The Future Virtual: An Intellectual History of Cyberpunk Criticism.

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Western Australia. Submitted through the School of Humanities, Discipline of History, in 2012.

Abstract

This dissertation is an intellectual history of cyberpunk criticism. Looking through the lens of the history of ideas, it examines cyberpunk critique for academic trends, and for critical successes and absences. In the course of its analysis, this dissertation examines key themes in the genre criticism. These include the influence of posthumanist philosophy on cyberpunk criticism; the idea of the posthuman and its place in the critical literature; the key role of feminist criticism in the formation of the cyberpunk critical discourse; interpretations of spaces in the cyberpunk genre; and, lastly, the role of history and the idea of historicity in cyberpunk fiction and critique. It finds that the majority of cyberpunk critics analyse the genre using the critical tools provided by postmodernism. It also observes that the philosophical leanings of the cyberpunk critical discourse tend to be overwhelmingly posthumanist. While it acknowledges the significant and intellectually important criticism provided by the discourse constructed upon these twin pillars, it concludes that the lack of consideration of alternative critical resources, particularly those which could have been provided by humanism, has created lacunae within the genre discourse. Ultimately, it finds that, although a lively community of criticism has grown up around cyberpunk, it is a critical community which is marked as much by its silences as its vigorous discussions.

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Preface

This project began through a serendipitous coincidence. Had I not been reading a certain novel, on a particular day, in a specific place, it would never have come to be. That being said, the germ of the idea for this thesis quickly took hold in my consciousness. It has allowed me to combine my academic passions in a single space. I have loved science fiction literature since I was a child, and cyberpunk has held a fascination for me since I first read Gibson's *Neuromancer*. I wrote a joint Honours degree in History and Philosophy, and this project has allowed me to continue an involvement in both disciplines. Indeed, without my undergraduate training in philosophy I suspect much of the literature which has formed the basis for this study would have been very difficult for me to comprehend. Similarly, the understanding granted by training in History of Ideas has been a key part of this dissertation. The combination of both philosophical and historical understandings has allowed me to pursue the key themes of cyberpunk critique to places which I could not have imagined six years ago, when my study began.

A question which may be asked is 'Why cyberpunk? What is it that makes cyberpunk an attractive prospect for one to write about, both as a critic and as an intellectual historian?' I have several answers to this question, and they provide different inspirations for me to write about cyberpunk, and about cyberpunk criticism. Firstly, I enjoy reading cyberpunk. I first read Gibson's *Neuromancer* at 16, when a friend lent me his copy. I bought my own copy part way through my reading, because I knew I was going to want to read it again and

again. Secondly, cyberpunk is thematically strong. At its best, cyberpunk raises deep philosophical questions in ethics, ontology and epistemology. Analysing cyberpunk, and the critical literature which has been written about it, enables me to explore these themes, whilst retaining the connection to the literature which I enjoy. Lastly, and importantly for me as a historian, cyberpunk is strongly temporally determined. It is literature which is indicative of a certain cultural moment, one which has always fascinated me. The political, economic and intellectual milieu of the cyberpunk *oeuvre* is a time of change and, to some degree, crisis. Cyberpunk is the literature of that crisis, and allows us a vision of the time which is both enthralling and apposite. Similarly, the critical literature written about cyberpunk allows a continuing view of the ways in which scholars have read that vision of crisis, allowing a survey of critical thought across time. Teasing out the threads of our time's intellectual dynamic is a project which I find enthralling, and the opportunity to pursue this enterprise with cyberpunk criticism was one which I could not pass up.

It will rapidly become obvious to anyone reading this thesis that, despite my passion for cyberpunk, and indeed my great respect for the critical discourse which has grown up about it, I have certain intellectual filiations which, at times, elicit my concerns. It has become a standard part of historical practice to confess to one’s biases prior to the commencement of a study, and this is no bad thing. We can no longer pretend (if indeed ‘we’, meaning historians, ever really did pretend) to pursue a purely ‘objective’ history. History is an interpretive process, and of course the personality, passion and biases of the interpreter will come

through in the work. The majority of the cyberpunk critical discourse is conducted by academics who would identify as postmodernist and/or posthumanist; I, on the other hand, am both a modernist and a humanist. Since I first read Habermas, I have been convinced by his argument that the project of Enlightenment that is modernity is incomplete; I am to some degree sustained in my intellectual pursuits by the idea that it may be completed. Perhaps this is simply a product of my own subject position; I am, after all, a well educated, white, middle-class male. However, my belief in modernity is a belief not that I particularly deserved the privileges which have come to me, but that everyone does, and that the project of the Enlightenment, ultimately, is about the extension of opportunity to all. This is why I find the future imagined in cyberpunk both compelling and disturbing; it is at once an entirely plausible extrapolation from our present circumstances, and a future which I find truly terrifying.

In contemporary historical theory, it is taken as a given that we all have intellectual affiliations which inflect our work. With that in mind, it is perhaps best to outline, in brief, the philosophical and political underpinnings of this dissertation. I am both a Marxist and a humanist, and as will become obvious as the argument progresses, a commitment to these systems of thought provides a guide for both the historical and the critical components of this thesis. However (and despite the occasionally combative tone of my dissertation) I do not believe that a commitment to humanist ideals precludes a meaningful dialogue with posthumanists, nor that a commitment to Marxism implies a dismissal of Marxism's political alternatives. On the contrary, Marxism and humanism remain vital by absorbing critiques and recognising the need for change. I hope

that my genuine desire to participate in that process is obvious throughout this thesis.

I imagine there are always many accrued debts in the construction of a doctoral dissertation. Certainly I would have been unable to complete, or even begin, my project without the assistance of the people and institutions outlined below. The University of Western Australia provided me with first a Postgraduate Award scholarship, and then in the concluding stages of the project with a completion grant. To my supervisors, Doctor Chantal Bourgault de Coudray and Associate Professor Rob Stuart, I owe an immense debt. Doctor Bourgault provided key criticisms early in the project, and Professor Stuart has been a source of criticism, encouragement and mentoring throughout its duration. He has read each and every draft of my work with a keen eye, and if this dissertation is cogent and concise, then much of the credit for that must go to his careful editing. Of course, any errors, omissions and infelicities in the text remain entirely my own. Lastly, without the support offered by my friends and particularly my parents, this dissertation would never have seen the light of day.

The Future Virtual: Cyberpunk, Postmodernism and Critique.

Chapter One: Introduction.

This thesis will examine the ways in which cyberpunk science fiction, scholarly critiques written about it, philosophy (particularly postmodern philosophy) and culture intertwine and affect each other. It will argue that, through the lens of genre critique, the social and intellectual trends of the time, both the times of the primary works and of the critical texts, can be observed and analysed. Cyberpunk is a primary site for study of the culture of the 1980s.[1] Frederic Jameson has described this sub-genre as the 'supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself.'[2] In order to establish that the investigation of the intellectual history of cyberpunk criticism is both a possible and fruitful line of enquiry, however, certain underlying issues must be addressed. In this first chapter, it will first be argued that the history of ideas, with a method substantially different from that of literary theory, provides insight into the formation of the critical literature on cyberpunk. Following from this, the relationship between science fiction and philosophy will be examined.

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[1] Science fiction reference materials usually firmly site cyberpunk in the culture of the 1980s. See, for example, John Kessel, 'Cyberpunk', in James Gunn (ed.), *The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, Viking Penguin, New York, 1988, pp. 116-118, p. 116; Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2006, p. 311; Edward James, *Science Fiction in the 20th Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, pp. 198-199; Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 206-213; Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint, *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2011, pp. 254-160. Kessel is keen to position cyberpunk in opposition to its direct antecedents in the science fiction of the 1970s, and James and Roberts note that the main concerns of cyberpunk are particularly germane to the culture of the 1980s. Luckhurst identifies four interlocking aspects of William Gibson's first trilogy which make it 'such a quintessential embodiment of the postmodern 1980s.' These are, respectively, the arch-capitalist nature of the societies portrayed; a dominance of technology maintained alongside an ambivalent relationship with said technology; a dense and pastiche-driven prose style; and lastly, a mournful elegiac attitude towards the past buried under the weight of technological change. Luckhurst's summary is excellent, particularly for identifying that the cyberpunk relationship with technology is more nuanced than has often been recognised. Bould and Vint note similar themes to Luckhurst.

[2] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, p. 419.

It will be argued that the commonality of speculation as a procedural method, a willingness to reach outside contemporary society in order to search for answers, gives science fiction a unique relationship with the philosophical mode of discussion. The diversity of the critical sources stemming from cyberpunk writing will be seen to provide insights into key areas of cultural and philosophical debate. Although the critical literature is diverse in origin and theme, however, it is often restricted in the texts which it discusses. This in turn imposes certain restriction on this thesis. The reasons for these truncated discussions are complex, and worthy of discussion before proceeding with the bulk of the thesis. Primarily, however, this introduction will present the argument that intellectual history, and the hermeneutic method, can provide a novel and productive insight into the links between cyberpunk science fiction, critique, and postmodern culture.

The history of ideas has, in recent times, taken a turn around the post. Post-modernism, post-structuralism and post- (or anti-) foundationalism have made their home in intellectual history. The effect of the incursion of these new critical methods on the discipline has been a "linguistic turn." Intellectual history has, under the guidance of luminaries such as Hayden White and Dominick LaCapra, abandoned the preoccupation with authorial intention which Quentin Skinner had encouraged.[3] At first blush, this thesis seems to be peculiarly amenable to these new approaches to intellectual history. Many of them, after

[3] For Skinner's lengthy and thorough exegesis on this and other points in the history of ideas, see Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', *History and Theory*, 8:1, 1969, pp. 3-53. For programmatic essays by LaCapra and White, Dominick La Capra, 'Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts,' *History and Theory*, 19:3, 1980, pp. 245-276, and Hayden White, 'The Context in the Text: Method and Ideology in Intellectual History', in Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, 1987.

all, have evolved from literary theory, and it is popular literature and its criticism, rather than canonical "old school" philosophy, with which this text wrestles. However, the new approaches pioneered by LaCapra, White and others suffer from serious problems. At best, these new, linguistic approaches to intellectual history provide innovative interpretative options for the intellectual historian; at worst, they risk abandonment of any realistic "conversation with the past" in favour of a sort of conversation with ourselves that could be had without the benefit of historical understanding. It could, of course, be argued that we treat history simply as the description of past events; that no "conversation" need be had at all. This way of viewing history has two obvious problems. The first is that such an antiquarian approach neither makes for interesting, illuminating history, nor satisfies people who ask "What's the point?" The second problem with such a position is that even the slightest recognition of the subjectivity problem (via the hermeneutic circle or otherwise) makes the construction of this type of 'non-interpretative' history impossible. Interpretation is always present (in both senses of the word 'present'). However, even when recognising the epistemological difficulties involved in interpretation, it is important to stick to the business of doing history. The increasing obsession with interpretative difficulties and semiotic struggles evinced by Frank Ankersmit, Hayden White[4] and others is unavoidable, but is also not particularly productive. If the production of meaning is simply the play of signs without referents, then the need for history seems questionable. As John Toews has put it, 'Reading LaCapra's critical commentaries [on the history of ideas], one begins to wonder

[4] See, for example, Frank Ankersmit, 'Historiography and Postmodernism', *History and Theory*, 28:2, 1989, pp. 137-153; Frank Ankersmit, 'Historical Representation', *History and Theory*, 27:3, 1988, pp. 205-228; and Hayden White, *The Content of the Form*.

if it is possible to avoid the pitfalls of a referential or representational theory at all without ceasing to 'do' history and restricting oneself to thinking about it.'[5]

The pursuit of meaning (whatever we are to conclude that 'meaning' means) is at the heart of intellectual history. There are practical difficulties, however, with the recovery of meaning. Firstly, meaning is not obvious in texts or contexts (particularly not in the texts and contexts of the fictional literature which makes up a considerable portion of the primary sources for this thesis). We may know perfectly well what a text means to us on first glance, but this can hardly take into account the full vagaries of meaning. If it did, intellectual historians and literary critics alike would be looking for other work. Given that this is not the way to do things, what is? How does one determine whether the behaviour of corporations in Gibson's novels is a critique of 1980's corporate culture, or is simply a part of the plot structure, with unintended critical outcomes? This is where the 'old' intellectual history and the new manifest their greatest differences. Dominick LaCapra has identified two extremes in intellectual history – the 'presentist' and the 'documentary.'[6] The documentary extreme is more closely associated with the older style of intellectual history – that advocated by Skinner, Pocock and others. Skinner's method consists of the reconstruction of meaning in past texts by establishing, in the main, authorial intent. This is done through a careful intermixture of contextual and intratextual analysis. Once this has been achieved, and the meaning (or potential meanings)

[5] John Toews, 'Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience,' *American Historical Review*, 92:4, 1987, pp. 879-907, p. 886.
[6] LaCapra, 'Rethinking Intellectual History,' esp. pp. 272-276.

of the text has been rediscovered, the job of the intellectual historian is done.[7] LaCapra typifies this documentary approach as consisting of the search for 'facts' in the past – the presentation of intellectual history as 'reconstruction of the past.'[8] He is no doubt correct in arguing that this method, if conducted uncritically, aims at that historical impossibility: the unbiased account. Nonetheless, no historian can hold a viable 'conversation with the past' without first making an attempt to discover what, as it were, the past was saying. LaCapra is, however, convincing in arguing that the intention-based methods advocated by Skinner do miss domains of great importance in intellectual history. Even if we accept the original text as the expression of authorial intention, this is only the beginning of the story which intellectual history can and should examine. The 'career' of the text after it is written is more than a simple process of readers passively reading and receiving the expressed intentions of the author. Paul Ricoeur has pointed out that with

> *written discourse, the author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide… Not that we can conceive of a text without an author; the tie between the speaker and the discourse is not abolished, but distended and complicated. The dissociation of the meaning and the intention is still an adventure of the reference of discourse to the speaking subject.* But the text's career escapes the finite horizon of its author. [9]

[7] See Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', pp. 3-53. LaCapra's criticism of this pure "documentary" approach is apt, but on reading further into Skinner's articles after the publication of 'Meaning and Understanding', one begins to wonder if this is really Skinner's approach at all. Skinner seems to have presented his arguments in very aggressive form, and subsequently amended them to a significant degree. In fact, the position adopted by Skinner later in his career is not so very far from LaCapra's own. For an example of this moderation of Skinner's original, fairly extreme position, see Quentin Skinner, 'Hermeneutics and the Role of History", *New Literary History*, 7, 1975, pp. 209-232.

