rastafarian musical traditions to emphasize punk music’s composite nature, cyberpunk literature cannibalizes other genres. Brandishing a rusted and fractured narrative structure, early cyberpunk flaunted its rearticulation of disparate styles (including noir, detective fiction, and westerns) and their subsequent radical compilation in new representation. In the works of William Gibson and other noteworthy voices of cyberpunk, the hacker figure is often referred to as a ‘cowboy.’ The title emphasizes the nature of sub-cultural computer hackers as liminal figures or boundary crossers between high tech and outcast sects. The cowboy image also plays up the western frontier myth that is the self-selected literary and cultural background to cyberpunk, resurfacing, as Heuser notes, “as a new and more interior frontier between man and machine, situated within cyberspace” (xxxiii). In other instances, hard-boiled investigative protagonists invoke detective fiction authors such as Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett. Tropes of capitalist corruption and two-dimensional corporate demons represent the black market of the near-future setting, exposing the dark side of wishful techno-utopias that overrun much of science fiction.

Only the boundary-crossing hacker/punk/sleuth, who has been ingratiated in this seedy side of urbanity, can subvert the economic exploitations, harkening the future narratives back to the noir revision of romanticized Los Angeles of the 1930s. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), a cinematic foray into the future dystopia of L.A., is often cited as a prime exemplar of cyberpunk's assembly of genres, as well as an epitome of *pastiche*.

Defined crudely as parody without content, pastiche is mimicry of genres or art forms, employed, according to Jameson, without the intent of making a statement about social conditions or historicity. Jameson determines that pastiche is a "statue with blind eyeballs" (17), unconcerned with producing a salient parallel to prior contexts since the potpourri of intertextuality is a superstructural extension of postmodernism itself. Put differently, in the cultural logic of late capital postmodernism is a representation of that economic base (postmodernity) that appears as a mosaic of styles stripped of their contextual significance. According to Jameson, to say that postmodern art's (like cyberpunk's) pastiche tendencies create postmodernism is to put the cart before the horse. This is not to say that history has been erased. Instead, history operates as a set of styles, a "depthless" mode of accessing the past "through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy qualities of the image, and the '1930s-ness' or '1950s-ness' by the attributes of fashion" (19). History, in the postmodern, has undergone a repression that Jameson sees as traumatic.<sup>7</sup> The onus is put upon the critic to wade through the continual stylistic homages that supposedly offer little statement about the context the work was borne out of, and elucidate the market forces or "political unconscious" represented in the text, often mediated through a reaction to technology. I am of the mind that history has not been buried so deeply under references that one must look past them

in order to see the true 'value' of a text, but that those references are at times crucial in understanding the junkyard mentality cyberpunk professes to use in redefining society and resistance. However, Jameson is lucidly on-target when he claims that the rhetorical situation of postmodernism that cyberpunk objected to is "the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world" (5). Adam Roberts points out that "the postmodern subject for Jameson, determined as ever by social circumstance, necessarily reflects the increasing reification and fragmentation of late capitalism."<sup>8</sup> Along with dragging historical context to the surface of postmodern critical theory and unpacking the signifiers of fragmented existence, what follows is a brief illumination of the reactionary statements made by cyberpunk to political regimes of the 1980s, showing how new economic and political relationships to governing technologies have spurred a new concept of resistance to the "decentering" of the postmodern subject within literature.

In brazenly overt modes, burgeoning cyberpunk literature directly engaged the political agendas of the Reagan administration and the fallout of Thatcherite nationalism, both neo-liberal projects that proffered the deregulation of government and heralded the rule of the market resulted in conditions that reduced collective responsibility (of the nation, community, government) and formed a breeding ground for corporate entities to subsume cultural identities. Franchises used technological advances in information systems (like global communications and the nascent internet) to advance their penetration of world markets. The Reagan administration pushed legislation that furthered fears among U.S. cyberpunk authors of the 1980s that the nation was becoming a Petri dish for corporate mergers. National identity was teetering dangerously close to

product branding, exacerbated by the fact that, according to Naomi Klein, “Reagan’s term saw the ten biggest [corporate] mergers in American history up until that point- and not one was challenged by the FTC [Federal Trade Commission].”<sup>9</sup> In 1983, Reagan put into action his plan to reduce government’s regulatory role by reducing the staff of the FTC and undercutting the organization’s ability to combat giant corporate mergers and anticompetitive actions. Not coincidentally, Bruce Bethke’s story entitled “Cyberpunk” was published the same year in the November issue of *Amazing Science Fiction Stories*. This was the first time that the term ‘cyberpunk’ had been published, and critics and artists alike flocked to the term as the banner under which ‘punk science fiction’ that explores cybernetic technology will operate. Bethke’s story codified an artistic movement that had begun brewing early in the Reagan era, offering a title for fiction exploring the possibilities for cultural liberation in a world dominated by corporate entities and technology.<sup>10</sup> Predictably, the punk sensibilities of Bethke’s work and others like him were boisterously oppositional to the unfettered capitalism that had become a reality. I will return, in greater detail, to the dialogue between cyberpunk and the information marketplace in the third chapter, though for now, the new science fiction entity known as cyberpunk would be discussed in the coming years as an art form conscious of the dangers of neo-liberalism, adopting a punk ideology that cast one eye warily upon emerging technologies while maintaining hope for a technologically energized future.

From Bethke to the most heralded authors of cyberpunk fiction, William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, along with Greg Bear, Tom Maddox, and Lewis Shiner, the major aesthetic and critical tenets of the literature were established by the mid 1980s. Partially responsible for the ‘punk’ epithet, the protagonists of novels such as *Mindplayers*

(Cadigan, 1987) and *The Artificial Kid* (Sterling, 1987) railed against corporate imperialism, declaring an anti-establishment project that was located in a putatively counter-hegemonic form of cyberspace. The youthful protagonists, participants in punk subcultures of the sprawling urbanity that defined the near-future of cyberpunk, saw in cyberspace a forum in which voices could be galvanized in opposition to mega-corporate branding of all free space and individuals. Free from print costs or geographical dislocation, cyberspace was instantly and readily accessible to all who wished to combat the cadres of capitalism that contributed to disenfranchisement. In a practical sense, resistance took the form of organizing virtual communities of dissenters, and, more subversively, by hacking the databases of corporate or governmental agencies, hindering the institution's ability to disseminate (mis)information or product. By turning cyberspace away from its use value as a tool of capitalist product trafficking and information auction, cyberpunk fiction furthered a punk music culture trope of retooling and redeploying the products of Western consumer capital.<sup>11</sup> Also, in recognizing the potential that cyberspace had for the establishment of anti-authority movements, so-called cyberpunk crossed the boundaries of high and low art by involving low-life characters in the discourse of high-tech. Boundary erasures in postmodernism of high art/low or mass-culture art are paralleled by cyberpunk's high-tech and low-life juxtaposition.

In a related effacement effort, cyberpunk from the 1980s and 1990s attempted to eradicate the stark lines of the human body. Cyberpunk protagonists often took a deconstructivist approach to the body. Characters were driven to alter their bodies, either through cybernetic implants or biological mutilations derived from technological



advances. In Jack Womack's *Ambient* (1987), non-mutant individuals develop an affinity for the social outcast victims of nuclear fallout. The alterations carried out by the non-Ambient (non-mutants) make a productive statement about the social matrix that drove them to create bodily camaraderie: "By altering the body in unappealing ways and thus becoming voluntary, the non-Ambient might not only find kinship but could well demonstrate the iniquity of a society that forced one to do so" (68). Conversely, the hacker-cowboy characters arm the body with the aforementioned jacks or cybernetic sockets so that they might create a union with the computer. By equipping the human body with technological tools, the boundary between human and machine is blurred, making it difficult to demarcate the beginning and end of each. The dualism of 'artificial' and 'real' is deconstructed in cyberpunk, and what emerges from the wreckage are two ontologies that I am most interested in explaining and, ultimately, writing: 1) the machine (or computer)/human interface; 2) the human body as fleshly prison.

One of the conditions that information technology in its infancy created through its 1980s penetration into popular culture was speculation that humans would soon merge with their machines. The personal computer was an especially mythological apparatus in creating the discourse of the computer/human interface that early cyberpunk was so fascinated by. As computer terminals began to play a more prominent role in industry and the capitalist market, humans found themselves spending greater amounts of time working on their PCs. For many employees, entire vocations rested on the utilization and mastery of the computer, the tool that would no longer amplify product servicing, but would in fact generate product altogether. Marxist critics pointed out the nightmare alienation of the worker from his/her work was manifested in computer-driven industry.<sup>12</sup>

What was produced was not tangible, and the hands of the typist rarely left the keyboard. Humans were becoming one with their computers. This behavior was encouraged in the neo-liberalism of Reagan and Thatcher-eras, since technology would supposedly topple restrictive borders that halted the world market from developing into a forum of global participation. Ultimately, cyberpunk authors exaggerated this economic mode, highlighting in their fiction the idea that when humans are wedded to their machines, humanity itself is shaken up. We, as humans, have moved on to a new subject position that can be characterized as the *posthuman*.

The posthuman subject can be defined in a variety of ways, most of which are at play in cyberpunk fiction, however the common theme is *a union of the human body with a machine/computer*. Katherine Hayles writes in her fantastic discussion of the subject, *How We Became Posthuman*, that “in the posthuman, there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals” (3).<sup>13</sup> The meltdown of biological and mechanical differentiation became a touchstone for cyberpunk literature as the defining characteristic of humanity’s state of being. For Gibson and Sterling, the human body had taken the first step to collapsing into the computer. Thematically, their works postulated that the human form was itself a computerized format in late capitalism, and thus, new modes of synergizing the human with the machine were underway. Why, though, did cyberpunk maintain an unflagging penchant for literary expression of human/computer interface?

The answer, in part, comes from the other fundamental element of early cyberpunk. Market and economic conditions that drove human workers to multitasking

jobs mediated by the computer prompted cyberpunk authors to wonder if the human body was, in actuality, an inadequate form of existence. Computer systems and resources could be updated in the event of technological advances or the looming threat of obsolescence. The terminals were more effective in relaying information and could process data at a capacity that dwarfed human capacity. Also, institutions in both the public and private sectors were redefining job parameters to accommodate machines that could replace human counterparts. However, these trends were not unique to computerization breakthroughs of the mid '80s and early '90s. Fordism and the implementation of assembly lines in the early twentieth were catalysts for similar paranoia surrounding humans' replacement as the agents of industry. Nonetheless, the aggravated computational importance and resulting worker alienation in service industry niches seemed the final nail in the proverbial coffin for the "pure" human body in late capitalism. As economist Daniel Cohen points out, "the entire history of the twentieth century could...be retold as the dehumanization of the world."<sup>14</sup> Cyberpunk literature, perpetually concerned with railing against the exploitation of humanity and marginalization of the lower class by corporate giants, engaged these issues overtly.

The most celebrated and cited example of the exploration in cyberpunk literature of the theme of post-industrial dehumanization is found in the genre's seminal novel, William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Released in 1984, Gibson's novel is often credited as the text that garnered cyberpunk its tremendous readership as well as growing critical attention. Though Gibson was reluctant to claim responsibility as the progenitor of cyberpunk, there is no denying that *Neuromancer* engendered literary merit for and scholarly devotion to the genre that is normally withheld from science fiction. Many

cyberpunk texts have drawn inspiration from Gibson's philosophical meditations on the trajectory of late capitalist culture, the consuming glut of urbanization, and punk temperament that glorified the digerati hacker subversive. Further, Gibson's exploration of a virtual environment that functioned as a navigational tool for data and communication, known for the first time as "cyberspace," broke new ground in literary representation and in technology vernacular as a near-fully realized concept. The importance of cyberspace as a venue for counter-cultural revolution cemented Gibson's representation as a harbinger of the information age.<sup>15</sup> His definition of cyberspace as a "consensual hallucination" was prescient in anticipating the world-wide utilization of the internet, as well as the technology's eventual entrance into the realm of the banal. Yet, Gibson's text also foregrounds a distinct ontology that would define his genre. In addition to cyberspace, the Gibsonian theme that has surfaced most often in cyberpunk is bodily deconstructivism.

When we are introduced to *Neuromancer's* protagonist, Case, one of the first useful pieces of information we learn about him is that he is a console "cowboy," a data hacker of reputation, "one of the best in the Sprawl."<sup>16</sup> Case is presented as an authority figure, a representative of the subversive underworld of data thieves, and by extension, an emissary for anti-corporate resistance. Hence, when Case returns from a brief entry into Gibson's cyberspace, it is quite telling that he is disgusted with his fleshly existence: "For Case, who had lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh" (6).

There are multiple bedrock elements of cyberpunk that are exemplified in this scene. First, the experience of being jacked into cyberspace offers the user a bodiless existence that is preferable to the stifling malaise of embodied life. Consciousness, in *Neuromancer* is deployed into cyberspace, causing an individual to forget their fleshly reality and enjoy a digitized identity that is transcendent. Secondly, if virtual existence is exalted bliss, life in the human body is the antithesis. Flesh is the form of the biblical Fall, a punitive jail that would be shed if possible. Fortunately for Case and his fellow hackers, the opportunity for escape comes in the form of cyberspace. Flesh is a “prison” because, like the carnal and crude “meat” that it is likened to, it is limited, terminal, and prone to decay. Cyberspace is the alternative. It is a clean, upgradable, inorganic realm that can facilitate the ultimate expression of posthuman identity possible: the pure mind. Case and the other members of the cowboy bar satiate their contempt for their bodies by fleeing them, breaking free from their corporeal jailers and allowing their minds to articulate identity in infinite ways in cyberspace. By positing the body as “meat,” *Neuromancer* defines flesh as a commodifiable object, both eradicable and expendable. This ontological stance leads to a third implication: an elided importance of the body’s impact on subjectivity. Case believes that he returns, time and again, from cyberspace unchanged, with his identity as “Case” intact even when he breaks from his body. More to the point, were he to escape the prison of his flesh and exist exclusively in cyberspace (an adventure he attempts on more than one occasion, each time with more daring longevity), he would remain himself with no real ramifications emerging from this discarding of the body. Subjectivity, according to this philosophy, is not ensconced in the flesh. Only the pejorative rotting capabilities of the flesh define identity, but that can be

shorn once the subject is digitized in cyberspace. Case champions a cyberpunk ethos, reinforced in the works of Gibson's followers, that in virtual space "data [is] made flesh" (16) and the corporeal is usefully erased.

Since Gibson is most often anointed the brewer of cyberspace discourse, it is worth explaining why cyberspace provides the genre with an alternative to embodiment. Put simply, cyberspace, or virtuality in other texts, is the forum of possibilities. There are few sociological rules that govern the virtual environment; in most instances, the restrictors are mathematical, physical, or computational in nature. Nevertheless, users are free to construct virtual identities in any gender, race, or pseudo-physiological context they desire. In many ways, cyberspace is the antidote to confining social schematics of reality that seek to brand individuals with corporate logos or compartmentalize them within, for example, gender roles. Since cyberspace offers a chance for rearticulation, humans who have been victimized by disenfranchisement or economic exploitation become creators of their own reality. The flexibility of the program caters to imagination and creativity, as well as individualized expression.

