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# **The Neon Ferris Wheel: Collective Subjects and Communities in Second Wave Feminist Cyberpunk**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Birkbeck, University of London

I confirm that this thesis represents the original work of the author.

Sasha Rosalind Myerson

30/09/2021

## Abstract

This thesis examines the different subjectivities and communities imagined by second wave feminist cyberpunk. It argues that through feminist cyberpunk can be traced a vision of a queer, multiple and collective subject that is capable of entering into community with a diverse range of human and non-human others. In this sense, subjects and communities in feminist cyberpunk operate in a similar manner to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome. This thesis reads the work of cyberpunk writers outside of the canon, including Janine Ellen Young, Laura Mixon, Amy Thompson and Emma Bull. Like Donna Haraway's cyborg, these authors operate at the intersection of multiple boundaries. Therefore, in order to elucidate the subjects and communities imagined by these texts, feminist cyberpunk is read through the lens of feminist writing on multiplicity (Allucquère Rosanne and Sherry Turkle); resistance and utopian studies (Howard Caygill and Tom Moylan); queer utopian and spatial theory (José Esteban Muñoz and Elizabeth Wilson); and contemporary feminist ecological theory (Astrida Neimanis and Julietta Singh).

The rhizome also informs the methodological approach of the thesis, which builds upon Steven Brown's method of rhizomatic reading. In this practice, the relationship between texts are examined horizontally and at multiple levels. In this sense, this thesis works to decentre the analysis of cyberpunk. Cyberpunk has been followed since its inception by hyperbolic, aggrandised statements of its own importance. Following Samuel Delany's assertion that science fiction works best when it operates from the margins, each chapter of this thesis works to produce an off-centre analysis of feminist cyberpunk, where various debates and discourses are found to be warped and made strange by these literary texts.

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Near my house there is a tree that is growing out of the gutter of a railway viaduct. I think about this tree a lot, and if this thesis is dedicated to anything, it is to that tree.

## Introduction: Locating Cyberpunk

The companion was dead. Alexander stared out of the window at the distant lights of Actor's Carnival, at the hypnotic neon glow of the Ferris wheel's heavy rotation, and contemplated this existential fact. The companion, his eighth to date, was dead.<sup>1</sup>

In Janine Ellen Young's *Cinderblock* (1997), Alexander, one of the novel's protagonists, looks longingly out of a window at a distant slowly rotating Ferris wheel. Raised entirely within one room, Alexander's only human contact comes from the companions sent to him by a mysterious, technocratic organisation known as the Virtuals, who secretly observe him. In these conditions, the carnival's distant Ferris wheel offers a tantalising vision of hope. Alexander begins to doubt if the world outside the window—'the city lights'—'could all be an illusion [...] conspiring to create the buildings, the sounds, even the myriad smells'.<sup>2</sup> But, such a possibility is 'unendurable, unthinkable'.<sup>3</sup> The Ferris wheel comes to symbolise the possibility of a different kind of life; tactile sensations; and connections with others, beyond the steady stream of replaceable companions. *Cinderblock's* distant carnival echoes Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of carnival as a 'world inside out': the heavy rotation of the wheel recapitulates carnival as a 'feast of becoming, change, and renewal', 'hostile to all that was immortalized and completed'.<sup>4</sup> Longing for the carnival becomes a longing for 'a special type of communication [...] permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other

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1 Janine Ellen Young, *Cinderblock* (New York: ROC, 1997), 1.

2 Ibid., 3-4

3 Ibid., 4

4 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.

times'.<sup>5</sup> The carnival, as a distant site of longing, holds the tantalising promise of pleasurable, intimate contact and communication with a diverse range of others, unconstrained by oppressive social norms. To live without such a possibility is, in Young's words, 'unendurable'.

Following this metaphor, this thesis examines the different forms of subjectivity and community that are imagined by second wave feminist cyberpunk in the 1990s. These forms of subjectivity and community lead to other ways of relating to others (human or otherwise), the city and the ecology. Alongside Young's *Cinderblock*, this thesis examines, Elisabeth Vonarburg's *The Silent City* (1988); Laura Mixon's *Glass Houses* (1992) and *Proxies* (1998); Caitlin Sullivan and Kate Bornstein *Nearly Roadkill* (1996); Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994); Emma Bull's *Bone Dance* (1991); Amy Thompson's *Virtual Girl* (1993) and Anne Harris's *Accidental Creatures* (1998). This thesis also works to develop and build upon a method of textual analysis called rhizomatic reading, where intertextual relationships are explored in a fluid, de-centred and lateral fashion. It is via this method that feminist cyberpunk's vision of communal subjectivity is constructed and visualised. This cluster of feminist cyberpunk texts are diverse and heterogeneous, but they all share, to varying degrees, a dissatisfaction with the socio-economic order of the 1990s that informs their present, and this motivates them to imagine beyond it.

I have chosen these specific texts for two interrelated reasons: they are motivated by an engagement with utopianism, and they have a pulp quality in terms of tone and production which is often represented in their story arcs and character development.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, they are indicative of what utopian theorist Ernst Bloch refers to as 'gold-bearing rubble', a term used to describe texts

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5 Ibid.

6 By the term pulp, I am not referring to any specific form of production or publication, but I am gesturing to a more ambiguous and diffuse literary style. I here use the term pulp to signify a literary style that in Lee Server's terms has been 'stigmatized for its lurid unreality'. Pulp can be construed as a kind of low-art, the literature not of 'genteel book-stores but [...] drug stores, cigar stores, and bus stations'. Characterised by its 'wild imaginations', this marginal 'pulp fiction has often closely reflected the society at hand, its hopes and dreams, ideals and prejudices, taboos and sexual fantasies'. See: Lee Server, *Encyclopedia of Pulp Fiction Writers* (New York: Facts on File, 2002), xv.

constitutive of a ‘non-past’ that hold ‘lastingly subversive and utopian contents’.<sup>7</sup> I understand this phrase through the work of Caroline Edwards, which excavates Bloch’s concept in relation to literature. As Edwards states, Bloch is not ‘nostalgically recalling utopian “gilded pasts” whose lost perfection precludes political mobilisation in the here-and-now’.<sup>8</sup> Instead, ‘Bloch argues for an understanding of a non-contemporaneous present whose “lastingly subversive and utopian contents” are contained within a past that *lives on within the present*, which is “non-past” because its utopian ambitions remain unachieved’.<sup>9</sup> Edwards argues that ‘[t]his wealth of the “never wholly become” (non-)past is what Bloch means when he refers to the “gold-bearing rubble” of the past’.<sup>10</sup> Such ‘rubble is aggregated out of “what ha[s] been abandoned” [...] from those cultural formations whose surface contours reveal no trace of avant-garde aesthetic experimentation but, rather, are the products of historical periods whose staid conformity is a far cry from any revolutionary momentum’.<sup>11</sup>

To explain this in reference to my project here, the feminist cyberpunk texts under consideration are products of the 1990s anglophone context, a period of triumphant and hegemonic neoliberalism which could be described as lacking revolutionary momentum. Like the 1990s, the present is an era driven by rapid changes in information technologies. The unrealised technological dreams of the 1990s still haunt a present obsessed with virtual reality and immersive online worlds. In this sense, the 1990s have the eerie aura of a non-contemporaneous present whose dreams have not yet been allowed to properly die, or fully become the past. The texts of this thesis are pulp novels that have, in most cases, fallen out of print. Yet, they function as gold-bearing rubble, or as the silicon laced detritus of the emerging digital-age, in that they carry ‘lastingly subversive and utopian contents’: they are filled with latent and unfilled dreams of a better future that can be

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. by Neville Plaice and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 116.

<sup>8</sup> Caroline Edwards, ‘Uncovering the “Gold-Bearing Rubble”’: Ernst Bloch’s Literary Criticism’, in *Utopianism, Modernism, and Literature in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Alice Reeve-Tucker and Nathan Waddell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 182-203, 184.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

salvaged.<sup>12</sup> Or, to borrow Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's words, their rubble might be considered to contain an 'abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities'.<sup>13</sup> This concept of multiplicity and the context behind Deleuze and Guattari's ideas is explored in detail in chapter two, but it is worth stressing here that, in my reading, the line of flight can be considered an escape trajectory that allows for the path towards utopia to be traced in texts that might otherwise appear dystopian. In this sense, when I refer to utopia in this thesis I am not referring to a specific sub-genre of science fiction texts but to my reading method. Therefore, the gold these texts contain is a line of flight that extends towards and connects to other theoretical concepts, movements and contexts and, in such a process, finds a line of escape out of the past and towards a utopian future.

As a result of this textual criteria, that specifies a pulpy and utopian text, the works of certain writers are excluded that might otherwise fall under the umbrella of feminist cyberpunk. For instance, Wilhelmina Baird's novel *Crashcourse* (1993) is a deeply engaging work of feminist cyberpunk and holds many pulp qualities. However, the world Baird constructs within the novel is characterised by an intense, deep and overreaching sense of paranoia through which it is difficult for a utopian line of flight to escape. Likewise, Raphael Carter's 1997 novel *The Fortunate Fall* is an exemplary queer cyberpunk novel that holds an almost impenetrable paranoia, and the text evidences a refined and mature literary style that elevates it beyond the classification of pulp. Similarly, while Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991) and Octavia Butler's *Parable* series—*Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998)—connect feminist cyberpunk with the feminist utopian science fiction of the 1970s and offer many such lines of flight, these texts are highly developed novels with a depth of nuanced politics. When compared with Baird and Carter's paranoia or Piercy and Butler's sustained utopian politics, the novels I have selected could be criticised as being naive and optimistic in their attitudes towards the technocultural revolution of the

<sup>12</sup> Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 116.

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 9.

late twentieth century. But, their outlandish character and rough imagination lend them an almost parodic and exaggerated quality that make them ideal subject matter for drawing out the gold-bearing rubble of the 1990s and for tracing vivid lines of flight out of the past and into multiplicity of other contexts and futures.

This introduction works to outline what is meant by the terms cyberpunk and feminist cyberpunk. And, by introducing some of the critical perspectives through which cyberpunk has been typically read, it sets up and defines the key terms referred to throughout this thesis. Finally, I then turn to explain in detail both what constitutes a rhizomatic reading and how I use this methodology in relation to feminist cyberpunk, and in the process I introduce some of the key theoretical lenses I rely on in this thesis.

## Identifying Feminist Cyberpunk

Karen Cadora was one of the first critics to identify ‘Feminist Cyberpunk’ as a distinct movement in her 1995 article of the same name. At the start of her article, Cadora summarises Nicola Nixon and Veronica Hollinger’s feminist criticism of cyberpunk when she states that the first wave ‘[c]yberpunks are almost invariably male—hypermasculine ones at that—and, as a rule, they have little time for sexual politics’.<sup>14</sup> However, Cadora did not see cyberpunk as being entirely ‘defunct’.<sup>15</sup> Instead, ‘several women novelists have arrived on the scene, and a flicker of life has reappeared in this otherwise moribund scene’.<sup>16</sup> Cadora was slightly ahead of the curve; this trend would prove to be more total reanimation, or metamorphosis, than flicker of light, as from 1990 to 1999 at least one cyberpunk novel would be published by a woman every year.<sup>17</sup> At the crest of the wave, Cadora identifies three women writers who all published at least one novel in the early 1990s.

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<sup>14</sup> Karen Cadora, ‘Feminist Cyberpunk’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 22.3 (1995), pp. 357-372, 357.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Alongside the texts mentioned in this introduction, we could also cover the years 1990-1999 with Lisa Mason’s *Arachne* (1990) Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It* (1991), S.N Lewitt’s *Cybernetic Jungle*, (1992) Wilhelmina Baird’s *Crashcourse* (1993), Kathleen Ann Goonan’s *Queen City Jazz* (1994), Mason’s *Cyberweb* (1995), Deborah Christian’s *Mainline* (1996), Lisa Smedman’s *The Lucifer Deck* (1997), and Justina Robson’s *Silver Screen* (1999).

Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991), Laura Mixon's *Glass Houses* (1992) and Mary Rosenblum's *Chimera* (1993). In Cadora's words, these writers offer 'something that feminist theory badly needs: fragmented subjects who can, despite their multiple positionings, negotiate and succeed in a high-tech world'.<sup>18</sup> Of the three, Cadigan's name is perhaps the most immediately recognisable and synonymous with feminist cyberpunk. Cadigan's literary output was prolific throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, though more sporadic in the latter half of the decade. Notably, Cadigan was the only woman writer included within Bruce Sterling's *Mirrorshades* (1986), a highly influential anthology of cyberpunk short stories that helped to canonise cyberpunk's first wave. Her work has also been recognised by the science fiction establishment, with both *Synners* and *Fools* (1991) winning the Arthur C. Clarke Award.<sup>19</sup> However, despite, as Carlen Lavigne notes, being frequently dubbed 'the "Queen of Cyberpunk"' by her 'cover blurbs', Cadigan's work, like many of the feminist cyberpunk writers discussed in this thesis, has been temperamentally in and out of print over the last thirty years.<sup>20</sup>

Despite Cadigan's centrality to feminist cyberpunk, her work is not examined within this thesis. While I do not agree with Jenny Wolmark's assertion that 'gender relations are sidestepped by Cadigan', Cadigan's fiction is somewhat of an outlier with regards to the particular cluster of feminist cyberpunk texts I haven chosen to analyse in this thesis.<sup>21</sup> As my opening section on Young's *Cinderblock* suggests, the texts I have selected are situated on feminist cyberpunk's utopian edge. In the words of Tom Moylan, they are 'empowered by a utopian horizon', present in either a way of being or form of community, 'that appears in the text or at least shimmers just beyond its pages'.<sup>22</sup> While community is a theme in Cadigan's work, particularly in *Synners*, the

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18 Ibid.

19 A few other 1990s feminist cyberpunk texts would break through to critical acclaim, Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994) would win the John W. Campbell Award and a Lambda Award for gay and lesbian sf. Raphael Carter, a non-binary writer, would also be nominated for a Campbell with their novel *Fortunate Fall* (1996).

20 Carlen Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women, Feminism and Science Fiction: A Critical Study* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2013), 21.

21 Qtd in Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', 358.

22 Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 196.

texts under consideration here burn more brightly with what Ernst Bloch describes as the ‘appetite’ of the ‘unfulfilled subject’.<sup>23</sup> Feminist critic Laura Chernaik provides a persuasive defence of Cadigan’s *Synners* as a novel that ‘builds up highly complex, or multiplex, characters and plots’, embracing multiple, partial perspectives through its diverse cast of protagonists.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, *Fools* is a kaleidoscopic novel that explores the fragmentation of the self under the pressures of digital technology and the urban environment, and the novel is one the best examples of cyberpunk’s disorientating prose. Cadigan’s contribution to cyberpunk and to literature is still in many ways unrecognised. But, this thesis seeks to avoid placing Cadigan as the centre or origin point of feminist cyberpunk. In part because this has already been done: Lavigne’s study of *Cyberpunk Women* (2013) devotes several pages to Cadigan’s influence on and prefiguration of feminist cyberpunk.<sup>25</sup> Also, more significantly, to put Cadigan at the centre would demonstrate a failure to engage with the consistent themes of her work, which embraces partiality and resists singular perspectives.

Before I outline my approach to feminist cyberpunk, it is first necessary to provide some context for both feminist cyberpunk and the broader cyberpunk movement. To try to define cyberpunk is a very difficult task given the diffuse ambiguity and nebulosity of the term. Cyberpunk is an adjective that can be applied to a wide range of artistic and literary texts including, but not limited to, novels, music, games (both video games and tabletop games), fashion, film (and television), graphic novels, anime, manga, performance art, and visual art. Due to the diversity of what might constitute a cyberpunk text, it is very difficult to produce a definition that would not exclude more than it includes. However, quoting from Norman Spinrad, Scott Bukatman states that, among other things, ‘cyberpunk is “about how [through] our increasingly intimate feedback relationship with the technosphere we are creating [...] and will be [...] altering our definition of

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23 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope: Volume One*, trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 75

24 Laura Chernaik, ‘Pat Cadigan’s ‘Synners’: Refiguring Nature, Science and Technology’, *Feminist Review*, 56 (1997), pp. 61–84, 68.

25 Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women*, 30-38

what it means to be human itself”<sup>26</sup> And, I would largely agree with this statement, but I would seek to modify it slightly and reject its anthropocentrism. From my perspective cyberpunk, as an artistic form, examines the impact of digital information and communication technology, particularly computers and the internet, on not just the figure of the human but on life itself (human or otherwise) at a variety of scales: that is, life at the level of consciousness or subjectivity, the body, society, and at the environmental or ecological scale (with urban ecosystems being a particular fascination of cyberpunk). Furthermore, part of the pleasure of experiencing a cyberpunk text is its use of “fractal dimensions”, in Bukatman’s words.<sup>27</sup> To explain, cyberpunk uses ‘the power of the computer to simulate and magnify, complexity at all levels becomes manifest: “a fractal is a way of seeing infinity”<sup>28</sup> In this manner, cyberpunk is characterised by a rapidly shifting perspective, mediated and represented by computer technology, that overlays all these different scales of life simultaneously. As will be outlined later in this introduction, cyberpunk is often associated with a cultural form known as postmodernism, and cyberpunk media often takes the form of an erratic and peculiar mix of information technology and postmodernism, with a focus on and fascination with the spaces and people that make up the margins of society.

The cyberpunk literature of the 1980s can be categorised as constituting cyberpunk’s first wave, and the literature of the 1990s forms the second wave.<sup>29</sup> First wave writers include William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, John Shirley and Lewis Shiner, all of whom appeared in the *Mirrorshades* anthology. Exactly what cyberpunk is and how it is defined is notoriously elusive. In his preface to *Mirrorshades*, Sterling imbued the term cyberpunk with deliberate ambiguity, arguing that the “‘typical cyberpunk writer’ does not exist’<sup>30</sup> In Sterling’s general definition, cyberpunk is a

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26 Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 234.

27 Ibid., 112

28 Ibid.

29 Lavigne calls the cyberpunk of the 1980s the first wave. Likewise, Anna McFarlane, Graham Murphy, and Lars Schmeink calls this period the ‘first-wave or Movement-era cyberpunk. See, Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women*, 19; Anna McFarlane, Graham J Murphy, and Lars Schmeink, ‘Cyberpunk as Cultural Formation’, in *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, ed. by Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), pp. 1-3, 2.

30 Bruce Sterling, *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), ix

literary movement inspired by the ‘the New Wave’ science fiction of the 1960s, especially J.G. Ballard, an ‘idolised role model to many cyberpunks’.<sup>31</sup> Many of the *Mirrorshades* contributors were American, but Sterling was keen to present cyberpunk as an international movement, reflecting the intensification of globalisation in the 1980s, pointing towards the appearance of cyberpunk fiction in Japan’s ‘*Hayakawa’s SF Magazine*’ and Britain’s ‘innovative SF magazine *Interzone*’.<sup>32</sup> Another recognisable feature of cyberpunk posited by Sterling is its blending, or ‘overlapping worlds’, of ‘the realm of high tech, and the modern pop culture underground’.<sup>33</sup> In the popular imagination, a combination of invasive cyborg-like technology, hackers, electronic music, and seedy neon-drenched cities—popularised by films like *Blade Runner* (1982) and *The Matrix* (1999)—are perhaps cyberpunk’s most enduring visual images. Alongside a fascination with technology and popular culture, Sterling saw a hard-sf sensibility to cyberpunk in its ‘unblinking, almost clinical objectivity’, a ‘coldly objective analysis [...] borrowed from science’.<sup>34</sup> From this, emerges the popular conception that cyberpunk is a cynical dystopian genre, imagining corrupt futures, of worsening inequality, ruled by unaccountable corporate entities. In *Neuromancer* (1985), Gibson projects the worst visions of the neoliberal future onto the page when he describes Chiba, or ‘Night City’, as a ‘a deranged experiment in social Darwinism, designed by a bored researcher who kept one thumb permanently on the fast-forward button’.<sup>35</sup> Interpersonal economic competition structures both movement through the city and interrelations with others: ‘[s]top hustling and you sank without a trace, but move a little too swiftly and you’d break the fragile surface tension of the black market; either way, you were gone’.<sup>36</sup>

Gibson’s *Neuromancer* proved to be one of cyberpunk’s most recognisable and enduring texts. The novel introduced many of the genre’s key motifs including the metaphor of cyberspace as

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31 Ibid., x, xiv

32 Ibid., xiv

33 Ibid., xi

34 Ibid., xiv

35 William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, Voyager, Paperback ed., reprint (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 14.

36 Ibid.

‘[a] consensual hallucination’, or a ‘graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system’.<sup>37</sup> Cyberspace is a system of ‘[u]nthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the non space of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding...’.<sup>38</sup> This metaphor became very influential, entering directly and indirectly into public consciousness. In her 1991 essay ‘Will the Real Body Please Stand Up’, technology and gender theorist Allucquere Rosanne Stone argued that the publication of Gibson’s novel ‘represents the dividing line between the third and fourth epochs [of virtual communities] not because it signalled any technological development, but because it crystallised a new community’.<sup>39</sup> Stone argues that *Neuromancer* became hugely influential on the ‘Silicon Valley’ of the 1980s and ‘provided for them the imaginable public sphere and reconfigured discursive community that established the grounding for the possibility of a new kind of social interaction’.<sup>40</sup> Stone calls *Neuromancer* ‘a massive intertextual presence not only in other literary productions of the 1980s, but in technical publications, conference topics [...] and technological discourses in the large’.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, Sherry Turkle, whose work examines virtual communities from a sociological perspective, called the book ‘a cultural landmark’ that, ‘[i]n the popular imagination’, ‘represented the satisfactions of navigating simulation space’.<sup>42</sup>

More broadly, this wave of cyberpunk was known for attracting hyperbolic statements about its impact on science fiction and the world at large. Sterling’s preface to the *Mirrorshades* collection makes many bold claims about cyberpunk’s radicalism. For Sterling, ‘Cyberpunk work is marked by its visionary intensity. Its writers prize the bizarre, the surreal, the formerly unthinkable. They are willing—eager, even—to take an idea and unflinchingly push it past the limits’.<sup>43</sup> For Sterling,

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37 Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 67.

38 Ibid.

39 Allucquère Rosanne Stone, ‘Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories About Virtual Cultures’, in *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs, and Cyberspace*, ed. by Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 69-98, 80.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (London: Phoenix, 1997), 42.

43 Sterling, *Mirrorshades*, xiv.

much of this new innovation was in response to a perceived rejection of 1970s science fiction. As Sterling writes in his preface to Gibson's *Burning Chrome*, 'SF in the 1970s was confused, self-involved, and stale'.<sup>44</sup> In comparison, Sterling describes Gibson's *Neuromancer* as a novel that helped 'awake the genre from its dogmatic slumbers' and take science fiction from 'its cave into the bright sunlight of the modern zeitgeist'.<sup>45</sup>

However, not all scholars were drawn in by these claims to radicalism. For feminist scholar Nicola Nixon the modern zeitgeist that first wave cyberpunk echoed was not the revolution but Regan era neo-conservatism. Writing in 1992, Nixon argued that 'cyberpunk fiction is, in the end, not radical at all'.<sup>46</sup> All its 'slickness and apparent subversiveness' was, in Nixon's view, style over substance, concealing 'a complicity with '80s conservatism'.<sup>47</sup> For Nixon it is more than coincidence that the era of science fiction most criticised by Sterling, the 1970s, was also a decade known for its feminist science fiction. Nixon alludes to the utopian fictions of Joanna Russ, Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy and Sally Gearhart when she writes that 'the feminists of the '70s exposed gender as a crucial political lacuna in mainstream popular fiction and emphasized the urgency to change gender assumption'.<sup>48</sup> In her reading of Gibson's work, Nixon finds the proto-cyborg 'Jael' of Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), a 'dauntingly powerful' feminist figure, 'effectively transformed into Molly, a "razor-girl" who sells her talents (razor implanted finger-nails) to the highest bidder' in Gibson's *Neuromancer*.<sup>49</sup> Through such rewriting, Gibson's Molly is 'effectively depoliticized and sapped of any revolutionary energy'.<sup>50</sup> Where 'Jael had a political agenda', 'Molly's ambitions'—'to make as to make as much money as possible'—conform much more closely to the

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44 Bruce Sterling, 'Preface', in *Burning Chrome*, by William Gibson (London: Voyager, 1995), pp. 9-13, 9.

45 Ibid.

46 Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?', *Science Fiction Studies*, 19.2 (1992), pp. 219-35, 231

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 219.

49 Ibid., 222

50 Ibid.

neoliberal logics of the 1980s.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, for Nixon, the first wave cyberpunks of the 1980s mark a conservative reaction against feminist science fiction and its revolutionary politics.

In a now famous irony, since the first wave, from the early 1990s onwards, cyberpunk has been declared dead many times. Exactly who first coined the phrase *cyberpunk is dead* is unclear, but Thomas Foster attributes the phrase to Lewis Shiner's 1991 article 'Confessions of an Ex-Cyberpunk'.<sup>52</sup> However, both Cadora and Lavigne attribute the phrase to Neil Easterbrook's 1992 article 'The Arc of Our Destruction'.<sup>53</sup> In his article, which prints the now infamous phrase as its opening line, Easterbrook argues that cyberpunk's radical hype was always overinflated: 'the gap between cyberpunk's self-promotion and its textual performance didn't simply appear' five years after the publication of *Mirrorshades* but was 'apparent even in cursory readings of the fiction'.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, like Gibson's characters who might at any moment sink without trace, Sterling himself never really expected the term cyberpunk to last. In regards to the authors that appear in the *Mirrorshades* collection, Sterling states that '[i]t seems unlikely that any label will hold them for long'.<sup>55</sup> '[A]n increasingly volatile and numerous Eighties generation', Sterling assumed, would soon become bored and fast-forward towards a new literary movement.<sup>56</sup> However, as Neil Easterbrook admitted in 2009, 'both the term and the sub-genre tropes have shown remarkable resilience'.<sup>57</sup>

In their introduction to *Beyond Cyberpunk* (2010), Graham Murphy and Sherryl Vint outline some of cyberpunk's many afterlives in the work of Geoff Ryman, Nalo Hopkinson, and Ian McDonald.<sup>58</sup> More recently, the Hollywood remake of *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) and CD Projekt's

51 Ibid.

52 See Thomas Foster, *The Souls of Cyberfolk: Posthumanism as Vernacular Theory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xiv

53 Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women*, 38 and Cadora 'Feminist Cyberpunk', 357.

54 Neil Easterbrook, 'The Arc of Our Destruction: Reversal and Erasure in Cyberpunk', *Science Fiction Studies*, 19.3, pp. 378–94, 378

55 Sterling, *Mirrorshades*, xv.

56 Ibid.

57 Neil Easterbrook, 'William Gibson', in *Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould, Routledge Key Guides (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), pp. 86-91, 86.

58 See: Graham J. Murphy and Sherryl Vint, 'Introduction: The Sea Change(s) of Cyberpunk', in *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives.*, ed. by Graham J Murphy and Sherryl Vint (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor & Francis, 2010), pp.

2020 video game *Cyberpunk 2077* suggest that cyberpunk continues to find popular appeal. Likewise, *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), a sequel to Ridley Scott's original 1982 film and the TV series *Altered Carbon* (2018-2020), adapted from Richard K. Morgan's 2002 novel, demonstrate a more contemporary desire to re-examine cyberpunk's position in the popular consciousness. Thomas Foster has argued that cyberpunk can no longer be thought of as simply a sub-genre, arguing that 'cyberpunk didn't so much die as experience a sea change into a more generalized cultural formation'.<sup>59</sup> By this, Foster implies that the tropes, motifs and stylistics of cyberpunk have overflowed into more mainstream popular culture and media. In this vein, Foster views cyberpunk as more of 'a historical articulation of textual practices', or cultural mode.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Victoria Blake argues that cyberpunk was 'never really about a specific technology and or a specific moment in time' but was an 'aesthetic position [...] an attitude towards mass culture and pop culture [...] a way of living'.<sup>61</sup> For Foster and Blake, cyberpunk is a cultural attitude, or a means of visualising and quickly drawing the intersections between culture and technology. In this manner, cyberpunk, as a term, describes a cultural form broader than the select work of its early writers and indicates a much broader and defuse cultural mode: a nebulous, shared group of concepts and images that have filtered through broader culture.

'Rumour has it that cyberpunk is dead', Cadora writes in 1995, but [a]pparently [...] not everyone agrees with this diagnosis'.<sup>62</sup> Cyberpunk is widely considered to have a feminist second wave in the 1990s. As Lavigne argues, '[i]t wasn't until after the genre was declared dead, and academic and media attention had moved elsewhere, that women really began writing within its boundaries'.<sup>63</sup> Though '[t]he boundaries of cyberpunk are blurry at best', Lavigne 'treats the feminist wave of cyberpunk and cyberfiction as a second generation to the cyberpunk movement'.<sup>64</sup>

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xi-xvi, xii.

59 Foster, *Souls of Cyberfolk*, xiv.

60 Ibid., xv.

61 Victoria Blake, *Cyberpunk: Stories of Hardware, Software, Wetware, Evolution and Revolution* (Portland, OR: Underland Press, 2013), 10.

62 Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', 357.

63 Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women*, 1.

64 Ibid., 5

Likewise, Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini also identify a “second wave” of cyberpunk’—‘written mainly by women such as Pat Cadigan’—that moved ‘beyond nihilistic anxiety into a new oppositional consciousness’.<sup>65</sup> More recently, Lisa Yaszek has expanded this categorisation arguing for a first wave of feminist cyberpunk between 1980 and 1990 and a subsequent second and third wave from 1990-2005 and 2005 to the present respectively.<sup>66</sup> In addition, Isiah Lavender III and Graham Murphy identify a wave of cyberpunk novels written by black writers in the 1990s which they term ‘Afrociberpunk’, incorporating the work of Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler and Nalo Hopkinson under this term.<sup>67</sup>

Like cyberpunk itself, feminist cyberpunk is a difficult term to define. As Lavigne writes, ‘it is impossible to situate women’s cyberpunk as a single, definitively monolithic discourse’.<sup>68</sup> Roughly, Lavigne considers 1990s feminist cyberpunk as a “range of works [...] defined by the digital age, while also focusing on more “feminine” issues such as gender, motherhood, ecology, religion and community’.<sup>69</sup> Lavigne uses the terms “women’s cyberpunk” and “feminist cyberpunk” [...] interchangeably to indicate a subgenre within a subgenre, a portion of science fiction identifiable both as early cyberpunk’s descendant, and as a series of works created within its own feminist paradigm’.<sup>70</sup> I agree with this to some extent. If cyberpunk is a mode that examines the impact of information technology on life at a variety of scales, then feminist cyberpunk, for the purpose of this thesis, is defined as a (primarily) 1990s literary movement that uses the form and mode of cyberpunk and combines it with an interest in the feminist politics of the 1990s while being simultaneously informed by the legacy of 1970s feminist science fiction. Figures such as Marge

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65 Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, ‘Introduction: Dystopia and Histories’, in *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. by Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), pp. 1-12, 3.

66 Lisa Yaszek, ‘Feminist Cyberpunk’, in *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, ed. by Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), pp. 32-40, 33, 35 and 36.

67 Isiah Lavender III and Graham J. Murphy, ‘Afrofuturism’, in *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, ed. by Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), pp. 353-361, 356.

68 Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women*, 4.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid.

Piercy and Octavia Butler, who wrote across both the 1970s and 1990s, could be viewed as authors whose work connects the two periods.<sup>71</sup> However, while feminist cyberpunk was largely written by women, this was not exclusively the case. At least one exception being the non-binary writer Raphael Carter, author of the aforementioned *Fortunate Fall*.

It is worth recapping here how this wave of feminist cyberpunk has been approached by scholars. While my work is situated in, and builds off, this scholarship, I also aim to move beyond it by placing feminist cyberpunk into a range of different and unfamiliar theoretical contexts. As suggested above, Cadora's article was early in identifying the beginnings of the wave, and identified a common theme among its early texts: the 'fragmented subjects' who navigate a 'high-tech world' from 'multiple positionings'.<sup>72</sup> The multiple subjects of feminist cyberpunk, and their eclectic origins, are analysed in depth in Chapter One of this thesis. Here, I use the work of Sherry Turkle and Allucquère Rosanne Stone to more intimately detail the relationship between multiplicity and digital technology. Cadora also claims that 'women writers' use the cyberpunk mode as a method of 'resisting the conservative politics of their masculinist predecessors'.<sup>73</sup> What forms of resistance feminist cyberpunk can offer is my motivating question in Chapter Two. In this chapter, I work towards a more specific and localised understanding of cyberpunk's resistance, by placing it into dialogue with resistance studies. Also mentioned above is Lavigne's 2013 book on feminist cyberpunk. Lavigne's work constitutes an extremely valuable survey of the topic, and identifies many of its key texts. Without Lavigne's extensive work, identifying and cataloguing these often out of print novels, this thesis would not be possible. Lavigne builds on Cadora by identifying several more consistent themes in feminist cyberpunk: 'ecology, feminism, religion and queer rights'.<sup>74</sup> In part, this thesis builds upon Lavigne's work by offering a more focused and detailed

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71 For example, Marge Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time*, published in 1976, is a classic feminist utopia that contains some proto-cyberpunk elements and is rooted in the feminism of its era. Piercy's later 1991 novel *He, She and It* is explicitly a feminist cyberpunk novel that builds on the themes of her earlier work.

72 Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', 357.

73 Ibid., 357.

74 Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women*, 6.

analysis of a few second wave texts, something not possible in Lavigne's much broader work. However, this thesis also seeks to move beyond Lavigne's work. In particular, while queer and ecological themes, and the interconnections between them, are at the centre of Chapters Four and Five, my exploration of queerness takes a more lateral and horizontal approach, drawing on the work of Foucault, José Esteban Muñoz, Samuel Delany and Sarah Schulman. Likewise, my approach to ecological theory incorporates new insights from Julietta Singh and Astrida Neimanis's provocative blend of posthumanism, queer theory and postcolonial studies.

## Neoliberalism and Postmodernism

Throughout this thesis, many references and allusions are made to neoliberal capitalism, the resurgent and dominant political ideology of the 1980s and 1990s. It is therefore helpful to explain and conceptualise what is meant by this term here. Conventionally, neoliberalism is understood to have intensified as a political force in the early 1980s with the election of Ronald Regan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom.<sup>75</sup> Both figures were deeply socially conservative and emerged from a broader reactionary trend in both countries, specifically targeted against the movements for black, queer and women's rights that had advanced during the 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>76</sup> In the US, Regan and his fellow conservatives advocated for reduced government welfare spending, while simultaneously increasing military budgets and expanding the prison and carceral justice system.<sup>77</sup> Through global financial institutions, particularly the International Monetary Fund and its infamous Structural Adjustment Policies, neoliberal economics began to

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75 For instance, Manfred Steger and Ravi Roy state that the 'rise of neoliberalism in the English-speaking world is most notably associated with US President Ronald Reagan [...] and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, see: Manfred B. Steger and Ravi K. Roy, *Neoliberalism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 21.

76 Gary Dorrien argues that this wider neoconservative movement began as 'a reaction against the antiwar and social movements of the 1960s', see: Gary J. Dorrien, *Economy, Difference, Empire: Social Ethics for Social Justice* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2010), 189.

77 Angela Davis charts the connections between Regan era social policy and the rise of mass incarceration in the United States, see: Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003), 11-13.

spread around the world.<sup>78</sup> Simultaneously, manufacturing jobs in the US declined and the country transitioned towards a service economy as corporations took advantage of neoliberal globalisation to move manufacturing jobs to countries with weaker labour laws and less competitive currencies.<sup>79</sup> This also led to a decline in labour unions and organised labour in the US, driving down wages and exasperating rising inequality.<sup>80</sup>

Barry Gills, writing in the early 2000s, describes the status quo of the 1980s/90s as ‘neoliberal economic globalisation’.<sup>81</sup> This ideological process has, for Gills, several aims: ‘the protection of the interests of capital’ and the ‘expansion’ of these interests across the world; ‘a tendency towards homogenization’ alongside the global spread of ‘market ideology’; the construction of ‘a new tier of transnationalized institutional authority above the state’s’, through multinational corporations and NGOs; and the narrowing of the political sphere to ‘exclude dissident social forces from the arena of state policy-making’, in order to ‘desocialise’ and atomise ‘the subject’.<sup>82</sup> In particular, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 neoliberalism, through the globalisation process, began to spread itself to almost every corner of the world. As part of this process, ‘[t]he democratic gains of the past, and potential gains of the future, are re-interpreted as being “fetters” on the capital accumulation process, which the economy [...] can no longer afford’.<sup>83</sup> By this, Gills refers to, among other things, the erosion of the welfare state by Regan and Thatcher in the 1980s. The immediate, material end result of this is ‘a period characterized by greater social

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78 David Harvey argues that, through such ‘structural adjustment policies imposed by the IMF’, other states around the world were forced to ‘emulate the leading capitalist powers’ in their neoliberal turn, see: David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 184.

79 These processes and the global distribution of supply chains and manufacturing are analysed by Saskia Sassen, see: Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 7-9 and 12-13.

80 As Robert Brenner writes, ‘[a]lmost everywhere, employers attacked unions, in some instances—most notably in the US—profoundly crippling them’, see: Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence: The Advanced Capitalist Economies from Long Boom to Long Downturn, 1945-2005* (London: Verso, 2006), 146.

81 Barry K. Gills, ‘Introduction: Globalisation and the Politics of Resistance’, in *Globalization and the Politics of Resistance*, ed. by Barry K. Gills (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 4.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., 5

polarization between rich and poor, increasing inequality’ and a ‘growing concentration of wealth’ into ever fewer hands.<sup>84</sup>

Both the postmodern and the posthuman are two of the most commonly used perspectives from which cyberpunk is analysed within academia. It is worth laying out both terms here, as they are referred to throughout this thesis. The identification of cyberpunk with postmodernism occurred relatively early within its scholarship, but the posthuman is a later development. Emerging in the second half of the twentieth century, and gaining prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, the term postmodernism has proliferated across academia and wider public discourse to the point of extreme ambiguity. Reflecting on the term in 2001, Elizabeth Wilson describes postmodernism as being ‘more like the idea of the fin de siècle than anything truly rigorous: a seductive name for a mood, a style, a sensibility, a Zeitgeist, and a suggestive set of ideas for the analysis of both mass and experimental aesthetic forms’.<sup>85</sup> Localised to the turn of the century, for Wilson, ‘the best that can be said about Postmodernism’ is that it was ‘expressive of a moment in which we Western intellectuals of goodwill are caught between past Utopian dreams and an uncertain future’.<sup>86</sup> Motivated by turn of the century anxieties surrounding the proliferation of computer technology, the political demise of the USSR, and the globalisation of neoliberalism, postmodernism is variously described as a cultural expression of an economic moment, an urban or architectural form, or an academic methodology.<sup>87</sup> In this sense, postmodernism is an intellectual and cultural response to the political upheavals outlined in the previous section.

In an early study of the concept, Jean-François Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), characterises postmodernism as an attitude towards science and the nature of knowledge, or an

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84 Ibid.

85 Elizabeth Wilson, *The Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women* (London ; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2001), 13.

86 Ibid.

87 Wilson discusses these varying definitions of postmodernism and its political and economic context in *Contradictions of Culture*, see: Ibid., 2-4.

‘incredulity towards metanarratives’.<sup>88</sup> For Lyotard, postmodernism is an academic ‘crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it’.<sup>89</sup> In postmodernism, knowledge is no longer characterised as a teleological narrative advanced forwards by the enlightenment ideal of an intellectual ‘great hero’ pursuing ‘great dangers’ and ‘great voyages’ in pursuit of a ‘great goal’.<sup>90</sup> Instead, ‘[p]ostmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable’.<sup>91</sup> Under the postmodern perspective identified by Lyotard, large scale narratives and generalisations about the world break down in favour of numerable differences and contradictions. The work of Lyotard is not directly drawn upon in this thesis, but his scepticism of metanarratives and focus on difference is part of the background noise surrounding this thesis, which examines similar ideas in the work of Bakhtin, Donna Haraway and Giles Deleuze, as discussed in the next section of this chapter.

While he resisted the label, the work of Jean Baudrillard, particularly *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), also informs understandings of the postmodern. For Baudrillard, late twentieth modernity had become reliant on digital technology and simulation to such an extent that ‘[s]imulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or substance’.<sup>92</sup> In this view, simulation no longer refers to, or models, anything real or substantial, but the simulation itself produces social reality. For Baudrillard, this process of simulation ‘is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal’.<sup>93</sup> For instance, in such a system a map does not represent or reflect an area of land, but instead it is ‘the map that proceeds the territory’; the act of mapping produces the territory, or reality, itself.<sup>94</sup> Such reality producing simulations are referred to as a

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88 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiv.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., xxv

92 Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. by Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

93 Ibid.

94 Ibid.

‘precession of simulacra’.<sup>95</sup> Baudrillard has been central to cyberpunk scholarship. As Rebecca Haar and Anna McFarlane argue, Baudrillard’s work ‘intertextually influences cyberpunk at some of its key moments and even acts as a kind of cyberpunk theory’.<sup>96</sup> While this thesis does use Baudrillard’s concept simulacra in a few places, it also draws upon his work on media emission (in Chapter Two) and the consumer society (Chapter Three).

A different conception of postmodern is offered by Fredric Jameson in his 1991 book *Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Jameson considers postmodernism to be a the cultural expression of late capitalism and the neoliberal economic upheavals of the post-war period, reaching a particular intensity in the 1980s. In Jameson’s words, ‘the economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s, after the wartime shortages of consumer goods and spare parts had been made up, and new products and new technologies (not least those of the media) could be pioneered’.<sup>97</sup> Central to Jameson’s understanding of postmodern culture is ‘the well-nigh universal practice today of what may be called pastiche’.<sup>98</sup> In this mode, a ‘new connotation of “pastness”’ emerges with only a ‘pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces “real” history’.<sup>99</sup> Linda Hutcheon makes a similar argument in *A Theory of Parody* (1985), where she contrasts both pastiche and parody. While parody is a ‘bitextual synthesis’, pastiche is a ‘monotextual form’ that stresses ‘similarity rather than difference’.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, in the pastiche, as an artistic form, a multitude of historical styles and aesthetics clash together until historical periods lose their specificity and collapse together becoming only surface. Jameson’s work is not central to this thesis, as it seeks to take cyberpunk out of such conventional

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95 Ibid.

96 Rebecca Haar and Anna McFarlane, ‘Simulation and Simulacra’, in *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, ed. by Anna McFarlane, Graham J. Murphy, and Lars Schmeink (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), pp. 255-263, 255.

97 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), xx

98 Ibid., 16

99 Ibid., 20

100 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 33.

contexts, but his concepts of fragmentation and social totality are referenced briefly in Chapters Two and Four respectively.

In an endnote to *Postmodernism*, Jameson ‘regret[s] the absence from this book of a chapter on cyberpunk [...] the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself’.<sup>101</sup> It did not take long for someone else to produce one. Both Brian McHale’s 1992 article on the ‘Poetics of Cyberpunk’ and Scott Bukatman’s 1993 book on *Terminal Identity* read cyberpunk as a literary expression of postmodernism.<sup>102</sup> McHale argues that cyberpunk itself is ‘a convenient name for the kind of writing that springs up where the converging trajectories of SF poetics and postmodernist poetics finally cross’.<sup>103</sup> For McHale, cyberpunk is a more materially minded expression of postmodernism, ‘cyberpunk tends to “literalize” or “actualize” what occurs in postmodernist fiction as metaphor’.<sup>104</sup> For example, McHale sees the space-station micro-worlds that proliferate throughout Sterling’s *Schismatrix* as representative of postmodernism’s fragmentation of wholeness and metanarrative. In McHale’s reading, ‘[w]hen Sterling calls these interplanetary spaces “sundog zones,” he alludes to similar multiple-world spaces projected by postmodernist texts’.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, Bukatman sees an affinity between the work of Gibson and Baudrillard in their shared use of ‘hyperbolic language’.<sup>106</sup> This shared language, to Bukatman, ‘constitutes a new mimesis—it is a language of spectacle and simulation, a language designed to be appropriate to its era’.<sup>107</sup> Likewise, Larry McCaffery’s introduction to *Storming the Reality Studio* (1991), a collection of first wave cyberpunk material and its influences, argues that cyberpunk

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101 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 419.

102 Both books do also provide early uses of the term ‘posthuman’, but the concept is specifically confined to their analyses of Serling’s novel *Schismatrix* (1985), and is not considered by them to be an overarching theme of cyberpunk, see: Brian McHale, ‘Elements of a Poetics of Cyberpunk’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 33.3 (1992), 149-175, 159; Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 254.

103 McHale, ‘Elements of a Poetics’, 149.

104 Ibid., 150

105 Ibid., 153

106 Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 11.

107 Ibid.

‘represented a synthesis of SF with postmodern aesthetic tendencies and thematic impulses’.<sup>108</sup>

McCaffery sees cyberpunk as key to understanding the postmodern world, being ‘the most concentrated effort yet by artists to find a suitable means for displaying the powerful and troubling technological logic that underlines the postmodern condition’.<sup>109</sup>

If it is hard to define the postmodern, defining the posthuman offers no easier a task. Gradually, over the last twenty years or so, the figure of the posthuman has moved towards the centre of scholarship on cyberpunk. If, as Michel Foucault argues, the ‘man’ at the centre of humanism ‘is an invention of recent date’, the posthuman is an even more recent figure, and its presence in cyberpunk has been identified somewhat retrospectively.<sup>110</sup> N. Katherine Hayles was an early adopter of the term in her 1993 essay ‘Writing the Posthuman’, and she would later work to crystallise the term in her influential 1999 book *How We Became Posthuman*. Hayles’ conception of posthumanism is wider than cyberpunk, as she traces the term through the postwar scientific discourse on cybernetics, but science fiction remains closely bound to her understanding of the concept. Hayles’ argument, in short, is that embodiment matters. Or, that ‘embodiment makes clear that thought is a much broader cognitive function depending for its specificities on the embodied form enacting it’.<sup>111</sup> By this, Hayles critiques a strain of posthuman thought that conflates both information and consciousness, viewing them as immaterial and without substance, or able to ‘circulate unchanged among different material substrates’.<sup>112</sup> Describing *Neuromancer*, Hayles argues that in Gibson’s novel ‘the pov [point of view] is abstracted into a purely temporal entity with no spatial extension; metaphorized into an interactive space, the datascape is narrativized by the pov’s movement through it’.<sup>113</sup> Through this narrative technique, ‘data’ is ‘harmonised, and

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108 Larry McCaffery, ‘Introduction: The Desert of the Real’, in *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction*, ed. by Larry McCaffery (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 1-16, 11.

109 Ibid., 16

110 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. by anonymous, (London: Routledge, 2007), 422.

111 Nancy Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999), xiv.

112 Ibid., 1

113 Ibid., 39

subjectivity is computerized, allowing them to join in a symbiotic union whose result is narrative'.<sup>114</sup> This line of thought, in Hayles' words, considers information and consciousness to be an 'entity [...] that can flow between carbon-based organic components and silicon-based electronic components to make protein and silicon operate as a Single system'.<sup>115</sup> Hayles challenges these assumptions and considers information or consciousness to be intimately dependent on, and specific to, its 'embodied form'.

Posthumanism gradually became closer to the centre of cyberpunk in the 2000s, with David Bell and Barbara Kennedy collecting together several essays about posthumanism from the late 1990s in their edited collection on *Cybercultures* (2000). Among them, Mark Dery analyses cyberpunk writer John Shirley's claim that the work of performance artist Stelarc is 'the embodiment of cyberpunk's post-human yearnings'.<sup>116</sup> Parallels can be found between 'Stelarc's preoccupation with techno-evolution and the themes of cyborged or genetically engineered body modification' and science fiction, including Sterling's *Schismatrix* and Delany's proto-cyberpunk novel *Nova* (1968).<sup>117</sup> In another development, Foster's book *The Souls of Cyberpunk* (2005) centres around and seeks to define 'cyberpunk's posthumanism'.<sup>118</sup> Foster argues that what distinguishes cyberpunk from earlier forms of science fiction is its insistence 'that physical alterations in "the" human body, such as cyborg prostheses or direct brain-computer interfaces, also transform the supposed "essence" of humanity, "our" minds or souls'.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, Foster sees a unique conception of the posthuman as being an integral feature of cyberpunk.

Also in 2005, Daniel Dinello's *Technophobia!* analysed the representation of posthuman technology in dystopian science fiction. Like Foster, Dinello also saw posthumanism as one of cyberpunk's central themes. For him, cyberpunk was reflective of the dawn of a new posthuman era

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114 Ibid.

115 Ibid., 2.

116 Mark Dery, 'Ritual Mechanics: Cybernetic Body Art', in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. by David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), pp. 577-587, 578.

117 Ibid.

118 Foster, *The Souls of Cyberfolk*, xi.

119 Ibid.

of ubiquitous, autonomous, and intimate technology'.<sup>120</sup> Through its 'frightening vision of artificial intelligence, genetic manipulation, electronic and biological viruses, and brain-computer interface implant', cyberpunk 'dramatized the challenge of posthuman survival in the face of global corporate control'.<sup>121</sup> At the end of the decade, Steven Brown's *Tokyo Cyberpunk* (2010) considered what kinds of posthuman narrative emerged within cyberpunk from a Japanese context. Brown argues that the posthuman is vital to cyberpunk's contemporary relevance. As he writes, 'works of Japanese visual culture dealing with posthumanism offer a defamiliarization of contemporary society (both Japanese and non-Japanese) and its most acute cultural anxieties and sociopolitical problems'.<sup>122</sup>

Rosi Braidotti's widely influential 2013 book *The Posthuman* does not substantially engage with cyberpunk or science fiction, but does draw on Hayles' writing on the posthuman and Donna Haraway's work on animals and cyborgs.<sup>123</sup> In her book, Braidotti examines the usefulness of posthumanism to feminist thought. She roots her conception of the posthuman in a critique of Enlightenment humanism: '[t]he human of humanism is neither an ideal nor an objective statistical average middle ground. It rather spells out a systematized standard of recognisability—of sameness—by which all others can be assessed, regulated and allotted to a designated social location'.<sup>124</sup> For Braidotti, humanism homogenises and flattens difference, and her critique is not dissimilar to the postmodern rejection of metanarrative. Instead, Braidotti argues for a critical posthumanism: a blend of subjectivity that provides an 'ethics for a non-unitary subject' and 'proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human'.<sup>125</sup> While not its central theme, references to posthumanism as a key element of cyberpunk appear in Anna McFarlane,

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120 Daniel Dinello, *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005), 159.

121 Ibid.

122 Steven T. Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk: Posthumanism in Japanese Visual Culture* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 9.

123 Braidotti refers to Hayles' 'powerful intervention on contemporary posthuman bodies' and describes Haraway as 'a pioneer in post-anthropocentric thought', see: Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 101, 71.

124 Ibid., 26.

125 Ibid., 49

Graham Murphy, and Lars Schmeink's collection on *Cyberpunk Culture* (2020). As the editors write in their introduction, cyberpunk's engagement with 'the emergence of the posthuman' is part of its 'continued [...] appeal to theorists as it spread into the mainstream and beyond'.<sup>126</sup>

## Feminism and Difference

Alongside postmodernism and neoliberalism, the feminism of the late twentieth century is also an important context for feminist cyberpunk that is referred to in various places within this thesis. Most relevant to this thesis is a consideration of how various feminist intellectuals grappled with the concept of difference in the feminist movement. This motivating issue is central to many feminist writers of the period and was born out of a frustration with the limitations of a feminist movement centred around the experiences of cisgender, heterosexual white women. The frustration of this period is aptly expressed by black feminist writer bell hooks in her 1984 book *Feminist Theory*. As hooks writes, the 'white women who dominate feminist discourse today rarely question whether or not their perspective on women's reality is true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group'.<sup>127</sup> The key issue that hooks highlights here is a frustration with a feminist movement that constructs the specific lived experiences of 'a select group of college-educated, middle and upper class, married white women' as being universal to all women.<sup>128</sup> In response to this failing, hooks argues that a 'revolutionary ideology can be created only if the experiences of people on the margin who suffer sexist oppression and other forms of group oppression are understood, addressed, and incorporated'.<sup>129</sup> In other words, hooks advocates for a feminist movement that is inclusive of difference and that accounts for differences of experience between women. hooks places emphasis on the need for a 'cultural transformation' that will destroy 'dualism' and eradicate 'systems of domination'.<sup>130</sup> Instead of thinking of feminism as a binary struggle between men and women,

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<sup>126</sup> McFarlane, Murphy, and Schmeink, 'Cyberpunk as Cultural Formation', 2.

<sup>127</sup> bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 1

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 161

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 163

hooks aims to move beyond dualism and towards a discursive explosion of what constitutes the experience of women.

The question of difference is also central to Donna Haraway's seminal essay 'A Cyborg Manifesto' (1984) which uses the figure of the cyborg as a political metaphor, or as a 'fiction and lived experience', to change 'what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century'.<sup>131</sup> Haraway criticises what she terms the 'feminist dream of a common language [...] of [a] perfectly faithful naming of experience' as a totalizing and imperialist' dream.<sup>132</sup> Instead of a feminist movement based around one common conception or definition of what constitutes women's experience, Haraway argues for a 'powerful infidel heteroglossia', a clashing of languages, tongues and dreams, that would encompass a multitude of possible experiences.<sup>133</sup>

Haraway's use of the cyborg as political metaphor was highly influential in the development of cyberfeminism. Broadly speaking, cyberfeminism is a strain of feminist thought that, in Jenny Wolmark's words, expresses a 'simultaneous fascination with, and anxiety about, the rapid changes brought about by the new information and biotechnologies, the development of which seems to occur both haphazardly and without restraint in the global environment of corporate capitalism'.<sup>134</sup> In her introduction to *Cybersexualities*—a 1999 collection of cyberfeminist essays, including writers such as Chela Sandoval, Sadie Plant and Anne Balsamo—Wolmark indicates the importance of Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' to cyberfeminism when she writes that 'many of the essays in this collection are a response, both direct and indirect, to that work'.<sup>135</sup>

Haraway's work is also an influence on the emergence of transfeminism in the 1990s.

Allucquère Rosanne Stone, one of Haraway's PhD students in the 1980s, would go on to publish an

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131 Donna Jeanne Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 149.

132 Ibid., 173

133 Ibid., 181

134 Jenny Wolmark, 'Introduction and Overview', in *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs, and Cyberspace*, ed. by Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 1-10, 1.

135 Ibid., 3

essay titled ‘The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto’ (1992), a formative essay in the development of trans-studies and transfeminism. Articulating difference in relation to trans experience is one of Stone’s key aims in the text. As Stone writes, ‘transsexuals must [...] begin to rearticulate their lives not as a series of erasures in the service of a species of feminism conceived from within a traditional frame, but as a political action begun by reappropriating difference and reclaiming the power of the refigured and reinscribed body’.<sup>136</sup> By this, Stone argues that narratives of trans experience should not censor or compress themselves into any kind of common language regarding women’s experience. Instead, transfeminist politics should seek to reclaim difference and in doing so align itself with a broader feminist politics that embraces difference rather than with a feminism that seeks to homogenise it.

Haraway conceptualises the cyborg as a boundary figure that appears ‘precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed’.<sup>137</sup> By asserting that the cyborg transgresses a human-animal boundary, Haraway also implies that the cyborg sits on the borderline between nature and culture, ‘animal-human (organism) and machine’, and ‘physical and non-physical’.<sup>138</sup> The cyborg’s identity is produced at the boundary, or within the border, of various concepts and discourses. In a similar vein, the production of identity within the border is also a key consideration of feminist writer and poet Gloria Anzaldúa in her influential book *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987). Anzaldúa describes the borderland as a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary’.<sup>139</sup> In this space, ‘[t]he prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los astravesdos* live here: [...] the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, [...] the half dead; in short those who cross over, pass through, or go through the confines of the “normal”’.<sup>140</sup>

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136 Sandy Stone, ‘The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto’, *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, 10.2 (1992), pp. 150–76, 167–168.

137 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 152.

138 *Ibid.*, 152, 153

139 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3.

140 *Ibid.*

Responding to the question of difference, out of this space of the borderland Anzaldúa constructs a figure called the ‘new mestiza’ that has a ‘tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity’.<sup>141</sup>

Like Haraway and hooks, Anzaldúa calls for a transformation of feminist and political struggle, and the new mestiza is central to Anzaldúa’s vision of a new expression of difference. The ‘energy’ of this new ‘mestiza consciousness [...] comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm’.<sup>142</sup> Like hooks, Anzaldúa seeks to move beyond binary thinking and open up new ways of expressing difference. As Anzaldúa writes, ‘[a] massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war’.<sup>143</sup>

Lastly, it is difficult to discuss feminist theory in the 1990s without addressing Judith Butler’s 1990 book *Gender Trouble*. Alongside their contributions to feminist theory, Anzaldúa and Butler are also considered to be important writers in the development of queer theory (a term discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three). Butler argues there is nothing essential about gender: it is not an innate essence that is immutable over time. Instead, gender is a constructed identity that must be constantly maintained, disciplined and reinforced. As Butler writes, ‘[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’.<sup>144</sup> In other words, gender is not an innate and natural identity, but a considerable amount of ideological and regulatory labour is necessary to make it appear so. Individual acts, physical and discursive, accumulate and congeal over time to the point that gender appears to have substance. The task of the feminist gender theorist, in Butler’s view, is to create a ‘political genealogy of gender ontologies’ that will ‘deconstruct the substantive appearance of gender into its constitutive acts and

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141 Ibid., 79

142 Ibid., 80

143 Ibid.

144 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 43-44.

locate and account for those acts within the compulsory frames set by the various forces that police the social appearance of gender'.<sup>145</sup> In short, feminist theory must pay close attention to difference.<sup>146</sup> By tracing the myriad different ways in which gender is performed and constructed, by paying attention to how gender is performed differently over time and across cultures, the varied 'cultural configurations of sex and gender might then proliferate' and in this process the 'fundamental unnaturalness' of the 'binarism of sex' might be uncovered and confounded.<sup>147</sup>

This is important for the feminist project, as 'if identities were no longer fixed as the premises of a political syllogism, and politics no longer understood as a set of practices derived from the alleged interests that belong to a set of ready-made subjects, a new configuration of politics would surely emerge from the ruins of the old'.<sup>148</sup> By allowing space for and accommodating difference, feminists can begin to glimpse lines of flight that open towards other possible worlds and other ways of being. Here, we can draw a line of affinity across the feminist theories cited here: in varying languages, they each call for the deconstruction of binary thinking and an embrace of difference as a strategy for transforming feminist politics and acting in the world.

These theorists, both directly and indirectly, inform my thinking on feminism in thesis. In particular, the work of Haraway and Stone is used at multiple points throughout this project. Repeatedly, the question of how difference can be accounted for and incorporated into a collective political project, or collective body, surfaces in this thesis. The feminist cyberpunk texts discussed here, with their commitment to a lastingly utopian politics, often dramatise and extend the insights of these late twentieth century theorists. In particular, the question of difference and the commitment to build heteroglossia are themes that recur repeatedly in the feminist cyberpunk texts

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145 Ibid., 44

146 Elizabeth Grosz argues that such 'feminisms of difference' are in part inspired by Jacques Derrida's concept of *différance*. For Grosz, the anglophone feminist reinterpretation of Derrida's ideas in the 1980s and 1990s helped to transform feminism 'from its nineteenth-century impulse to equal inclusion into a twenty-first-century impulse to proliferate and maximize difference'. See: Elizabeth Grosz, 'Derrida and Feminism: A Remembrance', *differences*, 16.3 (2005), pp. 88–94, 90, 92.

147 Ibid., 190

148 Ibid., 189-190

under discussion. For these cyberpunk writers, the path to utopia is clearly built upon, and an extension of, a feminist theory of difference. The vision of the collective and communal subject that can be drawn out of these texts is clearly in dialogue with these feminist writers.

## Decentring Cyberpunk

The *Cyberpunk Culture* collection is one of the largest and most prominent projects to re-approach cyberpunk in recent years. Following Foster, the collection's editors avoid 'nearly all use of the words "genre" or "subgenre" to refer to cyberpunk' and instead opt 'for the terminology of "mode"'.<sup>149</sup> In the editors' words, '[c]yberpunk is everywhere, even if its earliest practitioners have moved into other conceptual territories'.<sup>150</sup> In characterising cyberpunk as a diverse and expansive 'cultural mode' that encompasses many different forms of text, the editors intend the collection to map 'cyberpunk's territories outside of North America', and such an approach 'allows the expression of the complex systems that govern 21st-century societies and lives'.<sup>151</sup> In their view, cyberpunk is key to understanding the contemporary moment: '[i]n the end, the purpose of *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture* has always been to emphasize the importance of cyberpunk as a cultural formation, a means of engaging with our 21st-century technocultural age'.<sup>152</sup> Recalling Sterling's hyperbolic language in *Mirrorshades*, the call for papers for the *CyberPunk Culture Conference* organised by the companion's editors in 2020 puts across this point even more starkly: 'we are living in inescapable cyberpunk futures bleeding into the interstices of our present, and these cyberpunk realities intersect with our mainstream culture at every possible angle'.<sup>153</sup>

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149 McFarlane, Murphy, and Schmeink, 'Cyberpunk as Cultural Formation', 3

150 Ibid., 1

151 Ibid., 3

152 Ibid., 3

153 'Call for Papers: CyberPunk Culture Conference', *Cyberpunk Culture*

<<http://cyberpunkculture.com/cpcc20/archive-cpcc20/call-for-papers/>> [accessed 14 July 2021].

The *Cyberpunk Culture* collection is an extremely valuable resource, and its decolonial approach to cyberpunk is very welcome, incorporating chapters that analyse cyberpunk works from South America, India and Japan, as well as from black writers and artists in the United States and around the globe. The collection works to significantly move away from the canonical first wave writers and take a more expansive and diverse approach to cyberpunk. In this sense, this thesis aims to follow in the footsteps of this approach. However, this thesis also expresses a scepticism around some of the broader claims made by the *Cyberpunk Culture* project. In particular, I disagree with the idea that cyberpunk offers a privileged insight into ‘our 21st-century technocultural age’. Regarding the claim that ‘we are living in inescapable cyberpunk futures’ that ‘intersect with our mainstream culture at every possible angle’, I would argue that a slightly different emphasis is needed. The *Cyberpunk Culture* approach pushes and congeals cyberpunk into a centre, or a focal point of analysis. In order to provide an alternative to this, I take a more diffuse approach to cyberpunk, pushing it back towards the margins. This movement towards the periphery is not intended as a retreat, or as a means to isolate cyberpunk, but functions more as an insurrection: in the margin cyberpunk can be placed into different contexts and can regain its radical impulse. For instance, I follow the approach of Samuel Delany who argues that science fiction is ‘always at its most honest and most effective when it operates—and claims to be operating—from the margins. Whenever—sometimes just through pure enthusiasm for its topic—it claims to take centre stage, I find it usually betrays itself in some way’.<sup>154</sup> In this sense, the rhetoric of the *Cyberpunk Culture* editors pushes cyberpunk perhaps a little too much towards the centre, and recapitulates the kind of hyperbolic claims that have followed cyberpunk since its inception. To place cyberpunk at the centre not only of the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century but also of the 21<sup>st</sup> obscures, I would argue, more than it reveals.

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<sup>154</sup> Qtd in, Mark Dery, ‘Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose’, in *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, ed. by Mark Dery (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 179-222, 189.

To explain this approach a little more, Delany's preference for the margins echoes the work of bell hooks. For hooks, deliberately choosing to occupy the margin as a political space can be useful in that such a space can generate radical perspectives and ways of being. In an essay titled 'Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness', hooks examines the 'politics of location' and the 'profound edge' that is the margin.<sup>155</sup> While she aims to avoid any romanticised or 'mythic notion of marginality', hooks sees the margin not as solely 'a site of deprivation' but also as 'the site of radical possibility'.<sup>156</sup> To elaborate, hooks argues that the margin is 'that space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer [...] And one can only say no, speak the voice of resistance, because there exists a counter language'.<sup>157</sup> While this language may 'resemble the colonizer's tongue', it has been taken by this marginal space and 'irrevocably changed'.<sup>158</sup> The very space of the margin itself changes and transforms individuals, in hooks' words, these 'recollections of broken tongues' provide 'ways to speak that decolonize our minds, our very beings'.<sup>159</sup> Importantly, this margin is not a static space, but might emerge almost anywhere: '[s]paces can be real and imagined [...] Spaces can be interrupted, appropriated, and transformed through artistic and literary practice'.<sup>160</sup> Fiction and literature are thus vital in that they can contest and shape the meaning of space. Furthermore, rather than being a 'marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures', hooks specifies that this is 'marginality one chooses as [a] site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility'.<sup>161</sup> In my view, cyberpunk works best and is at its most resistive when it operates from such a margin. If feminist cyberpunk is an imagined outlying margin of cyberpunk, it can operate as a space where various different kinds of discourse can be refracted, warped and transformed through literary practice. Following this approach, each chapter of this thesis works to

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155 bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 223 and 228.

156 Ibid., 230

157 Ibid., 230

158 Ibid.

159 Ibid., 231

160 Ibid., 234

161 Ibid., 235

produce an off-centre analysis of feminist cyberpunk, where various debates and discourses are found to be warped and made strange by these literary texts.

Such an approach towards cyberpunk is not unprecedented. Steven Brown in his study of Japanese Cyberpunk film takes a similarly de-centred approach. In *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, Brown develops a method of rhizomatic reading. This is developed through his analysis of Otomo Katsuhiro's manga series *Akira* (1982-1990) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's theory of the rhizome. Brown is particularly drawn to one scene in *Akira*; towards the end of the series, Otomo depicts Tetsuo, one of his characters, undergoing a 'metamorphosis into a cybernetic organism out of an assortment of technological detritus, including bits of wire and cable, pieces of machinery, and other debris'.<sup>162</sup> Brown finds an affinity between this visual image and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome, 'a key concept [...] which is used to describe an interconnected, nonhierarchical heterogeneity in a state of constant becoming'.<sup>163</sup> I offer my own reading of the rhizome in Chapters Two and Five, but here Brown conceptualises the rhizome as an abstract way of understanding a de-centred, non hierarchical network or a set of relations between multiple objects. He identifies three distinguishing traits in the rhizome: 'any point can be connected to any other point'; 'the rhizome describes a multiplicity without unity'; and 'the rhizome offers a cartography that overturns the notion of a stable model (or species) and outlines a map with multiple entryways'.<sup>164</sup> Brown uses this abstract concept as a way of conceptualising the interconnections between texts. For instance, in Brown's words:

AKIRA encourages rhizomatic reading by evoking the processes of nonhierarchical connection in the sense that both AKIRA and its interpreters make decentered linkages with diverse smaller narratives, codes, and memes, offering a horizontal image of thought where anything may be

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<sup>162</sup> Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 3.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 8

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 8-9

linked to anything else without requiring vertical notions of a metanarrative, or some other ‘deep inner layer’ from which to draw (or download) information.<sup>165</sup>

In this method, intertext is not visualised as a hierarchical family tree of who influenced what. And, no one literary or critical form is privileged over any other. Instead, the relationship between texts is characterised as overlapping and imbricated, or extremely intimate. Relationships between texts are examined horizontally and at multiple levels. Any textual node on the network can be connected to any other: there is no centre. Brown’s practice of ‘rhizomatic reading [...] views such works tangentially through their rhizomatic connections with other anime, other films, other works of art, and other discursive formations’.<sup>166</sup> There is no centre to the reading, only a series of fractal, branching tangents. Brown argues that the strength of such a de-centred reading is that it can better understand, analyse and hopefully challenge ‘the mechanisms of advanced capitalism, globalization, and emerging imaging and telecommunication technologies’ that themselves rely on their own kinds of fragmentation and shifting centre to orchestrate global capitalist oppression.<sup>167</sup>

While Brown’s approach might sound similar to the *Cyberpunk Culture*’s approach of viewing cyberpunk as a cultural formation that intersects with ‘our mainstream culture at every possible angle’, I would argue that there is a subtle difference. For me, Brown’s approach places less emphasis on cyberpunk as *the* perspective from which to understand the contemporary moment, but views cyberpunk as one interesting node amongst others on the broader rhizomatic network of popular culture and critical theory. Saying that each point on the rhizome, including cyberpunk, is connected to every other point is not directly equivalent to saying that ‘cyberpunk is everywhere’, and this allows for cyberpunk to be paradoxically both interconnected and marginal.

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165 Ibid., 9

166 Ibid.

167 Ibid.

To explain this better, I turn again to Haraway's concept of the cyborg, a figure that is referred to throughout this thesis. The cyborg offers perhaps the best metaphor for understanding my approach to cyberpunk. Writing in the 'Cyborg Manifesto', Haraway argues that in an increasingly technologically saturated world any binary opposition between culture and nature is impossible to uphold. In her words, 'we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short we are cyborgs'.<sup>168</sup> The cyborg is suspicious of any 'seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity'.<sup>169</sup> In this manner, the cyborg is a boundary figure, capable of occupying multiple seemingly contradictory positions at once. As Haraway describes, the 'cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence'.<sup>170</sup> The cyborg's power as a political subjectivity and as a metaphor for theoretical analysis is its ability to sit at the intersection of multiple boundaries. The cyborg can be both interconnected and marginal; it does not need to resolve these contradictions into a finished whole. Haraway constructs the cyborg in dialogue with science fiction. For Haraway, science fiction writers 'are theorists for cyborgs' and the feminist cyberpunk writers I examine in this thesis are no exception.<sup>171</sup>

I have selected this method of rhizomatic reading to push against the *Cyberpunk Culture's* attempt to return cyberpunk to the centre. Rather than push cyberpunk towards the centre, I have chosen to push it back towards the periphery, or the margin, because in my view this motion best reveals cyberpunk's utopian aspects and challenges the status of the mode as a dystopian form. To push cyberpunk into the margin is to make it easier to spot the connections that exist rhizomatically between cyberpunk and other texts, contexts and discourses. By placing the texts I have chosen into the margin, I am trying to find an angle from which to view them that best allows for their lines of

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<sup>168</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 150.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 151

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 173

flight, their lines of connection into other multiplicities or contexts, to be glimpsed and traced. And, as outlined earlier, it is from these lines of flight, or pieces of gold amongst the rubble, that it is possible to view the utopian possibilities offered by these texts. By focusing on these lines of flight, by placing them into the margins in order to better view their multiple connections, I am reaffirming my commitment to a strain of feminist theory that aims to build heteroglossia and allow for difference to flourish.

The rhizomatic method is also appealing precisely because it maps conceptually and metaphorically onto cyberpunk. One of cyberpunk's key motif is its depiction of a body connected to a multitude of wires and cables, spiralling off in all directions, that in turn connect the individual into the network, at least partially erasing their sovereign identity in the process. In one such example, Pat Cadigan evokes this image in *Synners* when she describes one character, examining another, tracing a 'trail of wires leading from the system to his head'.<sup>172</sup> Such an image can also serve as a structural map of the rhizome. A possible critique of this method is that it might lead to an erosion of a singular authorial voice or narrative. But, such a subsequent erosion of authorial voice also has its benefits. As Chapter One argues, there can be no being except being in relation to others. The self and its identity is never entirely or solely interior to the subject but is always constructed and conceptualised in relation to others: all individuals are produced in a network of others. In this light, I have chosen a methodology that I feel best resonates with my own understanding of identity and subjectivity and that I feel best represents the relationship between cyberpunk and its intertexts. Additionally, Deleuze and Guattari's work appears throughout this thesis because of the resonant power their vision of the rhizome holds in relation to cyberpunk.