[8] LaCapra, 'Rethinking Intellectual History,' p. 272.

[8] Paul Ricoeur, 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text,' *New Literary History*, 5, 1973, pp. 91-117, p. 95. Emphasis in original text.

This process of dissociation and interpretation is as much the proper subject of intellectual history as the establishing of the "original" meaning of a text, and as such will make up a substantial part of the analytic content of this thesis. If we treat original, canonical texts as merely the opening sentences in a conversation that intellectual historians seek to reconstruct, study and participate in, then the study of interpretations becomes a critical part of the overall project of the history of ideas.

LaCapra is cautious in advocating his alternative approach: 'a more "performative" notion of reading and interpretation in which an attempt is made to "take on" the great texts and to attain a level of understanding and perhaps of language use that contends with them.'[10] It is not completely clear precisely what it is that LaCapra here suggests; however it seems that he argues that we, as historians, should engage with our texts on a more openly interpretative level. This, in itself, seems like an excellent idea. If there is any point in developing a historical understanding of a subject/object (text or otherwise), surely it is that we should have a developed, educated and interesting interpretation of it. LaCapra, however, recognises that this method, applied on its own, runs the risk of justifying 'creative misinterpretation.'[11] LaCapra's position then becomes uncertain. On the one hand, he invokes "the facts" to put limits on creative misinterpretation, and yet, on the other, his disavowal of the documentary method apparently leaves him without this resource. We may, for the purposes of establishing "the facts" have to accept the use of what LaCapra terms the documentary method. Any interpretative spiral must begin somewhere, and

[9] LaCapra, 'Rethinking Intellectual History,' p. 273.
[11] LaCapra, 'Rethinking Intellectual History,' p. 274.

establishing as nearly as possible what original texts meant, in their own terms, in their own times, is as good a beginning as we can ever have. This should not, however, be the end of the process. As Skinner points out, even if we "know" what the correct reading is, the other readings do not have to be discarded. Skinner argues, to the contrary, that the 'status of the one uniquely correct reading … can only be that it represents one good reading amongst others.'[12] The other readings may then become "incorrect", but they still have interpretative validity, particularly if we are looking through the lens of intellectual history. For if we do view the original text as the opening sentence in a conversation, then it is important both to know as precisely as we can what that sentence was, and also how people have responded to it. LaCapra's warning concerning the purely interpretative, presentist method in intellectual history is apt. It *is* a method prone to misuse, even by the well intentioned. However, his attempts to defend it are, at best, questionable. It is difficult to appeal to the "facts" of the past to determine interpretative accuracy in the present when one is indulging in theoretical tail-chasing regarding the interpretative problems of establishing said facts. An alternative method, I would argue, would be to accept the potential pitfalls in interpreting the 'facts' of past texts, and, in awareness of these traps, proceed with attempting to establish the facts anyway. We can either allow the point that all historical facts are also interpretations to blind our eyes to the goals of historical analysis, and continue to engage in largely fruitless meta-historical debate, or we can accept the warnings provided to the discipline of history by recent trends, and yet persist with the work of being historians. Again,

[12] Quentin Skinner, `Hermeneutics and the Role of History', *New Literary History*, 7:1, 1975, pp. 209-233, p. 226. For Skinner, of course, the 'correct' reading is that which is the best expression of authorial intention.

it seems difficult to conduct a conversation when one denies oneself the opportunity to work out what the other 'person' is 'saying.'

Umberto Eco writes very cogently on this point in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Eco divides the potential for the creation of meaning in texts into three component parts – the *intentio auctoris* (authorial intention), the *intentio lectoris* (the intention of the reader), and, critically for Eco, the *intentio operas*, the intended meaning, as it were, of the text itself.[13] For Eco, the 'intention of the empirical author', as the actual person who wrote the text, is 'radically useless.'[14] In saying this, Eco is not, of course, implying that the author herself is useless – rather that 'Since the intention of the text is to produce a model reader able to make conjectures about it, the initiative of the reader consists in figuring out a model author that is not the empirical one…'[15] What this essentially means is that the author that the reader sees in the text is not the actual author, but an ideal author extracted in reverse from the text the author had produced. This, it seems, is in direct disagreement with Skinner's insistence on authorial intention. This difference, however, is one of focus, rather than a substantial impediment to the advancement of some form of reasonably unified theory. Skinner's focus, as an intellectual historian of the "old school," is on establishing what the text in question could legitimately have meant to the *actual* author, and thus to her contemporary readers. Eco's focus is, to use LaCapra's vocabulary, more presentist – he wishes to understand what the text can mean *to*

[13] See Umberto Eco, 'Interpretation and History', pp. 23-43, p. 25 and 'Overinterpreting Texts', pp. 44-73, pp. 61-66, in S. Collini (ed.), *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
[14] Eco, 'Overinterpreting Texts', p. 66.
[15] Eco, 'Overinterpreting Texts', p. 64.

us, or to readers at any other time for that matter. For the purposes of this thesis, both foci will be necessary. In order to understand not just the foundational texts of cyberpunk and of postmodernism but also the interpretative work produced on the former, one will have to accept that authorial intention, even if it is the beginning of meaning, cannot possibly be its ending. Eco, in his method of reading, however, does not have recourse to authorial intention (*intentio auctoris*) in order to place limits on the proliferation of possible interpretation. Rather, he introduces the concept of *intentio operas*, the intention of the work itself. In the third lecture documented in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, 'Between Author and Text,' Eco seems to be making an appeal for reasonable interpretation – for looking for interpretations that, as it were, the text to some degree encourages, rather than simply hunting down the things that we wish to find in it.[16] Eco recognises, as many no longer seem to, that the text itself is a point of some solidity. As he puts it, 'Between the mysterious history of a textual production and the uncontrollable drift of its future readings, the text *qua* text still represents a comfortable presence, the point to which we can stick.'[17]

Having established that we must, despite the necessary subjectivity of our history writing, write history anyway, the critical question for the historian then becomes 'How do we write the best history?' What method and understanding of the historical craft allows both the acknowledgement of our subjective position, but also the full engagement of our subjectivity with our past, the elusive beast which we study? Many attempts have been made to resolve this methodological difficulty, but a promising strand, relatively recently

[16] Eco, 'Overinterpreting Texts', pp. 71-73.
[17] Eco, 'Between Author and Text', in Collini, S (ed.), *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, p. 88.

reclaimed in the Anglo-American tradition, has been that of hermeneutics. This recent re-examination of hermeneutic ideas in the Anglo-American world has come with the general challenges made to logical positivism and its various theoretical offshoots. In history specifically, as historians have abandoned the idea of history as the perfect record, and historians as purely objective transmitters of past 'fact', new theoretical understandings of the way we interact with the past have been required. Hermeneutics, as expressed by Hans-Georg Gadamer and his various disciples, has increasingly become the framework around which historical method is based. Hermeneutic theory offers the historian a powerful method for interpreting and interacting with the past, one which acknowledges the historian's own historical position, yet which will also, when well applied, not result in the gross subjectivism which Dominick LaCapra so rightly fears. This is not to say that this moderate position between the objectivism of 'historical science' and the subjective involutions of postmodern theory has always typified hermeneutics as a method. Versions of the hermeneutic idea, which pre-existed Gadamer, such as those expressed by Dilthey and Croce, proposed 'a subject who aims to understand an object… as it is in itself. This means that the subject must be as open-minded and unprejudiced as possible, approaching the object without preconceptions.'[18] This, in itself, does not sound particularly problematic. Indeed, the point has often been made that the past must be allowed to tell its story, even if it only has the voice of the historian with which to tell it. The problem with pre-Gadamerian hermeneutics was this: it insisted that the correct method of doing history was to attempt to discard ones own historical position in an attempt to regain the historical position

[18] William Outhwaite, 'Hans-Georg Gadamer', in Quentin Skinner (ed.), *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 25.

of the past which we study. Gadamer criticised this, saying that 'a hermeneutics that regarded understanding as the reconstruction of the original would be no more than the recovery of a dead meaning.'[19] The meaning of the past must be a present one; our understanding must also be such. Any meanings which we extract from the past are irretrievably meanings *for* the present. If this is not the intention of our historical inquiry, then we run the risk of meaningless antiquarianism. There is a further, and more critical problem with such an attempt to become the past in order to study it. Such an attempt, made by an historian necessarily conditioned by his own present historicity, is of necessity doomed to failure. We cannot ever completely abandon our own subject positions; pretending that we can is both fundamentally mendacious and also deleterious to the production of good history.

Gadamer advocated a different understanding of hermeneutics. Outhwaite contrasts Gadamer's idea to those preceding him by stating that, for Gadamer,

> *Our understanding of a text arises out of our position in a historical tradition, and this is in fact our link with the historical influence or effectivity of the text itself. Understanding is not a matter of forgetting our own horizon of meanings and putting ourselves within the alien texts or society; it means merging or fusing our horizons with theirs.*[20]

The process by which we go about creating this fusion of horizons is what we call the hermeneutic method, and has been characterised with the now ubiquitous name of the 'hermeneutic circle.' The method has been dubbed a circle, although

[19] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, cited in Outhwaite, 'Hans-Georg Gadamer', p. 27.
[20] Outhwaite, `Hans-Georg Gadamer', p. 25. See also I. Oliver, 'The 'Old' and the 'New' Hermeneutic in Sociological Theory', *British Journal of Sociology*, 1983, 34:4, pp. 519-553, p. 535-537 for an elaboration of similar thoughts.

it might be better said that there are at least two circles to which we must pay close attention. The first, and that which Skinner is careful to place emphasis on, is contemporaneous with the object of study. It is a circle in which the historian examines both text and context, carefully allowing each to illuminate the other, in the search for possible meanings of the text and the examination of the world of its context. The second, and that which was closer to Gadamer's heart, is the circle which encompasses the text and its interpretation across time, including, of course, the interpretation proposed by the historian. This process, by which we attempt to merge our own historicity with that of the object of study, is not the simple process of interpreting the past from the present. Rather, we come at the past reality through the understanding of tradition. It is the understanding of what links us to the past we wish to study that enables the incremental merging of the two 'horizons.' This part of hermeneutics encourages us to build bridges to the past by an understanding of the traditions which link it to us.

It is important, as Michael Pickering points out, not to perceive tradition, in the sense in which Gadamer uses it, as a dead thing, cut off from the present. On the contrary, 'A tradition… is not timeless but is temporally located, not locked in the past but in a process of becoming.' [21] As such a 'living' entity, then, tradition can be seen as our link with the past – a way of building the bridge to begin the merger of differing cultural horizons. One such tradition is the type of textual interpretation which makes up a large part of the body of sources for this thesis. Stretching as it does between the time of writing of the

[21] Michael Pickering, 'History as Horizon', *Rethinking History*, 1999, 3:2, pp. 177-195, p. 192. Pickering's discussion of the role of tradition in Gadamer's hermeneutics is illuminating, particularly pp. 188-193.

primary sources, through to the present day, it represents a critical opportunity to bridge the cultural and temporal gap between one's own historical position and that of the object of study. The analogy of the circle is illustrative of the very nature of the way in which the bridge is to be built, the merger to be undertaken: historian, text and interpretation constantly inform and challenge each other, in the search for meaning and understanding. Zygmunt Bauman has commented on the hermeneutic method that

> *The richer is our own historically developed practice, the richer is the past which we consider a problem for, and are capable of, understanding. The richer a past which we treat in such a way, the richer becomes our civilisation and its further absorptive capacity. The hermeneutic circle is not just a method to be appropriated by professional historians. The hermeneutic circle is the way in which history itself moves.*[22]

An awareness of the idea of hermeneutics becomes, on this understanding, not just a useful tool for the historian, but a necessary understanding of the nature of history itself.

The method resulting from the ideas of hermeneutics is particularly applicable to the study of cyberpunk and the critiques which have been constructed around it. Skinner's early methods of inquiry in intellectual history were too restrictive, and failed to recognise the importance of interpretation after the 'event' of the original text. There is as much, if not more, to be learned from the interpretative actions of critics writing about a text as there is to be learned from the regaining of meaning in the original text itself. LaCapra's criticisms, whilst leaning too far in the direction of linguistic subjectivism, make this plain.

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[22] Zygmunt Bauman, *Hermeneutics and Social Science: Approaches to Understanding*, Hutchinson and Co, London, 1978, p. 46.

What happens to a text, after it has ‘left the horizon’ of its author, to paraphrase Ricoeur, can be as indicative of the mindset of the critics and their time as the text itself was in its own. In this thesis, of course, a relatively short time period is under examination – cyberpunk and the critiques written in response to it have only been with us since the early 1980s. This very closeness, temporally, between the text, the following work and the present day make it even more important to study text and criticism, and to allow them to illuminate each other, and also to reveal facets of our own life. This dissertation, dealing as it does with two distinct canons; the literary canon of cyberpunk and the critical/philosophical canon of postmodern theory, and also with the body of cultural criticism which follows from their intersection, is obviously one where walking the tightrope between establishing meaning through the documentary methods advocated by ‘old’ intellectual history and understanding and utilising the interpretative methods and cautions issued by the ‘new’ school of intellectual historians is particularly important. The fact that, even in simply attempting to establish the ‘meaning’ of past works, the questions we ask of the past to some degree determine the answers we will get should not act as a deterrent to making inquiries. It rather emphasises the difficulty, and also the importance, of being a ‘good’ historian. We may speak for the past in our own words, but it is vital that, in doing so, we strive at all times to allow the past to speak through us. The process of *attempting* to be objective is the key to good history, rather than the achievement of the impossible goal of objective history writing.