If we return to the earlier lament over worker alienation via the increased role played by computers in the work force, we can see why cyberspace was such an alluring narrative setting for Gibson and others in the 1980s and 1990s. Recalling the punk principle of tool redeployment, cyberpunk artists became infatuated with the possibilities of computer-generated alternative realities partly because those same technologies were impugning human value. If the human form was made insufficient for postmodernity by computers, how could one resist that marginalization by redirection? For Gibson, the answer was to formulate resistance through cyberspace. Other authors, like Neal

Stephenson, took the anti-corporate resistance a step further, representing cyberspace, or in this case the “Metaverse,” as corporate-free environment. In his novel *Snow Crash*, Stephenson amplifies the cyberpunk anticipation of a sprawling corporate metropolis that has subsumed the U.S. The narrative takes place in a Los Angeles that has been transformed into a series of miniaturized nation-state suburbs that are pitted in direct social and economic competition with corporate-run communities known as “franchulates.”<sup>17</sup> Stephenson tragically and humorously represents the fallout of globalization and neo-liberalistic economics that paved the way for franchised national identity and a tidal wave of homogenized urbanity. Stephenson’s virtual champion, the aptly named Hiro Protagonist, has been reduced to living in a cramped storage unit, a testament to the appropriation of available space by multinational conglomerates. However, the tight living quarters are not without benefit, since the storage unit is equipped with a fiber optic uplink to the virtual world of the Metaverse. Analogous to Gibson’s cyberspace and nearly all other conceptions of virtual environments, the Metaverse is a computer mediated landscape that aims to fulfill its egalitarian promise. Hiro makes sure of this, since he is one of the creators of the technology. Dissatisfied with his reality, Hiro constructed the Metaverse as a sanctuary safe from corporate inscription and rule. There are no brands in the Metaverse, since the space (equivalent to bandwidth) is monitored and distributed by Hiro and his fellow hackers. It is not available to companies that would monopolize the locales or peddle products. Instead, it is an escapist laboratory where individuals may construct their identities in whatever form they wish, and they may trade information in the Metaverse’s open-market without financial regulation of government. It is the free space that neo-liberalism thought it

could generate, but failed. Essentially, the Metaverse is a reactionary outcry to a world that does not accommodate punk subcultures without absconding with them. The corporate culture spies, or “gargoyles,” infiltrate the music and hacker scenes that Hiro frequents, leaving him and his community no refuge in reality. The narrator punctuates the climate early in *Snow Crash*: “when you live in a shithole, there’s always the Metaverse, and in the Metaverse, Hiro Protagonist is a warrior prince” (63).<sup>18</sup> In short, Stephenson’s virtual environment presented a Utopia counter to the dystopic urban eyesore of L.A. Interestingly, characters of *Snow Crash* spend a great deal of time in the Metaverse as a means of transcending not only their unfulfilled existence in reality, but also escaping their human frames. When Hiro jacks into the Metaverse, he ceases to “exist” in his flesh (“Hiro’s not actually here at all. He’s in the computer-generated universe” (24)). In the rationale of the novel, the flesh can be discarded and subjectivity (as Hiro) remains undisturbed.

Perhaps in no other text is the desire for corporeal escapism more resonant than in Jack Dann and Gardner Dozois’s cyberpunk anthology *Beyond Flesh*. Published in 2002, *Beyond Flesh* is a monumental gathering point not only in cyberpunk discourse, as many of the genre giants are contributors, but also as a *mise en scene* of transcendent energies centered on expanding the possibilities of humanity. Editors Dann and Dozois assembled the collection with the desire to explore the possibilities of moving beyond the provincialities of the human flesh. All of the anthology’s short stories touch upon the inadequacies of the human body in one form or another, granting the mind or consciousness a privileged position as the crucial element of humanity that must be excavated and salvaged from the decaying corporeal vessel. Echoing the philosophical



positions of Gibson and Sterling, the editors of *Beyond Flesh* crafted a multifarious response to the problem of the fetters of the body. In the introduction, Dann and Dozois announce to the reader that the included tales “show you what it might be like when human consciousness is no longer restricted to the prison of the flesh, or the basic human form.”<sup>19</sup> By predominantly including cyberpunk artists (such as Michael Swanwick and Greg Egan), Dann and Dozois amplify the insistence in cyberpunk fiction that the human body is an article that may be elided and that subjectivity is grounded in mental capabilities independent of physiology.

In his story “Ancient Engines,” Swanwick utilizes one of the fundamental mythologies surrounding cyberspace and the inculcation of technology that leads to bodily escapism: immortality. Even in the earliest stages, cyberpunk touted the promise of neo-immortality if the consciousness was mapped onto cyberspace and the body was set aside. At other junctures, cyberpunks threw their lot in with alternative vehicles of technology (robots or data streams) into which the human mind could be downloaded and relocated whenever need be, effectively guaranteeing ‘immortality’ provided any dependence upon organic elements (for identity or otherwise) was overcome. Swanwick writes in this mode, positing that a “mech” (mechanized humanoid, absent of any organic component) could live forever, as long as upgrades were performed. A stranger in the barroom setting acts as the story’s foil to the would-be immortal mech. The stranger addresses the human body as if it were a mechanism or system on the verge of extinction: “Death is inherent in flesh people. It seems to be written into the basic program- a way, perhaps, of keeping the universe from filling up with old people” (86). Swanwick invokes a bedrock argument and fear within cyberpunk, that humans are analogous to computer

programs and that some revolution must take place in the face of overpopulation or overcrowding in the metropolis. Humans are a terminal vehicle out of necessity. If one could escape the dependency upon physical space (in the form of the human body), then issues of urban swell could be circumvented. Thus, a reliance upon machined/computer technology grants individuals a way out of their entrapment. Since humans are conditioned to die, the passage also acts as a lament over corporeal limitations. Further, presenting flesh as an inferior program to the continually upgradeable and durable mech form is strikingly similar to the recognition that humans are becoming inadequate components within the workforce. The basic computer programs that augment the capabilities of service industry workers are not hard-wired to terminate or rot. They are written to embrace upgrade and extension. Yet, the human body has been reluctant that evolve into a program that easily accepts prolongation. Instead, that drive is located within the mind, perpetually seeking elevation or escape from a leaking house made of tissue. By depositing the mind within technology, “humanity” purportedly assures itself of an unassailable virtual morphology.

Greg Egan’s contribution to *Beyond Flesh* draws more heavily upon cyberpunk themes of identity displacement onto a virtual space. In the case of “Learning To Be Me,” the first-person narrator grapples with his fear that the cultural practice of downloading consciousness (and all of one’s feelings, emotions, memories, and personality) into a cybernetic “jewel” that replaces the brain actually disrupts human subjectivity, and eradicates any semblance of humanity. The jewel is superior to the organic brain because it will not decay, become riddled with Alzheimer’s disease, or perish with the downfall of the body. Instead, the jewel may be networked with computer systems, guaranteeing

consciousness extension beyond mortality. The narrator, however, is skeptical about the procedure, and remains the only member of his family or friends wholly “human.” He is aware of the impact corporeal erasure and conscious expatriation may have on subjectivity. He asks if after the surgical procedure, “would you still be ‘yourself?’” or would you be the jewel mimicking you (54)? Eventually succumbing to social pressures and cognizance of his impending death, the narrator decides to go through with the procedure. Shockingly, the narrator perceives a shift in his temperament and personality, however, he knows he has not yet been through the procedure. Alarmed, he discerns that the only explanation is that he had switched and the effect of the jewel’s implementation was so thorough, he could not differentiate between it and his organic predecessor. This strain of thinking dovetails into panic that he could not prove that he ever possessed a brain, or, that he had not always been the jewel (a human/computer interface).

Understandably left in a panic over his ontological existence, the narrator decries “*I’d lost control. My body had turned into a living straightjacket*” (58). Egan examines the cyberpunk conception of the flesh as a prison, noting that even possessing a cybernetic component (the jewel) is not enough to rid the subject of the trammels of the body.

Complete escape is the only method of emancipation from the postmodern onslaught of heterogeneous forces that erase choice (even over brain matter) and constitute identity.

The narrator opines after the realization that he was/is the jewel, “I had *always* been powerless. My will to act upon ‘my’ body, upon the world, had *always* gone straight into a vacuum, and it was only because I had been ceaselessly manipulated” (59-60). The narrator recognizes the loss of his agency in the late capitalist world and, instead of

seeking resistance to these forces within his flesh, accepts subjectivity within the jewel technology that might liberate him. (“The jewel is immortal. The brain is decaying” 64).

Like many of the fundamental tenets of cyberpunk, Egan’s tale lauds the human mind as the exclusive element of humanity and thus, postulates an affinity with Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum*.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the narrator resurrects the Cartesian philosophy as an amelioration of his corporeal prison: “I suggested that the notion of human consciousness as ‘software’ that could be ‘implemented’ equally well on an organic brain or an optical crystal was in fact a throwback to Cartesian dualism: for ‘software’ read ‘soul.’” (52-3).

There is a concern with liberal humanism contained within the cyberpunk ontology that I want to return to later in this chapter however, it is useful to view Egan’s piece, and the preceding cyberpunk texts, as reinstating the capacity for human choice and agency within consciousness. Yet, this reinstatement cannot occur concomitantly with the use of the human body. This was of course a minor concern for the participants of *Beyond Flesh*, since the flesh could be transcended through cyberspace, with identity remaining intact. The implication of these cyberpunk philosophies is extremely troubling to me (though I do recognize their productivity), as I am uncertain as to what remains of the human body. Clearly, corporeality in this version of postmodernism is of minimal importance to subjectivity. Why can’t the human body be thought of as a site of resistance? Is subjectivity located exclusively within consciousness? How is the mind/body dualism complicated by notions of gender, racial, and sexual identity? Can subjectivity in cyberpunk discourse be rethought to conceive of the body as a subversive tool and an indelible marker of *human* subjectivity? My desire to answer these questions

has led me to look beyond regurgitations of cyberpunk status quo, and interrogate epistemic shifts that the genre has undergone. Not only have the cornerstones of cyberpunk fiction been tackled in direct confrontation by new voices within the genre, but also the merits of artistic reactions to social and economic epochs of the 1980s and 1990s have experienced a revision that points towards a new philosophy, ontology, and subjectivity possible within a genre formerly known as cyberpunk.

The new visions of cyberpunk philosophy are evident in the works of Richard K. Morgan, Pat Cadigan, and M. John Harrison.<sup>21</sup> These three authors have participated in a shifting of the core cyberpunk tenets, which were forged in the genre's genesis, rethinking them as projects stripped of technological idealisms and negative relations to the human body. In recent studies, critics like Heuser and Andrew M. Butler have argued that the literature metamorphosed into something new. Unfortunately, neither critic offers a tremendously satisfying account of what this changed cyberpunk proclaims or even looks like.<sup>22</sup> I strongly believe, however, that three epistemic transitions have taken place within cyberpunk during the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

First, the cyberpunk conceit of positing cyberspace as a road to escapism from a corporeal prison is ripped apart in the new cyberpunk and exposed as an illusion of transcendence. Cyberspace lures the user into a false sense of infinite possibility or eternal life, an existence that is predicated upon maintaining a computer interface with the human body. Presence in a virtual landscape is made possible because of fleshly embodiment. As Heuser points out, "all movement and perception remains determined by a visual perception, and all brain activity still relies upon a body" (33). In other words, the body is the ineradicable link with the computer program, making linguistic or virtual

(digital) representations of escapism into cyberspace a fallacy. The body, as dissatisfying as it may be for cyberpunk protagonists, is not an easily discarded shell that can be traded in for a digitized ethereal identity. It is the vital scaffolding of humanity. Thus, in a move of philosophical maturation, late cyberpunk artists, like Morgan and Cadigan, realize the shortcomings of positing subversive resistance in an ephemeral space (exclusively or dominantly), and recast the corporeal as the vehicle for negotiating the dystopic world of late capitalism.

With the realization in mind that the body is a necessary element of identity in a cybernetic age, these artists began to conceptualize ways in which punk outcasts and hackers could scream back at the market or governmental forces oppressing them while using the body as a tool with as much efficacy as cyberspace. The body is no longer a prison of “meat” that must be escaped. In some cases, VR offers a temporary forgetting of human flesh, but the user always returns to the site of their body. The early discourse of cyberpunk, which held a disregard for the importance of corporeality in subjectivity, is revised to accept the human body as a form that makes a more resonant resistant statement than any identity in cyberspace ever could. K.W. Jeter’s novel *Noir* (1998) captures the assault upon the human frame that corporations perpetrate, and the steps cyberpunk characters will take to reclaim the body as a denial and disavowal of corporate social potency. In *Noir*, the DynaZauber corporation is so effective in the conveyance of product messaging that their contribution to the “network” of information that circulates everyday life is inescapable. Individuals are captives to the caprices of the company. Consequently, the very flesh of a person is a medium of branding, essentially deployed strategically (and surreptitiously) to extend advertising. The egregious hijacking of

humanity at the behest of economic market competition is openly explained by one of DynaZauber's executives: "In the marketplace, at least, rape is the natural order of things. And remarkably popular, too, on both sides of the exchange. People hand over their money, their lives, to DynaZauber or any other corporation . . . the customers are always bottoms looking to get topped, the harder and bloodier, the better" (314-15). Jeter claims that market exchange at the corporate level is grotesquely violent and visceral. Jeter's protagonist, McNihil, detests the ubiquity of DynaZauber and their relentlessness within the information network. In response, McNihil gets "thin-film insertion surgery" in order to filter out the deplorable branded corporate world and see objects as though they appeared in a 1940s noir film (52).<sup>23</sup> The only tonic to the violation by the human body is to reclaim ownership of the flesh, equipping it to denounce corporate messaging, and thereby transforming corporeality into a means of resistance. Current cyberpunk artists, like Jeter, convincingly envision the body as a dissenting outlet, while also lucidly showing exactly what punk subculture is resisting against.

An additional revisionist feature of contemporary cyberpunk is the fracturing of the line that compartmentalized cyberspace as set apart from reality. Cyberspace affects the human body analogue and vice versa. For example, the narrative of Pat Cadigan's *Tea from an Empty Cup* centers on a police investigation of a young boy who was found dead in a cyber café, or virtual-wired boutique. Apparently, the boy was "killed" in cyberspace and the impact left him deceased in reality as well. Cadigan blurs the distinction between virtual identity and real, creating a symbiotic relationship between the flesh and cyberspace existence that disrupts bedrock cyberpunk claims that the body inconsequential. Cyberspace exaggerates the potential of what can be accomplished by

humans, but contemporary cyberpunk artists see that potential most productively applied to reality and the human body. Tomoyuki Iguchi, of Cadigan's *Tea*, goes so far as to encode information gleaned in cyberspace upon his body and to brandish it within the real world. Cadigan emphasizes cyberpunk's need to redirect much of the subversive work done in virtual back towards reality. In short, the body is rethought into cyberpunk subjectivity and the possibilities of cyberspace are reeled back in from their lofty heights of separatist exclusivity.

The second epistemic shift that has taken place within cyberpunk is closely linked with the recent trend to explore cybernetic/informatic possibilities within the body and reality. Defying the conventions of the genre, new takes on cyberpunk have depicted cyberspace as an appropriated extension of reality, replete with corporate-peddled web space, informational surveillance, and regulation of the data exchanges and identity parameters. In effect, cyberpunk art of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries is a representation of the philosophical crumbling of idealistic egalitarian cyberspace. An instrumental usage of burgeoning internet technology for foundational cyberpunks was an exchange of information (otherwise forbidden or censored), set apart from the regulating specter of governmental and corporate observation. That tenet could never fully come to fruition. Hackers who sought refuge from the sprawl in cyberspace sooner or later found their virtual haven administered by a status quo, or invaded by corporations determined to purchase web space/sites and operate with economic propriety. Artists such as John Shirley and Rudy Rucker were somewhat prescient about the realities of their near-future in which they would see the internet turned into a corporate playground, owned by globalizing agents rather than trafficked by desperate youths. However, most cyberpunks



of the '80s and '90s foresaw cyberspace as a way out of corralled life (similar to Stephenson's postulation that the Metaverse would be the unbranded rebuttal to the branded world). Few anticipated the historical, social and economic events that would transform cyberspace into both an extension of our economic actuality and a civil straightjacket.

One of the reasons that corporate-free cyberspace has become a defunct theme for Morgan and his contemporaries is that the information age technologies that were supposedly reworkable into tools of subversion, in all actuality, became artifacts of hyper economic fluidity unparalleled in the period of late capitalism in the twentieth century. Economist Daniel Cohen explains this conception of the internet, "the new technologies that were brought to life by a generation of young people who thought they were criticizing capitalism.... Yet, rather than criticize capitalism, the new technologies gave it a 'new spirit,' a breath of new life" (2). The internet (and by extension ruminations on cyberspace possibility) was borne from an idealist dream of communicating free of charge. In 1978, two University of Chicago students linked the first modem in an attempt to circumvent telephone bills (and spatial inconveniences). More importantly, the internet-in-infancy mode of communication deconstructed the hierarchies of corporate service providers and the (mostly ungrounded) fear of surveillance/phone tapping. The leveling of economic and social hierarchies in the workplace is, for Cohen, one of the defining logics of capitalism in the information age. Unfortunately, or predictably, the sheen on the egalitarian project did not last, and social realities make the world web a far different medium than the cyberpunk prognosticators wished. The horizontal accessibility of data, free from corporate filtration, in Gibson's *Neuromancer* is a far cry from the

actual distribution of information on the current net. Uplink to cyberspace is owned and maintain by multinational corporations, and the avenues of virtual travel are as riddled with billboards and advertisements as your average highway.<sup>24</sup> Vincent Mosco, in his terrific study of the mythologies surrounding cyberspace *The Digital Sublime*, has posited that internet communication has mutated into a breeding ground for capitalist entities.