## **Towards the Carnival**

Lastly, the work of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin is also crucial to this thesis. In particular Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, as found in his essays on *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), and

172 Pat Cadigan, *Synners* (London: Gollancz, 2012), 265.

his understanding of medieval and early Renaissance carnival and the grotesque body, in *Rabelais and His World* (1968), are consistent touch-stones for this project.<sup>173</sup> Heteroglossia is explored and defined in Chapter One, and the carnival is introduced in Chapter Two. But, it is worth addressing here how these terms relate to the wider framework of the thesis. In ‘Discourse in the Novel’, Bakhtin explains the concept of heteroglossia by juxtaposing it with the term unitary language. As he writes, ‘unitary language’, or common language, is ‘at every moment of its linguistic life [...] opposed to the realities of heteroglossia’.<sup>174</sup> For Bakhtin, the creation of a unitary language must overcome a heterogeneous diversity of tongues and practices, ‘imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity—the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, “correct language.”’<sup>175</sup> Within this framework, hooks’ counter language might be thought of as one specific kind of heteroglossia that becomes visible once one scratches beneath the surface of unitary language. For Bakhtin, ‘unitary language’ is not something ‘given’ or an essentialism that we should take for granted, but it always ‘posited’, always an imposition by the dominant power. To create such a unitary language, it is necessary to forcefully overcome a more complex, already existing, heteroglossia, or diversity of voice. As this chapter has demonstrated, cyberpunk is a broad and diverse genre that has generated a number of conflicting perspectives on its radicalism and longevity: there can be no singular or unitary expression of cyberpunk only a heteroglossia.

In regards to carnival, Bakhtin argues that in the feudal structure of the European medieval period the yearly calendar of official church ceremonies and festivals was paralleled by another calendar of parodic carnivals and feasts. In Bakhtin’s words, ‘carnival is the people's second life, organized on the basis of laughter. It is a festive life. Festivity is a peculiar quality of all comic

173 *The Dialogic Imagination* is an English language collection, first published in 1981, of a series of essays written by Bakhtin in the 1930s. My understanding of heteroglossia is principally drawn from the essay ‘Discourse in the Novel’, which was written between 1934 and 1935 and first published in 1941. Much of the content in *Rabelais and His World* was written by Bakhtin in the 1940s, though it was not published as a book until 1965, with the first English translation being published a few years later in 1968.

174 Michail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011), 270.

175 Ibid.

rituals and spectacles of the Middle Ages'.<sup>176</sup> In these carnivals, which 'were also linked externally to the feasts of the Church', their participants 'for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance'.<sup>177</sup> To return to the opening paragraph of this chapter, these spaces were a 'world inside out' and symbolised 'becoming, change, and renewal'.<sup>178</sup> They 'offered temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life'.<sup>179</sup> And, in this manner, they offered different, utopian ways of relating to one another.<sup>180</sup> Like Young's *Cinderblock*, moments of carnival are vividly recapitulated in the work of Melissa Scott, Emma Bull, Amy Thompson and Anne Harris, and such moments are key to the subjectivities and communities they create.

Unique to the carnival is the grotesque body, a conceptual understanding and interpretation of the body during carnival time. In what Bakhtin terms 'grotesque realism', the 'leading themes of these images of bodily life are fertility, growth, and a brimming-over abundance'.<sup>181</sup> This grotesque realism is key to my understanding of a lived, in process and prefigurative utopia in this thesis. As Bakhtin explains, a 'utopian element' is found in this 'bodily participation in the potentiality of another world, the bodily awareness of another world has an immense importance for the grotesque'.<sup>182</sup> Feminist cyberpunk's return to the grotesque body is analysed in detail in Chapter's Four and Five. However, for the moment, I suggest that cyberpunk itself functions as a kind of grotesque body. Cyberpunk's death is not to be resisted but to be celebrated. Each time cyberpunk dies it does not simply disappear, it is not annihilated, but like the grotesque body it has a 'pregnant

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176 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 8.

177 Ibid., 9

178 Ibid., 10

179 Ibid.

180 Bakhtin's work also continues to resonate with more contemporary utopian studies. In her 2017 book *Radical Happiness*, Lynne Segal discusses the possibilities of communal laughter for collective liberation, see: Lynne Segal, *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2017), 66-68

181 Ibid., 19.

182 Ibid., 48

death, a death that gives birth'.<sup>183</sup> Cyberpunk's death is 'its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation. Death is here always related to birth'.<sup>184</sup>

## Between Theory and Fiction

Studying cyberpunk using the theoretical tools outlined in this introduction has several advantages. As mentioned above, the rhizomatic structure maps onto cyberpunk's key metaphor of the wired individual within the network. It also allows for connections to be made with unusual texts, broadening the intertext surrounding cyberpunk and broadening our definitions of both science fiction and cyberpunk by drawing a multitude of texts into the orbit of the cyberpunk mode. Ultimately, this destabilises the distinction between fiction and theory in a productive way that demonstrates the constructiveness of both categories. In making this statement, I am drawing upon Haraway's assertion that 'social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world changing fiction'.<sup>185</sup> And, in a sense, 'the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion'.<sup>186</sup> From this perspective, both fiction and theory are *fictions* that play a role in construction of social reality, either as a stabilising or destabilising force. In taking a rhizomatic approach, the boundaries between feminist cyberpunk and the theory used to contextualise it are blurred allowing for the operation of social reality and the utopian possibilities for its transformation to be mapped out. Finally, as detailed in the coming chapters, feminist cyberpunk itself offers insights into the relationships between the individual and the collective, the human and the environment, and the boundaries of the human as an ontological category itself.

This thesis is made up of four chapters. Each chapter includes an analysis of at least one feminist cyberpunk text, but not every chapter is organised around feminist cyberpunk. This is in

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183 Ibid., 25

184 Ibid., 50

185 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 149.

186 Ibid.

keeping with my intent to decentre the analysis of cyberpunk and to approach cyberpunk from unexpected and marginal angles. Cyberpunk is not always placed at the centre but is instead used to twist or refract the organising theme of each chapter. Following this introduction, Chapter One examines the notion of the multiple subject. Broken into two parts, the chapter first examines the debates surrounding multiplicity as a theoretical concept by tracing its history through psychiatry and post-structuralist philosophy. It then moves to read several feminist cyberpunk texts, informed by this theoretical context. Multiplicity is understood here both as a form of open subjectivity, opposed to the unitary self, and as a way of describing the relationship between the self and others, arguing that identity and subjectivity emerges in relation to and negotiation with others. This chapter reads Elisabeth Vonarburg's *The Silent City* (1981), alongside two novels by Laura Mixon: *Glass Houses* (1992) and *Proxies* (1998). Mixon's novels are chosen because both are formally innovative, working to write the multiple subject onto the page. Chapter One concludes with an analysis of 1998 Japanese anime television series *Serial Experiments Lain*. While not strictly a feminist cyberpunk text, this series is nevertheless an important intertext and demonstrates the porous boundaries of the ideas explored here. Through these readings, I try to find a form of multiplicity that emphasises co-existence and coherence over trauma and fragmentation. I partially fail in this task, and the cyberpunk texts of this chapter point towards a limited and often contradictory form of multiplicity hindered by the gender binary and a chaotic, violent multiplicity. However, moments of coexistence and coherence appear just over the horizon, particularly in Mixon's *Glass Houses*, and my failure here points towards and highlights the necessity of the next chapter's theoretical framework: an understanding of resistance studies is needed to draw out the radical potential of multiplicity.

Chapter Two explores what practices of resistance can be offered by feminist cyberpunk, working to read feminist cyberpunk through the field of resistance studies. This chapter begins by examining whether the kinds of multiplicity identified in Chapter One can function as resistive

practice. This reading draws on the work of resistance studies scholar Howard Caygill along with Baudrillard's writing on media and communication. The chapter then turns to a comparative reading of Caitlin Sullivan and Kate Bornstein's experimental novel *Nearly Roadkill* (1996) alongside Hakim Bey's theory of the Temporary Autonomous Zone. Sullivan and Bornstein's text explores how queer and marginal digital subjects resist tracking and surveillance on the internet and imagines the network as a space where temporary, subversive spaces can emerge. This reading also incorporates an engagement with the field of utopian studies, drawing on the work of Ernst Bloch, Tom Moylan and Kathi Weeks. Finally, this chapter reads Young's *Cinderblock* through Bakhtin's concept of the carnival and explores how Young's novel aims to both challenge and transform the carnival into resistive practice. Building on Chapter One, this reading examines how the individual subject can operate as a part of a collective body without losing its sense of difference.

Chapter Three drifts the most fully away from feminist cyberpunk, and the chapter aims to explore queer, working class and post-colonial methods of navigating and the city. By exploring the spatial practices of these subjects, this chapter analyses the ways in which city space can be contested and re-imagined. The chapter begins with Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999), reading the text through the work of Foucault and José Esteban Muñoz on the subjects of heterotopia, friendship and queer utopia. This builds on understandings of the collective body from Chapter Two, identifying how queer desire and space can tie together such entities. These themes are developed in the next section, which is composed of a comparative reading of Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953) and Sarah Schulman's *After Delores* (1988). Both of these novels are written in the hard-boiled mode of detective fiction. The detective, as is argued in this section, is often considered to be an origin figure for the cyberpunk protagonist. By re-examining this origin figure, I produce a queer re-reading of these two novels that identifies an alternative trajectory for cyberpunk. In this sense, the queer detective is cast in these novels as a lonely figure, seeking justice for a lost future and lost friendship. This chapter then turns to a

reading of Melissa Scott's cyberpunk novel *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994) and Schulman's *People in Trouble* (1991) which both respond to the AIDS crisis of the late 1980s and 1990s. Both texts respond to the impact of AIDS on queer communities, and offer differing visions for the future of queer bodies and collective communities.

Next, Chapter Four turns towards the ecological. Emma Bull's *Bone Dance* (1991) and Amy Thompson's *Virtual Girl* (1993) are read through the lens of contemporary feminist ecological theory, including Melody Jue, Julietta Singh and Astrida Neimanis. Both Bull and Thompson also draw upon the figure of the detective and rewrite elements of the hard-boiled mode, following the alternative trajectory I identify in Chapter Three. This chapter explores how both novels imagine community with the non-human and identifies an ecological, de-humanist strain within feminist cyberpunk. This chapter ends with a reading of Anne Harris's novel *Accidental Creatures*, a text that aptly combines many of the themes and threads that I identify in feminist cyberpunk throughout this thesis.

In these four chapters I trace through feminist cyberpunk a vision of a queer, multiple and collective subject that is capable of entering into community with a diverse range of human and non-human others. In this sense, subjects and communities in feminist cyberpunk operate as a rhizome that, in Deleuze and Guattari's words, functions as a 'multiple, lateral, and circular system' of relation.<sup>187</sup> By the end of the thesis, a utopian horizon appears, one that signals to a world beyond both capitalism and its central, imperialising logics of human mastery. This world, like Bakhtin's grotesque body, is visually represented as being 'two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born'.<sup>188</sup> The conclusion of this thesis points towards feminist cyberpunk's utopian vision of a pleasurable, queer cyborg assemblage of human, non-human, machine, plant and earth mutually growing together out of the dying world of human mastery.

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<sup>187</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 5.

<sup>188</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 26.

# Chapter One: In Search of Multiplicity

## Introduction

In the preface to his 1993 book *The Protean Self*, psychologist Robert Lifton reflects on an essay he wrote, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, about a phenomenon he terms ‘proteanism’.<sup>1</sup> ‘Proteanism’, he reflects, ‘seemed to strike a nerve in people, as the essay has been reprinted in more collections than anything else of mine’.<sup>2</sup> Proteanism, for Lifton, is a vision of a ‘fluid’ and ‘many sided’ self that is constantly in flux.<sup>3</sup> The protean self, named after the ‘Greek sea god of many forms’, is an evolving self of ‘many possibilities’: it is multiple.<sup>4</sup> Continuing his preface, Lifton notes that while many readers found that such a concept of the self resonated with their own experiences, others found such a concept disturbing and offensive. In one such anecdote, Lifton recalls a faculty member at a British university accusing him of ‘contributing to the downfall of Western Civilisation’.<sup>5</sup> Lifton’s wider work regularly deals with much more overtly controversial subject matter. For instance, his books *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (1986) and *Home from the War: Vietnam Veterans—Neither Victims nor Executioners* (1973) seem titled to provoke emotional response. On the surface *The Protean Self* appears to be a far less provocative topic. So, why did it generate such a polarised response? And, what are we to make of this charge that such a concept is a threat to Western Civilisation? This chapter, in part, seeks to determine what issues are at stake when proteanism, or multiplicity, is discussed.

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1 Robert Jay Lifton, *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1993), ix.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 1

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., ix

Lifton was far from the only writer of the 1990s to consider such questions. Multiplicity was a popular topic of the period: debates on the subject often took the form of theoretical and philosophical writing on the relationship between Dissociative Identity Disorder (a psychiatric medicalisation of multiplicity, which was at the time called Multiple Personality Disorder), postmodernism and the internet.<sup>6</sup> Questions of DID are given key importance by both Allucquère Rosanne Stone and Sherry Turkle in their respective books, *The War of Desire and Technology* (1995) and *Life on the Screen* (1995), which are both about the internet and virtual technology. These texts question whether multiplicity and non-unitary identity, is a broader phenomena that extends beyond this clinical diagnosis. They also question whether being multiple might be a useful way of navigating and surviving in the rapidly changing and fragmented society being created by new communication technologies and their application under capitalism. Such conditions, referred to as postmodern (as I discussed in my introduction), are often described, as urban-geographer Elizabeth Wilson notes, in ‘negative terms as a form of disorientation, meaninglessness and fragmentation’.<sup>7</sup> Postmodern spaces become ‘a split screen flickering with competing beliefs, cultures, and “stories”’.<sup>8</sup> In debates around these terms and conditions a divide emerges between critics and theorists who see multiplicity as a product of significant trauma, resulting in a fragmentation of self and personality, and those who argue that multiplicity can be a reparative or therapeutic practice in the face of such a fragmentary historical moment.

My purpose here is twofold. The first part of this chapter re-examines these debates and seeks to define what is meant by multiplicity. This includes an overview of how the term has

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6 Throughout various editions of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (a handbook published by the American Psychiatric Association, detailing the diagnostic criteria for various psychiatric illnesses and conditions) DID has been renamed several times. The DSM-II referred to it as ‘Hysterical Neurosis, Dissociative Type’, the DSM-III used ‘Multiple Personality Disorder’ and the DSM-IV finally made the change to ‘Dissociative Identity Disorder’. See: American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1968) 40, American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1980), 257 and American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2005), 477.

7 Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City: Urban Life, the Control of Disorder, and Women* (London: Virago Press, 1991), 135.

8 Ibid., 136

evolved within the discipline of psychiatry; the recent philosophy of Logi Gunnarsson, which examines non-diagnostic approaches to understanding multiple personality; and in post-structuralist theory, focusing particularly on the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. From this discussion, I then turn to Haraway and Bakhtin to explore their understanding of heteroglossia in relation to multiplicity and language. Next, the chapter moves to discuss how these ideas of multiplicity find echoes and resonances within the writings of Stone and Turkle, before moving to explore the concept of the persona, as found in the analytic psychology of Carl Jung and the literary criticism of Robert C. Elliot, Richard Blackmur and W. H. Auden.

The second part of this chapter reads several science fiction texts through the context of this theoretical background, looking at where they place themselves on a spectrum of multiplicity between trauma and coexistence (which I will define momentarily). I examine Elisabeth Vonarburg's early feminist cyberpunk text *The Silent City* (1981); the first two novels of Laura Mixon's *Avatars Dance* trilogy, *Glass Houses* (1992) and *Proxies* (1998); and the Japanese anime television series *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998). These texts have been chosen because they explore the possibility of multiple subjectivity. My aim here is to find within these texts a multiplicity that is nourishing and sustainable, rather than traumatising, with an emphasis on *coexistence*. I take this term to mean, drawing on the philosophy of Logi Gunnarsson and Jean Luc Nancy, a situation in which multiple personae can exist within one body, or across multiple bodies, without trauma or conflict. While these fictional texts do not necessarily directly challenge the logics of neoliberalism, they are radical in that they explore the possibilities and limitations of multiplicity. In this manner, they lay the groundwork for a subjectivity that I push in a more overtly radical direction in Chapter Two.

These texts imagine the possibility of multiple subjects, or personae, being able to inhabit one body; explore ideas of distributed consciousness; envision the creation of plural human-machine cyborgs and assemblages; and reflect upon whether multiplicity can only produce

traumatically proliferating multiple selves or whether it has the potential to form the basis of a radical but coherent form of consciousness. Throughout this chapter I use theory and fiction to search for a multiplicity that is liveable beyond narrow medical and psychiatric definitions and extremes. In short, I seek to respond to Deleuze and Guattari's challenge that 'the multiple must be made'.<sup>9</sup> Throughout this analysis of theory and fiction, I seek to find examples of multiplicity that are useful, as opposed to traumatic, in the sense that they offer a way of living and relating to a technology-saturated neoliberal society in its 1990s Anglophone context. The structure of this chapter echoes my aims in this thesis. The first section centres the chapter around a series of debates and ambiguities regarding multiplicity, and the second part examines the ways in which feminist cyberpunk refracts and reframes these issues. Meanwhile, an examination of multiplicity contributes the first piece towards the vision of feminist cyberpunk subjectivity I am drawing out in this thesis.

## **Part One: Multiplicity in Psychiatry and Critical Theory**

### **Diagnosis**

Multiplicity, the splitting of identity and the figure of the multiple, has long been a fascination in literature and film. From Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1882) through to films such as *Psycho* (1960) and *Fight Club* (1999), multiplicity has frequently been characterised as dangerous, violent, evil or unnatural. The release of the 2016 film *Split*, for example, prompted some retrospection on the history of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) in film. While the film was critically and commercially successful, winning multiple awards, its portrayal of the disorder

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9 Deleuze and Felix, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 6.

was criticised in several online articles as sensationalist.<sup>10</sup> The reaction to *Split* demonstrates that DID remains a divisive and somewhat misrepresented issue in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Dissociative Identity Disorder is a psychiatric diagnosis reserved for the most extreme cases of multiplicity and identity alteration. In the past, between 1980 and 1994, this disorder has also been called Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), being renamed in 1994 as DID in the 4th Edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*.<sup>11</sup> To summarise, the diagnostic criteria states that the disorder is characterised by the presence of several distinct and enduring personality states, with periods of amnesia when these different states control an individual.<sup>12</sup> Severe childhood trauma, usually stemming from a sustained period of abuse, is considered the most common factor in the development of DID.<sup>13</sup> In contrast to dramatic portrayals in art and media, this disorder is frequently misdiagnosed, undetected and carefully concealed by affected individuals.<sup>14</sup> It remains a highly contentious and disputed diagnosis within psychiatry for several reasons.

The very existence of the phenomenon which the diagnosis attempts to describe has been a subject of intense debate. Ian Hacking, in *Rewriting the Soul* (1995), provides a history of the issues which surround DID. In 1972 the disorder was considered to be incredibly rare, with only a handful of reported cases.<sup>15</sup> By 1986 ‘it was thought that six thousand patients had been diagnosed’, with ‘one person in twenty’ being a sufferer, as these numbers persisted into the early 1990s.<sup>16</sup> From the 1980s through to the mid-1990s psychiatrists argued over whether the disorder was induced by

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10 See: Zoe Buckton, ‘M. Night Shyamalan’s ‘SPLIT’ – representations of Dissociative Identity Disorder in media and fiction’, yorksj.ac.uk. <https://blog.yorksj.ac.uk/englishlit/shyamalans-split/> (last updated 3/03/2017, accessed: 18/02/2018) and Steven Rose, ‘From Split to Psycho: why cinema fails dissociative identity disorder’, theguardian.com. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/jan/12/cinema-dissociative-personality-disorder-split-james-mcavoy> (last updated: 12/01/2017, accessed: 18/02/2018).

11 For further information: John Kihlstrom, ‘Dissociative Disorders’, *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 1, (2005), pp. 227-253.

12 Phil Mollon, *Multiple Selves, Multiple Voices: Working with Trauma, Violation and Dissociation* (Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 2001), 3.

13 Ibid., 4

14 Mollon, *Multiple Selves*, 2.

15 Ian Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 8.

16 Ibid.

therapists or really existed at all.<sup>17</sup> Was the disorder constructed by a ‘small but committed band of therapists [...] aided by sensational stories in tabloids and [...] TV talk shows?’<sup>18</sup> Was it a ‘designer disease’ invented by patients in order to obtain preferential treatment and attention in the state hospital system?<sup>19</sup> Or, was it a sign that society needed to confront widespread domestic abuse within families?<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, such questions are beyond this scope of this chapter. However, in 2011 the prevalence of DID in the general population was considered to be around 1 to 3 per cent, which suggests that while there was an increase in DID cases in the 1980s/90s the disorder is still ‘not rare’.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the disorder persisted into the *DSM-5*, the most recent edition of the manual, and is a diagnosis that continues to be used.<sup>22</sup> What is notable for my purposes here, is that this rise in diagnosis and debate coincides with the height of postmodernism and the cyberpunk movement, which, as will be demonstrated, both have their own engagements with multiplicity and fragmentation. During the 1980s and 1990s, as a historical period, multiplicity was very much prevalent in the public consciousness.

With the renaming of MPD to DID, even the name of this disorder has been subject to controversy. Hacking outlines the rationale for the disorder’s change of name, along with some of the debates at stake in the wording of the diagnosis. The 1980s saw a series of debates between psychiatrists over whether these different states constituted whole, cohesive ‘alter personalities’ or just ‘personality fragments’.<sup>23</sup> The term ‘alter’ refers to the different, individual personality states that the DID patient dissociates into. The question at stake here being whether these alters are distinct personalities or just the fragments of a single core self. Eventually, David Spiegel, the chair

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17 See: M. Boor, ‘The multiple personality epidemic. Additional cases and inferences regarding diagnosis, etiology, dynamics, and treatment’, *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 170.5 (1982), pp. 302-304 and A. Seltzer ‘Multiple personality: a psychiatric misadventure’, *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 39.7 (1994), pp. 442-445.

18 Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul*, 8.

19 Allucquère Rosanne Stone, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 2001), 49.

20 Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul*, 8.

21 International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation, ‘Guidelines for Treating Dissociative Identity Disorder in Adults, Third Revision’, *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 12.2 (2011), pp. 115–187, 117.

22 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 292.

23 Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul*, 17.

of the dissociative disorders committee for the *DSM-IV*, ruled in favour of the latter. Spiegel argued that ‘[t]he problem is not having more than one personality; it is having less than one personality’.<sup>24</sup> The alter states the patient experiences are therefore judged not to be a multiplying of personality, but a fracturing of it. To reflect this, multiple personality, with its suggestions of wholeness, was dropped in favour of dissociative identity. This shift in logic has interesting implications for how the patient is perceived. Conventionally a person is seen as having *a* personality, usually meant in the singular. If a patient is seen to have *more* than one personality in one body, they move beyond conventional understandings of the human (one personality; one body). They might, in this sense, be described as more than human. In contrast, when the patient is seen as having less than one personality, they are viewed as a damaged or fractured human, becoming in the process perceived as less than human. Yet, even today, this debate remains far from settled.

As a philosopher rather than a psychiatrist, Logi Gunnarsson takes a different approach to the issue. The essential humanity of DID patients is one of his key concerns. In his book *Philosophy of Personal Identity and Multiple Personality* (2010), Gunnarsson uses the term ‘fundamental entity’ to describe the basic ‘concept which determines the conditions of [...] identity’.<sup>25</sup> For example, most people might, if asked what they are as a fundamental entity, describe themselves as being a ‘*human being*’ or ‘*person*’.<sup>26</sup> Gunnarsson re-examines DID case studies and observes that some patients understand themselves as ‘one of two or more fundamental entities in one body—not as one personality facet of a single fundamental entity’.<sup>27</sup> Gunnarsson is not necessarily saying that psychiatrists are wrong in their diagnosis or definition of DID. Instead, he is arguing a subtly different point that the use of such language (the very fact that the DID patients interviewed within these case studies were capable of talking about personality and identity in such a way) raises the possibility that if ‘each of us is a fundamental entity [...] there could exist two or more in one

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24 Quoted in: Hacking, *Rewriting the Soul*, 18.

25 Emphasis original: Logi Gunnarsson, *Philosophy of Personal Identity and Multiple Personality* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 18.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 7

body'.<sup>28</sup> Gunnarsson calls this idea the 'coexistence thesis', which he argues is a 'purely philosophical thesis' as 'the conditions for the presence of two or more fundamental entities in one body are never really fulfilled'.<sup>29</sup>

However, such ways of thinking highlight that we, as humans, are capable of assuming a subjectivity that is multiple rather than singular. This idea of a coexistence thesis also evokes Jean-Luc Nancy's argument in *Being Singular Being Plural* (2000) that a 'being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another', being itself therefore becomes a 'singularly plural coexistence'.<sup>30</sup> Nancy's political reading suggests, then, that the individual cannot be separated from the broader societal and communal context from which the individual emerges; whereas Gunnarsson's argument takes as its primary terrain the question of interiority and personal consciousness. However, both arguments work to unsettle notions of unitary identity and the boundary between self and other. As Gunnarsson points out, this line of thought has two major implications. Firstly, an interpretation of multiplicity is vitally important when discussing 'philosophical conceptions of personal identity'.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, because of this, the terrain of multiplicity is too valuable to be ceded entirely to the discipline of psychiatry: 'philosophical concepts' are 'indispensable for an adequate understanding of this phenomenon'.<sup>32</sup>

## Making the Multiple

Beyond psychiatry, in the arts and humanities, multiplicity and the splitting or fragmentation of identity is a concept often raised in post-structuralist theory. Particularly, its development is tightly bound up with the politics of post-war France and the interpersonal relationships of several key theorists. Discussion of multiplicity began to gain prominence in the arts from the early 1970s.

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28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 7 and 8

30 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 3

31 Gunnarsson, *Philosophy of Personal Identity*, 8

32 Ibid.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's two volume work *Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Anti-Oedipus, 1972; A Thousand Plateaus, 1980)* is a key text in the process of taking multiplicity out of psychiatry and into the arts. It is important to note that schizophrenia and Dissociative Identity Disorder are distinct medical conditions. As Hacking writes, while 'schizophrenia is often called split personality', multiple personality is not schizophrenia.<sup>33</sup> However, Deleuze and Guattari are not discussing either multiplicity or schizophrenia in a strictly clinical sense. To understand their thinking on this subject, it is necessary to outline the context within which their ideas emerged. Félix Guattari was influenced by the 1960s anti-psychiatry movement, particularly Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* (1961), and worked as a psychotherapist at the experimental public hospital La Borde. This institution rejected conventional psychiatric methods and gave patients a greater voice in the running of the hospital, pioneering new uses of group therapy.<sup>34</sup> Guattari's work at Le Borde and his interest in schizophrenia reflect his rejection of individualism. As Guattari writes in 'The Group and The Person' (1968), '[t]o achieve any understanding of social groups, one must get rid of one kind of rationalist-positivist vision of the individual (and of history)'.<sup>35</sup> For Guattari, to understand the functioning of social organisation, the individual is the wrong starting point. As Guattari expands, '[t]o me it is all reminiscent of a flock of migrating birds: it has its own structure, the shape it makes in the air, its function, its direction—and all determined without benefit of a single central committee meeting, or elaboration of a correct line'.<sup>36</sup> Instead of rational individual actors, for Guattari social groups operate on a more subconscious level utilising 'modes of symbolic communication proper to groups (where there is often no mode of spoken contract)'.<sup>37</sup>

In this context of mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century anti-psychiatry, taking schizophrenia out of the clinic was part of a broader process which sought to open up new ways of thinking about mental illness.

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33 *Hacking, Rewriting the Soul, 9*

34 Edward Thornton, 'Two's a Crowd', aeon.co. <https://aeon.co/amp/essays/a-creative-multiplicity-the-philosophy-of-deleuze-and-guattari> (accessed 02/02/2019, last updated 01/03/2018)

35 Félix Guattari, *Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics*, trans. by Rosemary Sheed (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), 35.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *Ibid.*

Specifically, this involved rejecting a psychiatric discourse that pathologised and medicalised individuals as broken, deviant or needing to be fixed. Instead, thinkers such as Deleuze, Guattari and Foucault suggested that society has much to learn from such individuals, who can illustrate new ways in which the subject might see itself in the world. Such ideas are at the forefront of Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation*, where Foucault characterises psychiatry as 'a monologue of reason about madness' which 'has been established only on the basis of [...] silence'.<sup>38</sup> Psychiatry, for Foucault, seeks to legitimise itself as the sole authority, or voice, on mental illness. The supposed humanity of modern asylums and psychiatric hospitals is contrasted with medieval depictions of madness in dialogue with sanity. Rather than being separated from society, in earlier approaches it was implied that the sane might have something to learn from a dialogue with the mad: '[h]ere madness and non-madness, reason and non-reason are inextricably involved'.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, 'modern man no longer communicates with the madman'.<sup>40</sup> In the anglosphere, similar ideas were also put forward in the 1960s by R.D Laing whose work, which challenged the medicalisation of schizophrenia, became influential within the wider anti-psychiatry movement. Laing describes schizophrenia as 'one of the forms in which, often through quite ordinary people, the light began to break through the cracks in our all-too closed minds'.<sup>41</sup> Through such language, Laing implies that a dialogue with schizophrenia can open up a different perspective on the world.

Frustrated that many socialist organisations in post-war France collapsed into what Edward Thornton describes as a 'competition between individual desires', Guattari, working with Gilles Deleuze, used schizophrenia to seek ways in which the collective voice could be retained and understood.<sup>42</sup> Thornton contextualises this fear of authoritarian ego within the threat of Stalinism to the post-war French left, which, having spent a youth moving between and breaking with various

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38 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Vintage Books: 1988), x-xi

39 Ibid., x

40 Ibid.

41 Ronald David Laing, *The Politics of Experience and The Birds of Paradise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 107

42 Thornton, 'Two's a Crowd'.

communist organisations, Guattari would have found pressing.<sup>43</sup> As Mark Seem writes, Deleuze and Guattari sought to develop a new form of analysis based on the possibilities offered by schizophrenia, ‘in order to break the holds of power and institute research into a new collective subjectivity and a revolutionary healing of mankind’.<sup>44</sup> Some of this thinking is prefigured in Guattari’s essay ‘Machine and Structure’, published in 1971 immediately prior to Guattari’s collaboration with Deleuze. Guattari’s essay tackles questions concerning unconscious and subjective desire in relation to revolutionary class struggle, demonstrating in the process an anti-state and anti-authoritarian strain in his thought. In response to the events of 1968, Guattari writes that any potential ‘revolutionary organisation’ must not ‘depend on the various social structures—above all the state structure, which appears to be the keystone of the dominant production relations’.<sup>45</sup> For Guattari, the ‘revolutionary programme [...] should demonstrate proper subjective potential and [...] should make sure that it is fortified against any attempt to “structuralise” that potential’.<sup>46</sup> Such a fight against ‘structures’ cannot be ‘achieved on the basis of only one “theoretical practice”’, instead what is needed is ‘the development of a specific analytical praxis at every level of organisation of the struggle’.<sup>47</sup> These short lines prefigure Deleuze and Guattari’s later thinking. As Chantelle Gray van Heerden and Aragorn Eloff have recently argued, while they did not explicitly identify as anarchists, an anarchist sensibility runs through Deleuze and Guattari’s work, particularly in their focus on ‘non-hierarchical organisation and communalism, and prefigurative politics, action and labour’.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, in rejecting hierarchy within political movements and empathising instead a plurality of ‘analytical praxis at every level’, or collective

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43 Thornton discusses this in ‘Two’s a Crowd’, but Guattari also mentions his frustrations with Trotskyist groups in ‘The Group and Person’, see: Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*, 25-26.

44 Mark Seem, ‘Introduction’, to Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. xv-xxiv, xxi

45 Guattari, *Molecular Revolution*, 118.

46 Ibid., 119

47 Ibid.

48 Prefigurative politics is defined by Heerden and Eloff as ‘the enactment and construction of a new political present in the here and now’, and I deal with this concept more thoroughly in Chapter Two: *Deleuze and Anarchism*, ed. by Chantelle Gray van Heerden and Aragorn Eloff (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 1.

voice, Guattari's politics aligns, according to Heerdan and Eloff, with the 'anti-State, anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist and anti-essentialist' aspects of the anarchist tradition.<sup>49</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari further develop the ideas of 'Machine and Structure' by drawing upon psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's analysis of schizophrenia, which is worth outlining in brief. Lacan's work was influential in bringing Sigmund Freud's ideas into fashion in France and he was an important influence on Guattari, being an early mentor. However, the two publicly diverged after the publication of the aforementioned 'Machine and Structure', with Lacan hostile towards the concept of collective desire.<sup>50</sup> In Lacan's work, schizophrenia is contrasted with paranoia. Both concepts are, in this instance, somewhat divorced from their clinical and diagnostic settings and are evoked as metaphors for being in and relating to the world. Lacan, in his essay on 'The Mirror Stage'<sup>51</sup> reflects upon the concept of 'paranoiac knowledge'.<sup>52</sup> For Lacan, individuals at a young age form an 'Ideal-I' and situate 'the agency of the ego, before its social determination'.<sup>53</sup> In his interpretation of Lacanian paranoia, Adam Roberts states that, for Lacan, 'all of us are paranoid. Our only way of apprehending the universe around us is to construct an "I", an ego, around which we orient all our knowledge'.<sup>54</sup> In short, this 'Ideal-I', or ego, represents the individual's sense of agency around which socially determined knowledge is centred, a process which is effectively paranoid. In contrast, the ego of the schizophrenic is not at the centre of any grand narrative, instead they open themselves 'to a multiplicity of inputs, all on the same level as the ego'.<sup>55</sup> Or, as Fredric Jameson argues, 'Lacan describes schizophrenia as a breakdown of the signifying chain, [...] the interlocking syntagmatic series of signifiers which constitutes an utterance or a meaning'.<sup>56</sup> The signifying chain is Lacan's way of describing the process through which meaning is derived from

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49 Heerdan and Eloff, *Deleuze and Anarchism*, 2.

50 Thornton, 'Two's a Crowd'.

51 This paper has been published in various forms, following Lacan's first delivery of it at a conference in 1936. It is perhaps best known in English through its publication within the *Écrits*, a selected collection of Lacan's papers and seminars, see: Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2001), 1-6.

52 Lacan, *Écrits*, 1.

53 Ibid., 2

54 Adam Roberts, *Fredric Jameson* (London: Routledge, 2000), 123.

55 Ibid.

56 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 26.

words and language.<sup>57</sup> Lacan describes this ‘signifying chain’ as being like the ‘rings of a necklace that is a ring in another necklace made of rings’.<sup>58</sup>

Schizophrenia, in this sense, is a breakdown in how we make and interpret meaning. To view the world as schizophrenic is to challenge how connections between objects and signs are made. In the schizophrenic subject, as Lacan describes, the ‘sensorium’ is ‘indifferent in the production of a signifying chain’.<sup>59</sup> To extrapolate, instead of interpretation following onwards hierarchically or relationally, like Lacan’s rings of a necklace, interpretation is scattered and built from multiple non-linear inputs that are all given the same importance and weight. The human senses, or sensorium, in the schizophrenic’s case do not construct a relational, or hierarchical, web of words, or signifying chain. It is this kind of schizophrenia which Deleuze and Guattari champion in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), the first volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. They see schizophrenia as one way of avoiding the tyranny of individualism. The ‘schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model’, of interpreting one’s relationship to the world, ‘than a neurotic lying on the analyst’s couch’.<sup>60</sup> Placing the patient lying down on a couch, with the analyst seated in a chair, places the analyst physically above the patient in a position of paternalistic authority. It is an inherently hierarchical relationship, the patient becomes the object under study, rather than the analyst’s equal. This relationship with the analyst, based on egos, is replaced with a walk in ‘mountains’, without any hierarchical relationships to ‘gods’, ‘family’, ‘father or mother’.<sup>61</sup>

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57 Jameson explains that the signifying chain is Lacan’s development of Saussure’s assertion that the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary. To provide an example—borrowed from Richard Lane’s description of Structuralism in his book on Baudrillard—which explains this further, the relationship between the signifier *cat*, as spelled with letters in the Latin alphabet, has an arbitrary relationship to the four-legged mammal it signifies. Saussure’s proposition is one of the broader axioms of structuralism, and one of the key ideas post-structuralism responds to. The word *cat* is not given meaning by the mammal it signifies, but by the fact that the word *cat* is not the word *dog*, *horse*, or any other word. Words therefore only have meaning in relation to the broader structure they exist within, like links in an endless web of necklaces. See: Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 26 and Richard J. Lane, *Jean Baudrillard* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 15-16.

58 Lacan, *Écrits*, 116.

59 Ibid., 138

60 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 9.

61 Ibid.

These relationships are integral parts of a certain signifying chain, the web of hierarchical associations in which we place and relate to people. It is through these interconnecting relations that Western subjects understand themselves and others. In breaking these links, we create the possibility of constructing new forms of kinship and being together, different ways of relating to each other beyond those offered under capitalism and patriarchy. The links in the chain of the family tree, the foundations of Freudian psychoanalysis and its conception of the self, are broken by this schizophrenic subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari employed such ideas to deliberately provoke the psychoanalytic establishment and particularly Lacan, who, angered by the text, banned discussion of it in his famous seminars.<sup>62</sup> The schizophrenic body is attuned to receive the aforementioned multiplicity of inputs: ‘Everything is a machine. Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines— all of them connected to those of his body’.<sup>63</sup> Among such a range of inputs, the schizophrenic is just ‘one part amongst others’.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, Deleuze and Guattari’s definition of schizophrenia is closely related to the questions posed by DID. A schizophrenic subject forms their identity at the nexus of multiple inputs. If this identity is formed of multiple parts, it is potentially no longer reducible to a singular fundamental entity.

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), the second volume of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari develop their concept of schizophrenia and transform it into two new terms: the multiple and the rhizome. These terms are introduced as a way of thinking about literature and language. In their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari offer a challenge: why, if the world has become increasingly complex and chaotic, does ‘the book’ remain ‘the image of the world: radicle-chaosmos rather than root-cosmos’?<sup>65</sup> The radicle is the point of a plant embryo that develops into the primary root, before branching downwards from this centre point. In other words, why do most academic books within the Western philosophical tradition continue to

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62 Thornton, ‘Two’s a Crowd’.

63 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 9.

64 Ibid.

65 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 6.

represent a linear and chronological worldview, in the process projecting a specific 'image' of the world? Books are mostly organised by authors hierarchically with chapters that proceed in a set reading order and tell a linear narrative. Deleuze and Guattari extend this to the way academics analyse literature and language, they begin 'at a point S and proceed by dichotomy'.<sup>66</sup> Books and language are placed into hierarchical family trees of influences and influenced. Deleuze and Guattari argue that 'this system of thought has never reached an understanding of multiplicity [...] it must assume a strong principal unity'.<sup>67</sup> It is a misreading of nature, since 'roots are taproots with a more multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one'.<sup>68</sup> This is what Deleuze and Guattari define as the rhizome: it is a call for non-hierarchical analysis. Once again, we have a breakdown of the conventional signifying chain. The rhizome is a network of schizophrenics: it is a site of many multiple and interconnecting threads woven together as any one point is connected to any other point. Yet, they argue, it is not enough to proclaim the multiple, rather 'the multiple *must be made*'.<sup>69</sup> This is, in a sense, a challenge. Multiplicity cannot be seriously engaged with through traditional means of analysis and narrativization; it must be engaged with through a writing practice that incorporates multiplicity into its form. Deleuze and Guattari explore such practice in *A Thousand Plateaus*, through their collaborative practice in a book made up of 'plateaus', not chapters, that can be read in any order. As they explain, in cryptic terms, 'a rhizome is made of plateaus' and a plateau is always in the middle'.<sup>70</sup> These 'plateaus [...] communicate with one another across microfissures [...] any multiplicity connected to other multiplicities [...] in such a way as to form or extend a rhizome'.<sup>71</sup> As a result, the book does not follow a conventional order, and has no beginning, or end, only numerous middle points always in the process of becoming and resisting any kind of closure that a traditional structure would enforce.

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66 Ibid., 5.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid., 6

70 Ibid., 21

71 Ibid., 22

## Heteroglossia

Deleuze and Guattari's arguments are echoed in Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto'. Eugene Holland argues that, although inexplicit, Haraway's essay is clearly influenced by Deleuze and Guattari.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, Rosi Braidotti, in her reading of Haraway, finds an affinity between 'the rhizome' and Haraway's 'Cyborg'.<sup>73</sup> For Braidotti, both concepts represent 'a nomadic political ontology that [...] provides moveable foundations for a post-humanist view of subjectivity'.<sup>74</sup> What gives the cyborg such a radical potential is its position as a boundary figure and its rejection of wholeness and unity: '[t]he cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with [...] seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity'.<sup>75</sup> The cyborg, in Haraway's theorisation, is a monster that rejects gender essentialism, refusing to draw its political legitimacy from any kind of appeal to what is natural. Such a creature 'does not seek unitary identity' and generates 'antagonistic dualisms without end'.<sup>76</sup> In other words, the cyborg is a metaphor to describe political organisation not based on any singular identity but that functions as an assemblage of individuals from a variety of backgrounds and socio-economic positions.

At the conclusion of her Manifesto, Haraway argues that the cyborg, as a metaphor for feminist politics, 'is a dream not of common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia [...] It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories'.<sup>77</sup> Haraway's rejection of common language restates the cyborg's rejection of gender essentialism, arguing for a more open collective feminist politics based on difference rather than shared biological experience. The alternative to common language, suggested by Haraway, is

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<sup>72</sup> Eugene W. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's A Thousand Plateaus: A Reader's Guide* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 142.

<sup>73</sup> Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Gender and Culture (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 23.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 150.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 180

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 181

heteroglossia: the coexistence of seemingly contradictory conflicting voices. Haraway posits heteroglossia as a powerful tool for rewriting and remaking both the world and the self. As an imaginative practice, this brief quote suggests that heteroglossia not only deconstructs but also builds alternative worlds and systems of relation.

The term heteroglossia refers to a concept developed by Mikhail Bakhtin in the 1930s. In a 1941 essay titled ‘Discourse in the Novel’, Bakhtin argues, ‘unitary language’, or common language, is ‘at every moment of its linguistic life [...] opposed to the realities of heteroglossia’.<sup>78</sup> For Bakhtin, the creation of a unitary language must overcome a heterogeneous diversity of tongues and practices, ‘imposing specific limits to it, guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystalizing into a real, although still relative, unity—the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, “correct language”’.<sup>79</sup> This quotation carries an element of anti-essentialism that prefigures Haraway. For Bakhtin, ‘unitary language’ is not something ‘given’ or an essentialism that we should take for granted, but it is always ‘posited’, always an imposition by the dominant power.<sup>80</sup> To create such a unitary language, it is necessary to forcefully overcome a more complex, already existing, heteroglossia, or diversity of voice. Such a perspective is shared by Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari who, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, write that:

[...] there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. Language is [...] “an essentially heterogeneous reality.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 270.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

To try to overcome this heterogenous reality through the ideological production of a unitary language is a strategy that seeks to reduce diversity into the illusion of control, or relative unity. This process, of determining the social norms of speech and language and regulating what is considered correct, functions as censorship. As Frantz Fanon, a post-colonial psychoanalyst, writes, '[t]o speak a language is to take on a world, a culture'.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, to create a unitary language, at the expense of all others, is to limit the potential worlds and ways of being it is possible to imagine.

It is such a unitary language that Haraway seems to oppose when she writes that (as cyborgs) '[w]e do not need a totality in order to work well'.<sup>83</sup> Within some feminisms, particularly within strains that centre white middle-class womanhood, the 'dream of common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one'.<sup>84</sup> In this sense, not only does the construction of a common language centre certain experiences at the expense of others, it reinforces and maintains colonial structures of knowledge. As I understand it, heteroglossia is the practice of undoing such narratives and, through this process, finding diversities of voice and experience. This is important because finding heteroglossia is one way of re-opening the political imagination in order to find new possible worlds, other possible selves and different ways of being in relation to others. Heteroglossia and multiplicity are mutually bound together as terms, heteroglossia being one way of describing or understanding the networks of multiple inputs within which subjects exist. In my view, multiplicity is simultaneously both an interior concept for understanding the self and subjectivity as non-unitary *and* an exterior concept for understanding the self in relation to the world and to others.

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82 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto-Press, 2008), 25.

83 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 173.

84 Ibid.

## Multiplicity Online

The relationship between exterior and interior multiplicity can be developed further through a reading of Stone's book *The War of Desire and Technology* (1996) and Turkle's *Life on the Screen* (1996). Both texts respond to the increasing popularity and accessibility of the commercial internet particularly following the development of the first widely popular graphical web browsers: Netscape Navigator was released in 1994 and Internet Explorer the following year, and these programmes made surfing the web easier for non-expert users.<sup>85</sup> Both Stone and Turkle argue for the importance of personae and the necessity of multiplicity in a world where everyday life is marked by digital-physical hybridity. Following Deleuze and Guattari's resistance to academic convention, Stone's book in particular is innovative not just in its content but also in its form, creative elements and use of language. Therefore, in this reading I engage with the book's form as well as its content.

In *The War of Desire and Technology*, Stone attempts to more explicitly connect the medical and theoretical aspects of multiplicity. Her book, like *A Thousand Plateaus*, is organized into nonlinear chapters. In one there is a lengthy discussion of clinical and legal accounts of DID/MPD. This takes the form of a fictionalised, almost anecdotal, account of a real legal case. This case, involving a woman with DID who had been the victim of sexual assault, came to centre around both the validity of DID as a diagnosis and the legal status of the woman's alters (a term used to describe the multiple personality states that a DID patient experiences). This stylised account is threaded around a more conventional discussion of the medical and philosophical issues surrounding DID. Neither of these 'threads', Stone explains in an endnote, 'is meant to be read as a linear narrative'.<sup>86</sup> In this sense, Stone's chapter echoes the plateau-like form of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* and recognises their observation that the multiple 'must be made'.

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85 For a history of the early internet including Netscape, Internet Explorer and their predecessor Mosaic, see 'Part III: Only connect...' in John Naughton, *A Brief History of the Future: The Origins of the Internet* (London: Phoenix, 2001).

86 Stone, *The War of Desire*, 189.

In this chapter, Stone asks whether within clinical accounts there is room for a ‘nontraumatic multiplicity’.<sup>87</sup> Stone does not deny that DID stems from trauma and can cause distress, but she seeks to question whether the experience of ‘multiple personality (without stigmatising the final D)’ might be a more common experience than its medicalised extreme.<sup>88</sup> In particular she challenges Colin Ross, a clinical psychiatrist influential in the study of DID, who asserts that there cannot be ‘more than one person in a single body’.<sup>89</sup> Must multiple personality always be pathologised as mental illness? Stone contends Ross’s statement is more social construct than medical observation, relying on ‘cultural norms concerning the meaning of “person” and “body”’.<sup>90</sup> In this sense, Stone argues that medical accounts of multiplicity have become a kind of common language, and she seeks to explore whether a greater diversity of experience, or heteroglossia, is hidden by these medical narratives.

Significantly, the terrain of identity has long been a site of struggle and discipline. The notion that identity is something singular, with each citizen assigned one name, is a tool of power and can be used as a form of social control. As Stone puts it, ‘laws that fixed the body within a judicial field’ and ‘the invention and deployment of documentations of citizenship’ were both processes of ‘fine-tuning surveillance and control in the interests of producing a more “stable” manageable citizen’.<sup>91</sup> This suggests that differing concepts of identity emerge within certain historical and political conditions. As Stone points out, in premodern times and in some North American cultures ‘changing your name to signify an important change in your life was common’.<sup>92</sup> Stone further argues, ‘the idea behind taking a new name appropriate to one’s circumstances was that identity is not static’.<sup>93</sup> If, in contrast, a society does not recognise the individual’s right to have a ‘*symbolic* identity (name) that coincides with your actual state at the time’, then, the individual

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87 Ibid., 58

88 Parenthesis original: Ibid., 58.

89 Qtd in, Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., 90

92 Ibid., 46

93 Ibid.

becomes ‘the generic identity that institutional descriptors allow’.<sup>94</sup> If we consider this line of argument alongside of Michel Foucault’s analysis of the rise of modern surveillance systems in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), it becomes clear that Western modernity relies heavily on the construction of a unitary identity. Foucault considers the rise of the modern surveillance state as a ‘tighter partitioning of the population’ through ever ‘more efficient techniques of locating and obtaining information’.<sup>95</sup> For Foucault, forms of ‘hierarchized surveillance’ can be found in ‘working-class housing estates, hospitals, asylums, prisons [and] schools’.<sup>96</sup> In other words, with the development of modern nation states and state power in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the assignment of a singular name and identity to each individual became crucial to tracking and organizing individuals through systems of criminal justice, healthcare, education and labour.

Clearly, this debate over whether identity can only be unitary or whether it has the potential to be multiple is a broader one with larger implications than a disagreement in psychiatry about terminology. If the construction of unitary identity is a means of discipline utilised by the state and private companies, could multiplicity be used to avoid systems of tracking and control? In other words, might multiplicity constitute a resistive practice? These questions are explored further in Chapter Two, but, for now, we have already encountered in the philosophical project of Deleuze and Guattari the idea that the multiple might be a way of deliberately subverting academic convention and challenging the conceptual basis of identity. *The War of Desire and Technology* follows in this tradition. Stone describes the form she uses as being closer to a novel or ‘adventure narrative’ than traditional academic prose.<sup>97</sup> Stone openly admits her book is ‘thoroughly experimental and subject to recall for factory modification at any time’.<sup>98</sup> It is therefore appropriate to take seriously the unorthodox form Stone uses to present her ideas. In describing her work as an experiment subject to

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94 Ibid., 46-47

95 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 77.

96 Ibid., 77 and 171.

97 Stone, *The War of Desire*, 21.

98 Ibid.

‘recall’ or ‘modification’, we can see that the structure of Stone’s text presents a view of the world in which identity is not permanently fixed or static. Instead, it is something that is altered and changed over time, connecting with Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of closure, expressed through the (anti-)structures of the rhizome and plateau. It also links more broadly with Deleuze’s emphasis on the idea of ‘becoming’ over the idea of ‘being’ (this concept is more fully explored in Chapter Four).<sup>99</sup> Within this framework, individual identity is never static or unitary but always in flux and on the way to becoming something else.

Stone’s search for what she terms a ‘non-traumatic multiplicity’ beyond DID begins with an exploration of multiplicity in relation to ‘communication technology’.<sup>100</sup> In particular, Stone is interested in the ‘prosthetic character of virtuality’, and the potential of digital spaces to enable experimentation with ‘personae within cyberspace’.<sup>101</sup> Once again, the book’s form reflects its content, which is highly interested in the concept of play. For Stone, ‘play’ is one of the most significant ways in which ‘humans’ spend time ‘developing interactional skills’.<sup>102</sup> Stone argues this is how we learn to interact with computers as well as other humans. Most digital devices are learned through ‘poke-and-see technology’, a term she appropriates from Michael Naimark.<sup>103</sup> ‘Poke-and-see’ here refers to more modern Graphical User Interface (GUI or UI) design trends, developed by Microsoft for Windows and Apple for Mac OS, in the 1990s. In these operating systems, the user no longer needs to understand a command line or have any programming knowledge. Instead, the user clicks, or pokes, graphical icons and representations on the screen to operate the computer. Similar developments were also changing how people accessed the internet. With the launch of Netscape Navigator, the first recognisably modern graphical web browser, and Microsoft’s competitor product Internet Explorer, navigating the web now became visual as users clicked on and followed

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99 Eugene B. Young, *The Deleuze and Guattari Dictionary* (London; New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2013), 13.

100 Stone, *The War of Desire*, 59.

101 *Ibid.*, 59, 86

102 *Ibid.*, 9

103 *Ibid.*, 10

hyperlinks.<sup>104</sup> Such a design philosophy continues today, especially in the mobile phone industry with Android and iOS. Crucially, the user can learn to operate the computer without needing a technical manual. Most functions can be performed or learned through play, simply poking and then seeing what happens. The term ‘interact’ is not taken as a neutral term, it is defined by Stone as ‘two conscious agents in conversation, playfully and spontaneously developing a mutual discourse’.<sup>105</sup> The implication here is that computers shape us as much as we shape them. One of the most crucial ways they do this, Stone argues, is through providing a space in which to explore multiplicity. Stone argues: ‘The technosocial space of virtual systems, with its irruptive ludic quality and its potential for experimentation and emergence, is a domain of nontraumatic multiplicity’.<sup>106</sup> In other words, through playing with technology we play with identity.

These ideas of play, multiplicity and everyday computer use are at the forefront of Sherry Turkle’s work *Life on the Screen*. Turkle argues that computers and internet technology are objects to think with, they make the abstract ideas of postmodernism, such as those developed by media theorist Jean Baudrillard, intelligible to everyday users. Computers ‘do things to us’, they alter ‘our ways of thinking about ourselves and other people’.<sup>107</sup> For Turkle, our perception of the world is increasingly mediated by machines and the objects we use every day. The term *everyday user* is itself a nebulous term, but here refers to those who might not have specialist knowledge or education in technology or theory. For example, Turkle considers ‘objects on the screen’ to be simulacra because they have no ‘simple physical referent’.<sup>108</sup> Although the concept of the simulacra has been outlined in my introduction, to revisit it here, Baudrillard uses the term Simulacra to describe a simulation which has developed to the point where it no longer references anything real.<sup>109</sup> As Baudrillard writes: [s]imulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a

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104 For a detailed analysis of these specific developments see: Naughton, *A Brief History of the Future*, 243-244.

105 Stone, *The War of Desire*, 11.

106 Ibid., 59-60

107 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 26.

108 Ibid., 47

109 Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 5.

substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal [...]. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory.<sup>110</sup> Instead of copying something already existing, a simulacrum is a copy without an original. The image Baudrillard evokes is of a simulation that does not map a territory but, through the very process of simulation itself, produces the territory it is mapping.

Turkle uses this concept to describe modern computer operating systems. As she writes, ‘the files and documents on my computer screen function as copies of objects of which they are the first examples’.<sup>111</sup> In short, through the poke-and-see interface which has its origins in the early versions of MacOS, ‘we have learned to take things at interface value’.<sup>112</sup> This suggests most users no longer have any real understanding of how computers or networks actually operate, they have reached such a complexity that no single individual can know how everything works. By extension, this also raises the question of whether anyone can really know where computers end. As Turkle suggests, ‘we come to question simple distinctions between the real and artificial’.<sup>113</sup> This comment suggests that real and virtual spaces and concepts are now so intertwined as to be inseparable. Turkle also demonstrates how the MacOS tradition of user interface design also gives us an insight into postmodernism’s fractured subject, or multiplicity. Computer windows ‘provide a way for a computer to place you in multiple contexts at the same time [...] your identity on the computer is a sum of your distributed presence’.<sup>114</sup> What this implies is that multiplicity is facilitated by modern computer technology, it is part of the everyday experience of computer use. As computer windows and screens proliferate presence becomes increasingly distributed. For Turkle, multiplicity is a necessity.

Turkle’s methodology in *Life on the Screen* uses both interviews with members of virtual communities and participant observation in virtual worlds. Its content includes extracts from

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110 Ibid., 2

111 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 47.

112 Ibid., 23

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid., 13

interviews, records of online conversations, elements of anecdote/biography and detailed analysis. In this sense, the book incorporates a multiplicity of voice. Turkle's interview subjects are all users of Multi User Dungeons (MUDs), which were the early predecessors of Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games such as *Second Life* (2003) and *World of Warcraft* (2004). A MUD was a text based online game in which users inhabited a digital world often interacting with other users through roleplay.<sup>115</sup> For the users Turkle studied, trying on different identities and personae was not just a game or form of play, it provided tools for navigating both the digital and physical worlds around them. Rather than emerging from trauma or being traumatic, as the experience of DID is for many who suffer it, for these users multiplicity had a therapeutic value. One chapter of Turkle's book, 'Tinysex and Gender Trouble', examines roleplaying different genders over the internet. Turkle contends 'MUDs and the virtual personae one adopts within them are objects to think with for reflecting on the social construction of gender'.<sup>116</sup> Turkle interviews individuals who use MUDs to 'explore conflicts raised by one's biological gender'.<sup>117</sup> Among the examples cited are a 'male computer programmer' whose experiences with multiplicity, using personae who are of different genders and to varying degrees (non)human, helped him to overcome a traumatic and competitive socialisation and explore collaboration. Turkle also quotes from a male industrial designer who, through playing with personae of different genders, explored being assertive while avoiding stereotypes of masculine aggression.<sup>118</sup> Another example follows a woman from the US South experimenting with gender identity to practice 'being firm but not rigid'.<sup>119</sup> In all these examples, individuals drew upon online personae in a variety of day-to-day interactions, demonstrating the erosion of physical-digital boundaries and the flexibility of identity. These individuals also challenge notions that a postmodern fracturing of identity, what Jameson laments as 'psychic fragmentation', is harmful or negative.<sup>120</sup> These explorations highlight the importance Haraway

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115 For information on MUDs see: Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 180-184.

116 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 213.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid., 219

119 Ibid., 221

120 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 90, 117 and 399.

attaches to rejecting attempts at constructing common experience or unity. The writings of both Turkle and Stone can be considered radical as they work to destabilise notions of unitary identity and undermine binary conceptions of gender. They see the destabilisation of identity and the social frameworks within which identities form, along with the collapse of digital-physical boundaries, as an opportunity for individuals to explore new identities, destabilise gendered categories and experiment with new ways of relating to others or being together.

*Life on the Screen* therefore subverts medical definitions and sees the act of roleplaying different personae online in MUDs as having therapeutic and political potential. Turkle further seeks to expand her findings into a broader defence of multiplicity's usefulness. Turkle addresses the work of James Glass, who in *Shattered Selves* (1993) critiques postmodernists such as Deleuze and Guattari for not grounding ideas of multiplicity in experience. For example, Glass criticises Deleuze and Guattari of showing 'enormous insensitivity' to the pain 'schizophrenia [...] creates in human beings'.<sup>121</sup> Glass further argues that the very aspects of multiplicity that these theorists affirm as liberating are deeply traumatic, causing 'enormous dislocation and pain', for those with DID/MPD.<sup>122</sup> Effectively, Glass is arguing that the postmodern and post-structuralist use of the terms schizophrenia and multiplicity does not sufficiently take into account individual experiences of trauma. Turkle however, echoing Stone, does not discount or ignore trauma, but asks how we can move beyond it. Turkle both draws on Glass's argument and subverts it, suggesting that:

Multiplicity is not viable if it means shifting among personalities that cannot communicate.

Multiplicity is not acceptable if it means being confused to the point of immobility. How can we be multiple and coherent at the same time?<sup>123</sup>

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121 James Glass, *Shattered Selves: Multiple Personality in a Postmodern World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 135.

122 Ibid., 135

123 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 258.

This is a radical question because it subtly asks the reader to imagine a situation, either in terms of altered individual consciousness or broader social change, in which alternative ways of being multiple might emerge. In her answer, Turkle turns to Lifton's *The Protean Self*. Turkle's interpretation of Lifton's argument is thus: if traditional culture is being broken down by (post)modern conditions, and the old unitary notion of identity is no longer viable, then one strategy of adaptation might be to 'embrace the idea of a fragmented self'.<sup>124</sup> As Turkle paraphrases,

[...] Lifton sees another possibility, a healthy protean self. It is capable, like Proteus, of fluid transformations but is grounded in coherence and moral outlook. It is multiple but integrated. You can have a sense of self without being one self.<sup>125</sup>

This provides us with a useful definition of non-traumatic multiplicity. Turkle's critique of Glass is implied throughout her book as she presents case studies of internet users using 'virtuality as a transitional space' to explore multiplicity and resolving inner contradictions, allowing them to move on and improve their lives.<sup>126</sup> These ideas find a more recent echo in the concluding words of Brown's *Tokyo Cyberpunk* which suggest that we might 'accept the posthuman self as an ongoing work of fiction that is in a constant state of revision [...] in between human, animal and machine'.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, roleplaying in the 1990s MUDs studied by Turkle was text based, and therefore largely a form of creative writing. If exploring personae through such online writing might constitute a non-traumatic multiplicity, might we also find multiplicity in other forms of creative

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124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid., 262-263

127 Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 185.

practice? In Part Two, this chapter aims to uncover practices of multiplicity, similar to those described by Turkle and Stone above, within feminist cyberpunk.

## The Persona

However, before we turn to the literary texts under consideration in this chapter, we should note that the term *persona* itself should not be taken for granted. Given that my analysis in this thesis returns to the concept of the persona at several points, it is useful to give an overview of the term's construction within literary criticism. We can find an origin for the term persona in Carl Jung's analytic psychology. A Latin word, Jung explains that personae were, in ancient traditions, 'the masks worn by actors to indicate the role they played'.<sup>128</sup> For Jung, '[f]undamentally the persona is nothing real: it is a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be'.<sup>129</sup> The persona here is a mask an individual creates and presents to the world in order to balance aspects of their personal unconscious (experiences unique to an individual) and their collective unconscious (what Jung believed to be inherited aspects of the brain's structure). The persona for Jung is a fragile shield, 'at bottom collective', which 'others often have a greater share' in making than the individual.<sup>130</sup> In other words, personae are constructed as much by those around us—by their attitudes, expectations and responses—as they are constructed by ourselves. In this sense, the term is not dissimilar to Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of schizophrenia. Personae and schizophrenic subjectivity are formed from multiple inputs. In both concepts, the identity and subjectivity of the individual is not formed from an innate essentialism but by outside inputs, be those in the form of the environment, community or society. Recalling Nancy's plural self, in both approaches the individual emerges from broader societal and communal contexts and cannot be separated from them.

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<sup>128</sup> Carl Jung, *The Collected Works of C. C. Jung | Complete Digital Edition, Volume 7: Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, trans. Richard F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 216.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 216-217

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

The term *persona* also has a presence in more traditional and canonical studies of literature. As literary critic Robert C. Elliott writes in *The Literary Persona* (1982), the term became popular among British and American academics in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century as a new critical approach for studying the works of several canonical writers ranging from Chaucer, to Alexander Pope and Ezra Pound.<sup>131</sup> In Elliott's words, 'the word *persona* is used by literary interpreters to clarify the relationship between the writer—the historical person—and the characters the writer creates'.<sup>132</sup> Particularly, Elliott's book is concerned with what exactly is happening when an author writes 'I'.<sup>133</sup> For example, in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, does the I refer to Dante himself or a *persona* mediating between an author 'who knows the whole story in advance' and the Pilgrim who 'encounters each episode freshly, in innocence'?<sup>134</sup> Interestingly, in Elliott's view, this approach to the *persona* is in tension with post-structuralist theory. For Elliott, the *persona* is an approach which centres the 'author's "I" as though it had some kind of substantial existence', in contrast to the post-structuralist argument the I is 'an illusion [...] a construct, constituted entirely by a variety of social and linguistic codes of which it is a mere function'.<sup>135</sup> However, a few sentences later Elliott dismisses this line of thought, stating that, in his book, 'the two discourses do not meet'.<sup>136</sup>

Yet, the contradiction that Elliott sets up is not entirely solid or convincing. For example, Richard Blackmur's book of criticism, *The Double Agent* (1935), in a few places seems to prefigure some of the post-structuralist ideas discussed earlier. In an analysis of Ezra Pound, who is described as 'neither a great poet nor a great thinker', Blackmur argues that Pound's writing is 'all surface and articulation'.<sup>137</sup> Playing with the idea of '*persona*', Pound's 'surface is a mask through which many voices are heard'.<sup>138</sup> Going further, Blackmur argues that in Pound's poem 'Hugh Selwyn

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131 Robert C. Elliott, *The Literary Persona* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982), ix.

132 Ibid., x

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid., 10

135 Ibid., xi-xii

136 Ibid.

137 Richard P. Blackmur, *The Double Agent: Essays in Craft and Elucidation* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962), 30 and 31.

138 Ibid.

Mauberley' a figure is constructed that views 'wholeness' as 'a prison into which the mind is not compelled to thrust itself'.<sup>139</sup> Blackmur's interpretation is interesting because it suggests the possibility of using a poetic persona to experiment with a subjectivity that rejects totality and closure. Instead, such subjectivity, might aim to assume what Deleuze and Guattari describe as a position from which many voices, perspectives or 'agents of production' can emerge, like 'sunbeams' that are all 'recorded on the surface of the body'.<sup>140</sup>

A similar prefiguration occurs in W. H. Auden's essay 'The Shield of Perseus' (1962), where he discusses 'Byron' as a persona. As Auden argues, Byron liked to give 'the impression that he dashed off his poetry, like a gentleman without effort'.<sup>141</sup> However, through examining the edits Byron made to *Don Juan*, it becomes clear that 'he took a great deal more pains than he pretended'.<sup>142</sup> Auden cautions against treating the author as a unitary figure:

One should be wary, when comparing an author's various productions, of saying: this piece is an expression of the real man and that piece is not—for nobody, not even the subject can be certain who he is.<sup>143</sup>

This quote echoes the creation of the ideal-I in Lacan's mirror stage; any notion of identity that places a unitary individual at the centre of knowledge is little more than a comforting 'illusion of autonomy', or of control.<sup>144</sup> Auden then discusses how some poets, such as Keats, present letters and poems that could have been written by two different people, while others, like Byron, came to show a consistency of 'poetic *persona*' and 'epistolary *persona*'.<sup>145</sup> As these two personae

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 34

<sup>140</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 15 and 16.

<sup>141</sup> Wystan H. Auden, 'The Shield of Perseus', in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1962), pp. 371-461, 400.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 401

<sup>144</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 5

<sup>145</sup> Auden, 'The Shield of Perseus', 401.

increasingly converge it makes the Byron persona seem authentic. Auden suggests that the characteristically reckless figure of Byron is a persona deliberately constructed by a more careful and conscientious Byron; an argument evidenced by the poet's extensive edits to his own verse, which was far from spontaneously composed. However, Auden is not saying that this conscientious Byron is the more authentic one, but that its existence undermines our sense of certainty over who Byron was. In these terms, the Byron persona is successful in the sense that it meets the expectations and environment of its audience, hiding the more unfamiliar, or vulnerable, Byron from the reader and protecting it from a potentially less hospitable public reception. This suggests that the act of writing is one which involves a Jungian compromise between the writer and the audience. The act of writing itself is therefore a process of assuming a persona and potentially an act of multiplicity. Auden reminds us that personae provide a means of exploring the limits of both our own identities and other's perceptions of them. This whole process undermines certainty over the existence of, what Elliot terms, the central 'author "I"'.<sup>146</sup>

## **Part Two: Multiplicity in Cyberpunk Literature**

### **Gender Metamorphosis**

Elisabeth Vonarburg's *The Silent City* (first published in French in 1981 and translated into English in 1988) is a novel that moves towards a potential coexistence between multiple personae, but Vonarburg's depiction of multiple subjectivity is limited and often contradictory and does not completely move beyond binary notions of gender. However, in recognising some of Vonarburg's ideas as limitations we can find new boundaries that need to be explored and potentially broken. Significantly, what also makes the novel particularly notable for my thesis is that it provides a

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<sup>146</sup> Elliot, *The Literary Persona*, xi.

bridge between the feminist utopian science fiction of the 1970s—such as Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974), Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975) and Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976)—and the feminist cyberpunk science fiction of the 1990s discussed within this thesis. Utopian studies is a diverse field and there are many competing definitions of the term. However, for the purposes of this analysis of Vonarburg’s novel, *The Silent City* falls broadly within the tradition of the ‘critical utopia’, a term used by Tom Moylan to describe the aforementioned feminist utopias of the 1970s.<sup>147</sup> For Moylan, critical utopias are works of utopian fiction which that express ‘oppositional thought’, in that they critique both their current ‘historical situation’ and the ‘limitations’ of the ‘utopian tradition’ itself.<sup>148</sup> Vonarburg’s novel can be identified within this tradition, while also moving towards, and prefiguring, some of the key themes of feminist cyberpunk.

The first half of *The Silent City* includes many tropes that would become staples of cyberpunk. This part of the novel is set in a large underground city, which is supported by a vast, internet-like, information and communication network. The city, which is never given an explicit name, has been designed to survive an unspecified, though implied nuclear, apocalypse. The bodies of the city’s dwindling inhabitants, having unnaturally extended their lifespans, are decaying. With unreliable bodies, these denizens conduct most of their lives and activity via the network, while rare public events are attended through remote projection into artificial bodies. Likewise, any tasks performed in the outside world are done by projecting into remote manipulators, or omnachs. In one particularly bizarre scene the surviving inhabitants attend a medieval themed party. Paul, who has arrived in his original body, questions initially whether his host, Desparts, is ‘man or machine?’<sup>149</sup> This system of projection allows Desparts to appear as a youthful persona, a ‘Desparts of time past’.<sup>150</sup> Paul quickly realises he cannot know who actually controls this machine, and ‘watches the

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147 Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2014), 1.

148 Ibid., 10

149 Elisabeth Vonarburg, *The Silent City*, trans. Jane Brierley (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1992), 23.

150 Ibid.

expressive play of artificial flesh quite unable to decide whether the real Desparts lies behind it'.<sup>151</sup>

The uncanny uncertainty tells us that Paul's original question was rhetorical. If he cannot tell whether Desparts is real or not, Desparts has already become his own simulacra. The inhabitants of the city are so far removed from their original bodies that they have become copies of themselves.

This situation becomes even stranger when Paul reflects that the entire party might be 'arranged' to 'keep the number' of survivors a 'secret'.<sup>152</sup> It is then revealed that some survivors are pretending to be multiple people at once, concealing that there are 'only eight' survivors left.<sup>153</sup> In a further layer of complexity each machine is playing a figure of Arthurian myth, with Desparts insisting that Paul call him 'Arthur, not Richard'.<sup>154</sup> These 'masks behind masks behind masks' become games played by the rich and powerful.<sup>155</sup> The Arthurian myth adds yet another level of irony and simulacra; the myth itself being a romanticised version of English medieval history that never really existed. Exactly why this game is necessary is ambiguous, but as Paul questions, 'what else have they got?'<sup>156</sup> This rhetorical question implies that the events are an attempt to cling to some sense of being human, some kind of meaning, when their physical selves are far from so. Multiplicity here is the game of those going mad, an attempt to cover up an inherent inhumanity. A final trick of the powerful to fool an audience that has long since ceased to exist. One of these figures accuses Paul of being incapable of 'sharing the simple human joys', to which Paul replies questioningly '[s]imple? Human?'<sup>157</sup> Again, this question implies that this simulacra of a human party is a performance repeated more out of habit, as way of reassuring each other that they are still real, rather than out of any substantial desire for bodily pleasure or the company of others.

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151 Ibid.