This thesis, therefore will consist of an inquiry into both the canonical texts of cyberpunk and postmodernism, and also critiques written on cyberpunk,

in the main by literary and cultural critics of the postmodern persuasion. This will allow for a view into both 'worlds' simultaneously, as well as illuminating aspects of present thought. Beginning with the study of the canonical texts in question, and using (LaCapra's reservations notwithstanding) an essentially documentary approach to establish their meanings, whether these are clear or clouded, coherent or confused, will give a grounding to the further study of the interpretations which have stemmed from them. The examination of the texts of cyberpunk criticism, however, offers an opportunity to study postmodern interpretative theory in action. The ways in which meanings which stem from the texts of the canon are contested, affirmed or altered (and sometimes simply misrepresented or misread) in the critical literature, can be used to illuminate a limited but important part of the intellectual milieu of postmodern culture, from the 1980s to the present day. A key proposition of this thesis, therefore, will be that the nature of the culture and philosophy of a time can be extracted from its literature. This chapter will proceed with discussion of the strong links between philosophy and science fiction, thus justifying the connections which will later be drawn between postmodern culture, philosophy and critique, cyberpunk science fiction and the overall cultural milieu from the 1980s to the present.

Recently, discussions of the relationship between science fiction and philosophy have significantly increased. The *Matrix* films alone have spawned at least three edited collections of works dealing specifically with the philosophical issues raised in the trilogy.[23] Some years earlier, Robert E. Myers attributed this

[23] William Irwin (ed.), *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Chicago, Open Court, 2002; William Irwin (ed.), *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded*, Chicago, Open Court, 2005; and Glenn Yeffeth (ed.), *Taking the Red Pill: Science, Philosophy and Religion in The Matrix*, Dallas (Texas), Benbella Books, 2003.

proliferation to two simultaneous causes: that 'Science fiction has come out of the closet, and philosophy has come down from the ivory tower.'[24] It has been suggested, however, that the doors may not have completely opened, nor the descent as yet reached the ground. Indeed, Stephen R.L. Clark has argued that 'philosophical puzzles… could be explored through the imaginings of people less constrained than academics,' and 'that opening oneself to what is described, imagined, hinted at in the genre allows one to catch sight of possibilities that professional philosophy has for too long neglected.'[25] Science fiction also allows us to test, as it were, the boat of philosophy on the waters of fiction. However, the mere increase in popularity of discussing philosophy in terms of science fiction does not necessarily indicate that this is the correct path to take. In most, if not quite all, edited collections and individual books and articles discussing science fiction and philosophy there is a dearth of justification for this type of project. In most cases (for example the edited collections to do with the *Matrix* films cited above) the editors and the authors of the various articles move directly to their discussion of various philosophical issues apparently raised by science fiction texts, without first asking, and more importantly answering, the questions 'Why is it that we can discuss philosophy in terms of science fiction?' and, 'How is it that science fiction raises these philosophical conundra?' The connections between science fiction and philosophy are often not made explicit; they are rather assumed. This is most likely because the authors felt that the themes and issues raised in the texts which they studied had such obvious philosophical content that no explication was necessary. Lou Marinoff, for

[24] Robert E. Myers, 'Introduction: Exploring the Intersection', in R.E. Myers (ed.), *The Intersection of Science Fiction and Philosophy*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1983, p. *ix*.
[25] Stephen R.L. Clark, *How to Live Forever: Science Fiction and Philosophy*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 5.

example, when discussing the links between philosophy and the *Matrix* series, mentions that 'to introduce Plato's Allegory of the Cave, all I have to do is ask 'Have any of you seen a movie recently that addresses the difference between appearance and reality?'… Dozens of hand shoot up, and voices call out '*The Matrix!*''[26] It is not only the *Matrix* films which inspire such instant philosophical gratification. Any avid reader of science fiction understands the sense of wonder and questioning that good (and even indifferent) science fiction can inspire. However, for the purposes of this thesis, these connections need to be examined and explained. This will not only justify the ongoing philosophical argumentation throughout the thesis, but will enable a more cogent and applied discussion of the philosophical issues themselves. As will be discussed below, science fiction raises questions in many of the areas discussed by philosophy, including metaphysics, ethics and, interestingly, history of philosophy. This last is crucial for the overall themes of this thesis, as the links between postmodern philosophy and cyberpunk science fiction become most apparent when studied through the contextualising lens of the history of ideas.

Philosophy and science fiction have been linked for longer than many philosophers would, one suspects, like to acknowledge. Indeed, it is arguable that philosophers began doing science fiction before the concepts of modern science existed, and certainly before the existence of the (mainly) twentieth century literary genre of science fiction. This is because science fiction and philosophy often contain a similar key component: speculation. Plato, in *The Republic*, speculates about the organisation of a future society, and the changes in structure,

[26] Lou Marinoff, '*The Matrix* and Plato's Cave: Why the Sequels Failed' in William Irwin (ed.), *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded*, p. 5.

ethics and beliefs which would be required to bring it about. George Orwell in *1984*, Isaac Asimov in *Foundation* or Frank Herbert in *Dune* do very similar things. They all, including Plato, tell stories which enable the reader to imagine things not as they are, but as they might be in the future. The story told by Descartes to justify his methodological scepticism, his tale of systematic deception by a *malin génie* (evil demon, updated in more recent times to the 'brain in the vat' story) sounds very like the "consensual hallucination" of Gibson's cyberspace, or, for that matter, the non-consensual hallucination of machine-space in *The Matrix*. In each case, the story is told as a starting point to speculation about the nature of belief, reality and the truth (or lack thereof) of the external world. Yet we call Descartes a philosopher and William Gibson and the Wachowski brothers fiction writers/directors. This is not to attempt to broaden the category of 'philosopher' to include Gibson and the Wachowski brothers. The similarities elucidated here serve merely to make the point that science fiction and philosophy often do similar things, provoking similar thoughts in their readers. In fact, science fiction and philosophy not only serve to provoke similar ways of thinking, but use similar tools to do it. They each can propose a modification to the world as it is now, and speculate on the effects that this will have – the challenges that would be posed to people under such an altered system, the benefits and detrimental effects that such an alteration to the way we live might have. As Robert E. Myers puts it, 'philosophers may set up a schema that differs in significant aspects from the one adopted by most persons and then trace the implications of this "new" or altered schema…'[27] Science fiction, in literature, has a commitment to just such speculations. This is, simply put,

[27] Myers, 'Introduction: Exploring the Intersection', p. *xiii*.

because it is fiction, linked with science. The history of philosophy as a discipline, at least since the Enlightenment, has been strongly linked to the history of science (indeed, many great philosophers were also scientists), and so it is that science fiction, as literature, may have a special link to philosophy. If present scientific developments can provoke major ethical and public debate (think of the controversies surrounding cloning, or stem cell research, to mention just two such recent debates, or the continuing Darwinism/intelligent design conflict), then does it not also stand to reason that a fiction which bases itself on extrapolating present trends in the sciences, be they genetics, cybernetics, population studies or whichever science happens to take the author's fancy, should also be able to raise and discuss philosophical dilemmas?

Metaphysical and epistemological questions can be raised easily within a science fictional context. As mentioned above, Putnam's 'brain in the vat'[28] story has a distinctly science fictional ring to it, and yet this is a story being told by a professional philosopher for philosophical purposes, rather than by a science fiction author for entertainment purposes. Putnam uses the expanding knowledge which science has acquired about the workings of the human brain to raise methodological doubt about the nature of our experience, renewing Cartesian doubt for a modern generation. A critical point is that it is the science within this science fictional tale which enables him to re-raise this point. The continuing progress of scientific understanding raises issues which clever authors can use to examine the nature of the human condition, not only in the present but into the imagined future as well. Mark Rowlands has suggested that 'Most great science

[28] See Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.

fiction stories are about something that is essentially *alien* or *other* to us… In the great science fiction stories we stare into the monster, and it is always ourselves we find staring back.'[29] It is the presence of this other in science fiction, this examination of different ways of thinking and being, which enables science fiction to examine deep philosophical questions. Philosophy itself often requires the use of modes of thinking which, for want of a better word, do not come "naturally." Descartes, in order to propose the methodological doubt as to the reality of perceptual experience which forms the heart of his *Meditations*, had to go to the extreme lengths of proposing a *malin génie*, an entity which deliberately and maliciously deceived him as to the nature of his experiences. This is not the kind of proposition about which one usually thinks, and certainly not a way of thinking which we usually uphold. As John Ahrens and Fred D. Miller have put it 'This sort of science fiction [metaphysical science fiction] often employs philosophical assumptions which are quite at variance with enlightened common sense.'[30] That said, if humans went about systematically doubting the existence of live electrical cables and moving buses, and acting to explore this doubt, then the future of the species would be threatened. However, it is a mode of thought which has been critical in the development of modern philosophy. Methodological doubt, in various forms, has enabled philosophy to ask fundamental questions about the nature of being, knowing and belief – questions which seem ridiculous from an everyday perspective. Science fiction, because it also steps outside the everyday to the as yet unformed world of the future or the altered worlds of the present or past, similarly has the capability to

[29] Mark Rowlands, *The Philosopher at the End of the Universe*, Ebury Press, London, 2004, pp. *vii-viii*.
[30] John Ahrens and Fred D. Miller, 'Beyond *The Green Slime*: A Philosophical Prescription for Science Fiction', *Philosophy in Context*, 11, 1981 pp. 1-10, p. 4.

ask such searching questions. Philosophy and science fiction, therefore, have this in common: they propose modes of thought and ideas about existence which are to some degree foreign to the ways in which we 'normally' think of the world, and which challenge us to think in new ways, and to create novel solutions, not only to potential problems in the future, but also to ongoing epistemological and metaphysical difficulties.

Robert E. Myers describes epistemology as including 'questions on the possibility of knowledge and its nature, the degree of certainty, the problem of error, the kinds of knowledge and the nature of and criteria for truth.'[31] Given this definition, it follows that many good science fiction stories raise significant epistemological issues. One example, extracted from Gibson, might be the epistemological status of cyberspace.[32] If it is a 'consensual hallucination' is it then "true" or "false?" What, in other words, is the epistemic status of events which take place in cyberspace?[33] Myers goes on to describes metaphysics as dealing with 'such problems as the relation of appearance and reality, the ultimate nature of reality, the categories we use to order and interpret what we understand to be real…, and the implications of major models or paradigms that have been adopted to explain the order of reality…'[34] The discussion of problems such as these seems to come as naturally as breathing to science fiction authors. A quote from the flyleaf of a copy of Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a*

[31] Myers, 'Introduction: Exploring the Intersection', p. *xii*.
[32] William Gibson is credited by the Oxford English Dictionary with the invention of this now-ubiquitous word. In the *Neuromancer* series, it is an abstract, computer generated sub-reality, accessed via "jacking-in", using neural electrodes. It is also described as a "consensual hallucination."
[33] This will be examined in greater detail in the chapter of this thesis entitled 'The "Other" Spaces of Cyberpunk: Cyberpunk and Spatiality.'
[34] Myers, 'Introduction: Exploring the Intersection', p. *xii*.

Strange Land serves to illustrate this: 'Although he knew it was an impossible task, Robert Heinlein deliberately set out to question every axiom of Western Culture. To throw doubts, and, if possible, make the antithesis appear a possible and perhaps a desirable thing.'[35] This, it seems, neatly sums up the way science fiction can assert deeply questioning metaphysical propositions: through speculation that things may not be the way they seem, or that they could be different from the way that they are.

It is this ability to examine the ways in which things could be different which enables science fiction, at its best, to make significant contributions to ethical discussions. Thomas L. Wymer has said that 'Science fiction… can function as the means by which a culture critically explores and creates its own values and consciousness.'[36] Many philosophers might raise their heads in shock at this description, for it also seems to perfectly describe the role of the professional ethicist. This quote implies that science fiction can not only be the vehicle for the discussion of abstract philosophical dilemmas, but can also provide the method for the critique of contemporary society. Science fiction can, and often does, act as a sort of extrapolatory crystal ball, taking contemporary phenomena, be they social, political technological or from any of a broad range of fields, and imagining the ways in which they might develop in the future. The effects that the individual author foresees in the future act not only as a warning (or recommendation) of the value of present practice for future people, but also as a critique of the said practice in contemporary times. Present value systems

[35] Robert A. Heinlein, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (unexpurgated edition), Hodder and Staughton, London, 1992, p. *i*.
[36] Thomas L. Wymer, 'Perception and Value in Science Fiction', in Thomas D. Clareson (ed.), *Many Futures, Many Worlds*, Kent State University Press, 1997, pp. 1-13, p. 12.

can be subject to such critiques in science fiction either through carrying them to their logical extremes in the posited future world, or through the proposition of alternatives. Social and political systems in the proposed future, often facilitated by technological advances envisioned by the author, can be used to highlight flaws in the present order, or to affirm its goodness. Ethical questions can also be raised on a broader level. Isaac Asimov's robot stories, for example, raise key issues to do with consciousness and ethical status. The robot protagonists of *I, Robot* are keenly self aware, and yet restricted by the Laws of Robotics which Asimov developed. Much of one of the stories is taken up in an extended ethical debate which the robot has with (him)self, which results in (him) being able to create an extension to the Laws with which (he) was programmed, to whit: The Zeroth Law: It is permissible for a robot to take a human life when it is done to protect humanity. This is clearly, to some degree, a defence of a utilitarian viewpoint on ethics. Other ethical questions are raised in the stories, however. We might ask 'What restriction upon the behaviour of self aware creatures can be ethically countenanced?' In other words, are the Laws of Robotics themselves an ethical construction, or merely a self-serving enslavement of another self aware "species?" We might also use the robot books as a starting point for a discussion of racism, through the lens of "robotism." In cyberpunk, also, points worthy of ethical examination continually surface. Set in a future of incredible technological advances, juxtaposed with equally massive social degeneration, cyberpunk fiction, particularly that of Gibson, significantly questions the assumed link between technological and social progress.