Mosco writes:

The growing integration of communication sectors into a consolidated information and entertainment arena explains much of why there has been an unprecedented acceleration in mergers and acquisitions [of internet agencies]. Communication systems in the United States are now largely shaped by a handful of companies including U.S.-based firms: Microsoft, AT&T, General Electric, Viacom, and Walt Disney Corporation, AOL-Time Warner, and the Liberty Media Corporation. . . Each of these firms also has a significant trans-national presence through outright ownership, strategic partnerships, and investment. (160)

The mythos of cyberspace as venue for subversive reactionary statements is surely undercut by the rampant appropriation of the forum by trans-national entities.

Cyberpunks defined their beloved internet as a means to galvanizing disparate communities, as a virtual community. Much of the reasoning for locating the communal focal point in cyberspace was its notional ‘distance’ from the bombardment of advertisements that so thoroughly construct identity in postmodern life. Of course, the internet is looked upon far differently by commerce giants than by ad-weary individuals. Many users have ingested the corporate *modus operandi* as the primary function and context of cyberspace. Bill Gates’ comments regarding the internet seem to reflect the tremendous popularity that cyberspace has as an economic exchange site, as against notions of it as a community activist forum. Gates refers to the net as “the ultimate market” that hosts capitalistic dialogue and exchange.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps even more alarming than

the corporate influence on cyberspace is the governmental regulation and monitoring that has gutted the *carte blanche* project of data surfing. The U.S. government, in stoking the xenophobic fire following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, has mandated that web logs (or 'blogs') will now be monitored for incriminating evidence. Activist groups have been outspoken in opposition to the policy, claiming that surveillance of this magnitude violates free speech. In a more practical light, the monitor jeopardizes any remaining notions that cyberspace is, in fact, a free space that facilitates oppositional voices and resistant organizations. Historicizing this movement is important for understanding why recent cyberpunk narratives have reconstructed cyberspace as a dystopic miasma of surveillance, with responsibility placed upon legislative organizations.

The trial of a Muslim webmaster has brought even more attention to the U.S. government's regulation of cyberspace. On February 26, 2003, University of Idaho graduate student Sami Omar al-Hussayen was arrested and charged with three counts of promoting terrorism under the umbrella of the USA Patriot Act. According to prosecutors, al-Hussayen helped set-up and register multiple web sites for the Islamic Association of North America (IANA). The group publishes Islamic religious books and has not been marked as a terrorist organization, however prosecutors brought charges against the IANA because its website provided links to sites that allegedly recruited and raised funds for Chechen and Palestinian terrorist organizations. As webmaster, al-Hussayen was supposedly implicated under the "expert guidance or assistance" provision of the Patriot Act. However, despite his webmaster status, al-Hussayen had no knowledge or control over the content of the site or the links. The charges that sought deportation as

well as punitive measures were dropped after six weeks of testimony. No clear link was established between al-Hussayen and terrorism, but the tightening of regulations on cyberspace is clear. Even bandwidth and web space providers are apparently at risk in an environment that once philosophically and ideologically privileged and supported free information exchange. Social critics who view the internet as jurisdiction of the First Amendment have declared the case a trampling of constitutional rights. In demonizing a proponent of cyberspace information and data trafficking, the neo-conservatives of the U.S. government have generated a fear of laissez faire technocracy that was produced two decades earlier under the deregulation-kick of a Republican administration. No doubt the surveillance of cyberspace by government has influenced contemporary cyberpunk authors, arguably giving them pause in perpetuating the anointment of the internet as the bastion of subversive resistance.

This historical shift in social landscape is not meant as evidence that cyberspace is no longer pertinent to cyberpunk. Rather, it is meant to support my position that the idealisms concerning the liberatory possibilities of technology have waned, and cyberpunk artists have begun to consider new uses of virtual information networks. Cyberspace was/is crucial to any subversive task because the virtual environment celebrated diversity and displacement of the status quo. Frederic Jameson's characterization in *Late Marxism* of the postmodern Utopia strikes a remarkable similarity to the potentials of cyberspace: "a Utopia of misfits and oddballs, in which the constraints for uniformization and conformity have been removed" (102). Neal Stephenson's 'Metaverse' exemplifies Jameson's Utopia: "Your avatar [virtual persona] can look any way you want it to.... You can look like a gorilla or a dragon or a giant

talking penis in the Metaverse. Spend five minutes walking down the Street and you will see all of these” (*Snow Crash*, 36). Opportunity for possibility draws users to cyberspace, and it is the counteraction of the eclectic diversity of the space at the hands of homogenizing forces that seems to disconcert Morgan, Cadigan, and Harrison. Their reluctance to laud cyberspace and focus instead on corporeal resistance to government is the fallout of clenching of the (digitized) Invisible Hand.

Reactions to unassailable institutions like trans-national corporations and the U.S. government are not the only points of contestation within the discussion of emancipatory cyberspace. New cyberpunk authors have engaged more personal ontological qualms regarding the shunning of the body in favor of a ‘wholly’-virtual identity. Specifically, concerns over the ruptured synchronization of mind and body have led artists, most notably Cadigan and Morgan, to view cyberspace existence as a disembodied purgatory that erases vital aspects of humanity. This realization comes as the third major epistemic shift in cyberpunk. Essentially, a new importance has been assigned to embodiment. At the outset of *How We Became Posthuman*, Katherine Hayles asks what I view as the relevant cybernetic and philosophical question related to contemporary cyberpunk subjectivity: “How, I asked myself, was it possible...to believe that mind could be separated from body ?” (1). Hayles’ query, contextualized within the discourse of cyberpunk, performs the following tasks: it acknowledges a long-standing tradition that believed it was possible to separate the mind from the body, accentuating a Cartesian philosophy that saw the mind as the seat of humanity. Also, the question interrogates that dualism, asking if it need be rethought as impossible. Hayles begins to answer this question both scientifically and ontologically. The latter most concerns me, and I attempt

to utilize whatever conclusions she reaches as a starting point for my readings of ‘new’ cyberpunk. What I want to call attention to is an epistemological return to the body. More than the impossibility of actually escaping the body (that was recognized earlier as an instrumental component of cyberspace immersion), the epistemic return marks an occasion for examining new constructions of subjectivity (subversive or otherwise) that are tempered by corporeal contributions in the works of Morgan, Cadigan, and Harrison. In reclaiming the importance of embodiment, social and personal agency is situated within reality as an actual possibility, rather than an achievement available only in cyberspace. For these artists, cybernetic technology can no longer be relegated to computational or digitized vectors, but if it is to achieve a grandiose efficacy, it must be integrated within the human body and conscientiously utilized within our social and fleshly realities.

The cyberpunk fiction that operated under the delusion of material erasure has passed in some quarters; we have arrived at a new discourse that does not function under that pretense. The chapters that follow situate an analysis of recent cyberpunk authors moving the genre in new directions, within an exploration of humanity in the information age. My aim of this project is to challenge the validity of bedrock cyberpunk philosophies, and to elucidate a new subjectivity that allows for social agency and embraces the body as an indelible site of subjectivity in the cyberpunk schema. Further, I want to push forward a representation of the tenets of what others had called ‘new’ cyberpunk, or post-cyberpunk. Those labels are incomplete to me, since they signal either a postmortem nod or the passing of a predecessor. Such thoughts would be misleading. Cyberpunk is not dead, nor have its contemporaries forgotten their antecedents. Many of

the Gibsonian and fundamental elements of cyberpunk live on, others have been rewritten. However the new ideas about subjectivity that embrace the corporeal have resulted in a new epoch that I define as *posthumanist cyberpunk*. The posthumanist cyberpunk is an amalgam of the organic/computer posthuman, and the liberal humanist concept that an individual is proprietor of the self. Social agency for the posthumanist subject is created by an ability to map consciousness onto a cyberspace environment or upload consciousness into a different human organism, creating in both scenarios a reconstructed subjectivity in the hands of the individual. Individuals are the sculptors of identity, the authors of digitized and embodied Selfhood. The important break that posthumanist subjectivity makes from the posthuman is a fundamental recognition that embodiment is a vital criteria of humanity.

The posthuman, which was earlier defined in a simplistic sense as the merger of man and machine, can be illustrated further, though always cited as an integral essence of cyberpunk identity. Posthuman subjectivity entails four major claims. First, the posthuman privileges informational pattern or digitization over material instantiation.<sup>26</sup> It is a reduction of humanity to code lines of ones and zeros. Thus, we understand, in part, why the posthuman subjects of early cyberpunk were so infatuated with cyberspace identities and complete immersion into the virtual landscape. Secondly, posthuman view conceives of the body as a prosthetic that all humans (from the control center of their minds) manipulate. Augmenting or replacing the body with other prosthesis is simply a propagation of the process, and a phenomenon we are all accustomed to. Thirdly, human beings may be easily and seamlessly integrated with machines/computers. The absolute differences between bodily existence and computer simulation are blurred. Fourth, and

most important, drawing on Jameson and other postmodern critics who cite the authority of market factors, the posthuman subject is a collection of heterogeneous forces. As Hayles points out, “the presumption that there is an agency, desire, or will belonging to the self and clearly distinguished from the wills of others is undercut in the Posthuman” (3).

Also at play in my concept of posthumanist cyberpunk is a reintegration of liberal humanism. I cast the usage of liberal humanism as a “reintegration” mainly because critics and writers alike have proclaimed a feud between cyberpunks and humanists that has sent the two sects scurrying for their respective corners.<sup>27</sup> According to Michael Swanwick’s “A User’s Guide to the Postmoderns” (1986), humanists concentrate on existential or philosophical issues endemic to (obviously) humans, while the cyberpunks rely quite heavily on technology, punk style and antagonism to authority, and a fully-realized high-tech future, all in place of the androcentric concerns of humanism. Also, the merits of liberal humanism have fallen under the scrutiny of critics who saw the philosophy as proffering a dangerous univocality. The liberal humanist subject *possessed* a body but was not conceptualized as *being* a body. Themes of universality associated with liberal humanism egregiously erased markers of bodily difference such as race and sex. However, the utility of liberal humanism that I want to redeploy in conjunction with the posthuman is the possibility for personal choice. Counter to the late capitalist context of posthuman subjectivity that was inscribed and constituted exclusively by heterogeneous influences, the liberal humanist, and thus the posthumanist cyberpunk, is capable of agency through conceiving of the individual as proprietor of his/her own person.



In Richard K. Morgan's novels *Altered Carbon* and *Broken Angels*, individuals exercise the ability to purchase new bodies for themselves, downloading a digitized consciousness into the new form. By owning the corporeal and the mind, and subjecting their identities to reconstructions of their own design, posthumans exemplify propriety over their subjectivity. The technological apparatus that links users to virtuality in Morgan's works are embedded within the flesh (within a cortical stack, to be precise). Virtual technology has returned to integrate within the corporeal, reworking the disembodiment that erased bodily subjectivity in earlier modes of cyberspace, here elevating digital/computer embodiment as the reality of humanity. Outlying social, market, and economic forces still inscribe humans in Morgan's world, but those influences are only partially responsible for existence in reality. The posthumanist subject possesses the capability to reconfigure identity in response or resistance to their world, though now in a more tangible and relevant manner than the escapist virtual ephemerality. In other words, the posthumanist cyberpunk subject is a suzerain being. The posthumanist ontology allows for ownership of identity, resulting in a new ability for humanity to refute invasive social powers in favor of self-created individuality.

While I will return in greater detail to Morgan's representation of posthumanist cyberpunks in chapter 2, I would be remiss if I did not address why this study does not focus in great detail on the figure of the cyborg. Much of the new ontology that I am attempting to outline, as you will see, can slip into semantic coupling with the cyborg definition. The literal cyborg is a synthetic being, or, a cybernetic organism. Any semantic battle is beside the point. As I discussed earlier, the cyborg being can be represented in a variety of circumstances, though the most common articulation is an

individual whose intent in bodily augmentation is to expand the limits of inadequate flesh. The cyborg is often visually identified, as the cybernetic additions call attention to themselves in their clash with the flesh. Here lies an effective difference. The cyborg (in most cases) is a compilation of parts without resonant unity. The posthumanist cyberpunk embeds or embodies virtual technologies within the flesh, creating a cohesion or synthesis. There is definite overlap between the two identities, which I acknowledge, however I avoid lengthy discussion of the cyborg also because of the focus of this project. Posthumanist cyberpunk, for me, is a controversial reaction to the politics of cyberspace and the disembodied projects of traditional cyberpunk. The new ontology is a contestation of the jettisoning of the human body that takes place in lieu of virtuality. Cyborg identity, on the other hand, seems a response to un-modified or purist conceptions of humanity, not those linked to notional computer spaces. Cyborg subjectivities, genders, and sexualities have been theorized extensively (though not exhaustively) by excellent critics such as Donna Haraway and Patricia Warrick. Revisionist contributions to cyberspace-mediated identity in cyberpunk remain relatively unmined, and thus, it shall receive the bulk of my attention in this project.

What is of interest and importance in posthumanist cyberpunk is radical new emphasis placed upon the flesh. The human body in this new ontological wave of Morgan, Cadigan, and Harrison has become as utilitarian and de-limited as its virtual counterpart of the '80s and '90s. In a productive discovery of literary representation, I have rethought cyberpunk's allergy to its body as a terminal phenomenon. Certainly the current offering promises avenues for existing in postmodern urbanity under the rubric of individuation. So often, humans seem eager to apply technologies to outer realms, rather

than asking what impact they might have on provinciality. By calibrating the importance of the human form as the crucial vehicle of agency, the art of posthumanist cyberpunk thankfully engages corporeal provinciality as its overt subject matter.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the variegated uses of ‘postmodernism’ and ‘postmodernity’, I want to clarify my usages of the terms in this work. I employ the term ‘postmodernism’ as descriptive of the particular epoch that follows modernism. As many of the seminal cyberpunk texts that this chapter examines were written in the formative early years of the 1980s, I think it important to discuss the social and economic conditions that produced (or expedited, as it were) those novels. Further, my use of Fredric Jameson’s theories on the epistemology of postmodernism works to contextualize cyberpunk as a reinforcement of, or, reaction to, political factors of the age. Secondly, I use the term ‘postmodernity’ as indicative of the movements within the cultural field (specifically of the United States). The ontologies of ‘postmodernity’, as espoused by cyberpunk artists, have undergone great revision in recent years, most notably reincorporating elements of modernism and liberal humanism. Thus, the crux of this thesis concerns the philosophical transformations cyberpunk has made for the sake of outlasting the deceased discourses of postmodernism it claimed earlier. In summary, it is crucial to analyze the epoch of the genre (postmodernism) in order to understand cyberpunk’s theorization of it (postmodernity), and the resultant reformation of that theorization.

<sup>2</sup> Jameson regrets not including a chapter on cyberpunk precisely because he views the science fiction subset as “the supreme *literary* expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself.” In Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1991) p.419. Such an endorsement from a theorist like Jameson ushers cyberpunk to the contemporary critical table, even if a bit belatedly.

<sup>3</sup> One would find evidence of this technology in John Brunner’s *The Shockwave Rider* (1975), William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), and Pat Cadigan’s *Mindplayers* (1987), to name a few.

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Butler rightly points out the measures that middle-class, middle-aged cyberpunk writers have taken to sidestep shades of hypocrisy or boundary overstep in their deference of the ‘punk’ element in favor of the ‘cyber’: “Some writers, such as Greg Egan, sensibly leave this punk element out of their fiction and concentrate on the possibilities of the virtual (computer- or mathematically- generated environment) or the post-human (augmented thought process, without quite being the human-machine combination that constitutes the cyborg).” In Andrew Butler, *The Pocket Essential Cyberpunk* (Great Britain: Cox & Wyman, 2000) p.15.

<sup>5</sup> One might invert this merger and read it as cyberpunk’s embrace of hard science and cutting-edge information technologies, rather than inscribing the punk onto the cyber.

<sup>6</sup> In Sabine Heuser, *Virtual Geographies: Cyberpunk at the Intersection of the Postmodern and Science Fiction* (New York: Rodopi, 2003) pp.5-9. Heuser believes that the truly innovative aspect of cyberpunk is its style. Interestingly, in light of the innumerable instances of punk cultural cooption and cyberpunk appropriation-turned-formulaic-imitation, stylistic elements have been forced to undergo rapid reshaping, if for no other reason than terminal self-preservation. Heuser may be right that style makes cyberpunk unique

and productive, however, the philosophical traditions of the literature seem to be the force most resistant to mass re-packaging.