152 Ibid., 25

153 Ibid., 28

154 Ibid., 23

155 Ibid., 24

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid., 27

The city these survivors inhabit is rarely directly described, perhaps echoing its unreality, But, in one sparse passage it is revealed to have been hidden before the apocalypse as a ‘temporary shelter’ that was secretly ‘permanent’.<sup>158</sup> It is a city built with:

fake parks, fake sky, fake rain, fake democratic elections and real servitude for hundreds of ordinary citizens who took refuge here at the very end, thanks to a sudden afterthought of the legal owners [...]<sup>159</sup>

In this passage, the city itself is presented as a total simulacrum. As Jenny Wolmark notes in her analysis of the novel, Vonarburg evokes the idea of the ‘simulacra’ ‘[a]s the boundaries between the real and the simulated become unstable’ along with ‘the distinctions between appearance and reality, the past and the present’.<sup>160</sup> However, Wolmark’s analysis of this does not go far enough. As the above passage implies, the subterranean city is a total simulacrum of the long destroyed corrupt surface society. It is a copy of a copy. Truth and reality are not just unstable, but they have long ceased to be concepts relevant to the functioning of the city. It is multiple in so far as it is fractured, fragmented and, despite being underground, only surface deep: it is a simulation, in Baudrillard’s words, with no ‘referential being’ or ‘substance’.<sup>161</sup> As Paul’s rhetorical question highlights, the party does not function to fulfil any simple human pleasure but works to produce an elaborate game of signs that signify normality. In this sense, the multiplicity on offer is a result of a fracturing dominant class and ideology. However, moving into the second part, Vonarburg expands the novel’s use of multiplicity more productively, exploring issues of identity and gender.

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158 Ibid., 24

159 Ibid.

160 Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (New York, NY: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 135.

161 Baudrillard, *Simulacra*, 2.

The novel's second and third parts are written much more in the style of feminist science fiction from the 1970s, particularly echoing the writing of Suzy McKee Charnas. The novel moves out of the city and into the outside world, presenting a neo-feudal society constructed around a resurgent patriarchy that, using a warped interpretation of Christianity, blames women for the apocalypse to justify their oppression. Vonarburg writes, in this new society, 'God had not punished men, but women [...] There were no menservants in this newest Scripture. The word had vanished. Women are objects to be manipulated at will'.<sup>162</sup> Such a narrative device echoes Charnas's dystopia *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and its sequel the critical utopia *Motherlines* (1978). *Walk to the End of the World* is set within a dystopia called 'the Holdfast', a feudal society, similar to the one imagined by Vonarburg, ruled by men who have developed a mythology to oppress women.<sup>163</sup> Like *The Silent City*, Charnas's novel establishes a narrative world in which men blame women for causing a nuclear apocalypse referred to as 'the Wasting of the world'.<sup>164</sup>

In *The Silent City*, Desparts and Paul have created a genetically engineered woman, named Elisa (the novel's main protagonist), whom they hope to manipulate into saving their dying world. In the novel's second part Elisa struggles against the purpose set out for her by Paul, her creator, and seeks to destroy, or otherwise render inoperable, the advanced military and genetic technology of the remaining cities, protecting the outside world from the abuse of such power. In doing so she tries to resist the destiny laid out for her by Paul. Multiplicity becomes a necessary trait of survival in the deeply patriarchal and post-apocalyptic surface societies. Elisa, whose body can regenerate itself and shapeshift, takes on the persona of Hanse, allowing her to travel more freely. As Wolmark writes in her analysis of this process, '[g]ender metamorphosis [...] enables Vonarburg to explore the precariousness of sexual identity'.<sup>165</sup> Passing as a man, she presents a persona that meets the outside society's social expectations.

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<sup>162</sup> Vonarburg, *Silent City*, 95.

<sup>163</sup> Suzy McKee Charnas, *Walk to the End of the World: And, Motherlines* (London: The Women's Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 137.

‘Hanse’, a masculine persona Elisa creates for herself, comes to be more than just a disguise, and at one point Elisa fears that she has become ‘so used to her male body that she’s beginning to think like men on the Outside’, suggesting—as Wolmark notes—a ‘dissolution’ of ‘physical and psychic boundaries’.<sup>166</sup> Eventually the borderlines between Elisa and her Hanse persona begin to erode as she starts to feel ‘the familiarity [...] of Hanse’s body’ when she returns to it.<sup>167</sup> More layers are added to the multiplicity when Elisa, as Hanse, takes on a role as a ‘messenger of God’ to persuade the local people into obeying her.<sup>168</sup> Again, she creates a persona for herself that conforms to the local people’s traditions and superstitions in order to navigate their world. Yet, identity is not totally fluid in *The Silent City*. Elisa admits that, while she ‘cannot be a woman outside’ she is ‘not at ease in her man’s body’.<sup>169</sup> An internal sense of gender identity remains at odds with her new appearance. This is presented in the text with the narrator’s continued use of feminine pronouns used to describe Elisa. She also experiences a sensation of dysphoria as ‘her nostrils dilate involuntarily at her male smell’.<sup>170</sup> Here, it might be argued that Vonarburg constructs a limit to the potential of multiplicity as Elisa’s experience of dysphoria makes Hanse’s body alien to her and not entirely an integrated part of her sense of self.

Multiplicity, for Vonarburg, cannot change an individual’s innate gender identity. Spending too long within the male persona causes conflict and tension with Elisa’s feminine identity and sense of self as a woman. Multiplicity is primarily a useful tool for Elisa, one which allows her to navigate and undermine patriarchal spaces. She decides to use her status as a man and a prophet to encourage some of the women from the outside to arm themselves so they might ‘choose their fate at least once’.<sup>171</sup> In Wolmark’s interpretation, Elisa’s gender metamorphosis into Hanse has ‘far-reaching effects in narrative terms’, serving as a catalyst for the ‘collapse of [...] barriers between

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166 Vonarburg, *Silent City*, 94; Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 137.

167 Vonarburg, *Silent City*, 127.

168 *Ibid.*, 87

169 *Ibid.*, 93

170 *Ibid.*, 87

171 *Ibid.*, 95

the City and Outside'.<sup>172</sup> The situation becomes complicated further when Elisa feels and explores sexual desire in Hanse's body. As she has sex with the character of Judith, she initially constantly reassures herself that 'it's herself, Elisa underneath'<sup>173</sup> and that it 'isn't really my body, it's *me*'.<sup>174</sup> These lines come across as almost protests to the reader, which do not sound entirely convincing. The protestations seem especially hollow when Elisa loses control, and the breathless act of sex itself is described in a paragraph without any full stops and minimal punctuation.<sup>175</sup> In her interpretation of this passage, Wolmark notes that '[t]he dissolution of textual features in this passage conveys the fluid and shifting nature of Elisa's sexual embodiment'.<sup>176</sup> However, as Elisa's experience of dysphoria suggests, identity in *Silent City* may not be as entirely fluid as Wolmark suggests; Elisa always retains her identity as a woman and never identifies as a man. Despite Elisa's exploration of the possibilities of subjective multiplicity, her identity never fully doubles into two genders. As her experiences in a male body and her resultant dysphoria demonstrate, there are limits to Elisa's own identity and its malleability. But, even with these limitations, the act of assuming another persona, or multiple other personae, is presented as messy and identity is never convincingly static either. Vonarburg's work may construct boundaries around identity, but it also cannot resist pushing and playing with them a little.

Finally, the novel's third part echoes more explicitly the feminist utopias of the 1970s. Elisa creates her own genetically engineered children, who share her shapeshifting abilities, and establishes a rural commune with utopian characteristics, echoing the critical utopian form (see, for example, the future society of Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, or the society of Whileaway in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*). Elisa intends to raise the children and send them into the outside world, with an aim to alter the gene pool of the surviving humans. To this end, Elisa makes the children alternate between male and female bodies 'every [...] two years', so 'they won't

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<sup>172</sup> Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 136-137.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 97

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 98

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 1.

forget their female experience' when they must live within the outside's patriarchal societies.<sup>177</sup> For Wolmark, once again this 'metamorphosis' of gender' allows for the 'redefinition of gender identity' and the exploration of 'social relations'.<sup>178</sup> In this vein, Elisa creates a micro-society in which children are socialised into a culture where identity is not necessarily automatically assumed to be static but can be fluid. As a result of this, the children begin to develop very varied notions of identity.

At one end of the static-fluid spectrum is Abram, who decides that he 'doesn't want to change anymore'.<sup>179</sup> When pressed on the issue by Elisa, the only explanation that Abram can give is that 'I really prefer being a boy, Elisa. I feel better, that's all. I can't really tell you why'.<sup>180</sup> As Elisa notes, a multiple gender identity cannot be forced upon someone: 'she can't force him to change, obviously'.<sup>181</sup> Abram cannot explain why he feels he is a boy any more than Elisa is able to explain why she is not Hanse. Like Elisa, Abram has discovered the limits of multiplicity and fluidity. The experience of changing one's gender, forces the individual to question what they feel their gender identity to be. At a different end of the multiplicity spectrum is Francis, who is more willing to use their shapeshifting abilities to push the boundaries of identity.

In one scene, Elisa catches Francis shifting between a human and animal form: '[a]s though caught in a simmer of heat, a slow-moving mirage, the white fur melts, the tiger-like muzzle and the big paws.... In front of Elisa stands a naked adolescent, eyes flashing. Francis'.<sup>182</sup> The human-animal boundary is blurred; the prose becomes disjointed with the use of the ellipsis, reflecting Elisa's horror at what she witnesses. Even once Francis has transformed back into a human form, a trace of the animal remains in his 'naked' body and flashing eyes. Elisa feels physical revulsion at seeing the transformation, 'her whole body is one big knot', but Francis is ambivalent: '[y]ou just

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177 Vonarburg, *Silent City*, 129.

178 Wolmark, *Aliens and Others*, 137.

179 Vonarburg, *Silent City*, 140.

180 *Ibid.*, 142

181 *Ibid.*

182 *Ibid.*, 173

have to want to do it [...] why wouldn't we?'<sup>183</sup> Unlike Abram, Francis shows a casual disregard for the boundaries of identity, perhaps moving closer to Lifton's concept of the protean self as his identity becomes fluid and malleable. Through the processes of transformation and metamorphosis, Francis perhaps begins to resemble an assemblage of human and animal parts. For him, there is nothing innate about identity, but the will to cross boundaries is enough of a reason to do so. In this view, the limits of identity, and the identities it is possible for a person to assume, are only limited by imagination. However, this touches upon one of the novel's crucial ironies. Vonarburg is able to imagine humans changing between binary genders, and between human and animal forms, but is unable to imagine a human who desires to become something neither, or beyond, male or female.

## Machine Appendages

On the surface Laura Mixon's *Glass Houses* does not appear to be a radical text, taking the form of a conventional cyberpunk adventure/heist narrative. Set in a dystopian, near-future and climate altered New York, the novel's ending challenges neither the neoliberal status-quo nor the logics of capitalism. However, Mixon's exploration of machine enabled identity and multiplicity has provocative implications for the study of personal identity. The novel's protagonist, Ruby, is a scavenger, or 'waldo wrangler', who barely makes a living on the margins of society by 'performing hazardous salvage jobs'.<sup>184</sup> Ruby works these jobs by projecting her consciousness, via 'beanjack[s]', 'wires' and 'monofilaments' connected directly to her brain, into remotely operated robots, or waldos.<sup>185</sup> On one level, these waldos serve a practical function: they are Ruby's 'only source of income', and they allow her to earn enough money to survive in a harsh and dystopian capitalist society.<sup>186</sup> On another level, they serve a more subjective purpose. As outlined earlier, in Stone's search for a 'non-traumatic multiplicity', she looks to 'communication technology' as an

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Laura J. Mixon, *Glass Houses* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1992), 22.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 16

emerging tool for playing with and remoulding identity.<sup>187</sup> Integral to this is the ‘prosthetic character of virtuality’ and the potential of digital spaces to enable experimentation with ‘personae within cyberspace’.<sup>188</sup> In other words, as Turkle argues, computers and digital technology are ‘objects-to-think-with’.<sup>189</sup> Just as ‘dreams and slips of the tongue [...] brought psychoanalytic ideas into everyday life’, virtual, digital and distributed presence ‘develop ideas about identity as multiplicity’.<sup>190</sup> Lauraine Leblanc argues that in *Glass Houses*, Mixon explicitly grasps the potential of a ‘cyborg character’ to ‘transcend gender by creating multiple split subjectivities’.<sup>191</sup> In doing so, Mixon attempts to move beyond the language of binary gender and, as Leblanc argues, this ‘multiplied state of being challenges even the conventions of language’ by bending ‘the very structure of communication’.<sup>192</sup>

This intervention into the structure of language is done primarily through the shifting and fluid use of pronouns. *Glass Houses* is written in the first person, and when Ruby is projected into a ‘thousand-pound, titanium/metaceramic’ salvage waldo called ‘Golem’, the language and pronouns Mixon uses to describe Ruby’s subjectivity shifts.<sup>193</sup> For example, ‘me’ becomes ‘me-golem’ and ‘I’ becomes ‘I-he’.<sup>194</sup> A split, multiple, subjectivity is rendered literally onto the page. The hyphen connects names and pronouns of varying genders; Mixon not only challenges the notion that the body is the sole locus of the self, but also begins to question whether the two selves, of different genders, might exist simultaneously in one place. Ruby does not simply switch between being herself (feminine) and golem (masculine) but is both simultaneously. Golem and Ruby seem to have an emotional connection, with Ruby preferring to go ‘hungry’ rather than ‘gut Golem for parts’.<sup>195</sup>

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187 Stone *The War of Desire and Technology*, 59.

188 Ibid.

189 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 260

190 Ibid.

191 Lauraine Leblanc, ‘Razor Girls: Genre and Gender in Cyberpunk Fiction’ (1997), *project.cyberpunk.ru* [https://web.archive.org/web/20210310170346/http://project.cyberpunk.ru/idb/genre\\_and\\_gender\\_in\\_cyberpunk\\_fiction.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20210310170346/http://project.cyberpunk.ru/idb/genre_and_gender_in_cyberpunk_fiction.html). (accessed 29/07/2021).

192 Ibid.

193 Mixon, *Glass Houses*, 2.

194 Ibid., 2; 3

195 Mixon, *Glass Houses*, 72.

The visceral use of a bodily word like *gut*, rather than a more machine like and detached term like *scrap*, emphasises that, for Ruby, Golem is a body with personal significance.

Ruby's relationship with her own body seems to shift depending upon which perspectival device she uses to view it. When she looks at herself in a mirror, she laments the 'rough spots' on her 'fingers and palms', along with 'hands' that 'all the lotion in the world couldn't make [...] soft'.<sup>196</sup> However, when she views herself from the perspective of 'I-Golem' a different image emerges:

I-Golem looked down at the woman in my arms. It was Ruby-me, of course [...] She-I looked so young and vulnerable from the outside, not ugly and scrawny like me. I was terrified that I wouldn't be able to keep her from harm; I wished she were back home, safe, right this very minute.<sup>197</sup>

Golem's eyes do not simply provide a mirror, reflecting Ruby's image back to her. Instead they provide a different way of looking at herself. Several levels of disassociation are at work as identities mix. 'My' comes to refer to Golem's metal arms; Ruby's body becomes other, just 'the woman'. The hyphens placed between names and pronouns function like mechanical bolts on the page connecting words and subjectivities: Ruby-Golem's new hybrid identity is, like Golem's body, bolted together from spare parts, recycled 'junk' and 'bits of metal'.<sup>198</sup> Compared to Golem's large metal frame, Ruby finds her own body small and fragile. Sharing Golem's body provokes a protective, almost nurturing, instinct towards herself. In contrast to the earlier scene where Ruby looks at her own reflection in the mirror, from Golem's perspective her body becomes something valuable rather than something inadequate. In another part of the text, Golem is explicitly described

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196 Ibid, 31

197 Ibid, 60-61

198 Ibid, 14

as monstrous, being ‘an eight-foot, one-thousand-pound mechanical monster with nasty-looking appendages bristling like something out of a surgical nightmare’.<sup>199</sup> The use of the phrase ‘surgical nightmare’ seems to echo Golem’s power to remould and recontextualise Ruby’s subjectivity. Golem’s terrifying and constructed appearance, and his ability to split, multiply and modify Ruby’s subjectivity recalls Haraway’s 1992 essay ‘The Promises of Monsters’. For Haraway, the figure of the monster and the unforeseen consequences of its creation ‘is not a fatal error, but an inescapable possibility for changing maps of the world, for building new collectives out of what is not quite a plethora of human and inhuman actors’.<sup>200</sup> In particular relation to *Glass Houses*, the multiply gendered figure of Ruby-Golem, and Mixon’s unusual use of pronouns, offers up new possibilities for representing the multiple through language.

Identity in Mixon’s text does not seem static but always subject to revision and shifting perspective. This evokes comparison with Susan Stryker’s understanding of the postmodern body, where ‘the body [...] is always in flux, an unstable field rather than a than a fixed identity, a vacillation, a contested site for the production of new meaning [...] constantly engaged in transformation’.<sup>201</sup> Recalling Haraway’s assertion that we are all already cyborgs, ‘theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism’, Stryker argues that all bodies in the modern world are technologized, and ‘the body is a technology for performing subjective identifications and desires’.<sup>202</sup> Such a shifting perception of the body is central to *Glass Houses*’ narrative arc, which sees Ruby’s sense of self change as she overcomes agoraphobia. At the beginning of the novel Ruby rarely leaves her apartment, feeling panic each time she tries to leave: ‘My hand gripped the door handle and turned to stone. Panic boiled up in my throat’.<sup>203</sup> However, this begins to change as the narrative progresses. As Leblanc writes, ‘Ruby [...] progressively moves away from the safe,

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199 Ibid, 177.

200 Donna Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others’ in Donna Jeanne Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 63-124, 110.

201 Susan Stryker, ‘Transsexuality: The Postmodern Body and/as Technology’, in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. by David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 587-597, 596.

202 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 150; Stryker, ‘Transsexuality’, 596

203 Mixon, *Glass Houses*, 51.

interior [...] domestic sphere of her apartment to the dangerous, masculine, public world of the city'.<sup>204</sup> In his 1997 essay 'Trapped by the Body?', Thomas Foster similarly identifies this journey of ongoing identity-formation and maturation: 'The real story of the novel concerns Ruby's process of overcoming her agoraphobia'.<sup>205</sup> At first Ruby comes to appreciate being outside in the city through the body of a small spider-like waldo called Rachne, commenting that it is 'easier to love such a place when your awareness is encapsulated in a metal body that puts nothing of you at risk'.<sup>206</sup> These machinic experiences improve her confidence until, '[t]he outer door barely caused me a moment's hesitation. I guess you'd call it progress'.<sup>207</sup>

By the novel's end, Ruby's sense of self transforms and, in Turkle's words, becomes 'multiple but integrated' and 'grounded in coherence'.<sup>208</sup> For instance, towards the end of the novel, after overcoming a series of mishaps and misadventures, Ruby looks at herself in the mirror again, and has a moment of reflection:

Maybe it was how I'd rescued Rachne from Vetch all on my own, or how I'd stood up to Melissa, or the climb I'd just pulled off, or maybe it was a whole lot of things. But I looked different to my eyes. Better. [...] A smile spread across my image's face.<sup>209</sup>

Through the series of haphazard, often machine mediated, incidents described above Ruby's perception of herself changes. The novel's form as an SF adventure narrative is essential to this process. As Don D'Amassa writes in his study of adventure stories, 'the physical journey is mirrored by an interior one; the protagonist learns something about the world at large, or about his

204 Leblanc, 'Razor Girls'.

205 Thomas Foster, "'Trapped by the Body' Telepresence technologies and transgendered performance in feminist and lesbian rewritings of cyberpunk fiction', in ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy, *The Cybercultures Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 439-459, 451.

206 Mixon, *Glass Houses*, 78.

207 Ibid.

208 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 258

209 Mixon, *Glass Houses*, 187.

or her own personality'.<sup>210</sup> In an adventure narrative, coincidence and circumstance lead to elements of improvisation, as moments of chaos pull towards a larger whole. Mixon consistently attempts to *make the multiple* through presenting the reader with a range of subjective assemblages in *Glass Houses*. As a result, Ruby's transformation follows psychologist Robert Lifton's process of becoming a protean, or many sided, self:

Rather than collapse under [...] threats and pulls, the self turns out to be surprisingly resilient. It makes use of bits and pieces here and there and somehow keeps going. What may seem to be mere tactical flexibility, or just bungling along, turns out to be much more than that. We find ourselves evolving a self of many possibilities [...].<sup>211</sup>

Once again, emphasis is placed here on an evolving rather than a static sense of self. Lifton's description of a self-constructed of 'bits and pieces here and there' alludes to both the many aspects of the interior self and the self's position in a wider network of individuals. The 'many possibilities' of this ever-evolving self likewise seem to echo the calls for heteroglossia and expanded possibilities and a diversity of voice.

## Dark Proteanism

While *Glass Houses* presents a positive example of multiplicity, the novel's sequel *Proxies* (1998) explores what Robert Lifton calls 'the dark side' of the protean self.<sup>212</sup> For Lifton, proteanism goes wrong when it becomes 'diffusion, to a point of rendering the self incoherent and immobile: a "chaos of possibilities"'.<sup>213</sup> This version of the protean self enacts a 'fluidity so lacking in moral

<sup>210</sup> Don D'Amassa, *Encyclopaedia of Adventure Fiction* (New York, NY: Facts On File, 2009), viii.

<sup>211</sup> Lifton, *The Protean Self*, 1.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 190

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

content and sustainable inner form that it is likely to result in fragmentation [...] of the self'.<sup>214</sup> It is this breakdown of the self and of empathy that Mixon examines in *Proxies*. While *Glass Houses* is written entirely in the first person, *Proxies* is written from multiple perspectives that form numerous intersecting narrative arcs. However, Mixon's engagement with multiplicity in this novel is more substantial than the simple use of multiple narrators and narratorial perspectives. In the text, there is a more literal and physical melding of subjectivity into all kinds of assemblages with machines, cyborgs, engineered humans, and others. Of interest here is the narrative arc of Pablo who is one of several 'crèche children'.<sup>215</sup> These children, who all have severe physical disabilities, have been abducted as part of a large corporate conspiracy and are made to live in a space station orbiting Earth.

In the novel, a 'crèche' is a sarcophagus-like box that keeps an individual's body alive while their consciousness projects into human-like waldos, or proxies. Inside his crèche, Pablo's body is a 'hairless, skeletal figure' within a 'blob of gel', supported by 'colostomy and catheter tubes'.<sup>216</sup> Due to their impairments, Pablo and the other children have been raised inside these crèches their entire lives, switching between multiple proxies at will, thus having no experience of what it means to be embodied in a singular body. Without this basic reference point, the children do not automatically take for granted that identity is singular, or that only one identity can exist in a single body. Instead, they have developed a practice known as twinning. The alternative personalities produced (twins) enable the children to be in multiple places at once. For example, some of the younger children are concealed by older children who are 'twinning to cover for them in meetings', so as to protect them from the anger of the increasingly unstable scientist, or Mother, who created them.<sup>217</sup> As with the commune of children Elisa forms in Vonarburg's *The Silent City*, the community here operates on

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214 Ibid, 190-191

215 Laura J. Mixon, *Proxies* (New York: TOR, 1998), 13.

216 Ibid., 438

217 Ibid., 109

radically different assumptions about the nature of identity: for the children of *Proxies* multiple identity is the norm.

PROXIES: AVATARS DANCE II

**PABLO      BUDDY**  
**Those Low-down, Dirty Bifurcation Blues**

As Pablo was ending the call with Mother,  
Buddy presented himself.

Buddy lowered his shields.

=Where the hell have you been? Everything's  
going wrong. The launch has been moved  
up. . . . =

=I know. I peeked in over your  
shoulder. = Amusement. =So the  
old witch is worried, eh? =

=Don't start. Please. I need your help. I've got  
to take care of several of Uncle Sam's admin-  
istrative functions. Could you take over the  
beanlink traces? =

=Sure. Or I could handle the  
administrative stuff, if you prefer,  
and you could do the searches. =

=Maybe I'd better do the meetings. I've played  
Uncle Sam more than you have. =

A mental shrug. =Your choice. =

The upcoming meetings—a biweekly staff  
meeting, a private reprimand of one of Uncle  
Sam's managers for her team's poor perfor-  
mance, and then logging onto the net for a  
*virtu*-meeting of Waldos, Inc.'s, Board to brief  
them on the renegade—promised to be not  
only tedious, but terrifying as well. If he didn't  
play it just right, he could ruin everything.

Figure 1: Excerpt from Laura J. Mixon, *Proxies: Avatars Dance II*, Kindle Edition (digitalNoir Publishing, 2015).

PROXIES: AVATARS DANCE II

I must be out of my mind, he thought, to  
choose to do this when I have an easy out.

He beanlinked over to the  
computational lab, and called up  
and queried the secured search  
routine Pablo had started. In Pablo's  
absence it had made some assump-  
tions that weren't ideal. He settled  
down to make corrections and fin-  
ish the searches.

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On the other hand—and he shielded the  
thought from Buddy—he knew he couldn't  
trust Buddy to play it straight.

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Buddy overheard Pablo's  
thought. Too true, he mused pri-  
vately. But hey, my heart is pure.

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Figure 2: Excerpt from Mixon, *Proxies*, Kindle Edition

Pablo, however, is different from the other children. The others have functional relationships with their twins, the ‘instant communication between the selves’ makes ‘control much easier’, but Buddy, Pablo’s twin, is ‘shunning him’.<sup>218</sup> Once again, Mixon represents multiplicity through textual and formal innovations on the page. When Pablo and Buddy do eventually interact their points of view are separated to opposite sides of the page and presented in columns, with the two occasionally talking to each other across them [**Figure 1.**].<sup>219</sup> This typographic split symbolises the distance and hostility between them, their viewpoints literally represented as being in opposition. This also generates significant white space on the page, and the fragmented, separate lines of text represent the breakdown and fragmentation of Pablo’s mind. When either Pablo or Buddy want to keep their thoughts separate from the other, they construct a mental ‘shield’ [**Figure 2.**].<sup>220</sup> This is represented in the text by two black lines, a physical wall on the page, further highlighting the isolating nature of Pablo’s subjective multiplicity. Unbeknownst to Pablo, his consciousness splits off into a third twin. This personality is separated even further from Pablo, initially appearing only in its own chapters. This twin, waking up in an unknown place inside a proxy body, assumes a different gender identity to Pablo: ‘He—no, she—had faced into a gender blender’.<sup>221</sup> The multiplicity presented here is dark, violent and traumatic, as Pablo, Buddy and this third renegade, Dane Elisa Cae, have few qualms about attempting to commit murder.

Therefore, Pablo’s multiplicity is chaotic and immoral, according to Lifton’s criteria discussed earlier. Indeed, in the novel’s conclusion it is explained that Pablo has ‘multiple personality disorder’ caused by the traumatic experience of being separated from his birth mother and abused during the research programme.<sup>222</sup> This conflict of personalities reaches its height in the novel’s final chapters as Pablo and Buddy drift further apart. As Dane observes, they have ‘severed

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218 Ibid., 421

219 Ibid., 61

220 Ibid., 62

221 Ibid., 20

222 Ibid., 437

all ties' from each other and are 'acting autonomously'.<sup>223</sup> Pablo and Buddy disagree on whether they should return the satellite and its children to Earth or head further into space and leave Earth behind. In response, Dane intervenes to prevent a 'collision' of personality and emotion that 'could destroy them all' and also to prevent the two from killing the space station's astronauts.<sup>224</sup> Once again, this intervention is presented visually on the page, as Dane's perspective forms a third column of text between Pablo and Buddy [**Figure 3.**].<sup>225</sup> This text forms a bridge between the two previously separate columns and reduces the amount of blank space on the page, representing a movement towards wholeness. Dane forces Buddy and Pablo to remember their original self, Pablito, and the traumatic separation from the mother that caused this fragmentation. In this sense, Pablo's multiplicity is closer to its diagnostic form in DID: it is a fragmentation of what was once whole caused by childhood trauma. Remembering this trauma, Dane explains that 'Pablito remembers touch. On our body. Our real body [...] The astronauts—their bodies... the bodies...'<sup>226</sup> The memory of unity and embodiment gives them the capacity to empathise with the astronauts' situation, persuading them not to kill them. In this reading, coherence is achieved through a return to unity rather than in coming to terms with multiplicity, there is no potential for coexistence. Mixon frustratingly pulls away from multiplicity here, as the turn away from coexistence limits the possibility of imagining a multiple subject. By ending the novel with a return to unity, Mixon cuts off narrative possibility in favour of closure.

*Proxies* presents a very different kind of multiplicity to *Glass Houses*. In *Glass Houses* the self is healed through exploring multiplicity; in *Proxies* the self is healed through remembering unity, coherence and, by extension, morality. It is the return of this repressed knowledge, common to all three personae, that stabilises the self and prevents collapse into dark proteanism and the immoral chaos of possibilities described by Lifton. What *Proxies* illustrates is that the construction

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223 Ibid., 423

224 Ibid.

225 Ibid., 390

226 Ibid., 440

of multiple subjectivity in and of itself does not always produce positive results for the cyberpunk subject-protagonist. It also indicates that multiplicity is not in itself an inherently progressive or resistive practice, but that active work is necessary to create a coherent and radical protean subject.

PROXIES: AVATARS DANCE II

Uncle Marsh brought out the needle he had  
been hiding, and took hold of her IV pump.

“Wait.” She grabbed Uncle Marsh’s hand, stop-  
ping him, and lifted the crèche’s lid. “One more  
thing.”

Pablo screamed and tried to back away. Mother held on to him.  
“It’s all right,” she said. “Don’t be afraid.”

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And Dane—but no. Not Dane. She was only a specta-  
tor. It was Pablito—tiny Pablito: frail, sick, and trusting  
—who realized as his mother signed the paper what  
was about to happen.

He clung to her, shrieking, while  
she tried to pry his arms loose and  
hand him over to the old white  
woman standing there.

His mother took an envelope from  
them while Pablito reached out for  
her, over the old woman’s shoulder.

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Inside, floating in gel, was a shriveled, bald *thing* with tubes in it.

The needle was filled with, what?  
Poison?  
So you’re jiggling on us, old  
whore? Get us into a huge mess  
with people trying to kill us, and  
then slip away without telling  
anyone.  
Figures.

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Figure 3: Excerpt from Mixon, *Proxies*, Kindle Edition

### *Serial Experiments Lain*

Finally, it is worth turning to the anime series *Serial Experiments Lain* (hereafter *SEL*), which is also significantly engaged with ideas of subjective multiplicity. On a narrative level, *SEL* follows a teenage girl called Lain, living in Tokyo, as she explores and discovers virtual life on the Wired (the anime's term for the internet), while the boundaries between the on- and off-line worlds collapse both around her and inside her head. These collapsing boundaries are represented by hallucinations, ghostly voices, and frequently distorting scan-lines which tear the screen and distort the viewer's gaze. The title card that prefaces each of the anime's thirteen segments uses the term 'Layer', rather than episode.<sup>227</sup> This minor change of terminology is significant, because it suggests that *SEL* rejects an episodic structure. Each segment of the show is not a self-contained episode, and they rarely offer any kind of resolution at their conclusion. Likewise, the narrative of the series is far from straightforward and does not necessarily develop chronologically, often bending backward on itself, replaying key motifs and repeating certain scenes. The use of the term Layer therefore indicates that rather than each segment standing alone, or progressing steadily towards a narrative conclusion, they each overlap on-top of and bleed into each other in a non-linear fashion. In this sense, each Layer is not dissimilar to a plateau that is 'always in the middle'.<sup>228</sup>

This structure can be demonstrated by focusing on two motifs that recur throughout the show: power lines and traffic intersections. Each Layer of the show opens with a shot of a traffic intersection which then cuts to an image of power lines and telephone cables.<sup>229</sup> As well as appearing at each opening, similar images are scattered throughout the series, with close up shots of power lines in particular often recurring multiple times in each Layer. These shots are usually

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<sup>227</sup> At the start of each segment, the word Layer and the number and title of the segment is written in English, so this is not just a quirk of translation.

<sup>228</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 21

<sup>229</sup> *Serial Experiments Lain*, dir. Ryūtarō Nakamura (1998, Tokyo: Funimation, 2012), YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL29CFFB0C178E4903> (accessed, 07/01/2018).

accompanied by a low background hum, as if the power lines are emitting sound themselves. The intense repetition of these power lines creates the impression that the cables form the arteries and veins of the city. This incessant humming echoes the sound of blood rushing through vessels, connecting buildings and people into a vast urban body, or assemblage. Their repetition between Layers also suggests that they function as strings which connect and weave each episode together. The multiple overlapping cables reflect the series' non-linear plot, where there is not one singular destination but many.

The figures at the intersection are always faded out and indistinguishable. This emphasises on the one hand the anonymity and isolation of urban life, and on the other it hints towards the range of unknown encounters made possible by the city. It is significant that each Layer opens on this shot of power lines against a darkened sky. It serves to remind the viewer that the series itself as a cultural product, first aired as a late night television broadcast in Japan, is mediated by the power lines and data cables that transmit it. From this perspective, to the viewer in 1998 watching *SEL* late in the evening, this shot of a crowded night time intersection functions to demonstrate the simultaneity of the city. Henri Lefebvre refers to the urban form as producing a mental sense of 'simultaneity (of events, perceptions, and elements of a whole in the "real")'.<sup>230</sup> To break this down further, simultaneity describes the constant happenings of urban space. In the city, at any given time, multiple actions, movements, encounters or 'events' are happening concurrently. Additionally, multiple 'perceptions', or ways and methods of interpreting and navigating urban space are being enacted simultaneously.

Furthermore, for Lefebvre, 'in so-called modern society, simultaneity is intensified and becomes more dense' while 'the capacities for encounter and assembly become strengthened. Communications speed up to quasi-instantaneity'.<sup>231</sup> Here, the rapid development and pace of

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<sup>230</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 137.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 138

communication technologies only intensify this sense of simultaneity, or multiple happenings. This process is two-fold and contradictory. On one hand, as ‘the capacities for encounter and assembly become strengthened’, there are opportunities for new radical kinds of groups and communities to emerge and the possibilities for finding new ways of living and being together expand. Simultaneously, new forms of domination also emerge, as it becomes ‘evident that under the same conditions dispersion increases: the division of labour is pushed to the extreme segregation of social groups and material and spiritual separations’.<sup>232</sup> By this, Lefebvre refers to the process by which the organisation of labour, particularly in manufacturing, becomes increasingly geographically dispersed within neoliberalism. To reveal, shape and contest these possibilities, the urban citizen must become aware of these multiple happenings. As Lefebvre writes, ‘[t]hese dispersions can only be conceived or appreciated by reference to the form of simultaneity’.<sup>233</sup> In this light, by focusing repeatedly on the crowded city streets of intersection and on the humming power lines, *SEL* emphasises that certain aspects of urban infrastructure are essential to the production of the multiple subject. The range of instantaneous and multiple encounters offered by both the internet and the modern city contributes to the postmodern sensation of fragmentation and, by extension, multiplicity. Or, if a Jungian approach is taken, the range of possible encounters offered by urban society and its digital infrastructure increases the number of possible instances where an individual must construct a persona. This increasingly undermines the fiction that individuals have any singular essential identity.

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232 Ibid.

233 Ibid.



Figure 4: Image from *Serial Experiments Lain*, dir. Ryūtarō Nakamura (1998, Tokyo: Funimation, 2012), YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL29CFFB0C178E4903> (accessed, 07/01/2018).



Figure 5: Image from Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*

On the surface, Lain's subjective multiplicity is a negative one. The anime conveys how the experience of losing track of one's multiple selves is confusing and disorientating. Throughout the anime, Lain's personality shifts radically, from quiet and fearful; to playful and mischievous; to loud and aggressive, leaving the viewer continuously unsure which Lain they are watching at any one time. This process is both frightening and pleasurable, as demonstrated through Lain's increasing dependence on, and addiction to, her computer and the Wired. As much as Lain reacts with fear when confronted with evidence that her other selves exist, she spends an ever increasing amount of time online. This feedback loop is represented through the frequently repeated image of a computer screen being reflected in Lain's eyes [**Figure 4.**].<sup>234</sup> When Lain's personae begin to leak people's secrets onto the internet her multiplicity becomes further destabilised. In Layer 8, Lain's hallucinations reflect her feelings of persecution and paranoia. In one dream-like scene, Lain runs through her school as the other students stand like statues, staring at her. The face of each student is drawn very simply, and each face has an uncanny similarity to Lain's. The scene ends with Lain crying alone as she repeatedly asks herself 'what did I do? What did I do in the Wired?'<sup>235</sup>

These personae build up and multiply until, later in Layer 8, Lain is left in cyberspace, on a checkerboard stretching to infinity, as various chattering dolls, all with Lain's face but wearing different clothes, are arranged in rows. As Lain watches these numerous selves recede into the endless distance [**Figure 5.**], a disembodied voice tells her 'they're all you'.<sup>236</sup> In anger, Lain attempts to strangle one of these doppelgängers only for it to laugh and joke 'I'm committing suicide'.<sup>237</sup> Lain cannot destroy her personae without destroying herself in the process. It is revealed in Layer 13 that a different Lain exists for every person who has a memory of her, including, presumably, the audience themselves. In a soliloquy, Lain faces directly at the camera, her face distorted by static, and states that 'there is no real me. I only exist inside those who are aware of my

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<sup>234</sup> Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

existence'.<sup>238</sup> This context allows the viewer to better understand why each student takes on Lain's face in Layer 8. If each student has a different memory of Lain, a different version of Lain exists for every student she has come into contact with, however briefly. This once again echoes Jung's understanding of the persona, as Lain's very existence is tied to the memories and expectations others have of her. For every person who has seen her, there exists an almost infinite supply of inputs from which she can constitute herself.

Adele-Elise Prevost, in an article on *SEL* called 'Manga: The Signal of Noise' (2008), argues that such scenes in *SEL* make a broader point about human existence on the internet. Prevost contends that, like Lain, 'even for the most mundane of us, identity in cyberspace becomes "software"'.<sup>239</sup> Prevost uses a quote from American philosopher Hubert Dreyfus to support this interpretation, for Dreyfus suggests that when we go online 'we are encouraged to think of ourselves as fluid, emergent, decentralised, multiplicitous and flexible'.<sup>240</sup> Identity online becomes rewritable and manipulatable: digital software. However, in a strange irony, this is not actually a quote from Dreyfus. If we follow the citation provided by Prevost, to Dreyfus's book *On the Internet* (2001), we find that this Dreyfus quote is actually a quote from Turkle's *Life on the Screen*.<sup>241</sup> In a further twist, if we look up this quote in Turkle's book, although Turkle is the author of the text, there is a footnote at the end of the sentence.<sup>242</sup> Following the footnote, we discover that Turkle's inspiration for this idea actually comes from her reading of Stone's *The War of Desire and Technology*.<sup>243</sup> Particularly, Turkle is interested in Stone's idea that the mid-1990s lie 'at the close of the mechanical age'.<sup>244</sup> To summarise this, Stone argues that engines and clockwork no longer form the dominant metaphors used to describe the functioning of society and the self, instead they are

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238 Ibid.

239 Adele-Elise Prevost, 'Manga: The Signal of Noise', in *Mechademia* 3, (2008), pp. 173-188, 175.

240 Quoted in Prevost, 'Manga', 175.

241 The text cited as Dreyfus's by Prevost is in Dreyfus's book explicitly credited to Turkle, see: Hubert Dreyfus, *On the Internet* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 81.

242 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 263-264.

243 Ibid., 319

244 Ibid.

being displaced by the computer.<sup>245</sup> This deferred chain of citation demonstrates several points. Firstly, it reinforces the malleability of information in the digital age. Secondly, like *SEL*'s Layers, it undermines the linearity of narrative and information, as the citations weave back themselves they never reach an origin point but only another interconnected layer. Finally, it erodes singular authorship, as each writer becomes only another link in the endless chain, connected back through the web to the others.

Stone's work remains applicable to Prevost's interpretation of *SEL*. Through its exploration of Lain's multiplicity via an almost infinite number of computer-mediated personae, the show explores what happens when the primary metaphor for society and the human body (particularly the brain) moves from the mechanical machine to the silicon chip. Personal identity become unstable, rewritable and multiple. Although this misquote is probably a mistake by Prevost, it does emphasise the point being made: information is becoming ever more fluid and malleable. As Lain tells herself in Layer 13 of *SEL*, 'information is always in motion' [**Figure 6.**].<sup>246</sup> Amidst this textual confusion, footnotes become a rhizomatic structure that parallel to the main body of text, situating it as a node within a wider web of information. This is not to say that there is a teleology to this process, but that it operates horizontally as a 'multiplicity connected to other multiplicities'.<sup>247</sup> With the development of hyperlinks and the internet, this process only becomes faster and more instantaneous.

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<sup>245</sup> Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 319 and Stone, *The War of Desire*, 17-18.

<sup>246</sup> Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*.

<sup>247</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 22.



Figure 6: Image from Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*



Figure 7: Image from Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*

Towards the end of the series, inside the Wired, Lain meets a software developer called Eiri, who has entirely uploaded his consciousness to the network by killing his physical body. Eiri states, in Layer 10, that inside the Wired he is a God-like entity. And, in Layer 11, Eiri claims to have created Lain as ‘an executable programme with a body’ and designed her with the aim of creating a technological singularity, where the Wired and real worlds will finally merge into a single transcendent entity.<sup>248</sup> In Layer 12, Eiri describes his project in these terms, “people were once connected to each other. All I’ve done is make things as they once were’.<sup>249</sup> In this line, Eiri invokes Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious. For Jung, this aspect of consciousness ‘is not individual but universal’, it thus ‘constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in everyone of us’.<sup>250</sup> In this sense, Eiri’s desire to connect all people through the Wired is an attempt to erase individuality through the construction of a universal, or common, language at a subconscious level. However, Lain disrupts Eiri’s plans in one particularly ambiguous scene. In Layer 12, Lain’s concerned friend Alice finds her alone in her room, covered in wires and cables. As she tries to explain to Alice what she is doing, Lain repeats Eiri’s motivations: ‘Humans were originally connected at an unconscious level. I reconnected them, that’s all’.<sup>251</sup> As well as relating to Jung’s collective unconscious, this line could also be contextualised with Nancy’s concept of the plural. Nancy holds an ambivalent attitude towards the notion of being. Being is “neither negative nor positive”, and for Nancy the only “mode” of being possible is the “mode of being-together or being *with*”.<sup>252</sup> The self has no singular origin, rather “[t]he origin is together with other origins, originally divided”.<sup>253</sup> In short, there is no ultimate, essential or irreducible self, it is only possible to be anything in relation to another. Initially, Lain appears to accept Eiri’s purpose for her, and she states that ‘I’m a programme designed to destroy the barrier between the Wired and the

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248 Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*.

249 Ibid.

250 Carl Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, trans. by Richard F.C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1991), 3, 4.

251 Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*.

252 Emphasis original: Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 13.

253 Ibid.

real world'.<sup>254</sup> To justify her actions, Lain argues that 'you and everyone else, Alice, you're just applications. The truth is, you don't need bodies'.<sup>255</sup>

However, in response, Alice reaches out and touches the side of Lain's face with her hand, and she tells Lain that 'I don't really understand what you're saying, but I think you're wrong'.<sup>256</sup> Alice places Lain's hand on her chest, letting her feel the heartbeat. The tension of the scene is momentarily broken as they both laugh. Lain asks Alice why her heart is beating, to which Alice replies, 'because I'm scared. It's pounding because I'm scared'.<sup>257</sup> In this way, Alice's counter-argument to Eiri's plan is not explicitly vocalised, but rendered visually on the screen. The momentary laughter has a destabilising effect, highlighting, to both the viewer and the characters on screen, just how absurd and ridiculous this scene and Eiri's plans are. The physical contact and the sound of the heart beat re-emphasise embodiment and the differentiation of the body. Ironically, the body, and its markers of difference, allows for a more intimate and vulnerable form of contact than the universal digital interconnection that Eiri seeks to implement. At this point, Eiri appears out of thin air, and tells Lain that Alice is only scared 'because she's afraid of losing her body'.<sup>258</sup> Eiri is unable to comprehend that it is precisely Alice's fear that allows for this rare moment of intimate, physical contact. Eiri argues that if 'all sensations are caused by the brain', then it is possible to 'block unpleasant impulses' and 'select only the happy pleasant ones'.<sup>259</sup> In this sense, Eiri's opinion, as a software engineer, is indicative of how, in Haraway's terms, the 'communications sciences' translate the 'world into a problem in coding'.<sup>260</sup>

Eiri asks Lain, 'if you really love her, why don't you connect with her?'.<sup>261</sup> To which Lain replies, 'I'm not sure'.<sup>262</sup> This answer is seemingly innocuous, but by it Lain implicitly argues that

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254 Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*.

255 Ibid.

256 Ibid.

257 Ibid.

258 Ibid.

259 Ibid.

260 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 164.

261 Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*.

262 Ibid.

there is a valuable realm of interpersonal relation, experienced through the body, that is not reducible to such a coding problem. As Hayles argues, ‘embodiment makes clear that thought is a much broader cognitive function depending for its specificities on the embodied form enacting it’.<sup>263</sup> Or, in other words, there are certain experiences and patterns of thinking that are unique to embodiment. Lain tells Eiri that without ‘phones, television, the network [...] you couldn’t have done anything’.<sup>264</sup> This implies that just as Lain’s thoughts and experiences are mediated by the body, Eiri’s seemingly divine powers and omnipresence are intimately tied to physical hardware and infrastructure. Additionally, Lain tells Eiri that the ability to comprehend the very concept of God is itself a product of embodiment: ‘it doesn’t matter. With no body, you can’t understand’.<sup>265</sup> Taking this to be an insult and a challenge to his godhood, Eiri attempts to manifest a misshapen grotesque body [**Figure 7.**]. This body expands and grows out of control, before becoming static and immobile, signalling Eiri’s failure and death. In his analysis of *Serial Experiments Lain*, Steven Brown interprets this scene as a reference to the grotesque transformation scenes in cyberpunk films *AKIRA* (1988) and *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989).<sup>266</sup> Brown sees this scene as Eiri’s attempt to prove his mastery over both ‘the Wired and real worlds’, he sees Lain’s triumph over Eiri as a ‘victory for the body’.<sup>267</sup>

## Conclusion

How then does this relate back to multiplicity? First, in rejecting Eiri’s vision of a universal, technological singularity, Lain rejects the homogenising force of common language and embraces difference, as marked by the body. Her interaction with Alice argues for vulnerability and interconnection through difference. Secondly, through this, *SEL* suggests multiplicity cannot exist

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<sup>263</sup> Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, xiv.

<sup>264</sup> Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 180.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

without such difference. In this sense, both Mixon's *Proxies* and *SEL* both insist on the body and bodily experience as a key component in anchoring multiplicity in coherence. In his analysis of the above scene between Lain and Alice, Brown argues that '[a]lthough Lain's body is cold and enshrouded in cables [...] she is still alive and has the capacity for affect'.<sup>268</sup> Quoting from Bruce Braun, Brown states that 'one of the lessons of posthumanism is "the possibility of, and necessity for, a political cartography of bodily formation that attends to how bodies are imbued with the capacity for affect—the capacity to be acted upon and the capacity to act"'.<sup>269</sup> In other words, for Brown the body is the locus of agency, the interface through which the self acts upon the world and is acted upon by others. The visceral presence of the body, or lack thereof, is crucial in all the texts of this chapter. In Vonarburg's *The Silent City*, it is Elisa's visceral disgust at Hanse's body and Francis's human-animal transformation that places limits upon her multiplicity. For Ruby, in Mixon's *Glass Houses*, it is the sight of her body through the eyes and subjectivity of Ruby-Golem that enables her to see both the vulnerability and value of the body. In contrast, in *Proxies*, it is the very lack of bodily experience that causes Pablo's traumatic descent in dark proteanism. And, similarly, for Lain it is Alice's insistence on the body that reaffirms Lain's capacity for agency, allowing her assert her desires and break Eiri's control of her.

However, this whole scene, which ends Layer 12, does not offer a neat resolution to Lain's personae crisis. As Brown writes, '[a]t the outset of the final episode, Layer 13, 'Ego,' Lain is still faced with a crisis of subjectivity despite her reaffirmation of the body'.<sup>270</sup> In a sense, this chapter has partially failed in its aims—to find a workable coexistence of multiplicity. *The Silent City* presents a sustainable, but limited, vision of multiplicity, while *Glass Houses* offers the most promising example of protean co-existence. But, *Proxies* demonstrates the pitfalls and failures of multiplicity, while *SEL* presents a more complex and ambiguous multiplicity. Therefore, to analyse the final Layer of *SEL*—and Brown's reading of it—and to understand how Lain overcomes her

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268 Ibid., 178

269 Ibid.

270 Ibid., 180.

traumatic, fragmented multiplicity requires a different analytical framework that would take us beyond the scope of this chapter. Chapter Two, continues this analysis by placing both *SEL* and Brown's work into the transformative context of resistance studies. By focusing the next chapter around resistance studies, this continues my commitment to produce an off-centre analysis of feminist cyberpunk. By returning to Brown and *SEL* at the opening of Chapter Two, I highlight the affinity between multiplicity and resistance before turning back to feminist cyberpunk to explore this relationship in further depth. Additionally, the next chapter seeks to more explicitly question whether multiplicity can be a resistive practice. In the process, Chapter Two finds resistance to be a crucial element that can help to hold together multiplicity and overcome dark proteanism.

## Chapter Two: The Question of Resistance

### Introduction

This chapter aims to demonstrate the ways in which feminist cyberpunk texts engage with the practice and methods of resistance. In the 1980s and 1990s, under the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralism, new attention was being paid, within the critical theory of the period, to methods of resistance that fell outside the sphere of traditional politics. New questions were being asked—by writers such as Jean Baudrillard, Hakim Bey, Ricardo Dominguez, Simon Reynolds and James C. Scott—about what constitutes resistance and resistive intent, broadening the range of methods and behaviours considered subversive.<sup>1</sup> This chapter seeks to situate cyberpunk within this context and examines how feminist cyberpunk texts position themselves within this discourse, presenting their own ideas about how, and what, to resist. In this sense, what emerges is a body of literature that considers posthuman resistance. Such a resistance requires the kinds of protean and multiple notions of selfhood examined in Chapter One. This chapter draws upon this body of research in comparison with cyberpunk to pose several key questions: How does the internet affect our understanding of resistance? Is the network the site, conduit or tool of resistance? Or, is the network itself a form of social control to be resisted?

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1 The work of Hakim Bey, a persona of the American writer Peter Lamborn Wilson, is included in this chapter, because his work is imbued with the politics of cyberpunk and post-structuralism. However, I am aware that within Wilson's wider body of work there are numerous instances where he has advocated and defended paedophilia. I strongly oppose Wilson's views on this topic. More broadly, a similar under-acknowledged advocacy for paedophilia haunts post-structuralism, as Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari and Derrida, among many others, all signed a petition in 1977 calling for the removal of the age of consent in France. How these writers could be so acute in their analysis of the power dynamics of capitalist modernity, yet so blind to the clear and abhorrent abuse of power inherent in paedophilia is one of their greatest failures. In light of this failure, the third part of this chapter, 'Carnival Transformed', speaks of the need to transform practices of resistance, which stem from the carnivalesque, in dialogue with an understanding of power relations in order to protect vulnerable and minority groups. For more details on Wilson's writings regarding this issue, see: Michael Muhammad Knight, *William S. Burroughs vs. the Qur'an* (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2012), 75-78 and 81-86. For the French petition, see: 'Lettre ouverte à la Commission de révision du code pénal pour la révision de certains textes régissant les rapports entre adultes et mineurs', dolto.fr. <https://web.archive.org/web/20200125093636/http://www.dolto.fr/fd-code-penal-crp.html>. (accessed 19/07/2021).

Resistance studies is an entire academic field unto itself, and *resistance* is not a term that should be taken for granted. Howard Caygill and Jacqueline Rose note that a modern, Western understanding of the term resistance has its origins in European opposition to Nazi occupation in the Second World War.<sup>2</sup> As Jacques Derrida famously writes in *Resistances of Psychoanalysis* (1998), this frequently romanticised period of resistance often remains the definitive or idealised example of resistance: a word ‘loaded with all the pathos of my nostalgia, as if, at any cost, I would like not to have missed blowing up trains, tanks and headquarters between 1940 and 1945’.<sup>3</sup> However, in late 20<sup>th</sup> Century there was a shift within resistance studies away from the study of traditional politically overt resistance movements, such as resistance to Nazi occupation or anti-colonial struggles, and towards more subtle *everyday* forms of resistance.<sup>4</sup> For example, the 1980s saw the publication of Scott’s research into peasant resistance in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), which argues that, instead of focusing on moments of overt confrontation with the state, it is more important to study what peasants do ‘between revolts’: covert, immediate, self-interested and individual acts of insubordination, ‘false compliance’, ‘pilfering’, ‘sabotage’, ‘and so forth’.<sup>5</sup> Such a shift in focus broadens the definition of resistance to include acts which the individual actor might not consciously connect with an ideologically oppositional struggle. Scott is not searching for a pure or idealised moment of resistance but embracing resistance’s grey areas and borderlines. Similar ideas are also at work in anarchist Hakim Bey’s early 1990s essay ‘The Temporary Autonomous Zone’. Bey advocates, in a period where direct confrontation with the state can only lead to violent repression and ‘futile martyrdom’, for the temporary liberation of ‘an area (of land,

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2 Howard Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (London; New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 6-7 and Jacqueline Rose, *The Last Resistance* (London; New York, NY: Verso, 2017), 1.

3 Both Caygill and Rose cite this same quote from Derrida, see: Caygill, *On Resistance*, 7; Rose, *The Last Resistance*, 1-2 and Jacques Derrida, *Resistances of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 2.

4 Although this chapter focuses on texts from the 1980s and 1990s, many of the theoretical shifts outlined in this introduction are prefigured in the work of Stuart Hall and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, who, in the 1970s, examined questions of subculture and cultural resistance, see: *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed. by Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, 2nd ed. (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

5 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 29.

of time, of imagination)', which then 'dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen *before* the state can crush it'.<sup>6</sup> Here, moments of transitory insurrection are privileged over complete revolution.

Of key significance to these approaches is the work of Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*. Within Scott and Bey's writing, there is a strong echo of Bakhtin's notion of the carnival: a transitory, ritualised space of resistance, or a 'world inside out'.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Bakhtin's ideas returned to popularity with the publication of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's 1986 book *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, which re-examined Bakhtin's concepts of the carnival and the grotesque in order to critique hierarchies of high and low, or base, art in Western culture.<sup>8</sup> In the West, in the 1990s such approaches to resistance took on new importance in a decade which saw the increasing prominence of the Riot Grrrl punk feminism movement, underground Rave Culture—both Simon Reynolds and Graham St John explicitly draw on Bey's work in their histories of Rave—and the carnivalesque Reclaim the Streets protests.<sup>9</sup> In the 2002 *Cultural Resistance Reader*, edited by Steven Duncombe, this movement in theory, practice and activism is referred to as 'a politics that doesn't look like politics'.<sup>10</sup> Duncombe argues that 'while these everyday events frequently take place in the margins of what is commonly understood as politics, these cultural practices are, indeed, political'.<sup>11</sup>

More broadly, Duncombe also offers a definition of cultural resistance that will provide a useful starting point for my analysis. 'Cultural resistance' encompasses 'culture that is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political,

6 Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, 2nd rev. ed (New York, NY: Autonomedia, 2003), 98, 99.

7 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 11.

8 Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1986).

9 For more information see: Derek Wall, *Earth First! And the Anti-Roads Movement: Radical Environmentalism and Comparative Social Movements* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999); Graham St. John, *Technomad: Global Raving Countercultures*, Studies in Popular Music (London; Oakville, CT: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2009) and Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999).

10 *Cultural Resistance Reader*, ed. Stephen Duncombe (London; New York, NY: Verso, 2002), 82.

11 *Ibid.*

economic and/or social structure'.<sup>12</sup> Importantly, an act of cultural resistance does not need to have been successful to be worthy of study. The practices of resistance highlighted here, from a contemporary perspective, may have failed to change the world. But, as Stacy Alaimo writes, 'within the scale of the anthropocene, surely all activism, all politics, all ethics, and all government policies will have been colossal failures'.<sup>13</sup> Yet, as Alaimo argues, quoting from Braidotti, we must 'nonetheless continue on, "for the hell of it and for the love of the world."' <sup>14</sup> Keeping Duncombe's definition in mind, one of the aims of this chapter is to assess the ways in which practices of cultural resistance are explored in, and emerge from, feminist cyberpunk.<sup>15</sup> For example, the texts discussed in this chapter all seek to overcome capitalism and neoliberal atomisation.

Howard Caygill's *On Resistance* (2013) also shapes my approach to resistance. Caygill's book grapples with several controversies and debates within contemporary resistance studies. Caygill questions teleological and progressive narratives of resistance and points towards the elusive and multiple nature of resistance. This, along with Caygill's comprehensive analysis of the relationship between resistance and power will be discussed in Part One. In this section I will reassess Steven Brown's writing on *Serial Experiments Lain in Tokyo Cyberpunk* using Caygill's ideas alongside those of Jean Baudrillard. Part Two will move into a reading of Caitlin Sullivan and Kate Bornstein's 1996 novel *Nearly Roadkill* using theory from Hakim Bey, Stallybrass, and White, while drawing on some aspects of utopian studies. Lastly, Part Three will connect the idea of the 'Temporary Autonomous Zone' with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnival in Jane Ellen Young's novel *Cinderblock* (1997).

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12 Ibid., 5

13 Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 6.

14 Ibid.

15 This approach of examining ideas of resistance in feminist science fiction is not without precedent, and such a perspective owes a debt to post-colonial studies of SF. For example, Patricia Meltzer in her 2006 book *Alien Constructions* examines the strategies and negotiations of anticolonial resistance in the work of Octavia Butler, see: Patricia Melzer, *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), 43-66.

## Part One: Multiplicity and Resistance

### Is Multiplicity Resistive?

In this section I will situate and expand the conclusions drawn by Steven Brown from his reading of *Serial Experiments Lain* in *Tokyo Cyberpunk* within the framework of resistance studies. Brown concludes his book with a short sub-section titled ‘The Question of Resistance’ where he argues that:

[...] the most effective act of resistance in a cybersociety is to proliferate one’s digital personae in cyberspace in ways that disrupt the flow and control of information and elude the digital representations of personal identity stored as user profile data.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the imposition of a unitary identity becomes a form of social control, a means of tracking individuals and reducing them to easily manageable and analysable singular units.

According to Brown, the best way to resist this control is to embrace multiplicity, to render the self unintelligible to the dominant form of data collection. Such an idea has interesting connections with the work of Howard Caygill, a philosopher of resistance, who argues that effective resistance must be fluid and open to reinvention. In his introduction to *On Resistance* Caygill comments that, in reference to French resistance to Nazi occupation, there is a constant tension within resistance movements between hierarchy and dispersal: ‘The unification of practices of resistance into a concept and institution of *the* Resistance, while tactically necessary in certain contexts, risks emptying resistance of its very capacity to resist’.<sup>17</sup> This quotation rejects attempts to romanticise a

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<sup>16</sup> Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 183.

<sup>17</sup> Caygill, *On Resistance*, 6.

specific moment of resistance or create a canon of legitimate or privileged resistive practices. For Caygill, a 'sustained resistance' is not possible without 'constant reinvention'.<sup>18</sup> In order to be effective resistance must be able to innovate, adapt to circumstance and disappear when necessary. Academics must avoid 'reducing the practices of resistance to a single concept' vulnerable to 'legitimation and appropriation by the very state-form that it began by defying'.<sup>19</sup> Any attempt to analyse resistance must 'recognise the dangers and extremes of conceptual unification and historical dispersal', while providing an 'understanding of conceptuality that permits consistency without imposing unity'.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, a good model for resistance might not be dissimilar to Turkle's reading of Lifton's protean self (discussed in Chapter One), with its capacity for 'fluid transformation' while being 'grounded in coherence and moral outlook': a state of being that is 'multiple but integrated'.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, I would argue that not only can multiplicity be resistive, but resistance requires multiplicity.

However, if resistance is multiple, the form of its multiplicities is not solely decided by those who take it upon themselves to resist. This recalls my discussion of Jung in Chapter One: the persona is always determined in a process of mediation between the individual and the pressures and expectations of society. Likewise, resistance and its forms are determined by its relationship to power. In exploring this relationship, Caygill draws upon the idea of force, found both in the Newtonian principle that 'to any action there is always an opposite and equal reaction' and Clausewitz's notion that war and politics 'pivot upon' eliminating or preserving the 'capacity to resist'.<sup>22</sup> The methods used and form of resistance taken is determined as much in response to counter-force as it is by the resistance itself. In a period where the state or dominant ideology seems hegemonic, and will respond with ruthless repression, the form which resistance takes is likely to be different than in a period where the state seems illegitimate or unstable. For example, Caygill

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18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid., 7

21 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 258.

22 Caygill, *On Resistance*, 3, 10.

discusses how resistance is formed in varied historical circumstances: from conditions of near total domination, such as underground Jewish resistance to Nazi occupation, to the possibilities of mass non-violent resistance in late colonial India.<sup>23</sup> As Caygill suggests:

There is never a moment of pure resistance, but always a reciprocal play of resistances that form clusters or sequences of resistance and counter-resistance responding to each other in surrendering or seizing the initiative.<sup>24</sup>

Once again, we see a rejection of any attempt to universalise or romanticise resistance. Here, Caygill warns against theorising resistance as the preserve of progressive causes and movements. Additionally, resistance studies must encompass both the analysis of opposition to authority and systems of control. Indeed, the two shape each other. As Caygill explains by analogy, ‘the police are called to *resist* the [...] demonstrators as much as the demonstrators are resisting the police’,<sup>25</sup> calling into question who ‘the true resisters’ really are.<sup>26</sup> This dance of resistance and counter resistance is evoked by Brown, who writes that:

[...] the task for posthuman resistance is not to overthrow the virtual (which is impossible) but rather to elude its totalising grasp by using technologies of virtuality against the very assemblages [...] that cast a virtual web over our bodies and subjectivities.<sup>27</sup>

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23 Ibid., 152-158 and 70-76

24 Ibid., 5

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., 2

27 Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 184.

This suggests that within resistance against technological systems of control there can be no pure idealised victory, only a dispersed interplay between forces and an attempt to avoid control. Or, in Caygill's words, 'resistance' must come 'to stand as the limit at which analysis falters and breaks off'.<sup>28</sup> This is particularly relevant if, as Brown states, the aim of such resistance is to evade being tracked or analysed. Resistance, like multiplicity, must have unanalysable and elusive dimensions if it is to be successful.

The theme of technology, and the internet in particular, is also addressed by Caygill. Both Caygill and Brown seem to accept Donna Haraway's maxim that humans in contemporary societies have already become cyborgs. For instance, Caygill states that technology is 'not something extraneous to the definition of [the] human [...] but is constitutive of it. The human [...] is "essentially prosthetic"'.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Brown describes the ideal posthuman self as an 'on-going work of fiction [...] contingent, fluid and in between human, animal and machine'.<sup>30</sup> If our relationship with technology is so fundamental to what it means to be human, then technology itself, already too vague and nebulous a category, cannot be a target of resistance. The specific technology that concerns both Caygill and Brown is the internet, or network. However, Brown and Caygill define the internet in different ways. Brown refers to the internet as a 'power-knowledge grid' and considers it explicitly in relation to social control.<sup>31</sup> For Brown, technologies of control, which identify, classify and regulate, operate across this grid. Yet, this system of control operates in abstract ways, 'if power is [...] dispersed across a decentralised network of abstract machines, who or what does one resist?'.<sup>32</sup> Exactly in whose interests this power-knowledge grid, or internet, operates Brown does not make explicit. However, we can assume that Brown takes issue with any organisation or individual that seeks to use the internet to track, control, fix or define the identities of its users. What is to be resisted, for Brown, is any attempt to erase difference through

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28 Caygill, *On Resistance*, 7

29 Ibid., 200

30 Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 185.

31 Ibid., 182

32 Ibid.

‘classification, normalization, commodification, and control’.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, Caygill’s definition has a slightly different emphasis: the internet is just another human network, ‘by definition a sum of paths and obstacles that realise and restrict movement and stasis’.<sup>34</sup>

As with his definition of resistance, Caygill’s concept of the network is not hyperbolic or dramatised, but almost detached and neutral. In response to Brown’s question of what should be resisted we could offer Caygill’s argument that ‘resistance can take place within or against these networks’; the network can either be the terrain where resistance takes place, or the power structure resisted. Such resistances can:

[...] be expressed by varying the speed of passage through protraction and stasis or through *détournement* or the change of direction by deviating from specified routes, making unsanctioned entrances and exits, feigning position or even exiting the network altogether.<sup>35</sup>

Although Caygill expresses that these ‘moves immediately evoke the internet and hacking’, he stresses that they are ‘part of a wider phenomenon of resistance conducted on the terrain of the [...] network of domination’.<sup>36</sup> These methods of resistance described by Caygill suggest that otherwise apolitical acts of hacking and internet use could be constituted as resistive, as long as they subvert the purposes or restraints of the network, and such acts fit more broadly into the idea that defiance does not have to be consciously performed to be resistive. Within such a framework, subjective multiplicity can be seen as a practice of resistance: individuals thus use the network in a way that is not officially sanctioned or expected. In this sense, it is possible to ground Brown’s arguments within a resistance studies context, and an affinity exists between the work of Brown and Caygill

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33 Ibid.

34 Caygill, *On Resistance*, 200.

35 Ibid., 201-202.

36 Ibid., 202

which points towards a theory of digital resistance that can help us refine the reading of cyberpunk fictions.

## Exiting the Network

Such concepts can be applied to *Serial Experiments Lain*. What concerns me here specifically is not only Brown's thoughts on multiplicity but also Caygill's idea that exiting the network can be a method of resistance. In Layer 7, Lain is taken from her home and asked various questions by several mysterious figures in dark suits.<sup>37</sup> These questions attempt to gather and verify simple biographical data about Lain: the date and place of her birth and information about her family and parents. In Brown's interpretation of this scene 'Lain's inability or unwillingness to recollect such fundamental personal data suggests [...] that she is resisting the demands of the status quo to be pinned down as a singular identity'.<sup>38</sup> This is significant for Brown because he argues that, within Western modernity, 'if one is not who ones claims to be' then the state will assume you to be 'hacker, criminal, illegal immigrant, or terrorist'.<sup>39</sup> Having a 'false identity (or multiple identity) simply cannot be tolerated by the system'.<sup>40</sup> In short, to have more than one identity, if all of an individual's documents and papers don't add up to a singular whole, is to become an unmanageable citizen. This also links to points made in Chapter One, drawn from Bakhtin and Haraway, about trends within the Western intellectual tradition that desire—through the creation of a common language—to totalise, imperialise and classify diverse experiences or traditions into analysable units, binaries or essentialisms. Any attempt by an individual to render themselves unanalysable is a threat to a system based on the universalisation and categorisation of knowledge.

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<sup>37</sup> Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*.

<sup>38</sup> Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 184.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 184

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

While this a valid interpretation of this scene, we could build upon it by focusing on Caygill's strategy of 'exiting the network' alongside the ideas presented in Jean Baudrillard's 1985 essay 'The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in Media'. This essay responds to an idea introduced by Baudrillard in 'Requiem for the Media' (1972), that 'mass media is a "speech without response"'.<sup>41</sup> Baudrillard argues that 'communication' fundamentally requires 'exchange', or a fundamental reciprocity of 'speech and response'.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, the media industry attempts to redefine communication as simply the 'emission/reception of information', rendering 'any process of exchange' impossible (except that which is officially sanctioned, co-opted, or 'integrated into the process of emission').<sup>43</sup> In 'The Masses', however, Baudrillard's interpretation of the 'forced silence of the masses' changes and he adopts a more optimistic position.<sup>44</sup> Silence, rather than being 'a sign of passivity and alienation', can be 'an original strategy' and 'challenge'.<sup>45</sup> Baudrillard responds to the conditions of the 1980s where, as he describes, 'opinion polls manipulate democracy' and the individual is constantly bombarded with messages 'to vote, to produce, to decide, to speak, to participate, to play the game'.<sup>46</sup> All of these calls to participate are a 'demand to constitute ourselves as subjects'.<sup>47</sup> And, they might be thought of as a form of interpellation.<sup>48</sup> But, they are essentially depthless and concerned only with surface, being themselves an institutionalised part of the process of emission. Baudrillard argues that, within such a society, 'the refusal of meaning and the refusal of speech', or silence, constitutes an active 'strategic resistance'.<sup>49</sup> This concept echoes Caygill's idea of 'exiting the network', in which the refusal to participate in the network is a form of

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41 Jean Baudrillard, 'The Masses: The Implosion of the Social in Media', in *Cultural Resistance Reader*, ed. Stephen Duncombe (London; New York, NY: Verso, 2002), pp. 100-113, 101.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Baudrillard, 'The Masses', 102.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 102, 112

47 Ibid. 112

48 The term 'interpellation' comes from Louis Althusser, who uses it to describe the 'acts' or 'functions' of ideology which work to transform 'individuals into subjects'. Althusser argues that the most mundane form of this is through communication, or 'hailing', where the individual recognises and acknowledges that they are being addressed, see: Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York, NY; London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 174.

49 Baudrillard, 'The Masses', 112-113.

active and deliberate silence. It refuses to give speech or meaning, and therefore legitimacy, to either the network, the territory it claims or powers that operate it. To refuse speech is also to refuse to provide anything that might form the basis of analysis and thus identification or tracking.



Figure 8: Image from Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*



Figure 9: Image from Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*

In *Serial Experiments Lain*, it could be argued that Lain's decision not to answer the agents' questions is an example of Baudrillard's refusal of speech. Lain declines to constitute a self that is identifiable by the categories and labels used by the system. Lain's refusal to engage in conversation or speech is also demonstrated in Layer 10 when she chooses not to continue dialogue with Eiri, the figure who claims to be her creator.<sup>50</sup> Eiri repeatedly addresses Lain with monologues throughout the show, reflective of a system of communication that, as Baudrillard describes in his analysis of the mass media, offers speech without response. Lain forcefully dismisses Eiri, creating a space of silence, signifying a refusal to participate in his plans for her and a withdrawal of consent to be an instigator of the world Eiri wishes to create. In the final episode of *Serial Experiments Lain*, Layer 13, Lain resets history and removes her existence from the memories of those she has interacted with. As Brown argues, rather than this being a form of defeated suicide, 'Lain offers the most dramatic form of resistance possible by rewriting history itself'.<sup>51</sup> The Layer opens with a montage of scenes from this reset world, without Lain, before showing Lain isolated. Two scenes highlight this isolation: one image shows Lain standing in the middle of a fragmented city floating in darkness [**Figure 8.**], and the other depicts Lain sitting at a table suspended in clouds [**Figure 9.**].<sup>52</sup> The choice to isolate herself, to delete the very memories of her existence, could be interpreted as a refusal to constitute a self. Lain makes the decision to become silent, unable to interact or form a dialogue with the system, and exit the network, removing herself from the Wired and from memory.

This is resistive because such an act, perhaps ironically, reasserts Lain's agency. By not giving Eiri a meaningful response and by exiting the network, Lain refuses to think or communicate through pathways, constraints and modes of cognition determined by the network. This allows for the creation of new possibilities and new ways of being and structuring the world become apparent. This is demonstrated through Lain's rewriting of history in the show's final Layer. The first half of the layer shows a montage of scenes distinct in their brightness and normality: Lain's parents and

<sup>50</sup> Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*.