It is in this relationship with contemporary society that we can observe the third way in which philosophy and science fiction are linked. Wymer suggests that we should 'look at science fiction as a movement, a series of events in the history of ideas… since it is a genre which has come in recent years to sum up, in fact to recapitulate, some of the major developments of the last three hundred years or so of Western culture.'[37] This suggestion seems to express not only the fundamental reason behind the writing of this thesis, but to emphasise the connection which will be stressed here: the connection between science fiction writing and the philosophical climate of the times in which it is written. The classical science fiction of Asimov and Robert Heinlein expresses a confidence in the progress of reason and the scientific method indicative of the philosophical and social confidence of its time. Asimov, in the epic *Foundation* saga, seems with Popperian certainty to extend 1950s American culture to a galactic scale. His way of saving the Galactic Empire from thousands of years of barbarism is to preserve its knowledge in an isolated enclave of specialists, ready to be released back into the galaxy of savages, whether they are receptive or not. Cyberpunk, on the other hand, displays a more cautious and critical assessment of the role of science, technology and progress, with the dystopic worlds portrayed by Gibson, Sterling, Cadigan and others suffused with technological and scientific progress, but populated by teeming masses unable to access the benefits which should have accrued from these advances.[38] Whilst the presence of what, for lack of a better term, might be called "posthumanising" technologies in cyberpunk appeals to the postmodern, the presence of stringent social and

[37] Wymer, 'Perception and Value in Science Fiction', p. 2.
[38] Brooks Landon notes that 'cyberpunk writers were intensely interested in new technological frontiers – but wary of the implications of these new technologies.' Brooks Landon, *Science Fiction After 1900: From the Steam Man to the Stars*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p. 160.

economic critiques may indicate that other concerns are also present. Science fiction, like other literature, is created by certain authors, at certain times, and read by readers at these or other times. The texts, therefore, will betray the obsessions of the author at the time of writing, and this is a matter for the contextual method of the history of ideas to uncover and analyse. For the writer, the text is always contemporary, and will express the contemporary problems which the author wishes to discuss. For the reader, the text is always present, and the meaning of the discussion may change. Hence the concentration of this dissertation not only on the primary texts of cyberpunk, but also on subsequent critique and discussion. However, through the examination, with the hermeneutic method, of the meanings expressed by the author in the text and the meanings present in the surrounding context, the text (in this case science fiction novels, in the main) can illuminate the philosophical issues contemporary to its writing, be they the dominance of order and reason in Asimov, or the examination of their breakdown in Gibson.

Science fiction and philosophy, therefore, are closer together than at first they might seem. Whilst philosophy occasionally takes the guise of a dispassionate, tired debating forum amongst cloistered academics, and science fiction the mistake-riddled obsession of a popular culture sub-group, each, in fact, has more to offer the other than at first appears. Justin Leiber reminds us that Plato 'supposed that successful fiction is inspired, felt philosophy… while philosophy is reasoned fiction, schooled possibilities…'[39] If this is the case, and it seems that this accurately describes the relationship between science fiction

[39] Justin Leiber, 'On Science Fiction and Philosophy', *Philosophical Speculations in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, 1:1, 1982, pp. 5-11, p. 7.

and philosophy, then discussing philosophy in terms of science fiction, and vice versa, is by no means wrong. It may rather bring something extra to each. It is possible that science fiction may provide philosophy with interesting situations to discuss and investigate, but also that philosophy can inspire science fiction to examine new and interesting possibilities. If the arguments and analysis outlined above hold, then this is indeed the case. Science fiction can both illuminate and comment upon the philosophical debates contemporary with it, and thus prove a useful and rich resource in discussing contemporary philosophy. The critical literature surrounding a series of texts can also provide elucidatory material, and it is to this which we next move.

Much of the analysis in this thesis will be based upon the examination of the critical literature surrounding cyberpunk. This is partially due to the commitment earlier expressed to hermeneutics, to understanding the tradition which has grown up around cyberpunk. It is a central idea of hermeneutics that the study of this tradition will allow us a greater connection to cyberpunk itself, or perhaps rather would serve to connect us to cyberpunk and cyberpunk to us. However, this is not the only reason for studying the critical tradition surrounding cyberpunk. The tradition itself is actually the object of study for this thesis. The aim of this dissertation is, in many ways, not only to allow cyberpunk to illuminate the cultural milieu of the 1980s, but also to allow subsequent critique to continue to provide us with information regarding the progress of these cultural obsessions, particularly those of postmodernism. The main body of this thesis, therefore, will consist of discussion of the critical literature on cyberpunk, illuminated by an understanding of the primary sources of which

these critiques make use. The critical literature based upon cyberpunk is diverse and rich, both in the topics which it discusses and the disciplines from which it comes. This diversity will become obvious as this dissertation progresses. Despite this, it is appropriate here to discuss briefly the breadth and depth of this source base. Firstly, critics and authors from a wide variety of fields have used cyberpunk as a starting place for their commentaries. Obviously, literature theory features heavily in the critical literature on cyberpunk, but gender studies, cultural studies and even philosophy feature strongly also. Articles from *Modern Fiction Studies* sit alongside those from *Extrapolation, Genders,* and *The Journal of Popular Culture*. Far from being the domain of a few literary critics, discussions of cyberpunk have taken on proportions well beyond those which would be predictable, given the relatively slim primary source base. This is due to the fact that cyberpunk has relevance in numerous areas of contemporary interest, including but not restricted to simulation and the nature of reality, philosophy of mind and the mind/body problem, gender issues and technology, and corporate power in an increasingly corporatised world. Before foreshadowing the coming examinations, however, it is of interest to examine precisely what the cyberpunk source base utilised by the critical literature is, and to gain an understanding of why these novels may have been selected for critical appropriation rather than others.

When reading literary criticism on cyberpunk, it quickly becomes obvious that there is a certain body of key texts which defines the cyberpunk subgenre. These texts include two trilogies by William Gibson (the first

including *Neuromancer, Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, and the second consisting of *Virtual Light, Idoru* and *All Tomorrow's Parties*), and some works by Pat Cadigan and Bruce Sterling, including *Synners* and *Mindplayers* by the former and most often *Schismatrix* by the latter. Added to this collection of novels, two anthologies of short stories, the *Mirrorshades* anthology (edited and with a foreword by Bruce Sterling) and the collection of Gibson's short stories, *Burning Chrome*, also feature frequently in critical discussions. Gibson's newer works, the trilogy beginning with *Pattern Recognition*, have yet to gain significant status in the critical literature, and whilst both Sterling and Cadigan have written numerous other novels, they also do not carry much weight in the academic literature. However, what the development of this list of prescribed texts tells us is that cyberpunk, small subgenre of a generally outcast form of writing though it is, has already evolved a canon – a body of texts without which one cannot be said to understand the genre. Other authors are mentioned in the critical literature on cyberpunk, of course, but in general so infrequently as to be discounted from the nascent cyberpunk canon. This canon, such as it is, seems to consist almost exclusively of works composed by the authors listed above: Gibson, Sterling and Cadigan. Whilst agreeing with Joseph G. Kronick's observation that canons should consist of rules rather than lists,[40] it becomes increasingly obvious that what critics of cyberpunk tend to examine is a list – and a short one at that. A more interesting question by far, however, and more in keeping with the contextualising goals of this thesis, is not which books and authors make the cut, but instead to ask precisely how the cut was made. In one sense this question may in fact seem irrelevant. Why should one not simply

[40] Joseph G. Kronick, 'Writing American: Between Canon and Literature', *The New Centennial Review*, 1:3, 2001, pp. 37-66, p. 39.

discuss only the texts which the critical literature examines and leave it at that? The answer, in intellectual history terms at least, is that the selection of texts is in itself a decisive process, and deserves examination. More prosaically, but also importantly, at some point a selection must be made from the plethora of texts which have been called cyberpunk (or, for that matter proto- or post- cyberpunk). The adoption of the nascent canon of cyberpunk from the critical literature on the sub-genre is one method of doing this, and is in fact a method which fits very well indeed with the methodology and goals of this thesis. There is a second canon to consider in the critical literature, of course – the scholarly canon. There is a veritable plethora of critical texts which might be considered to be a part of the critical canon for cyberpunk. Works by Donna Haraway, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard at the very least deserve consideration as 'canonical' texts. This thesis does not propose to examine the complex processes of canonisation. It is sufficient, for the purposes of the examinations to be undertaken, to acknowledge that there *is* a group of key texts which inform cyberpunk criticism.[41]

In following the map established by the processes of canonisation, however, literary critics have created a further vast and rich body of critical literature, which raises many and complicated issues. Thematically, much of the critical material on cyberpunk is postmodern, both in its theoretical basis and, for want of a better word, in its general "feel." Literary criticism based upon

[41] The examination of the twin 'canons' of cyberpunk criticism could prove to be both an interesting and lengthy pursuit. Certainly, at least one excellent article has been devoted to the study of the canonisation process of one cyberpunk text. See Sarah Brouilette, 'Corporate Publishing and Canonisation: *Neuromancer* and Science Fiction Publishing in the 1970s and Early 1980s', *Book History*, 5:1, pp. 187-208. Without wishing to excessively foreshadow future work, an intellectual history of cyberpunk's 'canons' could prove to be fruitful ground for further examination of the cultural climate which surrounded the development of cyberpunk criticism.

cyberpunk has expanded upon, interpreted, and in many cases misinterpreted the primary texts in affirming postmodernity, and in finding support for posthumanist ideas. This is not to imply that postmodernism is a unitary doctrine which has a single dogma. However, there are certain consuming passions in postmodern theory which continue to influence the writing of postmodern critique. Cyberpunk, due to the nature of its own themes, often seems to express and confirm these passions of postmodernity, and to provide the perfect launching pad for the continued proliferation of postmodern thought. However, in the coming chapters, this thesis will contend that this is actually often not the case, and that, in presenting postmodern interpretations of cyberpunk, critics often miss the mark. Thus, this thesis will require continual inter-textual reference between the primary texts (both of cyberpunk and the postmodern movement) and the critical literature on cyberpunk, a hermeneutic understanding of the tradition from start to finish. It will present a meta-critical view of cyberpunk scholarship, and in doing so, attempt to illuminate both the strengths and limitations of the cyberpunk critical tradition.

Chapter Two of this dissertation, entitled '"Posthumanism with a Vengeance": Cyberpunk and Posthumanist Literary Criticism' will discuss a perennial postmodern theme: the decay and death of the humanist subject. Posthumanism is a predictable progression from the antihumanism apparent in much postmodernist thinking. Cyberpunk has been fruitful ground for those who wish to proclaim the death of the humanist subject, and its decay into a multiplicity of 'subjectivities'. The idea of the cyborg, in particular, has triggered

a massive body of writing, beginning with Donna Haraway, who in “A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s” proposed ‘cyborg writing’ (and indeed cyborg existence) as a postmodern method of, amongst other things, gender transgression (this will obviously also be referred to in the later chapter on gender and cyberpunk). Returning to the point, the death of the humanist subject, in our contemporary world, comes from the play of subjectivities engendered at least partly by the blurring of boundary lines and binary differences – such as those between genders and between nature and technology. If this is the case, then the decay of the subject should be even more apparent in cyberpunk writing, where the dividing line between technology and nature is even more blurred. For example, it is questionable whether simply wearing glasses makes one a cyborg, but what is not in question is that a character such as Gibson’s Molly Millions, who has nerve upgrades, razors under her fingernails and, most obviously, mirrorshade glasses implanted into her face, is such a creature. This difference being observed, it should be comparatively easy to observe also the absence of any Enlightenment, humanist subject in Gibson’s and others’ work. I will argue that this is not the case, and that, in the instance of *Neuromancer* at least, it is the struggle of two inherently non-human characters (the artificial intelligences Neuromancer and Wintermute) to achieve the status of a unitary subject which drives the plot. It is not apparent that any other characters in cyberpunk novels are significantly “posthuman” either. The mere fact that the form of their humanity in many ways differs from our own, or from our preconceived notions of what it is to be human, is not indicative of the formation of a fundamentally different condition, that of being “post-“ human. Once again, Gibson has commented, albeit obliquely, on this topic, claiming that

‘The emotional friction in my books has to do with how far these people have been taken from what we think of as human, and yet how like us they are and yet how they do manage to retain reserves of love and to remain themselves. I think that is something that a lot of us still do, and it amazes me that we can.’[42] It is worthy of consideration, then, that rather than examining posthumanism (either as an extant condition, or as something to be striven for) cyberpunk may in fact examine the resilience of human people in the face of a dehumanising world.

The chapter which continues the argument will be titled ‘“But It Ain’t No Way Human”: Cyberpunk and Theories of the Posthuman’. Chapter Three contains manifest links to the previous chapter, and indeed some time will be devoted to disentangling these intellectual threads, in order to clarify the following discussion. It will be observed that, within the idea of the posthuman, there are two main divisions: one which, for lack of any other terminology, this thesis terms the ‘cybernetic’ posthuman, and another which will be termed the ‘philosophical’ posthuman. The chapter goes on to propose that a confused conflation of the two occurs in much of the critical literature on cyberpunk, and that the critical literature often treats evidence of one (the ‘cybernetic’ posthuman) as evidence of the other (the ‘philosophical’ posthuman). The chapter analyses in some depth the differences between these two formations of the posthuman. It proposes that the confusion between and conflation of these two differing ‘posthumans’ in the critical literature makes much of that critical literature deeply suspect. It goes on to suggest that the cybernetic posthumans which abound in cyberpunk not only do not necessarily provide evidence of the

[42] John Aloysius Farrell, ‘The Cyberpunk Controversy’, *The Boston Globe Sunday Magazine*, 19 February 1989, (Interview with William Gibson).

genre's support for their philosophical siblings; they may actually provide evidence of precisely the opposite.