<sup>7</sup> In *Postmodernism*, Jameson solidifies his diagnosis of traumatic loss of historical depth by noting postmodernism's adherence to a productive loop of Platonic (and eventually Baudrillardian) "simulacrum." The condition is a perpetual production of copies without a correlating original. One may think of a CD, an encoded artifact that cannot be productively linked with its ephemeral "original" musical performance. In the age of CD burners and MP3 files, copies are replications of other copies that are disconnected from any source.

<sup>8</sup> In Adam Roberts, *Fredric Jameson* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p.124.

<sup>9</sup> In Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 2000) p.163.

<sup>10</sup> The conception date(s) for 'cyberpunk' are by no means hard and fast. Bethke's story is indisputably the first to use the genre term (and it obviously has had lasting effect), however, the themes explored in the fiction have appeared in earlier texts. Among them, the human/computer interface and a possibility of digitized identity was a major component of John Brunner's *The Shockwave Rider* (1975). Similarly, stories by James Tiptree ("The Girl Who Was Plugged In" 1973) and Alfred Bester ("Fondly Fahrenheit" 1954) have proved touchstones for much of the 1980s cyberpunk. These aforementioned stories appeared in Pat Cadigan's anthology *The Ultimate Cyberpunk* (New York: ibooks, 2002). Many of these 'early' cyberpunk stories were influenced by the actual scientific research produced in the Turing Tests of 1950. Nonetheless, 'cyberpunk' as a genre took off to critical and commercial acclaim in the mid 1980s, and thus, it is important to recognize its relative 'birth' (if not its zenith) during the Reagan era.

<sup>11</sup> A useful, though crude, example of artifact re-use comes in the form of safety pins or metal studs adorned to clothing. Here, the intended use of household goods has been redirected, resulting in a (appropriately punk) disruptive expression of subjectivity. The tools of domesticity that are loaded with gender normative ideologies have been dispersed into a new context that rocks the stability of their social uniformity.

<sup>12</sup> Lyotard, for example, has referred to the post-modern age as the 'computerization of society'.

<sup>13</sup> Hayles' work on posthuman subjectivity is discussed in greater length in chapter 2, however it is worth mentioning at this time that I have built some of my cyberpunk ontological concepts off of her theories, taking them in new directions. Nonetheless, I believe her book remains the finest on subjectivity in a virtual age. In N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> In Daniel Cohen, *Our Modern Times: The New Nature of Capitalism in the Information Age*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003) p.14.

<sup>15</sup> Ironically, Gibson did not own a computer when he wrote his book, nor was he well versed in recent computer science developments.

<sup>16</sup> In William Gibson *Neuromancer*, (New York: Ace Books, 1984) p.5.

<sup>17</sup> In Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*, (New York: Bantam/Spectra, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> The inclusion of Stephenson's text is not meant to laud the Metaverse scenario as an unimpeachable cyberpunk response to corporate rule. In fact, the Metaverse devolves by the end of Stephenson's novel to become, in a less egregious way than reality, another branded space rife with governmental and capitalist intrusion. In certain ways, the Metaverse, and *Snow Crash* as a project, is evidence of some of the failed idealism that cyberpunk pushed in its early stages. However, the example of the Metaverse does reinforce a philosophy in cyberpunk that posited bodily escapism into a virtual landscape as the answer to postmodern malaise.

<sup>19</sup> In Jack Dann & Gardner Dozois, ed. *Beyond Flesh*, (New York: Ace Books, 2002), p.X.

<sup>20</sup> Roy Porter conceptualizes the Cartesian philosophy as "I am thinking, therefore I am." Porter recognizes the Cartesian privileging of the human mind over the body (and inherently separate from) as a quest for certainty: "my own consciousness is the thing of which I can be sure, the sole Archimedean point in the human universe. Neither God nor nature, but the ego or consciousness is the spring of human self-understanding." In Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason: The Modern Foundations of Body and Soul*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2003), p.7.

<sup>21</sup> This emergence can be framed from 1995 to the present.

<sup>22</sup> Heuser believes the "short-lived hybrid" appeared in the early 1980s and burned out by the early '90s (6). Any remnants are something altogether different, essentially pretenders to the throne. Butler, on the other hand, sees cyberpunk's fatality as occurring in 1986, if not sooner (16). However, he does recognize that

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cyberpunk themes have persisted into the '90s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. This reluctance to give up the ghost, though, results in what Butler calls "the new cyberpunk," categorical "cyberpunk-flavoured fiction" (57). These works are without the punk styles or reliance upon computers for liberation, making it difficult for me to even justify the linkage with cyberpunk. Nonetheless, Butler unfortunately doesn't elaborate his useful overview with musings on the philosophies of this "new" cyberpunk.

<sup>23</sup> In K.W. Jeter, *Noir*, (New York: Bantam/Spectra, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Amazingly, the resurrection of 'free' internet linkage may lie in the recent upsurge of 'wireless internet' locales at cafes or libraries. The wireless hardware technology is young and therefore still relatively expensive, however the service is gratis in most cases.

<sup>25</sup> In Vincent Mosco, *The Digital Sublime: Myth, Power, and Cyberspace* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), p.52.

<sup>26</sup> See Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p.2.

<sup>27</sup> See Hesuer, *Virtual Geographies*, p.7.

## Chapter 2

“Resleeving” the Body in Cyberpunk:  
*Altered Carbon*’s Return to the Corporeal

Early cyberpunk artists loved to reflect. They encouraged U.S. and British societies of the 1980s and 1990s to examine their existence in the gleaming surfaces of the cyberpunk’s mirrored sunglasses. As Bruce Sterling writes in his landmark introduction to the *Mirrorshades* anthology, “Cyberpunk is a product of the Eighties milieu . . . a definitive product . . . [and] mirrored sunglasses have been a movement totem since the early days of ‘82” (x-xi). The world around the cyberpunk could see their gruesome and wonderful reality cast in the mirrors, along with a representation of personal identity. Those who donned the mirrorshades were walking opportunities for self-examination, that is for everyone but the wearer. Seldom in Sterling’s anthology does the individual turn the glasses on her/himself and contemplate their own positionality and the consequences of the resounding philosophy of disarticulation of identity from the body. Conceptualized liberation from the organic human form was a necessary compensation for the world scrolling by on glass lenses.

Afloat amidst waves of literary study concerned with the body’s influence on subjectivity, cyberpunk authors embraced burgeoning trends of cybernetics- specifically how computer-generated and controlled information created a new reality- that humans could use as a highway for escape from embodiment. Rather than tackle how corporeality constituted identity, the cyberpunks saw the flesh as a prison of humanity and adopted Gibson’s theory of transcendence into cyberspace as the remedy for the fettered, contemptible existence

For the cyberpunks, identity was forged in the mind and manifested as information that, if freed of the flesh, could rearticulate itself in ways only dreamed of in reality. Thus, new conditions were imagined that interfaced computers and humans. The jacked-in user, through sockets behind the eyes or the neck, was capable of redefining himself in cyberspace, as a digital reflection of imagination. As opposed to the trammels of the organic body, cyber identity is boundless. Simultaneously, the demarcation of man and machine became indistinguishable, as the interface between human and computer was purportedly seamless. In effect, humans became posthuman. Given that the cyberpunk literature of the '80s and '90s privileged the informational patterning of consciousness over material instantiation, the body was relegated to a role of prosthesis that served to facilitate human congruence with the computer, acting as a sort of layover site that was serviceable only until a full exodus into cyberspace could be achieved. In early and mid wave cyberpunk, the body did not greatly impact subjectivity. Cyberpunks turned away from the liberal humanist model that championed possessive individualism, autonomy of society, and individuality secured because the subjects owned themselves. Instead, they postulated that identity was not owned, but a byproduct of disparate heterogeneous influences at work on the individual. Moreover, these influences were under the direct control of corporations or governmental cadres that sought to brand and regulate the body. As Katherine Hayles points out, the human being is a "set of informational processes." In articulating this claim, Hayles defines cyberpunk notion of subjectivity, which consists of a variety of informational inputs from multiple sources, convergent at one point - the human being - though not in synch with one another, in order to determine the subjects place in the world. These processes flow and ebb from the

psyche, the family, the television, advertisements, communal dialogue. They are inscriptive factors that arrive in the form of informational entities, immaterial and ephemeral. This concept is important in cyberpunk, not only because it delegitimizes material conditions, but because it reinforces the hierarchy of informational humanity over material humanity. Cyberpunk fiction effectively erased agency as it is tied to the human form, claiming that the only vehicle of humanity that could not be corrupted was the virtual self, capable of instantaneous reconstruction in cyberspace.

To say this alleged need to escape the body troubles me would be a vast understatement. I undertook an examination of cyberpunk out of fear that the early philosophies of the genre had entrenched themselves not only in our vernacular, but in our notions of ontological reality. Can human identity really escape the body without consequence? I was dissatisfied with the philosophies of the cyberpunk artists of the '80s and '90s who believed both that consciousness could ultimately be free of the corporeal and that subjectivity's vital element lay in the informational mind. Yet, in the course of reading further, I recognized an epistemic shift in the cyberpunk of the past ten years (1995-2005) that deconstructed the philosophies that dominated the genre in its early years (1975-1994). Other scholars have dubiously referred to this new wave as post-cyberpunk, though little has been written about what exactly has changed in the art form. Most are merely concerned with the determined writers who cling to a genre that purportedly died by 1986 and hence, assign a new label in hopes of rekindling interest. The purpose of this chapter is an examination of a text written by a leading member of post-cyberpunk, Richard Morgan's *Altered Carbon* (2002), in order to reopen and reperiodize cyberpunk's generic history. Morgan's novel heralds a teleological return to



the body in cyberpunk that moves away from theorization of the flesh as a prison. *Altered Carbon* works against cyberpunk traditions by reinvesting the human body with the potential for agency and, more importantly, by recasting Posthuman subjectivity as an ontology predicated upon corporeality.

To elucidate the contributions *Altered Carbon* makes in constructing a new cyberpunk posthumanity, it is useful to understand how Morgan grapples with the bedrock tenets of his predecessors. First, contrary to the earlier cyberpunk idealism that figured cyberspace as an egalitarian utopia free of corporate appropriation and governmental oppression, Morgan's cyberspace (called "virtuality" in *Altered Carbon*) is a purgatory that offers no significant change in environment over the stifling sprawl of the city. The cyberpunk authors of the 1980s offered hopeful prognostications of the internet's potential when the technology was still in its infancy, replete with optimism that cyberspace could bridge communities in the exchange of information free of governmental monitor. However, the sheen of newfound technology has worn off for Morgan. The neo-liberalist<sup>1</sup> projects spawned from the Reagan era have been torn down in Morgan's fiction, and his writing is undoubtedly influenced by the current state of the world web as a virtual playground for corporate commodification and sponsorship, and more alarmingly, government surveillance. One can return to the 2003 al-Hussayen civil liberties and webmaster trial as evidence of regulatory constriction on the internet and the separation from the initial idealism of some supporting parties. No doubt the surveillance of cyberspace by government has influenced contemporary cyberpunk authors, arguably giving them pause in perpetuating the anointment of the internet as the bastion of subversive resistance.

Secondly, the perpetual theme in cyberpunk of bodily escapism is contested by Morgan. In casting the body as “meat” and as an essentially useless vehicle, Gibson and his ilk overlook its importance. If the organic form that houses the consciousness is imperiled, the crucial human/computer interface is put in jeopardy. Though it may be confining, the body is a nonetheless crucial element in maintaining connection to a virtual world. Further, Gibson, Sterling, and Brunner’s exploration of body augmentations through cybernetic implants indicates a subtext of interest in expanding the corporeal possibilities of the Posthuman. Though the interface of man and computer is prevalent in Posthuman narratives, complete liberation of the body into digitized form is a suspect transgression of intelligible subjectivity. In Morgan’s work, shedding of the flesh ruptures humanity. Complete transference of consciousness to cyberspace infringes upon dangerous universalizing that elides the significance of race and sex in constituting identity. For Morgan and others exploring somatic trends in post-cyberpunk, positing subversiveness in a forum absent of materiality is fraught with shortcomings. Instead, the body is the form that resistance takes.

Morgan articulates a new Posthuman subjectivity in his novel through a technology appropriately called “altered carbon.” Morgan’s narrative takes place in a twenty-fifth century where humans are fitted with cortical stacks at the base of the brain that store a person’s consciousness. The technology condenses and loads an individual’s cognitive history into the storage unit so that in the event of death, the “stack” needs merely to be retrieved and the consciousness downloaded into a new body or “sleeve.” The implication of Morgan’s future is an existence that is no longer governed by the finality of death, as the reloading of consciousness into a new “sleeve” is as

commonplace as changing wardrobes. Identity in *Altered Carbon* is considered, in part, what is downloadable and transferable, capable of fluidly occupying one body and then another. However, organic death or loss does tremor identity. As opposed to previous trends in cyberpunk that sought exodus from the constraints of human flesh altogether, consciousness in this text finds its ultimate flexibility and destination within the previously abhorrent body/real world. Being downloaded into a body forces the individual to assimilate their newfound flesh, and all of its sexual, racial, and cultural implications. Here, individuality is contextual rather than universalized for the liberal humanist or fractured for the Posthuman.

The consciousness is synthesized with the body in *Altered Carbon*, positing identity as “embodiment” or, as Katherine Hayles has brilliantly articulated, “embodied virtuality.” Embodied virtuality compounds two crucial elements of the Posthuman. In previous cyberpunk conceptions, the union of computer and human was exacted through an interface of the two, with the virtual component given greater value over the organic. Yet Morgan has rearticulated the Posthuman by embedding the virtual component *within* the body. The repository of human identity, the “stack”, allows for a virtual existence by digitizing the unquantifiable consciousness, making the final step towards allowing the user to pour “himself/herself” into the virtual system. The entrenchment of consciousness housing within the body, despite its virtual destination, instantiates or gives a tangible reality to the ephemeral identity that wafts through virtuality, yearning to be free. Thus, no matter how thoroughly the self immerses into the virtual space, it is embodied by its fleshly context. Embodiment is a totality. Morgan has envisioned technology matching the mutability of the body with the mutability of virtuality because the human subject can

never escape the body while retaining the signified humanness that defines us.

Consequently, virtuality exists on the plane of the computational system, but also exists as embodied within corporeality's limits.

I want to move beyond Hayles' concept of embodied virtuality, however, by defining the shift in cyberpunk as a coalescence of Posthuman and liberal humanist ontologies.<sup>2</sup> The result is what I define as *posthumanist* subjectivity. The posthumanist agent in cyberpunk is an amalgam, a collision between the blended organic/computer Posthuman, and the liberal humanist concept that an individual is proprietor of the self. Social agency for the posthumanist subject is created by an ability to map consciousness onto a cyberspace environment or upload consciousness into a different human organism, creating in both scenarios a reconstructed subjectivity in the hands of the individual. We have arrived at a new cyberpunk discourse that does not function under the pretense of material erasure, but instead acknowledges that identity shifts when the body is erased. Unlike previous cyberpunk explorations of the Posthuman that saw the body as a normative assumption relative to a particular kind of social and discursive practice, Morgan's cyberpunk subjectivity focuses on embodiment that is an incorporation of cultural signifiers, physiological traits, and technological augmentations. Posthumanist subjectivity is individually articulated through the created network of corporeality and consciousness.

To illustrate this new subjectivity more clearly, I will turn to the text of *Altered Carbon* in more detail. The novel begins with former U.N envoy Takeshi Kovacs awaking in the decanting tank he has just been resleeved in. Kovacs deadpans "Coming back from the dead can be rough." In sardonic fashion, Morgan introduces the reader to

resurrection themes in his work. In a metonymic fashion, the resurrection indicates a Lazarus-like rise of the supposedly dead cyberpunk genre. The bastard literature has returned, but in a new form. As Morgan outlines humanity's existence in a virtual realm after the body expires, a reader within the cyberpunk genre might ostensibly believe that virtual immortality, or "storage" as it is called in the text, would be the oft dreamed-of destination where agency was finally granted to the individual consciousness. However, we become aware that this is a new type of cyberpunk when the narrating Kovacs declares that virtuality presents a new fear, one greater than reality, where "you had no control, and literally anything could happen" (138).