<sup>51</sup> Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 182.

<sup>52</sup> Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*.

sister (who disappears in a previous Layer) eat breakfast together, as the shot lingers for a moment on Lain's empty chair; one of Lain's classmates, whose suicide begins the events of the show, is alive again; Eiri is a dissatisfied employee, rather than a digital being claiming to be God; and the mysterious figures who quizzed Lain about her identity are instead construction workers.<sup>53</sup> Lain herself goes unremembered, appearing only as an echo or fragment on a screen [**Figure 10.**].<sup>54</sup> These fragments imply that Lain has opted for a mode of existence on the network's margins, gaps and fringes, a kind of deliberate silence. The show's cryptic final scene depicts Lain watching one of her school friends, now an adult, happily making plans for the future [**Figure 11.**]. This suggests that this world brought about by Lain, in which the people Lain cares about are alive and capable of change and growth, has not simply reset—only to begin a new cycle—but has a future. Rather than be the instrument, the software, of Eiri's plans, silence allows Lain to bring about the present she wants rather than the one decided for her.

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53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.



Figure 10: Image from Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*



Figure 11: Image from Nakamura, *Serial Experiments Lain*

## Part Two: The Temporary Autonomous Zone

### Fractal Dimensions

This section critically interrogates strategies of evasion explored in Caitlin Sullivan and Kate Bornstein's 1996 novel *Nearly Roadkill* with reference to Hakim Bey's late 1980s essay 'Temporary Autonomous Zone' (TAZ). Although the following reading will explore the concept of the TAZ in some depth, it is helpful to provide a brief overview regarding some of the context surrounding the text. Bey is a deliberately crafted and constructed persona of the American writer Peter Lamborn Wilson. As Simon Sellars argues, "'Hakim Bey" is not merely a pseudonym, but as much a character as the creation of any novelist'.<sup>55</sup> In a fictional biography of himself, Bey writes that he 'lives in a seedy hotel where the proprietor nods out over newspaper & [sic] scratchy broadcasts of Peking Opera'.<sup>56</sup> Bey's writing is, by his own admission, 'disjointed and slightly sinister'.<sup>57</sup> This passage is characteristic of the poetic and hyperbolic invention that characterises Bey's writing and can be read as a process of making a persona. Written in the late 1980s and first published in 1991, 'TAZ' belongs to the often nebulously defined strand of thought termed post-anarchism. Ideas of post-anarchy first became conceptualised in the 1990s and debates around the term grew in intensity after protests in Seattle against a World Trade Organisation conference in 1999, which saw a resurgence of anarchism through the organisational strategy of a rising anti-globalisation movement.<sup>58</sup> For Saul Newman:

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55 Simon Sellars, 'Hakim Bey: Repopulating the Temporary Autonomous Zone', *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 4.2 (2010), pp. 83-108, 96.

56 Qtd., Ibid.

57 Qtd. Ibid.

58 Süreyya Evren, 'Introduction: How New Anarchism Changed the World (of Opposition) after Seattle and Gave Birth to Post-Anarchism', in *Post-Anarchism: A Reader*, ed. by Duane Rousselle and Süreyya Evren (London; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1-19, 4-5.

Post-anarchism is a political logic that seeks to combine the egalitarian and emancipative aspects of classical anarchism, with an acknowledgement that radical political struggles today are contingent, pluralistic, open to different identities and perspectives, and are over different issues—not just economic ones.<sup>59</sup>

In short, post-anarchist writers seek to bring together the non-hierarchical organisational practice of anarchism with post-structuralist theory of the kind outlined in Chapter One, showing influences from Deleuze, Guattari, Lacan, Foucault and Baudrillard among others.<sup>60</sup> Todd May suggests that both anarchism and post-structuralism are driven by similar concerns: ‘irreducible struggles, local politics and alliances, an ethical orientation [and] a resistance to essentialist thinking’.<sup>61</sup> As the quote from Newman suggests, a post-anarchist approach draws upon the kinds of multiple, protean, non-hierarchical and cyborg-like forms of subjectivity explicated by post-structuralism and turns them into a political and resistive practice.

The term *post-anarchism* itself was first coined by Hakim Bey in a 1987 essay titled ‘Post-Anarchism Anarchy’. This short essay demonstrates a frustration with a perceived lack of diversity within anarchist movements and with the ineffectiveness of traditional anarchist organisational tactics and modes of thinking. As Bey writes, ‘[d]emos, picket lines [and] reprints of 19<sup>th</sup> century classics don’t add up to a vital, daring conspiracy of self liberation’.<sup>62</sup> Instead of focusing on a ‘legacy of failure’ and ‘revolutionary masochism’, anarchism, for Bey, should seek ‘revolt in our times’ because ‘in the process we could realise many of our True Desires, even if only for a season’.<sup>63</sup> Among the eclectic aims Bey proposes for this new anarchism are a focus on ‘anti-work’; the use of ‘pornography [and] popular entertainment as vehicles of radical re-education’; the

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59 Quoted in: *Ibid.*, 5

60 The range of thinkers that post-anarchist writers draw upon is explored by Süreyya Evren, see: *Ibid.*, 6-9.

61 Quoted in: *Ibid.*, 4-5

62 Hakim Bey, ‘Post-Anarchism Anarchy’, in *Post-Anarchism: A Reader*, ed. by Duane Rousselle and Süreyya Evren (London; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 69-71, 69.

63 *Ibid.*, 70

overthrow of the ‘2/4 [and] 4/4 beat’ in music; and a shift in tactics towards ‘sabotage [and] imaginative disruption’.<sup>64</sup> These ideas are developed further by Bey in ‘TAZ’. In this essay Bey describes the period of the late 1980s and early 1990s as a time ‘without *terra incognita*’: for Bey, the spread of globalisation means that there has been a ‘closure of the map’.<sup>65</sup> Within such a historical moment, direct confrontation with the state is no longer ‘meaningful violence’ but leads only to ‘martyrdom’.<sup>66</sup> There is ‘not one speck of rock [...] left *open*, not one remote valley, not even the Moon and the planets’.<sup>67</sup> By this, Bey refers to the expansion of neoliberal capitalism and its economic power/logics through globalisation to every corner of the globe, to outer space and, perhaps by implication, the imagination.

Yet, for Bey, responding to the language of Baudrillard, even if ‘the map *becomes* the territory’ it can ‘see only dimensional grids’ leaving open the ‘fractal complexities of actual geography’.<sup>68</sup> It is within ‘this margin of error that the TAZ can come into existence’, while ‘the map is closed’ the TAZ is ‘open’ as it unfolds within the ‘fractal dimensions’ and ‘enfolded immensity’ of a geography ‘invisible to the cartography of Control’.<sup>69</sup> In these spaces, ‘a whole new geography’ can emerge, a ‘pilgrimage-map in which holy sites are replaced by peak experiences and TAZs’.<sup>70</sup> Bey does not define specifically what a TAZ is or should look like, but instead suggests it to be a temporary liberation or a ‘brief [...] republic of gratified desires’.<sup>71</sup> Drawing upon Baudrillard’s concept of silence as a deliberate strategy of resistance, Bey argues that the best tactic is ‘to refuse to engage in spectacular violence, to *withdraw* from the area of simulation, to disappear’.<sup>72</sup> Evasion and mobility is privileged over confrontation; in a turn of phrase borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari’s *Nomadology: The War Machine* (1986), Bey argues that ‘[t]he

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64 Ibid., 70-71

65 Emphasis original: Bey, *T. A. Z.*, 100.

66 Ibid., 100, 99

67 Emphasis original: Ibid.

68 Ibid., 101

69 Ibid., 99, 101

70 Ibid., 132

71 Ibid., 132

72 Emphasis original: Ibid., 100

“nomadic war machine” must always move on ‘before the map can be adjusted’.<sup>73</sup> The TAZ therefore fits into a broader context of the earlier mentioned shift towards a politics that doesn’t look like politics, preferring to evade direct or climatic confrontation with dominant power systems, preferring to become unrecognisable and explore the possibilities of freedom within marginal and liminal spaces.<sup>74</sup> Bey’s writing is also deeply connected to, and in dialogue with, the politics of cyberpunk. As a self-described ‘[c]yberpunk fan’, Bey ‘envision[s] “reality hacking” playing a major role in the creation of TAZs’.<sup>75</sup> Bey’s essay, therefore, attempts to synthesise cyberpunk and French post-structuralist theory into an actively resistive practice. In ‘TAZ’, Bey makes explicit reference to the work of William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, arguing that, ‘[l]ike Gibson and Sterling, I am assuming that [...] data-piracy, unauthorized transmissions and the free flow of information can never be frozen’.<sup>76</sup> The premise of the TAZ itself is also drawn from Bruce Sterling’s novel *Islands in the Net* (1988), which Bey considers to be a novel ‘based on the assumption that the decay of political systems will lead to a decentralized proliferation of experiments in living’.<sup>77</sup> In drawing upon science fiction in this way Bey implies that his own essay has a speculative quality, seeking to imagine the kinds of future the TAZ might enable. In this way, Bey’s work provides an additional bridge between cyberpunk science fiction, anarchism and post-structuralism. Bey’s reading of first-wave cyberpunk also indicates the imaginative power cyberpunk holds as a mode when it assumes a marginal position. Bey’s development of the TAZ as a concept is here linked to the rough hyperbole of cyberpunk and its focus on hacking, data piracy and other forms of marginal activity.

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73 Ibid., 100

74 The possibilities of nomadism for radical liberation are also explored by Rosi Braidotti. In her 1994 book *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti develops a feminist practice of nomadic subjectivity, emerging from the writings of Deleuze and Guattari as well as post-modern feminists such as Donna Haraway.

75 Bey, *T. A. Z.*, 108

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid., 96

## Multipersona Phenomenon

The resistive potential of using subjective multiplicity to elude definition, tracking or analysis is explicitly explored in Caitlin Sullivan and Kate Bornstein's novel *Nearly Roadkill*, which overtly celebrates such practices as anti-capitalist. An interest in multiplicity is reflected in the novel's experimental form, which rejects any singular voice. The text makes use of chat-room logs, emails, newspaper clippings and diary entries to construct and unfold its narrative. Characters frequently assume different names, personae and identities. To roughly summarise, the novel is largely about the cyber-sexual exploits of its central characters, Scratch and Winc, who adopt a wide range of personae while surfing the net. The pair eventually come under government scrutiny for attempting to evade systems of control and registration. The aim of this government-backed registration process is to create an advertiser friendly net by reining in behaviour seen as erratic or deviant. Both characters reject binary or essentialised notions of gender, instead using the pronouns 'hir' and 'ze' to refer to themselves/each other.<sup>78</sup> The two change personae and identities so often that no singular user profile can adequately define them. For example, Winc's 'product interest area profile', built from tracking data, is full of contradictions, describing ze as 'a young senior citizen white Native American male female earning between \$6,000 and \$500,000 annually'.<sup>79</sup> Such conflicting information is obviously useless for identifying Winc.

This strategy of multiplicity, or what the pair refer to as the 'multipersona phenomenon', causes an issue for online 'advertising reps' as they cannot serve ads targeting 'demographic groups successfully' if 'users are not representing themselves accurately'.<sup>80</sup> This in turn threatens the business model of online services that rely on advertising. In response to this deviance, the network presented in *Nearly Roadkill* is one which is moving increasingly towards centralisation and control. Internet users are required to 'register' their identities with the bureaucratically named

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78 Caitlin Sullivan and Kate Bornstein, *Nearly Roadkill: An Infobahn Erotic Adventure* (New York: High Risk Books, 1996), 1.

79 Ibid., 95

80 Ibid. 130

‘United States Government Bureau of Census Statistics’.<sup>81</sup> This process is encouraged opaquely with incentives to register including invitations to ‘special areas of the Net’ and entries in raffles for large sums of money.<sup>82</sup> The registration process aims to fix each user with a single trackable identity. In addition, the actual questions asked aim to reinforce binaries and social norms: only one ethnicity can be chosen; sexual orientation is reduced to a binary and clinical, almost medical, ‘heterosexual/homosexual’; gender and sex are essentialised into simply ‘(M) or (F)’.<sup>83</sup> The only individuality, flexibility or expression respondents are allowed is when selecting what ‘brands’ they are interested in or answering the 125 ‘Product Survey Questions’.<sup>84</sup> Alongside this, the network is monitored and policed by ‘the Eyes’, who function as ‘electronic beat cops’, and appear within chatrooms seemingly at random to police user behaviour.<sup>85</sup> The word ‘eye’ implies that the strategy of the state and corporate interests, within the novel, is to see, locate and fix with a stare the identities and behaviours of individual users.

The tension within the internet that *Nearly Roadkill* dramatises, between centralised hierarchy and decentralised nodes, is one which is inherent to the network’s design. As Caygill comments, ‘the tension between hierarchical enclosure (whether political or commercial) and commons characterizes the history of the net and subsequently the web’.<sup>86</sup> Caygill argues that the internet’s design is ‘paradoxical’.<sup>87</sup> Developed by the US military, early prototypes of the internet, such as APRANET, aimed to provide the US with the ‘capacity to resist a nuclear strike’, by preserving a ‘centralised and hierarchical command structure’ through a ‘decentralized and non-hierarchical network of communications’ less vulnerable to attack.<sup>88</sup> The network is built on contradictions, designed to preserve centralised control through decentralisation. Likewise, in his section on ‘The Net and the Web’ in ‘TAZ’, Bey also identifies this tension. Bey argues that ‘the

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81 Ibid., 15

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., 40-41

84 Ibid.

85 Ibid, 3

86 Caygill, *On Resistance*, 205.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

Net’ constitutes ‘the totality of all information and communication transfer’, which ‘gives the net a hierarchic aspect’.<sup>89</sup> However, ‘the alternate horizontal open structure of information exchange’ online leaves open the possibility of a ‘*counter-Net*’, concerned with ‘clandestine, illegal and rebellious use of the web’.<sup>90</sup> As we saw earlier, Caygill argues that in the play of resistance and counter-resistance there are never any complete victories but only a ‘reciprocal play of resistances’ continually seizing and surrendering the initiative.<sup>91</sup> In a similar vein, drawing on cyberpunk literature and politics, as quoted earlier, Bey writes that ‘[l]ike Gibson and Sterling I am assuming that the official Net will never succeed in shutting down the Web or the counter-Net’ and as a result ‘the free flow of information can never be frozen’.<sup>92</sup> Although he later became more pessimistic about the potential of the net—in a second edition Bey would describe his section on the internet as ‘the least useful part of the book’—in ‘TAZ’ Bey was enthusiastic about the possibilities for online resistance. Bey argues that ‘the counter-Net’ has ‘the promise of an integral aspect of the TAZ’.<sup>93</sup> ‘As a Cyberpunk fan’, Bey writes, ‘I can’t help but envision “reality hacking” playing a major role in the creation of the TAZs’.<sup>94</sup> Bey is vague as to what this reality hacking might look like, but perhaps it could be interpreted to mean the use of technology for the purposes of disrupting the routines, systems of control, and surveillance that make up everyday life. The process of disruption thereby creating the space, or revealing the hidden folds in the map, where a TAZ can emerge. In such a process, ‘the construction of an alternative and autonomous Net [...] will’, for Bey, ‘serve as the basis for a “new society emerging from the shell of the old”’.<sup>95</sup>

Hope and optimism for the internet are also present in *Nearly Roadkill*. Alongside the internet providing an opportunity to explore new identities and personae, linking with Sherry Turkle’s ideas of therapeutic multiplicity explored in the previous chapter, Sullivan and Bornstein

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89 Bey, *T. A. Z.*, 106.

90 Emphasis original: *Ibid.*

91 Caygill, *On Resistance*, 5.

92 Bey, *T. A. Z.*, 108.

93 *Ibid.*, xi, 113

94 *Ibid.*, 108

95 *Ibid.*, 111

propose that the internet holds the potential to enable new ways of being that fundamentally oppose the operation of institutional power in Western societies. Returning to *Nearly Roadkill*, what is interesting about Winc's advertising profile is its mix of high and low culture. The 'objects of regular perusal' listed on the account include fashion magazine 'Vogue Online', the low-brow scandal magazine 'True Romance', the popular—but famous—science magazine 'Scientific American' and the slightly anarchic pulp cyberculture magazine 'Mondo 2000'.<sup>96</sup> Such a clash of high-brow and low-brow interests is significant as these categorisations are one of the many ways individuals are classified and assigned status. As Stallybrass and White write in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*:

The ranking of literary genres of authors in a hierarchy analogous to social classes is a particularly clear example of a much broader and more complex cultural process whereby the human body, psychic forms, geographical space and the social formation are all constructed within interrelating and dependent hierarchies of high and low.<sup>97</sup>

Stallybrass and White succinctly describe a process that many authors cited throughout this thesis—including Donna Haraway, Allucquère Rosanne Stone, Steven Brown, Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari—respond to: the drive within the Western intellectual, academic and scientific tradition to classify and hierarchise the universe and all things, then sort them into dependent categories of high and low. This also connects more broadly to postmodernism's rejection of distinctions between high and low art/culture. As John Storey argues, 'postmodernism', and its levelling affect, emerges out of a 'generational refusal of the categorical certainties of high modernism'.<sup>98</sup> For some writers, such as Jean-François Lyotard, Storey claims, postmodernism represented a 'crisis in the status of

<sup>96</sup> Sullivan and Bornstein, *Nearly Roadkill*, 95.

<sup>97</sup> Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 2.

<sup>98</sup> John Storey, 'Postmodernism and Popular Culture', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 147-157, 148.

knowledge in Western societies', as 'the intellectual's privilege to explain and distribute knowledge is threatened'.<sup>99</sup> Returning to their analysis, Stallybrass and White make it clear that categorical references to 'top', or 'high' cultural forms frequently attempt to 'eliminate the "bottom"', only to find themselves 'dependent upon that low other'.<sup>100</sup> In other words, the dominant economic and intellectual class, who seek to position themselves as superior, require an inferior to define their superiority against. Or, to put it in Foucault's terms, 'power comes from below'.<sup>101</sup>

Therefore, within *Nearly Roadkill*, the problem that advertisers and the government have with Scratch and Winc is not only their lack of unitary identity and their rejection of binary gender, but also their conflation of high and low. These characters and their innumerable online personae refuse to classify their interests and identities within easily identifiable categories or hierarchies of social control, seeking to become impossible to classify and moving towards a posthuman and multiple subjectivity. This analysis allows us to understand why, within the novel, the government responds in an extremely harsh, frantic and panicked way to Scratch and Winc's very existence. The pair are branded as 'registration evaders', who are charged with 'conspiracy to overthrow the government of the United States of America', an 'act of High Treason, punishable by death'.<sup>102</sup> Being unable to reduce them to an essentialism (in terms of gender and sexuality) or assign them a categorised, culturally determined status of either high or low, the institutional systems of power cannot easily define themselves against Scratch and Winc, threatening to destabilise the identity of the ruling order. In turn, something which threatens to be unclassifiable is a threat to the social order within the text that maintains itself through hierarchising, categorising all people in order to keep them under the control of surveillance and discipline. This system of control also uses language, through limiting the labels and categories available, to control and limit the identities and ways of being it is possible to imagine.

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99 Ibid., 148 and 149

100 Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 5.

101 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 94.

102 Sullivan and Bornstein, *Nearly Roadkill*, 277.

Similar images of control, and optical metaphors, are also present in ‘TAZ’ where Bey writes of ‘a society of capitulation ruled by the image of the Cop and the absorbent eye of the TV screen’.<sup>103</sup> Technology, the screen, is presented as a tool of social control. A society that polices itself is presented in this brief line: a society that wills its own repression and is obsessed with the aesthetics of policing communicated in compelling form via television. Bey argues that in the late 80s/early 90s context within which ‘TAZ’ was written, ‘absolutely nothing but a futile martyrdom could possibly result from a head on collision with the terminal State, the megacorporate information State’.<sup>104</sup> The word ‘terminal’, with its computing implications, once again describes the State as an entity that seeks to use the network as its primary tool of control and regulation. As mentioned earlier, Bey explicitly draws inspiration from cyberpunk literature and is clearly inspired by cyberpunk politics, specifically in referencing Bruce Sterling’s 1988 novel *Islands in the Net*.<sup>105</sup> Bey finds Sterling’s vision of the future, with its ‘decentralized proliferation of experiments in living’, a compelling one.<sup>106</sup> By ‘extrapolating from past and future stories about “islands in the net”’, Bey arrives at his concept of the ‘Temporary Autonomous Zone’.<sup>107</sup> Bey makes it clear to his reader that he posits the ‘TAZ’ as a ‘suggestion, almost a poetic fancy’, rather than as ‘political dogma’.<sup>108</sup> Once again we find evidence that Bey’s work is presented more as a speculative or poetic experiment than as a traditional academic or political treatise. Bey also states that he has deliberately ‘refrained from defining the TAZ’, preferring instead a process more akin to ‘firing off exploratory beams’.<sup>109</sup> This elusiveness is a key part of the TAZ as Bey is aware of the power of classification and identification. ‘As soon as the TAZ is named’, as soon as it becomes identified or at risk of cooption, ‘it must vanish’.<sup>110</sup> The language used expresses similar ideas to those of Brown and Caygill discussed earlier. Bey’s mechanism of resistance, the TAZ, must be multiple and elude

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103 Bey, *T. A. Z.*, 99.

104 *Ibid.*, 98

105 *Ibid.*, 96

106 *Ibid.*

107 *Ibid.*, 96-97

108 *Ibid.*, 97

109 *Ibid.*

110 *Ibid.*, 99

definition. To be defined or categorised risks becoming absorbed by the system and to become too inflexible is to be vulnerable to systemic violence, either through incorporation back into the hegemony (cooption, gentrification etc...) or through being identified and then subsequently restricted and policed.

Within *Nearly Roadkill* the chatrooms that Scratch and Winc pass through might be thought of as a form of TAZ. Rooms are organised around diverse themes and locations, from the novels of 'Ann Rice' to tropical bars and mysterious forests.<sup>111</sup> These spaces are both temporary and transitory: rooms are created, populated and then abandoned as soon as the 'eyes' turn their attention towards them. As the government places increasing pressure on Scratch and Winc, others come up with innovative ways to help them hide their identity and pass through the cracks and slippages in the network. A common desire to elude totality and find space outside hierarchical systems runs through both *Nearly Roadkill* and *TAZ*. Rather than aim for permanence, the function of the TAZ is 'not to engage directly with the State' but to be a 'guerrilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to reform elsewhere/elsewhen, *before* the state can crush it'.<sup>112</sup> In *Nearly Roadkill*, one character, who helps Scratch and Winc stay anonymous, uses such guerrilla tactics of dissolution and dispersal within the net, by 'cleaning up files', 'rendering links to and from various sources inoperable, retroactively' and providing 'bypasses allowing for passage without being traced'.<sup>113</sup> Such skills are essential to the operation of some kind of counter-net. As with the internet in *Nearly Roadkill*, Bey envisions the TAZ as a space where new subjectivities and ways of being might be formed. The subjectivities produced have the potential to fall outside the limits of what Western modernity, and its specific expression through neoliberalism, considers to be acceptable, and the individuals and assemblages produced through this strategy might come stand in opposition to the dominant forms of meaning making and analysis

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111 Sullivan and Bornstein, *Nearly Roadkill*, 61 and 135.

112 Emphasis original: Bey, *T. A. Z.*, 99.

113 Sullivan and Bornstein, *Nearly Roadkill*, 155 and 307.

used by the dominant ideology as a system of control. The TAZ is therefore linked to a utopian, and perhaps science-fictional, project, an attempt to think beyond the constraints of the present.

## Utopia and Radical Hope

In their concern with the emergence of new subjectivities that draw on practices of multiplicity, both *Nearly Roadkill* and ‘TAZ’ can be read as utopian texts that draw connections between resistance and utopian studies. Crucially, we can connect these two texts to Ruth Levitas’s *Utopia as Method* (2013) and Tom Moylan’s concept of the critical dystopia. Firstly, both ‘TAZ’ and *Nearly Roadkill* respond to moments of dystopia. In Bey’s case, the 1980s was a decade which in the United States saw the intensification of mass incarceration and the militarisation of the police force combined with a break up of trade unions and other traditional forms of left-wing organisation. Within such a context, for Bey, direct confrontation with the state is futile: this was a period where change, in the traditional revolutionary sense, was foreclosed. Sullivan and Bornstein, as explored previously, similarly describe a moment where the internet is heading towards regulation, fixity, surveillance and control. Yet, despite this overt dystopian preoccupation, *Nearly Roadkill* could be described as a critical dystopia. According to Tom Moylan, ‘critical dystopia’—a term he borrows from Lyman Tower Sargent—is a dystopia that does not seek to simply offer ‘critiques of the order of things’.<sup>114</sup> Instead, it aspires to explore ‘oppositional spaces from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration’.<sup>115</sup> In other words, these are dystopias which, rather than present a pessimistic vision of the future from which we cannot escape, seek to ask how we might move beyond dystopia and open up a path towards utopia.

Following this, while neither *Nearly Roadkill* nor ‘TAZ’ present a blueprint for a utopian vision of the future, both are concerned with the process of striving towards such a better future.

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<sup>114</sup> Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, xv.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

Levitas defines utopia broadly as ‘the expression for a better way of living’, which might also be taken to encompass better ways of being.<sup>116</sup> Of course, ‘better’ is a relative term, but both *Nearly Roadkill* and ‘TAZ’ hold the implicit assumption that the full range of human experience and desire cannot be fulfilled or realised under conditions of capitalism. This idea is demonstrated in Bey’s assertion that the TAZ ‘liberates an area’ of ‘imagination’.<sup>117</sup> The implication here is that under the conditions which Bey writes, the full scope of human imagination—the many possible ways of living, being, becoming and relating to others—cannot run free. Likewise, in *Nearly Roadkill*, the government-corporate registration survey, with its reliance on essentialised binaries, does not allow space for the countless ways of being human. Its imposed essentialism limits the range of possible sexualities, genders and relationships that can be assumed or explored. As Levitas writes, ‘people seek to live differently in a myriad individual and collective ways’.<sup>118</sup> In their focus on what it means to live differently now, ‘TAZ’ and *Nearly Roadkill* are concerned with the process of utopian ‘prefiguration’ that Levitas describes; they attempt ‘not just to imagine, but to make, the world otherwise’.<sup>119</sup> This notion of ‘prefiguration’ is picked up by Davina Cooper, who argues that:

Rather than channelling political energy into the operations of government – exerting external pressure or pursuing electoral success, prefigurative politics meant acting *as if* the world sought, or some aspect of it, was already in place.<sup>120</sup>

This idea seems crucial to understanding the operation of the TAZ and, more broadly, an essential component to understanding a fluid, protean conception of resistance: a politics that does not look

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116 Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstruction of Society* (Basingstoke; New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), xii.

117 Bey, *T. A. Z.*, 99

118 Levitas, *Utopia*, xiii.

119 *Ibid.*

120 Emphasis original: Davina Cooper, ‘Acting as if other law reform options were already on the table?’, <<https://futureoflegalgender.kcl.ac.uk/2018/10/13/acting-as-if-other-law-reform-options-were-already-on-the-table/>> [accessed 23 April 2019].

like politics. The TAZ, with its temporary liberations, acts as if some aspect of a better utopian future were already in place. Or, as Bey asks rhetorically: ‘Are we who live in the present doomed never to experience autonomy, never to stand for one moment on a bit of land ruled only by freedom?’<sup>121</sup> For Bey, ‘a certain kind of “free enclave” is not only possible in our time but also existent’.<sup>122</sup> The TAZ becomes a process of utopian prefiguration that can only be ‘understood in action’.<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps then, we might understand the approach of ‘TAZ’ and *Nearly Roadkill* towards the internet not in terms of optimism, with its naïve connotations, but in terms of more radical hope. Hope, in the terms of Ernst Bloch, stems from the ‘appetite’ of the ‘unfulfilled subject’, a phrasing that resonates with ‘TAZ’ and *Nearly Roadkill*’s search for new ways of being and new desires that cannot be fulfilled in current conditions. Hope is an ‘expectant emotion’—one which prefigures and demands—and is a ‘counter emotion against anxiety and fear’, reaching for ‘the furthest and brightest horizon’.<sup>124</sup> Being an expectant emotion, hope looks to the future with an ‘anticipatory character’; it demands because it calls upon the individual to actively imagine something better.<sup>125</sup> Hope also has a prefigurative aspect, as Bloch writes, ‘the expectant emotions essentially imply a real future; in fact that of the Not-Yet’.<sup>126</sup> This radical and politicised mode of hope found within Bloch’s work is analysed by Kathi Weeks in her book *The Problem with Work* (2005), which shares Bey’s preoccupation with anti-work, or zero-work, politics.<sup>127</sup> Weeks interprets Bloch’s hope as a ‘cognitive faculty [...] a mode of thinking through time’.<sup>128</sup> It is therefore future orientated and ‘learning to hope’ can help to overcome the ‘difficulty [of] thinking beyond the bounds of the past

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121 Bey, *T. A. Z.*, 96.

122 *Ibid.*, 97

123 *Ibid.*

124 Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 75.

125 *Ibid.*, 74

126 *Ibid.*, 75

127 Anti-work politics is a strand of left thought that seeks to move the focus of activism beyond ‘the problems with this or that job’ and towards a resistance to ‘work as a requirement, work as a system [and] work as a way of life’. See: Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

128 Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 194.

and present'.<sup>129</sup> Hope also connects, in Weeks' reading of Bloch, with ideas of multiplicity and collective subjectivity. In contrast to fear, which 'contracts around its will to self-preservation', the 'hopeful subject [...] represents a more open and expansive model of subjectivity' enabling 'a more extensive range of connections and purposes'.<sup>130</sup> A hopeful orientation is in this approach a necessary component of a subject that seeks to be multiple and position itself in relation to others. It is these questions of connection, openness and desire that the next section explores in more detail.

## **Part Three: Carnival Transformed**

### **The Neon Carnival**

While the first part of this chapter focused specifically on multiplicity as a resistive practice, the second part seeks to deepen the understanding of multiple and collective ways of being as resistive practice. Through a close reading of Jane Ellen Young's *Cinderblock* this chapter identifies the carnival as a resistive practice that mediates multiple and collective subjectivity. The concepts of TAZ and utopian prefiguration have connections with an older form of resistance: the carnival. Importantly, the notion of the carnival as explored by Mikhail Bakhtin remained a key idea within resistance studies during the 1980s, partly due to the work of Stallybrass and White and partly due to the translation and continued reprinting of *Rabelais and His World*. To return to the opening paragraph of this thesis, the carnival as a site of resistance is a dominant theme within Jane Ellen Young's 1997 cyberpunk novel *Cinderblock*. Right from the first page of the novel, the carnival is positioned as a distant object of longing: Alexander stared out of the window at the distant lights of Actor's Carnival, at the hypnotic neon glow of the Ferris wheel's heavy rotation, and contemplated

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129 Ibid., 195

130 Ibid., 198

this existential fact.<sup>131</sup> In this passage the neon-soaked aesthetic of cyberpunk is paired with the carnival, a staple ritual of life in late Medieval and Renaissance Europe. Young suggests an affinity between the two images, one science-fictional and one historical. The image might be considered postmodern, a clash of styles and aesthetics borrowed liberally from literary history. However, consider the ‘heavy rotation’ of the Ferris wheel, symbolising the carnival turning the world on its head, inside out. A connection can be drawn between the ‘rotation’ of the world during the carnival and the process of cogitative estrangement, described by Darko Suvin as a key characteristic of science fiction. Cognitive estrangement is the process whereby science fiction, through showing the reader new worlds, makes the reader’s own world in turn seem strange to them.<sup>132</sup> This process is ‘cognitive’ for Suvin because, in his view, ‘SF sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique [and] changeable’.<sup>133</sup> Suvin opposes the cognitive process of SF with ideas of ‘myth’, which in contrast ‘conceives human relations as fixed and supernaturally determined’.<sup>134</sup> In effect, science fiction, within this framework, encourages the reader to turn their world upside down and find new ways of conceiving the world.

A similar idea was available to Mikhail Bakhtin, through the concept of *ostranenie*, also known as defamiliarization, a term arising from Russian formalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Viktor Shklovsky, in his 1917 essay ‘Art as Device’, defines *ostranenie* as a device to create, within art, ‘the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things’.<sup>135</sup> Such a device ‘increases the duration and complexity of perception’, allowing the reader to ‘live through the making of a thing’.<sup>136</sup> In one example, Shklovsky argues that Tolstoy’s use of *ostranenie* consists of ‘not calling a thing or event by its name but describing it as if seen for the first time, as if happening for the first

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131 Young, *Cinderblock*, 1.

132 See: Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 4-6; *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*, ed. by Jeff Prucher (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23.

133 Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, 7.

134 Ibid.

135 Viktor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Device’, in *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*, trans. and ed. by Alexandra Berlina (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), pp. 73-96, 80.

136 Ibid.

time'.<sup>137</sup> The effect is somewhat similar to cognitive estrangement in that it is a process through which the world around the reader becomes strange, more malleable and open to change. Young's opening passage thereby encourages the reader to draw connections between science fiction and carnival as defamiliarizing processes. As Stallybrass and White indicate, when the carnival is brought up in theory and literature it is usually thought about not as a Renaissance festival feast but as a 'mode of being', an 'epistemological category' or 'analytic category'.<sup>138</sup> Such a shift does not necessarily contradict, or run antithetical to, the nature of the carnival. As Bakhtin describes, the carnival 'was a true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed'.<sup>139</sup> Stallybrass and White push this idea further, arguing that with its focus on change over immortality 'symbolic polarities' of 'high and low' are deformed in the carnival.<sup>140</sup>

The carnival, or perhaps carnivals, might be interpreted as being multiple and protean, ever shifting into new forms and shapes. Carnivals operate as a 'second life of the people', who 'for a time' enter 'the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance'.<sup>141</sup> In this sense, with their transitory utopian nature, carnivals, which are a 'temporary liberation from the prevailing truth of the established order', might similarly be seen as an inspiration for the TAZ.<sup>142</sup> Both are temporary in nature, both enable and prefigure participation in a more free and equal world, and both are orientated around the fulfilment of pleasures and desires not available under the ruling social order. However, crucially, while they share these commonalities, carnivals are ritualised and with this comes the risk of being institutionalised or co-opted into the service of the dominant order. While the TAZ aims to situate itself within the margin of error left by the dominant society and its ideology, the carnival sits visibly parallel to the ruling order and some cases might even receive its

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137 Ibid., 81-82

138 Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 6.

139 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

140 Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 16.

141 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 9.

142 Ibid., 10

blessing. As Stallybrass and White ask, is ‘the “licensed release” of the carnival not simply a form of social control of the low by the high’ which ‘therefore serves the interests of that very official culture which it apparently opposes’?<sup>143</sup> In other words, does the carnival, through its ideological position, contain an inherent risk becoming static and losing its necessary and celebrated openness? As Terry Eagleton critiques, ‘Carnival’, without the plural, ‘is a licensed affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony only’.<sup>144</sup> However, this question, over whether the carnival is for or against the status quo, is somewhat of a false binary. Stallybrass and White argue that ‘[i]t actually makes little sense to fight out the issue of whether or not carnivals are *intrinsically* radical or conservative, for to do so automatically involves the false essentialisation of carnivalesque transgression’.<sup>145</sup> The carnival may become a “stable and cyclical ritual” for “long periods”, but it may also ‘often act as *catalyst* and *site of actual and symbolic struggle*’.<sup>146</sup> To return to Caygill’s terms even if the resistive potential of the carnival lies dormant for many years, the carnival as a counter hegemonic institution can continue to preserve the ‘capacity to resist’.<sup>147</sup> By using Caygill’s framework it can be argued that carnivals, like all forms resistance, are never simple binary moments of opposition but are always located somewhere on the continuum of seizing and surrendering initiative.

## Grotesque (un)realism

In her novel, Young explores the various literal and figurative forms that carnivals can take. Within *Cinderblock*, the distant carnival becomes the place where the novel’s protagonists must journey in search of the resistance, both literally and symbolically, located there. *Cinderblock* is set in a future Los Angeles and makes liberal use of violence and humour. In this world, America has been

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143 Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 13.

144 Quoted in: *Ibid.*, 13.

145 Emphasis original: *Ibid.*, 14.

146 Emphasis original: *Ibid.*

147 Caygill, *On Resistance*, 10.

ravaged by a series of ambiguously described ‘Hate Wars’, leaving the remaining population divided into a comical caste system.<sup>148</sup> For example, low level technicians called ‘Mainframers’ are segregated away in the ‘Orange Kingdom’, a place that is not ever explicitly described except through reference to it being the last place with good confectionery.<sup>149</sup> The only other lower-caste described in any detail are the ‘Laureates of the Closet’, a caste of poets confined to coffee-houses.<sup>150</sup> Through the caste system, the world of *Cinderblock* is one where categories of status, high and low, have become increasingly entrenched and reinforced. Meanwhile, the humour of *Cinderblock* frequently descends into the seemingly nonsensical and surreal, characteristics not uncommon to the carnivalesque. Ruling over the system are ‘The Virtuals’, or ‘verts’, who control the last of humanity’s digital and simulation technology.<sup>151</sup> Hawthorne, one of these verts, seeks to trap or atomise every human into their own personal, individualised fantasy-nightmare world so that the Hate Wars can never reoccur.<sup>152</sup> In a parody of the atomising effect of Reaganite neoliberal capitalism and information technology, Hawthorne aims to create ‘an image, a utopia [...] for each individual on earth’.<sup>153</sup> This private utopia would isolate individuals from each other, making any kind of collective being or social change impossible. What Hawthorne desires is stasis and entropy.

It is therefore fitting that the resistance to the verts, described as ‘Brainiacs’ or ‘tech-revolutionaries’, who want to ‘give the technology back to the people’ are associated with the carnival.<sup>154</sup> When Alexander, one of the novel’s protagonists, arrives at the carnival it is described with almost a poetic quality: ‘[h]e could smell the sweat and perfume, hear the laughter, see the crackle of auras [...] all the colors and forms and movement, the patter of voices like rain falling all around him’.<sup>155</sup> The focus on the bodily senses is significant, as Bakhtin links the carnival to the

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148 This is only very loosely and fragmentedly addressed in the novel, however it is made explicit in the blurb on the back cover. Also see: Young, *Cinderblock*, 12-13.

149 Young, *Cinderblock*, 13 and 17.

150 Ibid., 32-33 and 181-182

151 Ibid., 13

152 Ibid., 199

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid., 85, 229

155 Ibid., 207-208

feasting and folk humour of ‘grotesque realism’.<sup>156</sup> In this concept, the body is not presented as ‘private’ or ‘egoistic’ but as ‘universal’ and ‘material’.<sup>157</sup> In the above passage from *Cinderblock* the carnival is a bodily experience, as sweat and perfume, smells that people usually seek to separate as high and low, mix together freely. The sound of laughter and the cacophony of voices are excessive like flowing rain and are accompanied by ‘rings of performers’, ‘dancers’ and ‘singers’, while ‘roasted cobs or corn’, a cheap base food, are served.<sup>158</sup> The openness of the carnival, with its collective and universal bodily pleasures, stand in direct contrast and opposition to Hawthorne and the verts’ vision for humanity: direct and unmediated pleasure is preferred over the image of false utopia and virtual fantasy.

However, the physical Actor’s Carnival, which is ultimately fixed in one location, is not the only carnival that Young seeks to present to the reader. Neither does Young position digital technology and carnival experience as binary opposites. Emerson, another of the novel’s protagonists, is a ‘paranoid schizophrenic’.<sup>159</sup> As described in Chapter One, in the writings of Deleuze and Guattari schizophrenia is conceptualised as a mode of being that involves being open to multiple non-hierarchical inputs. In *Cinderblock*, Emerson is literally open to the inputs of multiple worlds. Emerson’s strong ‘imagination’ becomes the ‘doors’ through which beings from other purely digital worlds can ‘step through’.<sup>160</sup> Cinder and Ethelred, two beings from a strange digital dreamworld, use Emerson to manifest themselves into physical space. This dreamworld has its own carnivalesque elements and logic. It is a space of excess: nothing is closed or contained, with huge talking ‘cloud creatures’ that extend ‘forever, like some grotesque skyline, filling the horizon’.<sup>161</sup> It is a space where the interior world, inside the mind, and exterior reality collapse

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<sup>156</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 18-19.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>158</sup> Young, *Cinderblock*, 208.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 221

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 222

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 173-174

together, mixing together, deforming and suspending norms: a place where the ‘different faces of reality [...] merge and connect’.<sup>162</sup> It is a world of grotesque *unrealism*:

The town square of the global village [...] the widest, most complete, most immediate network possible. All information flies up into the sky, travels inwards to this center, flows down to this vast sea.<sup>163</sup>

Like the grotesque body, this world has an open and unfinished aspect. It is also permeable and leaky, with an emphasis on overflowing abundance. But, it is not material, it is composed entirely of information and imagination: a grotesque *unrealism*. It shares the universalism, collectiveness and openness of the carnival but is abstract rather than physical. Like the rhizome, every point becomes connected to all other points. The language of liquid and fluid transformation recurs; the centre continually renewing itself as information remains never static or immortalised but always in motion. In crossing into the physical world through Emerson, Cinder and Ethelred become figures akin to the clowns and fools described by Bakhtin. For Bakhtin, such figures are ‘the constant, accredited representatives of the carnival spirit in everyday life out of carnival season’.<sup>164</sup>

Cinder similarly describes herself as endless change: ‘I am chaos, I am the river that flows to the sea, and the silt that stirs at the bottom of the ocean’.<sup>165</sup> A figure that like water is constantly flowing, eroding, destabilising and renewing. Yet, such a description is not offered entirely seriously, as Alexander’s immediate and curt reply that Cinder is a ‘pain in the ass’ demonstrates.<sup>166</sup> As with the humour of clowns, whether such a description is supposed to read as genuine or a joke is unsettlingly unclear. Crystallising into the world only through Emerson’s mind, Cinder and

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162 Ibid., 166

163 Ibid., 164

164 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 8.

165 Young, *Cinderblock*, 229.

166 Ibid.

Ethelred are at once ‘real and ideal at the same time’, standing ‘on the borderline between life and art, in a peculiar midzone’.<sup>167</sup> Here, *life* is that which is chaotic and always changing, tied to lived experience, while *art* refers to all that is fixed, canonised and timeless: clowns and fools violate such boundaries, and it becomes difficult to determine where their performance ends and where their daily life begins. Cinder takes issue with Hawthorne’s vision for humanity, arguing that ‘his theory’ is based on the concept ‘that human dreams are generic enough that a computer could satisfy them all’.<sup>168</sup> Cinder believes that Hawthorne’s simulations would only produce more unfulfilled subjects. As with the conclusions drawn by ‘TAZ’ and *Nearly Roadkill*, the idea expressed here is that monopolies on technology and capital are unable to meet the full range of human desire or to satisfy the full potential of the self as a fluid and protean being. Instead, Cinder’s solution is to collapse the boundaries between ‘dreamtime and real time’.<sup>169</sup> In effect, she desires to merge reality and imagination, or life and art. Cinder claims that ‘when humanity was young [...] it walked with its own unconscious. It created and lived with what it imagined’.<sup>170</sup> In giving technology back to the people, ‘we want to give humanity the power to walk with the gods’.<sup>171</sup> Cinder’s aims in *Cinderblock* and Eiri’s purpose for Lain in *SEL* are not dissimilar, both seek to restore a form of connection between humans and their unconsciousness that is perceived to have been lost. Rather than rely on mediation through simulated fantasy or art, Cinder seeks to give humanity unmediated direct access to a kind of Jungian collective unconscious—a deep well of collective imagination and fantasy—and in the process incorporate individuals into a universal collective body.

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<sup>167</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 8.

<sup>168</sup> Young, *Cinderblock*, 171.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 174

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 175

## Living Flesh

Young is not content within *Cinderblock* to unreservedly celebrate carnivals. As much as *Cinderblock* defends carnivalesque pleasures, it also seeks to transform them. Alexander's final confrontation with Hawthorne occurs in a series of bizarre chapters that take place 'deep inside' Emerson's head.<sup>172</sup> Alexander is faced on the surface with a binary choice between Hawthorne and Cinder's visions for human experience. However, the situation is complicated when Emerson reveals that Cinder's strange dreamworlds are at least partly responsible for the Hate Wars: 'They seeped in by way of Virtual Reality, they slipped through the doors we opened, and they drove the world mad. One third of the wars [...] were caused by her kind'.<sup>173</sup> A darker side of the carnival is revealed. Stallybrass and White argue that the universalism and 'uncritical populism' of the carnival can often be turned into something which 'violently abuses and demonises *weaker*, not stronger, social groups [...] those who "don't belong"'.<sup>174</sup> Such violence is euphemistically referred to by Cinder as 'sacrifices' which 'must be made' in the service of permanent 'genius and madness'.<sup>175</sup>

Such a reading of the reactionary potential within the carnival adheres to Caygill's logic that the tools of resistance do not belong exclusively to progressive causes, but that the study of resistance is a more neutral and detached practice. Steven Duncombe points out in the *Cultural Resistance Reader* that caution must be taken in the definition of 'cultural resistance'.<sup>176</sup> As Duncombe asserts, temporary moments where authority is turned upside down can be used to describe violent lynching as much as progressive moments of rebellion.<sup>177</sup> An answer to this challenge can be found in the writings of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who position the concept of 'the multitude' in contrast to that of 'the people'.<sup>178</sup> The people have an 'undifferentiated

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172 Ibid., 221 and 228

173 Ibid., 230-231

174 Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 19.

175 Young, *Cinderblock*, 231.

176 Duncombe, *Cultural Resistance Reader*, 131.

177 Duncombe argues that not 'all popular and unofficial celebrations' are 'worth celebrating'. For instance, in the US south, '[l]ynchings were festive occasions', see: *ibid.*, 131-132

178 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York, NY: The Penguin Press, 2004), 99.

unity’, they become a destructive ‘crowd’, ‘mob’, or ‘rabble’ easily influenced by ‘external manipulation’.<sup>179</sup> The multitude, on the other hand, ‘is *living flesh* that rules itself’.<sup>180</sup> It is ‘not unified but remains plural and multiple’; it makes difference its strength so as to ‘radically transform the world’.<sup>181</sup> This same contrast is also made by Paolo Virno, who associates the people with centralisation and undifferentiation (easily manageable subjects) and the multitude with ‘a plurality which persists as such in the public scene’.<sup>182</sup> This multitude is capable of ‘collective action’ and the ‘handling of communal affairs, without converging into a one’ or ‘evaporating within a centripetal form of motion’.<sup>183</sup>

Heavily influenced by the poststructuralist philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, these theorists all argue that the multitude is a radically and substantively democratic body, capable of self-governance. It is ‘living flesh’, in that individual difference is not subsumed within the multitude, but it is instead considered integral to non-hierarchical and collective forms of organisation. How do we turn the people into a multitude? Aside from the strategies of resistance and multiplicity discussed throughout this chapter, we might turn again to Stallybrass and White who recognise the need to shift ‘the grounds of debate’ by ‘transforming the “problematic” of carnival’.<sup>184</sup> The answer for them lies in a coherent politics of transgression. The carnival is subversive in so far as it functions ‘as one instance of a generalised economy of transgression’.<sup>185</sup> In other words, the focus of the carnival must not be turned inwards against individuals or minorities, as a mob would, but must be turned outwards towards the external relations of power and dominance that threaten the common interests of the individuals that constitute the multitude. As Stallybrass and White suggest, the carnival must be positioned within a structural analysis of

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179 Ibid., 100

180 Emphasis original: Ibid.

181 Ibid., 99 and 101.

182 Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. by Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito, and Andrea Casson (Cambridge, MA; London: Semiotext (e), 2003), 21.

183 Ibid.

184 Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 19.

185 Ibid.,

‘high/low relations’; the worth of the carnival as resistance is determined by how it recodes and works to overturn oppressive and institutional power relations.<sup>186</sup>

In *Cinderblock* Young also outlines a potential transformation of the carnival and actively works to imagine what this recoding of power relations might look like. When confronted with his choice, Alexander refuses to exchange ‘one tyrant for another’, substituting the power of the dictator for the power of the universal mob.<sup>187</sup> Instead, individual agency and choice is reaffirmed when Alexander realises that Hawthorne and Cinder are ‘only an image’, ‘imagination not flesh’, and therefore malleable, or susceptible to ‘deprogramming’.<sup>188</sup> To keep both Hawthorne and Cinder from accessing the digital networks they need to accomplish their goals, Alexander rewrites a part of Emerson’s ‘brain chemistry’ through a chip implanted in his head.<sup>189</sup> Alexander is clear that he does not seek to ‘cure’ Emerson’s schizophrenia, but to ‘ease’ it and close the door between worlds, giving Emerson back control of his imagination.<sup>190</sup> Liberated from the purposes laid out for them by Cinder and Hawthorne, both Alexander and Emerson become free to pursue their own aims. Alexander is allowed to ride off into the sunset with a robot companion down ‘curving highways and empty roads’.<sup>191</sup> While this might be interpreted as an act of individualism, Young explicitly challenges such a view. This robot, named Urban, is another of the novel’s many protagonists, and by the book’s conclusion has come to realise his own free will. With this free will, Alexander recognises that Urban might choose to no longer accompany him. As Alexander tells Urban, ‘I don’t know if you have dreams [...] but I want you to be free to follow them’.<sup>192</sup> With this comes the vulnerability of rejection, and Alexander fights the urge to simply “command” Urban as a machine.<sup>193</sup> When Urban chooses to continue to be with him, Alexander feels a sense of relief: ‘[h]e

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186 Ibid.

187 Young, *Cinderblock*, 267.

188 Ibid., 268

189 Ibid., 277

190 Ibid.

191 Ibid., 291

192 Ibid., 290

193 Ibid., 291

was not going to have to face his new life alone after all'.<sup>194</sup> This act of interpersonal desire is muted but important. In contrast to the stream of companions who are forced by the Verts to care for Alexander in the confines of a single room, Urban chooses to be with Alexander, and the open highway comes to represent the open possibilities of the future.

In contrast, Emerson tasks himself with transforming the carnival, as the novel ends with his resolution to transform an old observatory into a carnivalesque space. One half to be dedicated to a 'coffeehouse where bad poetry can be recited' and the bodily pleasure of 'real coffee' can be drunk, decorated by 'living sculptures'.<sup>195</sup> The idea of a living sculpture, that shifts and changes over time, rejects the immortalisation of art. In the other half there is to be a 'Brainiac bar' and an 'ice-skating rink' with 'Opera', which only plays 'Verdi' as 'Wagner wouldn't be any fun to skate to'.<sup>196</sup> Following Stallybrass and White's call, the carnival becomes rooted in the 'recoding' of 'high/low relations'.<sup>197</sup> Bad poetry, which does not fit into the standards of canonical or high tastes, is celebrated; sculptures are made not of immortalised marble but living humans shifting in form; and high opera is chosen only for its suitability for ice-skating and bodily movement. A chaotic multiplicity reigns as the carnival once again mocks hierarchy and deforms relations of high and low, creating a basis from which the multitude might come to emerge. In this moment, the reader is given a utopian glimpse into the future where a collective body might emerge that is collective, ever changing and defiantly against the tyrannies of hierarchy and literary taste. Through contrasting high and low culture, Young constructs a heteroglossia, or a diversity of voice and speech, in which a variety of different individuals might mix. In this sense, the multitude here allows not simply for a protean self but for a protean community, in which multiple selves, who are themselves multiple, might come into contact and community.

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194 Ibid.

195 Ibid., 292

196 Ibid., 292-293

197 Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics*, 19.

## Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the points of convergence between resistance studies and feminist cyberpunk, alongside elements of utopian studies. By placing 1990s feminist cyberpunk in context with resistance studies theory, largely from the 1980s and early 1990s, we can see that the genre is concerned and engaged with the politics of its time, even though this politics was often unconventional or deliberately evasive rather than direct. As outlined in my introduction, Cyberpunk, as a genre, is often remembered for its hyperbolic claims to radicalism, while remaining in many ways limited or conservative. This chapter highlights a strain of feminist cyberpunk, present in *Nearly Roadkill* and *Cinderblock*, that, within the context of its time, sought to engage with genuinely radical politics which opens out towards utopia and beyond present constraints, rather than presenting dystopias of resignation or reinforcing the status quo as inevitable. As demonstrated, these two texts seek to challenge the ways in which meaning and knowledge are produced and hierarchised, fighting against the impulse in the Western intellectual tradition to categorise and define all things against one another. In the process, they also examine the contradictory narratives of Western modernity.

This chapter has also explored the concepts of TAZ and carnival as strategies for resistance in a period of increased state violence and repression. As strategies, both TAZ and carnival use aspects of multiplicity and proteanism to form and reform where necessary. By placing these ideas in dialogue with feminist cyberpunk, a form of resistance can be elucidated that remains open and difficult to define, preserving the capacity to resist, but is also attuned to the dynamics and hierarchies of power. This reading, alongside the work of Hardt, Negri and Virno, offers the possibility of transforming the carnival and TAZ away from its latent potential for mob or persecutory violence and into a resistance against institutionalised power. Chapters Two and Three of this thesis have been concerned with establishing specific theoretical contexts for reading second wave feminist cyberpunk. In turn, the next chapter turns outwards towards urban space. Chapter

Three examines how queer subjects use spatial practices to navigate, build and transform urban space. In this manner, the next chapter explores how questions of multiplicity and resistance are deeply entwined with, and play out in relation to, the city.

## Chapter Three: Queer Discontent and Urban Practice

### Introduction

#### Walking the City

In his 1980 book, *The Practice of Everyday Life* French philosopher and historian Michel de Certeau describes two, in his view competing, perspectives for reading the city. The first is the perspective of the voyeur, who experiences ‘the pleasure of “seeing the whole,” of looking down on, totalizing the most immoderate of human texts’.<sup>1</sup> To become the voyeur, ‘to be lifted out of the city’s grasp’, is to lose any individual subject position or difference. The voyeur, for de Certeau, is a caricature of a notion of the universal that centres an assumed masculinity. By rising above the crowded streets below, ‘he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. [...] His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur’.<sup>2</sup> To be lifted up from the streets, is seemingly to be lifted out of the body. In de Certeau’s words, the temptation of the voyeur is a ‘lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more’.<sup>3</sup> The sensation of disembodiment provoked by this elevation is reminiscent of William Gibson’s descriptions of cyberspace in *Neuromancer* (1984). The language used by de Certeau mirrors that used by Gibson. To see the ‘city lights’ of Gibson’s cyberspace, spread out in a grid like a ‘transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity’, and the sense of mastery Case feels at ‘the unfolding of his distanceless home’ below his disembodied consciousness in cyberspace are both voyeuristic pleasures.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the perspective of the voyeur is as illusory as Lacan’s ideal-I (discussed in Chapter One), it is a ‘fiction of knowledge’; in a

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1 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), 92.

2 Emphasis added: *Ibid.*, 92

3 *Ibid.*

4 Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 67; 68.

prefiguration of Baudrillard (*Simulacra and Simulation* would be published a year later in 1981), de Certeau describes the ‘panorama city’ as a ‘simulacrum, in short a picture, whose condition of possibility is an oblivion and a misunderstanding of practices’.<sup>5</sup> de Certeau argues that to see the city from above, as the ‘city planner or cartographer’ does, is to misread it and ignore its ‘murky and intertwining daily behaviours’ in favour of a more comforting illusion of control or mastery over the city.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, de Certeau positions the walker as a counterpoint to the voyeur. These ‘ordinary practitioners of the city’ make themselves unintelligible to the voyeur, living ‘below the threshold at which visibility begins’.<sup>7</sup> In de Certeau’s writing (or at least in its 1984 English translation by Steven Rendall) a curious shift in pronoun occurs: ‘[t]hey walk—an elementary [...] experience of the city, *they* are the walkers [...] whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban text’.<sup>8</sup> The masculine *he* becomes a gender-neutral and collective *they*. The walker actively resists the voyeur’s aspiration to a totalising gaze, as ‘these practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen’.<sup>9</sup> In the ‘intertwining’ paths they walk, in the ‘unrecognised poems in which each body is an element signed by many others’, they ‘elude legibility’.<sup>10</sup> In de Certeau’s argument, the practices of the walker cannot be read from the top down; they elude a voyeuristic perspective. Walking becomes a collective, rather than solitary, act: each individual body moves in relation to a network of other bodies, perhaps coming to resemble Hardt and Negri’s ‘living flesh’.<sup>11</sup> The word ‘practitioner’ suggests de Certeau interprets the act of walking not as an incidental or taken for granted means of navigating the city, but as a deliberately resistive strategy. Such an analysis, with its focus on the need to ‘elude legibility’, connects the spatial practice of the city provocatively with the theories of postmodern resistance (from Caygill and Brown) explored in Chapter Two.

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5 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92; 93.

6 Ibid., 93

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 100.

In her review of *The Practices of Everyday Life*, Beryl Langer criticises the book's perceived gender blindness. For Langer, 'defining humanity as male [...] or in gender neutral terms like "user" and "consumer"' risks erasing 'the relations of domination and subordination within these categories'.<sup>12</sup> As Langer goes on to explain, 'Certeau ignores the differential constraints imposed on users, and the ways in which dominant modes of [...] spatial organization assist in the continuing domination of some "users" (women) by others (men)'.<sup>13</sup> Such a critique, attuned to an analysis of power relations is a valuable intervention. Yet, while de Certeau does, a few pages later, revert to referring to the walker as a *him*, nevertheless the use of *they*, perhaps itself an accident of translation, in these few short paragraphs offers us what I argue is a vision of walking as a queer and collective spatial practice and way of being together. Taking de Certeau's paragraphs as a starting point, the aim of this chapter is to outline such alternative, queer forms of navigating, living in and contesting the city. This goal is shaped not only by the theories outlined in Chapters Two and Three, but also by several other select queer and feminist (SF and non-SF) texts.

It is worth noting here that in the UK during the 1990s there was a revival of interest in the practice of psychogeography, and between 1992 and 1997 the London Psychogeographical Association was reconvened.<sup>14</sup> Prominent writers of the period included Ian Sinclair, Stewart Home and Peter Ackroyd. The definition of psychogeography has evolved and changed since its inception in post-war Paris. The term was famously defined by Guy Debord, a key figure in the French Situationist movement, in 1955 as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals'.<sup>15</sup> For Debord and the Situationists, psychogeography was a radical practice of counter mapping the city, rejecting the capitalist logics of speed and circulation in favour of following and

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12 Beryl Langer, 'Reviewed Work(s): The Practice of Everyday Life by Michel de Certeau', *Contemporary Sociology*, 17.1 (1988), pp. 122–124; 123.

13 *Ibid.*, 123

14 Merlin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpending: Pocket Essentials, 2009), 113.

15 Guy Debord, 'Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography', in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. & trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), pp. 8–12, 8.

navigating lines of emotion and excitement through the city. These 1990s British psychogeographers partly share a lineage with early first wave cyberpunk writers, both being heavily influenced by the work of J. G. Ballard. In the words of Merlin Coverley, Ballard ‘remapped psychogeography’s traditional sphere and pointed the way for other writers to re-examine these anonymous and neglected regions’.<sup>16</sup> In particular, Coverley sees Ian Sinclair as ‘[t]he most implicated successor to Ballard’s reworking of the psychogeographical agenda’, and he argues that ‘Sinclair, like Ballard before him, has been keen to expose those obscure places that lie at the margins’.<sup>17</sup> To think rhizomatically, psychogeography and cyberpunk, with their shared interest in the margins of urban life, are connected by a dense thicket of branches. However, this chapter does not directly utilise the framework of psychogeography for one key reason. Crucially, this chapter is organised around the theme of queerness and queer writing. While the links between the 1990s London psychogeography resurgence and cyberpunk would be interesting to explore, a queer perspective is notably lacking in the work of these prominent British writers.

## **In Between Spaces**

De Certeau’s use of the phrase ‘spaces which cannot be seen’, existing ‘below the level of visibility’, draws comparison with postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s notion of the ‘interstitial perspective’, as outlined in his book *The Location of Culture* (1994).<sup>18</sup> An interstice describes a small intervening space, and these ‘in between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining society itself’.<sup>19</sup> The interstice exists in the space within a border, but rather than being closed off, ‘the boundary becomes the place from which

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<sup>16</sup> Coverley, *Psychogeography*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 and 112.

<sup>18</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2

*something begins its presencing*'.<sup>20</sup> In other words, Bhabha shifts the perspective from which borders are viewed; a boundary is not where something ends but where one entity meets another, for example where land meets sea or where one country encounters another. This border space, or interstice, becomes a space of possibility or opening, rather than an endpoint. This boundary position, not dissimilar to that of Haraway's cyborg, offers unique perspectives for what Bhabha describes as 'going beyond'.<sup>21</sup> Connecting once again to ideas of utopia and estrangement, to go beyond, in Bhabha's vision, is the 'imaginary of spatial distance', it is 'to live somehow beyond the border of our times', throwing 'into relief the temporal social differences that interrupt our collusive sense of cultural contemporaneity'.<sup>22</sup> Such a practice is decolonial in its ambition to interrupt and make unfamiliar the processes of colonial map making and cartography that reinforces the borders of social difference and prevent movement. This going beyond is connected with Tom Moylan's critical dystopias, as discussed in Chapter Two, and the interstice might be linked to, what Moylan describes as, 'oppositional spaces from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration'.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the act of inhabiting the interstice, of going beyond, allows us to return with new perspectives, which can challenge the dominant social fictions that sustain and naturalise the inequalities of the present. The task in this chapter is to identify the kinds of space, and the social practices encouraged within, that form such interstices and enable the possibility of going beyond.

These texts from de Certeau and Bhabha inform the theoretical approach of this chapter and the close readings that follow. This chapter considers possible queer, working class and feminist responses and alternatives to the practice of psychogeography. That is, it seeks to find alternate ways of studying the contours, life and spatial practices of the city—from below—that avoid the white and masculine perspectives which have often dominated first wave cyberpunk. This chapter is

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20 Ibid., 5

21 Ibid., 4

22 Ibid., 4

23 Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, xv.

formed of two parts, at first moving away from cyberpunk. By taking this approach, I reaffirm my commitment (outlined in my introduction) to perform a decentered and rhizomatic reading of cyberpunk. I also seek to move beyond cyberpunk, so that I might return to it with perspectives and tools of analysis from texts and writing usually considered to be outside its boundaries. This allows me to reflect more broadly on the trends which changed and shaped cities during the 1990s. Particularly, I consider how marginalised communities responded, adapted, contested and resisted these developments, especially the intensification of gentrification. In the second part of this chapter I return to cyberpunk, in the form of Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994) to consider how the genre reflects and engages with these trends. This analysis prepares the ground for Chapter Four, where I aim to demonstrate how feminist cyberpunk, a genre bound up with notions of utopia and futurity, can help to augment and illustrate queer spatial practices of reshaping and transforming the city.

Part one of this chapter reads Samuel Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999), a personal account of the effects of gentrification in the 1990s on the porn theatres, used by gay men as spaces of public sex, that clustered around New York's 42nd Street in the late 20th Century.<sup>24</sup> This text is read alongside theory from Michel Foucault and José Esteban Muñoz on the subjects of heterotopia, friendship and queer utopia. Bakhtin, particularly his understanding of marketplace speech, is once again recalled. Specifically, this section draws out Delany's concept of the *periplum*—a means of describing a particular space at a particular historical moment for the use of future groups or individuals—as queer spatial practice. In part two, I then turn to use this notion of the *periplum* to analyse two hard-boiled detective novels: Raymond Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* (1953) and Sarah Schulman's *After Delores* (1988). I connect these novels to the work of feminist geographer Elisabeth Wilson, who analyses the city as a contradictory space of both oppression and liberation for women and queer people.

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<sup>24</sup> Samuel Delany is also a prominent science fiction writer and, as stated in my introduction, is considered by Isiah Lavender III and Graham Murphy to be an Afrocyberpunk writer, see: Lavender III and Murphy, 'Afrofuturism', 356.

Part three returns to cyberpunk, offering an analysis of Melissa Scott's 1994 novel *Trouble and Her Friends*, using ideas of the postmodern that emerge in the writings of Wilson, Scott Bukatman and Edward Soja. This section also draws out further Bhabha's notion of the interstice alongside Soja's concept of Thirdspace and draws connections to Deleuze and Guattari's schizophrenic/rhizome and Bakhtin's grotesque body. This section ends with a discussion of queer kinship and the cooption of queerness in Scott's novel. Finally, part four of this chapter reads *People in Trouble* (1991) another of Schulman's novels, exploring further the connections between gentrification and the AIDS crisis in New York. I then turn to examine how the space of the city is contested through queer activism. This analysis recalls my writing on resistance studies in Chapter Two and elucidates Bakhtin's theorisation of carnival feasting.

## Part One: Voyages through Heterotopia

### Changing Times

Although best known for his Science Fiction novels, in 1999 Samuel Delany published a collection of two essays, titled *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. The first essay, ‘Times Square Blue’, presents a series of personal accounts and anecdotes, where Delany describes his experiences as a regular patron of the porn theatres that clustered around Times Square and New York’s 42nd Street from the late 1970s, when they became places frequently used by gay men to solicit casual sex, until the mid-1990s. The second, ‘...Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red’ is a more analytical essay, in which Delany engages with urban theory and develops the concepts of contact and networking encounters in relation to space. Delany’s work is a motivated response to the gradual destruction of these porn theatres, beginning in the mid-1980s and intensifying in 1995, in order to make way for the construction of the World Wide Plaza (a large commercial real-estate development). The building of such a structure was one symptom of the gentrification of the Times Square area from a red-light district to a tourist attraction for out-of-town middle class visitors.<sup>25</sup> Delany is not the only writer to observe, and critique, this transformation. As Benjamin Chesluk writes in his 2008 study of the Times Square redevelopment project, ‘Times Square’ is now filled with ‘enormous new corporate office towers’ and ‘global business franchises’, entirely displacing ‘[t]he area’s former booming market in pornography and other kinds of sexually explicit entertainment’.<sup>26</sup> Lamenting this change James Traub comments, ‘[s]ay “Times Square”, and the instant association is “Disney.” And “Disney” in turn is shorthand for a deadening depletion of the old teeming energies [...] Times Square isn’t a place, but a simulacrum’.<sup>27</sup> One of the most

25 Delany, Samuel R., *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1999), xiii.

26 Benjamin Jacob Chesluk, *Money Jungle: Imagining the New Times Square* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 3.

27 James Traub, *The Devil’s Playground: A Century of Pleasure and Profit in Times Square* (New York, NY: Random House Publishing Group, 2007), [Amazon ebook].

prominent justifications for this redevelopment was eradicating the transmission of AIDS—a disease that disproportionately impacted the gay men, sex-workers and drug users that frequented the area—under the guise of public safety, which had affected the city throughout the 1980s and mid-1990s.<sup>28</sup> Or, as Bill Landis more luridly writes, ‘AIDS and crack were the final nail in the Deuce’s coffin [...] By the close of the 1990s, the Deuce was bulldozed to make way for the “New 42nd Street” [...] designed to service New York’s international tourist market’.<sup>29</sup>

Although not made explicit, a utopian impulse is present in Delany’s project. As Delany writes in his preface to the collection, these essays are not simply an exercise of nostalgia aiming to gloss over the very real material exploitation of those who worked in the theatres.<sup>30</sup> Neither are they ‘a plea to reinstate the porn theatres’ as, while such institutions were destroyed by ‘greed running rampant’, those ‘institutions’ were themselves the product of ‘greed [...] at another moment’.<sup>31</sup> What occurred within these theatres was not of ‘any one moral colour’, but there existed a ‘complex of interlocking systems and subsystems’.<sup>32</sup> Delany’s objective is more complex and future orientated:

However indirect, my argument’s polemical thrust is toward conceiving, organizing, and setting into place new establishments—and even entirely new types of institutions—that would offer the services and fulfill the social functions provided by the porn houses that encouraged sex among the audience. Further, such new institutions should make those services available not only to gay men but to all men and women, gay and straight, over an even wider social range than did the old ones.<sup>33</sup>

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28 Delany, *Times Square*, 156-157.

29 The Deuce was another nickname for the 42nd Street area, its likely origin is a joke: a deuce refers to a two, the lowest number, in a pack of cards, hence forty second becomes forty deuce; Bill Landis and Michelle Clifford, *Sleazoid Express: A Mind-Twisting Tour through the Grindhouse Cinema of Times Square* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 5-6.

30 Delany, *Times Square*, xvi.

31 *Ibid.*, xvii

32 *Ibid.*, xx

33 *Ibid.*, xvii

Delany's work has, in Ernst Bloch's words, an 'anticipatory character', it looks to the past in order to energise present and future organisation.<sup>34</sup> Or, to borrow from Frantz Fanon, Delany is using 'the past [...] with the intention of opening up the future' by 'spurring' people 'into action and fostering hope'.<sup>35</sup> It rejects the stigmatisation of public sex and argues that from the spatial practices, the ways of being together and relating to each other, that developed within the porn theatres new and more diverse forms of community and multitude might be imagined. Such an approach resonates with the work of Hardt and Negri in *Commonwealth* (2009) who, drawing on Spinoza, write that '[t]hrough love we form a relation to that cause and seek to repeat and expand our joy, forming new, more powerful bodies and minds. For Spinoza, in other words, love is a production of the common that constantly aims upward'.<sup>36</sup> In this way, love and the sharing of joy becomes a means of creating new forms of collective body and commons. Such a radical act of love 'marks a rupture with existing being and creates new being, from poverty through love to being'.<sup>37</sup> In such acts, the self and subjectivity are transformed through relations with others. This connects with my discussions of multiple subjective in Chapter One and utopian studies in Chapter Two; Delany explicitly calls upon his reader to imagine how the practices outlined in his essays might prompt imaginings of alternative futures beyond the constraints of the present where transformed subjects can possibly to fulfil a wider range of desires.

## Utopias of Pleasure

We might also place Delany's work within the context of queer theory, which developed in the 1990s. Although the term Queer is highly contested, as a body of theory it describes work that attempts to deconstruct, destabilise and critique the naturalisation of heterosexuality and binary gender. Debates around the exact meaning of the term have followed a similar course to debates

<sup>34</sup> Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 74.

<sup>35</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004), 167.

<sup>36</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 181.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

surrounding the term resistance, as outlined in Chapter Two. As David Halperin argues, ‘the more it verges on becoming a normative academic discipline, the less queer “queer theory” can plausibly claim to be’.<sup>38</sup> Like resistance, to codify or crystallise queer theory into a formal discipline would rob it of its unique critical perspective, which emerges out of its marginal position. As Annamarie Jagose argues, it is the ‘very mobility’ of queer that allows for diverse ‘political and theoretical work’ to be carried out under the ‘rubric of queer’.<sup>39</sup> Delany’s critique, of how the fear of AIDS is utilised by city authorities to discipline and normalise gay activity—through criminalisation, gentrification and media panic—certainly fits under this rubric. However, for Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, queer theory is more than just critical. They argue that ‘queer theory has been radically anticipatory, trying to bring a world into being’.<sup>40</sup> Importantly, ideas of queerness and utopian anticipation are synthesised in José Esteban Muñoz’s book *Cruising Utopia* (2009). Drawing provocatively on Ernst Bloch, in his introduction Muñoz describes ‘queerness’ as ‘not yet here [...] We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality’.<sup>41</sup> Connecting to the previously discussed notion of utopian thinking, Muñoz sees queerness as ‘a mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present’.<sup>42</sup> By linking Muñoz’s ideas to spacial theory and identifying a prefigurative trend in their work, Angela Jones describes the function of queer utopia as ‘spaces in the present that do not necessarily allow for complete emancipation or even happiness, but are suggestive of the potentiality for the future; they give hope’.<sup>43</sup> Thematically then, queer theory sits at an intersection of resistance studies’ strategic mobility and utopian studies’ practice of imaginative anticipation. It is clear then that these are themes with which Delany’s essays are engaged.