Chapter Four, entitled 'Cyberpunk Spatiality: The "Other" Spaces of Cyberpunk' examines the characteristics of cyberpunk spaces. In particular, it examines the quintessential "space" of cyberpunk, cyberspace, and also the interstitial spaces beloved of Gibson, and to a lesser extent embraced by other cyberpunk authors. It examines three main ways in which critics have viewed cyberpunk cyberspaces: firstly, as a massive extension of a dualist view of the mind/body problem; secondly, as an extension of Cartesian mathematical space; and lastly, as confirmation of Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulation. It will be observed that all of these interpretations of cyberspace suffer from serious flaws, but also that they all do capture something of the nature and role of cyberspace in cyberpunk fictions. Chapter Four also examines the role of interstitial spaces in cyberpunk fiction, particularly in the work of William Gibson. Gibson assigns a highly positive role to interstitial spaces in his fiction, at least where he is willing to openly term them as interstitial. The critical literature has largely reacted positively to Gibson's use of the interstitial; this is perhaps unsurprising given the largely postmodern slant of much cyberpunk criticism. This chapter examines such enthusiasm in both Gibson's fiction and the critical literature, and finds reasons for doubt.

Feminist cyberpunk criticism has represented continual guiding force and source of innovation in cyberpunk criticism. Feminist debates have been amongst

the most complex and interesting in the critical literature surrounding cyberpunk, constituting a significant part of the literature, some of it quite influential.[43] Chapter Five, 'Women, Men and Machines: Cyberpunk and Feminist Criticism', aims to analyse these debates from the perspective of intellectual history. The debates have centred around two poles: firstly, direct character analyses taken from the texts (for example the characters of Case and Molly in *Neuromancer*) and the gendered status of these individuals and their relationships with each other. Molly herself is a figure of much contention, with arguments varying from presenting her as a strong, self-empowered woman to others examining the ways in which she is exploited by a still innately patriarchal society. The second pole around which discussion has taken place is that of the enabling powers of the technologies presented in cyberpunk. It has been claimed that cyborg technologies (augmentation, digitisation, cyberspace) offer freedom from gender – a breakdown of the binaries present in Enlightenment discourses. Chapter Five will question not just the idea of such a breakdown (whether it is such a wonderful idea), but whether in fact it is facilitated by the technologies presented in cyberpunk, and indeed whether the black and white presentation of Enlightenment philosophy implicit in such readings is valid.

Chapter Six is less obviously linked to those preceding it, but it is key to the ideas of this thesis as a whole, and is in fact the major thread which draws this thesis together. One of Frederic Jameson's most important (for a historian at least) observations about the postmodern condition is that it creates a

[43] For example, Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London, Free Association, 1991.

world where it is increasingly difficult to have a sense of history – to gain historicity. This is one area where cyberpunk texts do seem to ratify the "condition of postmodernity" and exemplify postmodern writing. It will be argued that cyberpunk writing, particularly Gibson's *Neuromancer* trilogy and Sterling's *Schismatrix*, demonstrates precisely this characteristic of postmodernity, in that all the novels seem to take place in a perpetual present, with little reference to past events, even those taking place in previous novels in the series (this is obviously particularly relevant to Gibson, whose work exists in this 'serial' form). It is interesting that, despite the richness of cyberpunk criticism, comparatively little has been written on Jameson's astute observation. There will also be significant links displayed to the work of Jean-François Lyotard, whose discussions of the death of the grand narratives of the Enlightenment have had both a significant influence on postmodern theory and have observable parallels in cyberpunk writing. Critically, for the historian at least, Francis Fukuyama's 'End of History' thesis is roughly contemporaneous with the emergence of cyberpunk, and it will also be used to illuminate the cyberpunk view on history and the future. Chapter Six, entitled 'A Future Without a Past: Cyberpunk and History', will discuss the potential reasons for this lack of historicity in cyberpunk, and also the treatment (or lack thereof) of the historicity issue in the critical literature. There are myriad possibilities, but to list a couple, the highly technologised state of societies in cyberpunk literature might be a reason, as might the dominance of a certain kind of capital culture (this is one of the suggestions which Jameson makes in *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*). Whatever the reasons, there is a clear case to be made that, in this aspect of cyberpunk, if not so much in others, postmodern

criticism has a point. The decay of the sense of history into an endless present is "present" in cyberpunk writing, and is well worth further examination, and Lyotard's identification of scepticism towards grand narratives is also present in the fractured writing of the cyberpunk subgenre.

Cyberpunk science fiction is a complex and interesting sub-genre, raising numerous questions of philosophical import. In this chapter the ways in which we might extract an understanding of the issues raised, and the processes by which this comes about, has been indicated. The method provided by intellectual history, hermeneutics, enables a considered merging of points of view, and this gradual fusion of socio-cultural horizons, undertaken through the tradition established in the critical literature on cyberpunk, will enable a deeper understanding not just of the primary texts, but also the postmodern culture from which they, and the critical texts, arose. Cyberpunk, as a sub-genre of science fiction, is in a unique position to provide us with information as regards the philosophical obsessions of its time, and of ours, and once again, the continuation (or not) of these threads through the critical literature will provide crucial insights. Lastly, the nature of the texts which critics consider, and why they consider some texts and not others, must always play a part in how we examine and understand cyberpunk. Over the coming chapters, cyberpunk and its critiques will act as a lens for the viewing and analysis of contemporary culture and philosophy. The interests and obsessions of both cyberpunk novels and the critical literature resulting from them allow the examination of numerous issues of philosophical and historical import, including the advance of postmodernism. The coming chapters will examine the alleged breakdown of the unitary humanist subject, the role of gender in culture, literature and critique, the

construction of the mind (and the deconstruction of the philosophy of mind proposed by postmodernity), and the death of history. Firstly, however, we turn the key on the philosophical history of cyberpunk, and examine its links with posthumanist philosophy.

Chapter Two: "Posthumanism With a Vengeance": Cyberpunk and Posthumanist Literary Criticism.

It is apparent, when confronted with the literary criticism written about cyberpunk, that the overwhelming majority of the critics consider the sub-genre to be posthumanist in its philosophical leanings. There are rare and brief exceptions to this rule. Istvan Csiscery-Ronay, for example, describes *Count Zero* as 'Gibson's attempt to recover a place for the individual artist and work of art from the postmodern vortex that *NM* ended up affirming. *CZ*'s moral and aesthetic vision stands on whether it can create a humanistic and compassionate counter-pleasure, equal to *NM*'s.'[1] However, this implies the acceptance of *Neuromancer's* posthumanist status, and Csicsery-Ronay also goes on to argue that *Count Zero* fails in its attempts to create a humanist vision in the cyberpunk universe. The overall outcome of Csicsery-Ronay's impressive discussion, then, is the implication that it is impossible, at least for Gibson, to successfully insert a humanist standpoint into a genre which is essentially posthumanist: that '*CZ* is about the difficulty of telling any other story than *NM*, and of maintaining a modernist novelistic narrative against the flow of apocalypse.'[2] The discussion of cyberpunk to follow in this chapter is, in relation to the majority of cyberpunk critique, cast critically, as a respectfully dissenting judgement. It will be argued that, in many ways, cyberpunk as a whole is humanist in style and intent, and that this is not necessarily a bad thing. Whilst it is true, particularly in the work of William Gibson, that a dehumanising, even inhuman, world is the setting of

[1] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., 'Antimancer: Cybernetics and Art in Gibson's *Count Zero*', *Science-Fiction Studies*, 22:1, 1995, pp. 63-86, p. 64. Contractions in original text.
[2] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., 'Antimancer', p. 84. Contractions in original text.

cyberpunk, the themes, characterisation and plot and narrative progression contain startlingly (in the light of the overwhelmingly *post*humanist critical interpretations of cyberpunk) humanist values and standpoints.

Despite these reasons for considering cyberpunk to be a genre predominantly humanist in its outlook, however, it remains the case that the majority of literary criticism written about cyberpunk maintains that cyberpunk is significantly, if not wholly, posthumanist in outlook. This is perhaps not surprising, as cyberpunk burst onto the literary scene at a time when, particularly in America, postmodernist and posthumanist theory increasingly dominated radical critical culture. The massive changes engendered by the perceived failures of both left liberalism and Marxism had led to an abandonment of both humanist critical methods and humanist philosophy in general,[3] and anti-humanism and posthumanism became *de rigueur* for 'advanced' critics. This transformation had occurred earlier in France, with Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut concluding that 'French philosophy of the '68 period resolutely chose the antihumanist position.'[4] Whilst Ferry and Renaut refer only to the French intellectual milieu, it is possible to generalise their comments to the world of radical literary criticism as a whole. Into this critical culture came a brand of science fiction which identified itself in many ways as being in opposition to classical, humanist science fiction (at least in its own propaganda).[5] There is an

[3] For a brief exposition on this theme, see Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths: Explorations in the Critical History of Ideas*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1995, p. 3.
[4] Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1990, p. *xxiii*.
[5] See for example, Bruce Sterling's preface to William Gibson's collection of short stories, *Burning Chrome*, Bruce Sterling, 'Preface', pp. 9-13 in William Gibson, *Burning Chrome*, Voyager Press, London, 1995, first published Gollancz 1986.

obvious desire in posthumanist theory to dismantle (or rather deconstruct) old paradigms (particularly those of humanist thought), and there is a similar tendency in cyberpunk with regards to more traditional forms of science fiction.[6] While it will be argued that to treat cyberpunk as simply an extension of its own propaganda machine is questionable, cyberpunk is, undeniably, quite different from most prior science fiction. Cyberpunk was, and is, science fiction written for an age when human technology has changed, and has changed the way people view the world. As Bruce Sterling put it in the introduction to Gibson's collection of short fiction, *Burning Chrome*, 'It [cyberpunk] derives from a new set of starting points: not from the shopworn formula of robots, spaceships and the modern miracle of atomic energy, but from cybernetics, biotech and the communications web.'[7] Posthumanist theory posited itself as new theory for a new age of (post)humanity, and cyberpunk developed as the science fiction of that new age. The match between an oppositional social/aesthetic theory and the self-declaredly radical new sub-genre was to be expected.

This chapter will examine this phenomenon in cyberpunk criticism, and analyse the evolving web of relations between literary criticism, philosophical posthumanism and cyberpunk science fiction. The connections between literary theory and philosophical posthumanism, of course, have been discussed elsewhere at great length, by both opponents and proponents of post/antihumanism.[8] The discussion of these links, therefore, will be confined to

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[6] For a brief exegesis on the differences between classical science fiction, the New Wave and cyberpunk, see Sabine Heuser, *Virtual Geographies: Cyberpunk at the Intersection of the Postmodern and Science Fiction*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2003, pp. x-xi.

[7] Bruce Sterling, 'Preface', p. 11, in William Gibson, *Burning Chrome*.

[8] For examples of this literature, see Neil Badmington, 'Introduction: Approaching Posthumanism', in Neil Badmington (ed.), *Posthumanism*, Palgrave, New York, 2000,

a series of remarks intended to elucidate the main discussion, namely the ongoing posthumanist interpretative matrix which has inflected cyberpunk criticism. Critical discussions of cyberpunk novels demonstrate a number of intellectual threads, which quite frequently become tangled. Amongst these, the confusion of the technological posthuman with the philosophy of posthumanism stands out as perhaps the most common tangle. However, there is also a significant degree of disagreement as to the *hopeful* or otherwise nature of cyberpunk literature – particularly in Gibson's work. It would seem that those who argue that posthumanist philosophical tenets are those that people should espouse, and that cyberpunk is a predominantly posthumanist genre, should be prepared to accept the logical outcome of such positions. If the worlds imagined in cyberpunk fiction are essentially or predominantly hopeful ones, and if they represent the imagined posthumanist (or posthuman) future, then it follows that, in the imagined worlds of cyberpunk at least, posthumanism offers a viable alternative to a revised humanism. However, should the converse be true, and the worlds imagined by cyberpunk prove to be a future nightmare, rather than a future utopia, and yet still remain posthumanist, then those who have both identified with posthumanism *and* identified it in cyberpunk have a significant problem. This largely unresolved tension underlies much of the critical literature on cyberpunk. It may also be present in the genre literature, as Darko Suvin has observed, arguing that Gibson's 'work does not accept the values of the black,

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particularly pp. 8-10; Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, pp. 195-201. An interesting article on the potential critical disjunctures between 'theory' and posthumanism is Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, 'What's Wrong With Posthumanism', *rhizomes*, 7, 2003 (online resource).

closed world he evokes with such skill: he hates the status quo. But his balancing act accepts the status quo a bit too readily as inevitable and unchanging.'[9]

[9] Darko Suvin, 'On Gibson and Cyberpunk SF', in Larry McCaffery (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, pp. 249-365, p. 357.

Indeed, whether cyberpunk is interpreted as utopian or dystopian, both of these perceptions raise problems for the posthumanist critics of cyberpunk. Utopia, after all, is an idea that reached its apogee in the Enlightenment with its ongoing narratives of progress and human transcendence. If cyberpunk is utopian (although it seems a significant stretch to so characterise the devastated oppressed worlds of many cyberpunk novels), then it is utopian in that in some way it imagines a better future. If it is dystopian (and the argument that cyberpunk is a predominantly dystopian sub-genre is easier to make), then it is dystopian precisely because it imagines what can go wrong with the present as it progresses into the future. In either case, critics of the posthumanist persuasion must proceed very carefully, for the idea of progress, and also the idea of transcendence, are humanist ideals which the antihumanist philosophical movement has come to regard with the greatest suspicion. The very idea of utopia (and, by definition, its corollary, dystopia) entail the idea of progress.