Virtuality in *Altered Carbon* is a tool that can be used for interrogation or data relay. Yet, in most cases, the inhabitants of virtuality who are absent of body, drift in storage as if it were limbo. The cyberspace-equivalent does not satisfy with a projection of subjectivity onto a limitless space that grants the user flexible articulations of the self. Instead, it shatters subjectivity leaving the individual a shell of their jettisoned humanity. Morgan emphasizes that virtuality is a deplorable alternative to corporeal reality through the depiction of his characters' incessant desire to avoid time in storage and to remain embodied. At one point, the detective investigating the murder case central to the novel's narrative tells Kovacs that even wealthy connections "will not keep you organic forever" (155). The tacit threat of organic death and subsequent virtual life implies that lack of a human "sleeve" means a disengagement from the world and the ultimate punitive fate.

Later in the novel, Kovacs says in a discussion over the trappings of virtuality that "Most virtual systems recreate you from self-images held in the memory, with a commonsense subroutine to prevent your delusions from impinging too much...but most

of us grow rapidly attached to whatever sleeve we're living in, and that form blanks out previous incarnations. We are, after all, evolved to relate to the physical world" (159). Morgan is highly aware of the consequences of a virtual self. The attachment to the human form is not dismissed as trivial, but an influence on how human's project themselves onto virtuality. If anything, the failed initial projects of cyberpunk are mourned. Kovacs' statements regarding attachment to physicality are met with a quintessential post-cyberpunk lament from his enemy: "Where is the voice that said altered carbon would free us from the cells of our flesh?" (160). Also, Kovacs' sentiments are evidence of a more significant conception of the body's role in subjectivity. When consciousness is transferred into a new body, human subjectivity is rethought. The new body creates a new self. This is a major detour from the earlier cyberpunk authors who claimed that subjectivity was reducible to informational patterns in the mind, and that the body was "meat" or a prosthesis that could be left in the corner.

In the Posthuman age, Morgan explores an ontology that thinks about the body not as a separate entity, like one would a hitchhiker, but as a defining costume that dictates who we are. At a tantalizingly loaded juncture in the text, Kovacs finds himself displaced from his acquainted sleeve, and embodied within a young woman's form. Kovacs transitions the reader into a new subjectivity by explaining that "a digitized mind is only a snapshot" (119). The experience in the female body creates a new Kovacs, complete with new theories about the implications of cross-sleeving. Kovacs says "to be a woman was a sensory experience beyond the male." Through his self-described cross-sleeving, Kovacs experiences a new cognition. This is not to imply that femaleness is only the body, and that Kovacs' predominantly male experiences inscribed in his

consciousness can be overcome simply by placing him in a woman's flesh. Instead, the corporeal sensations of the female human form impact identity in a much more significant fashion than earlier cyberpunk novels prognosticated. To borrow from Judith Butler, the body matters.

At the moment when Kovacs is returned to the male sleeve that he wears for the majority of the novel, the narration presents an amazingly nuanced syntax, hidden within simplicity. The narrator Kovacs utters a final "I was" before the sentence ruptures without punctuation, only to finish one line below with "Not" (124). The pronoun "I" signifies a subjectivity that includes the female body worn by Kovacs. This subjectivity becomes altered as Kovacs loses consciousness and is resleeved in the prior body. The "I" ceases to be when a new body is inhabited, reconstructed as a different Kovacs, reinforcing Morgan's exploration of the impact of corporeality upon subjectivity.

Similarly, when Kovacs is confronted by a woman he killed a few days prior, now resleeved in a drastically different-looking body, she is surprisingly calm, telling him "The me you torched in that cruiser, she's dead. That wasn't me. So, no hard feelings" (219). Kovacs acquiesces and later regurgitates the protean quality of altered carbon in the form of a platitude. "No matter how much you might know intellectually that you'll be resleeved with the bulk of your mind intact, the person you are at that moment is going to die" (281).

One may be tempted to ask at this point why the new direction of cyberpunk must be discussed as distinct from the antecedent genre works, especially considering that 'early' cyberpunk explored a conjunction of cybernetic technology with humans similar to that of Morgan's cortical stacks, only it was discussed in terms of the 'cyborg' figure.

Keeping in mind the explanation I gave in the introduction for not discussing these ontological shifts in terms of cyborg studies (of the sort that Harraway or Yaszek participate in), we can look at the logic of *Altered Carbon* for the differentiating rationale. When Kovacs is greeted by a steel-faced receptionist at the Bancroft estate, he identifies the being as a “mandroid” (100). The discourse of the novel identifies this entity as a machine/human hybrid, but Kovacs does not address it as a fellow human. Machine components in human shape do not signify humanity, as the being has passed beyond human intelligibility into a new distinction. Further, the machined cortical stack technology embedded in the flesh does not qualify people as cyborgs (or “mandroids,” for that matter). They are referred to as humans. Morgan’s use of resleeving technology in the text pushes human beings into the realm of posthumanity by seamlessly interfacing computational technology and corporeality. However, it does not transform the individual into a cyborg, which would signal a disavowal of humanness. For Morgan, the digitizable consciousness that enables reconstruction of the subject is an expansion of corporeal capability – an augmentation of humanity. Kovacs edifies this distinction when he notes that “most jobs that require a human form are better done by those organic alternatives” (101). He goes on to claim that the “truth is that a robot human is a pointless collision of two disparate functions.” He doesn’t view his existence as partially robotic and the longevity of his humanity is, in part, secured by his continued use of the resleeving technology.

The resleeving process in *Altered Carbon* presents a new sort of economy of the flesh. As was earlier discussed, agency and choice for the Posthuman were erased because the self that existed in reality was a product of market forces colliding without



much concert or control. Morgan attempts to rewrite this trend in his novel. Kovacs examines his own subjectivity at one point in that tireless trope of gazing into the mirror. He muses on “the self I’d built somewhere in the coils of memory that trail all the way back to childhood” (180). Interestingly, Kovacs refers to the self as a built product. Rather than being subjected to the onslaught of corporate and/or governmental messages that regulate identity for the cyberpunks of the past, Kovacs essentially owns himself and is able to “build” subjectivity in the mind, similar to the function imagined for cyberspace escapism in its inception. The built-self coupled with the capability of literally purchasing one’s body, results in an existence imbued with agency to change his or her subjectivity, rather than have that subjectivity dictated completely by outside influences. The synthesis of the virtual field of consciousness coupled with a newfound respect for the flesh culminates in a new cyberpunk that is defined as posthumanist. Agents in cyberpunk have relocated their site of non-conformity into an organic merger of information and material.

The artistry involved with Morgan’s built-self process is less of an abstraction formed in Enlightenment possessive individualism, and a more tangible rearticulation of the human body. Kovacs summarizes this notion in a conversation about the rigors of his Envoy duties: “That’s what an Envoy is, Curtis. A reassembled human. An artifice” (186). In the logic of Morgan’s text, the body and humanity are artifice, the subject is the artificer. The subject, in this case Kovacs, imagines and constructs the body through technological capabilities (resleeving), inhabiting and shaping a new human form to suit his evolving needs, and breaking from postmodern anxieties over cultural emptiness and absence of autonomy. This moment is emblematic of the move in contemporary

cyberpunk towards a new ontology of self-determination in an age when humanity is considered depleted beyond recognition: *the posthumanist artificer*.

The posthumanist artificer is a subject of radical autonomy. Humanism has long been centered on a self-determinism that could trump social forces, allowing the individual to negotiate a spatial and historical position in even the most frenzied, alienating markets. Postmodernism's collapse of the unified subject due to a dominance of capitalist media messaging results in heteronomy of the self. Autonomy appeared to be impossible in the face(s) of fracturing conditions. Humanity in postmodernism is multiplicity. However, by embracing the elastic potential of multiplicity, the posthumanist can stage a writing and rewriting of embodied identity that is necessary for understanding one's (changing) place in society, and determining agency. The human becomes as protean as the world around him.

If we think of the human body and consciousness as a micro-network and the subject as the operator, then we begin to understand how the posthumanist artificer is a new ontology, formed on the principals of dominant information age rationality. The posthumanist artificer is an *open system* humanity: the subject has access to all of the immediate parts that constitute subjectivity and is able to author the revision of those parts.

Perhaps the most revolutionary ontological move that Morgan's posthumanist cyberpunk philosophy makes is a counter to the bedrock reductions that everywhere circle foundational cyberpunk art. When Kovačs confronts an avid opponent of continual resleeving, he seems also to address the entire genre of cyberpunk that came before. "I dropped my gaze into my lap and let out a sigh that was only partially manufactured.

Then I took off my own sunglasses and looked up at her. It was all there on plain display. The naked fear of resleeving and all that it entailed; paranoid essentialism with its back to the wall” (164) Here, emotion is not all simulacra or produced by culture, but is genuinely personal. The mirrorshades have come off, and Kovacs takes an honest look at humanity, no longer hiding behind a listless costume trope. He is aware of the new Posthuman. The essentialism jeopardized by resleeving is a claim that physicality is all that constitutes identity. Equally threatened is the belief that the digitized mind is the lone site of humanity. The polarized essentialisms have been backed against a wall for execution, eradicated in favor of a subjectivity that embeds that limitless consciousness within the versatile form of the human body.

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<sup>1</sup> By neo-liberalism, I mean the political and economic policies that advocate deregulation, market rule, the reduced role of government, and privatization.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Hayles has written the best book I have encountered on the restoration of liberal humanism in conjunction with the posthuman, *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). She writes, “I see the deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject as an opportunity to put back into the picture the flesh that continues to be erased in contemporary discussions about cybernetic subjects” (5). Hayles does a marvelous job articulating how instantiation of informational and cognitive patterns (in a material form) begins to revise the liberationist fantasies of cybernetic research and literatures exploring the subject. However, Hayles does not discuss, in a prolonged or specific sense, the particular human form as a participant in this new ontology. I am attempting to pick up the discussion in such a way that theorizes the flexibility of corporeality, specifically those trends explored in contemporary cyberpunk novels. However, Hayles and I share a commitment to reinstating a modicum of agency in the posthuman through an application of information technology.

## Chapter 3

Clothing Lost Souls:  
Reuniting Body and Mind in *Tea from an Empty Cup*

Pat Cadigan's *Tea from an Empty Cup*<sup>1</sup> is a textual search party. The narrative revolves around two different investigations into the disappearance of a single person. Paralleling these investigations is a philosophical search that Cadigan herself undertakes for signifiers that have gone missing from cyberpunk notions of identity. Specifically, the text involves a search for a synchronous relationship between the physical body and virtual reality, and also a search for the role of national identity in a global-systems world.

The novel begins with the discovery of a slain body in an Artificial Reality (AR) booth. Lt. Dore Konstantin is assigned the investigation of Tomoyuki Iguchi's death. Konstantin is fascinated by the case, in part because it fits a pattern of recent murders in which the online persona of the AR user (the avatar) is killed, followed by the proxy 'real' death of the user in reality. In this instance, Tomoyuki Iguchi's avatar, Shantih Love, has her throat slashed in AR. In reality, Iguchi dies a similar death. Konstantin is baffled by the scenario after viewing a surveillance tape of the AR booth that shows no one enter after Iguchi. The mortal wound appears to have been administered in the online realm. Konstantin must immerse herself in the AR forum that Iguchi was using at the time of his death in order to pursue her investigation. However, Konstantin is a novice at AR navigation, and the online scenario of Post-Apocalyptic Noo Yawk Sitty puts her on unfamiliar (and newly dangerous) turf. Konstantin is advised to seek out Body Sativa, the

pseudo-deity of online omnipotence who can answer any question about AR existence and explain the dangerous trend of concomitant real world/AR deaths.

Occurring simultaneously to Konstantin's embarking on her cyberspace journey is Yuki's search. Concerned about the circumstances of her friend Tomoyuki Iguchi's death, the young Asian woman, Yuki, examines the final days of Iguchi's (or "Tom's") life. She seeks the counsel of the pimp Joy Flower, owner of a brothel that specializes in boys surgically altered to pass as Japanese. Joy hires Yuki as an office attendant in trade for the latter's use of an AR "hotsuit" which belongs to a brothel. The suit allows Yuki to interface with the virtual realm and experience sensory, visceral reactions to the events that take place while she is in AR. Unbeknownst to Yuki, Joy has supplied the hotsuit in order to involve the young woman in a tawdry fantasy game of projection. Clients of the brothel pay to "ride" Yuki while she is immersed in AR, taking control of her body and evicting Yuki from corporeal ownership. When she first becomes aware of this surreptitious hijacking, Yuki struggles to understand the violation that takes place. "Her hand moved on its own, but she refused to open her eyes . . . [i]t felt as if someone was wearing her hand as a glove- Panic exploded inside her. Her eyes snapped open and she jumped out of the chair . . . trying to catch someone molesting her" (141). Yuki's search for Tom in AR transplants her consciousness and creates a lag in awareness of the body, and as a result, she is slow to recognize and ultimately defend her flesh from intrusion. In this scene of virtual rape and in the novel as a whole, Cadigan begins to rework the early cyberpunk trope of escape from the flesh through the cyberspace causeway. Instead, Cadigan depicts the relationship of corporeality to virtual consciousness as an estranged, yet far from disconnected, coexistence.

In the course of her own investigation, Yuki comes to realize the subtle link between physical and virtual identities and begins to come to terms with her own national identity. The inauthenticity of Joy Flower's "Japanese" prostitutes (called "Joy Boys") establishes Cadigan's concern with the determination and commodification of national identity. Cyberpunk's longstanding play with the breakdown of nationalisms and nation-states thanks to trans-national corporate takeover is crucial to Cadigan's text. However, in juxtaposition to other cyberpunk authors, Cadigan does not revel in her textual world's lack of national identity, but sends Yuki on a journey to rediscover her Japanese nationhood: a voyage that will transform ontological and physical significations of her body. Through the search for explanation of Tom's murder, Yuki examines her own subjectivity in the AR space, and returns to reality after rediscovering forgotten Japanese history. Yuki incorporates this knowledge into her own body, claiming her form as emblematic of Japan by acting out tea and dance rituals that celebrate the physicality of the national body. She attempts a deconstruction of the degraded fetishization of Japanese identity that is artificially pantomimed in Joy Flower's brothel.

Central to Cadigan's novel are discussions of virtual reality's impact on embodiment (carried out in Konstantin's story) and embodied national identity (corporeal personhood representing the nation) in a context that privileges nation-less virtual selves (addressed in Yuki's thread). In both cases, Cadigan's post-cyberpunk elevates embodiment to the ontology. Cadigan shows the co-dependent relationship of the body and avatar by reuniting body and mind. She also reinvests corporeal signifiers of race and nationality with immense importance; a philosophical move that subverts the trans-national erosion of nation-state identity. In doing so, Cadigan's *Tea from an Empty Cup*

allows the individual to use the body as a mechanism for the discontinued nation to recover.

The similarity between the recovered body with its physical boundaries and the resurrected nation-state with its borders is telling. Cadigan's critique of cyberspace and globalization is that the deregulation symptomatic in both systems has effaced stable signifiers of identity and made the individual easily commodified and exploited. The response, though not without its shortcomings, is protectionist. By privileging the body and the nation-state, greater control over self-hood and national identity can be achieved. The contentious logic of Cadigan's text is that the recovery of the nation-state will lead to greater self-reliance and individualism.

Cadigan's description of artificial reality is a much more nuanced one than most cyberpunk insinuations that the virtual space is something completely distinct from sensorial embodied experience. Yuki recalls how Iguchi used to press her on what 'reality' consisted of: "*Oh, what that supposed to mean anyway, 'artificial reality'?*" Tom used to say to her whenever she used the term. *If it's reality, how can it possibly be artificial?*" (28). In *Tea from an Empty Cup*, the organic contact with the computer system is an *interface* in the truest sense of the word. Material and immaterial conjoin and dialogue with one another, the reality of each impacting the summation product (AR navigation). Unlike the ocular consumption of television, taken in from the distanced comfort of the couch and in an immobile position, cyberspace navigation is engaging. Cultural and technology critic Steven Shaviro notes that "Television addresses my ears and eyes, but the Net solicits my entire body. Web surfing is a tactile, physical experience" (6).<sup>2</sup> The aesthetic model of Cadigan's AR might be better defined as *haptic*

space, what Deleuze and Guattari call a “pure connection” that occurs at “close range” and through “close vision” (493).<sup>3</sup> Haptic space is a two-way flow that is interactive, rather than a passive/active relationship. Within a haptic space, the “orientations, landmarks, and linkages” of AR are, for the human user, “in continuous variation” (493). The shifting of patterns is not seen from a distance, like television, but is interacted with. Consequently, the organic component of the interface is affected by the shifts in the haptic AR just as the user may affect changes in the AR space. In *Tea from an Empty Cup*, this principle is at work when the ostensible cause of Iguchi’s death from the throat wound received in cyberspace is mirrored in his embodied reality. Cadigan sees the overlap of AR and reality as an opportunity to reconfigure the escapist philosophy of cyberspace.