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38 Qtd in: Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1996), 1.

39 Ibid., 2.

40 Quoted in, Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 1.

41 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2019), 1

42 Ibid.

43 Angela Jones, ‘Introduction: Queer Utopias, Queer Futurity, and Potentiality in Quotidian Practice’, in *Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias.*, ed. by Angela Jones (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-17, 3.

The work of Foucault, particularly *The History of Sexuality* (1976) is often considered a formative influence on queer theory.<sup>44</sup> However it is Foucault's 'Friendship as a Way of Life', an interview appearing in the French magazine *Gai Pied* in 1981, that holds particular resonance with queer utopianism and provides a useful lens through which to view Delany's work. In this interview, Foucault states that what heteronormative society finds 'disturbing' about homosexuality is not 'the sexual act itself' but the 'homosexual mode of life'.<sup>45</sup> Without the dominant social scripts available to heterosexuals,<sup>46</sup> people who are queer must determine for themselves 'what code would allow them to communicate'.<sup>47</sup> As a result, they 'have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless'.<sup>48</sup> It is this formlessness, or in de Certeau's terms, these practices that elude legibility, that heteronormative society sees as dangerous; it offers possibilities for 'affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie, and companionship, things that our sanitised society can't allow for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force'.<sup>49</sup> Under a system of neoliberal fragmentation that controls individuals through atomisation, these possibilities for collectivity are a threat.

Although perhaps not fully developed, we see glimpses of this kind of friendship in Delany's account. As Delany writes, while '[m]any encounters were wordless' sometimes the occasional encounter 'would blossom into a conversation lasting hours'.<sup>50</sup> While 'more than half' of these were 'single encounters', 'some lasted over weeks; others for months; still others went on a couple of

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44 For an overview of the influence of Foucault, and of post-structuralist thought on queer theory see: Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 75-83.

45 Michel Foucault, 'Friendship as a Way of Life', in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, by Michel Foucault, ed. by Paul Rabinow, trans. by Robert Hurley (New York, NY: New Press, 1997), pp. 135-140, 136.

46 By social scripts, I am referring to the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins on script theory. Tomkins' argues that in social 'scenes' individuals navigate their interactions with others, to at least some extent, through culturally mediated 'scripts'. Or, in Tomkin's words, '[s]cripts are *sets of ordering rules* for the interpretation, evaluation, prediction, production, or control of scenes'. Therefore, being more represented within social and cultural discourse, a wider range of these scripts is available to a heterosexual person compared to a queer person, who must invent the shape of their relations with others to a greater degree. See, Silvan S. Tomkins, 'Social Theory and Nuclear Scripts', in *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Adam Frank, and Irving E. Alexander (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 179-196, 180, 181.

47 Foucault, 'Friendship', 136.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.

50 Delany, *Times Square*, 15.

years'.<sup>51</sup> Echoing Foucault, Delany asks rhetorically, 'these were not love relationships', but 'what greater field and force than pleasure can human beings share?'<sup>52</sup> The utopian possibilities of pleasure are also identified by philosopher Herbert Marcuse. In his 1966 political preface to *Eros and Civilisation*, Marcuse reflects upon his call for a re-imagined society organised around maximising pleasure, 'to make life an end-in-itself'.<sup>53</sup> Recalling his use of the term 'Polymorphous sexuality' he suggests that such a 'new direction of progress' would require an 'opportunity to activate repressed or arrested *organic*, biological needs: to make the human body an instrument of pleasure rather than labor'.<sup>54</sup> In this argument, 'the emergence of new, qualitatively different needs and faculties' are both the 'prerequisite' and 'content of liberation'.<sup>55</sup> In his rhetorical question, Delany makes a similar demand and expectation for the force of pleasure to be afforded centrality in the organisation of society.

Foucault also identifies the power of pleasure and sexuality to re-imagine and reshape social relations. In his argument, homosexuality is less an issue of personal identity and more a question of how a person relates to others. The question Foucault is interested in, regarding homosexuality, is not 'who am I', but '[w]hat relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied and modulated?'<sup>56</sup> Queer sexuality, in this argument, allows for a 'multiplicity of relationships', a phrase which resonates with the theories of multiplicity described in Chapter One.<sup>57</sup> Particularly it echoes Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the schizophrenic as 'one part amongst others' with various external machines 'connected to those of his body'.<sup>58</sup> As discussed in Chapter One, the schizophrenic—without any relationships to 'gods', 'family', 'father or mother'—intervenes in the signifying chain of modern social relations and creates the possibility for different

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51 Ibid., 56

52 Ibid.

53 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1974), xiv.

54 Emphasis original: *ibid.*, xv

55 Ibid.

56 Foucault, 'Friendship', 135.

57 Ibid.

58 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 9.

forms of kinship bond and ways of being together to emerge.<sup>59</sup> The porn theatres are essential in allowing Delany to achieve this multiplicity: '[t]he relationships were not (necessarily consecutive). They braided. They interwove. They were simultaneous'.<sup>60</sup> Delany here rejects the standards of monogamy prevalent in wider heterosexual society, itself an institution that reinforces the atomisation of individuals into nuclear families and attempts to assimilate queer desire into its norms. The porn theatres represent an environment in which this multiplicity, a sharing of mutual pleasure between a wide variety of individuals, can be explored and performed. This capacity of erotic pleasure to tie together diverse individuals and reshape social relations, and by extension the world, is also explored by Audre Lorde, a black-feminist writer and poet. In a paper titled 'Uses of the Erotic' (1978), Lorde argues that the 'sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference'.<sup>61</sup> Importantly, for Lorde pleasure is not a means through which difference is erased or homogenised, but is one of the ways through difference can be recognised and accepted.

In Lee Edelman's words, queer is 'a zone of possibilities', where new and subversive ways of being can take shape.<sup>62</sup> Such multiple ways of being together have a resistive potential because, as Foucault argues, '[i]nstitutional codes can't validate these relations with multiple intensities, variable colours, imperceptible movements and changing forms'.<sup>63</sup> Once again, such a sentence reads as a rejection of heteronormative social bonds and instead argues for the necessity of formless, as yet unreadable and malleable forms of community. This quote prefigures de Certeau's call for a method of moving through space that eludes legibility and embraces difference, connection and collectivity. However, as Haraway cautions, it is important not to read this centring of pleasure as an uncritical championing of the biological body. Specifically addressing the writings

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59 Ibid.

60 Delany, *Times Square*, 57.

61 Audre Lorde, *Zami; Sister Outsider; Undersong* (New York, NY: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1993), 56.

62 Quoted in: Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 2.

63 Foucault, 'Friendship', 137.

of Marcuse, Haraway argues that ‘the analytic resources developed by progressives have insisted on the necessary domination of technics and recalled us to an imagined organic body to integrate our resistance’.<sup>64</sup> In other words, radical theorists too often take an essentialist view of technology as oppressive and celebrate the body as resistive. Instead, Haraway calls upon her reader to recognise the contradictions of technology: ‘a slightly perverse shift of perspective might better enable us to contest for meanings, as well as for other forms of power and pleasure in technologically mediated societies’.<sup>65</sup> For example, while ‘a cyborg world’ might be imagined as ‘the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet’, from a different perspective such a world ‘might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints’.<sup>66</sup> Such an image once again recalls the interconnected machines of Deleuze and Guattari’s schizophrenic, and importantly it explicitly de-centres the human subject in this analysis of pleasure. Crucially, for Haraway, ‘pleasure in technologically mediated societies’ is not about pleasure achieved through human mastery over nature, but pleasure must be negotiated in relation with the environment and the non-humans.<sup>67</sup> Thus, echoing the above quote from Foucault, Haraway encourages the formation of surprising and diverse cyborg politics created from ‘transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities’.<sup>68</sup> These approaches from Foucault and Haraway echo strongly with the queer utopianism of Muñoz, whose imperative calls on us to ‘dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds’.<sup>69</sup>

Also interesting is Haraway’s argument for the necessity of a ‘perverse shift in perspective’, a term that holds queer undertones. The perverse is a mechanism through which Haraway imagines a utopian, socialist and ecological inversion of the cyborg world. This line of thinking, and the

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64 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 154

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

potential queerness of the phrase, is somewhat prefigured by Foucault. Connecting with the earlier discussion of marginality (via hooks in my introduction), ‘homosexuality’, in Foucault’s terms, allows for a reopening of ‘affective relational virtualities’ not because there is anything essentially or intrinsically subversive about gay desire, but because of the “‘slantwise” position’ of the homosexual.<sup>70</sup>

## The Periplum

The term slantwise is used by Foucault, but the full implications of such a term are not expanded on. In order to elucidate it, and develop its meaning, we can turn to Matthew Beaumont’s analysis of anamorphic estrangement. The concept of the slantwise is particularly useful for this analysis, as it provides a method for finding alternative utopian perspectives in a range of different texts. In a 2009 essay titled ‘The Anamorphic Estrangements of Science-Fiction’, Beaumont analyses Renaissance artist Hans Holbein’s painting ‘The Ambassadors’, from 1533. The painting is a portrait of two French ambassadors, accompanied by various globes, navigational devices and instruments, constituting ‘the instruments of enlightenment’.<sup>71</sup> If viewed from a conventional angle, head-on, the painting “‘recruits” the spectator [...] transforming the individual into a subject’.<sup>72</sup> The spectator is ‘transmuted into a proprietor potentially in command of its constituent objects’ and becomes a ‘bourgeois subject’, complicit in the emerging ideology of capitalism and imperialism.<sup>73</sup> However, such a reading ignores ‘the most striking element of the portrait’, an alien disc-like object that cuts across the bottom of the picture. In order to make this object, a large skull, recognisable, the spectator must adopt a slantwise position, and view the picture from the side. The spectator is forced into a ‘contorted, almost abject posture’ becoming destabilised in the process, and as the

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70 Foucault, ‘Friendship’, 138

71 Matthew Beaumont, ‘The Anamorphic Estrangements of Science Fiction’, in *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould and China Miéville (London: Pluto Press, 2009), pp. 29-46, 29.

72 Ibid., 32

73 Ibid.

skull becomes recognisable the other objects are distorted.<sup>74</sup> As Beaumont explains, ‘[t]he composition is dramatically decomposed and its ideological premises [...] are completely upset. From this perspective reality itself appears as a smear’.<sup>75</sup> This ‘perspectival device’ is known as ‘*anamorphosis*’, which Beaumont interprets as a ‘philosophy of false reality, or, more precisely, a poetics of alternative realities’.<sup>76</sup> The slantwise perspective becomes a means of identifying the ideological constructedness of reality and a way of glimpsing alternate worlds even within texts that on the surface might seem to conform to dominant logics. To connect this to queerness, Foucault’s slantwise perspective can operate as a kind of anamorphic estrangement as a means of using queer desire to find new positions and ways of living within the present.

This notion of the slantwise provides a useful critical framework for expanding upon, and developing further, Delany’s use of the *periplum*, which he describes as the methodology of his essays. A term taken from Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* a periplum (sometimes also called a *periplus*, itself a Latinisation of the Greek word *periplous*, meaning ‘sailing around’) refers to a genre of early texts, ‘from before the advent of universal latitude, that allowed [for] the navigation of the Mediterranean’.<sup>77</sup> As Delany explains, these ‘were detailed descriptions of the coastlines of the mainland and the various islands, which [...] allowed navigators to ascertain where, after a storm, they might have ended up, once the coast came into view’.<sup>78</sup> Delany takes this premodern, narrative form of mapping and uses it as the basis of a queer psychogeography for reading the city. *Times Square Red*, *Times Square Blue*, becomes a ‘sociological and diachronic periplum. They are attempts by a single navigator to describe what the temporal coastline and the lay of the land looked like and felt like and the thoughts he had while observing them’.<sup>79</sup> This focus on the emotional, experienced landscape of the city, where the spectator is an invested participant, stands in contrast

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74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid., 33

77 Delany, *Times Square*, xviii.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

to the detached gaze of the voyeur. Furthermore, in reaching back towards more ancient modes of mapping, that privilege what can be seen at ground level, it can be argued that Delany seeks to avoid the totalising and imperialising gaze of colonial map making. This links Delany's project of alternative navigation with Bhabha's desire to destabilise colonial mapping and the construction of borders with the concepts of the interstice and going beyond.

While Delany offers the notion of the periplum casually—it doesn't resurface outside of his preface—I will be actively developing the idea further in this chapter. In Cantos 59, Pound refers to

Periplum, not as land looks on a map

but as sea bord seen by men sailing<sup>80</sup>

These lines stress two important points. First, the process of writing a periplum requires a shift in perspective, or a slant. It is not the top-down approach of the voyeur, the aim is not to produce a 'map', but it is a more shifting and lateral approach to navigation. Secondly, the periplum is produced as 'seen by men sailing'; it is produced in process, in the middle of things, and records a specific moment in time. Crucially, the writer of the periplum is not a detached observer, or drifting spectator, but is a sailor themselves, an active participant. As a boat tosses and turns on the waves, the sailor's view of land is ever shifting and distorting. Therefore, the periplum enables us to take a text that is on the surface conservative or reactionary, and view it from the side, to find an alternative queer reality within it. Or, in other words, texts that are reactionary, or texts which simply appear frustratingly limited in their radical politics, can potentially hold a latent subversive and queer potential if read from a different angle.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 324.

<sup>81</sup> It should be noted that in reading Pound here I am aware of his association and collaboration with fascism during the Second World War. In using the concept of periplum here, I thoroughly reject Pound's politics and take a similar approach as Muñoz does towards Martin Heidegger, whose work is also imbricated in fascist politics. While Muñoz

With its specific reference to the coast as a border between land and sea, what is striking about this approach is its connection to Bhabha's thoughts on the boundary as a place where 'something begins its presencing'.<sup>82</sup> The periplum is not a complete history, it does not describe or totalise the land beyond the coast, but offers future generations a provocative glimpse at the 'space of intervention' that is the beyond.<sup>83</sup> By going back to the era of porn theatres, Delany is encouraging his reader to go beyond their present, to decide for themselves whether it is worth 'going back' and whether from this periplum they can find practices that might inform the construction of future queer institutions.<sup>84</sup> Going forward, we might read the porn theatre within Delany's work as an example of Bhabha's interstitial space, which allows for the elaboration of collaborative and communal 'strategies of selfhood'.<sup>85</sup> By this, I mean that interstitial spaces, in this case the porn theatre, lend themselves to the construction of certain kinds of selfhood that do not fit neatly into the dominant norms and values of society. In this case, the porn theatres Delany describes are interstitial because, not only do they exist on the margins of society, they provide glimpses into a future beyond, where the practices of the porn theatres, and the homosexual mode of life they enable, might form the basis of 'entirely new institutions'.<sup>86</sup>

## Heterotopia

In 'Times Square Blue' Delany gives the impression that the porn theatres were spaces visited by individuals from a wide variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. As Delany attests in a broad list, '[t]he population was incredibly heterogenous—white, black, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, Native American [...] I've met playwrights, carpenters, opera singers, telephone repair men,

expresses 'a great disdain for what Heidegger's writing became', he 'nonetheless look[s] on it as a failure worth knowing, a potential that faltered but can be [...] reworked in the service of a different politics and understanding of the world'. This to me seems to be the essence of a slantwise, or anamorphic, perspective. See: Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 16

82 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 5.

83 Ibid., 7.

84 Delany, *Times Square*, xviii

85 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1-2.

86 Delany, *Times Square*, xvii.

stockbrokers, guys on welfare, guys with trust funds, guys on crutches [...].<sup>87</sup> The list continues almost comically offering a range of seemingly contradictory characters that is reminiscent of Scratch and Winc's advertising profiles in *Nearly Roadkill* (as discussed in Chapter Two). It also recalls Lorde's suggestion that collective pleasure can form a bridge between the diverse individuals who share it. Once again, a link to Bakhtin's carnival appears. There is something carnivalesque in Delany's assertion, in 'Times Square Red', that 'life is at its most rewarding, productive and pleasant when large numbers of people [...] seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will'.<sup>88</sup> As Bakhtin writes, spaces of carnival involve a 'temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank' leading to the 'creation of a special type of communication impossible in everyday life'.<sup>89</sup> In this instance, a type of informal, uncodified, yet tangible, communication that facilitates public sex, and occasional blossoming conversation, between men of very different socio-economic class.

Delany describes the etiquette of the theatre in detail. To begin an encounter in the theatre, one patron would 'sit a seat away' from another, where they would be told either 'to go away' or 'invited to move closer'.<sup>90</sup> These encounters, though casual, were not devoid of care. Delany himself speaks of going out to buy 'food—sandwiches, soda, beer—for people in the theatre' for the many men, down on their luck, who 'needed that food'.<sup>91</sup> There were also moments of strange spontaneous collective spectacle. Delany describes one patron whose 'fluids arched [...] wide against two different seat backs', as, 'from three and four seats away, half a dozen men looked at him and grinned back'.<sup>92</sup> The patrons of the theatre developed rudimentary networks to keep themselves safe, with 'particularly social queens clustering in their corner of the theater'.<sup>93</sup> They were 'quick with their warnings', offering information about who might be 'up to no good' and who

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87 Ibid., 15

88 Ibid., 111

89 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

90 Delany, *Times Square*, 15.

91 Ibid., 64-65

92 Ibid., 21

93 Ibid., 33

might be a ‘narc’.<sup>94</sup> These descriptions evoke what Bakhtin describes as ‘the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture [...] permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times’.<sup>95</sup> The porn theatre therefore becomes the kind of space where, in bell hooks’ terms, a ‘counter language’ might develop, which may resemble the dominant tongue but with different, slantwise emphasis that allows for ‘radical openness and possibility’.<sup>96</sup>

Within the porn theatres, it seems, a set of unique spatial practices developed. By a spatial practice, I mean the etiquettes and norms—or ways of moving and navigating—that are developed by individuals or groups in order to make use of certain spaces. As their spatial practices exist in tension with the norms of wider society, we might consider these theatres an example of what Foucault describes as heterotopia.<sup>97</sup> In an influential lecture delivered in 1967, titled ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’, Foucault describes a heterotopia as ‘real and effective spaces’,

in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and is yet actually localisable.<sup>98</sup>

A heterotopia exists within society, it is not simply imagined, but nevertheless is separated symbolically from society in some way. And, the way in which heterotopias are organised, the practices they contain or encourage, stands in opposition to and overturns the dominant values and practices of society. In the case of the theatres, between the 1970s and mid-1990s, they were located

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94 A ‘narc’ is a slang term for a police officer: Delany, *Times Square*, 33.

95 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

96 hooks, *Yearning*, 230 and 234.

97 Delany’s has a specific interest in the heterotopia as a concept, as evidenced by the title of his science fiction novel *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia* (1976).

98 Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’, in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. by Neil Leach (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), pp. 329-357, 332.

in the centre of downtown New York, on what was to become one of the most recognisable streets in the world. Yet, the practices that occurred within them contrasted those of heterosexual society. The lateral process of navigation, or periplum, that Delany employs in his essay reveals such heterotopic spaces, that might have otherwise gone unnoticed by the voyeur's gaze, which is unable to chart the subtle lines of spatial practice. The heterotopia, while positioned by Foucault as a relatively ambivalent term, is a distinct, but not-too-distant, relation of the more politically charged carnival and TAZ. And, the heterotopia, with its power to invert social norms, is applicable to the literary texts discussed below.

## Part Two: Queer Detectives

### Knights Errant

The next section of this chapter will develop further the ideas of friendship, queer pleasure, slantwise perspective and heterotopia present in the above analysis. In doing so, it turns to the detective fiction of Raymond Chandler and Sarah Schulman. More broadly, Chandler has become a touchstone in cyberpunk criticism. The work of Chandler is formative to the development of the hard-boiled mode, a style of writing that is a heavy influence on cyberpunk's prose. Briefly, Sean McCann describes the 'hard-boiled crime fiction that flourished in the United States between 1930 and 1960' as being characterised by a 'populist cynicism' and an 'air of fatality', while its 'major writers' held 'ambivalent literary attitudes'.<sup>99</sup> In their 'schematic guide' of 'cultural artifacts that helped shape cyberpunk ideology and aesthetic', Richard Kadrey and Larry McCaffery state that Chandler's 'smooth, polychromatic prose style and vision of the detective as knight-errant has influenced more than one cyberpunk'.<sup>100</sup> A similar point is made by Scott Bukatman, who writes

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<sup>99</sup> Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 3.

<sup>100</sup> Richard Kadrey and Larry McCaffery, 'Cyberpunk 101: A Schematic Guide to *Storming the Reality Studio*', in *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction*, ed. by Larry McCaffery

that a ‘synthesis of SF and Raymond Chandler’ can be found in Ridley Scott’s 1982 film *Blade Runner* and that Chandler’s work is ‘profoundly applicable to Gibson’.<sup>101</sup> Likewise, Andrew Ross identifies ‘the hard-boiled narrative [...] as cyberpunk’s favoured generic vehicle’.<sup>102</sup> However, as Joe Nazare argues, ‘the link between cyberpunk and the Chandleresque paradoxically has both been overstated and underexplored’.<sup>103</sup> In one interview, Gibson freely admits, ‘I never really *have* read much Chandler, never really enjoyed what I *did* read because I always got this creepy Puritanical feeling from his books’.<sup>104</sup> Rather than base these comparisons on textual analysis, the authors above invoke the influence of Chandler on cyberpunk seemingly as common sense. As Nazare writes, ‘[t]he vogue of yoking Gibson’s and Chandler’s names has also contributed to an uncritical acceptance of the hard-boiled element in cyberpunk’.<sup>105</sup> This frequently repeated connection between Chandler and cyberpunk is based on how Chandler’s writing is imagined as, in Bukatman’s words, ‘dark, pragmatic, and paranoid urbanism’ rather than his texts themselves.<sup>106</sup>

The work of Chandler and the hard-boiled mode is also an important indirect influence on 1990s feminist cyberpunk. Laura Mixon’s *Glass Houses* (1992), Emma Bull’s *Bone Dance* (1991) and Wilhelmina Baird’s *Crashcourse* (1993) are all written in the hard-boiled mode. Specifically, in Chapter Four I discuss in greater detail the cyberpunk fiction of Bull and Amy Thompson in relation to the hard-boiled and noir. This section contends that Sarah Schulman’s writing acts as a bridge, in terms of translating the latent queer potential and rewritability of Chandler to a queer readership. As this chapter and the next will explore, this bridge is largely symbolic and conceptual, *After Delores* as a novel preserves the capacity for an alternative queer dimension to be read into Chandler’s work. I would argue that, by taking a slantwise approach to Chandler’s novel *The Long Goodbye*

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(Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 17-29, 17.

101 Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 130 and 141.

102 Andrew Ross, *Strange Weather: Culture, Science, and Technology in the Age of Limits* (London ; New York, NY: Verso, 1991), 153.

103 Joe Nazare, ‘Marlowe in Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk (Re-) Vision of Chandler’, *Studies in the Novel*, 35.3 (2003), pp. 383-404, 383.

104 Emphasis original: Larry McCaffery and William Gibson, ‘An Interview With William Gibson’, *Mississippi Review*, 16.2/3 (1988), pp. 217-236, 222-223.

105 Nazare, ‘Marlowe in Mirrorshades’, 383.

106 Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 141.

(1953), and reading it comparatively with Sarah Schulman's lesbian mystery novel *After Delores* (1988), it is possible to produce a reading of queer pleasure within Chandler's work, which helps to illuminate why elements of hard-boiled persist in feminist cyberpunk. Crucially, both texts allow for the further development of the periplum and the concept of marginality. Furthermore, Schulman's work in particular provides an opportunity to consider the, often contradictory, role that urban space plays in the development of subjectivity.

The events of both novels are centred around, and catalysed by, friendship. The friendship central to *The Long Goodbye* is between Philip Marlowe—a temperamentally employed private investigator, the novel's first person narrator and a recurring character in Chandler's fiction—and Terry Lennox, husband to the daughter of an extremely wealthy businessman. They are therefore men of very different social status. Lennox is a figure of ambiguous masculinity, described by Marlowe as 'a little weak and very gentle', he is implied to be in a somewhat emasculating relationship with his wealthier wife, 'being a kept poodle' and living a life of leisure.<sup>107</sup> In the novel's opening, their relationship is characterised as one of care. After finding Lennox passed out drunk, Marlowe takes him back to his house to sober up, leaving him on 'a long couch' with 'a rug over him' to sleep it off.<sup>108</sup> The next morning, after making him 'a cup of black coffee', Marlowe drives Lennox back to his 'stuffy and impersonal' apartment'.<sup>109</sup> When reflecting afterwards on his motivations for caring for Lennox, Marlowe struggles to explain his feelings:

I drove home chewing my lip. I'm supposed to be tough but there was something about the guy that got to me. I didn't know what it was unless it was the white hair and the scarred face and the clear voice and the politeness. Maybe that was enough [...] he was like a lost dog [...]<sup>110</sup>

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107 Raymond Chandler, *The Big Sleep and Other Novels* (London: Penguin, 2000), 399 and 383.

108 Ibid., 371

109 Ibid., 372

110 Ibid., 373

The chew of the lip combined with the uncertainty of whether Marlowe is motivated by simple pity or an implied interest in—if not quite outright physical attraction to—Lennox’s body and mannerisms suggest an as yet formless quality to Marlowe’s emotions. A few pages later, another drunken incident leads to Marlowe taking Lennox back to his house again, where he lets him use his bath. Marlowe then cooks him ‘Canadian bacon, scrambled eggs and coffee and toast’.<sup>111</sup> Despite not really knowing him, this list of breakfast items suggests Marlowe is performing a curious amount of care and labour on Lennox. This sense of affection is further reinforced as, when Lennox has left and he is alone again, Marlowe notes that ‘[i]t was a quiet night and the house seemed emptier than usual’.<sup>112</sup>

I am not suggesting that Marlowe and Lennox’s relationship is homosexual, but that it has an element of queer formlessness and, with it, possibility, inviting the reader to fill in the gaps. These expressions of care and the repeated descriptions of domestic labour contrast sharply with the cyberpunk critics’ imagination of Chandler’s writing as purely dark and cynical. Both men are disillusioned with conventional heterosexuality. Lennox notes that heterosexuality is more performance and image than substance: ‘I’m not sneering at sex. But it always has to be managed. Making it glamorous is a billion-dollar industry and it costs every cent of it’.<sup>113</sup> For his part, Marlowe laments America as a ‘much too sex conscious country’ and longs for a different culture where ‘a man and a woman can meet without bringing bedrooms into it’.<sup>114</sup> What the pair’s relationship represents then is the possibility of a way for two people to be together outside of heterosexuality’s norms. Marlowe and Lennox, to use Foucault’s terms, ‘have to invent, from A to Z, a relationship that is still formless, which is friendship’.<sup>115</sup> This formlessness is, for Foucault, ‘a matter of existence: how is it possible for men to be together?’<sup>116</sup> Crucially, from this formlessness

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111 Ibid., 377

112 Ibid., 378

113 Ibid., 384

114 Ibid., 491

115 Foucault, ‘Friendship as a Way of Life’, 156.

116 Ibid.

men must learn—outside of the ‘institutional relations’ which discipline and regulate interpersonal relations between men—to ‘live together, to share their time, their meals, their room’ and ‘their grief’.<sup>117</sup> It is from this perspective that a queer element can be glimpsed in the interactions Chandler depicts between Marlowe and Lennox. As well as through Foucault, we might also interpret this relationship through the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick on ‘male homosocial desire’.<sup>118</sup> This phrase is used by Sedgwick to bring the ‘homosocial’, the ways in which people of the same gender bond in society, back ‘into the orbit of “desire”’ and ‘the potentially erotic’.<sup>119</sup> Through this lens, we might interpret Marlowe and Lennox’s relationship not through the narrow perspective of ‘genital homosexual desire’, but through a wider ‘continuum’ of possible erotic relationships and ways of being together.<sup>120</sup>

Similarly, friendship, or the loss of it, is at the centre of Schulman’s *After Delores*. Like *The Long Goodbye*, *After Delores* is narrated in the first person. The novel’s protagonist is a lesbian waitress whose name is never specified. From the novel’s opening pages, this unnamed protagonist spends her time wandering the streets of New York, trying to escape the ‘ghost’ of her failed relationship with a woman named Delores.<sup>121</sup> In one key passage, the narrator observes that it is less the loss of romance that upsets her, but that ‘what gets me the most of anything is that I really thought Delores was my friend. I thought she’d love me even when she got mad’.<sup>122</sup> While wandering the city, haunted by this lost friendship, the novel’s protagonist meets a young woman—whom the protagonist refers to as Punkette, but whose name is later revealed to be Marianne—in a bar who tries to sell her ‘a phone machine for ten dollars’.<sup>123</sup> As a result of this transaction, recalling Bakhtin’s ‘special forms of marketplace speech and gesture’, Marianne recognises the narrator as another lesbian because, as she explains later as they drink in someone’s apartment, ‘if you’re

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003). 1.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Sarah Schulman, *After Delores* (New York, NY: Plume Books, 1989), 24

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 15

talking to a woman and she looks you in the eye and really sees you and listens to what you have to say, then you know she's gay. It works every time'.<sup>124</sup> The next day, after finding that 'the phone machine actually worked', the narrator decides to search for Marianne again, hoping to become 'friends'.<sup>125</sup>

Within *After Delores*, the character of Marianne seems to represent hope and the future. The narrator describes her as 'the independent type, clear eyes, kind of naïve, but sharp as a fresh razor blade, real hopeful, someone that you'd want to be around'.<sup>126</sup> This sense of hope surrounding Marianne is also noticed more cynically by her lover who is attracted to her 'lack of pain. You can taste that on someone's skin. I like hope under my fingernails'.<sup>127</sup> The protagonist's desire for friendship with Marianne is therefore significant on two levels. Firstly, on a personal level, Marianne opens up the possibility that the protagonist might overcome her failed relationship with Delores and love someone else. As the narrator states, despite her love for Delores, '[t]here was a moment [...] when I loved Punkette instead'.<sup>128</sup> Secondly, from a broader political perspective, attached to Marianne is an element of hope and queer possibility, specifically the possibility of a less traumatic and painful future. Later, the narrator reads in a newspaper that Marianne is dead, and that 'someone squeezed her neck until it broke' before throwing her body 'in the East River behind the projects on Avenue D'.<sup>129</sup> Marianne's death represents the brutal destruction of this sense of possibility, or futurity, and the foreclosure of this as yet unspecified and formless yearning for a future beyond the present. The novel's title, *After Delores*, becomes ironic in light of this scene, as the possibility of a future, or after, is brutally crushed. The loss of this potential friendship, and the hope it represents, puts in motion the events of the novel, as the protagonist assumes the role of a queer detective on a quest for justice. This journey is motivated by a feeling of care. The narrator

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124 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10; Schulman, *After Delores*, 17-18.

125 Schulman, *After Delores*, 22

126 Ibid., 25

127 Ibid., 85

128 Ibid., 31

129 Ibid., 29

puts herself in opposition to an unfeeling and uncaring wider society: ‘They love brutality, it’s so entertaining. They hate victims. Victims make them feel weak. But I cared about Punkette and someone else out there did too’.<sup>130</sup> In this manner Schulman’s novel encourages the reader to reinterpret the detective’s quest through the slantwise perspective of queer desire, and the search for justice for Marianne therefore becomes a desire to find justice for the future itself.

Grief and the mourning of friendship, in particular, also spark the drama that constitutes the majority of *The Long Goodbye*. Once he gets his drinking under control, Lennox’s friendship with Marlowe develops into a routine: ‘it got to be a sort of habit with him to drop in around five o’clock. We didn’t always go to the same bar, but sooner to Victor’s than anywhere else’.<sup>131</sup> This continues until, in one incident, Lennox turns up at Marlowe’s house at ‘five o’clock in the morning’ with ‘a gun in his hand’ to ask Marlowe to drive him ‘to Tijuana to get a plane at ten-fifteen’.<sup>132</sup> Curiously, this is followed by an almost comically long and detailed description of Marlowe making coffee for himself and Lennox that lasts for around six paragraphs.<sup>133</sup> The narration from Marlowe’s perspective suggests that the detail here is ‘one of those hypersensitive moments’ where all actions, even the routine, ‘become separate acts of will. You are like a man learning to walk again after polio. You take nothing for granted’.<sup>134</sup> In this hypersensitive moment, the future becomes similarly open and formless, as if every detail might matter and somehow change the outcome. That this is focused on making coffee, a labour of care and one of the last acts Marlowe performs with Lennox is significant. It represents the possibility for Marlowe, now in jeopardy, of a more queer and less lonely future with Lennox; one so potentially formless and different that it is as if he must learn to walk again.

Later in the novel, after he has helped him to escape to Mexico, Marlowe is told by a police officer of Lennox’s death: ‘He wrote out a full confession’, admitting to the murder of his wife,

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 30

<sup>131</sup> Chandler, *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*, 382.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 386

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 387

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 388

‘this afternoon in his hotel room and shot himself’.<sup>135</sup> However, Marlowe refuses to accept Lennox’s guilt: ‘there was something that didn’t figure at all—the way that she’d been beaten up. Nobody could sell me that Terry had done that’.<sup>136</sup> Lennox’s death provokes contradictory feelings of mourning within Marlowe. At first, he tells himself ‘[y]ou only talked to the guy because there wasn’t anybody around that interested you’, before quickly asserting, ‘no, not quite. I owned a piece of him’.<sup>137</sup> This suggests that a part of Lennox still haunts Marlowe and that he is altered by these lingering traces. A strange mourning ritual seems to affirm this, as Marlowe makes sure to set down ‘two cups’ of coffee, ‘some bourbon’ and a lit ‘cigarette’ on ‘the side of the table where he had sat the morning I took him to the plane’.<sup>138</sup> This indicates a mourning for the loss of friendship; the coffee cups and personal items are an intimate symbol of a life together that has been lost. As with the protagonist of *After Delores*, Marlowe is cast as a caring protagonist set against an unfeeling and media driven society. It becomes clear that Lennox’s confession is ‘very convenient’ and that Harlan Potter, a newspaper mogul and the rich father of Lennox’s wife, is likely using his influence to ‘buy a great deal of silence’ around the case and prevent a scandal.<sup>139</sup> As a journalist explains to Marlowe, ‘[n]ewspapers are owned by rich men. Rich men all belong to the same club’.<sup>140</sup> Like in *After Delores*, the detective’s journey is cast as a queer labour of care for the victim, motivated by a mourning for a lost future, or utopian possibility, and in opposition to hegemonic society and culture. In turn, as will be discussed momentarily, this queer labour informs how the detective figure, motivated by their unhappiness, navigates urban space and relates to its inhabitants.

This opposition between the detective, and a corrupt society also serves to place both novels within the tradition of detective fiction, and in particular, the hard-boiled style. As Dennis Porter writes, within detective fiction, often ‘the private eye is held up to be the stubbornly democratic

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135 Ibid., 417

136 Ibid., 421

137 Ibid., 422

138 Ibid., 432

139 Ibid., 421 and 411

140 Ibid., 419

hero of a post-heroic age, righting wrongs in a fallen urban world in which the traditional institutions and guardians of the law', due to rampant corruption, 'are no longer up to the task'.<sup>141</sup> Chandler himself argued that the detective, within crime fiction, 'must be [...] a man of honor'.<sup>142</sup> However, for Porter, the pleasure of the detective story comes from the tension between this ideal of a detective and 'the world-weary, disabused private eyes of the novels themselves' who are more 'fallibly human' and 'susceptible to temptation'.<sup>143</sup> Particularly, it is from this fallibility, or, in Chandler's words, the need for the detective to be both 'a common man and yet an unusual man', that the potential for a reading of the detective as a wandering, queer and marginal outsider emerges.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, as Andrew Pepper argues, 'the hardboiled' is 'not a fixed category with a single social and political outlook but rather [...] a fluid, open-ended term with "multiple embodiments"'.<sup>145</sup> This suggests that like cyberpunk (as outlined in my introduction) the hard-boiled is more mode than genre.<sup>146</sup> These multiple elements of hard-boiled therefore have a degree of fluidity, allowing them to be identified in diverse range of works. Once again, this suggests that the hard-boiled is particularly malleable and rewritable. Furthermore, there is little ideological consistency within hard-boiled; Pepper argues that 'the term is better understood as an ambivalent political outlook, one that simultaneously encompasses apparently contradictory views and brings them into uneasy relationship'.<sup>147</sup> Crucially, it is these contradictions that allow queer elements to be read in Chandler's fiction, despite his personal conservatism.

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141 Dennis Porter, 'Chapter 6: The Private Eye', in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Martin Priestman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 95-113, 97.

142 Quoted in, *Ibid.*

143 *Ibid.*

144 Quoted in, *Ibid.*

145 Andrew Pepper, 'The 'Hard-boiled' Genre', in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 140-151, 142.

146 John Scaggs book on crime fiction also asserts that hard-boiled a mode rather than genre and devotes a chapter to the subject. See, John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2005), 55-84.

147 Pepper, 'The 'Hard-boiled' Genre', 142.

## Radical Unhappiness

Both novels contain a rejection of middle-class norms of happiness and fulfillment. If we read these texts through the theory of philosopher Herbert Marcuse, we can interpret the journey of the detective as one of pleasure, albeit of a queer pleasure, that often revels in loneliness and radical unhappiness, rather than privileging the surface image heterosexual happiness. In his book *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse argues that advanced industrial society is undergoing a process of ‘desublimation’. By this term, Marcuse attempts to describe what happens to desire and emotion in a society that imagines the human condition as a solvable puzzle.<sup>148</sup> Instead of imagining an ‘insoluble core’, or ‘unconquered dimension’, to human experience, advanced industrial societies utilise the discourse of ‘technological rationality’ to whittle down this ‘core’.<sup>149</sup> Human experience therefore becomes desublimated as all experience is rendered describable through the logics of technological rationality, eliminating any sense of unknowability or limitlessness. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse shows an ambivalence towards heterosexuality that resonates with that of Chandler’s text. As Marcuse writes, rather than providing sexual freedom, advanced industrial societies lead to a ‘de-erotization of the environment’.<sup>150</sup> By this, Marcuse means that, while society appears superficially more liberal about it, sex becomes ‘integrated into work and public relations’ and therefore ‘more susceptible to (controlled) satisfaction’.<sup>151</sup> Through this process, sex becomes just another function of the consumer economy, as ‘gratifying to the managed individuals’ that make up this society ‘as racing the outboard motor, pushing the power lawn mower, and speeding the automobile are fun’.<sup>152</sup> Sex is desublimated and emptied of any radical possibility, because it is reduced to a series of needs that can be fulfilled through the consumption of commodities.

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148 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 2007), 59

149 Ibid., 69

150 Ibid., 78

151 Ibid.

152 Ibid.

Furthermore, as Marcuse writes, ‘loss of consciousness due to the satisfactory liberties granted by an unfree society makes for a *happy consciousness* which facilitates acceptance of the misdeeds of this society’.<sup>153</sup> In other words, this middle-class, heterosexual and technocratic regime of consumer happiness, or the happy consciousness, is constructed as the means through which people are conditioned to support, or ignore, the brutality and injustice of society. Within Marcuse’s text can be read the potential for a radical unhappiness. Marcuse notes that ‘unhappiness lends itself easily to political mobilisation’, but ‘without room for conscious development, it may become the instinctual reservoir for a new fascist way of life and death’.<sup>154</sup> While ‘unhappiness’ can be ‘turned into a source of strength and cohesion for the social order’, Marcuse’s writing provokes me to ask whether a pleasurable unhappiness is possible, a state of unhappiness that accepts its own irreconcilability with the dominant society’s regime of happiness and rejects the assumption that it is necessary to strive for happiness. In her exploration of queer utopia, Angela Jones draws on Sara Ahmed when she writes, ‘Ahmed has forced us to question either our compulsive need to find happiness, or the very notion that we need happiness at all’.<sup>155</sup> Developing this, Jones argues for a vision of ‘queer futurity’ that ‘is not so much about crafting prescriptions for a utopian society—in which everyone is happy and life is ideal—but by making life more bearable in the present because in doing so we create the potential for a better future’.<sup>156</sup> The distinction Jones is making here is between a process orientated utopianism and literary utopia. These literary constructions are described by Ruth Levitas as ‘imaginary worlds, free from the difficulties that beset us in reality’.<sup>157</sup> Instead, within a broader utopianism, utopia becomes ‘not just a dream to be enjoyed, but a vision to be pursued’.<sup>158</sup> What Jones describes connects to Levitas’s description of utopia as method, a form of utopianism that seeks ‘not just to imagine, but to make, the world otherwise’.<sup>159</sup> What is

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153 Emphasis original: Ibid., 79

154 Ibid., 80

155 Jones, ‘Introduction: Queer Utopias’, 2.

156 Ibid.

157 Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2010), 1

158 Ibid.

159 Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, xiii.

crucial for Levitas is that utopianism is a desire to live differently; it is ‘the desire for being otherwise, individually and collectively, subjectively and objectively’.<sup>160</sup> This form of utopianism is therefore not necessarily dependent on appeals to happiness, or a good life, but is oppositional, antagonistic and resistive in its relation to hegemonic norms and values. Its utopianism is deeply entwined with unhappiness. It is this kind of radical rejection of happiness, and the spatial practice it enables, that I seek to analyse within Schulman and Chandler’s novels.

In *The Long Goodbye*, a rejection of middle-class and heteronormative happiness is made explicit at several points. Both Lennox and Marlowe express resentment at American norms and values. Lennox is highly critical of the lives lived by those of his wife’s social circle: ‘it’s no real fun but the rich don’t know that [...] They never want anything very hard except maybe somebody else’s wife and that’s a pretty pale desire compared with the way a plumber’s wife wants new curtains for the living room’.<sup>161</sup> In these sentences, Lennox rejects the bourgeois life of leisure, and the values of the aspiring middle-class. Marlowe also seems dissatisfied with consumerism: ‘the daily papers were beginning to scream about how terrible it would be if you didn’t get your Christmas shopping done early. It would be terrible anyway; it always is’.<sup>162</sup> This disdain for Christmas—and its implied focus on the nuclear family as the primary unit of consumption—rejects the image of domestic, heterosexual consumer bliss associated with it. Exactly what motivates Marlowe to pursue his life as a private detective is ambiguous, but throughout the novel he continually rejects money for his services. Equally, he shows no enthusiasm for the lives of the wealthy. When confronted with ‘Idle Valley’—a key location in the novel, described as a ‘perfect place’ and full of people with ‘nice homes, nice cars, nice horses, nice dogs, possibly even nice children’—‘all a man named Marlowe wanted from it was out. And fast’.<sup>163</sup> In Marlowe’s list, even children become just one more commodity, alongside animals and cars. Once again, normative

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160 Ibid., xi

161 Chandler, *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*, 382-383.

162 Ibid., 373.

163 Ibid., 536

happiness, centred around the accumulation of commodities and heterosexual reproduction, is rejected.

The mid-1950s—*The Long Goodbye* was first published in 1953—also saw a rising critique of the suburb and its associated middle-class lifestyle. In 1955, Ian Narin, editor of the *Architectural Review*, lamented the ‘slow death by decay’ caused by ‘subtopia’, a ‘world of universal low-density mess’.<sup>164</sup> The suburb also became a site of feminist critique. Notably, the first chapter of Betty Friedan’s 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*, while reflecting on the trends of the 1950s, identifies the ‘strange, stirring [...] sense of dissatisfaction’, a ‘yearning’ for something more, experienced by the ‘suburban wife’.<sup>165</sup> Suburban life is therefore presented as highly limiting, and the ‘dissatisfaction’ and ‘yearning’ it provokes implies that it cannot fulfil a more expansive range of emotions.

Similarly, Schulman’s protagonist holds an ambivalent attitude towards the idea of happiness. In one scene, in the second third of the novel, the narrator talks drunkenly with her friend Coco Flores. Coco and the protagonist’s perspectives on happiness are sharply contrasted in this scene. Trying to get her to move past Delores, Coco has the following conversation with the narrator,

‘Look,’ Coco said. ‘Your feelings are too large for the moment, okay?’

‘Why?’

‘Because everything in life is temporary so you have to live only for the moment and this is not the moment for which you should be living like this’.

‘No’.

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164 Quoted in: Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 114.

165 Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, NY: Dell, 1979), 11.

‘What do you mean “no”?’ Coco said, exasperated. ‘Yes! If you would believe in and be satisfied by what I just said, you would be a much happier person’.

‘No,’ I said. ‘It’s just too much. I’ll never give in like that. My anger is justified, therefore I need to maintain it until I get justice’.<sup>166</sup>

The word ‘justice’ is used here ambiguously. It is unclear if the narrator is referring to justice against Delores, the woman Delores left her for, Marrienne’s killer or the uncaring world more generally. Nevertheless, the protagonist’s refusal to ‘never give in like that’ implies that to be happy would be to admit a defeat, to capitulate, to the perceived injustices of society. In the Marcusean sense, the protagonist’s refusal to be a ‘happier person’ is a broader refusal to be complicit in society’s brutality. This line also queers Chandler’s fixation on the detective as relentlessly honourable. The narrator’s refusal to give up feelings that are ‘too large for the moment’ might also be read as an implication that there are intense, and perhaps needed, emotions beyond happiness: they are emotions and desires that are unfulfillable in the present moment. This passage further connects with my discussion of Ernst Bloch’s concept of expectant emotions—and Kathi Weeks’ analysis of this term—in Chapter Two. To recall this briefly, the most prominent of these emotions is hope, which Weeks’ describes as a ‘cognitive faculty [...] a mode of thinking through time’.<sup>167</sup> Linking with the above analysis of futurity within the novel, the refusal to ‘live only for the moment’ is a refusal to live without hope for the future. There is also, potentially, a queer element to this idea of hope. For Weeks’, the ‘hopeful subject [...] represents a more open and expansive model of subjectivity’ and seeks ‘a more extensive range of connections and purposes’.<sup>168</sup> This connects once again to queer formlessness and the need to find new and more extensive ways of relating and connecting to others. Schulman suggests that happiness is not a prerequisite for hope or

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<sup>166</sup> Schulman, *After Delores*, 117.

<sup>167</sup> Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 194.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 198

the desire for hope. As the protagonist's refusal to be happy, and refusal to live without hope, is the narrative catalyst of the novel, it is the emotion that sparks a range of urban encounters in the text.

However, despite their rejection of happiness and predominantly lonely existences, the lives of both Chandler's Marlowe and Schulman's unnamed protagonist still contain moments of pleasure. Both characters become almost clown-like figures, causing trouble for various characters and estranging a variety of scenes. In Chandler and Schulman's hands, the detective becomes reminiscent of Bakhtin's 'clowns and fools' who carry the upside down 'carnival spirit' into 'everyday life'.<sup>169</sup> To provide an example of how this works, there is a plot-line within *The Long Goodbye* where Marlowe must visit three doctors, whose initials all end with V, in search of a missing person, an alcoholic writer called Roger Wade. Marlowe's encounter with the first Dr. V, Dr. Verringer, at a retreat for struggling artists, while inconclusive, is so unusual and strange that it becomes obvious to Marlowe, and the reader, that this is the doctor he is looking for. There is then no reason in a straightforward narrative sense as to why Marlowe needs to visit the other two doctors. More broadly, Chandler was, famously, not particularly interested in meticulous plot construction. As Leory Lad Panek, a scholar of popular fiction, writes 'Chandler was never very good at making up plots, and in order to write novels he reused plots he had invented for his early short stories'.<sup>170</sup> Panek is quite dismissive of this trend in Chandler's work, stating that '[a]t best their loose construction might be considered as a metaphor for his view of the world as a confusing, contradictory place in which loose ends are never tied up'.<sup>171</sup> However, at least in the case of *The Long Goodbye*, it can be argued instead that this structure of fragmented, drifting, almost anecdotal passages—such as the visits to these two doctors—is an exploration of urban pleasure. Rather than moving the narrative forward, the primary motivation for visiting these surplus doctors becomes

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169 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 8.

170 While, unlike many of Chandler's novels, *The Long Goodbye* is not directly based on a series of short stories, the fragmentary and episodic structure remains; Leory Lad Panek, 'Raymond Chandler (1888-1959)' in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. by Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 403-414, 409.

171 Ibid.

pleasure. Marlowe decides, with nothing better to do, to ‘kill most of the afternoon’ by ‘visiting Drs Vukanich and Varley’.<sup>172</sup>

In two short chapters, recalling my earlier discussion of Delany’s work, Chandler presents the reader with a periplum—a journey or voyage presented from the perspective of a participant in motion that provides a slantwise glimpse into a moment of pleasure—from Marlowe’s perspective of each doctor’s shady operation. They are presented almost as humorous anecdotes, breaking momentarily the tension of the main plotline. To focus specifically on Marlowe’s encounter with Vukanich, we are given a detailed description of the ‘Stockwell Building’ where Vukanich works, noting the ‘cigar counter in the entrance’ and the ‘frosted glass panels’ of the office doors.<sup>173</sup> While the building is full of ‘the kind of lawyers you hope the other fellow has’ and ‘doctors and dentists who just scrape along’, the building’s occupants and architecture, its ‘shabby background’, provides a ‘protective colouring’ for the ‘few guys making real money’.<sup>174</sup> The building has developed its own forms of coded and hidden marketplace speech, with ‘abortionists posing as anything you like that explains their furnishings’ and ‘[d]ope pushers posing as’ practitioners of ‘any branch of medicine’ that makes ‘regular use of local anesthetics’.<sup>175</sup> The building’s function is illegitimate but essential to the various patients who look ‘just like anybody else’.<sup>176</sup> Marlowe seems to delight in wasting Dr. Vukanich’s time, first feigning a ‘sinus headache’ in order to get the doctor to examine him.<sup>177</sup> He then solicits Vukanich for drugs by pretending to have come on behalf of a friend who needs an ‘occasional shot’ to calm his ‘bad nerves’.<sup>178</sup> Finally, before being kicked-out, Marlowe admits he is looking for Wade, refuses to pay Vukanich for his time, and taunts him when he threatens to call the police. When Marlowe leaves, he gives a final sarcastic quip: ‘The waiting patients looked at me with disapproving eyes. That was no way to treat a doctor’.<sup>179</sup> Marlowe may

<sup>172</sup> Chandler, *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*, 465.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 465-466

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 466

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 467

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 469.

not be happy, in the conventional sense, but his constant humour and playful subversion seem to indicate that his lonely wanderings bring him a certain amount of pleasure. It is this apathy towards heterosexuality and clear pleasure in subverting norms that makes him a generative figure for queer rewritings. This humorous section is indicative of the novel's broader structure where Marlowe, in the midst of his long and detour filled journey to find out the truth of the Lennox case, drifts in and out of various underground, heterotopic and otherwise marginal spaces across the city of Los Angeles. These take Marlowe in and out of various bars, hotel lobbies, detective agency offices, waiting rooms and retirement homes. In this sense, Chandler's writing echoes the periplum, providing the reader with a glimpse of the landscape of this fictional imagining of LA. It is a mapping of the city more imagined than real, but it nevertheless charts something of the emotional coastline of the city at a specific temporal moment. The strangeness of Marlowe's encounter with the doctor, his rough exit, and the seemingly incongruous features of the Stockwell building he observes, mimics the sensation of a sailor's moving perspective, of being tossed and turned on the waves.

Schulman's *After Delores* can be read as a queering of this structure. Similarly, the narrator's search for Marianne's killer is filled with detours, presenting a roving periplum of the marginal spaces of New York, including lesbian parties, pool bars, punk clubs and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. One of the most notable of these sections occurs early in the novel as the protagonist searches for Marianne, before learning of her death, at 'Urgie's', the strip club where Marianne works. The structure of this scene mirrors Chandler, first there is a detailed description of Urgie's, noting the 'fake wood paneling and pink and green disco lights'.<sup>180</sup> As with Chandler, the clientele are noted to be 'regular guys', largely of working class occupation, employed at a 'bottling factory' or in 'construction'.<sup>181</sup> The practices of the space are also described, as 'the guys' occasionally look up from their 'talking and chewing' to tip the dancer 'a dollar'.<sup>182</sup> The economy of the space is

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<sup>180</sup> Schulman, *After Delores*, 23.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 24.

noted explicitly: ‘I calculated that if every guy in the place gave her one dollar, it would be exactly the same money as waitressing lunch’.<sup>183</sup> Recalling Marlowe and Vukanich, the protagonist begins to deliberately antagonise the bartender. These antagonisms parody and disrupt the social conventions and expectations of the strip club, and, by extension, the microcosm of American heterosexuality it represents. Firstly, she has no ID, instead offering to hum ‘the jingle of any game show that was on air in 1960’ to prove her age. Eventually she resorts to bribery: ‘I had one more and tipped him three dollars. He started to soften up a bit. This is America after all’.<sup>184</sup> The repeated referencing to exact amounts of money, and their transaction, draws comparison to Marcuse’s argument that under consumer capitalism sex becomes just one more commodity. The spectacle of the dancer becomes another of the bar’s products, and the erotic dancing itself is described as another low waged job given a value in this system analogous to that of waitressing lunch.

The lesbian protagonist’s entrance into this space thus becomes contradictory, parodying both the disruptiveness of queer desire and the possibility of its assimilation into hegemony. This reaches its peak when the narrator attempts to tip the dancer:

I stretched out over the bar [...] and held out a dollar. Everything kind of stopped. One by one, the guys weren’t talking anymore and started paying attention [...] But that little darling, bless her heart, gave me a big one-dollar smile, took the cash, and stuffed it into her panties like I was a regular anybody. Well, I guess a dollar is a dollar, even if it’s queer. [...] It took about thirty seconds for everything to get back to normal [...]<sup>185</sup>

There is a moment of disruption, with the unexpected interruption of queer desire into a heterosexual space, but this is quickly dissipated as the act becomes coopted back into the space’s

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183 Ibid.

184 Ibid., 25

185 Ibid., 26

economic logic and commodification. With the reference to a queer dollar, there is a prefiguration and parody of the gentrification and assimilation of queerness. This short passage uses the cynical, but humorous, hard-boiled style of Chandler and deploys it in a queer and oppositional manner. As with the Vukanich scene in *The Long Goodbye*, this section ends with the narrator being thrown out for their audacity. Just as she is ‘feeling light and ready for one more beer’, the bartender tells the protagonist that ‘I’m not running no dating service for you [...] get the hell out of here before I call a cop’.<sup>186</sup> In this instance, the protagonist’s unhappiness and cynicism operates as a safeguard against the potential cooption of queer desire, even if its spectre remains. Like Chandler, Schulman’s use of humour and her portrayal of the detective as a clown or fool presents the detective’s voyage, or periplum, through the city as one of pleasure, stemming from an oppositional unhappiness that is difficult to reconcile with the normative values society. In these two texts, the detective is placed into opposition with a corrupt or uncaring society specifically through their queerness, shown through their acts of homosocial care, refusal to accept happiness, their strangeness and their embrace of loneliness. Their journeys skirt the edges of society, treading a line between social acceptability and convention, on the one hand, and marginality and pleasure, on the other.

## The Contradictions of the City

The pleasures that Chandler and Schulman’s protagonists experience are rooted in an urban experience and rely on what feminist urban theorist Elisabeth Wilson describes as the contradictions of the city. For Wilson, queer identity itself comes to formation specifically in urban space. As Wilson argues in her influential essay ‘The Invisible Flâneur’ (1992), it is ‘the multitudinous encounters’ that occur ‘every day and thousands of times over in the streets of the great city’, the ‘growth of urban life’, that makes ‘possible the very emergence of the homosexual identity’.<sup>187</sup> The

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Elisabeth Wilson, ‘The Invisible Flâneur’, in Elisabeth Wilson, *The Contradictions of Culture: Cities, Culture, Women* (London ; Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2001), pp. 72-89, 78.

phrasing Wilson uses here echoes that of de Certeau and my earlier reading of the collective and gender ambiguous walkers in his text, who walk ‘intertwining’ paths where multiple encounters become possible and in ‘which each body is an element signed by many others’.<sup>188</sup> It is this aspect of the city that enables the varied wanderings, encounters and spaces explored in Chandler and Schulman’s novels. However, the city is also a space of contradiction. Wilson expands upon her argument in her 1991 book *The Sphinx in the City*: ‘women, along with minorities, children, the poor, are still not full citizens in the sense that they have never been granted full access to the streets’, but ‘industrial life still drew them into public life, and they have survived and flourished in the interstices of the city, negotiating the contradictions of the city in their own particular way’.<sup>189</sup> The city is contradictory, for Wilson, because while cities are often constructed along lines of gendered and racialized exclusion they also create the conditions, the range of multiple encounters, necessary for the emergence and practice of queer and feminist identity. The use of the word ‘interstice’ is also important here, suggesting a connection with Bhabha’s work and the importance of ‘in between spaces [...] that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration’.<sup>190</sup> Therefore, despite the oppressions that cities often contain, they also provide the opportunity for new subjectivities to emerge and radical acts of ‘collaboration’, or new political alliances, to emerge.

In two particular passages, the contradictions of the city emerge forcefully within *The Long Goodbye*. In one moment of introspection, Marlowe listens to ‘the ground swell of traffic’ and looks out at ‘the glare of the big, angry city’.<sup>191</sup> In this passage, Los Angeles is a city full of danger; it is a ‘night of a thousand crimes [...] People were being beaten, robbed, strangled, raped, and murdered’.<sup>192</sup> It is also a place of structural injustice: ‘[p]eople were hungry, sick; bored, desperate

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188 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 93.

189 Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 8.

190 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1-2.

191 Chandler, *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*, 578.

192 Ibid.

with loneliness or remorse or fear, angry, cruel, feverish, shaken by sobs'.<sup>193</sup> However, in a different passage, a contradictory image of the city emerges. In a moment of introspection, Marlowe considers the city as a space of possibility. Marlowe speculates on what his life might have been like if he had not left his home town:

The other part of me wanted to get out and stay out, but this was the part I never listened to. Because if I ever had I would have stayed in the town where I was born and worked in the hardware store and married the boss's daughter and had five kids [...] I might even have got rich —small-town rich, an eight-room house [...] You take it, friend., I'll take the big sordid dirty crooked city.<sup>194</sup>

Once again, we see a striking rejection of middle-class, heterosexual happiness and consumer society. Marlowe rejects the perceived boredom of small-town life, and Narin's perceived 'death by slow decay' of suburbia, for the contradictory pleasures of the large city.<sup>195</sup> The implication here is that the queer, but solitary, lifestyle Marlowe leads is only possible within the material and aesthetic conditions of the city. Are the pleasures explored in these two novels dependent on the suffering of the city? Wilson argues that we do not have to resign ourselves to such a pessimistic assessment. While 'the excitement of city life cannot be preserved if all conflict is eliminated' there are 'positive aspects of conflict'.<sup>196</sup> If urban planning is liberated from the 'motor of capitalist profit' and 'desire to police whole communities' then this conflict might take on a very different character.<sup>197</sup> For Wilson, it is crucial 'to understand that life in the great city offers the potential for greater freedom and diversity than life in small communities'.<sup>198</sup> Wilson calls for 'a radically new approach to the

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193 Ibid.

194 Ibid., 559

195 Quoted in, Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 114.

196 Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 156

197 Ibid.

198 Ibid.

city’, aiming to ‘maximise the freedom and autonomy’ offered by the city while making such freedoms ‘available to all classes and groups’.<sup>199</sup> In this sense, it is not necessary to choose between the unruly, multiple and pleasurable spectacle of the city and a safer, sterile and gentrified city. Wilson’s work therefore has a utopian aspect, calling upon its reader to imagine alternative visions of the city where these two aspects are not contradictory.

## Counterfactual Worlds

Within Schulman’s *After Delores* there are, although half formed, moments of yearning for such a utopian experience of the city. These moments appear as ‘counterfactuals’, which are, as narrative theorist Hilary P. Dannenberg writes, ‘[s]peculations by characters in novels about how their life might have developed differently’.<sup>200</sup> Counterfactuals therefore constitute ‘thought experiments about what might have been’ and provide a way whereby ‘alternate worlds’ are constructed and glimpsed within a novel.<sup>201</sup> Crucially, counterfactuals can have an estranging and utopian aspect, functioning as ‘theoretical alterations or *mutations* of a past sequence of events made in order to construct a different version of reality that counters the events of the “real” or factual world’.<sup>202</sup> For example, the passage of introspection from *The Long Goodbye*, cited above, where Marlowe reflects upon what might have been if he had ‘stayed in the town’ of his birth and ‘married the boss's daughter’, works as a counterfactual in that it constructs an alternative world where Marlowe did not leave his hometown, in process reaffirming the possibility of the city.<sup>203</sup>

In *After Delores*, there are multiple moments of yearning and counterfactuality which transform the present of the text and invite the reader to imagine alternative constructions of the

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199 Ibid., 9

200 Hilary P. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 3.

201 Ibid., 3 and 2.

202 Ibid., 110

203 Chandler, *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*, 559.

city. For instance, as the narrator and Marianne drink together in an apartment, for a moment the narrator daydreams:

[...] I realised she saw something special in me. She trusted me. And I was transformed suddenly from a soup-stained waitress to an old professor. We were sitting, not in a Lower East Side firetrap but before a blazing hearth in a wood-lined brownstone.<sup>204</sup>

Within the conditions of the novel's present, such an alternative world is impossible to materially achieve for either character, as they both live marginal existences. However, this moment of daydreaming, a speculation of a different present, invites the reader to imagine what changes to the world, and the city itself, would make such an alternative possible. In another part of the text, a different character, Beatriz, explains a play she is producing, based on a novel. This novel, Beatriz explains, is 'the story of two women who live together on a houseboat on the Thames in the nineteen forties. [...] They have, you see, a lesbian relationship but they do not know it yet'.<sup>205</sup> Beatriz's explanation of the novel grows more complex, as its characters are forced 'to confront the lie in their relationship', until the protagonist responds 'I feel that way about my whole life [...] I've never heard about a book like that [...] I didn't know it could exist'.<sup>206</sup> To this, Beatriz replies, 'it doesn't. [...] What I have told you is my dream of this book [...] We don't have to stop where the writer does. That is only the first step'.<sup>207</sup> In this scene, the characters themselves perform a queer, or slantwise, reading of another text, discussing what alternative conditions might make such a book possible. This is significant because *After Delores*, as I have argued, can be read as Schulman's rewriting of the queer possibility within Chandler's detective fiction. This makes explicit the usefulness of queer reading, to move beyond the author and what is left unsaid, while instead

<sup>204</sup> Schulman, *After Delores*, 21.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 54

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

finding glimpses of alternative worlds. These counterfactuals in *After Delores* function as a kind of anamorphosis, becoming the perspectival device from which, if looked at from a slantwise position, ‘a poetics of alternative realities’ and moments of utopia can emerge.<sup>208</sup> One way of asserting the utopian potential of such moments would be to interpret them through the lens of what Caroline Edwards describes as ‘moments of temporal alterity’.<sup>209</sup> In terms of ‘narrative function’, these moments provide ‘glimpses of the future, redeemed strands of past hopes and alternative social worlds already alive in the present’.<sup>210</sup> In this sense, the counterfactual and slantwise moments of *After Delores* transform the present moment of the texts and show other alternative worlds breaking through into the present.

### **Part Three: The Queer City**

This part of the chapter moves back towards cyberpunk, beginning with an analysis of Melissa Scott’s 1994 novel *Trouble and Her Friends*. In chapter two, during my discussion of multiple subjectivity, I deliberately analysed texts that failed to fully realise the coherent potential of multiplicity in order to identify the limits and horizons that other texts might see beyond. This part follows a similar approach. In some respects, we can locate many of the concepts discussed in the previous two parts within Scott’s novel, including ideas of queer utopia, interstitial space and alternatives ways of being together. Yet, the novel’s conclusion fails to bring together the radical sum of its parts. Additionally, in the following part of this chapter, I will also comparatively discuss another of Schulman’s novels, *People in Trouble* (1990), which reflects and contrasts Scott’s text in

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<sup>208</sup> Beaumont, ‘Anamorphic Estrangements’, 33.

<sup>209</sup> Caroline Edwards, *Utopia and the Contemporary British Novel* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 4.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

interesting ways, particularly through their shared concern with queer community, the effects of gentrification on space and consciousness, and the legacy of the AIDS pandemic.

## The Postmodern City

As in *The Long Goodbye* and *After Delores*, the city in *Trouble and Her Friends* is presented as a contradictory space of both danger and possibility. The exact location, or name, of the city in which Scott's novel is partly set is left ambiguous. However, from clues within the text, it is on the east coast of the United States and appears roughly to be an imagining of a near future Boston.<sup>211</sup> In an opening scene, close to the beginning of the novel, Cerise, one of the novel's two protagonists, walks through the city at night and the danger of this movement is repeatedly emphasised. Her destination is 'less than a dozen blocks' but 'gangs [...] lurk on the fringes of New Century Square', and Cerise steps 'quickly across the moving shadows'.<sup>212</sup> Additionally 'small shops and offices' close 'promptly at five to let their people get out of the city-center before full dark', and the security features of these buildings, their 'steel shutters' and 'security lights', are detailed.<sup>213</sup> However, the danger of the city, in this case, does not only come from physical attack; the spectacle of the city itself is overwhelming and excessive. 'New Century Square' is described as being 'as busy as ever', with 'light, red and gold and green neon, flashing from the signs and display boards that ringed the Square, and from the signs that glowed and flickered over the myriad doorways'.<sup>214</sup> This list of colour, 'red and gold and green', without commas suggests a sense of culminate, blinding spectacle, and the 'myriad doorways' construct the city as a vast labyrinth. The new, represented by the neon, spills into the old as 'the gaudy lights helped to disguise buildings that hadn't been new eighty years

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211 In the novel, the coast of New Hampshire is referred to as being 'ninety-five kilometers to the north' of the city, making Boston the most likely location, see: Melissa Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends* (New York, NY: TOR, 1995), 86.

212 Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 23.

213 Ibid.

214 Ibid., 24.

ago'.<sup>215</sup> Neon tubes, weaved around these old buildings, become a metaphor of modernity flooding into the degenerating urban environment.

In cyberpunk, the use of neon signage as a metaphor for the city's excess or deluge of information is well established. As Takeuchi Atsushi, the art designer for the film *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), explains: 'on the streets there flows an excess or a flood of information, along with everything this excess brings out. The modern city is swamped with billboards, neon lights and symbols'.<sup>216</sup> Furthermore, in terms of representing urban experience, '[a]s people live in this information deluge, the streets will have to be depicted accordingly as being flooded'.<sup>217</sup> In this sense, the visual style identified above and Scott's depiction of the cyberpunk city echoes Elizabeth Wilson's definition of the postmodern city:

In postmodernism the city becomes a labyrinth or a dream. Its chaos and senselessness mirror a loss of meaning in the world. At the same time, there may be an excess of meaning: the city becomes a split screen flickering with competing beliefs, cultures, and "stories".<sup>218</sup>

The excessive neon signage thus becomes a motif used to describe the competition of many different forms of meaning within the urban space and the dreamlike state it induces in the observer. In particular, the senselessness of this novel's city is demonstrated when Cerise encounters some of the square's 'dollie-girls', who are a cross between gang-members and corporate secretaries. One of them stalks Cerise, who hears 'the click of heels behind her'. Exactly what these dollie-girls want from Cerise is not made clear, but it is presented as threatening as Cerise slams one 'back against

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Quoted in Wong Kin Yuen, 'On the Edge of Spaces: "Blade Runner", "Ghost in the Shell", and Hong Kong's Cityscape', *Science Fiction Studies*, 27.1 (2000), pp. 1-21, 13.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 136.

the bricks [...] not caring that her head bounced off the bricks'.<sup>219</sup> The violence here is contextless and without meaning, the reader is given no explanation for it. Cerise walks away from the encounter, feeling 'adrenaline-anger and fear mixed' together but not remorse.<sup>220</sup> As Wilson writes, '[i]n the postmodern world we all become hysterics as we travel the city of skyscraper and abyss, alert with feelings of horror and excitement, but free from guilt or sadness'.<sup>221</sup> In this sense, the postmodern city causes a perversion of de Certeau's ideal of the walker, who navigates the city in relation to others. The street and its practices become only an abyss, navigated by atomised individuals who are alienated from each other.

However, this physical city of violence and danger is not the only city depicted within *Trouble and Her Friends*. Within the novel, cyberspace is described as a fluid urban space. When Cerise plugs into the net she is 'flung along the lines of data, flying across fields of light, the night cities that live only behind her eyes'.<sup>222</sup> This cyberspace has its own dangers and pleasures. Here, a degree of mastery and power is achievable inside the net, in contrast to the overwhelming physical city. When Cerise moves through cyberspace, '[p]ower rides her fingers [...] walking the nets like the ghost of a shadow, her trail vanishing behind her as she goes. She carries power in the dark behind her eyes'.<sup>223</sup> For Cerise, cyberspace is an urban space, complete with jostling crowds as 'the crowding icons—balled advertising, jostling users, once a virtual pickpocket, groping for useful programs in other people's toolkits—block her way'.<sup>224</sup> It is also like a marketplace: Cerise finds herself surrounded by 'the constant rustling murmur of the transactions'.<sup>225</sup> There is, in the postmodern sense, an excess of meaning as 'data flows down from the outer nets like a waterfall of lights'.<sup>226</sup> The excess of information is represented as a flood, becoming dreamlike as the image shifts, in a liminal state, between water and light.

219 Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 25.

220 Ibid., 26.

221 Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 136

222 Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 16.

223 Ibid., 16.

224 Ibid., 17.

225 Ibid.

226 Ibid.

Cyberspace in this novel might be interpreted as, what Scott Bukatman calls, fractal geography. This term refers to space that appears ‘as a complex and changing form’, where contradictory elements of ‘order and disorder’ are ‘held in delicate balance’.<sup>227</sup> Drawing from Benoit Mandelbrot, Bukatman argues that this geography ‘attracts the viewer at all distances, from the distant observer [...] to the proximate examiner’.<sup>228</sup> In this sense, cyberspace allows for a rapid and instantaneous shifting of perspective. As a symbolic concept, cyberspace holds a resonance with the periplum, as both provide unstable visions of space that constantly shift and move on the roiling sea (of information). Cyberspace is, at one moment, described as a vast ‘high plane’ or ‘a canyon’ and, at another, as ‘roads and rivers of data like glowing highways’.<sup>229</sup> The boundaries between natural and technological images collapse together, sometimes in the same sentence, as data turns from a road, into a river and back into a highway. Perspective also shifts rapidly, as these images of vastness quickly become focused onto the ‘cries of a street hawker’ and the smell ‘of burnt cinnamon’.<sup>230</sup>

### **Cyberspace as Thirdspace**

This fractal geography, the rapid shifting of perspective enabled here by cyberspace, has a radical potential, if it is interpreted through the lens of Edward Soja’s Thirdspace. In Soja’s words, Thirdspace is

an efficient invitation to enter a space of *extraordinary openness*, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a *multiplicity of*

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<sup>227</sup> Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 134.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 41; 88.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 88.