Before proceeding with examination of critical texts specifically related to cyberpunk, however, some brief discussion of the background of academic posthumanism is required. Posthumanism has a variety of roots in scholarship. Richard Wolin, in 'Antihumanism in French Postwar Theory', outlines a number of these; 'in a Foucauldian spirit', Wolin sketches 'a genealogy of French intellectual politics of the period; a genealogy that can account for why philosophical antihumanism could present itself as a redoubtable theoretical option…'[10] Whilst Wolin's position is unambiguously that of a humanist critic of posthumanist theory, this does not impair the accuracy of his genealogy of

[10] Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, p. 178.

post/antihumanist thought.[11] Wolin identifies four main areas of theoretical examination which were blended to create contemporary philosophical antihumanism. These are 'the influences of (1) the later Heidegger, (2) structuralism and structural anthropology, (3) semiology and linguistics and, later, [4] poststructuralism,' which 'combined to form, as it were, an epistemological united front whose main object was to have quit with "man," the subject of traditional humanism.'[12] The reasons for what seemed a particularly sudden departure from a tradition of Enlightenment stretching back some hundreds of years, were, of course, diverse. Wolin (somewhat cynically) attributes the adoption of Heidegger by the French Marxist Left to a simple desire to discredit Jean-Paul Sartre's brand of existential humanism.[13] The existential anti-humanism of Heidegger, on the other hand, had 'significant intellectual affinities [with] Marxism… insofar as both doctrines displayed an *a priori* mistrust of Western humanism.'[14] In this strange meeting of right reactionary and left revolutionary thought,[15] the common target appeared to be humanism, and its representative 'man'. Wolin argues that, along with Lacan's argument that 'the self can never be anything other than a patchwork of artificial, linguistic constructs that serve to cover up and distort the unconscious,'[16] and the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, who argued that '"structures", rather than human will and consciousness, are the fundamental determinants of

[11] It does, obviously, impact upon his conclusions about the legacy of posthumanist theory. However, since it is not Wolin's conclusions but rather his investigations of the intellectual foundations of posthumanist thought that are at issue, it remains both useful and interesting to examine Wolin's historical analysis.
[12] Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, p. 178.
[13] Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, p. 182.
[14] Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, p. 182.
[15] Darrin McMahon, in *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity*, describes 'Enlightenment bashing' as a new 'intellectual blood-sport, uniting elements of both the Left and the Right in a common cause.' Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of Enlightenment*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2002, p. 12.
[16] Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, p. 187.

cultural life,'[17] the 'critique of "man" that was forcefully elaborated in the thought of Heidegger… provided the ensuing wave of antihumanist discourse – so-called poststructuralism – with a firm foundation on which to build.'[18] The presence of such a foundation, however, does little to explain the adoption of antihumanist theory as the dominant left critical theory in (predominantly American) literary criticism. Wolin elsewhere comments that antihumanism undertook 'a rather surprising transatlantic migration that took place during the 1970s', and 'was heralded as "critical," "oppositional," and "radical" – claims that probably said more about the impoverished state of contemporary American radicalism… than anything else.'[19] Edward Said has noted another reason for the growth in popularity of antihumanist discourse, observing that antihumanism 'was an often idealistic critique of humanism's misuses in politics and public policy, many of which were in regard to non-European people and immigrants.'[20] It is of interest that the adoption of antihumanism, the assault on Enlightenment *tout court*, by Western radical intellectuals came at a time when both the left liberal thought of the 1960s and the alternative proposed by Marxism were deemed to have failed. Change within the structures of humanism no doubt seemed, at best, highly unlikely. For these, or other, reasons it cannot be doubted that antihumanist (or posthumanist) thinking became the main mode of radical criticism.

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[17] Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, p. 188.
[18] Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, p. 195. See also Neil Badmington, 'Introduction: Approaching Posthumanism", in *Posthumanism*, Neil Badmington (ed.), Palgrave, New York, 2000, pp. 5-10 for a similar account to Wolin's (if one which draws very different conclusions!).
[19] Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, p. 3.
[20] Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Palgrave, New York, 2004, p. 13.

At this point a brief excursus on the nature of the 'humanism' to which posthumanism presents itself as an alternative is merited. For humanism, despite the tendency of posthumanist authors to present it as a sort of overbearing philosophical/critical monster, is in fact characterised by internal division. There is one division, however, which it is most important to observe before proceeding with an analysis of the various critiques which posthumanist theory has, rightly or otherwise, levelled at humanism. This is the division between the kind of conservative literary theory which has, over a lengthy period of time, been advanced as 'humanist' in critical circles, and the philosophical humanism of, for example, Immanuel Kant, which was (and is) profoundly anti-conservative – even radical. Edward Said, in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, provides a brief but interesting history of conservative humanism. He states that it 'is thought of as something very restricted and difficult, like a rather austere club with rules that keep most people out, and when some are allowed in, a set of regulations disallowing anything that might expand the club's membership.'[21] Said traces this attitude from the literary High Modernism of T.S. Eliot through to the more recent criticism of Allan Bloom, whose work he describes as 'represent[ing] the nadir of what Richard Hofstader calls anti-intellectualism… education ideally was to be a matter less of investigation, criticism and humanistic enlargement of consciousness than a series of unsmiling restrictions, ending up with a small handful of elites…'[22] Said clearly has little respect or affection for this kind of 'humanism', and that is entirely understandable. Such narrow, reductionist and exclusionary doctrines have given humanism a very bad

[21] Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, p. 16.
[22] Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, p. 18. See also Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, pp. 33-42, 'The Cultural Politics of Neoconservatism', for an interesting examination of the continuing existence and influence of this kind of reactionary thought.

name. However, as Said also allows, 'it is worth insisting, in this as well as other cases, that attacking the abuses of something is not the same thing as dismissing or entirely destroying that thing. So, in my opinion, it has been the abuse of humanism that discredits some of humanism's practitioners without discrediting humanism itself.'[23] Later Said goes on to explain that he does not consider that 'a belief in humanism… must be accompanied by reams of laundry list exclusions, the prevalence of a miniscule class of selected and approved authors and readers, and a tone of mean-spirited rejection…' and that 'to understand humanism at all… is to understand it as democratic, open to all classes and backgrounds, and as a process of unending disclosure, discovery, self-criticism and liberation.'[24] Said's exegesis of conservative 'humanism' as opposed to liberatory humanist criticism could not be clearer – one is innately exclusive, regressive, and conservative, the other retains the liberatory potential for critical self-analysis, the Enlightenment virtue of reasoned critique of reason first summarised by Kant. However, whilst noting this distinction, it is apparent in reading much posthumanist criticism that many posthumanist critics do not particularly care which kind of 'humanism' they are dealing with. In a peculiar case of 'all cats are black in the night' syndrome, many posthumanist critics are happy to deal with humanism as if it were all of the Bloom school. This, needless to say, does their arguments little service.

Martin Halliwell and Andy Mousley, in *Critical Humanisms*, outline 'three important and interrelated characteristics of what this book will subsequently call "classical" or occasionally "liberal" humanism: the sovereignty

[23] Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, p. 13.
[24] Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, pp. 21-22.

of the subject (a key feature of liberal humanism); the transparency of language; and rationalism.'[25] Along with other, subsidiary concepts, most critics writing about the philosophical posthuman consider some variation of the above to be the humanist conception of the subject. This may be true for some kinds of humanism, but a philosophical monster which has existed for better than four hundred years wears many faces. Indeed the tendency of posthumanist critics to use the terms 'liberal humanist' and 'humanist' interchangeably marks a certain weakness in the arguments put forward.[26] This is a point which Terry Eagleton makes well in *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, when he writes that:

> *In a convenient piece of straw-targeting, all liberalism is seen as promoting some primitive Hobbesian notion of the self as a naked social atom anterior to its social conditions, linked to other anti-social atoms by a set of purely contractual relations external to its inner substance. It doesn't sound too beguiling, but some postmodernists actually seem to imagine that this is what all liberals must by definition hold. The history of Western philosophy, so we are asked to believe, is by and large the narrative of this starkly autonomous subject, in contrast to the dispersed, divided subject of current postmodern orthodoxy. This ignorant and dogmatic travesty of Western philosophy should not go unchallenged. For Spinoza, the subject is the mere function of an implacable determinism, its 'freedom' no more than the knowledge of an iron necessity. The self for David Hume is a convenient fiction, a bundle of ideas and experiences whose unity we can only hypothesise. Kant's moral subject is indeed autonomous and self-determining, but in a mysterious way quite at odds with its empirical determining. For Schelling, Hegel and the other Idealists, the subject is relational to its roots, as it is of course for Marx; for Kierkegaard and Sartre the self is agonisedly non-self-identical, and for Nietzsche mere spume on the wave of the ubiquitous will to power. So much, then, for the grand narrative of the unified subject. That there is indeed such an animal haunting Western thought is not in question; but the tale is far less homogenous than some*

[25] Martin Halliwell and Andy Mousley, *Critical Humanisms: Humanist/Anti-Humanist Dialogues*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2003, pp. 3-4.

[26] I would argue that, for the above typology to be true, one should probably also add the term 'capitalist' into the equation, giving the unwieldy but more accurate designation 'liberal capitalist humanist'.

> *postmodernist devotees of heterogeneity would persuade us to think.*[27]

Similarly, as Halliwell and Mousley have pointed out, 'Faith in the march of human reason towards perfection is itself not the only way of characterising Enlightenment thought, but it has contributed towards the idea of humanism established by a largely French and poststructuralist canon of criticism that it is a belief-system with an inflated and uncritical view of human capacities.'[28] Eagleton's analysis, when combined with Halliwell and Mousley's, demonstrates that both the terms 'liberal' and 'humanist' are more complicated than commonly assumed in posthumanist writing. In short, the term 'liberal humanist', when used by critics of a posthumanist persuasion is a straw man.[29] That they frequently engage with an absent opponent, however, neither renders posthumanism itself nor cyberpunk criticism with a posthumanist basis unenlightening.

Posthumanist attacks on humanism stem from various sources, and result in a variety of different critiques. Perhaps the single most common assault on the Enlightenment by posthumanist thinkers is established with the claim that humanist thought, deliberately or accidentally, consists largely of the drawing of a series of binary oppositions. This particular condemnation of Enlightenment thought is so common in posthumanist theory that it is difficult to trace any

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[27] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1996, p. 79.
[28] Halliwell and Mousley, *Critical Humanisms*, p. 4.
[29] Perhaps this is why Neil Badmington feels inclined to dig up René Descartes when he wishes to debate humanism, rather than engaging with the Enlightenment project in more modern terms. See Neil Badmington, 'Theorising Posthumanism', *Cultural Critique*, 53, pp. 10-17.

precise originator of the concept. Michel Foucault, for example, in *Madness and Civilisation,* set about constructing a text which is simultaneously a genealogy of the idea of madness in European civilisation and a deconstruction of the binary division which society has traditionally maintained between the 'sane' and the 'mad.' Another criticism of Enlightenment thought commonly purveyed by posthumanist critics is an attack on the inherent essentialism of the humanist position. It is commonly argued that, by inscribing 'Man' at the centre of things, humanism explicitly excludes other organisms (or perhaps even humans who do not fit some idealised type) and implicitly requires there to be some founding essence by which 'Man' can be recognised. Thus, William V. Spanos can write, of humanism, that:

> *…despite its pluralism, its alleged tolerance of the play of difference, humanism, in giving privileged status to Man, privileges the panoptic, assimilative imagination that assumes that the texts which are natural and good – proper – are those which have discovered the Identity inhering in the difference, and those which are bad, i.e., contribute to anarchy, the texts which do not or refuse to resolve the conflict of difference in the name of the humanistic Logos, i.e., that resist encirclement, cultivation and colonisation.*[30]

Spanos here states some of the ongoing assumptions of posthumanist theory. Firstly, that humanism, despite pretensions towards the cultivation of tolerance or acceptance and recognition of difference, is really only after the one essential thing which makes all humans human; and secondly, that this overriding essentialist quest, by its very nature, requires humanist thought to exclude and

[30] William V. Spanos, '*Boundary 2* and the Polity of Interest: Humanism, the "Center Elsewhere" and Power', *boundary 2*, 12:3, 1984, pp. 173-214, p. 181. For a similar argument, see William V. Spanos, 'The Uses and Abuses of Certainty: A Caviling Overture', *boundary 2*, 12:3, 1984, pp. 1-17.

repress all those things which are indicative of the differences between individual people (or indeed groups of people). As Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut have put it, 'Without going into the analysis of the specific modalities of this antihumanism again, it has to be pointed out, in order to understand the reason [for the turn against humanism in French philosophy], that it was always based on a line of argument according to which the humanism of modern philosophy, although apparently the liberator and defender of human dignity, actually succeeded in becoming its opposite: the accomplice, if not the cause, of oppression.'[31] An example of such an argument can be seen in the introduction to the collection of essays, *Posthumanism*. Neil Badmington argues there that, 'If, the anti-humanists argued, "we" accept humanism's claim that "we" are naturally inclined to think, organise and act in certain ways, it is difficult to believe that human society and behaviour could ever be different than they are now. Humanism was therefore to be opposed if radical change, the thinking of difference, was to become a possibility. The future would begin with the end of Man.'[32] Or, as it is put in a different way in the same collection, 'The claim of universal humanity inherent in the republican "we" underpins the apparent paradox that a nation like the United States, dedicated to the inalienable rights of man, should be a hostage to racism, sexism and homophobia… American hatred of difference and fear of the other is so persistent and complex precisely because Americans believe themselves to be human. Theirs is not a tolerance of difference, but of identity, of the identity of an abstract human nature',[33] and

[31] Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1990, p. *xxv*.
[32] Neil Badmington, 'Introduction: Approaching Posthumanism', in *Posthumanism*, Neil Badmington (ed.), Palgrave, New York, 2000, p. 7.
[33] Bill Readings, 'Pagans, Perverts or Primitives? Experimental Justice in the Empire of Capital', in Neil Badmington (ed.), *Posthumanism*, Palgrave, New York, 2000, pp. 112-128, p. 117.

later, 'As Lyotard reminds us, acts of great terror have been committed not simply in the name of but *as a result* of the presumption of a common, abstract, universal humanity.'[34] Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, observes that Western discourse concerning the Orient displays significant ethnocentrism, and that this ethnocentrism takes the course of a series of binary distinctions, e.g., 'The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal."[35] It could be argued that this is precisely the kind of essentialist discourse for which posthumanism has taken humanism to task.