By thinking about virtual space as an intelligible contributing factor to reality, or haptic factor, one can follow the logical step of considering the fallacies of disembodiment in virtual space and isolated experience in AR. If events in cyberspace are just as viable (in our earthly existence) as those experienced offline, then certainly the vehicle of existence in the real (the body) is as important as the form consciousness takes in AR. Similarly, if AR is mechanism that manipulates our reality, and hence our subjectivity, then corporeality must manipulate virtual experience. Cadigan’s use of the haptic space and interaction of the tangible with AR results in the body muscling its way back into the cyberpunk picture and out of the subordinated position of ‘prison’.

In his introduction to Mark Hansen’s *New Philosophy for New Media*, Tim Lenoir spells out the anxieties about material erasure that computational and cybernetic ingenuity brought about. He writes, “From the very beginning of critical engagement



with computer technology, concern has been voiced about the potential, feared by many, celebrated by some, of the end of humanity” (xv).<sup>4</sup> Lenoir writes that new trends in virtual spaces and machine/human combination have led to an unflagging paranoia over the extinction of the embodied human. Hansen, in his text, tackles questions of the body’s importance in the digital, post-photography age. He argues that “media convergence under digitality actually increases the centrality of the body as framer of information: as media lose their material specificity, the body takes on a more prominent function as selective processor in the creation of images” (xxii). Hansen’s articulation, both in its theoretical ramification and its relevance to Cadigan’s novel, defines a buttressing move that is underway, preventing the body from being washed away from ontological existence (that is founded on embodiment) under the torrent of digitized data flow. Hansen calls for recognition that even an existence inscribed by digital images and commands, an existence that is the dominant narrative of tech industry work environments, the body still remains the vital mediating device to interpret that information. Hansen says “the image can no longer be restricted to the level of surface appearance, but must be extended to encompass the entire process by which information is made perceivable through embodied experience” (10). This process says as much about the fleshly being that codifies information as it does about the informational text itself. Like Cadigan’s AR users who experience feedback sensations from the computer program and ultimately articulate the impact of information with their own bodies, Hansen’s new media participant enframes digital data turning information flow into a subjective experience. By these means of raising the body in level of import, human beings can enact some degree of ownership over information and realize that their

corporeality is an indelible element of subject existence, no matter how grand or intrusive the informational network.

Cadigan has made statements about the body's importance for subjectivity and an artistic need, in the post-cyberpunk age, to reinvest the genre with concern over the flesh. In a 1998 online interview for *Media in Transition*, Cadigan discusses the constant theme of human polymorphism in cyberpunk, and the material reality of those idealisms: "One of the things about artificial reality or virtual reality is that the idea of the body you have becomes less important than your imagination or your ingenuity. It is not that I think we will, or that we should, completely abandon our physical lives, it's just that that's not all there is to being alive."<sup>5</sup> Cadigan is not a Romanticist yearning to return to pure physicality, nor does she partake in the occasional strains of Libertarian cyberpunk thinking that sees technology as an inimical burden on humanity. She accepts the relevance and actuality of virtual reality systems in our lives, but will not transfer all notions of subjectivity (future or present) into artificial space. Cadigan is focused on synthesizing material and virtual realities in the figure of the new human who negotiates the informational world in modes different than pre-1980s consumerism.

In addition to marshaling a digital and material synthesized subject in cyberpunk, Cadigan's work also attempts to overcome the philosophy du jour of mind superiority. Early in *Tea*, an AR arcade owner becomes involved in an argument with a patron. The owner grimaces at the suggestion that carnal satisfaction exists primarily in the fleshly, material world, retorting "'Your body's not really *out here*. Your body's *in here*.' He leaned forward over the table and tapped his head. 'Your whole body is in here, and nowhere else'" (17). Whether he is aware of it or not, the arcade owner plays out a

fundamental ontological question of mind/body duality in his response. He portrays the mind as the primary port of subjectivity, relegating the body (in traditional cyberpunk fashion) to biological happenstance, a prosthesis that is an echo of the self conceived of in consciousness. However, the fissure in his argument is the tacit acknowledgment of a body. The mind recognizes not just synapses and conscious thought, like that transcendent ideal existence mapped onto cyberspace, but also the frame of a body. Without question, the shop owner elides the importance of corporeality, believing that recovery of the body can easily occur in the mind. Yet, the sublimated acceptance of bodily existence begins to hint at a realized embodied subjectivity present in even the most obdurate meat-transcendent.

It is appropriate that Cadigan's messenger of mind superiority is a shop owner. As owner of capital means of production (in the text's economic stratum), the man is the most understandable champion of material erasure. He has achieved success as proprietor of a digital and AR boutique, in part, because of the market conditions that naturalize the mind/informational over material hierarchy. As is true in contemporary work places where the product is intangible coding and network contribution that cannot be taken home at night, the dominant work places of Cadigan's text privilege information technology over organic labor. Similar to human labor completed at the computer keyboard and screen, laborers in *Tea* construct digital apparatuses by immersing themselves within their machine work stations. Workers are encouraged to forget their bodies in favor of the posthuman subjectivity that juxtaposes organic and computer. Over time, the subject is fully interpolated into the hierarchy and becomes a digitizable voice supportive of that matrix. In a potentially dire way, the individual may come to view

him/herself as an insufficient being whose organic contribution to the workplace is only a mildly acceptable shortcoming. Thus, by addressing the question of mind superiority over body in the rest of the novel, Cadigan also addresses the bourgeois shop owner who manufactures the very market conditions where the dualism prospers and the rhetoric of bodily erasure.

Shortly after the diatribe on the body's mental constructedness, the focus of the text shifts to the murder scene and Konstantin's first examination of the virtual-come-real death.

DiPietro and Celestine peeled the kid's hotsuit off him for the coroner. It was too much like seeing an animal get skinned, only grislier, and not just because most of the kid's blood was on the hotsuit. Underneath, his naked flesh was imprinted with a dense pattern of lines and shapes, Byzantine in complexity, from the wires and sensors in the suit. (36)

Cadigan delivers a resounding rebuttal to the beliefs that the mind functioned in AR independently of the body, that the flesh was unimportant contributor to subjectivity, and that consciousness and corporeality held little sway over one another. In this gruesome moment, Tom Iguchi's murdered body is literally branded with the diodes of his AR suit. The flash burns of virtual use are mirrored in the flesh. In the most stark and violent manner, Cadigan has made it clear that what happens in AR is experienced materially. Further, in a symbolic gesture, the hotsuit that is the transport device to digital exodus is removed, showing that the damage to the flesh stemming from the escape is not minimal and clean, like moving from one room to another, but is costly and ghastly.

Konstantin and the other detectives at the crime scene try to fit Iguchi's death into the pattern of virtual-to-reality slayings. However, they recognize that the feedback impact of AR on corporeality is not a trend emerging exclusively with the recent deaths, but has always been a palpable consequence of AR use. One investigator cites this, saying that AR has “*always* been non-safe, even before it was fatal” (38). The breakdown of non-real and real is a progressive move in post-cyberpunk, and is one that forces the reader to reconsider virtual immersion as an alternative to embodiment if the two are privy to the same crimes. The canvas of the murder scene closes with Konstantin looking from the unhelpful videotape of the AR booth to the body and back again. She remarks that the case is one of a “dead kid's false face pretending to be alive in a city pretending to be dead” (55). The mobius strip of authenticity and pretender that rattles Konstantin proves, as the case and novel unfold, to be truer than she ever imagined. For soon we come to learn that Iguchi was cloaking his identity in both AR and in reality by attempting to pass as Japanese. Additionally, the online avatar, Shantih Love, that was killed by the wound to the throat, triggering Iguchi's real death, has been resurrected and is interacting in the virtual world despite system limitations that prevent persona duplication. The loop of falsity grows ever wider, while the nuances of AR and the material world cinch ever closer.

Based upon the identification code adhered to Iguchi's body, Konstantin takes him for a Japanese man. But the identification system is a palimpsest, with one ID on top of another. Detective Mezzar tells Konstantin that Iguchi was “trying to turn Japanese. He wanted anyone who stripped his label to find his Japanese name underneath and take him for that” (74). When he was alive, Iguchi's attempted Japanese costume was carried

out in AR as well. Mezzner notes that Iguchi “was tryin’ to be a *Japanese* guy named Shantih Love” in cyberspace (75). The attempt at passing as Japanese in both realms leaves the reader and detectives to ponder Iguchi’s actual identity and his motivations for transforming his ethnicity.

The reasoning behind Iguchi’s passing is explained in the national breakup of Japan and the subsequent fetishization of Japanese national and ethnic identities in the marketplace. Initially, Yuki was drawn to Iguchi through national camaraderie, she (a Japanese woman) believing he was one of the few Japanese citizens who remained on the Pacific Rim following the earthquake and mass diaspora. When recounting her attraction to Iguchi, Yuki recalls the physical breakup of the islands: “They were both full Japanese, if, indeed it was still possible to be Japanese at all when the land itself had been all but obliterated” (64). Cadigan’s premise of a destroyed national geography is an exaggeration of the pejorative effects of globalization that threaten nation-states. Even though the culprit in the collapse of the Japanese island chain is a natural disaster, Cadigan creates the context to discuss how national identity is compromised when geography is transformed.

Like many other cyberpunk texts, *Tea from an Empty Cup* paints corporate capitalism as a trans-national entity. For the most part, corporate globalization remains on the periphery of the novel. Yet, the rampant traversing of boundary lines has destabilized ideas of the place and the nation. Yuki muses that she “couldn’t imagine the Japan [Grandma] Naoka had told her stories of” (64). The aggressive global capitalism that forces an individual to latch onto an identity, both nationally and within the market, does not allow Yuki to retain her Japanese nationhood after the collapse of the islands. She

tells Iguchi (in a flashback) that the Japanese diaspora led to a new integration in trans-national market as people “didn’t call Japan the motherland” anymore (67). Thus, without the geographical Japan, a central question of the novel becomes how one retains national identity without a spatial signifier. Yuki struggles with forming an answer to this issue, though she is aware that Japanese nationalism cannot die with the collapse of the islands. She says that the land loss “doesn’t mean Japan is dead     It doesn’t mean there isn’t a Japan somewhere” (67).

At this juncture, the text poses two possible outcomes of the tenuous Japanese national identity, exploitation or recovery. Iguchi’s response is exploitative. Capitalism responds to the Japanese land breakdown and fracturing of the nation by creating a new niche market. Authentic Japanese individuals become commodified in artistic trades and cultural movements. The Joy Boys prostitute ring commodifies Japanese culture in the flesh trade, seizing upon the opportunity to replicate corporeal Japanese ethnicity for profit. Iguchi also works in this vein. Ethnically Caucasian, the duplicitous man, Ash, constructs a new identity as Tomoyuki Iguchi. He goes to work for Joy Flower gaining the trust of displaced Japanese citizens and eventual access to their finances. The implication is that in the absence of geography, recognition of nationhood breaks down and inauthentic representations may be more easily passed off. However, a buttressing mechanism is in place to protect nationality. Embrace of the body as material signifier of nationhood is the second track offered by Cadigan in the face of national erasure.

Cadigan does not see reconstruction of Japanese national community in AR as particularly effective means of recovery. Escapism into cyberspace estranges the self from material components of nationhood. When Konstantin nears the completion of her

investigation into Iguchi/Ash's virtual death, she reaches the conclusion that AR is a "playground for lost souls" (228). Virtual existence only partially inscribes identity, but what must be tended to is the physical counterpart to the mind. At a similar point in her own investigation, Yuki becomes obsessed with the location of Japanese identity if it is not geographically relevant. When she reaches the Body Sativa, observer of AR's informational comings and goings, Yuki poses this question: "Am I *not* Japanese just because the physical islands were destroyed?" (219). Complete license to rearticulate subjectivity in cyberspace is turned around by this inquiry. The physical loss of the islands partly undermines Japanese nationality, speaking to the importance of physical models of identity. However, Body Sativa responds with a proposition that exemplifies Cadigan's entire project of reuniting body and mind, corporeality and AR, material and digital. She says, "All peoples have a source . . . We are re-constructing ours, not in soil and rock and ocean, but in flesh and blood, nerve and synapse. Can't you feel it?" (219). This is an exciting theorization of ontological authorship posed by Cadigan. Resurrection of physical geography is unnecessary for re-constructing the nation. Instead, the recovery of Japan takes place on an individual level within the body.

Graham Murphy accurately captures the significance of Sativa's claim of individualized physical nationhood: "Body Sativa initiates a (re)definition of nation as Cadigan removes the geographical terrain as the sole signifier of nationality and resituates nation in both mythology and corporeality."<sup>6</sup> Murphy recognizes the necessity of a new nationhood, especially when the power matrix of Cadigan's text involves "corporate enterprise that has seemingly replaced nation as the new constituency." What Yuki's introspective search while in AR yields is access to Japanese cultural memory



called “Old Japan”. In AR, Old Japan is an ontology that the user adopts, one that Murphy calls “a potential site of convergence for the Japanese diaspora of the novel.” The lecture on bodily importance Sativa gives triggers Yuki’s individuation and integration of national belonging. Sativa illuminates the productive effects possible when the “lost souls” wandering AR reclaim their bodies. For Yuki, this means considering her body as a metonymic signifier of Japan rather than naively hoping for the reappearance of the islands. Yuki takes the advice to heart and adopts a new “high-res vision” of her body’s importance (233). She ceremoniously returns to reality in a dance, now thinking of the Japanese heritage that she embodies. “Old Japan raised her arms, lifted her gracefully into a dance that her blood knew even though the last time it had been performed had been sometime long before most recorded history. There was no record of this anywhere; there didn’t have to be” (233). The identity that Yuki reclaimed in AR returns with her to embodied reality where she transforms the boundaries of her flesh into a record of Japan, standing in for nonexistent borders and geography. Further, Yuki’s struggle to remember Japan and keep the national identity alive mentally is what critics of globalization, such as John Ralston Saul, see as the fallout of corporate trans-nationalism. Cadigan counters the mass-produced amnesia of globalization by positing cultural stewardship in utilization of the body as a national marker.

Yuki’s ascension through corporeally Japanese subjectivity is set in direct opposition to Ash/Iguchi’s fatal quest for Old Japan. Yuki is allowed full access to the virtually-located Old Japan, or the ‘website’ that houses cultural history/identity, because she is full-blooded Japanese (218). Her fleshly existence matters and determines her subjectivity, even in AR. Ash/Iguchi was denied access because his genetic material was

not compatible with the cultural legacy of Japan. His attempt to pass as Japanese was an affront to the online realm, and the murder of his avatar is in direct response to his transgression.

Cadigan treads on dangerous ground with her concept of racial purity that grants access to a reclaimed and ascendant national selfhood. Murphy points out that “the idea of a 100% genetically ‘pure’ ethnic subject is increasingly unlikely due to transnational border movements of peoples across borders and the resultant genetic hybridity.” Only within Cadigan’s precise formulation of the status of national identity and the nation state does the construct of recovery as opened to ‘native sons and daughters’ have some ethical merit. However, the construct is still problematic given Benedict Anderson’s articulation of national identities predicated on “imagined communities.”<sup>7</sup> Anderson recognizes the fluctuated though still potent role that “nation-ness” plays in global systems. He claims that nationalism is a modular concept deployable through ideological and technological avenues. All communities, Anderson notes, are imagined; therefore, projects like those of Cadigan’s characters, centered on restoring an amorphous abstraction of the sovereign state through racially-material means, seem disingenuous and doomed to disappointment.

Cadigan moves around this problem through motivational factors. She retreats from strict (racially-driven) materialism to the imaginative tact that places constitution of the nation in the imaginations of the citizens. Yuki’s noble plan to resurrect Japan relies on one of Anderson’s core claims that intentionality inscribes nationality. He writes: “Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined” (6). Unlike Joy Flower, who wishes to gain access to Old Japan information in order to create more “authentic” and effectively-altered “Japanese” male

prostitutes, or Ash, whose exploitative designs have been covered, Yuki desires entry into Old Japan for restorative purposes. She is not utilizing Japanese nationalism or ethnicity to participate in vile market economics, but is trying to patch together her fractured identity through the galvanizing forces of nation. Nonetheless, Cadigan's philosophy that the body impacts nationality suffers from an essentialism that seems difficult to circumvent. Is a hybrid individual foreclosed from entrance into online cultural archives like Old Japan? Is ontology hypostatized at a genetic level, such that one can never move beyond ethnicity? Is bolstering of the nation-state a task only for one ethnically-specific citizen? Such questions are fissures in Cadigan's subject emancipation theories, but they do not throw out entirely the important statements made about the relevancy of embodiment for the information-age consumer.