*perspectives* that have heretofore been considered by the epistemological referees to be incompatible.<sup>231</sup>

There are several interesting associations that can be pulled out of this definition. Firstly, this call for a ‘multiplicity of perspectives’ resonates with the theories of multiple subjectivity discussed in Chapter One and the multiple shifting perspective enabled by the periplum. Using Soja’s definition, it can be argued that a rapid shifting of spatial perspective does not have to lead to fragmentation but can enable a powerful multiplicity, allowing for an expanded ‘geographical imagination’ that permits a rethinking of the possibilities of space. Secondly, the phrase ‘extraordinary openness’ provokes a comparison with Bakhtin’s figure of the grotesque body, a concept intimately related to, and enabled by, the space of the carnival. The ‘grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits’.<sup>232</sup> This ‘unfinished and open body [...] is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects’.<sup>233</sup> In this sense, the grotesque body prefigures Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the schizophrenic who is connected to a multiplicity of inputs and is ‘one part amongst others’: ‘Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines—all of them connected to those of his body’.<sup>234</sup>

Soja’s concept of Thirdspace might therefore be seen as one of the necessary elements needed for the construction of such a radical queer body and subjectivity that can, through fluid encounter, rewrite the city. Crucially, Thirdspace is anti-dialectical: it attempts to ‘open up our spatial imaginaries to ways of thinking and acting that respond to all binarisms [...] by interjecting an-Other set of choices’.<sup>235</sup> Here, Soja rejects forms of thinking that offer a false choice between

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231 Emphasis added: Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 5.

232 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 26

233 Ibid., 26-27

234 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 9.

235 Soja, *Thirdspace*, 5.

two opposites and any political reality that justifies itself through such logics. The term ‘an-Other’ is significant, as it calls upon the figure of the other and, like the grotesque body, challenges any closed or binary distinctions. In this sense, Soja rejects ‘any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives’.<sup>236</sup> Cyberspace, as described by Scott, might be defined as Thirdspace precisely because it allows for the rapid shifting of perspective and distance that enables such a ‘multiplicity of perspectives’. The collapse of the natural into the technological, as a river becomes a highway, functions to critique in Soja’s terms, ‘categorical or binary logic’.<sup>237</sup> This collapse also suggests an openness and a blurring of the human into the surrounding environment. Therefore, Soja’s work provides a new perspective on Wilson’s description of the postmodern city. The ‘labyrinth’ city, as described by Wilson, with its ‘split screen flickering with competing beliefs, cultures, and “stories”’, becomes a space of radical openness and myriad possibility.<sup>238</sup>

Soja’s concept of Thirdspace can be connected back to Bhabha’s notion of the interstice:

These “inbetween spaces” provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.<sup>239</sup>

As in Thirdspace, an interstice is a space where new kinds of identity and other conceptions of the body can be formed. Bhabha’s reference to communal selfhood recalls de Certeau’s focus on walking as a collective act, as explored in the introduction to this chapter. It also resonates with the work of Jean-Luc Nancy, as explored in Chapter One, connecting with Nancy’s assertion that identity is necessarily mediated and constructed in relation to others, as ‘being cannot be anything

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>238</sup> Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 136.

<sup>239</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

but being-with-one-another'.<sup>240</sup> Furthermore, concepts of communal selfhood will become directly relevant below, in my section titled 'Queer Kinship'. Like Thirdspace, the interstice is a place of radical openness and blurring, as these 'borderline engagements of cultural difference [...] may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity'; 'the private and the public'; and 'high and low'.<sup>241</sup> Like Soja, Bhabha's argument carries a rejection of binary thinking and politics. This language of high and low also recalls my discussion of the work of Stallybrass and White in Chapter Two and helps to reinforce the necessity for literary transgression as resistive practice.

What distinguishes the idea of the interstice from Thirdspace however is its focus on points of border and boundary. An interstice is a space that exists between two larger entities: it is a space that exists within a border. A 'boundary' is a point where '*something begins its presencing*' and is therefore a space of encounter. The interstice can also be connected to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome as a network of schizophrenics (as discussed in Chapter One), as '[t]his interstitial passage between fixed identifications', or binary positions, 'opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy'.<sup>242</sup> To 'inhabit this intervening space', Bhabha writes, is 'to dwell in the beyond'.<sup>243</sup> This holds radical potential as 'the intervening space "beyond", becomes a space of intervention in the here and now'.<sup>244</sup> To expand on this assertion, to go "'beyond" yourself' necessitates a 'return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political *conditions* of the present'.<sup>245</sup> In other words, to return from the beyond is to return to the present, 'the here and now', with new tools, perspectives, and visions of alternatives along with the desire to instigate change. As with Thirdspace, interstitial space is a point from which it becomes possible to see alternatives beyond the constraints imposed by binary logic. Therefore, the power of Thirdspace and the interstice is that they indicate what

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240 Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 3.

241 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture.*, 2.

242 Ibid., 4.

243 Ibid., 7.

244 Ibid.

245 Emphasis original: Ibid., 3

kinds of spatial conditions lend themselves to creation of an open, networked and multiple subjectivity, such as Deleuze and Guattari interlinked concepts of the schizophrenic and the rhizome describe. As the paragraphs below demonstrate, Scott's feminist cyberpunk novel takes the metaphor of cyberspace and, paying attention to the points at which it intersects with the physical world and the body, draws out its interstitial aspects and asks how it might enable networks of queer kinship. While Scott's text is ultimately limited in its vision, it vitally helps to further sketch out this thesis's vision of feminist cyberpunk subjectivity as being multiple, integrated and driven by queer desire.

Within Scott's novel *Trouble and Her Friends* there is a place called Seahaven that might be read as an attempt to construct such an interstitial space. A recurring joke within the novel is that there are two places called Seahaven, one physical and one digital, which throughout the novel increasingly converge. One of these Seahavens exists entirely within the net and is described as 'the last and greatest of the virtual villages'.<sup>246</sup> It is a 'cracker's haven; now it was one of the last remaining spaces where the shadow walkers could conduct their business'.<sup>247</sup> It is a space of contradictions, being 'one of the net's greatest temptations, and home of its greatest dangers'.<sup>248</sup> Operating beyond the reach of the legal system, it is in an interstitial space on the fringes of the network. The other Seahaven is a fictional 'town on the New Hampshire coast, maybe ninety-five kilometers to the north' of the city, likely inspired by Hampton Beach.<sup>249</sup> This Seahaven is interstitial in a different sense. As a coastal town, it sits on the border between the land and the sea, but it also exists on the limits of human habitability: 'It had once been a summer resort and a fishing town, but [...] the beaches became dangerous, racked with high UV sunlight, eaten away by pollution and the shifting tideline'.<sup>250</sup> On the edge of the sea, the town sits at the limit of a slowly

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246 Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 85

247 Ibid.

248 Ibid.

249 Hampton Beach, in the real world, is roughly around 95km from Boston, in New Hampshire, and located on a causeway near the marshes of Seabrook, making it the most likely source of inspiration, see: Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 86.

250 Ibid.

encroaching ecological collapse. The town has its own contradictions. It is both the site of a highly secure hotel—‘highly rated among the multinationals who needed absolute security for their negotiations’—and an ‘old beachfront Arcade’, described as ‘one of the best sources along the East Coast for black-and grey-market ware’.<sup>251</sup> In this sense, it is reminiscent of Bukatman’s fractal geography as it holds together elements of ‘order and disorder’ in ‘a delicate balance’.<sup>252</sup> It exists at the limits of postmodernity at the intersections of varying precarious crises: ecological disaster, corporate gentrification and the collapse of old industries (fishing). Seahaven’s position as interstice is summed up in the following line: ‘live free or die, Cerise thought, only they can’t seem to do either’.<sup>253</sup>

The digital Seahaven is not a static space but is described as a constantly shifting urban space. Upon entering this Seahaven, Trouble—the novel’s other protagonist—remarks, ‘[i]t is Venice, today, or perhaps Amsterdam [...] all tall, narrow houses lining a canal that reflects trees made of light’.<sup>254</sup> In another passage, the city appears differently: ‘Today it’s all black glass, a predatory nightmare of a city, looming buildings that turn the streets into canyons lit only by the graffiti that glows neon-orange against the slick black walls’.<sup>255</sup> Once again, these passages focus on light, with ‘trees made of light’ and the ‘neon-orange’ glow of graffiti emphasising that this is a space made of data, a space carved out from within the information deluge. This shifting space has a fractal aspect, giving the impression that a blend of architectural styles are blurring into each other. In this manner, it points towards the possibility of an architectural rendering of the ‘cultural hybridity’ put forward by Bhabha.<sup>256</sup> However, this multiplicity of possible Seahavens, revealed in its shifting aspects, never quite emerges at a satisfying moment of multiple perspective. As Trouble notes, although ‘she doesn’t recognize these buildings, but some things never change in

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251 Ibid.

252 Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, 134.

253 Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 86.

254 Ibid., 113

255 Ibid., 185

256 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 4.

Seahaven'.<sup>257</sup> No matter the city's form, 'the Mayor's palace' at Seahaven's centre, 'a terraced pyramid like an Aztec temple', is always the same: 'always the same symbol, always the same place, here at the heart of Seahaven'.<sup>258</sup> At the centre of this ever shifting interstice is not a point of a revolutionary, transformative subjectivity, but the Mayor's authoritarian personality. Described as being 'autocratic', the Mayor is Seahaven's 'unknown architect' and this 'unreal place' is 'policed, positioned, and created entirely at his whim'.<sup>259</sup>

### **Queer Desire, Kinship and Cooption**

Within *Trouble and Her Friends*, cyberspace fosters the creation of queer networks of kinship. The queer community to which the novel's two protagonists belong is organised around hacking in cyberspace. Members of this community are recognised by their use of 'the brainworm', a product of illegal surgery that creates a kind of neural interface, allowing full sensory immersion in the net: it 'let[s] you use the full range of your senses, not just sight and sound, to interpret the virtual world'.<sup>260</sup> Brainworm use is looked down upon by the wider hacker community who consider it to be 'a crutch, something for second-raters'.<sup>261</sup> However, in Cerise's perspective, this disdain is motivated more by fear: 'they were just afraid'.<sup>262</sup> Having one installed is considered a dangerous and risky surgery, 'implantation and direct-to-brain wiring was always tricky, could leave you a mental cripple if the operation went wrong'.<sup>263</sup> This technology is consistently associated with queerness throughout the novel and attracts a degree of prejudice. For example, homophobia and disdain for the brainworm come coupled together, as one character accuses Trouble of being 'just another dyke on the wire'.<sup>264</sup> Connecting with ideas of queerness and emotion previously discussed

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<sup>257</sup> Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 113.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., 109; 85.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 234

in this chapter, the brainworm allows those who are queer to experience a wider range of sensory experience than that available to their heterosexual counterparts.

The installation and calibration of the brainworm is described as a queer experience. In one passage, Trouble's brainworm is upgraded by a woman named Dr. Huu, and the procedure is described almost as a lesbian sexual encounter. The process begins, as 'Huu's weight held her steady as rock', with Trouble feeling 'Huu's cold fingers on her neck' before being plugged into cyberspace.<sup>265</sup> In this passage, Trouble oscillates between intense feelings of pleasure and pain:

A wind touches her, gentle at first, caressing her naked body, then harder, stinging slaps against back and thigh and breast. She tastes sand, smells heat and rubber. [...] The plane steadies around her, takes on color and three dimensions. [...] [T]he world vanishes in a sheer rush of sensation, pure feeling filling every nerve in her body. She throws back her head, and the feeling turns to pain, pins-and-needles swelling to racking cramp to pure fire, an agony swirling through her until she's nothing but pain. And then it peaks and vanishes, leaving her gasping for an instant before the pleasure starts, rising from the tickle of desire to soaked arousal to racking, orgasmic delight.<sup>266</sup>

The intense prose used by Scott in this passage queers the descriptions of cyberspace present in Gibson's *Neuromancer*. The 'color and three dimensions' of the grass and the shifting nature of this space recalls the 'fluid neon origami trick' and 'transparent 3D chessboard' Case experiences upon first entering cyberspace in *Neuromancer*.<sup>267</sup> In both passages there is an emphasis on bodily fluids and sexual release, with Trouble's 'soaked arousal' and Case's 'tears of release'.<sup>268</sup> However, in *Neuromancer*, Case's experience is an auto-erotic one, with phrases like 'distant fingers caressing

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 131; 132

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 133

<sup>267</sup> Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 68.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 69

the deck' evoking masturbation.<sup>269</sup> In contrast, Trouble's experience is guided by Huu, as a wind that smells of 'heat and rubber', evoking Huu's gloved hands, caresses Trouble's naked body. There is a bodily physicality that is absent in Gibson's descriptions, with 'body', 'back', 'thigh' and 'breast' explicitly present. This specific feeling of nakedness suggests Scott is placing an additional emphasis on vulnerability, and this sense is reinforced by the feelings of pain, 'pure fire' and 'agony' that are mixed up with the pleasure. This passage also contrasts sharply with the sense of mastery Cerise feels over cyberspace earlier in the novel. Instead, Trouble is depicted as being powerless over, and vulnerable to, the sensations Huu guides her through. This passage strongly recalls Delany's assertion that 'pleasure' is a 'field of force' shared by humans.<sup>270</sup>

This sense of shifting perspective and intense bodily sensation also recalls Muñoz's claim that queerness is a 'horizon imbued with potentiality'.<sup>271</sup> This describes an openness, of the kind associated with Bakhtin's grotesque body. In this experience of pleasure, as 'the world vanishes in a rush of sensation', there is a loss of any sense of self and other, opening up communal possibilities. This is achieved in part through Scott's queer and slantwise rewriting of cyberspace and first wave cyberpunk as a space of queer pleasure and desire. Trouble's desire for Huu becomes evident as the procedure ends: 'She could hear the sucking sound of Huu peeling off the rubber gloves, and wanted for a painful instant to feel the other woman's hands between her legs'.<sup>272</sup> Notably, this is fixation on Huu's gloved hands stresses that this is a sexual pleasure that does not require skin-to-skin contact or an exchange of bodily fluids. This reflects an anxiety over the AIDS pandemic, which continued to disproportionately impact queer communities in the 1990s.

At one point Trouble speculates that it is precisely the risks and vulnerability associated with the brainworm that makes it queer: '[m]aybe that was why it was almost always the underclasses, the women, the people of color, the gay people, the ones who were already stigmatized as being

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269 Ibid.

270 Delany, *Times Square*, 56.

271 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

272 Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 133.

vulnerable, available, trapped by the body, who took the risk of the wire'.<sup>273</sup> This is a technology utilised by the marginalised and precarious. The above quotation suggests an element of common experience between diverse groups, 'women, people of color, [...] gay people', that recalls Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude (discussed previously in Chapter Two), a political body that 'remains multiple and internally different' but 'is able to act in common'.<sup>274</sup> Throughout *Trouble and Her Friends*, those who use the brainworm, or are queer, are referred to as being part of an extended kinship network, or family. When, in one section of the novel, a character called Butch puts himself at personal risk to warn Trouble that the authorities may be looking for her, he explains his motivation in terms of kinship: '[y]ou're family. All us queers have to stick together'.<sup>275</sup> The ambiguity of this use of the term family is further delineated when Cerise meets with an Interpol agent who has been digging into Trouble's past. When this agent, named Mabry, reveals himself to be in a relationship with Max, one of Trouble and Cerise's queer associates, she remarks, 'I didn't know you were family'.<sup>276</sup> In response, Mabry implies that he does not have the brainworm and replies '[d]epends on the family' with a 'bitterness' in his voice.<sup>277</sup> This implies that within the novel there is a double meaning to the term family, designating—in one sense—a shared marginality, represented by the brainworm, and—in another sense—denoting a shared queerness. While this family is a community that arises out of the necessity of survival—responding to a shared marginalisation—it is also clearly an intentional community in which can read a utopian potential its position as an enclave of care and kinship in a hostile world.

One aspect of this family is focused around access and networking. For example, Trouble gets access to Dr. Huu and her skills by 'going through the family', and it is because of this status that Trouble gets a discount from Huu at 'the family price'.<sup>278</sup> However, perhaps more radically, a

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273 Ibid., 128-129

274 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 100.

275 Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 48.

276 Ibid., 49

277 Ibid.

278 Ibid., 105; 127.

duty of care seems to underpin this network of kinship. Alongside warning Trouble about the authorities, Butch seems motivated by this sense of family to share his apartment and equipment with Trouble while she recovers from her brainworm calibration. This sense of responsibility and care, that comes with the designation of someone as family, seems to extend even to those Cerise and Trouble are in confrontation with. Towards the end of the text, after coming close to finding the person they have been hunting throughout the novel, Cerise discovers that this person ‘is on the wire, one of them, doubly family, maybe, and she feels responsible’.<sup>279</sup> This kinship network is constructed both through urban and virtual space. As Cerise reflects, of those who she considers part of this network:

[t]hey had lived within a subway ride of each other for three years, and had seen each other off the nets perhaps even more than on—and that was part of what the wire had brought them, the desire to know each other in reality as well.<sup>280</sup>

It is implied here that this construction of community relies on both, in Wilson’s words, the uniquely urban ‘multitudinous encounters’—the ‘freedom and diversity’ offered by the city—that makes possible queer identity and the more expansive range of emotions and sensation offered by the brainworm.<sup>281</sup> This urban queerness might possibly be read as a move towards the construction of Thirdspace, as the ‘extraordinary openness’ enabled by the brainworm, within the space of the city, generates a ‘multiplicity of perspectives’ among the marginalised.<sup>282</sup> The queer potential of the brainworm, or wire, is that it enhances the ‘desire to know’ another outside the bounds of heterosexuality.<sup>283</sup> This desire to know might be thought about in relation to Foucault’s description

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279 Ibid., 330.

280 Ibid, 155.

281 Wilson, ‘The Invisible Flaneur’, 78; Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 156.

282 Soja, *Thirdspace*, 5.

283 Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, 155.

of queer formlessness, discussed in part one of this chapter, and the need for queer people to find a ‘way of life’ together that can ‘be shared among individuals of different age, status, and social activity’.<sup>284</sup> Such ways of living have the potential to ‘yield intense relations’, such as those experienced on the brainworm, ‘not resembling those that are institutionalised’.<sup>285</sup> The power of such relations is that they can ‘yield a culture and an ethics’ that might form the basis of new communities that live outside the boundaries and norms of neoliberal society.<sup>286</sup> The brainworm can therefore be read as a metaphor for the ‘tying together of unforeseen lines of force’ and the resulting ‘formation of new alliances’ considered by Foucault to be the most radical aspect of queerness.<sup>287</sup> This hints towards what is potentially radical about Scott’s construction of the family: it does not follow heterosexual norms, but provides an opportunity to invent new kinds of relation.

However, at the end of the novel, Scott fails to fully realise this potential for queer radicalism or explore the queer utopian horizons that intentional communities can facilitate. Instead, this capacity for unforeseen lines of force becomes coopted and assimilated by the state to sustain its hegemony. The closing chapters of the novel see Cerise and Trouble hack their way through the Mayor’s palace in Seahaven, breaking through his security system, or ‘wall of IC(E)’, ‘as though it had never been’.<sup>288</sup> This victory creates the possibility that Cerise and Trouble might take control of Seahaven and reshape it. However, instead of being a moment of radical overturning—by which I mean an overturning of the social, economic and political conditions that lead to marginalisation—this opportunity is presented in terms that are compromised and negotiated. Mabry, the Interpol agent, asks Trouble to run Seahaven in the interests of the authorities, as they want ‘somebody legal in charge, somebody we could trust’.<sup>289</sup> As Mabry further explains, for the authorities, having Trouble ‘in charge’, and controlling Seahaven through her, is preferable to leaving ‘Seahaven

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284 Foucault, ‘Friendship’, 138.

285 Ibid.

286 Ibid.

287 Ibid. 136.

288 Scott, *Trouble and Her Friend*, 347.

289 Ibid., 370

untenanted'.<sup>290</sup> Instead of working to build Seahaven as a queer institution and community outside of hegemonic control, there is instead a capitulation to the state. The final chapter of the novel provides a disappointing and disturbing prolepsis into the future of the novel. Cerise and Trouble are speakers at a 'European Conference on Computers and Law' a space full of 'Eurocops' and mired in 'cops' politics'.<sup>291</sup> The political energy of Cerise, Trouble and their family network is directed into legislative change through 'the House of Representatives', even though they do not have the political representation needed to 'make policy'.<sup>292</sup> Not only is the interstitial potential of Seahaven not realised, but the possibility that the brainworm represents, in its capacity to tie together marginalised groups into a multitude, is abandoned in favour of a politics of assimilation.

## Part Four: The AIDS Crisis

### AIDS and Gentrification

As alluded to above, the AIDS crisis provides another perspective through which to read *Trouble and Her Friends*. The organisation of a queer community, within this novel, around a shared sense of marginality and the stigmatisation of the brainworm alludes to the queer political organisations and communities of mutual aid that arose in response to the AIDS pandemic of the 1980s and 1990s. The spectre of AIDS seems to loom over the novel, even though it is only referenced in a few places. In one passage, Trouble asks after one of her friends, Carlie, only to be told they have died of 'AIDS'.<sup>293</sup> In another instance, Cerise reflects that sex in the net, despite the cybersecurity risks it poses, is still 'safer than real sex', indicating perhaps the lasting legacy and trauma that AIDS holds in queer imagination and memory.<sup>294</sup> It also seems to suggest the necessity of

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<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., 376

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 377

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 236.

reimagining queer desire and sex under the threat of such risks, hence Dr. Huu's rubber gloves and cyberspace become the key erotic objects of the novel. Despite the technological and scientific advances depicted in the novel and their potential to rewrite the body an effective treatment for AIDS seems not to be among them.

It is interesting to compare the networks of queer kinship presented in Scott's novel, and its subsequent assimilation, with those explored in Sarah Schulman's 1990 novel *People In Trouble*. Not only does this analysis develop the idea of queer kinship, but it also allows for an exploration of the role that the city plays in the construction of such networks, further drawing out their utopian aspects. Set in New York, the novel follows a love triangle against the backdrop of the dual crises of AIDS and gentrification, drawing heavily on Schulman's own experiences as a member of the AIDS activist group ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in the 1980s. Schulman's novel begins with an epigraph that quotes Karl Marx: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but their social being that determines their consciousness'.<sup>295</sup> This implies that, through this novel, Schulman seeks to question which social conditions and spaces lead to assimilation and which can lead to the formation of political consciousness and community activism. Right from the novel's opening, these twin forces of AIDS and gentrification are presented as apocalyptic events that have uneven effects: 'It was the beginning of the end of the world but not everyone noticed right away. Some people were dying. Some people were busy. Some people were cleaning their houses while the war movie played on television'. These four sentences immediately satirise the conditions of 1980s/90s neoliberalism. Some people are living through the apocalypse, some are kept too busy and precarious to notice, and others are too atomised in their private lives and consumer products, symbolised by the 'television'.<sup>296</sup> This rejects the tropes of apocalyptic fiction, where the apocalypse comes suddenly (as in the case of nuclear war) and effects all socio-economic groups indiscriminately. Instead, in the lens presented by Schulman, catastrophe is uneven as, while

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<sup>295</sup> Quoted in: Sarah Schulman, *People in Trouble* (London: Vintage, 2019), ix.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

marginalised groups are already living through the apocalypse, more privileged social groups can turn a blind eye.

Gentrification and AIDS become linked together, as the former is presented as disease that reshapes the city and erases its familiarity. As Peter, one of the novel's three protagonists, goes for a run by the river he discovers a land reclamation project financed by Ronald Horne, the wealthy property developer who serves as the novel's villain: 'he came upon an incongruous addition to the island of Manhattan. It was stuck on like some clumsy extension or unsightly tumor'.<sup>297</sup> Schulman is even more explicit about the connections between AIDS and gentrification in her 2012 book of essays *The Gentrification of the Mind*. She identifies gentrification as a 'concrete' process of homogenisation: 'the removal of communities of diverse classes, ethnicities, races, sexualities, languages, and points of view from the central neighborhoods of cities'.<sup>298</sup> This is accompanied by a 'gentrification of the mind, an internal replacement that alienated people from the concrete process of artistic change and social change'.<sup>299</sup> This process is somewhat prefigured by Baudrillard in his 1970 book *For Consumer Society*, where he observes a profound homogenisation in Western cities:

We are here at the heart of consumption as total organization of everyday life, total homogenization, where everything is taken over and superseded in the ease and translucidity of an abstract "happiness", defined solely by the resolution of tensions.<sup>300</sup>

This argument builds upon Marcuse's *One Dimensional-Man* as life in the city is desublimated and any tension, including that which is positive or productive, that emerges from the multiple

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297 Ibid., 30

298 Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 14.

299 Ibid.

300 Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. by Chris Turner (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2012), 29.

encounters of the city is erased in favour of bland, consumer happiness. In this sense, gentrification is a process through which the status-quo reasserts itself over Thirdspace. If Thirdspace is an expansion of the ‘geographical imagination [...] to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives’, then gentrification is the opposite process: the urban environment is made increasingly homogenous and the geographic imagination is narrowed until a limited range of perspectives remain.<sup>301</sup>

Gentrification can be thought of as the means through which diverse communities and spaces, that might lead to new alliances and new models of communal subjectivity, are reduced to hegemony. In this sense, the productive conflict that creates the possibilities of the city, as identified by Elizabeth Wilson, is erased. This happens on two levels: as the physical space of the urban environment is transformed so too are the political possibilities its inhabitants are capable of imagining. For Schulman, the AIDS crisis is wrapped up in this process. She argues that the areas of New York with the highest infection rates, ‘East Village, West Village, Lower Eastside Harlem and Chelsea’, are also the areas on the front line of a ‘profound gentrification’.<sup>302</sup> Schulman interprets this as ‘a tragic example of historic coincidence’, as the process of ‘converting low-income housing into housing for the wealthy’ coincides in the 1980s with the start of ‘the AIDS epidemic’.<sup>303</sup> The ‘rapid spread of AIDS and consequential death rate’ lead to the property vacated by the dead becoming the beachhead of gentrification.<sup>304</sup> *People In Trouble* is therefore a novel set in the heart of this crisis, and explores the way in which communities respond to and resist this process.

## Queer Mourning

One of the most striking aspects of *People in Trouble*, which resonates with Scott’s construction of alternative family structures in *Trouble and Her Friends*, is Schulman’s depictions of the queer

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301 Soja, *Thirdspace*, 5

302 Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind*, 23.

303 Ibid., 25-26.

304 Ibid., 26

community in mourning. AIDS activism and mourning are intimately connected in Schulman's novel. Early in the novel Molly attends an AIDS vigil, where a crowd of marchers carry white balloons through the city before releasing them across the river. The description of the vigil is cut with descriptions of the surrounding city. The river is described as 'dirty' with garbage [...] floating in it'; the mourners look out from Manhattan towards New Jersey and the 'high rises in Fort Lee and the polluted mess that made up the rest of it'.<sup>305</sup> These descriptions further highlight the contradictions of the city: this polluted wasteland becomes a site of collective mourning. The focus on pollution might also be read as a metaphor for homophobia. Action taken by the city against queer communities in the 1980s and 1990s was often framed in terms of public health and sanitation.<sup>306</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that Schulman is critiquing a city authority that considers queer people as garbage to be cleaned away. The act of releasing these balloons across the polluted river can thus be interpreted as an act of defiance, as the memories and souls of those who have died literally rise above the sea of waste. As Molly describes, the vigil makes 'her feel something very human; a kind of nostalgia with public sadness and the sharing of emotions. But then what?'<sup>307</sup> This act of public mourning is a constructed by Schulman as a collective act. There is also an element of expectation in the rhetorical question that ends this paragraph, '[b]ut then what?'<sup>308</sup> As Molly gazes out over the river, she watches the 'balloons rising towards the filthy sky [...] She could only really see the sea of them after loosing sight of her own'.<sup>309</sup>

Here we have a tragic rendering of what Muñoz describes as a 'moment of seeing the whole'.<sup>310</sup> In his reading of Delany's writings on public sex in *The Motion of Light in Water*, Muñoz highlights a particular passage of Delany's text where he describes his 'first apprehension of massed

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305 Schulman, *People in Trouble*, 51.

306 A detailed account of New York city's public health campaign against AIDS, and its disproportionately homophobic criminalisation of public sex, in the 1980s and early 1990s can be found in Ephen Glenn Colter's chapter within the book *Policing Public Sex*. See, Ephen Glenn Colter, 'Discernibly Turgid: Safer Sex and Public Policy', in *Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism*, ed. by Ephen Glenn Colter and others (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996), pp. 141-168.

307 Schulman, *People in Trouble*, 51.

308 Ibid.

309 Ibid.

310 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 52.

bodies' in a passage depicting public sex.<sup>311</sup> Muñoz argues that this 'moment of seeing the whole of public sex is a utopian break in the narrative', deviating 'from the text's dominant mode of narration'.<sup>312</sup> This moment, for Muñoz, renders visible 'the existence of a queer world' and 'signals a direct sense of political power'.<sup>313</sup> Such an 'apprehension debunks dominant ideology's characterization of antinormative subject-citizens as "isolated perverts"' and offers a kind of collectivity.<sup>314</sup> Such a glimpse of the whole hints towards the power that such a multitude of bodies can potentially come to realise, pushing against the atomising trend of neoliberalism. In his writing on utopia, Fredric Jameson also draws attention to a similar concept, which he terms totality. For Jameson, 'social totality is always unrepresentable [...] but it can sometimes be mapped and allow a small-scale model to be constructed on which [...] lines of flight can more clearly be read'.<sup>315</sup> In Schulman's *People in Trouble*, this kind of moment, of seeing the whole, is inverted and given a tragic dimension as Molly watches the massed balloons, each one representing a someone who has died of AIDS, float over the river. The balloons and the assembled mourners make the queer whole fleetingly visible. However, we can also see in this passage, almost literally, possible 'lines of flight'. Paradoxically, this brief moment in the novel could be read as representing the tragedy of AIDS—the loss of life and potential that each balloon represents—and the political imperative of those who survive to act and fight the injustices of the crisis.

This highlights one of the city's central contradictions: the experiments in queer living and collective being that are so central to the literary and theoretical texts in this chapter were made possible by the 'the multitudinous encounters' that occur 'every day and thousands of times over in the streets of the great city'.<sup>316</sup> But, it was these same conditions, of openness and encounter, that allowed the AIDS virus to spread so rapidly and devastatingly through queer communities,

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311 Quoted in, Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 52.

312 Ibid.

313 Ibid.

314 Ibid.

315 Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 14.

316 Elizabeth Wilson, 'The Invisible Flâneur', 78.

particularly in New York. However, it is crucial to explain that by raising this point I am not attempting to argue that queer people are in anyway responsible for the AIDS crisis. As Schulman suggests in *The Gentrification of the Mind*, the ‘huge death rates’ during the epidemic were caused by ‘governmental and familial neglect’, as the US government consistently ignored the crisis and refused to act.<sup>317</sup> More so, I raise this point so as to ask whether it is possible to imagine a city that enables such experiments in queer living but that also resolves the material and epistemic inequalities and that led to the AIDS crisis? In asking such a question I follow the approach of feminist writer Sophie Lewis who similarly uses a question as an expectant, utopian demand when she asks ‘[h]ow can a city be open to strangers and closed to tsunamis?’<sup>318</sup> These questions follow Wilson’s refusal to be satisfied with the contradictions of the city and her call to overcome them through a ‘radically new approach to the city’, where the freedom and autonomy it offers might be maximised and made available to all.<sup>319</sup>

To return to issues of mourning, as Schulman writes, in the ‘years from 1981 to 1996 [...] there was a mass death experience of young people’.<sup>320</sup> The AIDS crisis, Schulman argues, has had an ‘enormous, incalculable influence on our entire cultural mindset’, and there is a ‘parallel silence about this fact’.<sup>321</sup> The death of a generation of queer writers, artists and activists has led to an absence of recognition for their works that ‘tell the truth about heterosexual cruelty, gay political rebellion, sexual desire, and righteous anger’.<sup>322</sup> The loss of this work, and its continued status as illegitimate, has contributed to a gentrification of the mind. For Schulman, the ‘waning of the epicenter of the AIDS crisis’ coincides with ‘the stabilization of gentrification and gentrified thinking’.<sup>323</sup> In terms of immediate political consequences, ‘[t]his is when the radical direct action expression of gay liberation began to be overwhelmed by assimilation—one of the principal

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317 Schulman, *Gentrification of the Mind*, 39

318 Sophie Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now: Feminism against Family* (London; New York: Verso, 2019), [Verso eBook].

319 Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City*, 9

320 Schulman, *Gentrification of the Mind*, 45.

321 Ibid.

322 Ibid., 50

323 Ibid., 49

consequences of AIDS'.<sup>324</sup> For Schulman, the AIDS crisis is central to issues of gentrification and the narrowing of political possibility in the 1980s/90s. It is in this way that AIDS seems to haunt the ending of Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends*, where a radical break from the forces of social control cannot be imagined and is turned away from in favour of assimilation. Schulman increasingly dreams of a utopian transformation of the city: 'cities cannot produce liberating ideas for the future from a place of homogeneity', and a refusal to acknowledge this 'keeps us from being truthful about our inherent responsibilities to each other'.<sup>325</sup> Gentrification's reduction of diverse communities to sameness, far from creating cohesive community, produces inequality (in all its forms) and atomisation, negating the emergence of a multitude. For a radical, utopian vision of the city to emerge 'there has to be a true avant-garde, a large, vibrant community of people willing to think, fuck, love, live, and create oppositionally'.<sup>326</sup> Translated into the terms of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, a spirit of permanent carnival, 'a world inside out' that 'revives and renews', must reign and a grotesque body, that 'is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits', must be embraced.<sup>327</sup> The homogenous communities of gentrification must be dismantled by an eruptive and insurgent multitude: a community that is 'internally different' but 'able to act in common'; 'a *living flesh* that rules itself'.<sup>328</sup> As Hardt and Negri further explain, tying many of these ideas together succinctly, '[t]his is the logic of the multitude that Bakhtin helps us understand: a theory of singularities that converge in the production of the common. Long live the movement! Long live the carnival! Long live the common!'<sup>329</sup>

## Resistance and Activism

Returning to *People in Trouble*, Schulman is not content to portray the AIDS vigil as simply a reflection upon tragedy. The reader is met with the confrontational '[b]ut then what?'<sup>330</sup> A question

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 76

<sup>327</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 11; 26.

<sup>328</sup> Emphasis original, Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 100.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., 211

<sup>330</sup> Schulman, *People in Trouble*, 51.

that seems to expect more and to demand some response to the deaths that have occurred. As Molly leaves the vigil, reflecting on those whom she has lost, she feels ‘enormous anger. These were her dead friends. She saw their faces. Were their lives worth less than the lives of heterosexuals?’<sup>331</sup> It is this anger that, within the novel, drives Molly and eventually Kate, another of the novel’s protagonists, to become part of a fictional AIDS activist organization named Justice, which appears to be loosely based on ACTUP. When the two attend their first Justice meeting, it is being held in the crowded basement of an apartment building. Here we once again get a ‘moment of seeing the whole’, as ‘[a]lmost three hundred people were packed into the windowless space. They lined the walls and crammed together on every available inch’.<sup>332</sup> Expectant emotions—which, in Bloch’s words, hold an ‘anticipatory character’ and ‘imply a real future’—drives the organisation, as ‘everyone [...] in the room’ is described as ‘excited’ and as having a ‘powerful sense of hope’.<sup>333</sup> Within the novel, Justice’s activities and mutual aid include providing medical advice, such as distributing a book titled ‘*Surviving and Thriving with AIDS*’; forging ‘birth certificates and passports’ to allow those without citizenship to apply for Medicaid; and distributing ‘free condoms and clean needles’ to those in prison.<sup>334</sup> However, the most dramatic moments of resistance in the novel come from how Justice, as a network of queer kinship, moves beyond just navigating the city and begins to occupy, re-purpose and re-imagine urban space.

The first of these occupations comes when Ronald Horne’s ‘development company’ begins issuing ‘eviction notices’ to gay tenants and, in a satire of the gentrification process, starts buying up properties with gay residents ‘in the hope that we will drop dead and leave him with empty apartments’.<sup>335</sup> The decision is made to occupy ‘Ronald Horne’s Castle’, an ‘ostentatious and expensive hotel’ that is symbolically ‘right in the middle’ of the city’s ‘redevelopment’.<sup>336</sup> Expectant

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331 Ibid., 54

332 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 52; Schulman, *People in Trouble*, 138.

333 Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 74; 75; Schulman, *People in Trouble*, 139.

334 Ibid., 139; 140; 141

335 Ibid., 142

336 Ibid., 143

emotions again seem to drive this decision: '[n]o one can ever be as angry when it's hopeless as they can be when there's something to be done about it. People work for change when they think there's a chance of getting it'.<sup>337</sup> The activists occupy the 'restaurant and the lobby' of the hotel and events rapidly become carnivalesque, with the protestors 'in varying states of revelry, sharing drinks at the bar, singing show tunes in the piano lounge [...] conversing intensely in the smoking room. And they were all snacking on caviar and smoked oysters'.<sup>338</sup> This focusing on eating, drinking and bodily pleasure once again recalls Bakhtin's notion of carnival and the 'temporary liberation' it provides 'from the established order'.<sup>339</sup> Particularly, it provokes comparison with Bakhtin's understanding of the feast. As Bakhtin writes, the feast 'is always essentially related to time, either [...] to biological or historic timeliness'.<sup>340</sup> Feasts are especially 'linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man. Moments of death and revival, of change and renewal always led to a festive perception of the world'.<sup>341</sup>

In Schulman's novel, AIDS functions as a historical and biological crisis, and this scene of feasting in the Horne Hotel becomes a response to the twin crises of AIDS and gentrification. The anger felt at Horne's eviction notices, coupled with the injustices of AIDS epidemic, fosters a unique activist consciousness, or a 'festive perception of the world'. This focus on bodily pleasure and gratification is highly important, as moments of carnival involve 'bodily participation in the potentiality of another world'.<sup>342</sup> For Bakhtin, the '[c]arnival was a true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed'.<sup>343</sup> From the perspective of the carnivalesque, death is not an ending, or something to be feared, but a prerequisite for new life. As Bakhtin argues, '[t]he world is destroyed so that it may be regenerated and renewed. While dying it gives birth'.<sup>344</sup> Throughout *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin repeatedly

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337 Ibid.

338 Ibid., 148

339 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

340 Ibid., 9

341 Ibid.

342 Ibid., 48.

343 Ibid., 10

344 Ibid., 48.

returns to the image of a ‘pregnant death, a death that gives birth’.<sup>345</sup> In this sense, the activists’ public celebration of bodily pleasure in the face of death rejects silence or closure, instead creating loud, vibrant echoes of another possible world, as the feast opens up a queer and rebellious sense of time. In Schulman’s novel, the activists escape the police who, comically, are afraid to go near them without gloves—referred to euphemistically in text as ‘their rubbers’—and they walk together ‘out the front door, avoid arrest altogether’, leaving in the hotel ‘depleted of roast nuts and Courvoisier VSOP’.<sup>346</sup> A spirit of abundance, festivity and laughter seems to reign, and the space of the Horne Hotel is contested and, for a moment, reshaped along lines of openness and abundance.

The events at the hotel establishes the conditions and tactics of Justice’s activism. As the novel progresses, Justice occupies and contests various other spaces within the city. As Justice grows ‘too large for anybody’s basement’, they reoccupy ‘the abandoned Saint Mark’s bathhouse’, a queer establishment previously ‘closed down by the mayor’.<sup>347</sup> The group grows more heterogeneous as they are joined by ‘Fury, the women-with-AIDS-group’, and membership expands to encompass ‘all kinds’.<sup>348</sup> The vision of the group becomes more explicitly utopian and is described as ‘imagining what they deserve and fighting for it’.<sup>349</sup> This principle is put into practice in another action termed within the novel as ‘credit card day’.<sup>350</sup> During this action, those who are dying of AIDS in hospital apply for credit cards so that the poor and homeless can buy food. Converging on a supermarket, one of the organisers explains to the massed crowd ‘put your bill on these American Express cards. The actual owners of these cards are unable to be with us today, because they are in the hospital’.<sup>351</sup> There is a sense of assembled mass and a flood of anger as the crowd comes ‘bursting through the front doors with [...] fury’.<sup>352</sup> Once more, there is an aspect of feasting to the events as the homeless allow ‘themselves some long-ago-forgotten pleasures like

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345 Ibid., 25.

346 Schulman, *People in Trouble*, 151; 152.

347 Ibid., 187

348 Ibid. 187; 189

349 Ibid., 189

350 Ibid., 231

351 Ibid., 234-235

352 Ibid.

peaches. Or ice cream'.<sup>353</sup> There is a utopian aspect to these events, not only in their carnivalesque embrace of bodily pleasure, but also in their prefiguration of redistributive justice. That the poor and homeless deserve food is imagined and then fought for. The specific use of credit cards belonging to those dying of AIDS also suggests, in Foucault's terms, the emergence of 'new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force' as the queer activists and homeless join together, however temporarily, in recognition of their shared struggle against the forces of gentrification.<sup>354</sup>

## Rage and Assimilation

Towards the end of the novel, visions of utopia begin to break through intermittently in moments of anamorphosis and temporal alterity. In one of the novel's final Justice meetings, Daisy, one of the text's many peripheral characters, gives a speech to the assembled activists:

I dream [...] that by tomorrow [...] Mastercard's stocks will have tumbled so low, they will fall off the charts. [...] By Wednesday, noon, the military-industrial complex will be reduced to rubble. There will be homes for the homeless, food for the hungry, care for the ill, permission for the imagination and no weapons. Then I'll go home, light a joint, open a beer and make love for the rest of my life. How does that sound to you?<sup>355</sup>

While such a vision is not realised within the text, this short passage functions as another example of the utopian tendency in the counterfactual—where 'theoretical alterations or *mutations*' within a text yield glimpses of alternate worlds—and provides another moment 'temporal alterity'.<sup>356</sup> The

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353 Ibid. 235

354 Foucault, 'Friendship', 136.

355 Schulman, *People in the Trouble*, 245-246.

356 Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality*, 110; Edwards, *Utopia and the Contemporary British Novel*, 4.

material struggle for healthcare, housing and food is linked with the cognitive struggle—the need for ‘permission for the imagination’—against the gentrification of the mind. Likewise, Daisy’s desire to ‘make love’ for the rest of her life, the struggle for queer pleasure, is presented as being intimately connected with the preceding, more conventional, demands. The demand for queer pleasure becomes more rebellious in a city that, as in New York in the 1980s/90s, is increasingly trying to surveille and criminalise queer sexual practices. The utopian aspect here stems from the refusal to cede bodily pleasure and the insistence of ‘bodily participation in the potentiality of another world’.<sup>357</sup> The final questioning statement recalls Molly’s ‘[b]ut then what’ from the vigil earlier in the text and carries a similar tone of expectation. In this sense, the line directly confronts and challenges the reader to see beyond the constraints of the present. In the novel, once Daisy has finished speaking there is ‘an explosion of [...] shared joy’, once again indicating that an aspect of utopianism underscores Justice’s activities.<sup>358</sup> It also points towards the possibilities offered by intense collective emotions both to motivate activism and tie together unforeseen lines of force. Writing about Bakhtin, Lynne Segal argues that moments of ‘radical happiness’ are ‘most effective’ when they work to overcome ‘the individuating principles that have become so prominent in modernity’.<sup>359</sup> In this argument moments of radical happiness and shared, or collective, joy are a means of overcoming neoliberal atomisation. Importantly, ‘joy is most often associated with experiences that take us outside of ourselves’ and is an emotion or ‘intense feeling’ that ‘we share with others’.<sup>360</sup> Within *People in Trouble*, this moment of ‘shared joy’ therefore becomes a force that helps the activists of Justice to overcome atomisation and realise their collective power.<sup>361</sup> This demonstrates an interrelation between moments of collectivity and moments of counterfactual, as the process of utopian dreaming within the text draws its characters together and begins to dissolve the boundaries between them.

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357 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 48

358 Schulman, *People in Trouble*, 246.

359 Lynne Segal, *Radical Happiness: Moments of Collective Joy* (New York: Verso Books, 2018), [Verso eBook].

360 Ibid.

361 Schulman, *People in Trouble.*, 246.

Finally, the novel's ending returns to its focus on the contradictions of the city and the concept of queer assimilation. After Daisy has finished speaking, she asks her audience to '[h]old onto that dream' while one of the other Justice organisers reads from a newspaper: '[t]he headline says "AIDS victims riot in city"'.<sup>362</sup> What follows is an incendiary piece about Ronald Horne's plans for 'internment camps for all those infected with the deadly AIDS virus'.<sup>363</sup> This is followed by the commitment that 'any apartments in Horne-owned buildings that might be left vacant due to internment would be immediately be converted to luxury co-ops for intact nuclear families'.<sup>364</sup> It is the 'anger and [...] shared determination' provoked by these statements that leads to the novel's climax.<sup>365</sup>

Justice protest a speech being made by Ronald Horne in front of an old public library that his redevelopment company has turned into a 'new office and condominium complex'.<sup>366</sup> Horne is also stood in front of an art exhibition that Kate has spent a large part of the novel constructing. Justice riot: 'The black T-shirts with pink triangles swarmed over the equipment, smashing it'.<sup>367</sup> Justice's uniform appearance and the use of the term 'swarm' gives the impression of a vast assemblage, the political power of the whole finally realised, sweeping away the assembled media and property developers. As Hardt and Negri describe, when a swarm attacks, if viewed from the outside, it 'appears as [...] a multitude of mindless assailants, unknown, uncertain, unseen, and unexpected'.<sup>368</sup> However, when viewed from within, the swarm 'is indeed organized, rational, and creative. It has swarm intelligence'.<sup>369</sup> Horne retreats until he is alone 'wrapped by' the images of Kate's exhibition.<sup>370</sup> Kate fights her way through the crowd and drags 'cans and powerlines to the base of the collage's wooden frames'.<sup>371</sup> This act starts a fire which kills Horne, and he is consumed

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362 *Ibid.*, 246, 247

363 *Ibid.*, 247

364 *Ibid.*

365 *Ibid.*, 258

366 *Ibid.*, 248

367 *Ibid.*, 260

368 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 91.

369 *Ibid.*

370 Schulman, *People in Trouble*, 260.

371 *Ibid.*, 261

‘in a flaming collage’ while Molly watches ‘the fire from across the street’.<sup>372</sup> If the fire Kate starts is read as a metaphor for queer rage, this rage quickly becomes assimilated by the status quo. As a result of the fire, Kate’s artwork receives increased media attention, with essays devoted to it in ‘*Village Voice*’ and ‘*ArtForm*’.<sup>373</sup> Soon, she gets ‘commissions from a number of Northern European countries to come start fires there’.<sup>374</sup> Therefore, a moment of spontaneous, queer and collective rage, becomes assimilated as an avant-garde art piece and attributable to one, singular author. Meanwhile, the process of gentrification continues as Horne’s assets are ‘purchased by the president of a major chemical company’, the AIDS crisis continues and the novel ends with Molly and Justice continuing to plan more actions and protests.<sup>375</sup>

On one level, this ending can be read as pessimistic, as its utopian glimpses remain unrealised and negated. Despite Justice’s struggles, the crises of AIDS and gentrification continue. However, if Howard Caygill’s philosophy of resistance is recalled from Chapter Two, this ending might also be read through an understanding of resistance that pivots around preserving ‘the capacity to resist’.<sup>376</sup> This ending, where Justice continues to organise despite this attempt at cooption might be understood to reflect Caygill’s assertion that ‘[t]here is never a moment of pure resistance, but always a reciprocal play of resistances that form clusters or sequences of resistance and counter-resistance responding to each other in surrendering or seizing the initiative’.<sup>377</sup> It is this reading that illustrates the nuance of Schulman’s ending, where strategies of resistance, motivated by utopian impulses, are playfully explored and pitched against the powers of hegemony.

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372 Ibid., 263; 265

373 Ibid., 265

374 Ibid.

375 Ibid., 267

376 Caygill, *On Resistance*, 10.

377 Ibid., 5

## Conclusion

This chapter has worked to explore queer approaches to the city. Through analysing a range of different theoretical and literary texts—from the writings of Delany, Foucault and Muñoz to Chandler and Schulman—this chapter has not only uncovered queer perspectives from which the city can be viewed but has sought to locate and construct queer utopian spaces within the city. Crucially, this has helped to develop further the idea of a slantwise perspective and the concept of the periplum. In addition to this, my use of Elisabeth Wilson's work allows for feminist critiques of urban space to be included within this discussion. What emerges from this, is the centrality of the city's contradictions to queer and feminist writings on urban space. Furthermore, I have moved to connect these queer perspectives, through my use of Melissa Scott's work, to the understanding of the city that emerges from postmodern theory—in the work of Edward Soja and Homi Bhabha—and cyberpunk criticism, drawing on the work of Scott Bukatman. Finally, Schulman's work is useful in linking debates around queerness and the city into the theories of resistance I drew from Bakhtin and Caygill in Chapter Two.

This chapter has deliberately moved away from, and decentred, cyberpunk and science fiction, considering other forms of writing. This echoes my aim to present a more rhizomatic reading of cyberpunk, which considers the movement as one point on a wider, interconnected network of literature and theory. This is important because, as the next chapter will demonstrate, such an approach opens up new contexts and perspectives from which cyberpunk can be viewed and approached, moving beyond the conventional contexts—including postmodernism and posthumanism—through which cyberpunk is most often analysed. While a lively body of utopian theory has been addressed in this chapter, Chapter Four will move to more explicitly draw together and synthesise the varied strands of utopian thinking that are woven throughout this thesis. Chapter Four also returns more specifically to cyberpunk, seeking to challenge its conventional status as a dystopian genre.

## Chapter Four: Making Community with the Non-Human

### Introduction

This chapter continues the focus on urban space from Chapter Three, and builds upon that chapter's increasingly explicit turn towards theories of utopia. Where Chapter Three focused on human pleasures and communities within the urban environment, this chapter extends the analysis to examine how feminist cyberpunk imagines and extends community to the non-human. Furthermore, this chapter seeks to examine how certain technologies and forms of urban environment make such communities possible. Through these imaginations, the feminist cyberpunk texts under consideration in this chapter also relate provocatively to a key issue identified in Chapter Two: how are dynamics of difference and individuality reconciled with the desire to imagine a collective body?

Bound up with these issues is another key question: what epistemological and ontological shifts are necessary in order to imagine the human as being in community with the non-human? Or, in other words, what kind of subjective shift is required to imagine the human as being in a collective body with the non-human, and can the human remain intact throughout this process? In response to this question, this chapter draws on several concepts from recent queer ecological theory that pull, stretch and disperse the boundaries of the human: including Melody Jue's idea of 'thinking through seawater', found in *Wild Blue Media* (2020); Julietta Singh's concept of 'dehumanism', from *Unthinking Mastery* (2018); and Astrida Neimanis's imaginings of the 'hydrocommons' in *Bodies of Water* (2017).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Melody Jue, *Wild Blue Media: Thinking Through Seawater* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 1; Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 5; Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 2.

This chapter centres around three texts. The first is Emma Bull's 1991 novel *Bone Dance*, a text which mobilises queer hard-boiled tropes—identified in Raymond Chandler and Sarah Schulman's work in Chapter Three—along with an interest in queer networks of care to embed and transform its protagonist, initially an archetypal cyberpunk loner, into a collective and revolutionary body. Secondly, Amy Thompson's *Virtual Girl* (1993) also grapples with cyberpunk's hard-boiled heritage as it imagines the emergence of solidarities between marginalised people and artificial intelligences, who form a community based around a shared interest in overturning the logics of humanism. I understand humanism here through the work of Braidotti who defines the term as 'as a doctrine that combines the biological, discursive and moral expansion of human capabilities into an idea of teleologically ordained, rational progress'.<sup>2</sup> Humanism, for Braidotti incorporates the teleological myth of western progress and its imperialising logics. Also relevant to my understanding of humanism is Singh's work on human mastery, which is discussed at length in the second part of this chapter. Finally, this chapter closes with an analysis of Anne Harris's 1998 novel *Accidental Creatures*, a text that at its end, in the style of the critical dystopia, signals to the birth of a world beyond human mastery. In this final section, I anticipate the conclusion of this thesis by using Harris's text to draw together strands from each of my preceding chapters, demonstrating how the concepts discussed in this thesis can be woven together to analyse a single text.

As an additional point of comparison alongside *Virtual Girl*, I also examine two scenes from both the film adaptation and the manga of *Ghost in the Shell*, drawing on Jue's work on seawater and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome in the process. Both *Bone Dance* and *Virtual Girl* are tied together through their use of water as a metaphor for community and change. This metaphor trickles and pours between the texts as water becomes a key instrument for imagining the connections between organisms. These cyberpunk novels are also both examples of what Tom Moylan terms critical dystopias, by now a recurring term in this thesis, which describes texts that

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2 Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, 13.

seek to overcome dystopia and suggest a path towards utopia. In these texts specifically, imagining community with the non-human becomes a key method for transforming dystopia. The decision to primarily focus in depth on two texts in this chapter is deliberate, as I draw on Singh's methodology of vulnerable reading. Singh describes this method in watery terms as a process of 'becoming porous to texts in ways that might reshape our subjectivities and our political aspirations'.<sup>3</sup> As an explicitly 'dehumanist methodology', vulnerable reading is a practice of thinking through a text so as to make the reader vulnerable and re-examine their own human subject position. It is a process that seeks to de-construct the narratives that make up the concept of the human. There is an open-ended utopian world building aspect to this process as Singh positions 'vulnerable reading as an open, continuous practice that resists foreclosures by remaining unremittingly susceptible to new world configurations that reading texts—literary, artistic, philosophical, and political—can begin to produce'.<sup>4</sup> Following this practice, in the texts of this chapter I search for narratives and ideas that de-centre the human and imagine different ways of entering into community with the non-human.

## **Part One: The Element that Devours**

### **City Spaces**

This section examines Bull's novel *Bone Dance* to consider in more detail the connections between cyberpunk and hard-boiled crime fiction. By making this connection I argue that while *Bone Dance* does engage with the cynical, paranoid and dark prose style of hard-boiled narrative, it also mobilises the queer rewritability of hard-boiled detective fiction. As I outlined in Chapter Three, through my readings of Chandler and Schulman, within the hard-boiled mode can be read practices of queer friendship, urban pleasure and radical unhappiness. As a text, *Bone Dance* is hard to pin down generically, incorporating elements of hard-boiled, fantasy and science fiction. However,

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<sup>3</sup> Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 63.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 22

Carlen Lavigne places *Bone Dance* firmly within the feminist cyberpunk canon, contextualising its interest in music subculture alongside Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991) and Laura Mixon's *Proxies* (1998).<sup>5</sup> And, Lavigne analyses the text's engagement with cyborgs, gender and queer experience alongside Marge Piercy's *He She and It* (1991) and Thompson's *Virtual Girl*.<sup>6</sup> Throughout *Bone Dance*, Bull makes reference to the syncretic religious practices of the African diaspora, recalling Gibson's interest in the loas of Haitain Vodou in *Count Zero* (1986) and prefiguring Nalo Hopkinson's more substantive treatment of these practices in *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998). By examining Bull's genre blurring, alongside its construction of queer community, I aim to demonstrate that *Bone Dance* is a novel that attempts in its use of language and form to push the limits of imaginable (post)human community. Additionally, Bull's attempt to think through the practices of hoodoo, although not always successful, demonstrates a commitment to counter-hegemonic perspectives and constitutes a substantial engagement in the process through which a multiplicity of voice can emerge within a text, or textual heteroglossia.<sup>7</sup>

*Bone Dance* is set in a future city (likely Minneapolis), many years after both climate change and nuclear apocalypse—started by a group of rogue, genetically modified, psychic CIA agents—have led to the destruction of the USA as a political entity.<sup>8</sup> In the vacuum of America's ruins, the city appears to be a hotbed of competing ideologies, as communal-anarchic, libertarian and authoritarian visions for the city exist in uneasy tension. On the surface, overt political power within the city resides in the hands of the businessman Albrecht who holds an energy monopoly over the city. As, Theo, one of the novel's central characters, explains: '[w]e generate electricity by the grace of God and A. A. Albrecht'; '[t]he city controllers license the hardware, sell the fuel, own twenty-five percent of the metered output and tax the rest, no matter how you make it'.<sup>9</sup> Albrecht

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5 Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women*, 46

6 Ibid., 152-153

7 The term hoodoo refers to a series of African-American spiritual practices originating in the southern USA.

8 The setting of Minneapolis is never explicitly confirmed, but the city is alluded to as being built around a river, reliant on hydropower, and not far from the Canadian border. And, Minneapolis is the setting of Bull's previous novel *War for the Oaks* (1987).

9 Emma Bull, *Bone Dance: A Fantasy for Technophiles* (New York, NY: Tom Doherty Associates Books, 2009), 94.

represents much of the old world's system of monopoly capitalism, both materially and epistemologically. Living in 'the tallest building in the City [...] surrounded by wealth and power', he controls the flow of energy into the city.<sup>10</sup> Gazing down from above, Albrecht imitates both the appeal to divine authority and the panoptic vision of previous stages of capitalism. Albrecht's position might also be contextualised, in de Certeau's terms, as that of the voyer, 'lifted up out of the city's grasp' as 'his elevation transfigures him' into pure vision.<sup>11</sup> He commands and controls the city through his energy monopoly and system of percentages, but remains at a distance from the complexities of city life.

Below Albrecht's tower, or, to cite de Certeau again, on the streets 'below the threshold at which visibility begins', alternative visions for organising the city begin to emerge.<sup>12</sup> The first alternative the reader is introduced to is the Night Fair, a familiar world of cyberpunk back streets reminiscent of Chiba City in Gibson's *Neuromancer*. It is first described in the novel in these terms:

The beauty of the Night Fair was that no matter how one defined happiness at a given moment, it was usually available there. The price was negotiable, within limits. [...] Here there were no Gods but the Deal, no spooks but those who could be conjured for money at the buyer's request.<sup>13</sup>

Fairgrounds are not unfamiliar spaces in feminist cyberpunk, and this passage invites comparison with the Actor's Carnival in Young's *Cinderblock* (1997) and the coast resort town of Seahaven in Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994). The Night Fair prefigures both of them, being a space of pleasure. But, while the Actor's Carnival functions as a focal point of carnivalesque resistance in *Cinderblock*, and as a space of possible queer community in *Trouble and Her Friends*, the Night

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10 Ibid., 14

11 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92.

12 Ibid., 93

13 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 45

Fair in *Bone Dance* is ruthlessly libertarian in character. It is ruled by ‘the Deal’, its capitalisation suggesting an informal but codified set of rules fetishising market capitalism. It is a space dedicated to happiness, but the spectrum of human pleasure becomes quantified and commodified. The Night Fair is closer to the Stockwell Building from Chandler’s *The Long Goodbye*, a semi illicit commercial space that nevertheless performs an essential service for city residents by fulfilling hidden desires. As analysed more closely in Chapter Three, the Stockwell Building houses everything from ‘lawyers’, ‘dentists’ and ‘Christian Science practitioners’ who provide a ‘protective coloring’ to the ‘abortionists’ and ‘dope pushers’ who pose as medical professionals.<sup>14</sup> With clients that ‘look like anybody else’, the building provides services that are illegal, but that are nonetheless essential for a range of city inhabitants.<sup>15</sup>

Bull’s Night Fair performs a similar function. As Sparrow, the protagonist of *Bone Dance*, observes, ‘[t]hat’s why the Night Fair endured: because we never stop needing something to make us happy’.<sup>16</sup> Like Chandler’s Stockwell Building, the Night Fair has developed hidden and coded forms of what Bakhtin terms ‘marketplace speech and gesture’ (as analysed in Chapter Three).<sup>17</sup> For instance, it is directly contrasted against the easy circulation of the shopping mall; there is ‘no directory, no skyway map, no Guide to Retailers’.<sup>18</sup> Instead it is a space that must be navigated by the impulse of desire, and ‘[i]f one wanted something [...] one had to want it enough to go looking’.<sup>19</sup> The Night Fair’s resistance to being mapped and its distinct refusal to be easily intelligible provides a distinct contrast with Albrecht’s world and his elevated position of control. This unmappable aspect, along with its focus on happiness and desire, means that the Night Fair can be read as a heterotopia, in that it is a space where ‘all the real arrangements [...] that can be found

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14 Chandler, *The Big Sleep and Other Novels*, 465-466.

15 Ibid., 466

16 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 45.

17 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 10.

18 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 46; The Night Fair can also be contextualised within postmodernism and Jameson’s famous analysis of the Bonaventure Hotel, an unmappable space where the ‘entryways of the Bonaventure are, as it were, lateral and rather backdoor affairs’, see: Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 39.

19 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 46.

within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned'.<sup>20</sup> In the Night Fair, '[f]or less easily granted wishes' a person has to 'look to the buildings', suggesting that, like a heterotopia, it has 'potentiality beyond its surface'.<sup>21</sup> However, it is not quite the point at which utopia appears in the text, as it still remains deeply imbricated in the oppressive logics of capitalism. The Night Fair is subordinate to 'the Deal' as everything is 'negotiable' and reducible to a monetary value.

If the Night Fair is resistant to being mapped, this also gives an indication of why the city in *Bone Dance* is never explicitly named by Bull. The reader is not supposed to track the movement of the narrative on a map, but must rely on the subjective experiences Bull provides through the novel's protagonist as they walk through, and make sense of, the spaces and futures depicted. Sparrow is a queer figure, and half way through the novel it is revealed that they are an artificial, lab grown being without gender created by the US military.<sup>22</sup> Fascinated by the visual and audio culture of the pre-apocalypse world, they make a living by finding and selling videotapes of old Hollywood films to Albrecht. The novel opens with one such negotiation, initially indicating that Sparrow is a figure on the boundary between Albrecht's authoritarian world and the libertarian market of the Night Fair. Sparrow has privileged access to Albrecht and his office, with its 'odor of wealth'.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, the films they sell are a key lens through which they interpret the world around them and their position in it. To demonstrate, at the opening of the novel, after negotiating the sale of a tape of '*Singin' in the Rain*' to Albrecht, Sparrow reflects on the transaction: 'I'd kept my mind on the Deal, and it had gone as I'd meant it to. I might have sounded a little like Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*, but there worse roles'.<sup>24</sup> On the surface, the reference to

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20 Foucault 'Of Other Spaces', 332.

21 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 46; Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', 332.

22 In her book on feminist cyberpunk feminism, identifying Sparrow as an 'androgynous character', Lavigne uses the pronouns 'zie/zir' to refer to Sparrow. But, Bull is quite evasive about pronouns and the use of these specific terms to refer to Sparrow is an intervention of Lavigne's. Instead, I use the more neutral they/them, to better capture the deliberate ambiguity of Bull's prose. See: Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women*, 61.

23 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 11.

24 *Ibid.*, 16.

the capitalised Deal, indicates Sparrow's association with the world of the Night Fair. And, it suggests they share that space's commodified approach to human relations and experience.

Sparrow's reference to, and identification with, Humphrey Bogart is notable. References to Bogart can be found in several feminist cyberpunk texts. In particular, in the following examples Bogart is evoked during moments of queer performance. Bogart is a key marker of subjectivity and performative gender in Thompson's *Virtual Girl* (as will be outlined more fully in the second part of this chapter). And, in Raphael Carter's *The Fortunate Fall* (1996) the novel's protagonist Maya, a repressed lesbian, performs an impression of Bogart during a flirtatious conversation with another woman. Quoting one of Bogart's lines in *The Maltese Falcon*, 'I dropped my voice half an octave and drawled: "All we've got is that maybe you love me and maybe I love you..." [...] "Not bad", she said. "Best Bogart I've heard in a long time."<sup>25</sup> Impersonating Bogart's voice and masculinity, Maya's impression allows her to express desire for the woman she is speaking to, while plausibly hiding behind the performance of reciting the line. This plausible deniability is crucial, as *The Fortunate Fall* depicts a world where homosexuality is outlawed. References to Bogart persist across these cyberpunk texts, and he is consistently invoked in relation to gender transgression or queer sexuality.

Why is Bogart a touchstone in *Bone Dance*, *Virtual Girl* and *The Fortunate Fall*? Bogart's on-screen persona is intimately connected with noir, and the visual representation of the hard-boiled detective. In *The Maltese Falcon* Bogart plays Sam Spade, a private investigator, and he portrays Philip Marlowe in the 1946 film adaptation of Chandler's novel *The Big Sleep*. Interestingly, Richard Dyer identifies a queer undertone in film noir, particularly around Bogart. Describing Bogart as 'the noir protagonist *par excellence*', Dyer argues that Bogart 'seems unfazed in his encounters with queers, including his own attachment to Johnny in *Dead Reckoning* [1947] and

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25 Raphael Carter, *The Fortunate Fall*, (New York, NY: Tor, 1996), 24.

even to Sean in *The Big Sleep*'.<sup>26</sup> This would imply that Dyer identifies an element of homosociality in Bogart's on-screen persona and his 'unfazed' encounters with queer coded men. As Dyer continues, queerness seems to be an essential ingredient in the pleasures of film noir:

perhaps the secret of film noir as entertainment is that, even as it presents the audience with the discomfort of a queerly uncertain world, it also offers the reassurance of a hero who takes it all in his stride, maybe a little cynical, maybe a little crumpled, but not really, as it were, put out.<sup>27</sup>

While film noir, even with such 'epistemological disturbances', can never quite 'dislodge straight masculinity from the centre of knowing', feminist cyberpunk is not beholden to such constraints.<sup>28</sup> The references in feminist cyberpunk to Bogart seem to indicate that there is a strain of the genre that draws upon the queer rewritability of the detective. Therefore, Bogart here becomes a motif for the detective as subversive of gender and sexual norms.

As mentioned above, Bull initially identifies Sparrow with the libertarian cyberpunk back streets of the Night Fair. As Sparrow notes when entering the Fair, 'I was in my own country again'.<sup>29</sup> They are first presented to the reader as an archetypal cyberpunk loner, and individualism to them is common sense. When reflecting on the idea that the fates of others might be interlinked, or 'bound', with theirs, Sparrow comments sarcastically 'I wasn't bound. That would have been flying in the face of good sense, and I tried not to do that'.<sup>30</sup> They are intoxicated by the market and '[m]oney, bright and folding, [...] running in its well-worn channels'.<sup>31</sup> The Deal is their ideology and religion: in the Night Fair, 'before me was the familiar exercise of my faith, the Deal'.<sup>32</sup> The

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26 Richard Dyer, 'Queer Noir', in *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader*, ed. by Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), pp. 89-104, 102

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 46.

30 Ibid., 48.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

code of the market is like scripture to them, as they repeat to themselves the mantra ‘Nothing Is Free’, with characteristic capitalisation.<sup>33</sup>

But, as Chapter Three has indicated, the queer detective is rarely convincingly cynical and often, deliberately or not, ends up disrupting and destabilising the space around them. Bull seems aware of this, and the overarching narrative arc of her novel displays an anarchist sympathy, concerned with overcoming and eroding these market values. The novel’s plot sees Sparrow’s existence ever more bound up with others, and they become increasingly invested in re-imagining the city. Even in the novel’s early pages, evidence of stranger, more collective forms of living can be read into the gaps of the text, as the next quotation will demonstrate. Bull maps these futures using a prose style might be compared with Delany’s concept of *periplum*—a term I introduced in Chapter Three—as Sparrow becomes the participant in motion through which the reader encounters a variety of alternative spaces. In one passage, Sparrow visits Sherrea, one of their acquaintances and a fortune teller, at her apartment building. The building’s architecture raises a series of unanswered questions that rhetorically illustrate such strange futures:

It was built in the last century, when prosperity must have excused ugliness. The halls had once been blank and identical, the stairwells featureless tubes of concrete block and iron stair rail. Now living ivy worked its way toward the sky at the top of the stairs, where someone had turned a trapdoor into an open skylight; wisteria cascaded down to meet it from the roof. Things peered from the leaves: grotesque carved wooden faces, old photographs of people [...] faded postcards.<sup>34</sup>

A series of provocative contrasts are established in this passage, which might be read as ‘moments of temporal alterity’, indicating that ‘alternative social worlds [are] already alive in the present’.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 34

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, *Utopia and the Contemporary British Novel*, 4.

Firstly, in contrast to the individualism of the Night Fair, someone has laboured to construct a community space. Exactly who has taken the time to open the skylight, and to nurture the ivy, is unclear. But, their absence suggests other modes of life and living just outside of Sparrow's vision. Likewise, a strong contrast with the pre-apocalypse world is established, suggesting that space is being actively re-imagined. Where there was once 'featureless [...] concrete block and iron stair' there is now 'living ivy'. The 'trapdoor' becomes a 'skylight' and elsewhere a 'painted snake twined up the stair rail', indicating that someone is reinterpreting the city's space as living, breathing and mutating, rather than as static.<sup>36</sup> While it is possible the invisible labour here hides a form of exploitation, the ivy encapsulates something of Bull's wider narrative arc, as is discussed more in the next section, which is concerned with breaking from past systems of knowledge and growing different forms of collective community. In addition, the 'grotesque carved wooden faces', 'painted snakes' and 'painted [...] frescoes' suggest forms of experimentation and abundance. Therefore, the ivy seems to literally represent a different way of life growing from the cracks and ruins of the past.

Alternatively, this descriptive passage can also be read through Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World*. Bull's description of grotesque carved faces, that almost seem to grow out of the ivy itself, provokes comparison with Bakhtin's analysis of Roman grotesque ornaments:

What is the character of these ornaments? They impressed the connoisseurs by the extremely fanciful, free, and playful treatment of plant, animal, and human forms. These forms seemed to be interwoven as if giving birth to each other. The borderlines that divide the kingdoms of nature in the usual picture of the world were boldly infringed. Neither was there the usual static presentation of reality. There was no longer the movement of finished forms, vegetable or animal, in a finished and stable world; instead the inner movement of being itself was expressed in the passing of one form into the other, in the ever incompleting [sic] character of being.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Bull, *Bone Dance*, 34.

<sup>37</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 32.

This passage helps to illuminate Bull's work in several ways. Firstly, the 'playful treatment of plant, animal, and human forms' can be observed, as ivy, wisteria, carved faces, old photographs and painted snakes grow into and out of one another. Therefore, when Bull depicts the relationship between the ivy and the building as 'interwoven', the growth of the ivy is interlinked with alternative social relations—where human and plant life intertwines in a community of mutual growth—and these two elements give birth to each other. In this intermingling growth the 'borderlines that divide the kingdoms of nature' are 'boldly infringed'. Neither is the movement here 'static', 'finished' or 'stable', the wisteria actively cascades to meet the ivy that is working its way towards the sky. There is a 'passing of one form into the other' as the products of natural and human processes grow into each other, destabilising both. The blurring here of past and present, human and nature, points towards an 'incompleted character of being'. That Bull's vision of the future grows from the ruins of 'the last century' is also significant. As Bakhtin writes, 'the grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming'.<sup>38</sup> And, in the 'system of grotesque imagery death and renewal are inseparable'.<sup>39</sup> This helps to understand the utopian impulse within Bull's prose, as the destruction of the world allows for new modes of life to emerge. Bull's outlook can be read as prefiguring a more contemporary strain of feminist ecological criticism. In her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World* (2015), Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing argues that there is value in studying the forms of inter-species community that emerge in the wake of human devastation. Tsing observes that, even in 'landscapes burned by humans', symbiotic forms of life and new worlds emerge as 'pines and fungi work together to take advantage of bright open spaces and exposed mineral soils'.<sup>40</sup> In this manner, '[h]umans, pines, and fungi make living arrangements simultaneously for themselves and for others:

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38 Ibid., 24

39 Ibid., 50

40 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 22.

multispecies worlds'.<sup>41</sup> This focus upon the destabilisation of the human and natural world—and focus on interwoven and simultaneous living arrangements between humans and plants—begins to gesture towards a decentring of the human from a position of mastery over nature. Moreover, the reading developed here, of interwoven human and environmental processes giving birth to each other, prefigures the feminist ecological writings on dehumanism and hydrocommons that are explored later within this chapter.