A further element of the posthumanist critical framework, almost certainly first identified and proposed by Jean-François Lyotard, is the cynicism with which it addresses the grand accounts of humanity which so enthralled Enlightenment thinkers. Indeed, it was Lyotard who wrote 'simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives.'[36] The specific metanarrative of the Enlightenment which occupied much of Lyotard's thought after this was the concept of rationality, particularly that embodied in the ideas of rational consensus proposed by Jurgen Habermas.[37] Without wishing to examine Habermas and Lyotard's lengthy and complex debate in detail, Fredric Jameson's appraisal of the postmodern objection to the idea of consensus welds

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[34] Bill Readings, 'Pagans, Perverts or Primitives?, p. 119. For an interesting rebuttal of the idea that racism and genocide are necessary outgrowths of the Enlightenment mindset, see Raymond Tallis, *Enemies of Hope: A Critique of Contemporary Pessimism*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1997, pp. 53-61. For a further rebuttal, specifically relating to Jacques Derrida's argument that Heidegger's Nazism was attributable to a surfeit of 'humanism', see Richard Wolin, *Labyrinths*, pp. 154-161.

[35] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin, London, 1995, p. 40.

[36] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (trans. G. Bennington and B. Masumi), Manchester University Press, 1986, p. *xxvi*.

[37] Lyotard's primary objections to Habermas' conception are expressed in Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (trans. G. Bennington and B. Masumi), Manchester University Press, 1986, pp. 65-66.

this piece of critique well to its companions. Jameson states that 'the ideology of groups and difference does not really strike a blow, philosophically or politically, against tyranny… 'Tyranny' meant the *ancient regime*; its modern analogue, "totalitarianism", intends socialism; but "consensus" now designates representative democracy… and it is now this that, already objectively in crisis, finds itself politically challenged by the new social movements, none of which find the appeal to majority will and consensus particularly legitimate any longer, let alone satisfactory.'[38] Or, as Lyotard himself put it, 'We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus.'[39] Lastly, and at least equally importantly, posthumanism adopts an oppositional position regarding the subject-centred philosophy of the Enlightenment. As Ferry and Renaut put it, 'From Foucault's declaration of the "death of man" at the end of *The Order of Things* to Lacan's affirmation of the radically antihumanist nature of psychoanalysis since "Freud's discovery" that "the true centre of the human being is no longer in the same place assigned to it by the whole humanist tradition," the same conviction is upheld: The autonomy of the subject is an illusion.'[40] By the time of the rise of cyberpunk as a sub-genre, post/antihumanist critique increasingly influenced the radical academic literary establishment. It is within this background of posthumanist critical theory which the dominance of posthumanist interpretations of cyberpunk establishes itself. There are, however, many ways to skin a cat, and, apparently, many ways to read the death of 'man' into cyberpunk fiction. The following paragraphs analyse the

[38] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, London, 1991, pp. 340-341.
[39] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (trans. G. Bennington and B. Masumi), Manchester University Press, 1986, p. 66.
[40] Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1990, p. *xxiii*.

variety of posthumanist readings of cyberpunk science fiction, and attend to common intellectual threads, common successes and failings, in the interpretative arts of their authors.

Early cyberpunk critique quickly associated cyberpunk with postmodernism. In the seminal *Mississippi Review 31/*32, devoted to cyberpunk, Istvan Csiscery-Ronay concluded that 'cyberpunk is… the apotheosis of the postmodern.'[41] Csicsery-Ronay continued his argument by claiming that

> *out of the antihuman evil that has created conditions intolerable for normal human life comes some new situation. This new situation is, then, either the promise of an apocalyptic entrance into a new evolutionary synthesis of the human and the machine, or an all encompassing hallucination in which true motives, and true affects, cannot be known. Neuromancer's myth of the evolution of a new cosmic entity out of human technology is perhaps the only seriously positive version of the new situation – but even it offers only limited transcendence, since the world is much the same in Gibson's later novel, Count Zero, set some years later.*[42]

Whilst Csicsery-Ronay does not specifically refer to cyberpunk as posthumanist in intent, it is easy to infer (as later critics do) that the change in human conditions which Csicsery-Ronay describes, as imagined in cyberpunk, is incompatible with a humanist mindset. In particular, the 'evolutionary synthesis of the human and the machine' which is, to greater or lesser degrees, imagined in cyberpunk fiction is one of the key themes of posthumanist interpretations of

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[41] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, 'Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism', in Larry McCaffery (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, pp. 182-193, p. 182. As Sabine Heuser notes in a footnote on p. 12, *Virtual Geographies*, 'The double volume of *Mississippi Review* has been frequently cited but is rarely stocked by academic libraries and thus remains very difficult to obtain. Fortunately, most of the stories and articles contained therein have also been published elsewhere.'

[42] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, 'Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism', p. 191.

cyberpunk.[43] This idea is, obviously, also key to interpretative examinations of the posthuman in cyberpunk. It is unsurprising, on the surface at least, that the idea of the cybernetic posthuman and philosophical posthumanism are strongly associated. After all, it would seem at best futile to argue for the continuation of the Enlightenment humanist project if there were no more humans about whom to be humanist. However, this dangerous and mostly unstated assumption requires interrogation. In the later chapter examining the idea of the technological post-human in cyberpunk criticism, the question of what puts the 'post' in posthuman will be explored.

Despite, or perhaps due to, the large quantity of posthumanist critique about cyberpunk, there are schisms in the critical literature. These critical disjunctures manifest not so much in the various presentations of the idea of the posthumanist being, but rather in the presentation of the opposing and preceding ideas of humanism. All the posthumanist critics of cyberpunk tend to agree that one of the great problems of humanist thought is its tendency to essentialise human nature. This, they argue, is not only a gross misrepresentation of humans, but also leads, by the projection of an idealised view of human nature, to the marginalisation and exploitative domination of people who do not fit this idealised view of 'man.' Thus, by this argument, the essentialisation of human nature by humanist thinkers was actually their extrapolation from the kinds of people they understood best. As the bulk of Enlightenment thought had its genesis in Europe, and was primarily conducted by white males, the things they thought were 'essential' in humans tended to be the things that white, European,

[43] The idea of cyberspace, Gibson's 'consensual hallucination' will be examined in greater depth in the chapter 'The "Other" spaces of Cyberpunk: Cyberpunk and Spatiality.'

wealthy, highly educated males valued. These 'essential' components of human nature, according to most posthumanist thought, and most posthumanist cyberpunk critics, are not only not 'essential' but actively exclude people from other, usually less privileged positions in the world. Thomas Foster has suggested that cyberpunk questions the essential nature of the humanist subject, and observes that

> *cyberpunk represents cultural identity as an inescapable, if partial, commodification of subjectivity, as a process of signifying for others in ways that are outside the control of individual subjects. This representation of the cultural commodification of identity can be understood as the result of the late capitalist extension of the commodity structure into previously sacrosanct areas of (white male) individual experience, but it can also be read as a precondition for revealing the histories of those social subjects who have been consistently denied such immunity, who have always inhabited bodies marked as particular and therefore not fully or only human because not generally human.*[44]

Or, in the words of Mary Catherine Harper, 'cyberpunk can be said to invite a critique of humanist subjectivity as well as to suggest the possibility of liberation from the constraints of such oppositional categories as masculinist rationality and feminised "meat."'[45] In these critical readings of cyberpunk, we must note that the prevailing critical vision of cyberpunk interprets it as a genre that questions humanist essentialism – even discards essentialist thinking altogether. It almost goes without saying that critics in general consider this to be a good idea.

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[44] Thomas Foster, 'Meat Puppets or Robopaths?: Cyberpunk and the Question of Embodiment', *Genders*, 18, pp. 11-31, p. 23.
[45] Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other: A Case for Feminist Cyborg Writers', *Science Fiction Studies*, 22:3, pp. 399-421, pp. 399-400.

However, what posthumanist critics of cyberpunk don't seem to be able to agree on is which part of being human humanists think is essential. On the one hand, there are those critics, probably the majority, who regard the human physical form as the ideal part of the essential human in Enlightenment thought. This, conveniently, meshes well with an argument presenting cyberpunk as posthumanist in nature. If the physical human is the defining facet of what is essentially human, the shrine within which the flawed concept of the humanist subject supposedly sits, then cyberpunk abounds with examples of the alteration (not to say desecration) of that shrine. If the physical body, the 'natural', unaltered human is indeed the thing which defines the humanist subject, then it seems that it is well and truly challenged, if not completely destroyed, in cyberpunk. Bodies are routinely altered, sometimes minimally, sometimes in truly amazing ways. The cyberpunk imagination of the possibilities of human transformation by technology allows for virtually anything – removable eyeballs, razorblade fingernails, even the complete rebuilding of nigh-on destroyed bodies. As Veronica Hollinger puts it,

> *Along with the 'other' space of cyberspace,* Neuromancer *offers alternatives to conventional modalities of human existence as well: computer hackers have direct mental access to cyberspace, artificial intelligences live and function within it, digitalised constructs are based on the subjectivities of humans whose 'personalities' have been downloaded into computers, and human bodies are routinely cloned.*
>
> *This is Sterling's post-humanism with a vengeance, a post-humanism which, in its representation of "monsters" – hopeful or otherwise – produced by the interface of the human and the machine, radically decentres the human body, sacred icon of the essential self, in the same way that the virtual reality of cyberspace works to decentre conventional humanist notions of an unproblematical "real".*[46]

[46] Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism', *Mosaic*,

Whilst the proliferation of technology in the imagined world of cyberpunk encourages the discussion of the cybernetic posthuman, it has also been the case that the 'cybernetic breakdown of the classic nature/culture opposition' has been argued as situating cyberpunk 'among a growing… number of science-fiction projects which can be identified as 'anti-humanist.''[47] Hollinger here raised a point which becomes a continuing theme in cyberpunk critique. The modification, and even destruction, of the physical human body in cyberpunk literature is read as an effort at deconstruction of the humanist conception of the human.[48] Under posthumanist interpretations of humanism, the human is most often identified as taking one side or the other of the mind/body binary split. It is of interest that, in order to maintain that the technological alteration of the physical human constitutes a deconstruction of the humanist conception of the human, posthumanists must, of necessity, argue that Enlightenment humanism placed the 'essence' of humanity in the body, or physical side of the mind/body binary. In other words, it is, on this interpretation, being a human being in a recognisably human body which constitutes being human for humanists. If that were the case, then significant technological alteration of the human body would indeed undermine humanist theory concerning the self. From Molly Millions'

23:2, 1990, p. 32-33. References to Sterling's 'posthumanism' remain a continuing presence in Hollinger's critical contributions. See, for example, Veronica Hollinger, 'Posthumanism and Cyborg Theory', in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, Routledge, New York, 2009, pp. 267- 278, p. 269.Sterling's regular references to characters in *Schismatrix* as 'posthuman' may be one of the factors which leads to the designation of his work as posthumanist. However, a distinction I will draw, in this and the next chapter, is the distinction between philosophical posthumanism or 'post-humanism' and technological posthumanism or 'posthuman-ism.' See also Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus, 'What's Wrong With Posthumanism', *rhizomes*, section (f) for the genesis of this idea.

[47] Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions', p. 30.

[48] This theme is examined in greater detail in the next chapter, entitled '"But it Ain't No Way Human": Theories of the Posthuman and Cyberpunk.'

razor nails and upgraded nervous system to Bobby Newmark's or Mark's complete withdrawal into cyberspace, these new and different selves created by the intersection of human and technology do present a deconstruction of the 'natural', 'essential' human self separate from the world and the technology present within it.

The question must be asked, however, does this really challenge the humanist idea of the subject? Do the eyeballs make the human? Many critics writing about cyberpunk would certainly consider this to be the case. Consider Timo Siivonen, discussing, in a typical fashion, the boundary figure of the cyborg in cyberpunk:

> *The cyborg is an oxymoron combining the mechanical world of the machine and the 'natural' world of the organic body. Human and machine, culture and nature, subject and object: the thought of the modern West has been traditionally structured around such pairs of opposing concepts. The oxymoronic cyborg seems to activate this set of pairs of concepts at the base of our thinking, which, while they have mutually excluded each other, have also presupposed each other's existence. In order to be a subject, a subject must have an object, through which it can produce itself. In the immersive nature of cyborg discourse, this dichotomy disappears. The border between human and machine has disappeared, or, at least, it has been problematised.*[49]

However, when discussing the fusion of human and machine which is the figure of the cyborg, Siivonen, along with many other authors of cyberpunk critique, conducts a piece of faulty reasoning. The argument behind the idea that the figure of the cyborg disrupts the subject/object distinction undeniably present in much Enlightenment thought is relatively simple. The cyborg, simply put, is a

[49] Timo Siivonen, 'Cyborgs and Generic Oxymorons: The Body and Technology in William Gibson's Cyberspace Trilogy', *Science Fiction Studies*, 23, 1996, pp. 227-244, p. 229.

combination of two things; a human (animate, biological and 'subject') with technology (inanimate, mechanical and 'object'). The argument apparently then proceeds immediately to the claim that this combination or fusion somehow disrupts the subject/object distinction. This, however, need not necessarily be the case. Consider a different case to that of the futuristic (or perhaps present-istic) cyborg: that of a human and a tool or prosthesis. Take, for example, the spectacles which many people wear to correct their vision. Removed from the wearer, they are simply metal, plastic and glass – an object. However, attached to the wearer, they become something more – a 'part' of the wearer which acts to effect their perception of the world, hopefully in a positive way. Is this monstrous fusion of inanimate object and thinking subject then a precursor to the collapse of one of the founding principles of Western logic? Definitely not, as Vivian Sobchack, when discussing her prosthetic leg, is at pains to point out, stating that, 'The desired transparency here, however, involves *my* incorporation of the prosthetic – and not the prosthetic's incorporation of me…'[50] The problems raised for the subject/object distinction by the figure of the cyborg are, therefore, resolved by the incorporation and encapsulation of the 'object' (the technological bit of the cyborg) by the subject (the human subject being, for want of a better term, 'cyborged'). Sobchack concludes her argument, which was made in opposition to Jean Baudrillard's interpretation of Ballard's *Crash*, with a warning statement about Baudrillard's 'deadly, terminal confusions between meat and hardware.'[51] In reference to these confusions, Sobchack argues that 'Without my lived-body to live it, the prosthetic exists as part of a body without

[50] Vivian Sobchack, 'Beating the Meat/Surviving the Text, or How to Get Out of this Century Alive', in *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk*, Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (eds), Sage Publications, London, 1995, pp. 205-214, p. 210.
[51] Vivian Sobchack, 'Beating the Meat/Surviving the Text', p. 213.

organs – a techno body that has no sympathy for human suffering, cannot understand human pleasure and, since it has no conception of death, cannot possibly value life.'[52] Moreover, without her lived body to live it, Sobchack's prosthetic is, quite simply, an object – an inanimate, if cleverly constructed, replacement for a lost limb.