Cadigan closes *Tea from an Empty Cup* with a scene that is both viscerally base and ceremonially elegant. Yuki awakens from her difficult journey in AR and discovery of Ash's treachery to a sparse room. She had passed out, exhausted, after declaring that "Japan lives!" but now finds herself rejuvenated (251). Yuki is presented with a cup of green tea that smells strongly. The taste grows more potent as she drinks. Part of an ancient Japanese custom, Yuki is participating in *Bunraku* (218). Murphy tells us that this ceremony is a mythologized "rebirth" that promises a transformation of the subject: "The myth of a new Old Japan comes full circle in this bunraku . . . [a]s the newly enlightened . . . Yuki banishes her culture-less Susanowo [or, exiled Sea god] personality, divorcing herself from her previous life as the impetuous and shallow . . . person trapped by the superficial eye-candy of AR" (154, bracketed additions mine). While most certainly recognizable as a return of Japanese nationhood within Yuki, Cadigan also drives home

post-cyberpunk's involvement of corporeality within revisionist ceremonies. Yuki's olfactory senses are piqued and she is aware of the effects the Bunraku ritual has on her body and mind. For even a brief moment, Yuki considers her self holistically, perhaps as a totalized existence.

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<sup>1</sup> In Pat Cadigan. *Tea from an Empty Cup*. (New York: Tor, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> In Shaviro, Steven *Connected, or what it means to live in the network society*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> In Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> In Hansen, Mark B.N. *New Philosophy for New Media*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> In "Exchange with Pat Cadigan: Queen of Cyberpunk." 3 Nov. 1998. Media-in-Transition. 28 February 2005. <[http://mediaintransition.mit.edu/science\\_fiction/transcripts/cadigan\\_index.html](http://mediaintransition.mit.edu/science_fiction/transcripts/cadigan_index.html)>

<sup>6</sup> In Graham J. Murphy. "Imaginable Futures: *Tea from an Empty Cup* and the Notion of Nation" *Extrapolation*, Summer 2004 v45 i2: p145 (17).

<sup>7</sup> In Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. (New York: Verso, 1991).

## Chapter 4

The “flesh-ghost in Market Street”:  
Bodies without Organs in *All Tomorrow's Parties*

And what costume shall the poor girl wear  
To all tomorrow's parties  
For Thursday's child is Sunday's clown  
For whom none will go mourning  
-The Velvet Underground, “All Tomorrow's Parties”

William Gibson's revision of his own theory on bodily transcendence is perhaps the most substantive evidence of the transition of cyberpunk literature into a post-cyberpunk mode. Gibson established the tropes of early cyberpunk in *Neuromancer* (1984) and molded the themes that the genre would come to be known by. As was discussed in chapter one, Gibson characterized the body as a flesh “prison” or “meat” in his early work, and in so doing created a philosophy which subordinated a decadent corporeality to the informational network of cyberspace. The task of early cyberpunk, following in Gibson's footsteps, was to conceptualize an apotheosis of the mind into digitization (or pure information). Under the aegis of escape from embodied imprisonment, cyberpunk committed to a praxis of disembodiment. Gibsonian cyberpunk maintained until very recently the philosophy that control over identity and data patterns could only occur for humans within cyberspace; that is, until Gibson rethought the importance of materiality with his novel *All Tomorrow's Parties* (1999).<sup>1</sup>

Gibson takes the title of his text from the Velvet Underground dirge for the fleeting neo-Epicurean days of psychedelic drug use and avant garde escapist art. The Velvet's song appeared on their Andy Warhol-produced debut studio album. Gibson draws on the song's themes of terminal partying, progressive artistic and social

movements' inevitable reckoning with cooption and eventual disdain by 'hip' circles. The allusion is perfectly fitting when we consider *All Tomorrow's Parties (ATP)* as a revision of Gibson's foundational cyberpunk ideas. First, the isolationism and de-regulated autonomy prescribed for cyberspace, cited in the opening chapter, has proven overly idealistic and been transfigured by pragmatism. Like the costumed partygoer of the song who is a vogue participant one day and the target of ridicule the next, the literary conception of a nascent cyberspace in cyberpunk fiction has undergone a maturity from optimism into replication of the status quo. *ATP* is set shortly after the millennium transition, and the web that Gibson knows looks drastically like the capitalist corporate culture it once sought to escape. Secondly, the lament (or mourning) for idealized cyberspace's death is absent. The apathy over cyberspace's (and by extension cyberpunk's) descent into banality is eerily paralleled by the lack of feeling over the counter-cultural figure's downfall into laughing stock that the Velvets sing of. Gibson has grounded cyberpunk within the teleological pattern that the Velvet Underground has established for subversive movements in the twentieth century: the progressive parties of today will not last and will not be missed tomorrow.

While some critics and authors would argue that the cyberpunk movement is bound for a telos of insignificance, Gibson seems to be making every effort to retool the philosophies of the genre in order to maintain its relevance. In the particular context of Gibson's novel, the cyberpunk ontology of embodiment can be seen to potentially resist increasingly virtual corporate and capitalist systems. *ATP* marks two significant shifts away from the bodily transcendent philosophy formed in *Neuromancer* and in the texts of cyberpunk authors that immediately followed. First, Gibson reverses the trope of the

cyberpunk leaving his/her body behind and mapping consciousness onto cyberspace.

Instead of diagnosing efforts in postmodernism to transform the physical into the digital,

Gibson examines the ways in which seemingly non-material phenomena in the

contemporary economic market are represented by emergent informational systems

manifesting themselves physically. In other words, digital systems and personas become

real and have a tangible impact on the material space of the global market. Gibson

explores this dialogue between the virtual and the material in the figure of the pop culture

Rei Toei who looms large over the narrative. Toei is a digital entity known as an “idoru,”

a cyberspace celebrity “who didn’t physically exist” (15). At every turn, the Toei system,

embodied in the figure of Rei Toei, seeks a way to materialize into the real world,

progressing from digital to physical. She is “the ultimate expression of entertainment

software” and her “audience knows that she does not walk among them; that she is

media, purely” (55). However, even as a disembodied individual, Rei Toei develops an

*Eros*, a life drive that is the catalyst for her to become human and emerge into

embodiment. Here, Gibson completes the reversal of early cyberpunk assessments of the

relationship between human flesh and human consciousness: existence on the

informational plane is the new prison and only substantiation can spring a person.

Gibson’s exploration of digital systems interacting with physical beings represents a

departure from early cyberpunk ontologies of consciousness and body; he examines

media information and programs (that formerly existed in cyberspace) in order to show

the tremendous impact those coded apparatuses have in our daily, reality-based lives.

Secondly, Gibson creates another reconstructed contact point between digital

information and physicality with the mysterious “syndrome.” The denizens of the San

Francisco/Oakland Bay Area in *ATP* are susceptible to infection by information network, which results in an altered perception and increased vulnerability to corporate messages that invade the mind and body. Carriers of the syndrome somatically register the ebb and flow of information in the world, and their health is simultaneously affected by the capriciousness of media influence. For instance, the novel's protagonist, Laney, is depleted by the syndrome (economically and in terms of his health) and forced to live in the shanty town of cardboard box homes that serve as a quarantined ghetto for the afflicted (1). When his caretaker brings his medical supplies, Laney peers out with the "red wink of a diode. Cables. Faint gleam of the interface" (3). He is sick, but he is unable to disconnect himself from his captor. The syndrome breeds dependence upon information, requiring the individual to use cyberspace interface like the heroin junkie relying on the needle. Cognizant of his addict-like relationship with corporate messaging, Laney coughs and confesses "I'm in deep, now" (3). Yet, even though the syndrome has forced Laney to crave information that ultimately makes him little more than a composite of brand messages, the illness grants Laney an unexpected ability. He is able to perceive informational patterns (their origins, destinations, and intentions) and manipulate them.<sup>2</sup> Laney acts as a sort of moderator, capable of changing the content of information bound for other global citizens. He remains wholly incapable of curing his own condition, but the intoxicant that made him hyper-receptive to messages of control has also made him "part of the node" (6). Observers are fascinated by Laney's abilities: "Yamazaki has seen what Laney can do with data, and what data can do to Laney" (6).

Laney is fragmented, ill, and outcast from society. He is precisely the kind of *schizophrenic* figure that Deleuze and Guattari, in *Anti-Oedipus*, claim capitalist social



conditions produce. Socially unintelligible because of disunity in the psyche, the schizophrenic is not a purely biological illness but a psychic condition that deterritorialized the subject rendering it incapable of codifying its place in the system. Deleuze and Guattari use schizophrenia to diagnosis of the social phenomenon of alienation and marginalization in late capitalism, and refer to the individual victim as the *body without organs* (9).<sup>3</sup> The body without organs (bwo) does not denote a body missing corporeal organs, but a body that is not organized, controlled, and disciplined by market conditions. Laney must also be considered as a body without organs even though the informational syndrome determines his health. This is because the market organization and control of Laney is incomplete; he reconstructs information waves in the ether of the world market before the system itself can contact other users. He is not fettered and controlled as prisoner stripped of social agency, but operates on the margins of society as schizophrenic and disordered. Hence, Gibson utilizes the radical possibility of the schizo/bwo figure in the fashion that Deleuze and Guattari envision when they claim: “The schizophrenic deliberately seeks out the very limit of capitalism: he is its inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel” (35). According to Deleuze and Guattari, capitalism ‘naturally’ creates peripheral figures, or, those not easily integrated into the normative consumptive/productive model of labor. For reasons of mental instability, social unintelligibility, or civil disobedience, the schizophrenic figure does not possess the coherence necessary to be monitored and inscribed by the capitalist system that created him/her. Laney’s disunity achieves its emancipatory potential when he redeploys the veritable schizophrenia that information flow infects him with, using it to interrupt the capitalist networks of consumer

surveillance. Laney sees “some kind of state change, some global shift in the nature of his perception” and immerses himself in the network stream to help shape the new order (13).

Through the themes of materialized data and subversive schizophrenia, Gibson makes his contribution to the new episteme of post-cyberpunk. He moves the manipulation of data flow out of cyberspace and into reality, positing that digital markets can be altered/disrupted by the bodies that consume them (Laney) and are produced by them (Rei Toei).

### **Capitalist Information Market**

In *ATP*, capitalism creates an incessant drive for media consumption. The medical researcher Yamazaki looks out upon the city and sees not the urban warrens that create community, but the “sign and signifier” of “the unending ritual of commerce, of desire. Vast faces fill the screens, icons of beauty at once terrible and banal” (6). The face of humanity is for the novel an iconic media presence, a harbinger of a terrible desire to be inundated with information. The (literal and figurative) body politic is information that takes on a human form. The floating cameras that survey everything, recording human activity and uploading their findings into cyberspace are referred to as “disembodied eye[s]” (35). Signs of informational data that has lumbered into real existence, broken free from cyberspace, are everywhere in the text, such as Laney’s perception that network information is spatially very near him (106) or Harwood’s attempt to “hack reality” (209). Even the urban organization of the “net people” resembles “a big communal

website” (47). Gibson crafts a dystopic sculpture of pervasive information-driven economics. The market that thrives on intangible, distilled media products imbeds itself deeply in the social order, so much so that the human gaze upon the world can only discern matter in terms of cyberspace mimicry. The web comes alive as a person and monitors us as a warden.

Never is the power of the information industry more palpable than in the novel’s discussion concerning the color of computers in chapter 26. The visual artist, Chevette, asks a hardware dealer why all computers are aesthetically the same. He responds that the beige coloring “was to help people in the workplace be more comfortable with radically new technologies that would eventually result in the mutation or extinction of the workplace” (111). According to this theory, by eliminating consumer choice the computer industry creates homogeneity and can effectively control individual use of the machines. When consumers become comfortable with computers, the workplace is transformed and modes of production move away from physical goods, instead constructing intangible ones. Thus, the market for informational products responds to the increased availability, and the informational networks that host these products achieves greater importance in our economic lives. While this is a much condensed version of the economic evolution of the computer industry that Gibson cites, it is a fair account of the actual history.

The homogeneity capitalism creates under the aegis of informational superiority is quite potent in destroying subcultural resistance. The bohemia enclaves of progressive art, communal living, and counter-cultural/economic organizations in *ATP* have been stripped of the resistant distance from dominant culture thanks to the continual

surveillance of information networks. The disembodied eyes that report on daily city life (like some reality TV show run amok) have “encouraged walk-on tourism” in the bohemian sectors (174). Gibson writes that the interest sparked by constant media barrage is “a crucial aspect of normalization” (174). As the voyeurism and tourism become more penetrating in the text, “the mechanisms of recommodification [become] quicker, more rapacious” (174). The information industry packages counter-cultural practices and ideas as commodities and the exploited bohemians face the difficult task of turning away the media eye in order to retain a degree of agency. Chevette and her documentary filmmaker friend, Tessa, decide to “document the [bohemia] life before it’s theme-parked” (67). Gibson’s scenario suggests that as delimited information exchange becomes more thorough, it can also become so pervasive that its pejorative effects creep beyond the bounds of cyberspace and into reality.

### **Rei Toei: Emergent System**

Gibson takes great pleasure in playing with the postmodern notions of bricolage, the overlap of artistic boundaries, using the Baudrillardian simulacra culture to show how the unreal, or digital reproductions, penetrate real social spaces, dissolving the clear distinctions between the authentic and inauthentic. When Chevette is told that the cyberspace celebrity Rei Toei “doesn’t exist,” the explanation for Toei’s non-existence is that “[t]here’s no live girl there at all. She’s code. Software” (69). Toei is “[h]undred percent unreal” because she doesn’t have a physicality. The bedrock early cyberpunk philosophic stance claimed that even non-physical, digital presence was “real” if it could

be engaged in cyberspace. *ATP* revises this stance by judging entities based upon their physical existence, or the possibility of achieving materiality.

Rei Toei falls into the category of an informational being with the *potential* to be material. In fact, Laney's quest in the novel is to ensure that Rei Toei is able to transcend the digital web space and step foot into reality. Laney observes the nodal points, or points of informational genesis and propulsion, where Toei begins to become physical (55, 163-64). Laney helps construct a new kind of media projector that allows digital images to be made tangible. Through use of the projector, Toei "simply continued to emerge, to be, to be *more*. More present" (164). Toei's emergence is not simply Laney's quixotic fantasy, but a suppressed desire of the populace to instantiate media icons. She is "a love object sprung from an approximation of the global mass unconscious" (164).

Laney succeeds in ushering Rei Toei into reality, facilitating her embodiment at the cathedrals of corporate consumerism- the Lucky Dragon convenient store chain. After hacking the information system, Laney hijacks the nodal points of Lucky Dragon commercials and uploads the emergent Rei Toei program into the mainframe of the chain store. Simultaneously, all over the globe, consumers see Toei "on every last screen, walking out of every Lucky Dragon" (269). The nanofax machines of the Lucky Dragon "slides up and out crawls, unfolds sort of, this butt-naked girl, black hair, maybe Chinese, Japanese" (268). Laney has given the information life. He examines the media projector that ferried Toei from cyberspace into actual space and decides the machine "no longer contains her" nor do virtual limits (275). She is a socially intelligible being, "as much history, no more, no less than the crude yet wistfully dainty vases pounded out of shell casings in some French trench" (275-6).

## Laney at the Center of Change

Laney is motivated to assist Rei Toei's articulation in reality, in part, because he is sympathetic to her existential crisis. Toei is sullen and incomplete in digital form. Without physical existence, her identity is partial, and "[s]he doesn't know herself" (250). She even attempted a marriage to the human pop singer, Rez, as a means of fulfilling her physical wishes, though the coupling doesn't work (55). There is a vacancy in Toei's subjectivity that parallels Laney's own void. The information syndrome that ostracizes him from society and relegates him to the quarantine cardboard city creates a gaping wound in his psyche: "That hole at the core of Laney's being, that underlying absence, he begins to suspect, is not so much an absence in the self as *of the self*" (71). Laney's identity is disturbed because he lacks the controlling apparatus for his subjectivity. He is the quintessential postmodern subject, incapable of pinpointing his place in the world market and incapable of affecting agency. He sees himself as "a Laney-colored smear, meaningless without context. A microscopic cog in some catastrophic plan. But positioned, he senses, centrally" (72). The syndrome that commodifies his humanity and reduces him to informational data that is quantifiable in the marketplace has actually shown him the fissures in the system. His excised humanity thrusts him to both the margins of society and directly to the center, where he sees firsthand the machinations of the media industry.