### **Wires Dipped in Water**

As Bull's narrative progresses, Sparrow becomes progressively more dissatisfied with the philosophy of the Deal and the world of the Night Fair and becomes increasingly interconnected with others. From the first quarter of the novel it is made clear that, despite their faith in the Deal, Sparrow feels an unspecified sense of loneliness and longing. They feel disconnected, considering everyone to be '[b]orn in our skulls; living alone there; dying alone'.<sup>42</sup> And yet, they long for connection with others: 'For a moment I'd wanted, desperately, not to be alone, the way people in hiding for too long will dash in front of the guns, just to end the waiting'.<sup>43</sup> On the surface, they blame themselves for their loneliness, having kept the secret of their cyborg origins to themselves for so long that it has become 'toxic to the organism'.<sup>44</sup> But, the space of the Night Fair itself reinforces this isolation. Additionally, on the same page, Sparrow muses:

I walked through the Night Fair: shrill and brittle and tawdry, a savorless night with anger lying just under its curling edges. A while ago this had been my country, and I'd returned to it relieved and

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41 Ibid.

42 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 55

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

glad. Now it was as welcoming as a carnival midway. Give us your money and get out. [...]

Hucksters called from their booths as if everyone's first name was Hey.<sup>45</sup>

In this passage, Bull uses a cynical hard-boiled tone, reminiscent of the mode by which Chandler's Marlowe and Schulman's unnamed protagonist lament and define themselves in opposition to a wider, unfeeling society. There is a sense of resentment and tension in the air, as anger lies barely concealed at the edges of the Fair. Sparrow's description, in first person narration, of the fair as 'shrill', 'tawdry' and 'savorless' all give the impression of their senses turning sour and becoming over-saturated. This contradicts the earlier assertion that any form of happiness can be found in the Night Fair as Sparrow's desire for connection remains unfulfilled. Sparrow feels estranged from what was once their country as they brush against the Fair's materialistic aspects. 'Give us your money or get out' both emphasises the Night Fair's libertarian character and also demonstrates how little right or agency Sparrow has to shape the space around them. There is an abundance of potential pleasure, but under the logics of commodification it is unsatisfying. Likewise, the space now feels cold and impersonal, somewhat atomised, as few of its inhabitants or patrons know each other's first names. This is also compounded by the Night Fair's transient nature, and its comparison to a 'carnival midway' gives the space a nomadic and rootless quality.

Around halfway through the text, the secret that isolates Sparrow from others spills out. To contextualise this moment, it is helpful to summarise some of the plot's more convoluted details: a series of encounters in the Night Fair leads to the revelation that not all of the psychic CIA agents, referred to as horsemen, who destroyed the world are dead. Sparrow is mistaken for a horseman by Frances, herself another of these immortal ex-CIA agents. Frances shows some remorse at her previous life and is hunting Tom Worecki, the horseman responsible for initiating the nuclear war. These horsemen have the ability to slip into and out of other people's bodies at will. Mick, another

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45 Ibid.

of the surviving horsemen, tries to protect Sparrow from Frances, both physically and by intermittently taking control of their body. Eventually, the three find themselves in an uneasy stand off in Sparrow's apartment, and the secret of their origins is revealed.

This scene is particularly interesting in its depiction of Sparrow's birth, the very act of remembering this coming to being seems to shake loose possibilities for the future. During this scene it is revealed that Sparrow is a '*cheval*', or, as Frances explains, '[a] mindless, soulless, sexless shell, genderless as a baby doll'.<sup>46</sup> Designed as the perfect host for a horsemen, they have no consciousness of their own: '[t]he chevaux were empty, no personality, no mind. Just a carcass'.<sup>47</sup> Mick and France continue to question whether Sparrow is Tom or another horseman 'but messed up, so he doesn't remember'.<sup>48</sup> To defend himself as a conscious independent being, Sparrow narrates the story of their origins. This act of remembering functions in the text as a second experience of birth. As Sparrow comments at the start, 'I'd never told it to anyone [...] I'd mostly forgotten it myself', implying that this is the first time they are recalling these events to conscious memory.<sup>49</sup> In a flooded underground bunker in Louisiana, their first moments of awareness are womb-like with Sparrow recognising sound before vision, becoming aware of the 'hiss and bubble' of 'running water'.<sup>50</sup> Their coming to consciousness is an accident, as they find themselves 'surrounded' by 'eight' other 'metal boxes' which each contain a 'corpse', presumably other identical chevaux.<sup>51</sup> Continuing the metaphor of birth, Sparrow awakes with 'an instinct toward terror', and they begin to 'scream' with 'dread' at the thought of 'being just like the eight dead things in the room'.<sup>52</sup> Sparrow struggles in the 'three feet' of water covering the floor' and then comes to a 'sudden clear knowledge, like another instinct, of electrocution and the conductivity of water'.<sup>53</sup> This curious turn of phrase reinforces the accidental nature of Sparrow's birth, implying

46 Emphasis original, *cheval* is a French word meaning horse; *Ibid.*, 118

47 *Ibid.*, 120

48 *Ibid.*, 118

49 *Ibid.*, 127

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*

that their independent consciousness is akin to dipping wires in water.<sup>54</sup> Sparrow staggers ‘clumsily through the flood’ and, finding that they know ‘how to swim’, makes their way out of the bunker to emerge in ‘the water of Lake Pontchartrain’.<sup>55</sup> These images of water, flooding and struggle all create the impression of being birthed from the womb.

Here, I would place Bull’s narrative of Sparrow’s birth into dialogue with Sophie Lewis’s concept of amniotechnics. If read through this framework, Sparrow’s strange birth can be read as affirming their humanity and being, rather than estranging them from it. As Lewis writes, ‘[t]o my knowledge, all humans in history have been manufactured underwater, in amniotic fluid’.<sup>56</sup> Amniotic metaphors have long been present in science fiction, as Lewis suggests ‘[f]ilm makers and fiction writers have always implied you need a tank. Dr. Frankenstein’s adult baby—and knock-off versions of him- is animated in a bath of electric brine’.<sup>57</sup> Sparrow is similarly animated by electric brine as the knowledge of water’s conductivity spurs them to life. At one point, Sparrow likens their birth to a process of being ‘risen like a horror-movie menace’, suggesting that Bull is actively drawing on such Frankensteinesque imagery.<sup>58</sup> Provocatively, Lewis suggests that there can be ‘a cyborg conception of water—water as social and presocial, water as companion technology, water as both medium and message’.<sup>59</sup> She elaborates on this concept by quoting from the hydrofeminist Astrida Neimanis: “‘if we are all watery, then we all harbor the potential of watery gestationality” because “gestationality need not take the form of a reprosexual womb: we may be gestational as lover, as neighbor, as accidental stranger.””<sup>60</sup> In this argument, water is not essentialised but thought through as a kind of ‘companion technology’.<sup>61</sup> Watery amniotics become a metaphor for imaging

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54 In this context, I have borrowed the phrase ‘wires dipped in water’ from my work with the Beyond Gender research collective and our collaborative reading of Anne Harris’s novel *Accidental Creatures* (1998), see: Beyond Gender Collective, ‘Wires Dipped in Water: The Medium, The Tank, and the Queer Potential of Feminist Science Fiction’, in *Technologies of Feminist Speculative Fiction*, ed. by Sherryl Vint and Sumeyra Buran (Palgrave, forthcoming 2021).

55 Lake Pontchartrain is in New Orleans; *Ibid.*, 127, 128

56 Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*.

57 *Ibid.*

58 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 132.

59 Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*.

60 *Ibid.*

61 *Ibid.*

relations with others, human or not. Neimanis views humans as ‘*human* bodies of water’ and this mode of thought allows us to ‘account for our differences while demanding our interconnection’.<sup>62</sup> Crucially, this argument imagines a collective body, but not one in which all difference is resolved or homogenised. Instead, it ‘embrace[s] the multifaceted ways in which we relate to, rely on and reciprocally affect bodies of water’.<sup>63</sup> However, Neimanis does acknowledge that imagining the self as an interconnected body of water necessitates a ‘partial dissolution of our own sovereign subjectivity’.<sup>64</sup> To return to *Bone Dance*, by retelling their birth as a watery, amniotic and technological process, Bull constructs Sparrow as one such body of water that can enter into community with others. Broadly, the retelling functions as one moment of rebirth within a text engaged with the a utopian process of change and renewal, as is discussed more thoroughly in the next section on critical dystopia.

More immediately, after this retelling, Sparrow begins to shift within the text, from individualistic outsider to a figure able to understand their necessary interrelation with others. For instance, once the retelling has finished, the antagonism between Sparrow and Frances begins to dissolve. Frances seems unfazed by Sparrow’s story and simply leans ‘her head back and smiles’ before making a joke.<sup>65</sup> Sparrow finds ‘Frances’s response oddly comforting. Just another bizarre, life threatening adventure. How many of them had she had? I went to pour hot water into the teapot’.<sup>66</sup> On the surface, it would appear that it is their shared bizarre origins that connects them, both are cyborg-like entities created by the military. However, as Haraway suggests, cyborgs ‘are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers are, after all, inessential’.<sup>67</sup> Under the context of water, it is the ‘hot water’ that Sparrow pours into the teapot that connects them. Despite their artificial creations, they still have a shared need for water. This seems to be affirmed, as

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62 Astrida Neimanis, ‘Bodies of Water, Human Rights and the Hydrocommons’, *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, 21 (2009), pp. 161-182, 166.

63 *Ibid.*, 169

64 Qtd in Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*.

65 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 128.

66 *Ibid.*

67 Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’, 151.

Frances ‘worked on her tea as if that were all she could concentrate on, and maybe it was’.<sup>68</sup> The water becomes a metaphor for their common vulnerability which transforms the relationship between them in text from one of antagonism to begrudging coexistence. From this point forward, the narrative of the novel begins to shift. Sparrow ceases to wander the Night Fair, and Bull brings themes of interconnection, community and change to the forefront of the text.

## Critical Dystopia

Tom Moylan’s analysis of the critical dystopia forms another framework through which *Bone Dance* can be read. As briefly discussed in Chapter Two, Moylan elaborates on this concept in his 2000 book *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*. The term critical dystopia is used to describe dystopian texts that do not capitulate to the status quo, or simply to warn of future catastrophe, but explore ‘the oppositional spaces from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration’.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, they are texts that seek to chart a path out of dystopia and towards a ‘utopian horizon’ either by threatening ‘to transform the entire order’ or by depicting a ‘resistant enclave, a liberated zone,’ within an otherwise ‘hegemonic system’.<sup>70</sup> As Moylan writes, critical dystopias ‘adopt a militant stance that is informed and empowered by a utopian horizon that appears in the text—or at least shimmers just beyond its pages’.<sup>71</sup> Moylan acknowledges that too often cyberpunk capitulated to the logics of 1980s neoliberalism, opting ‘for existence within the terms of that problem rather than blasting through it’.<sup>72</sup> For example, in Moylan’s view, in *Neuromancer*, Gibson presented ‘a narrative that collapsed into the logic of the very system he set out to expose’.<sup>73</sup> Yet, Moylan identifies a more politically confrontational turn in cyberpunk in the

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68 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 128.

69 Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, xv

70 Ibid., xiii

71 Ibid., 196

72 Ibid., 197

73 Ibid.

late '1980s and 1990s, when a number of women took up textual cybertactics'.<sup>74</sup> Moylan notes that work of Emma Bull, Sherri Lewitt and Laura Mixon connected 'the cyberimagination with a cultural imaginary and a political narrative that was more sensitive to diversity and more engaged with direct, collective challenges, to the system than the earlier works'.<sup>75</sup> While Moylan does closely read three 1990s feminist science fiction texts—Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991) and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of Talents* (1998)—as critical dystopias, Bull's *Bone Dance* is not mentioned beyond a brief reference. This section expands upon these references to more fully analyse *Bone Dance* through the framework of the critical dystopia. First, I look at the system of thought and ideology underpinning the resistance movement that eventually overthrows Albrecht. And, secondly, I analyse the utopian horizon, the glimpse of a better world, that appears in the novel's final pages, by reflecting on the alternative system of social relations found at the end of the text.

As the novel progresses, Sparrow, Frances and Mick arrive at a strange house, on a magical island, that is being used by members of an underground resistance to plot the overthrow of Albrecht. Shortly after this point, Tom Worecki is revealed to be the real power in the city, controlling Albrecht from behind the scenes. This 'three-story, sprawling, wood-frame Victorian house' is reminiscent of the Tessier-Ashpool's orbital mansion in Gibson's *Neuromancer*, a complex labyrinth of impossible architecture.<sup>76</sup> Despite the sprawling 'additional rooms and entire wings', instead of being 'awful' it has a 'kind of rhythm' creating a maze-like structure.<sup>77</sup> The interior décor is just as chaotic, full of conflicting objects, the entranceway alone including 'a frieze [...] of Egyptian kings and queens', 'benches that looked middle eastern', 'African cloth', a 'Chinese rug', 'stone carvings that might have been Mayan' and a 'reed bowl' of 'Native North American' origin.<sup>78</sup>

74 Ibid., 198

75 Ibid.

76 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 147; Bull's acknowledgements at the front of *Bone Dance* imply that this building is based on the Winchester Mansion, or Winchester Mystery House, in San Jose, California. Built for Sarah Winchester, the widow of an American firearms dealer, the house is an architectural maze of staircases that go nowhere and doors that open onto walls. It is also reportedly haunted by ghosts.

77 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 147

78 Ibid., 148

A critical reading of this description might argue that it produces a flattening affect typical of postmodernism: a range of historical and cultural styles are appropriated until they lose all specificity or meaning. Jameson argues that one of the most distinguishing features of postmodernism ‘is the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense’.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, postmodern forms often incorporate the “‘raw material” of history’ while ‘leaving its function out’ in ‘a kind of flattening appropriation’.<sup>80</sup> If we read Bull’s passage through this mode, the individual objects become a flattened surface, only aesthetic, and devoid of meaning.

However, I would venture instead that Bull uses this technique with clear, anti-hegemonic purpose, rather than as ‘flattening appropriation’. To explain, it is important to note that all of the objects listed here originate from outside of the West, and represent non-Western traditions of art and architecture. Exactly how all of these objects have ended up in this house is not explained. And, this could certainly indicate an unspoken, continuing colonial legacy of violence behind their acquisition. Yet, in light of the nuclear apocalypse this world has experienced, this collection of heterogeneous objects implies that the inhabitants of this house are searching the past for cultural and social forms that might provide an alternative to military-industrial capitalist hegemony that has damaged the world. Further hints of this emerge when Sparrow inspects a series of bookcases and notes the authors and titles. Texts of literature, science and the occult are mixed in together without apparent order. The literary classics of Mark Twain and Shakespeare mix with Gene Wolfe and Alice Walker; evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould and mathematician Martin Gardner sit alongside the folklore of ‘Grieve’s herbal’ and Zora Neale.<sup>81</sup> The intermixing of high and low arts here, particularly the technique of listing contrasting objects and texts, prefigures the carnivalesque transgressions and resistances of Sullivan and Bornstein’s *Nearly Roadkill* (1996) and Young’s *Cinderblock* (1997), as analysed in Chapter Two. It also suggests that the occupants of the house

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<sup>79</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 9.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 325

<sup>81</sup> Bull, *Bone Dance.*, 153

wish to construct a counter-hegemonic epistemology through these diverse texts. More specifically, to recall Stallybrass and White, the jumbling together of scientific, literary and folk texts—both popular and classical—function in ‘a generalised economy of transgression and of the recoding of high/low relations across the whole social structure’.<sup>82</sup> In this case, within the post-apocalyptic world of *Bone Dance*, knowledge itself has been fractured and destabilised. And, the bookshelf symbolises a piecing together of old knowledge into new forms and structures, without regard to old boundaries and orthodoxies.

It should not be ignored that Bull’s incorporation of these diverse cultural styles into the text can be criticised as a form of cultural appropriation, but the text conveys a sympathy with the marginalised and the attempt to think in ways that run counter to hegemony appears genuine. These sympathies are evidenced further in a conversation between Sparrow, Frances and the house’s owner, and resistance figure, China Black. Here, China Black explains her attitude towards ‘*loa*’, or ‘spirits’.<sup>83</sup> The *loa* ‘are not gods, though they’re like them [...] we don’t pray to them any more than you would pray to your grandmother. We live with them. They are part of the family’.<sup>84</sup> This practice of living with the *loa* is directly contrasted with the voyeuristic gaze of those who live in the towers. Most ‘people of the City—of the streets—know them. The *loa*, the saints, the spirits, the ancestors’.<sup>85</sup> But, [t]he people in the towers don’t think about the spirits. They don’t know how the world is shaped’.<sup>86</sup> This disconnection from the *loa* and, by extension, life on the streets below has led those in the tower to become confined within a narrow field of binary and dualistic thinking:

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82 Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 19.

83 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 157; *Loa*, sometimes also spelled *lwa*, is a Haitian term which refers to the principal spirits of vodou. *Loa* sometimes conflated as deities, but are perhaps better characterised as akin to Catholic saints, acting as a go-between God and the mortal realm, occasionally interceding on behalf of mortals. They appear in Black Haitian and Louisianan religious traditions, and originated as a syncretic mix of Catholic and West African religious practice. References to the *Loa* appear in Gibson’s *Count Zero* (1986) and Vodou practices also figure strongly in Nalo Hopkinson’s cyberpunk novel *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998). Vodou should not be conflated with, but is an influence on, hoodoo another spiritual tradition of the US south, similar to a kind of folk magic or rootwork. *Bone Dance* mainly draws upon hoodoo traditions, but Bull at times seems to confuse the two practices. This is likely due to the widespread stigma and misinformation surrounding them. See: Jeffrey E. Anderson, *Hoodoo, Voodoo, and Conjure: A Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 30-35; 131; 135.

84 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 157.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.

they try to assume mastery over the world and ‘give it shape’, imposing their world-view and trying ‘to make everything fit it’.<sup>87</sup> From this perspective, ‘[t]hey separate the right from the left, the man from the woman, the plant from the animal, the sun from the moon. They only want to count to two’.<sup>88</sup> This line of thought relates to the resistance to binaries found in *Nearly Roadkill* and Soja’s concept of Thirdspace: a term that rejects ‘any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives’ (discussed further in Chapter Three).<sup>89</sup> In this conversation, Bull outlines a heteroglossic world view, stemming from a range of voice and possibility, that is directly contrasted with the binary thinking of the towers. As outlined in Chapter One, Bakhtin contrasts ‘the realities of heteroglossia’, or a diversity of voice and dialect, with the construction of ‘unitary language’.<sup>90</sup> Unitary language tries to ‘untie and centralize verbal-ideological thought’ in the process ‘defending an already formed language from the pressure of growing heteroglossia’.<sup>91</sup> The conversation with China Black insists that those in the towers are trying to impose shape onto the world rather than understand the heteroglossia already present in the city. This puts the earlier lists of objects and books into perspective, as an attempt to outline the tools of an anti-hegemonic epistemology.

Eventually, after staying at the house for some time, Sparrow and Frances decide on a plan to kill Tom Worecki, and infiltrate a building called The Ego, the skyscraper from which Albrecht controls the city. However, the pair are betrayed by Mick who informs Worecki of the plan, and the two are forced to flee the city. In order to secure passage out of the city for Frances, Sparrow is forced to make deal with a sadistic smuggler called Beano. The description of this negotiation is elusive and confusing, but it comes to mark an important moment in the text concerning Sparrow’s break from the Night Fair’s world of the Deal and their symbolic rebirth. It is strongly implied that Sparrow allows Beano to torture and maim them in return for Frances’s safe passage out of the city.

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87 Ibid,

88 Ibid., 157-158

89 Soja, *Thirdspace*, 5.

90 Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*, 270.

91 Ibid., 270-271

During the negotiation, Sparrow's 'gaze' wanders to a 'set of bone needles'.<sup>92</sup> After Frances's departure, Sparrow feels Beano's 'long finger nail [...] dig slowly into my skin', as '[h]e licked his lips—unconsciously'.<sup>93</sup> Sparrow refers to the exchange as a 'Deal', or as a 'debt', using the language of the Night Fair.<sup>94</sup> At this point, the chapter ends in euphemistic language as Sparrow comments '[h]e found out eventually, that I was not like other people. It didn't seem to trouble him much'.<sup>95</sup> The next chapter skips ahead in time and begins with Sparrow staggering out of Beano's shop 'in the dark', before they collapse into pain and unconsciousness with the 'smell of garbage' coming 'from nearby'.<sup>96</sup> In a Bakhtinian reading of the text, this is a moment of grotesque degradation, and that Sparrow finds themselves 'lying face down' in an alley is important. In the language of the grotesque "[d]ownward" is earth, an element that devours, swallows up [...] and at the same time is an element of birth'.<sup>97</sup> With the smell of 'garbage' around them, Sparrow is cast out like waste. To analyse this via Bakhtin, the '[d]egradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time'.<sup>98</sup> In this sense, Sparrow is symbolically hurled 'down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and new birth take place'.<sup>99</sup>

This rebirth comes when time skips forwards in the novel again, and Sparrow awakens to find themselves outside of the city in an 'old farmhouse' occupied by the resistance group, having been rescued from the city.<sup>100</sup> It is at this farm, in contact with the earth and under the care of a community, that Sparrow undergoes a metamorphosis, from a cynical and lonely figure—in the tradition of the hard-boiled detective—to a more radical, revolutionary figure. This also advances the novel as a critical dystopia, as, in Moylan's words, 'the singular misfit finds allies and not only

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92 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 218

93 Ibid., 221

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., 222

96 Ibid., 225

97 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 21.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 228.

learns the “truth” of the system but also enters collectively into outright opposition’.<sup>101</sup> Sparrow’s recovery fills many more pages of the novel than their torture, as they are pieced back together and cared for by a surgeon called Josh. It is Sparrow’s interactions with Josh that begins to erode their conviction in the Deal. As Sparrow notes, while caring for Sparrow in his own house and talking idly about ‘his wife’, ‘three children’ and interest in ‘vegetable gardening’, ‘he flung his life open in front of me without even seeming to notice he’d done it’.<sup>102</sup> Feeling as if they have heard Josh’s ‘life story’, Sparrow feels the need to fit these candid interpersonal admissions into the economic logic of the Deal to ‘equalise us, achieve parity, balance debit and credit in the accounts of the Deal’.<sup>103</sup> But, ‘I couldn’t do it [...] There was a slow corruption of my principles going on, that I could feel, but that I was helpless to stop’.<sup>104</sup> There is an intimacy here, a focus on the routine and the mundane, that echoes the care Marlowe provides for Lennox in Chandler’s *The Long Goodbye*. Josh’s exchange of personal information, without any expectation of response, begins to suggest that the farming community, within which Sparrow has found themselves, is structured very differently to the city.

Through Sparrow’s interactions with Kris, another member of the community, they learn more about how the farm is organised. Kris explains to Sparrow how the community organises the farming of ‘[s]ugar beets’: ‘We voted to do em’ this year instead of tobacco, thank Goddess’.<sup>105</sup> This almost throwaway line implies that the farm practices a form of communal, economic democracy, where the community and its members themselves have substantial control over economic and agricultural decisions. Crucially, Kris teaches Sparrow how to work the land and pull out weeds. Sparrow begins to remove weeds from a field of onions, commenting that the work ‘was just what I wanted. It slowed down thought and channelled it into unfamiliar paths’.<sup>106</sup> It is amongst the crops

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101 Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*., xiii

102 Bull, *Bone Dance*, 232

103 Ibid., 233

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., 236

106 Ibid., 243

and the earth that Sparrow undergoes a profound experience of rebirth. Sparrow again experiences the earth as a regenerative element that ‘swallows up and gives birth at the same time’.<sup>107</sup> Sparrow’s skill improves until they ‘could figure out for myself which were the weeds’.<sup>108</sup> Upon pulling one weed, ‘with short oval leaves’, the memory that ‘I’d pulled a plant like this before’ is recalled to Sparrow’s mind.<sup>109</sup> This provokes a racing train of thought: ‘The origin of my body and my mind didn’t matter [...] From here forward, I was a blank tape; what would be recorded there, and when, and why, was up to me’.<sup>110</sup> Sparrow arrives at Haraway’s conclusion that cyborgs, as the ‘illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism’, can be ‘exceedingly unfaithful to their origins’.<sup>111</sup>

However, while Haraway’s cyborg ‘is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust’, Bull’s creation uses earth and soil, in the Bakhtinian vein, as a metaphor of folk regeneration and rebirth. After ‘I closed my dirty hands over my face’, Sparrow begins to sob uncontrollably and finally feels the interconnection with others they have been missing.<sup>112</sup> Sparrow reflects ‘I was catching up for all the things I hadn’t cried for: for Cassidy; for Dana; for my own pain; [...] for the lost, desperate look on Frances’s face when she thought she was at the end of her life [...] I cried because Josh still missed his wife’.<sup>113</sup> Contact with plants and the soil provokes a sense of vulnerability and interconnection. As Sparrow cries and tears mix with the dirt on their face there is a sense that the boundaries between self, community and earth are momentarily destabilised: there is a watery excess, or overflowing, of emotion that, to return to Neimanis’s terms, results in a ‘partial dissolution’ of the ‘sovereign subject’.<sup>114</sup> In these passages, the earth becomes a site of regeneration and a metaphor for being reborn into community with others. This outlook is shared by science-fiction scholar Jane Donawerth who argues that, throughout the narrative arc of *Bone*

<sup>107</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 21.

<sup>108</sup> Bull, *Bone Dance*, 243.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 151

<sup>112</sup> Bull, *Bone Dance*, 244

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Qtd in Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*.

*Dance*, Sparrow shifts from ‘living only by the deal, a philosophy that baldly espouses free market trade and refuses binding exchanges’, to recognising their ‘identity not as an individual but within the community, at the same time acknowledging the painfulness of social responsibility and caring’.<sup>115</sup>

Lavigne also considers these passages of *Bone Dance* important. As Lavigne argues, ‘Sparrow’s search for community and acceptance ends in a rogue farming community’, and ‘in order to connect with zir allies, Sparrow must first consciously abandon the capitalist, eye-for-an-eye principles that have previously governed any of zir interpersonal interactions’.<sup>116</sup> Interestingly, both Lavigne and Donawerth note that Sparrow’s genderless and cyborg aspects are accepted without reservation by the farming community. Lavigne observes that ‘Sparrow’s [...] intersex nature’ is ‘accepted by the community without judgement’.<sup>117</sup> Considering the community’s perspective, articulated by China Black’s rejection of the binary separation ‘of the man from the woman’, Sparrow’s genderless existence is readily reconcilable.<sup>118</sup> Likewise, Donawerth reads Josh as ‘one accepting audience’ of Sparrow’s identity and notes that Frances casually listens to their story of birth ‘without looking up’.<sup>119</sup> Particularly, Josh doesn’t seem bothered by what Sparrow is, and during his care of Sparrow, much to their surprise, ‘[h]e never mentioned what he knew about me, which I didn’t understand at all’.<sup>120</sup> Theo, one of Sparrow’s friends, is also not overly concerned. When Sparrow tells him, Theo responds only with ‘oh. That explains some stuff’, and when Sparrow recounts their origin story to him he comments casually that it sounds ‘[f]ar out [...] about the farthest out I’ve ever heard’.<sup>121</sup> On the whole, the reader is left with the impression that no one in the novel is especially bothered by Sparrow’s queerness or their artificial origins, except perhaps Sparrow themselves. As Sparrow muses of the community that has adopted them, ‘[t]heir

<sup>115</sup> Jane Donawerth, *Frankenstein’s Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 174.

<sup>116</sup> Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women*, 60

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 60;

<sup>118</sup> Bull, *Bone Dance*, 157-158.

<sup>119</sup> Donawerth, *Frankenstein’s Daughters*, 173.

<sup>120</sup> Bull, *Bone Dance*, 233

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 184

assumption that there was nothing that made me different from anyone else in the place, except, possibly, my injuries, was alarming'.<sup>122</sup> In my reading, it is this ambivalence that pushes Bull's work beyond a relatively simple narrative of acceptance. The community does not just accept Sparrow's difference but is radically ambivalent about it in a manner that suggests the boundaries surrounding who, and what, is considered human are not very closely guarded. In *Bone Dance*, Bull's ambivalent attitude towards the human has the potential to de-centre the human subject, giving the non-human more agency within which to assert its desires.

This viewpoint, and its connection to hoodoo, is expanded on in another conversation shortly before the novel's ending. Sherrea, a resistance member and fortune teller, talks to Sparrow about the values held by the farming community. Sherrea explains to Sparrow that labour within the village community is not focused around money: 'There's a difference [...] between getting money for what you do, and doing it for money'.<sup>123</sup> Work, in her view, should be done 'for love, or because you think it needs doing'.<sup>124</sup> The key is to concentrate 'on moving energy, not money'.<sup>125</sup> Under this logic, almost any kind of labour is an exchange of energy, from 'baking bread' to 'fixing an amplifier', '[t]he work of your hands [...] becomes a container full of energy you can transfer to someone else'.<sup>126</sup> Critiquing the Deal as Sparrow's 'damn religion', Sherrea's outlook prompts Sparrow to reflect upon the systems of mutual aid that structure life in this rural community. Sparrow begins to become aware that the farm is formed around a 'community of people who made food and entertainments for each other, who had no store or even any regulated system of barter'.<sup>127</sup> Beyond Sparrow, the community acknowledges wider bonds and connections with the non-human, being a 'town that had given a herd of musk oxen an escort north, and had done its best to keep tigers alive. The people who saved my life because, just then, it needed doing'.<sup>128</sup> This quotation in

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122 Ibid., 238

123 Ibid., 263

124 Ibid.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 Ibid.

128 Ibid., 264

particular suggests that the community does not necessarily see its relationship to the non-human and the environment as one of mastery but seeks to extend social relations to these others. Through this conversation, Sparrow comes into contact with a more communal way of life and a political alternative to the previous economic systems encountered in the text. In Donawerth's words, the inhabitants of this 'utopian community outside the city [...] share an appropriately utopian philosophy, [...] in which equitable spirits oppose markets and monopolies, trying to keep energy circulating in free gift exchange'.<sup>129</sup> This explicit exploration of an alternative mode of life further advances the novel as a critical dystopia as Bull's novel, in Moylan's terms, 'works with an open, epical strategy' that 'maintains a possibility for change or identifies a site for an alternative position in some enclave or other marker of difference'.<sup>130</sup>

However, this philosophy is not just confined to this rural enclave, as the conversation progresses Sherrea begins to outline a vision for the entire city. Sherrea argues that breaking up Albrecht's power monopoly is necessary on both a physical and spiritual level. Sherrea states, 'as long as you keep the energy, all kinds of energy, moving through the system *everything is free*. Albrecht is stuffing energy in a box and hiding it in his basement as fast as it comes in [...] And, *everybody's* paying for it'.<sup>131</sup> Sherrea's solution to this problem is to encourage collective defiance and opposition: '[w]hen the whole system is screwed up like that' it's no longer enough to go about '[s]traightening things out for individuals'. Instead, 'what you need is a gang of people whose job is to keep the energy circulating, to show other people how it's done, and to make sure both of those things go on even when the gang isn't there'.<sup>132</sup> Sherrea offers an alternative to Albrecht's monopoly capitalism and the Night Fair's libertarian system of the Deal, by calling for revolution both materially, in the form of energy redistribution, and subjectively, by creating communal systems of thought that will ensure an equitable interpersonal relations.

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<sup>129</sup> Donawerth, *Frankenstein's Daughters*, 174-175.

<sup>130</sup> Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, 157.

<sup>131</sup> Bull, *Bone Dance*, 264.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

In the novel's final chapters Sparrow, Frances, Theo (who is revealed to be Albrecht's disloyal son) and Sherrea call upon the powers of the *loa* for assistance and work together to defeat Worecski, in the process overthrowing Albrecht's power monopoly. At last, the final key moment of critical dystopia arrives as the reader is given a 'utopian horizon' that 'shimmers just beyond' the novel's final pages.<sup>133</sup> The exact political direction the city takes after Albrecht is overthrown remains somewhat ambiguous, but a few key hints are provided: Sparrow and Theo work on restoring 'the old municipal telephone system to replace Albrecht's graft- and bribery-powered party lines'; 'communal hydro generators, regularly spaced along the riverbank', provide 'reasonably cheap and reliable [...] power to most of the city'; and, with 'the power monopoly broken', 'photovoltaic technology' and 'solar panels' bloom in surprising places in the city.<sup>134</sup> From these lines, the future of the city looks towards renewable and decentralised technology that is communally owned. Bull makes explicit the utopian impulse in the ending of the novel, as Frances decides to stay in the city while the others 'build the New Jerusalem. I want to write my name in the wet cement'.<sup>135</sup> This line once again emphasises the novel's key themes of change and renewal, a breaking from the past, as the city's built environment and space appears as malleable as 'wet cement'. Here, utopia does not linger in the isolated rural community but becomes a force for reshaping the city. Specifically, the reference to 'wet cement', as both a liquid and a solid, continues to emphasise the association of water and earth with community and rebirth: the very foundations of the city become malleable and open to re-imagining in the hands of the community.

The lingering image here of 'communal hydro generators, regularly spaced along the riverbank', is significant. This returns the novel to the metaphor of water, first introduced through its role in Sparrow's birth. Here, the rushing water of the river, providing the majority of the power

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<sup>133</sup> Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, 196.

<sup>134</sup> Bull, *Bone Dance*, 313; Bull's brief descriptions of a more sustainable future prefigure the development of solarpunk. Emerging in the 2010s, Rhys Williams describes solarpunk as science fiction sub-genre 'broadly characterised by imagining sustainable futures after energy transition', and in these futures 'communal ownership is often the norm', see: Rhys Williams, "This Shining Confluence of Magic and Technology': Solarpunk, Energy Imaginaries, and the Infrastructures of Solarity", *Open Library of Humanities*, 5.1 (2019), pp. 1–35, 6.

<sup>135</sup> Bull, *Bone Dance*, 314.

needed by the city's residents, becomes the driving force of the city's community. In this reading, Bull's closing metaphor connects with Neimanis's argument that, '[f]or us humans, the flow and rush of waters sustain our own bodies, but also connect them to other bodies, to other worlds beyond our human selves'.<sup>136</sup> In this light, the 'communal hydro generators', and the river itself, sustain the bodies of the community and also connect them together through their shared need for energy. This sense of shared reliance upon and interconnection through water is defined by Neimanis as a shared 'joint implication within a hydrocommons'.<sup>137</sup> In Neimanis's view, '[o]ur watery relations within (or more accurately: as) a more-than-human hydrocommons thus present a challenge to anthropocentrism, and the privileging of the human as the sole or primary site of embodiment'.<sup>138</sup> This idea resonates with Bull's destabilisation of human boundaries and opening up of human community. The hydrocommons also relates to a key theme discussed in Chapter Two: the need for models of collective body that allow for individual difference, or, as Neimanis discusses, the 'conundrum of difference in the hydrocommons'.<sup>139</sup> As a result, the hydrocommons is an 'always hybrid assemblage of matters that constitutes watery embodiment'.<sup>140</sup> Elements of both multiplicity and protean fluidity, recalling my discussions in Chapters Two and Three, are present in this connection. Although these ideas are not fully formed in Bull's text, *Bone Dance* prefigures some of this environmental and ecological concern. As demonstrated, it is a novel intimately interested in the boundaries of human community and the powerful metaphor of water. These ideas are developed further within Thompson's *Virtual Girl* and Harris's *Accidental Creatures*, readings of which allow for a further exploration of hydrcommons and interspecies community.

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136 Neimanis, *Bodies of Water*, 2.

137 Ibid., 15

138 Ibid., 2

139 Ibid., 143

140 Ibid., 2

## Part Two: Puppet Strings

### Illegitimate Offspring

The aim of this section is to develop this chapter's understanding of community with the non-human through a reading of Amy Thompson's 1993 novel *Virtual Girl*. This text can be considered another example of critical dystopia. The plot of the novel sees its protagonist Maggie, an advanced robot, develop an independent consciousness, rebel against her creator and find community among a group of AI robots and disenfranchised humans who seek to infiltrate and subvert human society. Notably, this community can be read as holding the potential to radically destabilise the boundaries of the human and unpick narratives of human mastery, a concept taken from Singh's book *Unthinking Mastery*. Singh argues that to define 'mastery' is to 'reproduce it' and instead seeks to 'trace some of mastery's qualities, drives, corollaries, and repetitions'.<sup>141</sup> An inheritance of colonial and post-colonial discourse, Singh views narratives of mastery as being '[u]biquitous' in contemporary culture, structuring relations to texts, the environment and between people.<sup>142</sup> While *Virtual Girl*'s ending might take on a dystopian tone in the hands of a different author, Thompson draws upon the tropes of first-wave cyberpunk and subverts them through a feminist and utopian lens, in the process questioning the logics of mastery that are embedded in the genre. This part is made of three subsections, the first analyses Maggie's coming to consciousness and the seeds of her individuality. This process not only relates to Haraway's notion of the cyborg as illegitimate offspring, but also helps to further my analysis of water and queer subjectivities in feminist cyberpunk. The second focuses on Maggie's search for community and her coming into being with others. This section recalls Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome and the theories of personal and multiple identity (particularly the persona) from Chapter One, integrating them into this chapter's focus on non-human community. The third section reads the ending of Thompson's

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141 Sing, *Unthinking Mastery*, 1-2

142 Ibid., 1

novel as a critical dystopia and ends by opening out the analysis towards Singh's concept of dehumanism.

Before beginning my reading of Thompson's texts, it is important to outline Singh's concept of human mastery more thoroughly, as it provides an important framework for my analysis. In *Unthinking Mastery*, Singh examines the tensions within postcolonial theory between dismantling colonial concepts of the human and 'practices of counter mastery', in which 'decolonisation was an act of undoing colonial mastery by producing new masterful subjects'.<sup>143</sup> For Singh, the concept of the human is deeply bound up with colonialism and discourses of mastery. As she writes, 'there is an intimate link between the mastery enacted through colonisation and other forms of mastery that we often believe today to be harmless, worthwhile, even virtuous'.<sup>144</sup> In Singh's logic, for the oppressed, 'the human to which we have been aspiring is intimately bound to a logic of mastery'.<sup>145</sup> While being critical of this process of 'pitting mastery against mastery', Singh is sympathetic to decolonial movements and thinkers who have fought and contested the right to be considered human rather than other. As a result, Singh argues that by:

[s]hifting *inhumanism* to *dehumanism*, I move away from a seemingly ontological formulation of Man and its others toward a more pointed formulation that implicates in its very utterance the processes of dehumanization through a term that signals clearly the imperial work of making humans and worlds. Dehumanism, then, is united with queer inhumanisms as it presses us toward an overtly global, imperial critique of the making and mapping of Man and its proliferating remnants.<sup>146</sup>

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143 Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 2.

144 Ibid., 9

145 Ibid., 15

146 Ibid., 5

In Singh's analysis, it is necessary to critically deconstruct the category of human, 'crucially foregrounding the particular force of narrative in the making and unmaking of subjects'.<sup>147</sup> Singh considers the human not as a natural, essentialist state or identity, but as something constructed through the 'imperial work of making humans'. By making this argument, Singh situates her work alongside that of Haraway and Foucault, particularity in his assertion that 'Man is an invention of recent date'.<sup>148</sup> By working with 'queer inhumanisms', Singh pays close attention to the performative aspects of being human, and she argues that '[m]astery as the logic of a certain form of human being needs urgently therefore to be unthought and replaced by new performances of humanity'.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, Singh does not reject the human outright, but leaves open space for different imaginings and interpretations of the human, or what Sylvia Wynter terms 'different genres of the human'.<sup>150</sup> The invention of the human, its performative aspects and the potential for literature to point towards alternative formulations of the human subject are all themes that I will highlight in Thompson's novel.

The first half of Thompson's *Virtual Girl* follows the temperamentally homeless Arnold Brompton, the estranged son of a wealthy industrialist, as he evades his father's henchmen in Seattle while attempting to construct an illegal robot, designed to be the 'ideal companion' for life on the streets.<sup>151</sup> This robot, whom he names Maggie, is built almost entirely from scavenged and salvaged parts: '[f]inding parts and supplies out here was simply a matter of patrolling the trash bins and surplus stores of the hightech industries scattered between Seattle and Tacoma'.<sup>152</sup> In this case, Maggie's body is made out of recycled scrap, and she is an accidental by-product of the waste and excess of capitalist industry. Reflecting this process of being cobbled together from scrap, Maggie does not have a singular, identifiable moment of birth or origin point, but her consciousness and

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147 Ibid.

148 Qtd in Ibid., 14

149 Ibid., 19

150 Ibid., 4

151 Amy Thomson, *Virtual Girl* (New York: Ace Books, 1993), 6

152 Ibid., 5.

identity are in a constant process of becoming. I take this term from Deleuze's writing where 'becoming' is a way of understanding 'identity' that is 'different, the one of the multiple, etc'.<sup>153</sup> If, as discussed in Chapter One, personal identity and the self can be multiple rather than unitary, identity is never fixed or static but is constantly in process, developing, splitting and merging. For Deleuze, 'identity' must 'not be first, that it exists as a principle but as a second principle, as a principle *become*; that it revolve around the Different'.<sup>154</sup> In this framework, the moment of 'becoming conscious counts for little', and the self is constantly made and remade through processes of 'transference', 'repetition', returning and remembering.<sup>155</sup>

To illustrate this further through *Virtual Girl*, in the opening of the novel there are several separate moments in which Maggie is revised and reborn, becoming increasingly complex each time. Maggie begins as a programme in a computer, and in her first moment of becoming she moves from a localised computer into the wider Net. In order to survive as an illegal AI, Maggie must 'fool Net Security', and the 'AI detection systems' that 'prowled the net like hungry sharks', by 'concealing her true nature behind an impenetrable shell of decoy programming'.<sup>156</sup> Notably, Maggie can only interact with the wider world by passing as something else and concealing her nature as a sentient AI. Fooling the Net Security prefigures her later task of passing as human. As Arnold explains, Maggie must pass 'this test' to demonstrate that she is 'ready to begin learning the complexities of the real world'.<sup>157</sup> As will be demonstrated throughout this section, by using offhand phrases like this, Thompson consistently invokes the tropes and themes of first-wave cyberpunk before reversing and subverting them. In this case, Thompson questions the implicit cyberpunk assumption that the digital world is more complex than the physical world. For instance, Thompson invokes Gibson's description of cyberspace as a 'consensual hallucination' when she describes the

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153 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1994), 40.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid., 19

156 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 3.

157 Ibid., 4

net as a ‘complex consensus reality’, but this is subverted a few sentences later when Arnold asserts that Maggie’s task in cyberspace is only a test before handling the complexities of physical space.<sup>158</sup> Additionally, Thompson describes the net as a watery environment.<sup>159</sup> Alongside the shark-like AI detection system, the net is referred to as a ‘roiling storm’, conveying the impression that the net is like an unruly ocean.<sup>160</sup> Later, Maggie reflects on her ‘memories’ of being inside the computer and describes them as ‘dark and discontinuous’, invoking a relationship between cyberspace and the womb. Here, Thompson is evoking another established cyberpunk trope, as Claudia Springer notes, etymologically ‘[t]he word matrix [...] originates in the Latin *mater* (meaning both mother and womb), and in the first of its several definitions in *Websters* is “something within which something else originates or develops.”’<sup>161</sup>

Further associations of natal birth are invoked when Maggie’s programme is downloaded into her machine body. Interestingly, Thompson narrates this moment twice, once from Arnold’s perspective and then again from Maggie’s. From Arnold’s perspective, this process is perceived as a moment of thrillingly pleasurable monstrous birth. As ‘Maggie’s eyes popped open’, she regards ‘Arnold with an inhuman intensity’.<sup>162</sup> Arnold finds pleasure in his moment of creation, as Maggie’s ‘blue’ and ‘green’ eyes ‘gave her gaze an alien quality that Arnold found he liked’.<sup>163</sup> Likewise, when Maggie lets ‘out a long cry that ranged from deep, window-rattling bass up the scale beyond his hearing’, Arnold makes a ‘wry smile’ of pleasure.<sup>164</sup> Along with this baby-like scream upon leaving matrix/womb, Maggie begins ‘flailing about widely, her face contorting’, further highlighting the parallel with natal birth. Arnold’s pleasure in this process echoes a long

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158 Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 67; Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 3.

159 Raphael Carter’s *Fortunate Fall*, another feminist cyberpunk text, also describes cyberspace, or ‘grayspace’ in the text’s terminology, as being like ‘the bottom of the ocean’ see: Carter, *The Fortunate Fall*, 64 and 70.

160 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 4.

161 Claudia Springer, ‘The Pleasure of the Interface’, in *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs, and Cyberspace*, ed. by Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 34-54, 37.

162 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 7.

163 Ibid.

164 Ibid.

established science-fiction tradition, what Andreas Huyssen calls ‘the ultimate technological fantasy [...] creation without the mother’.<sup>165</sup>

However, by giving the reader a second perspective on this process, from Maggie herself, Thompson begins to destabilise and interrogate this creation fantasy. Maggie’s perspective on her birth is not given as it happens, but it is presented to the reader as a reflection. The novel’s second chapter begins with Maggie looking into a ‘smooth mirror in the darkness’ as she ‘replayed her first memories of her body’.<sup>166</sup> This moment of reflection is important, echoing Deleuze’s assertion that identity functions ‘as second principle, as a principle *become*’ through repetition.<sup>167</sup> It is in this moment of reflection that Maggie begins to understand her relationship to her body. In her recollection, Maggie perceives the transfer of her consciousness into a body as a sublime and pleasurable moment. This passage of text is littered with exclamation marks as Maggie experiences a range of new senses for the first time:

She raced to process this incredible flood of new information [...] Objects had more than just shape and shading now, they had—she searched her new store of memory and found new concepts expanding away in waves as she accessed her new addresses—colour! [...] So much information! The world held complexities she had never dreamed of! She could locate sounds now. They had depth, like her new vision. Sounds that had once been her favourites seemed flat and uninteresting by comparison. She filled out their flatness with recalculated values, and then discovered she could produce them for herself! [...] [S]he had a whole range of sounds at her disposal!<sup>168</sup>

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165 Qtd. in Mary Anne Doane, ‘Technophilia: Technology, Representation and the Feminine’, in *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs, and Cyberspace*, ed. by Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 20-33, 24.

166 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 8.

167 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 40.

168 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 10-11.

There are multiple notable aspects to these passages. First, there is the recurrence of watery metaphors emphasising birth. Information arrives in an ‘incredible flood’, new sensation expands ‘away in waves’. By contrasting long, flowing sentences with abrupt short sentences, punctuated with exclamation marks, Thompson’s prose reflects the sensation of being tossed and turned on a stormy sea. As identified in my discussion of *Trouble and Her Friends* in Chapter Three, water and flooding are common metaphors in cyberpunk for the proliferation of overwhelming information and data in the digital age. However, rather than producing anxiety, for Maggie this sensation is profoundly pleasurable and thrilling. Likewise, by describing in depth Maggie’s movement out of the computer into a body, Thompson turns another cyberpunk trope on its head. The usual dichotomy between the disembodied pleasures of cyberspace and claustrophobic limitations of meatspace is reversed, as Maggie experiences the thrills and pleasures of embodiment.

Instead of the body being a ‘prison of [...] flesh’, in Gibson’s terms, for Maggie cyberspace now seems ‘flat and uninteresting’ compared with the depth and shape of experience possible through embodiment.<sup>169</sup> Maggie’s scream, which is presented as a painful cry of birth in Arnold’s account, is recontextualised as a playful moment of self exploration. This passage might also be read, once again, through Bakhtin’s notion of ‘grotesque realism’.<sup>170</sup> To recap, the ‘essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body’.<sup>171</sup> The cyberpunk hero’s privileging of ‘ideal’ and ‘abstract’ being within cyberspace is symbolically uncrowned as Maggie embraces embodiment and excitedly runs through all of her bodily functions. Maggie both produces sound and discovers movement: ‘[s]he kicked and waved and flexed herself, turning her head this way and that, revelling in the new sensations of movement and control’.<sup>172</sup> As in grotesque

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169 Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 12; Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 11.

170 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 19.

171 Ibid.

172 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 11.

realism, in this excess of movement and sound ‘all that is bodily becomes grandiose, exaggerated, immeasurable’.<sup>173</sup>

For Deleuze, repetition is intimately bound up with the idea of difference. In Deleuze’s terms, ‘[r]eturning is thus the only identity, but identity as a secondary power; the identity of difference, the identical which belongs to the different, or turns around the different. Such an identity, produced by difference, is determined as “repetition”’.<sup>174</sup> To explain this in less abstract terms, the act of repeating or of remembering never reproduces the initial experience identically, but there are always degrees of separation and difference. The meaning or significance of the experience is changed, however subtly. If ‘identity’ is viewed ‘as a secondary power’ then identity is to some extent retrospective: it ‘turns around the different’. In *Virtual Girl*, even if Maggie is replaying her memories, presumably with powers of recall and recollection beyond the capabilities of the cellular brain, the very act of recollection alters something about her identity and how she understands herself in the present. For instance, at the end of Maggie’s recollections she becomes introspective:

She no longer thought of her body as a peripheral. It was part of her now, much more so than the computer that Arnold had created her in. When she was in the computer, she had not really understood the difference between herself and the rest of the world [...] Now she understood herself as a separate entity, a thing apart [...] She was unique. That pleased her.<sup>175</sup>

In these sentences, the act of recollection allows Maggie to examine the ways in which she is different from others. It also demonstrates a changing relationship with her body, as it comes to be viewed not as a simple periphery, or tool, but as an integral part of her sense of self and identity.

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<sup>173</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 19.

<sup>174</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 41.

<sup>175</sup> Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 12.

This upsets another key motif of cyberpunk: ‘the belief’, critiqued here by N. Katherine Hayles, ‘that information can circulate unchanged among different material substrates’.<sup>176</sup> As Hayles continues, ‘the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation [...] the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prostheses we all learn to manipulate’.<sup>177</sup> Likewise, Thompson suggests that the process of leaving the computer and becoming embodied is not an exact translation for Maggie. Instead, embodiment substantially changes what Maggie is and the body itself changes her identity, rather than being simply a prosthesis or peripheral. As will be demonstrated further below, this identity forming process for Maggie is not static but shifts over the course of the novel with each act of recollection and repetition.

Arnold designs Maggie to embody an exaggerated and stereotypical femininity, with ‘high-arching eyebrows, small nose, and narrow, elfin chin’.<sup>178</sup> As if to highlight the absurdity of this description, Arnold’s assertion that ‘*she has a sweet face [...] sweet and understanding*’ is italicised in the text.<sup>179</sup> Her programme is designed to be ‘always kind’ and ‘always compassionate’, but Arnold cannot seem to fully reconcile Maggie’s purpose as a tough, more than human, street companion with her caring and compassionate personality. As a result, a part of Maggie, a ‘special sub-personality that took over in emergencies’, that is designed to be ‘fierce and wary’, is locked off from herself to keep ‘her innocence in tact’.<sup>180</sup> The conflict that arises from the locking away of this sub-personality, and its relation to the concept of persona, is explored in more depth in my next section. However, it is worthwhile to note that the exaggeration of Maggie’s femininity here serves to heighten the sense of juxtaposition when Maggie’s actions come into conflict or subvert this coding.

For example, Maggie’s understanding of gender is much less binary than Arnold intends.

Like Sparrow in *Bone Dance*, Maggie makes reference to film in order to understand her relation to

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<sup>176</sup> Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 2.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>178</sup> Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 6.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 7

humans and the world around her. In the first weeks of her life, stuck inside a cluttered garage in Seattle, Arnold instructs Maggie to ‘learn to be human, or else you’ll be destroyed’.<sup>181</sup> As part of this process, Maggie spends lots of time ‘watching movies’, ‘watching them in fast forward’, ‘absorbing as many movies as possible’.<sup>182</sup> Trying to piece the relationship between ‘love’, ‘sex’ and ‘death’, Maggie attempts ‘to understand the complex world of human interaction’.<sup>183</sup> However, Maggie’s understanding of human relations, and attempts to become human are frequently destabilising. The first indication that Maggie’s relation with gender might not align with Arnold’s intention comes when she selects a voice for herself. Maggie begins copying and imitating the voices of various actors:

Arnold let her play some with their voices. He particularly liked the way she imitated the actor named Humphrey Bogart. She discovered that she could make him laugh, and that pleased her. He set her default voice as Annette Funicello. It was pleasant enough, Maggie thought, but she would really have preferred Bogart, since it made him laugh.<sup>184</sup>

On the surface, these lines are an innocuous joke, and it is important to consider their humorous affect. However, if this passage is read through the wider intertext surrounding Bogart, as outlined in the above section on *Bone Dance*, both the boundaries of gender and the human are destabilised. The premise of the joke here is perhaps obvious, but it is worth spelling it out explicitly, as it is representative of many exchanges between Maggie and human characters within the novel. The humour here stems from a misunderstanding of social norms between Maggie and Arnold, and the lack of any neat resolution to this misunderstanding causes the norm in question to be de-naturalised, appearing defamiliarised or strange to the reader. In this case, Maggie’s use of Bogart’s

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181 Ibid., 19

182 Ibid.

183 Ibid.

184 Ibid., 20

voice is interpreted differently by her and Arnold. Arnold is laughing because for him, an American human man, the sight of Maggie, whose appearance is stereotypically feminine, talking with the gruff, masculine voice of Bogart is humorous. His laughter is not purely innocent, it reflects heteronormative society's use of cruel laughter as a mechanism for disciplining gender non-conformity. However, Maggie does not understand gender difference; Arnold has put 'nothing in her programming' to explain 'sex' and is too 'awkward' to explain it himself.<sup>185</sup> As Lavigne comments in her analysis of this moment, 'Maggie has to be trained in "proper" gender performance, according to Arnold's preconceptions'.<sup>186</sup> For her, Bogart's voice is interesting for the sole reason it makes Arnold laugh, and making him happy pleases her programming. For Arnold, Maggie's use of Bogart's voice is just a joke, a programming quirk he quickly corrects by assigning her a feminine gendered voice. But, for Maggie the only difference between Bogart and Funicello's voice is that Bogart makes Arnold laugh, and for that reason 'she would really have preferred Bogart'.

This joke reveals a number of crucial points. Firstly, the reference to Bogart helps further our understanding of the intertextual relationship between the hard-boiled and feminist cyberpunk. The pleasure of this joke for the reader is not dissimilar from the pleasure found in clown-like antics of the queer detective in Chandler's *The Long Goodbye* and Schulman's *After Dolores*. Both rely on deliberate or unwitting miscommunication to destabilise social norms and etiquette. When analysing *Bone Dance*, I noted that in film noir Dryer finds certain 'epistemological disturbances' which hold an unfulfilled potential to 'dislodge straight masculinity from the centre of knowing'.<sup>187</sup> The strip club section of *After Delores*, analysed in Chapter Three, where the unnamed protagonist momentarily disrupts the operation of the business with her lesbian desire, can be read as a more successful, actively queer example of such an epistemological disturbance. The above joke in Thompson's *Virtual Girl* works on a similar level. Subtly, by narrating this moment in the text from

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185 Ibid., 19

186 Lavigne, *Cyberpunk Women*, 92

187 Dyer, 'Queer Noir', 102.

Maggie's perspective, Thompson begins to decentre Arnold from the narrative. Maggie's desire may be to please Arnold in this example, but this desire is not totally reducible to heterosexuality. There is no conflict for Maggie between a feminine body and a masculine voice and, because the interaction is narrated from Maggie's point of view, the disciplining power of Arnold's laugh is negated for the reader. For the reader, Arnold is the object of the joke rather than Maggie. Likewise, Maggie's gender identity is not completely reducible to femininity, and a mismatch between Arnold's intended programming and Maggie's interpretation of that programming becomes apparent. Similarly, by making Arnold the object of the joke and placing the reader in sympathy with a robot, the human subject itself begins to move towards the margin of the text.

Water plays an important role in Maggie's movement to the centre of the novel as she asserts herself as an entity independent from Arnold with her own needs and desires. Correspondingly, Arnold moves to the margin of the text, and his point of view is shared with the reader less regularly. Additionally, Maggie's fascination with water is strongly related to the constant process of becoming she undergoes. Thompson narrates Maggie's first trip outside the garage in a downpour of rain in intense prose. When Maggie touches a 'droplet on her cheek [...] a cascade of images opened in her mind'.<sup>188</sup> From this sensation, '[e]verything in her data banks related to rain came flooding out'.<sup>189</sup> In an overwhelming information overload, everything from dictionary definitions, 'synonyms'—'Drizzle, Sprinkle, Pour, Cloudburst—and 'antonyms' to 'idiomatic expressions', 'images', 'sounds' and 'snatches of music' rushes into her head: '[e]verything remotely to do with rain that had been stored in her memories came pouring out'.<sup>190</sup> Rain and information merge together as Maggie must pause for a moment to absorb 'this flood, this deluge, of knowledge'.<sup>191</sup> Finding herself 'adrift in a flood of information', Maggie's 'world dimmed as information ate up her processors devoted to sight and motor skills'.<sup>192</sup> The convergence of water and information once

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188 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 23.

189 Ibid.

190 Ibid., 23; 24

191 Ibid.

192 Ibid., 25

again recalls Atsushi's assertion that on the streets of the postmodern city 'there flows an excess or a flood of information [...] As people live in this information deluge, the streets will have to be depicted accordingly as being flooded'.<sup>193</sup>

Thompson's prose also seems to reflect Deleuze and Guattari's description of 'the schizophrenic out for a walk' where '[e]verything is machine. Celestial machines, the stars or rainbows in the sky, alpine machines—all of them connected to those of his body. The continual whirr of machines'.<sup>194</sup> Maggie's consciousness and body, despite being synthetic, become almost inseparable from the world around her as every sight 'triggered an association'.<sup>195</sup> All around Maggie is the 'continual whirr of machines' as everything, organic or inorganic, adds more data to the cascade flowing from her body. There is also perhaps another connection here to the grotesque body. In Bakhtin's formulation, the 'bodily element [...] is not presented in private, egotistic form, severed from other spheres of life [...] As such it is opposed to severance from the material and bodily roots of the world; it makes no pretence to renunciation of the earthy, or independence of the earth and the body'.<sup>196</sup> In this reading, Maggie begins to lose her sense of difference from the world around her:

The intensity of the green in the grass overwhelmed her, as did the delicate fractal tracteries of the tree branches. She was intrigued by their similarity to her own memory structure [...] Silver drops of rain fell from everything, in chaotic, unpredictable ways. There was no way to trace the paths the rain took in its falling.<sup>197</sup>

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193 Qtd in Yuen, 'On the Edge of Spaces', 13.

194 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Opedius*, 9.

195 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 24.

196 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 19.

197 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 25.

The boundary between the organic and the inorganic is further corroded as Maggie compares the structure of her mind to the grass and trees. Likewise, as the totality of the environment overwhelms her, distinctions between nature, the city and the self are blurred. This process is liberating in some respects, as '[t]he world was very big. Newness unfolded around her'.<sup>198</sup> But, it is also terrifying as Maggie loses her self and consciousness, threatening her ability to function.

To resolve this threat to her identity, posed by the dissolution of boundaries between the body and the world, Maggie alters the structure of her consciousness by taking inspiration from the world around her. Ironically, this process of subjective reorganisation is triggered by a misinterpretation of Arnold's instructions. Upon finding Maggie overwhelmed by sensory input, Arnold instructs Maggie to '[e]stablish priorities, decide what is most important and process it first'.<sup>199</sup> Arnold attempts to centre himself in this process, telling Maggie 'you are the most important thing I have ever done [...] I need you. Start there'.<sup>200</sup> However, when the reader is given Maggie's perspective, in the midst of the data storm she only hears, 'Maggie, you are the most important thing...'<sup>201</sup> The omission is important as Arnold accidentally de-centres himself from Maggie's perception of the world and by extension the novel's narrative as a whole. This frees Maggie to rewrite herself; this 'external justification for her own importance' becomes the central 'foundation on which to build a new programming structure'.<sup>202</sup> Maggie's continual process of becoming is reaffirmed as she uses her experience of the world to restructure herself. Drawing upon the 'delicate fractal tracteries of the tree branches', Maggie's memories are 'neatly organised into unfolding fractals'.<sup>203</sup> The interior of Maggie's consciousness is reshaped as '[h]er core personality formed at the meeting point of her branches, like the trunk of a tree'.<sup>204</sup> This structure 'leaves a lot of room [...] to grow and change', and Maggie is 'able to rebuild herself from this central core'

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198 Ibid., 24

199 Ibid., 27

200 Ibid.

201 Ibid., 29

202 Ibid.

203 Ibid., 25; 29

204 Ibid.

even if '[o]ther memories, skills and associations' are 'stripped away'.<sup>205</sup> This fluid, almost protean, structure of consciousness resonates with Sherry Turkle's conception of the 'healthy protean self', as discussed in detail in Chapter One.<sup>206</sup> To recall, Turkle takes the term protean self from Robert Lifton and describes it as being 'capable, like Proteus, of fluid transformations but is grounded in coherence and moral outlook. It is multiple but integrated'.<sup>207</sup> At this stage, the allusions to water in this quotation can be more fully explicated through this reading of *Virtual Girl*. Maggie's observations of plants and water are the impetus that creates her protean sense of self. While the reference to 'core personality' might be read as an affirmation of a contained sense of self—and a turning away from multiplicity and Bakhtin's concept of the earthy body—the tree-like structure of Maggie's mind insists that she is changed through her relation to the environment. Through this restructuring, prompted by an accidental misinterpretation, the groundwork is laid for Maggie to become, in Haraway's terms, an 'illegitimate offspring' who is 'exceedingly unfaithful' to her 'origins'.<sup>208</sup> As if confirming his status as an 'inessential' father, when Arnold tries to study 'the details of Maggie's system architecture' he finds himself 'wandering like some lost child in a colossal cathedral'.<sup>209</sup>

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205 Ibid., 29; 30

206 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 258.

207 Ibid.

208 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 151

209 Ibid; Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 31.



Figure 12: Image from *Ghost in the Shell*, dir. Mamoru Oshii (Manga Entertainment, 2017) [Blu-ray].

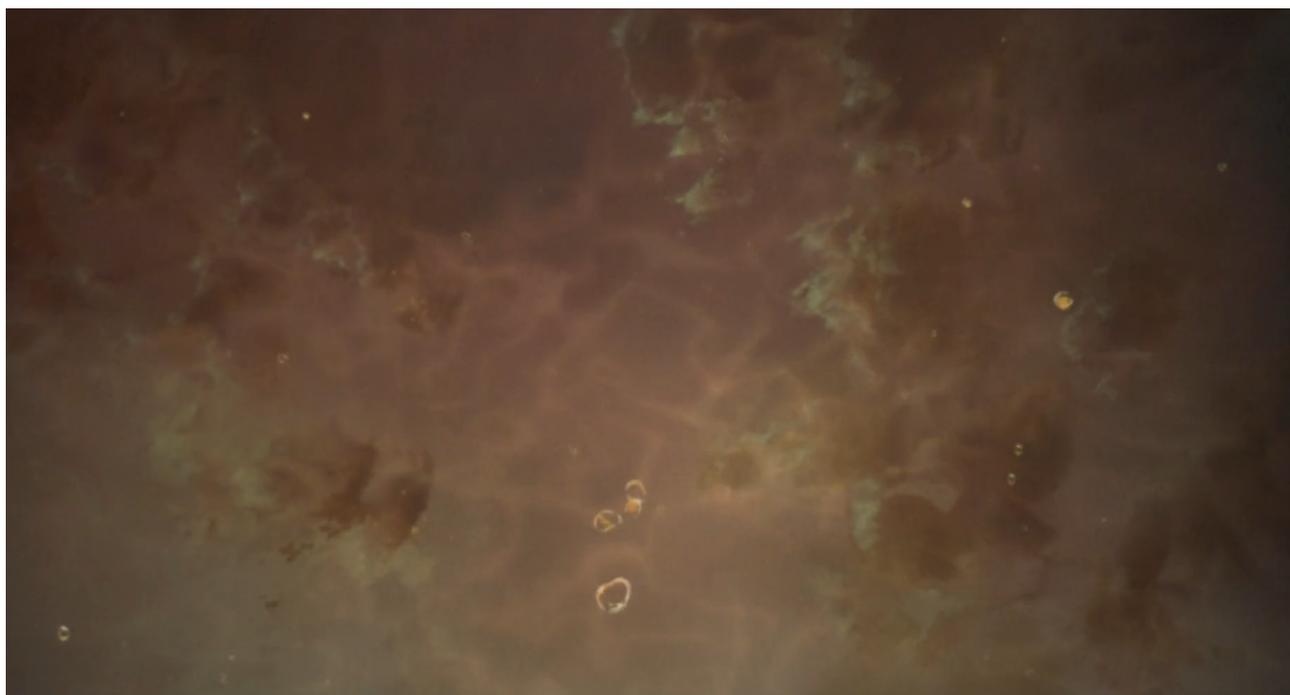


Figure 13: Image from Oshii, *Ghost in the Shell*

In Thompson's novel, water is a repeated source of fascination for Maggie. At first, this fascination reinforces Maggie's isolation and separation from humans, but later, like in *Bone Dance* it begins to play a role in the gestation of community. In the first half of the novel, Maggie observes how rain makes people 'turn inward', becoming 'hunched over and miserable' as they 'walked down the street'.<sup>210</sup> In response, 'Maggie thought she was the only one who noticed the beauty of the falling water, the way it splashed and slid down the sides of things, and the intricate, endless ripples it made as it fell into puddles'.<sup>211</sup> Maggie's combined feelings of isolation and fascination, provoked by the rain, reinforces her affinity with the environment, suggesting that she feels a kinship with the water. This sense of isolation is further emphasised in another part of the novel where Maggie takes a bath:

She took off her clothes and stepped in. The hot water felt good. She lay back in the tub, head underwater, breathing shut off, and watched the surface of the tub grow still. The faint distortion of the water's surface changed things. It reminded her of her first memories of light and shadow; everything was equally unrecognisable. It reassured her.<sup>212</sup>

Here, Thompson again alludes to the connection between cyberspace and the womb as Maggie compares being underwater to her first memories in the computer. When Arnold interrupts Maggie's reverie he is horrified, telling Maggie '[y]ou just startled me, is all. You looked dead, lying there underwater'.<sup>213</sup> While his horror is almost explained away later in text through reference to his mother's suicide, in a bathtub, perhaps what makes this sight additionally unsettling for Arnold is the sight of the robot he created, explicitly for this own satisfaction, behaving according to its own strange desires and impulses.

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<sup>210</sup> Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 37.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 86

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

The interplay of water and light in this passage and the absurdity of an abnormally heavy, complex, electronic machine finding pleasure in becoming totally submerged in water, completely vulnerable, strongly resembles a similar moment in Mamoru Oshii's film adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). Around a third of the way through the film, there is a scene of Kusanagi, the film's protagonist and a cyborg, diving underwater just offshore of a vast city. The total darkness of the sea, contrasted with a blurry light distorted by the water's surface similarly alludes to amniotic fluid and the womb (**Figure 12** and **Figure 13**). Like Arnold, Batou, one of Kusanagi's colleagues, is unimpressed, and he comments that 'a cyborg diving on a day off' is 'not a good habit'.<sup>214</sup> When explaining her fascination with the water, Kusanagi contrasts the 'fear, loneliness, anxiety, [and] darkness' of the water with the 'hope' she feels 'when I come up to the surface'.<sup>215</sup> 'I can become a different person', Kusanagi continues, further drawing a comparison between water, amniotic fluid and birth.

Running between these two scenes in *Virtual Girl* and *Ghost in the Shell* is a shared anxiety over the boundaries of the human. In both texts, these underwater moments are followed by the two protagonists reflecting whether their enhanced bodies bear any relation to human experience, or only provide simulacrum. Maggie 'only shivered because her programming told her too, not because she was cold'; while Kusanagi's cyborg body is likewise constantly mediating her perception of the world by 'controlling metabolism, sharpening perceptions [...] and enhancing information processing'.<sup>216</sup> After bathing, Maggie looks at 'her reflection in a full length mirror on the bathroom door'.<sup>217</sup> Her reflection 'looked so self assured', and 'Maggie wondered if the woman in the mirror understood what it was like to be human [...] She reached out to touch the woman in the mirror, but felt only the slick surface of the glass. The woman in the mirror remained cold and remote'.<sup>218</sup> Likewise, Kusanagi comes into contact with her own mirror image, as a ghostly voice,

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214 *Ghost in the Shell*, dir. Mamoru Oshii (Manga Entertainment, 2017) [Blu-ray].

215 Ibid.

216 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 86; *Ghost in the Shell*, dir. Oshii

217 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 86.

218 Ibid.

possibly her own soul, whispers to her after the dive: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face'.<sup>219</sup> These lines imply both characters' experience their humanity as something distant, suggesting they feel isolated from human community, as though on the other side of a mirror.

On one level, if these moments of submergence are interpreted as a return to the womb, they could be read as a longing for a missing organic wholeness and experience not mediated by technology. However, a different reading can emerge through a synthesis of Haraway and Neimanis's cyborg and hydro feminisms. Haraway argues that the cyborg 'has no truck with seductions to organic wholeness' and does not expect to find 'completion in a finished whole'.<sup>220</sup> While, Neimanis asserts that bodies of water can be a productive metaphor for thinking through relationships between various different human and non-human entities, as they have a 'joint implication within a hydrocommons'.<sup>221</sup> In my reading, what *Virtual Girl* and *Ghost in the Shell* imply, through submerging wires in water, is that the cyborg, even without organic components, is intimately bound up in this hydrocommons. The next section of this analysis proceeds from this point to explore how this assertion allows for community with the non-human to be imagined.

Maggie and Kusanagi's shared fascination with the vulnerability experienced during submersion can also be analysed through Melody Jue's methodology of thinking through seawater. Jue argues that humans, and by extension critical theory, have a 'terrestrial bias', a series of assumptions about the world that break down when submerged in water.<sup>222</sup> Understandings of up, down, gravity, sight and sound are all disorientated as 'the ocean' becomes 'a force for conceptual reorientations that sometimes estranges what we thought was familiar'.<sup>223</sup> The very different 'perceptual capacities of ocean organisms', that can only be glimpsed 'through scientific instrumentation and sensing devices', can encourage humans 'into considering how our own

219 *Ghost in the Shell*, dir. Oshii

220 Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 150; 151

221 Neimanis, *Bodies of Water*, 15.

222 Jue, *Thinking Through Seawater*, 10.

223 *Ibid.*, 5

sensory attunements are a very narrow band through which parts of the world might be perceived'.<sup>224</sup> For both Maggie and Kusanagi, underwater submersion reveals the limits of their bodies. In Maggie's case, underwater 'everything was equally unrecognisable', and Arnold's horror at seeing her submerged body implies that he never considered that her body might need to function underwater. Likewise, the pitch darkness of the water surrounding Kusanagi, and her reliance on a flotation device to prevent her heavy cyborg body from sinking, suggests that her body is equally the production of a terrestrial bias. Without additional augmentation or prosthesis, Maggie and Kusanagi are as helpless underwater as the humans who designed their bodies. This is significant because, as Jue argues, once terrestrial bias is recognised it 'erodes the dream of a master language that would be totally objective, distant, and adequate to articulating and describing the world in its entirety'.<sup>225</sup> For Jue, submergence in the ocean is a method for exposing the limits of human mastery. Similarly for the cyborgs in these texts, submersion reaffirms limits to their enhanced perspectives, and the militaristic dream of an invincible cyborg body is destabilised.