From his place at the center of data patterns, Laney sees that "everything is changing" and he is capable of perceiving this "change emerging from vast flows of data"

(56). The change that Laney sees in the system of commercialism is the potential to redirect information flow to amend damaged embodied subjectivity. Since “nothing is lost within the system,” an individual capable of seeing the lines and boundaries of the system is able to enact some control over it. Laney lectures a fellow syndrome patient on the subversive possibilities for users near the locus of change (136). He claims that physicality and geography can be manipulated by data. Even history, a principle deemed dead by postmodern critics, can be revitalized: “History was plastic, was a matter of interpretation. The digital had not so much changed that as made it too obvious to ignore. History was stored data, subject to manipulation and interpretation” (165). In a practical sense, what Laney wants to do is change the informational messages that construct an objectified and disenfranchising positionality for human beings in the market place. Laney wishes to alter the “*shape* of every narrative, every version” of post-humanity in order to restore individuality.

The market governance that infects individuals, declares them socially dead, and reduces them to non-entities is exemplary of what Gibson calls the *interstitial* condition (33). Meaning literally “between things,” the interstitial human, like Laney, is afforded neither autonomy/choice nor recognition as a social being. These subjects exist between product and consumer, the recipient of informational goods and the goods themselves. They are fleshly beings graphitied with information. At a poignant moment, Laney characterizes himself as a “Flesh-ghost in Market Street” (136). Gibson’s metaphor works brilliantly as representation of the condemned and terminal, yet economically consumable network user. Laney’s ontology is residual yet functional in the capitalist exchange. However, Gibson provides his character with a way out of his commodified

role: rearticulate the invasive information flows that you are a part of. In effect, Laney is the schizo figure whose body without organs can threaten the dominant structure.

In their survey of postmodern theory, Steve Best and Douglas Kellner explain the subversive capacity of Deleuze and Guattari's schizophrenic. They write: "For Deleuze and Guattari, the paradigm of the revolutionary is not the disciplined party man, but the schizo-subject, the one who resists the capitalist axiomatic unscrambles the social codes, and breaks through the walls of reterritorialization into the realm of flows, intensities, and becoming, thereby threatening the whole capitalist order" (91-2).<sup>4</sup> Laney performs the subversive rituals precisely as they are described. He decodes the informational patterns of corporate and media culture to perceive the immanent change. He aids Rei Toei's becoming physical. Most importantly, he shakes free of the passivity the market conditions in people.

Gibson titles the chapter in which Laney becomes fully aware of his new subjectivity "Panopticon." The invocation of Foucault's theory on surveillance power dynamics and discipline begins the paradigm shift Laney authors. The chapter begins such: "Laney's progress through all the data in the world (or that data's progress through him) has long since become what he is, rather than something he merely does" (163). Laney himself emerges as controller of information, a filter through which data passes and mutates. As opposed to being confined and regulated by data, clasped in an informational straightjacket, Laney becomes ephemeral and redirects the data outward into the network once it is stripped of its commodifying sub-routines. Laney enacts his agency on productive forces as a body without organs. He refuses to be organized and patrolled by information markets. Deleuze and Guattari note that in this process of



peripheral participation in capitalism, “the body without organs now falls back on (*se rabat sur*) desiring production, attracts it, and appropriates it for its own” (11). Laney’s schizophrenic syndrome and mutable physical/informational subjectivity conjoin in what Deleuze and Guattari see as “the two aspects of [capitalist] *process*.” Here, “the metaphysical process that puts us in contact with the ‘demoniacal’ element in nature or within the heart of the earth, and the historical process of social production that restores the autonomy of desiring-machines in relation to the deterritorialized social machine. Schizophrenia is desiring-production as the limit of social production” (35).

Additionally, Laney is at the helm of a new ontology of embodied human subjectivity. By perpetrating the return of the digital entity into embodiment, he “bring[s] forth some sort of new reality” (163). The philosophy of being changes course to consider digital to physical progression as evidence of post-humanity. Even more progressive is Laney’s confrontation of the panoptic information network. Though he accepts the Foucauldian postulation that one cannot step completely outside of ideology, Laney (and ostensibly Gibson) believes that reclamation is a possible tactic for subversive gains. Once immersed in the information flow and capable of controlling its impact on reality from the nodal points, Laney assumes a subjectivity that subsumes the paradigmatic power structure. “It is as though he becomes a single retina, distributed evenly across the inner surface of a sphere. Unblinking, he stares, globally, into that eye” (167). Laney stares back at the Panopticon, now an edifice of surveillance, control, and power himself. Gibson posits the argument that the digital street is not one way; though consumers are watched by informational mechanisms, the gaze can be reversed by the individual, and humans can monitor the positive and negative effects information carries.

This is the semi-autonomy from economy and society that post-cyberpunk has borrowed from its cyberpunk antecedent and reformed for embodied use.

### **Refamiliarizing the Body**

Gibson's insistence upon embodiment in *ATP* has an accompanying restored relationship between cyberpunks and the flesh. Throughout the novel, characters seem to be refamiliarizing themselves with their bodies. After a grueling night of pattern recognition, Laney attends to personal hygiene. "Laney tastes blood. It is a long time since he has brushed his teeth, and they feel artificial and ill-fitting, a though in his absence they have been replaced with a stranger's" (222). We get the sense that Laney has been estranged by corporeality, but the process of embodying information flows has generated a new awareness of his flesh. Earlier, when confronting the diabolical corporate architect of subliminal product messaging, Laney becomes "suddenly and terribly aware of his physical being, the condition of his body" (178). The proposition of an additional disenfranchising informational strand prompts Laney's anxieties over bodily harm. It is impossible for the subject (in this post-cyberpunk context) to forget the maledictions bound for the flesh.

Gibson revises the simulacra production of information that erodes corporeal importance and urges individuals towards digitized post-humanity. Even the most successful producers of ephemeral information are suspect to the possibility of a physical, embodied entity emerging from under their wings. At the close of the novel, a traveler mulls those "whose mills grind increasingly fine, toward some unimaginable omega-

point of pure information, some prodigy perpetually on the brink of arrival” (273). The threat of data instantiated and arrived is perpetual. This is the philosophical break between Gibson’s cyberpunk and his post-cyberpunk periods: humans are no longer always on the verge of retreating into digitality, we are always on the verge of becoming embodied in new ways.

The social unintelligibility of Laney as a Deleuzian and Guattarian body without organs enables him to partially step outside of the hypnotic information flow that has entranced postmodern subjects. He is capable of articulating his own relationship to capitalist “nodal points,” utilizing the revolutionary potential of the schizophrenic as the human immune to rigid ordering and control. Laney is interstitial in his liminality, but his semi-autonomy is secured through his meddling in the media schema, orchestrating Rei Toei’s emergence as a posthuman entity (165). Gibson represents Laney’s seizure of productive capability as agency. He acts as an artificer of posthuman life by producing from within the informational corporate media system a being capable of operating independently of it.

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<sup>1</sup> In William Gibson. *All Tomorrow’s Parties* (New York: Ace Fiction, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Laney’s sensitivity to information flow (and Gibson’s most recent novel, *Pattern Recognition*) echoes Alfred Bester’s short story “The Pi Man,” in which a semi-coherent man claims to be able to see the system patterns of the world and restore balance or equilibrium when needed.

<sup>3</sup> In Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

<sup>4</sup> In Steven Best and Douglas Kellner. *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991).

## Conclusion

### The Body is a Ship and I am Captain: Subjects Emerging Through Information Waves

*Fuck cyberpunk. That was the language of Nerdy interface, not fusion. A prosthetic limb is the driftwood of the expanded body . . . It is all the same synthetic flesh . . .*

*-Rob Hardin, "Technophilia's Last Wave"<sup>1</sup>*

If cyberpunk is dead, or at the very least dying, and post-cyberpunk is revealing itself to be the sub-cultural successor, then what do the revised ontological positions of the genre say about our current state? What immediate impact do the existential truths of posthumanist subjectivity have for our contemporary, daily lives?

Throughout this project I have been arguing for the reformist potential that I see, and that post-cyberpunk authors see, in the mutable subject. The individual who is able to revise the signposts of subjectivity, mind and body, in conjunction, is capable of an agency not thought possible in postmodernism. Unlike the Enlightenment conception of self-mastery that achieved determinism and knowledge through domination of nature, the posthumanist artificer additionally disenchants the information network that held human autonomy in its grasp. As we have seen, the body in the late capital marketplace is seldom considered the domain of the self, but rather a canvas on which economic and informational messaging can be scrawled. This bleak assessment does not allow for self-reliance and does not see the body as a mechanism in connection with the individual. However, post-cyberpunk theorizes the individual in control of his/her flesh, and investigates how one might use that control to dictate the information that purportedly alienates us from our corporeality. Since information brands the body, and information is made efficacious by the body, the artificer's manipulation of the fleshly mediating device of information thus partly changes the meaning of network information itself.

In his book *Our Posthuman Future*, Francis Fukuyama decrees that state control is needed to regulate advances in biotechnology that threaten our spiritual and physical existence.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, the rise of nanotechnology, microscopic informational and cybernetic devices implanted in the body, signals that posthuman reality is on the precipice. Fukuyama believes that having facilitated such thorough and (potentially) deterministic reconfiguration of the human body, science offers great promise and great danger. He claims that “science and technology, from which the modern world springs, themselves represent our civilization’s key vulnerabilities” (xii). Fukuyama sees nanotechnology moving us collectively into “a ‘posthuman’ stage of history” that will alter our humanity beyond all recognition (7). While Fukuyama’s humanist concerns are understandable, I believe he underestimates the philosophical merit of nanotechnology’s emancipatory potential. If biotechnology has a tacit potential for abuse that would rupture notions of humanness, is it not possible to also deploy that same technology for radical purposes of individuality?

The humanity of K.W. Jeter’s cutthroat information market discussed in chapter one could certainly be an existence one would seek to alter. If you recall, Jeter’s *Noir* portrays people in a late capitalist society who actively seek out exploitation and abuse at the hands of corporations in order to cling to a mystical and commodified sense of consumer purpose. Transcendence is sold through the purchase of goods that, in a not so veiled manner, condition the individual to be more receptive to product messages. Jeter describes this phenomenon as naturalized rape amongst customers who are always looking to “get topped, the harder and bloodier, the better” (315). McNihil uses biotechnology to alter his vision (and olfactory senses) as a means of inoculating himself

against the pervasiveness of messaging. Deliberately engaging in the reworking of humanness for personal aesthetic purposes, McNihil perpetrates exactly the sort of self-determined medical manipulation that Fukuyama sees as an abuse of nanotechnology. However, McNihil's use of cybernetics to fortify his existence against disenfranchising elements speaks to the potential radicalism and practicality of non-sanctioned, or "street", corporeal reconfiguration and the pertinence of post-cyberpunk meditations on protean subjectivity.

Efforts by Richard K. Morgan, Pat Cadigan, and William Gibson (in his recent works) to animate embodied subjects in their fiction reflect not only changing conditions in information technology, but speak to the recent discoveries in cognitive science and theory. Andy Clark has been instrumental in placing new philosophical and synaptic understandings of subjectivity into dialogue with one another. Clark recognizes that any new ground broken in the workings of human mental processes must take into account accompanying physical and social truths. In his study of cognitive science, *Mindware* (2001), Clark disputes existence of a "core agent" residing in consciousness that could be distilled and retained in *unchanged* form, even if the body is jeopardized. He notes this "core agent" is vulnerable to shifts in the internal and external "support systems" that surround it (158).<sup>3</sup> Any discussion of cognition must spin outward to reconcile with perceptive mechanisms (memories) and physicality (the body), exploring cognition as an embodied process that ultimately makes a statement about subjectivity. In this regard, Clark supports post-cyberpunk's fascination with linking the mind to the body. Also, Clark's system of what he calls *connectionism* (of consciousness to corporeality and of individual to information network) concisely applies the ontological theories of post-

cyberpunk to the discussions of cognitive existence that shape our beliefs in humanity and our humanness.

Reintroducing the human body into a cold and alienating postmodern urbanity is part of post-cyberpunk's social agenda. Confronting the decadent city with the flesh (rather than digitization) gives the individual a new site to examine identity within dominant structures. The swell of the city no longer spurs on a retreat to the computer, but is met with emboldened approach by the street walker. This contrast of the vulnerable body to the monolithic city space is not unique to post-cyberpunk. The photographer Spencer Tunick has devoted much of his career to confrontations of the flesh and urban stone/steel. Tunick's installation art of naked people lying in a prostrate sea at the heart of the world's metropolises (Moscow, Sydney, New York) poses provocative questions about the significance of the human body and the juxtaposition of intimate personal and public spheres. In relation to post-cyberpunk, Tunick uses corporeality as a means of reclaiming the human capacity to transform postmodern space. His work exemplifies the resonance of post-cyberpunk issues within the contemporary art community. Methodologies of articulating subjectivity may differ in the aforementioned disciplines; yet a rebellious capacity seems innate in each scientific and artistic outlet that boldly engages the problem of how to re/place the self in the world order.

By constructing identity, the posthumanist subject denounces the social institutions that claim jurisdiction and monopoly over network citizenship. Instead, the body is a workshop for human identity, where the subject is proprietor. In effect, post-cyberpunk facilitates a restoration of the revolutionary claims of modernization. Through the functions of technology that allow for computer/organic interface, and subsequent

embrace of the posthuman condition as one with positivistic potential, human beings become both the subjects and objects of modernization. Marshall Berman believes that modernization's reduction of humanity to object of progress and the simultaneous call into subjectivity through the progress speaks of the emancipatory possibility of concomitant human/technological procession. The dual registers of object and subject "give them [men and women] the power to change the world that is changing them, to make their way through the maelstrom and make it their own" (16).<sup>4</sup>

Simple navigation of the world is too often given credence in postmodern criticism as acceptable participation for humans. The network power structures are internalized as unassailable, and individuals are conceived of as the passive recipients and reflectors of that network information. Autonomy is dead in postmodernity, long live market forces. That defeatism is unacceptable in the modernization scope of agency conceived of by Berman, and it is certainly a heretic philosophy for the posthumanists in recent cyberpunk. Berman calls for ownership in the world and the capacity for change—two concepts postmodernity seems at best allergic to and at worst foreclosed from. However, in imagining a philosophy that encourages the individual to dictate the embodiment of network information, post-cyberpunk begins to fulfill Berman's mandate that men and women assume ownership of the world that manipulates their identities and morphs their existence.

The clandestine lure of cybernetics for the posthumanist is not a quest for ballast in a frantic, homogenous market. Cybernetics offer mutability of the self, a retort to evolving brand messages that cling to the body. If any sort of reclamation of power is to take place, it must start on an individual level; it must start with the body. Post-



cyberpunk's true achievement is the articulation of a self-built ontology, one that recognizes the human body as a signifier of subjectivity that might be transformed again and again, always in protest of capitalist inscription and in declaration of autonomy.

Fears over the death blow to aesthetics at the digital hands of media technology and informatics are, in light of recent posthumanist cyberpunk philosophies, narrow-minded. For the twenty-first century peers longingly towards a new manifestation of progressive artistry that hybridizes technological, informational, and corporeal mediums. The messianic figure is a radical artificer. We have arrived in an age where societal convalescence begins with remaking the self.

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<sup>1</sup> In Hardin, Rob. *Distorture*. (Illinois: Fiction Collective Two, 1998) p.141.

<sup>2</sup> In Francis Fukuyama. *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*. (New York: Picador, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> In Andy Clark. *Mindware: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Cognitive Science*. (New York: Oxford UP, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> In Marshall Berman. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. (New York: Penguin, 1982). Berman's thoughts on the simultaneous emergence as subject and object of modernization are explored, in their negative potential, by Claudia Springer. In her book on cybernetic bodies and desire, *Electronic Eros*, Springer writes that "those who adulate technology's penetration of the human body and mind can lose sight of how the attempt to become a technological object leads inevitably to extinction" (7). The extinction of humanity is averted in Berman's schema because the human has some control in the process of modernization by owning the realization of subjectivity, using it as a torch to guide one's path through the modern world. In Claudia Springer. *Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).