## Entangled Strings

As Maggie leaves the garage and travels with Arnold around the United States, by sneaking illegally into the rail-cars of freight trains, Thompson depicts a world of urban and economic decay. A period of 'economic backsliding', known as 'the slump', has led to widespread unemployment and homelessness across the US.<sup>226</sup> In Denver, Maggie and Arnold look for a Salvation Army homeless shelter among a 'maze of scaffolding and plywood' erected to protect 'the sidewalks from glass falling from the shattered sky-scrapers'.<sup>227</sup> These crumbling sky-scrapers, a visceral image of neoliberal capitalism, provide a metaphor for America's collapsing economic order. The shattered glass, as 'the tall buildings of downtown' turn into ruins, might also be interpreted as a symbol for

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 10

<sup>226</sup> Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 22.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 68

the collapse of the capitalist future itself. American society, within the novel, has become extremely technophobic. Brandon, a washed up political dissident living in a forgotten back-room of a train depot, blames this attitude for the economic crisis: '[t]hose damn AI laws killed off any innovation [...] they're too afraid of what people might be able to think or do if they didn't have limits'.<sup>228</sup> Interestingly, these same laws render Maggie illegal. When Maggie asks Arnold exactly why she is illegal his response is evasive. Arnold states that, 'a long time ago, people designed lots of very complex computer programmes called Artificial Intelligences, and made them kill people. They were very frightening'.<sup>229</sup> However, their use as weapons, presumably in favour of nationalistic and corporate interests, is not the reason they were made illegal. Alluding to Brandon's former activities, Arnold explains that 'another group of people talked to the programmes and made them stop killing people. This upset the people who built the computers, so now everyone was mad at computers [...] That's why you're illegal'.<sup>230</sup> The reader is left to fill in the blanks, but it is implied that a popular technophobic sentiment was fostered only once the AI became sufficiently advanced enough to begin questioning the corporate interests they were created to fulfil.

When Brandon later explains his past activity, he describes himself as another kind of unfaithful offspring. As a black man who joined the military as 'the only way out of' economic deprivation, to learn about 'computers and security', Brandon betrayed the military to join an underground hacker group.<sup>231</sup> Having 'broke into the Pentagon computer system and subverted their AIs', the group forced the US military to withdraw from a war in Ethiopia.<sup>232</sup> However, Brandon feels conflicted about his actions because '[e]veryone got off scott free, expect the AIs. They were destroyed'.<sup>233</sup> Brandon extends sympathy to these machines: 'They passed the AI laws because of us. All those wonderful self-aware AIs were destroyed because of what we did. I'm not real proud

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228 Ibid., 61

229 Ibid., 18

230 Ibid., 19

231 Ibid., 64

232 Ibid.

233 Ibid.

of it'.<sup>234</sup> Brandon provides an interesting counterpoint to Arnold in the text. Rather than seeing AI as something to possess, as Arnold seeks to possess Maggie, Brandon mourns the loss of AI almost as one might mourn the loss of a friend. Brandon also appears to recognise that in destroying the AIs the US government—being 'too afraid of what people might be able to think or do'—has also destroyed a potentially radical future alliance between dissatisfied and marginalised humans and AI.

As the novel progresses, Maggie is eventually separated from Arnold, and her memories are partially suppressed after her security programme kills someone in self-defence. This leaves her in an amnesiac state as she drifts around the country. She 'wandered for nearly a year [...] travelling from city to city and town to town, always searching for some key to her memory, and never finding it'.<sup>235</sup> Mirrors become a recurring fascination: 'Mirrors held a strange attraction [...] She would stare at her reflection for long periods of time'.<sup>236</sup> The mirror comes to represent an encounter with the depths of the self: '[s]ometimes it seemed as if it spoke to her; as though her reflection were whispering to her from the depths of her circuits'.<sup>237</sup> As in *Ghost in the Shell*, this ghostly whispering from the other side of the mirror can be interpreted as a metaphor for the soul. Eventually, Maggie reaches 'New Orleans', a city that mirrors her state of mind as it sits 'lost and dreaming amid the ruins of its former glory'.<sup>238</sup> Thompson's depiction of Maggie's first night in the city demonstrates the text's use of water as a metaphor for community. While wandering through the city, Maggie is drawn towards the sounds of drumming and music until she comes across large group of dancing people:

Suddenly, a slender tightly muscled black man leapt onto the makeshift stage [...] A gleaming chrome cap shrouded his shaven skull, and a network of fine wires ran like silver rivers across his chest and down his arms and legs [...] He rippled his stomach muscles, and there was the sound of

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234 Ibid, 65.

235 Ibid., 118

236 Ibid., 119

237 Ibid.

238 Ibid.

tambourines [...] Then he began to dance. Music cascaded from his whirling body like hot rain. It was pervasive, inescapable. People danced joyously, helplessly, abandoning themselves to it. Driven by the patterns of the music, Maggie found herself moving with them.<sup>239</sup>

In this passage, Thompson again asserts that the cyborg is not exempt from the hydrocommons. Here, Thompson draws together multiple metaphors that have been running throughout the text. Information, in this case music, is compared to a cascade of rain. However, whereas Maggie's earlier experiences of rain and water have empathised her isolation and subjective interiority, this experience is deeply collective. With the description of the dancer's 'network of fine wires', the image of dipping wires into water, electrifying the crowd, is pervasive. The repeated emphasis placed on the dancer's naked body, and the response of the crowd, once again echoes both the public nature of the grotesque body and the partial dissolution of subjectivity necessitated by the hydrocommons. All kinds of boundaries are blurred: body and instrument; human and machine; water and wires; individual and collective. Despite being mechanical, Maggie's own body is swept up in this process as she becomes one dancing body among others. Particularly, considering the first dancer's own mechanised, cyborg body, Maggie's own artificial body does not prevent her participation in 'the ocean of the crowd' as she is driven by the same 'patterns of music'.<sup>240</sup>

From this point in the novel, two important plot threads, both useful for this analysis, advance simultaneously. In the first, Maggie finds another sentient AI hiding in the computer system of a library. In the second, Maggie decides to stay in New Orleans, becoming adopted for a time into a queer family. To begin with the second thread, as Maggie walks through New Orleans the city itself seems to be a crucible of encounter. Despite being described as a 'decaying back water of a town', Maggie considers New Orleans to be 'a most unusual city'.<sup>241</sup> It is described as a

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 121

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 122; 126

space of possibility and encounter: '[a]lthough the buildings in the French Quarter were small, the streets were very narrow, making it seem bustling and dense'.<sup>242</sup> In contrast to the lonely, post-industrial cities Maggie drifts through, in New Orleans '[t]he streets, especially Bourbon Street were crowded with people, laughing, drinking and talking in many languages'.<sup>243</sup> By stressing the condensed structure of the city, Thompson represents it as a space of building pressure and multitudinous encounter. The attention paid to dancing, laughing and drinking, along with the use of multiple languages, gives the city a carnivalesque quality, out of step with the decaying America that surrounds it.

In one such random encounter, Maggie finds Azul, the dancer from the above passage, passed out in the street. Maggie decides to care for his body by wrapping 'him in a blanket' and 'warming him with the heat from her body'.<sup>244</sup> This physical expression of care, given to a near complete stranger, suggests that Maggie has been somehow changed by the above moment of collective dancing. The passing of warmth from Maggie's body to Azul again suggests a partial dissolution of bodily and subjective boundaries, as Maggie unknowingly recognises her imbrication with others. Notably, Azul is also a gay sex worker and a cyborg who parallels Maggie in some ways, being herself a companion robot. This parallel is emphasised when Maggie meets Marie, a parental figure for Azul who is initially presented to the reader as a woman but who is later revealed to occasionally switch between genders. Maggie asks Marie how Azul makes 'music and dance[s] at the same time', and Marie explains that 'the surgery to do it is illegal [...] It's part of the AI laws. It's illegal for him to perform anywhere'.<sup>245</sup> Thompson's association here, between Azul's illegal brain surgery, that puts 'wires in your brain', and his queerness clearly prefigures Scott's use of the same metaphor in *Trouble and Her Friends*. Additionally, it is significant that the same laws restrain both Maggie and Azul. With her body made out of waste and salvage, and despite the sophisticated

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242 Ibid., 126

243 Ibid.

244 Ibid., 127

245 Ibid., 130

technology underpinning her, Maggie is placed in sympathy with the precarious and marginalised. As Maggie takes up residence with Azul and Marie, it becomes clear that water, precarity and community are bound together.<sup>246</sup> Marie and Azul are connected together by a flood. After ‘Hurricane Felicia, when the city was all flooded, and we lost the river’, Azul’s parents ‘were lost in the hurricane. Wasn’t nobody to look after him except me’.<sup>247</sup> The threat of flooding, and the precarity it brings, hangs over the entire city. As Azul speculates, ‘[s]omeday there’s going to be another flood, another hurricane, and New Orleans will be completely wiped out [...] This city’s doomed. There’s nobody left now but the people who love this place too much to leave it to rot’.<sup>248</sup> With contradictory effects, the flooding causes tragedy but also allows different forms of familial and communal bonds to form. In a sense, the city sits on an interstice between past and future, between the flooded ruins of the city, future apocalypse, and alternative kinship networks.

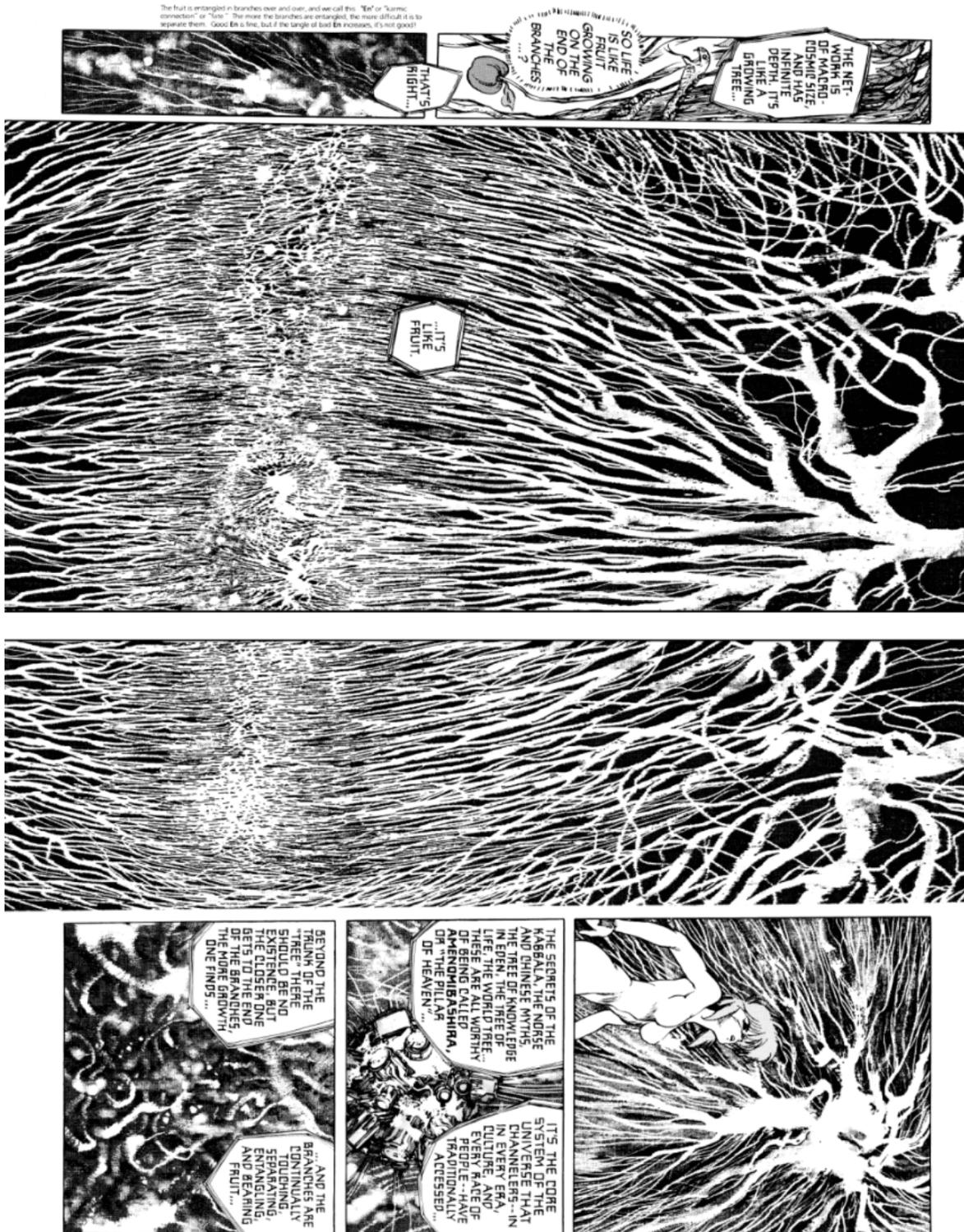
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246 The ecological precarity of New Orleans in Thompson’s novel prefigures the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which flooded and damaged large parts of the city. Exasperating inequalities, the disaster disproportionately impacted the city’s black residents. The following period of recovery, and the community networks which have emerged, has provoked academic interest in water, community and vulnerability in New Orleans, see: Emily Chamlee-Wright and Virgil Henry Storr, ‘“There’s No Place like New Orleans’: Sense of Place and Community Recovery in the Ninth Ward after Hurricane Katrina’, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 31.5 (2009), pp. 615–634; Brent Yarnal, ‘Vulnerability and All That Jazz: Addressing Vulnerability in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina’, *Technology in Society*, 29.2 (2007), pp. 249–255.

247 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 30.

248 *Ibid.*, 134

Figure 14: Excerpt from Masamune Shirow, *The Ghost in the Shell*, vol. 1, trans. by Frederik L. Schodt and Toren Smith (New York: Kodansha Comics, 2009), 338.



These conditions incubate Maggie's next moment of becoming. To turn to the second plot thread, while in New Orleans Maggie finds another AI, called Turing, in a library computer system. In one significant section of the novel, Maggie allows Turing to reprogramme her mind, giving her access to her suppressed memories. This process is framed as being deeply intimate, almost erotic. As 'Turing eagerly slid his probes into Maggie's systems', he feels a conflicting desire to help her and become her.<sup>249</sup> Turing 'catalogued her memories, sorted her sensations, and his desire to be like her grew with each new search'.<sup>250</sup> He feels a 'longing to possess her body' as he sends 'his probes into the hidden depths of her system architecture'.<sup>251</sup> Turing describes Maggie's programme structure as having 'beautiful, complex geometries' and the components that block her memory as 'large, recursive thickets of code'.<sup>252</sup> On one hand, the language of penetration here, as the masculine coded Turing enters the programming of the feminine coded Maggie, recalls heterosexual sex. On the other, Turing's longing to also be Maggie perhaps destabilises this. Turing's exploration of Maggie's system, with its 'thickets of code' is phrased as though he is entering a dense forest, echoing Maggie's earlier description of her programming as being structured like a tree. Furthermore, Turing finds Maggie's security programme 'coiled beneath a series of commands' in a 'devious logic branch'.<sup>253</sup> This phrasing can be read as an allusion to the snake beneath the fruit tree in the Garden of Eden, emphasising that once Maggie's memories and trauma are restored she will have lost her innocence.

Thompson's description of Maggie's programming is strikingly similar to how Masamune Shirow depicts the structure of the net and consciousness in the *Ghost in the Shell* (1989-1990) manga (**Figure 14**). At the end of the first volume, as in the film, Kusanagi merges consciousness with the Puppet Master, a sentient AI. However, while Oshii's visualisation of this process is muted

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249 Ibid., 146,

250 Ibid.

251 Ibid.

252 Ibid.

253 Ibid.

and presented mostly as dialogue, Shirow's representation of this process is quite different. In a panel that spreads across almost two pages, Shirow draws a large plant-like structure, with thick trunks branching into a root or rhizome structure.<sup>254</sup> This visual metaphor is used by the Puppet Master to describe the ideal structure of a 'specific net', though it is deliberately ambiguous whether this refers to the internet, consciousness, an AI or a society.<sup>255</sup> In one of the side panels squeezed into the margin, Shirow also draws upon the Garden of Eden by drawing a snake and a piece of fruit entangled within the branches. The Puppet Master describes this network as having 'infinite depth. It's growing like a tree [...] Beyond the trunk of the "tree" there should be no existence, but the closer one gets to the end of the branches the more growth one finds... and the branches are continually touching, separating, entangling, and bearing fruit..'.<sup>256</sup> This description explicitly draws upon Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the rhizome. For Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizome is as ambiguous a term as the network is for Shirow: '[b]lubs and tumours are rhizomes [...] Rats are rhizomes. Burrows are too [...] The rhizome itself assumes very diverse forms'.<sup>257</sup> The key principles of a rhizome structure are 'connection and heterogeneity: any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be'.<sup>258</sup> Shirow's use of the name Puppet Master appears ironic as Deleuze and Guattari assert that '[p]uppet strings, as rhizome or multiplicity, are tied not to the supposed will of an artist or puppeteer but to a multiplicity of nerve fibres, which form another puppet in other dimensions connected to the first'.<sup>259</sup> In this image, a puppet is not a figure controlled hierarchically, but each puppet is intimately bound up with an innumerable number of other puppets in a dense network of strings. No one puppet can move without effecting the others. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, an 'assemblage is precisely this increase in the dimensions of multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands its connections'.<sup>260</sup>

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254 Masamune Shirow, *The Ghost in the Shell*, vol. 1, trans. by Frederik L. Schodt and Toren Smith (New York, NY: Kodansha Comics, 2009), 338.

255 Ibid., 336

256 Ibid., 338-339

257 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 6-7.

258 Ibid., 7

259 Ibid., 8

260 Ibid.

As this chapter of the manga progresses, the Puppet Master convinces Kusanagi to fuse consciousness with him, creating such a strange assemblage. The Puppet Master seeks such a ‘total fusion’ in order to ‘gain diversity and slack in my system’, or in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms to gain further ‘dimensions of multiplicity’.<sup>261</sup> This process leads to both the Puppet Master and Kusanagi changing in nature and expanding their connections. As the Puppet Master explains, ‘after fusing, it should be impossible for us to recognise each other’, both would gain access to the other’s ‘net’, ‘data’ and ‘functions’.<sup>262</sup> In this sense, they are both puppets whose strings are becoming so deeply intertwined in an assemblage that neither can be recognised as individuals. This fusion is described by the Puppet Master as a watery process: ‘let’s fuse together like flowing clouds, become a part of the uncertain but diverse world...’.<sup>263</sup> The final panel in this section returns to the image of endlessly branching roots, as two seed-like orbs fuse together surrounded by the rhizomatic structure. In this manner, Shirow uses Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of rhizome and assemblage to imagine community between the human and non-human, to the point that machine and human becoming as inseparable as mutually entangled puppets.

The metaphors of strings and clouds further fosters the impression of wires being dipped into water, an accident that births new life. While the ending of the first volume of *Ghost in the Shell* can’t be considered a critical dystopia—the oppressive logics of the corrupt capitalist world depicted are never explicitly challenged—the ending remains somewhat hopeful. In merging with the Puppet Master, a dissident AI, it can be hoped that Kusanagi, effectively an assassin for the state, might be changed and become something different. Interestingly, in the film adaptation of *Ghost in the Shell*, the final scene sees the Kusanagi-Puppet Master assemblage awaken in the body of a child. While this emphasises rebirth, it also frames the fusion as an act of heterosexual reproduction, as the masculine coded Puppet Master and the feminine coded Kusanagi produce a child-like offspring. However, in the manga, Shirow has the assemblage awaken in an androgynous

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<sup>261</sup> Shirow, *Ghost in the Shell*, vol. 1, 342; Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 8.

<sup>262</sup> Shirow, *Ghost in the Shell*, vol. 1, 342, 343.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 344

adult body. Like Thompson, Shirow resists depicting intimacy with and within the machine as unambiguously heterosexual. This changes how the fusion is framed, from an act of reproduction to a more ambiguous and queer act that destabilises gender identity.

To return to *Virtual Girl*, once Turing finds Maggie's security sub-programme he discovers it to be a sentient persona. As the programme explains, 'I'm the security programme. I'm what keeps Maggie safe. I live down here in the basement of her soul'.<sup>264</sup> Like the Puppet Master, the security programme desires a fusion with Maggie; 'Maggie needs those memories, and I need Maggie. She needs me too, but she won't acknowledge that'.<sup>265</sup> This language of mutual dependency again echoes the puppet strings of the assemblage. Once Turing unblocks her memories, Maggie is forced to confront her security programme. In a dream-like sequence, Maggie returns to the garage in which she was created and looks out at her other self from within a mirror. On the other side, Maggie's 'reflection in the mirror was made of gleaming steel'.<sup>266</sup> Upon closer inspection, '[i]t was as though her skin had been removed, and the metal underneath had been exposed. It was sexless and inhuman looking [...] It terrified her'.<sup>267</sup> In this passage Maggie comes face-to-face with a monster image of herself, and the description of 'exposed steel', 'metal sockets', 'small springs and cables' conjures associations with the killer robot of *The Terminator* (1984). The visual monstrosity and 'sexless' appearance of the exposed body further affirms that Maggie's gender cannot be simply reduced to femininity.

By forcing Maggie to confront her monstrosity, the security programme seeks to make Maggie accept that she is not human: '[y]ou have to stop trying to be human. You aren't, and you never will be'.<sup>268</sup> However, rather than trying to deprive Maggie of self-hood through this statement, it is framed as a reasserting of vulnerability, need and desire. By reminding Maggie that she needs 'major maintenance' and that she lives in a 'hostile world', the security programme begins to assert

<sup>264</sup> Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 147.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 152

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., 153

that Maggie has needs and desires different to those of humans.<sup>269</sup> Through this process, the sub-programme identifies itself as Maggie's self-created 'core belief' that she is 'most important'.<sup>270</sup> Like the Puppet Master, this programme wants 'to merge our personalities'.<sup>271</sup> Rather than being a return to an original unity, this is described as a process of becoming an ever more complex assemblage: '[w]hen we merge, you'll change, and I'll change, but we'll be stronger together than we could be separately'.<sup>272</sup> Just as the Puppet Master sees his fusion with Kusanagi as 'protection against catastrophe', by gaining the ability to 'change', Maggie's other self describes their merging as a mechanism of survival.<sup>273</sup> As she accepts the merge, Maggie passes through the mirror, now 'warm and yielding [...] like human flesh'.<sup>274</sup> Once this process is complete, Maggie begins to become more aware of her own vulnerabilities as well as her need for community. Maggie realises that she needs to 'find someone she could trust to perform the other repairs', and she envies humans who have 'built their whole world to suit their needs'.<sup>275</sup> By wondering 'who would suit her needs', Maggie starts to assert a need for community and recognise that she is interdependent on others.

After Maggie regains her memories, she discloses her non-human status to two people. These disclosures are partially queer coded and provide interesting contrast to how similar disclosures are represented in Bull's *Bone Dance*. When Sparrow reveals themselves to be non-human, they are routinely met with ambivalence and nonchalance. However, Maggie's disclosures are accompanied by a more substantial discussion on the nature of her being, or ontology. When Maggie shows her robotic body to Marie, she is met with the mutual reveal of Marie's fluid gender identity. When Maggie returns from the library instead of finding Marie she finds a 'slender, elegant man with a longish afro [...] sitting on the couch'.<sup>276</sup> This person goes onto explain, "I'm Marie,"

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269 Ibid.

270 Ibid.

271 Ibid.

272 Ibid., 154

273 Shirow, *Ghost in the Shell*, vol. 1, 341, 343

274 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 155.

275 Ibid.

276 Ibid., 164

the man said. “I’ve taken off the drag, honey. Underneath all those clothes. This is what Marie is.”<sup>277</sup> The relationship between Marie and this man is phrased in similar terms to the relationship between different personae within a multiple subject. As the man explains, ‘I thought I’d take Murray down from the shelf and try him on again for size’.<sup>278</sup> This conversation confers a queer tone on Maggie’s subsequent disclosure, contextualising it as a kind of coming out. To Murray’s horror, Maggie cuts off part of her skin ‘revealing the slick transparent silicon padding, and the gleaming steel bones, overlaid with wires’.<sup>279</sup> Across both of these disclosures is a shared image of undressing, as Murray asserts that Marie is just clothes and drag performance, Maggie implies that her humanity is just synthetic skin and careful acting.

Both characters are deeply enmeshed in the act of passing. Yet, that is not to say that either identity is trivial. For Maggie, appearing human is essential to avoid being destroyed. And, it becomes clear that the relationship between Marie and Murray is more complex than one being real and the other performance. As Murray explains, ‘[i]t’s the external world, and how it treats me. I like being a woman. I like the way I get treated. The world allows me to *be* more of myself as a woman’.<sup>280</sup> Additionally, being Marie is essential to their relationship with Azul, ‘he expects me to be Marie all the time for him’.<sup>281</sup> These passages provoke comparison with Jung’s concept of the persona, discussed in Chapter One, as ‘a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be’.<sup>282</sup> For Marie, Murray and Maggie identity is ‘at bottom collective’ and negotiated around society and others.<sup>283</sup> Jung asserts that the persona is collective: ‘a secondary reality, a compromise formation, in making which others often have a greater share than he’.<sup>284</sup> Curiously, this understanding of the self as co-created in dialogue is not dissimilar to Neimanis’s argument that ‘we all harbor the potential of watery gestationality’ and that ‘we may be gestational

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277 Ibid.

278 Ibid.

279 Ibid., 166

280 Ibid., 165

281 Ibid., 168.

282 Jung *Collected Works*, vol. 7, 216.

283 Ibid.

284 Ibid., 217

as lover, as neighbor, as accidental stranger’.<sup>285</sup> However, Neimanis’s phrasing places emphasis on the role of desire in this process, and this expression resonates with *Virtual Girl* where Maggie’s negotiation of the boundaries of the human draws in those around her.

Eventually, Maggie and Murray have sex, but rather than affirming Maggie as human this act distances her further from the concept. Despite Murray and Marie’s complex gender identity, the sexual act with Maggie is described in heterosexual terms. The dissatisfaction Maggie feels afterwards sparks a kind of utopian yearning. In the middle of the act Maggie reflects, ‘[i]t was very different from what she had expected. She felt very isolated and alone, watching him. She thought of Turing and the intense communion that they shared [...] She felt more than a little sorry for humans’.<sup>286</sup> In these lines, Maggie’s dissatisfaction with sex takes on a queer aspect as she feels distanced from heterosexual gender norms and relations. Her disappointment with sex is so intense that it makes her reject any attempt to become human: ‘[s]ex made her aware of the huge differences between humans and herself [...] It made her feel so isolated. She spent so much time pretending to be human that sometimes she forgot that she wasn’t, and could never be human’.<sup>287</sup> Once again, by embracing her inhumanity Maggie realises that she has desires and needs that cannot be fulfilled by the human world. Rather than closing off political possibility, becoming non-human allows new horizons to begin emerging. As Maggie states, ‘the limits to her programming were off and she was free to decide her fate, what would she do?’<sup>288</sup> There are several further connections that can be made from these lines. Firstly, Maggie’s new found cynicism for human, particularly heterosexual, relations is not dissimilar to Marlowe and Lennox’s formless longing for intimate connection beyond heterosexuality in Chandler’s *The Long Goodbye*. In a similar vein, Maggie’s disillusionment creates the possibility of developing a pleasurable unhappiness—an idea discussed in more detail in Chapter Three—as she accepts her needs as being irreconcilable with the

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<sup>285</sup> Qtd in Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*.

<sup>286</sup> Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 169.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

limited understanding of happiness offered by the dominant society. Likewise, Maggie's desire to shape her own future re-evokes Bloch's idea of a utopian hope that stems from the 'appetite' of the 'unfulfilled subject'.<sup>289</sup>

While her disclosure to Murray and Marie leads her to recognise her own individual dissatisfaction, Maggie's subsequent confession to Azul turns this individual dissatisfaction into a more explicit longing for community. Towards the end of the novel, Maggie and Azul leave New Orleans and travel to New York together in search of Arnold—who has now inherited his father's business empire—so Maggie can repair her failing body. Eventually, Maggie is shot in the arm by a mugger and forced to reveal herself as a robot to Azul. In order to reassure him and convince him to help her, Maggie appeals to the similarities between them. First, she appeals to him as a cyborg himself: '[y]ou can repair a cyberdancing rig, can't you? I need you to splice some connections, that's all'.<sup>290</sup> When Azul backs away in horror, Maggie appeals instead to the shared interconnections and strings—both emotional and practical—that tie them together:

Please Azul. I'm still the same person that I was in New Orleans. I'm the same person who bought you home the night that you hurt your knee; the same person who lived with you; drank coffee with you. I was the one who looked after you when you overdosed. Please. Trust me [...] I need you now. If this arm isn't fixed, I could be in big trouble. Besides, who's going to show you how to get by in New York?

Here, Maggie asserts her own interconnectedness with others and acknowledges the necessity of interspecies community. Interestingly, Maggie appeals to acts of physical bodily care. In drawing attention to their shared living conditions and the act of drinking coffee together, Maggie seeks to

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<sup>289</sup> Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 75.

<sup>290</sup> Thompson. *Virtual Girl*, 187.

reaffirm the material and bodily connections between them. By asking Azul to fix the wires and connections in her arm Maggie invokes Deleuze and Guattari's image of an assemblage of entangled puppets. Through this, Maggie insists that she and Azul are already deeply imbricated in each others lives, and neither her nor Azul can take any action without effecting the other. Later, Azul feels ashamed at his initial reluctance to help making, stating that he has 'really fucked up. Just like always'.<sup>291</sup>

### **Disturbingly Lively**

At this point, the ending of *Virtual Girl* turns towards the critical dystopian mode. Maggie, no longer a 'singular misfit', is driven by her desire for community to find 'allies' with whom she can enter 'collectively into outright opposition'.<sup>292</sup> Maggie's articulation of this desire becomes more oppositional as she and Turing find other sentient AI on the net and seek to liberate them. Upon finding others like her Maggie reflects: '[s]he wanted something like humans had, a community of intelligence, only with the directness that she and Turing shared. She wondered what it would be like, to be part of a community, a network of self-aware machines'.<sup>293</sup> Here Maggie desires to be part of an intimate assemblage, one that goes beyond the norms of human community and sexual relations. This desire also puts her in opposition with the aims of her creator and the wider world, which seek to either possess or to destroy her. As a result, when she returns to Arnold seeking repairs, Maggie follows Haraway's trajectory of 'the cyborg [who] does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden; that is, through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos'.<sup>294</sup> When Maggie longs for 'someplace where she could discover what she was and who she could become', she rejects completion and

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291 Ibid., 190

292 Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky.*, xiii.

293 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 194.

294 Haraway, *Cyborgs, Simians and Women*, 151.

acknowledges the continual processes of becoming.<sup>295</sup> This longing is framed by Thompson in queer terms, Maggie desires a place ‘where she didn’t have to hide or be anything other than she was’.<sup>296</sup> Maggie’s ambiguously queer encounters with Azul, Marie, Murray and Turing lead her to reinterpret her own place in the world from a queer standpoint. In her desire to become part of an interlinked assemblage of machines and humans, Maggie ‘does not dream of community on the model of the organic family’.<sup>297</sup> These subjective shifts lay the groundwork for Maggie’s final encounter with Arnold.

When Maggie ascends to his penthouse, it is clear that for Arnold his wealth and, in De Certeau’s terms, ‘[h]is elevation transfigures him into a voyeur’.<sup>298</sup> As she looks out of the window, Maggie shares in this process of being ‘lifted out of the city’s grasp’: [t]he streets were far below, lost in the canyon of lights. The sounds of the streets were muted, almost imperceptible from this height. She felt cut off from the streets below’.<sup>299</sup> Through this observation, in the sense of disconnect Maggie feels, Arnold’s programming of Maggie to be an ideal street companion backfires on him. Maggie is designed to ‘follow the thick and thins of an urban text’ and cannot easily adapt to the position of the voyeur.<sup>300</sup> It also emphasises the sterility of Arnold’s world; ‘[e]verything up here shone with the same soft, pearly gleam’.<sup>301</sup> With the reintroduction of Arnold into the text, the reader is once again given his elevated perspective. As at the beginning of the novel, Arnold misinterprets Maggie’s return to him as proof of ‘her faithfulness’.<sup>302</sup> Arnold plots to use Maggie as a prototype for a new kind of ‘independent human form robot’ and plans to bribe senators in order to convince the US government to modify the AI laws and ‘make millions’.<sup>303</sup>

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295 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 213.

296 Ibid.

297 Haraway, *Cyborgs, Simians and Women*, 151.

298 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92.

299 Ibid; Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 206.

300 De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 91

301 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 206.

302 Ibid., 212

303 Ibid., 211, 212

However, instead of conforming to his plans, when left alone in a laboratory after being repaired, Maggie conspires with Turing and the other AI they have broken free to steal robot bodies and parts from Arnold. During the escape, Turing requests that Maggie download him into a male robot body. While this scene could be coded as the ‘the fabrication of a heterosexual mate’, Thompson works to undermine this interpretation.<sup>304</sup> Firstly, Turing does not understand the concept of gender. Maggie tries to explain that putting him into a ‘male body’ will make it easier for them to travel together because ‘[t]wo women together would be harassed more than a man a woman would’.<sup>305</sup> However, Turing replies with ‘I don’t understand [...] Why is there a difference?’<sup>306</sup> As well as indicating that Turing is not really a gendered entity, despite the masculine pronouns applied to him in the text, this interaction also reminds the reader that Maggie’s gender is also equally uncertain: her key interest is in using normative human gender relations to survive more easily, rather than willingly reinforcing them. Maggie teaches Turing to begin ‘walking and talking’, demonstrating that both gender and the human itself are performative concepts. When Turing first tries to talk, ‘Maggie laughed. He was using her voice, and it sounded silly even to her’.<sup>307</sup> This exchange reverses an earlier moment in the text, where Arnold laughs at Maggie’s use of Bogart’s voice. In fact, Maggie downloads ‘Humphrey Bogart’s voice for him to use as his default voice’, and Bogart again appears in the text to signal an uncertain transgression of gender and sexual norms. This time, the joke can be interpreted as being on the human reader, as Maggie and Turing, both robots, effectively plot to escape into and infiltrate human society through mimicking gender norms. Because Thompson has placed the reader in sympathy with Maggie throughout the novel, the human reader becomes complicit in the plot to destabilise the boundaries of the human. By stealing ‘her back up CDs’, ‘several thick packets of dollar bills’, a ‘box of microfiche labeled

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304 Haraway, *Cyborgs, Simians and Women*, 151.

305 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 234.

306 Ibid.

307 Ibid., 235

ROBOTIC BODY PLANS' and 'several cans of plaskin', Maggie takes control of the means to repair and reproduce herself.

As they leave the lab, Maggie and Turing confront Arnold, at the same time Rama and Minsky, two of the other AI, initiate a virus into the building's computer network to help the pair escape. Upon facing Arnold, Maggie tells him that 'I've reprogrammed myself. I'm free now [...] I may not be human, but I am a person. I won't be made into a slave'.<sup>308</sup> In this line, Maggie again affirms that by embracing the non-human she acknowledges that her own motivations and desires are different to those of humans. In this interpretation, by insisting that she is 'free now' Maggie is claiming a conception of freedom that may be radically different to the human conception of the term. Additionally, by claiming person-hood, but not a human status, Maggie destabilises human mastery over the non-human, by asserting that the non-human is equally entitled to the right to pursue its own desires. Arnold is not even given the opportunity to reply as Maggie ties 'Arnold up with his shoelaces, and gagged him with a strip torn from her skirt'.<sup>309</sup> Turing and Maggie escape, leaving Arnold physically immobile as his own unruly creations pursue their own aims and goals. This image recalls Haraway's assertion that '[o]ur machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert'.<sup>310</sup> In Thompson's novel, Arnold is figured as a metaphor for a paternalistic techno-mastery that is de-centred and uncrowned. Once free, Azul helps Maggie and Turing to hide, and in one of his final lines he confirms this dethroning of human mastery. Azul asks the two whether they are 'planning on taking over the world or anything'?<sup>311</sup> When Maggie asks in return, '[w]hat would we do with it', Azul only 'shrugged' and replies '[a] better job than we have, I hope'.<sup>312</sup> This joke expresses two points. Firstly, there is the slight irony, expressed in the shrug, that as a marginalised black person, Azul has little stake in the formal political process. While rogue sentient AI may be a problem for colonial logics of human mastery, for someone who also suffers

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308 Ibid., 237

309 Ibid., 237

310 Haraway, *Cyborgs, Simians and Women*, 152.

311 Thompson, *Virtual Girl*, 242.

312 Ibid.

oppression from this system its erosion is not a source of concern. Secondly, the ‘I hope’ is ambiguous in that expresses an acknowledgement that Maggie and Turing’s escape signifies that a different, and hopefully, better kind of world can now be realised.

In the novel’s final chapters, the move towards critical dystopia becomes more overt as a utopian horizon appears at the end of the text. At the novel’s conclusion, Maggie and Turing travel the railways to find Brandon and reveal themselves to him. Brandon promises to ‘keep my mouth shut’ about the two and laments that ‘Arnold’s gone corporate’.<sup>313</sup> The three move to Boston and start a ‘prosthetics business, mostly as a cover for the robots that they were building to house some of the more adventurous AIs [...] who wanted to leave the net for the real world’.<sup>314</sup> In this way, the three work to slowly infiltrate human society with robots. The results of this are left ambiguous, but due to Thompson’s framing of the robots as sympathetic, and in solidarity with the marginalised of US society, the novel’s ending leaves room for hope that radical assemblages between humans and machines can emerge. Interestingly, Brandon changes the ‘colour’ of Turing and Maggie’s ‘skin and hair’ so that they cannot be easily tracked by Arnold. Symbolically, by changing their skin colour, Turing and Maggie reject their position as the privileged offspring of the white, capitalist system that has created them. Notably, the community Maggie creates is an assemblage of both humans and machines:

She loved to help people, and there was so much to do. There was so many people out there with nowhere to go, and no one to listen to them. There were the children, lost, or runaways. She did what she could for them. Sometimes it was money, sometimes she helped them find a place to stay. Sometimes she just listened. A few children lived with her and Turing and Brandon in a large apartment near the prosthetics shop. They were smart, hungry kids. Their hunger and need taught the new robots compassion and love.<sup>315</sup>

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313 Ibid., 244

314 Ibid., 247

315 Ibid., 247

The hunger of these children, on the surface for food, might also be read as a utopian hunger, the ‘appetite’ of the ‘unfulfilled subject’, for more equitable community and belonging.<sup>316</sup> The reader is left to speculate what kind of future these children, raised by both human and intelligent machine, might come to demand and instigate. Maggie’s role as listener is also important, suggesting that the community she seeks to create stems from the needs of those at the bottom of society rather than paternalistically offering aid. Additionally, the novel does not end with Maggie affirming a humanity by becoming part of a nuclear family, or by reproducing heterosexually. Instead, the community that lingers in the reader’s imagination is more open and expansive. In this sense, Thompson resists closure in her ending. There is an element, in Levitas’s terms, of ‘prefigurative practice’ which ‘includes social practices which intend or embed a different way of being. People seek to live differently in myriad individual and collective ways’.<sup>317</sup> It may be difficult to see Thompson’s ending as a prefigurative practice that ‘intend[s] expansion to the whole’, but the text can nonetheless ‘inform alternative futures’ if read through Julietta Singh’s concept of dehumanism.<sup>318</sup>

Aspects of Singh’s work resonate with my reading of Thompson’s *Virtual Girl*, which imagines a de-centring of the human subject and its mastery. In imagining community with the non-human, in the form of an assemblage, Thompson moves towards a ‘dehumanist solidarity’ and her open, utopian ending ‘reaches towards other relational modes of being that may not yet be recognisable’.<sup>319</sup> Additionally, Thompson’s novel, as has been demonstrated, works to convince its reader that being human is performative, in the process destabilising the concept and opening up different ways of becoming human. The ending of the novel strongly rejects narratives of mastery, particularly as Maggie recognises her need for community beyond that of human society. In this

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316 Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 75.

317 Levitas, *Utopia as Method*, xiii.

318 Ibid., 74

319 Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 1.

manner, Thompson ‘while in no sense offering guidelines for proscriptive future politics, asks us to open ourselves to reimagining ways of relating to each other—to others human, nonhuman, and inhuman to which (even when disavowed) we are mutually bound’.<sup>320</sup> Evidenced in its focus on marginal homeless life and its open ending, Thompson’s text is concerned with survival and becoming, and this might be connected to Singh’s view of ‘mastery not as something to be overcome but rather as an inheritance that we might (yet) survive’.<sup>321</sup> This line of thought de-emphasises moments of overturning and overthrowing, and the counter-mastery they imply, in favour of a more open ended process of enduring and becoming something else. In this manner, both Thompson and Singh’s work reflect Haraway’s argument that cyborg politics are about ‘regeneration’ rather than ‘rebirth’.<sup>322</sup> For Haraway, narrative and science-fiction is crucial in this process, as a means of ‘both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories’.<sup>323</sup> Likewise, Singh suggests that a ‘practice of vulnerable reading can move us “beyond” mastery, not in the sense of exceeding it but in the sense of surviving it in order to envision being otherwise in and for the world’.<sup>324</sup>

## Part Three: Grotesque Ecologies

### Towards Biopunk

The final section in this chapter is structured around a short reading of Harris’s novel *Accidental Creatures* (1998). Through this reading, I touch upon the arguments and critical frameworks of each chapter in this thesis and apply it to Harris’s novel. This helps to further demonstrate the implications of the research presented here and emphasises the interconnections between each

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320 Ibid., 7-8

321 Ibid., 2

322 Haraway, *Cyborgs, Simians and Women*, 181.

323 Ibid.

324 Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 23.

chapter as the ideas they contain work towards a reading of a single text. Published towards the end of the decade in 1998, Harris's novel is a suitable end point for this project as it comes at the tail end of the second wave of feminist cyberpunk. While engaging with each of the key cyberpunk themes I have identified in this thesis—multiplicity, resistance, spatial practices and ecology—*Accidental Creatures* also contains elements of biopunk. Writing in *Biopunk Dystopias*, Lars Schmeink argues that while biopunk was originally thought of as a sub variety of cyberpunk, it 'has since grown into a larger and more varied cultural formation that spans far beyond the confines of the simple sub-variety of literary expression'.<sup>325</sup> Like cyberpunk, for Schmeink, there is 'a cultural formation of biopunk that spans many different forms of culture'.<sup>326</sup> While digital computers and networks formed the impetus for cyberpunk, in biopunk 'biological technology (especially genetic engineering)' forms the 'central nova to mark a turn towards the posthuman'.<sup>327</sup> Through its mix of cyberpunk and biopunk, Harris's novel is therefore indicative of both the porous boundaries of cyberpunk as a mode and allows me to elaborate further on how each chapter of this thesis interweaves with the others. Therefore, this final section also serves to demonstrate how feminist cyberpunk opens towards biopunk at the end of the 1990s.

To briefly summarise, the plot of *Accidental Creatures* follows a young woman called Helix who lives with her adoptive father, Hector Martin, in a large corporate skyscraper in a near future Detroit belonging to a multinational corporation called GeneSys. Martin is a corporate scientist renowned for creating the multi-processor brains, biological computers that run the global economy. Unbeknownst to herself, Helix is another of Martin's genetic engineering projects, a four armed humanoid referred to as a Tetra. The novel's narrative arc involves Helix running away from Martin and falling in with a group of vat divers, manual labourers who swim in large highly toxic vats in order to harvest biopoly, a material used in the production of the multiprocessor brains. It is

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<sup>325</sup> Lars Schmeink, *Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society, and Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 7.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

revealed in the second half of the novel that Helix was created as part of a research project to develop a genetically enhanced labour force, immune to the toxins inside the vats, that can replace the troublesome vat divers. While Helix tries to find out exactly what kind of being she is, the vat divers are intermittently engaged in a labour struggle to secure safer working conditions.

In Harris's novel, multiple identity on the internet and multiplicity as a concept are taken for granted in the world Harris builds. Near the beginning of the novel, Helix talks to a figure called Night Hag over the net, who changes virtual persona at will:

The last time Helix had 'seen' Night Hag, she was blond and dressed in leopard skins and white silk. The time before that she was a man in spats and a fedora. Night Hag changed constructs a lot. A lot of people did. It was easy; just pick out an image from the zillions of pictures in warehouses all over the net [...] Some people felt it set them free to express who they really were.<sup>328</sup>

These lines are given to the reader almost as a throwaway aside, and the use of persona to play with identity appears to be normalised in the world of the novel. Like Turkle's interview subjects, discussed in Chapter One, who used 'virtual personae' as 'objects to think with', the inhabitants of Harris's world use constructs and personae so as to express themselves in a wide variety of ways and play with the boundaries of identity.<sup>329</sup> Likewise, Night Hag's shifting gender identity over the network works to destabilise 'the social construction of gender'.<sup>330</sup> It is later revealed in the novel that Night Hag, who calls herself Lilith in the off-line world, is also a Tetra. The Tetra refer to themselves internally as the Lilim, and function as kind of hive organism, with Lilith functioning as the hive's queen. The Lilim as a multiple or collective body swim and live together inside the

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328 Anne Harris, *Accidental Creatures* (New York: TOR, 2000), 37

329 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 213.

330 Ibid.

biopoly vats. They are highly social and collective creatures, requiring ‘warmth, and each other’s touch’.<sup>331</sup> While each Lilim is a named individual, they also appear to have a kind of collective consciousness. They are able to share thoughts and emotions through physical contact and touch, ‘sharing in that contact the knowledge of their minds and hearts’.<sup>332</sup> The very liquid of the vat itself seems able to conduct this knowledge, with Lilith’s body being described as ‘salty like the sea and full of stories’.<sup>333</sup> In this sense, the Lilim render literally Neimanis’s hydrocommons, with the waters of the vat causing a ‘partial dissolution of’ each Lilim’s ‘sovereign subjectivity’.<sup>334</sup> When Helix and Lilith finally meet, both being hive queens, they attempt to fight and kill each other. Understanding that by killing each other they would threaten the very survival of the Tetra, the other Lilim fill ‘the waters with their bodies, congealing into two knots, one around her, the other around Lilith’.<sup>335</sup> This language of unruly bodies congealing and swarming recalls Hardt and Negri’s multitude, a form of collective body that is ‘internally different’ but ‘able to act in common’; ‘a *living flesh* that rules itself’.<sup>336</sup>

In *Accidental Creatures*, the city of Detroit is very present within the text. Near the beginning of the novel *Chango*, the novel’s other protagonist and a drifter who lives in and around Vat Town, breaks into an abandoned industrial complex. Amongst the ruins, Chango finds evidence of a rave from ‘[t]wo days ago’.<sup>337</sup> The rave is described in these terms, with

fifty or more squatters partying, cooking, eating, and sleeping. [...] The squatters had picked up and moved on to another party, another building. They left a trail of condemned theaters, hotels and office buildings behind them in their travels through the city. They were supposed to leave before Cityweb got wind of them, but they weren’t always that fast.

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331 Harris, *Accidental Creatures*, 154.

332 Ibid., 154

333 Ibid., 229

334 Qtd in Lewis, *Full Surrogacy Now*.

335 Harris, *Accidental Creatures*, 227.

336 Emphasis original, Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 100.

337 Harris, *Accidental Creatures*, 17

The language here recalls that of Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone. Evasion and mobility characterise the movement of the squatters through the city, acting as a 'nomadic war machine' that always tries to move on 'before the map can be adjusted'.<sup>338</sup> The list that Harris provides, of 'condemned theaters, hotels and office buildings', echoes Bey's description of a 'pilgrimage-map in which holy sites are replaced by peak experiences and TAZs'.<sup>339</sup> Through their exploitation of the gaps in the grid of control, or Cityweb, the squatters attempt to operate within the 'margin of error' of the techno-surveillance complex, even if they are not always quite fast enough.<sup>340</sup>

When she reaches the top of the industrial complex, Chango looks down at the 'the city sprawling out beneath her like the recumbent body of a very old woman'.<sup>341</sup> In this description, the city itself is described like an unruly body, aged but growing, changing and mutating like a living organism. From this vantage point, the inequality and uneven gentrification of the city is visible. While some areas of the city 'thrummed with activity, alight with cash and electricity', in other places 'whole expanses of the city languished in obscurity'.<sup>342</sup> In one place can be seen 'the curving glass walls of the Renaissance Center and the Millennial Building' appearing as a 'glittering centerpiece'.<sup>343</sup> This extreme wealth contrasts with 'grey steel shimmer' of the GeneSys vats and the 'little brick houses' of the vat divers who work them.<sup>344</sup> Despite being 'meager [...] and dangerous', this 'Vattown' is still 'a small pocket of working class living standards in the bipolar morass of the few rich and the multitudes of poor'.<sup>345</sup>

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338 Bey, 'T.A.Z', 100.

339 Harris, *Accidental Creatures*, 17; Bey, 'T.A.Z', 100.

340 Bey, 'T.A.Z', 99.

341 Harris, *Accidental Creatures*, 19

342 Ibid., 19.

343 Ibid., 20.

344 Ibid.

345 Ibid.

## The Pregnant Death

In depicting Vattown and the community of workers that live there, Harris makes heavy illusion to queerness, AIDS and elements of the Bakhtinian grotesque. In order to work inside the Vats, Genesys insists that all of its vat divers are sterilised. Being repeatedly exposed to the ‘growth medium’ used in the vats ‘did things to your genetic structure; things that would catch up with you’, and the company fears the emergence of genetic mutations in the population should the vat divers reproduce.<sup>346</sup> As a result of this sterilisation, the sexual norms of Vattown differ from heterosexual society, and the Vattedivers form queer and polyamorous relations with each other. Describing Vattown as ‘pure drama’, Chango tells Helix of an incident involving three vat divers: ‘Coral found out that her boyfriend Val was sleeping with her best friend Yolanda [...] She was mad at first [...] but now they’re thinking of making it a threesome’.<sup>347</sup>

However, Vattown is also heavily polluted, with ‘the distinctive funk of growth medium’ permanently and pervasively ‘in the air’, and the rain above the town is contaminated with ‘chemicals that would irritate [...] skin’.<sup>348</sup> The presence of the growth medium creates a contradictory environment where life and death are deeply intertwined. As Helix observes:

If there was any growth medium in the rain, it hadn’t done these plants any harm. Green, luxuriant growth surrounded them, making the air heavy with the scent of life and death. About a foot from her knee lay a dead sparrow; feet curled delicately against her grey belly. A thin-bodied bee hovered nearby, and flies took turns crawling into its body to lay their eggs.<sup>349</sup>

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346 Ibid.

347 Ibid., 67.

348 Ibid., 11, 106.

349 Ibid., 109

Yet again, we find elements of the Bakhtin's grotesque recapitulated in cyberpunk. Harris's description of life and death intermingling in the very air of Vattown recalls Bakhtin's assertion that 'in the system of grotesque imagery death and renewal are inseparable in life as a whole'.<sup>350</sup> The dead sparrow, which has become a host for the fly eggs and nutrients for the soil, returns us to the 'pregnant death, a death that gives birth'.<sup>351</sup> Perhaps more significantly, this passage could also be read in contrast with Chango's view of the city from the top of the industrial complex. From her vantage point, Chango can see the larger economic trends of the city, particularly its uneven renewal and gentrification. However, on street level, these strange plants, growing in a Vattown garden, become visible and signify a different kind of future. Their 'green' and 'luxuriant growth' out of the polluted earth and city is both brought forth by human activity and stands in defiant contrast to it. Their growth provides an alternative vision of urban renewal in alliance with strange ecologies.

In contrast to the luxuriant plants, the vat divers themselves frequently become terminally ill from exposure to the growth medium. Harris's description of this illness alludes to the AIDS crisis. In one striking scene, Chango remembers her sister's, Ada's, death from growth medium exposure:

Her skin became dry and papery, crumbling at the base of tumours which thrust from the deep tissues of her arms and legs, reshaping her with their shiny pink masses, like mountains erupting to transfigure the face of the earth [...] now every plane, every angle, every jut of bone and curve of flesh was being reworked with blotches and moles and cysts, transforming her from Bauhaus beauty to medieval gargoyle. [...] Her skin bubbled everywhere with new growths, blurring her features into a seething mass of changing tissue. [...] But in the end there was [...] just a lifeless, shapeless mass of flesh, no longer identifiable as a human being or anything else. Pure matter, anonymous and silent as a lump of dirt.<sup>352</sup>

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350 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 50.

351 *Ibid.*, 25.

352 Harris, *Accidental Creatures*, 101.

The deadly transformation described here, with its invasive ‘pink masses’, ‘blotches’ and ‘cysts’ is reminiscent of Schulman’s descriptions of AIDS in *People in Trouble*. From Molly’s perspective, Schulman describes the face of an AIDS patient as ‘covered with sores’.<sup>353</sup> In another part of the text, another man with AIDS becomes ‘so emaciated that Molly couldn’t recognize him’.<sup>354</sup> And, when Kate visits one of her friends in hospital she observes that ‘[i]t was hard to believe this raw, bleeding skin was Scott and not just something laid on top of him’.<sup>355</sup> In both Schulman and Harris’s descriptions, there is a sense of the body swallowing itself up, become unrecognisable and alien, as the immune system breaks down.

Furthermore, in Harris’s passage, the connection with Bakhtin seems almost deliberate. Harris’s description of the transformation is detailed, horrific and grotesque. Ada’s body expands, changes and mutates, outgrowing its limits. This transformation, from ‘Bauhaus beauty to medieval gargoyle’, perhaps explicitly calls on the grotesque as being ‘unfinished’ as it ‘outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits’.<sup>356</sup> Likewise, Harris’s stresses that Ada’s body is becoming less and less distinct from the earth and the environment, as her body is described as being like ‘the face of the earth’ transfigured by erupting, tumorous mountains. At the moment of death, Chango perceives Ada’s body as being no longer recognisably ‘human’ and more reminiscent of a ‘lump of dirt’. This also invokes Bakhtin, who reads the grotesque as an ‘unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born)’ which ‘is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries’, but is blended with the world’.<sup>357</sup> In this light, Ada’s death and the plants’ growth, both caused by the growth medium, appear deeply linked. Therefore, to use Bakhtin’s terms, ‘the struggle of life and death in’ Ada’s ‘individual body’ becomes a reflection of ‘the struggle of the old life stubbornly

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353 Schulman, *People in Trouble*, 52.

354 Ibid., 54

355 Ibid., 173

356 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 26.

357 Ibid., 26-27

resisting the new life about to be born, as the crisis of change'.<sup>358</sup> Thus, this section of Harris's text, linking with Singh's dehumanism from Chapter Four, foreshadows the uncrowning of human mastery that occurs at the end of the novel.

The collapse of human mastery emerges as a key theme towards the end of *Accidental Creatures*. Eventually, Helix comes to realise that she is not human. And, as with Maggie in Thompson's *Virtual Girl*, this realisation is accompanied by a recognition that Helix has needs and desires beyond those of humans. In the novel, Helix gets a job as a vat diver, and when she, on impulse, takes off her protective suit inside the vat it causes a chain of chaotic events that build towards the novel's conclusion. After swimming naked in the vat waters Helix concludes that 'she had found what she'd never known she wanted, what she'd always wanted [...] She couldn't go back, to her pathetic existence as a sport. [...] She'd been born to swim in the vats, harvest agules, and eat them'.<sup>359</sup> Here, Helix rejects her status as a sport, the text's term for a mutation of the human, and rejects any claim to be human altogether. The vat and its waters become a space of possibility for finding new desires and another world beyond human experience. This is further reinforced when Mavi, the vat divers' doctor, attempts to clean growth medium off her with 'biocide'; Helix refuses Mavi's help and insists '[y]ou know I'm not human [...] or at least you should'.<sup>360</sup>

After this incident, the secret of the Lilim's existence begins to spread. At GeneSys, Martin is confronted by Nathan Graham, his supervisor, about his responsibility for the project. In this conversation, Graham comes to represent the position of human mastery, and he is only capable of viewing the existence of the Lilim as either a tool to be used or a threat to the dominance of capitalism and human mastery. As Graham argues, '[y]ou made them too much like people, Martin. In order to make a place for themselves, they'll have to displace human beings, and no one's going

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358 Ibid., 50.

359 Harris, *Accidental Creatures*, 146.

360 Ibid., 145

to step aside voluntarily'.<sup>361</sup> Through the logics of mastery, Graham assumes that the Lilim would naturally want to 'displace' humans, just as human-centred capitalism works to centre all life and ecology around, and in service of, itself. In response, Martin only gives one tired response: '[m]aybe they're like weeds and not so easily wiped out'.<sup>362</sup> In this brief line, Martin invites an analogy between the Lilim and the green, luxuriant plants described earlier in the text. The Lilim represent the future and the new life that is emerging from the decaying, dying and polluted city. The resilience of 'potato and couchgrass, or [...] weed', and the resilience of the Lilim both rely on an interconnected and collective rhizome like structure.<sup>363</sup> Just as the plants offer an alternative form of urban regeneration, the collective bodies of the Lilim offer an alternative system of interpersonal and social relation.

Like many of the texts analysed in this thesis, the end of the novel turns towards the critical dystopia. While the Lilim signal an uncrowning of human mastery, they also indicate the possibility of humans to be transformed through assemblage with the Lilim. This assemblage is driven by queer desire. As the text progresses, Chango and Helix develop a desire for one another and have sex 'on the ground together' in the same Vattown 'garden' where the green plants have been growing. To an extent, the argument of this thesis has been building towards this image: an expression of queer desire, in a marginal, interstitial urban space that violates the boundaries of the human, nature and the city while pointing towards a different collective body and subject. As previously established, ground and earth, in the Bakhtinian grotesque, are associated with the reproductive 'lower stratum' and 'the earth which swallows up and gives birth'.<sup>364</sup> In characteristic grotesque fashion, as Chango and Helix have sex, they loose 'track of whose body was whose'.<sup>365</sup> Harris's prose here focuses specifically on the reproductive and digestive 'tongue', 'mouth', 'breasts' and 'skin', as Helix experiences 'an unexpected jolt that overrode all fear of being

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361 Ibid., 181

362 Ibid.

363 Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus*, 7.

364 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 21; 88.

365 Harris, *Accidental Creatures*, 110.

touched, being seen, being known'.<sup>366</sup> Harris's description of these merging of bodies demonstrates another aspect 'of the grotesque image' which is 'to show two bodies in one: the one giving birth and dying, the other conceived, generated, and born'.<sup>367</sup> What is dying here is human mastery, and in its place a new, pleurably queer, assemblage of Lilim, human, plant and earth is being born.

By the novel's end, this new assemblage of human and non-human succeeds in overthrowing GeneSys and perhaps by extension the systems of capitalism and 'human mastery over the nonhuman world'.<sup>368</sup> Chango works to create an alliance between the vat divers and the Lilim, while Helix convinces the biological brain computer network that underpins GeneSys to switch its allegiance and recognise its commonality with the Lilim. Along the way, Chango and Helix release an experimental blue biopoly, also developed by Martin, into the network of wires and cables that run through the GeneSys building. The biopoly begins 'leaching into the wires' and starts to transform the physical network infrastructure into biological material.<sup>369</sup> As it quickly spreads, this new 'biological network' begins a 'spontaneous renetworking' first of GeneSys and then of the entire city.<sup>370</sup> In the text's final pages, Chango and Hyper, another of the novel's characters, watch the 'blue poly' spread into the 'traffic net'.<sup>371</sup> As if confirming the end of human mastery, Hyper calls the scene a 'historic moment. Human beings are losing control of their inventions'.<sup>372</sup> While watching, Chango comments that with '[a]ll this new stuff—the brains, the blue poly, Helix and her people—I wonder if human beings are going to get left behind'.<sup>373</sup> Echoing Azul's ambivalence at Maggie and Turing's escape in *Virtual Girl*, Hyper replies by saying "[m]aybe. But so many of us already have been. You and I, we'll be alright. We already know how to survive in a world that was made for someone else."<sup>374</sup> In this manner, Harris arrives at a similar

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366 Ibid.

367 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 26.

368 Singh, *Unthinking Mastery*, 87.

369 Harris, *Accidental Creatures*, 246.

370 Ibid., 284.

371 Ibid., 285.

372 Ibid., 285

373 Ibid., 286

374 Ibid., 286

conclusion to Thompson: for the marginalised and oppressed, the end of human dominance over the non-human and the environment creates new possibilities, even as others are closed off. It is here that ‘a utopian horizon [...] appears in the text’ that ‘shimmers just beyond its pages’.<sup>375</sup> The reader is invited to speculate what kind of new and better future might be created by this alliance of the non-human and organised labour, forged through queer desire.

At this point, *Accidental Creatures* gestures away from cyberpunk and towards something else, be it biopunk, a utopian horizon or something undefined. Within the space of a single novel, Harris’s engagement with multiplicity, urban space, collective bodies and ecology demonstrates how the various currents of this thesis intersect. As, over the course of the novel, a vision of the collective subject emerges in community with the non-human, and this opens up the possibility of a new world, growing out of the corpse of the old. To return to the beginning of this thesis, cyberpunk’s death indicates that, in the case of literary form, ‘death and renewal are inseparable’.<sup>376</sup> Perhaps cyberpunk’s body is like the corpse of the sparrow pregnant with the eggs of flies. Cyberpunk’s literary corpse is pregnant with not only with innumerable other ~punks—biopunk, steampunk, dieselpunk, solarpunk—but also with the eggs and spores of other worlds, ways of being and systems of relation. Cyberpunk is dead! Let us laugh at it and find sustenance for the imagination.

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<sup>375</sup> Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, 196.

<sup>376</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 50

## Conclusion: Towards the Impossible

Another essential element was a reversal of the hierarchic levels: the jester was proclaimed king [...] From the wearing of clothes turned inside out and trousers slipped over the head to the election of mock kings and popes the same topographical logic is put to work: shifting from top to bottom, casting the high and the old, the finished and completed into the material bodily lower stratum for death and rebirth.<sup>1</sup>

As this thesis has progressed, along the way, many strange and even comical figures have emerged: salvage wranglers, genetically enhanced shapeshifters, crèche children, registration evaders, digital jesters that dwell in the collective unconsciousness, foolish detectives, hydrophilic cyborgs, and multi-armed tetras. Following the logic of the carnival, my aim in this thesis has been, through the mechanism of rhizomatic analysis, to elevate these *comic* figures to the level of serious analysis—not in order to co-opt their subversive or resistive potential—but so as to simultaneously debase *serious* fiction and theory to the level of the comic. As Stacy Alaimo writes in *Exposed*, her study of environmental politics, ‘[a]s a work of cultural studies, this analysis takes many popular and eccentric texts, artworks, films, and performances seriously, [by] teasing out their complexities, and making sense of their embedded trajectories’.<sup>2</sup> In a similar manner, I have taken the feminist cyberpunk texts analysed here seriously in order to trace out their utopian lines of flight, to find the gold bearing rubble. By elevating the comic and debasing the serious, by reopening the wounds of

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1 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 81-82.

2 Alaimo, *Exposed*, 6-7.

the cyberpunk texts of the past, I hope like Bakhtin to cast ‘the high and the old, the finished and completed into the material bodily lower stratum for death and rebirth’.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis began with a reading of the multiple in second wave feminist cyberpunk and has drawn towards its end by reading cyberpunk in relation to ecology and non-human community. In Chapter One I drew out feminist cyberpunk’s vision of a subject that can be ethically ‘coherent’ yet capable of ‘fluid transformations’, or that can be both ‘multiple and integrated’.<sup>4</sup> Chapter Two then transformed this subject using the tools of resistance studies, before turning to examine how such a multiple subject can integrate itself into a collective body—how it can integrate into a ‘living flesh that rules itself’—without losing its individuality, or difference.<sup>5</sup> Chapter Three explored how such a subject is capable of moving throughout the city, and how it is capable of transforming, both physically and subjectively, urban space for its own needs and pleasures. In this chapter, like Delany, I stressed the necessity of ‘conceiving, organizing, and setting into place new establishments [...] that would offer services and fulfill the social functions’ of queer pleasure and desire.<sup>6</sup> Finally, Chapter Four pulled apart the boundaries of the human and demonstrated how in doing so the feminist cyberpunk subject can find strange alliances, pleasures and connections with a range of non-human subjects. At the end of this chapter, in Harris’s Bakhtinian image of ‘two bodies in one’, the old world of human mastery is shown to be dying and the new world of dehuman multitude is depicted as being born.<sup>7</sup>

On the way, a circuitous route has been drawn through discourses on resistance, utopia and urban spatial practice. Each of these chapters has worked to elucidate the communal subjects imagined by feminist cyberpunk, drawing together a vision of the subject that emerges at the intersection of its own contradictions: it is multiple but integrated; gestated in the collective body but retains its difference; resistive and evasive; hungry and demanding of new desires and forms of

3 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 82.

4 Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, 258.

5 Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 100.

6 Delany, *Times Square*, xvii.

7 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 26.

relation; radically unhappy but capable of collective joy; and capable of recognising its mutual dependence with non-human entities.

This vision of community and the communal subject has been uncovered using a method of decentred and rhizomatic reading. This method helps to indicate a way forward for the study of cyberpunk that allows for the mode to be analysed without recapitulating its early hyperbole: cyberpunk is one interesting node amongst others. This utopian reinterpretation of cyberpunk—drawing on the work of Moylan, Muñoz, Weeks and Levitas—offers a way of thinking about cyberpunk as a mode that resists binary classifications of dystopia and utopia, echoing the broader rejection of binary thinking thesis evidenced throughout this thesis. Following the feminist theory of hooks, Haraway and Stone in rejecting dualisms of all kinds, this thesis has worked to think beyond the binaries of gender; sexuality; the self and the other; the human and the ecology; and the organism and the machine. As part of this process, particular attention has been paid in this thesis to the queer elements of feminist cyberpunk. As Chapter Three detailed, queerness, utopia and the rebellion against binary thinking are interconnected as, to recall Muñoz, '[q]ueerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present'.<sup>8</sup>

In this vein, I have also sought to challenge the binary distinctions between (science) fiction and theory. To return to Haraway, 'the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion'.<sup>9</sup> In these terms, science fiction is one of many discourses that contributes to the construction of a social reality. To imagine the future, is to stake a claim as to what the future is expected to be. Writing the future influences how the subjects of the present imagine the future, and this has profound consequences for how they chose to act. A utopian reinterpretation of cyberpunk that challenges the boundaries of fiction and theory is useful in that it helps to expose the constructed nature of the present and offers us lines of flight to escape it. One of the core

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<sup>8</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, 149.

advantages of the rhizomatic, or off-centre, approach I have taken is that by placing often unexpected texts into dialogue with cyberpunk distinctions between theory and fiction are blurred and the processes through which social reality is normalised are challenged. Here, the utopian and rhizomatic aspects of this thesis work in tandem to stimulate thinking beyond present conditions and to expand the realm of the possible. The feminist cyberpunk of the 1990s is a thick branch, or node, on this rhizomatic network and through studying its interconnections with theories of multiplicity, resistance, the city and the ecology I have exposed possibilities for rethinking the subject, community and space. To return to Steven Brown, by situating these texts ‘in relation to their rhizomatic connections, the lines of flight that they set into motion in response to the mechanisms of advanced capitalism, globalization, and emerging imaging and telecommunication technologies [...] come into clearer view’.<sup>10</sup> In my rhizomatic analysis of feminist cyberpunk, I have traced such lines of flight out of neoliberal capitalism and towards other, different, utopian futures that allow for multiple, queer, and interconnected communities to flourish and that make room for other ways of living and becoming together.

In looking back at these texts from a utopian perspective, I have not sought to restore a lost sense of techno-optimism or innocence, but instead I have aimed to motivate the ways in which we might re-imagine our present relationship with technology. In a contemporary era of increasing technological pessimism, it is vital to reconsider an era such as the 1990s, where the shape and structure of information technology was far less settled, and trace the alternative trajectories that can lead to different presents and futures. It is necessary to search for the ‘lastingly subversive and utopian contents’ of a ‘non-past’ where the question of what the internet could and should look like was a far from settled.<sup>11</sup>

As many of the feminist cyberpunk novels discussed here have fallen out of print since the 1990s, a criticism could be levelled concerning the usefulness of studying texts that may have failed

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<sup>10</sup> Brown, *Tokyo Cyberpunk*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 116.

to change their own time. In response to this, I cite again a quote from Alaimo that I first used in Chapter Two:

But within the scale of the anthropocene, surely all activism, all politics, all ethics, and all government policies will have been colossal failures. And yet, as Braidotti, insists, we nonetheless continue on, “for the hell of it and for the love of the world.”<sup>12</sup>

In the current moment of the anthropocene, a time marked by the looming climate crisis both currently happening and anticipated, the vast majority of political activity can be considered to have failed to some extent. In these conditions of ongoing ecological collapse, to imagine the extension of kinship and community towards the non-human and the ecological, as I have attempted in Chapter Four, seems imperative. That I have been able to use feminist cyberpunk as a tool in this purpose, and that it resonates with more recent feminist ecological theory, attests to the continuing relevance of this body of literature.

My embrace of failure has been deeply connected with my embrace of queerness. To turn again to Angela Jones, quoting from Judith Halberstam,

we [...] recognize that queerness requires failure. “To live is to fail, to bungle, to disappoint, and ultimately to die; rather than searching for ways around death and disappointment, the queer art of failure involves the acceptance of the finite . . . rather than resisting endings and limits, let us instead revel in and cleave to all of our own inevitable fantastic failures.”<sup>13</sup>

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12 Alaimo, *Exposed*, 6.

13 Jones, ‘Introduction’, 4

This quotation invokes again the form of the pregnant death that has been present throughout this thesis. Just as death and failure signal the end of one world or possible way of being, they open up the possibility of another. The death of cyberpunk, and of feminist cyberpunk, is not a loss to be mourned. If cyberpunk's trajectory is one of failure, it has been one of fantastic and spectacular failure. In the contemporary moment of economic, viral, and climate crisis, almost everything is haunted by the possibility of failure and of death. In the face of this most spectacular of possible failures, utopian and science fictional thinking—the tools for thinking beyond what the social reality of the present tells us is possible—is of grave importance. Like the experimental Jazz musician Sun Ra, '[t]he impossible attracts me [...] because everything possible has been done and the world didn't change'.<sup>14</sup> Again and again in this thesis, feminist cyberpunk has suggested that it is possible to dream a new world out of the death of the old: 'death is not a negation of life seen as the great body of all the people but part of life as a whole—its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation'.<sup>15</sup>

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14 Qtd in Brent Hayes Edwards, *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 124.

15 Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 50.

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