It requires a very narrow interpretation of the humanist idea of the conscious subject to argue that the physical modification of the human body imagined in cyberpunk constitutes a form of posthumanist discourse. This ultra-restricted humanism, in which the functioning of the subject is dependent on a completely inviolate physical form, is a picture of a humanism which really *never existed*. Indeed, as alluded to previously, in order to maintain that physical alteration of the human constitutes a deconstructive activity, and a disproof of Enlightenment humanism, it is necessary for posthumanist critics to maintain that the part of the human which humanism has traditionally seen as essential is the human body. This is a significant departure from much previous antihumanist thought. The typical criticism levelled at humanist philosophy by antihumanists has been that humanism locates the essence of humanity in the mental sphere, and enshrines the rational consciousness as the unalterable fact of human existence. This alleged over-emphasising of rationality (particularly of instrumental reason), and the subsequent creation of the Enlightenment 'Goddess of Reason', antihumanists have argued, leads to humanists ignoring the importance of anything which is not directly related to the abstract, reasoning consciousness. Thus, feminist critiques of Enlightenment humanism often

[52] Vivian Sobchack, 'Beating the Meat/Surviving the Text', p. 213.

present the argument that, as women have, in Western culture, often been presented as working bodies, and men as reasoning, mental creatures, the humanist emphasis on rationality has served, deliberately or accidentally, as a tool for oppressing women. This has led to an increasing discussion of 'embodiment' as a paradigm for the discussion of the human.[53] Whether one agrees with the portrayal of humanism as a philosophy which enshrines the reasoning consciousness at the cost of other aspects of the human or not, it remains interesting, and problematic, that the arguments presented by many critics of cyberpunk regarding body modification in the genre represent a significant departure from previous posthumanist critiques of the Enlightenment. For if humanist thought argues that the reasoning consciousness is the essence of what it is to be human, then modifications of the human body would appear to be, at best, irrelevant to debates about the validity of humanism.

Some posthumanist cyberpunk critics, perhaps realising the futility of attacking humanism through the idea of physical essentialism, instead examine the ways in which cyberpunk can be interpreted as undermining humanist visions of the essential nature of the reasoning consciousness. This is, frequently, deeply related to discussions of cyberspace. However, discussions of cyberspace are so intense that they compose the bulk of a chapter subsequent to this, entitled 'The "Other" Spaces of Cyberpunk: Cyberpunk and Spatiality.' Despite the overt

[53] Embodiment is also a paradigmatic concept in cyberpunk criticism. It not only forms a key concept in the articulation of this chapter, and much of the critical material relating to it, but also, for obvious reasons, the later chapter on feminism and cyberpunk. For an interesting note on embodiment in both the humanist and posthumanist traditions, see Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1996, p. 31, and Cathy Peppers, ''I've Got You Under My Skin': Cyber(sexed) Bodies in Cyberpunk Fictions', in *Bodily Discursions: Genders, Representations, Technologies*, Deborah S. Wilson and Christine Moneera Laennec (eds.), State University of New York Press, Albany, 1997, pp. 163-185, p. 182.

similarities between the thought of Baudrillard and the deconstructive activities posthumanist critics frequently wish to credit both themselves and cyberpunk with, there have also been critics who have identified similar problems in the work of Baudrillard and other postmodernists and in Enlightenment thought.[54] The key problem, these theorists have argued, in Enlightenment thought and in Baudrillard and others, is a tendency to write off the body. In humanist thought, it is argued, the body is often ignored as simply the resting place of the rational, thinking humanist subject, whereas in deconstructive postmodernism the body, as a part of the complex that is the subject, is written off as simply another thing to be deconstructed. These arguments are primarily made by feminist authors, and this is no coincidence. The recognition of the importance of embodiment present in more recent feminist theory is of critical importance to literary criticism of cyberpunk. However, it remains to be seen whether this awareness of the central importance of embodiment to the process of being human is an idea which should be put in opposition to humanist ideas of the human, or rather one which should be viewed as a way of improving the humanist viewpoint. Certainly, some critics of cyberpunk view the ways in which cyberpunk literature deals with embodiment as innately posthumanist. This approach, however, is often based on flawed interpretations of humanist ideas. As discussed above, it is not necessary, in order to be a humanist, to claim that being essentially human is dependent on a completely unaltered 'natural' human body. Another claim which posthumanist critics have made about cyberpunk is that it is a project which participates in the postmodernist fragmentation of the conscious subject. It is a generally accepted tenet of humanism that it proposes that humans are self-

[54] See, for example, Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body*, pp. 29-31.

positing, conscious thinking subjects, and that these subjects are unitary beings. Postmodernist and posthumanist theory, on the other hand, has attacked this idea of the human in favour of a picture of humans which paints them as amalgamations of fractured, not necessarily contiguous subjectivities. Whether or not this posthumanist view of the human is correct or not, it is difficult to find significant support for it in cyberpunk science fiction. Whilst it is true that characters in cyberpunk are often not in complete control of their own destinies (and sometimes not even of their own bodies or minds), it is generally still the case that they exist as unified subjects, thinking, feeling and existing as individuals. As Sharon Stockton notes, in opposition to the prevailing theory that cyberpunk presents fractured, non-unitary consciousnesses, 'Many critics argue that cyberpunk is the genre that most clearly pronounces the arrival of this postmodern subject… My own sense is that the genre of cyberpunk does not go so far, and I would take issue with the argument that it portrays a schizophrenic, 'Baudrillardian' subject. It seems clear to me that it is cyberpunk's project to remythologise an earlier, powerfully autonomous subject that is, in effect, a latter day version of adventure/romance.'[55]

There are certainly characters in cyberpunk which stretch this paradigm to its limits, however. Particularly in the work of Pat Cadigan, specifically in her novel *Mindplayers*, people routinely alter their own minds, grafting on memories, and even personalities copied from other people. The case of Jerry Wirerammer, who makes copies of his personality available to others in an

[55] Sharon Stockton, ''The Self Regained': Cyberpunk's Retreat to the Imperium', *Contemporary Literature*, 36:4, 1995, pp. 588-612, p. 588. See also Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 309.

attempt to avoid the Mind Police, is of particular import. With so many others copying his personality, his memories, what we might consider to *be* Jerry Wirerammer, it becomes apparently more difficult to argue in defence of the idea of humans as unitary, conscious subjects. 'Apparently', however, is not the whole story. What we are dealing with, in the Jerry Wirerammer case, is not a confusion of multiplicitous Jerry Wirerammer subjectivities, but rather a group of individual subjects, all of whom believe themselves to be Jerry Wirerammer. Altering the content of the consciousness does not necessarily imply altering its status as a unitary consciousness. The individual conscious mind, whilst retaining little or nothing of its original form, still remains an individual conscious subject. There is, however, a strong point to be made here for posthumanist critics (although none have bothered to make it). If the humanist perception of the subject is that of a rational, unitary conscious being, and a part of being a unitary consciousness is a perceived continuity of consciousness across time, then personality change, in the nature of Cadigan's characters in *Mindplayers*, might present humanist accounts of the subject with a significant challenge. Can there really be a continuity of consciousness if a person goes to bed at night believing herself to be one individual, and wakes up believing herself to be another? Cadigan's presentation of various mental technologies available to characters in *Mindplayers* makes the postmodern, posthumanist idea of consciousness literally possible in a way which is at best figurative now. Further, the merging of Visual Mark's digitised consciousness and the artificial intelligence Artie Fish in Cadigan's *Synners* represents another possible angle by which cyberpunk interrogates the human/machine divide. Unlike the example of cyborgia discussed above, this does not represent the simple integration of object by

subject. Artie Fish, despite being 'technological' is in (him?it?)self a conscious subject. Thus in this case, as Sabine Heuser astutely observes, 'Not only does the human incorporate the machine; the machine also incorporates the human.'[56]

Another, and very interesting, argument that cyberpunk, specifically *Snow Crash* by Neal Stephenson, presents an anti-essentialist (and therefore anti-humanist) view of the functioning of consciousness is presented by N. Katherine Hayles. Having previously stated that the posthuman 'considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, an evolutionary upstart that tries to claim it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow,'[57] Hayles then embarks on a considered discussion of the role of consciousness in *Snow Crash*. She argues that

> Snow Crash *writes the drama back into history, suggesting that we are all potential posthumans because the posthuman lies coiled around the brainstem and cannot be removed without killing the patient… Suggesting that the snow crash virus can be defeated by a healthy dose of rationality and scepticism,* Snow Crash *would inoculate us against the virus by injecting us with a viral meme… The essence of this meme is the realisation that the best way to counteract the negative effects of the posthuman is by acknowledging that we have always been posthuman. We should value the late evolutionary add-ons of consciousness and reason, not because they are foundational, but because they allow the human to emerge out of the posthumans we have always been.*[58]

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[56] Sabine Heuser, *Virtual Geographies: Cyberpunk at the Intersection of the Postmodern and Science Fiction*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2003, pp. 219-220. It is a pity that Heuser makes this excellent point briefly and towards the end of her book. In Cadigan's representations of consciousness, I think, there is perhaps the greatest room for the reading of cyberpunk as posthumanist literature.

[57] N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Posthuman Body: Inscription and Incorporation in *Galatea 2.2* and *Snow Crash*', *Configurations*, 5:2, 1997, pp. 241-266, p. 242.

[58] N.Katherine Hayles, 'The Posthuman Body', pp. 265-266. See also S. Dougherty, 'Culture in the Disk Drive: Computationalism, Memetics and the Rise of Posthumanism', *Diacritics*, 31:4, 2001, pp. 85-86 for further analysis of the posthumanist view of consciousness.

If correct, Hayles' argument would potentially have much greater consequences for the portrayal of cyberpunk as a form of humanist fiction than many other interpretations. Unlike those critics who consider that the essentialist problem in humanism lies in an over-valuation of the physical human, Hayles cuts closer to the bone when she considers that humanism locates the essence of the human in reasoning consciousness. However, there is a considerable problem with Hayles' analysis. If, as Hayles states, 'consciousness and reason… allow the human to emerge out of the posthuman[s]', then it could still be argued that reasoning consciousness is the foundational aspect of being human. Put in logical terms, if the difference between posthumans and humans, on Hayles' analysis, is consciousness and reason, then the reasoning consciousness would be a necessary but not sufficient condition for being human. A final word, however, on the problem of essentialism in Enlightenment discourse, and whether or not cyberpunk challenges humanism on this point. Many posthumanist critics seem convinced that one can argue for difference *or* for an essentialist account of human nature, mainly on the premise that an essentialist account of human nature may mouth attentiveness to difference, but, in essence, will always search for totality – for the recognition of that essential component in everyone. It has been argued, however, that the choice between difference and essentialism is a false choice. As Dena Goodman has put it, 'Rather than grounding a choice between universalism and difference, the complex legacy of the Enlightenment allows us to refuse that choice as well as its derivatives: between universalistic feminism and difference feminism, between political rights and social power, between

politics and civility.'[59] It has been put differently, and in a different context, by Robert Wokler who stated that 'Kant came from nowhere, went nowhere and put forward… *the view from nowhere*. And yet the humanitarian principles of his moral philosophy are radical and compelling in their intolerance of injustice everywhere. To be indifferent to difference is not to disregard the welfare of others. On the contrary, it is to be eternally vigilant, ever watchful of the abuse of individual rights and needs.'[60] These two authors seem to be arguing that the Enlightenment, humanist legacy is not simply an overwhelming drive to essentialism, determined to make everyone just the same, but rather a recognition that, in understanding that there are things which we all have in common, we can ground an ethical theory which might enable us to recognise and accept those things which make us different. If this is the case, then it is not simply posthumanist cyberpunk theory which needs serious re-appraisal, but rather the entire posthumanist assault on humanist essentialisation of the human.

When posthumanists deal with the mental component of humanist discourse, there is a marked tendency to read transcendentalism into humanist theory. This transcendentalism is not that of Kant's transcendental reasoning, but rather an impulse to transcend the limits of human embodiment, which many posthumanists impute to humanism. Derived in part from radical feminist critiques of Enlightenment thought, this critique of humanism focuses on the humanist tendency to privilege the reasoning consciousness over its embodied state. Feminist critiques of much Enlightenment thought have made the point,

[59] Dena Goodman, 'Difference: An Enlightenment Concept', in *What's Left of Enlightenment*, Keith Baker and Peter Reill (eds.), Stanford University Press, Stanford, pp. 129-147, p. 147.
[60] Robert Wokler, 'The Enlightenment Project and its Critics', in *The Postmodernist Critique of the Project of Enlightenment*, Sven-Eric Liedman (ed.), Rodopi Press, Amsterdam, 1997, p. 29. Emphasis in original text.

often quite validly, that many of the ideas of the Enlightenment, stemming as they did from a patriarchal cultural background, reflected this background in their initial expression. Thus, within the context of a philosophy which valorised instrumental reason at the expense of embodiment and a culture which valued the masculine at the expense of the feminine, a sort of double binary grew up. On one side were men (empowered) and rationality (valued), and on the other women (oppressed) and embodiment (repressed). Reasoning consciousness came to be seen as something to be desired, whereas embodiment, due to its association with the undervalued feminine, came to be seen as an unwanted curse, something to be at worst accepted, at best done away with altogether. From this interpretation of Enlightenment thought comes the continuing idea that transcendence, a concept much employed in humanist philosophy and literature, ultimately means transcendence of the embodied human, to a disembodied realm of pure reason. This central objection to the way humanist thought functions roots further disagreements with both the humanist tendency to focus on the things which make human beings commonly *human*, rather than the things which make them individually *persons*, and to the broader distinctions which humanism has drawn between humans and other kinds of animals. As N. Katherine Hayles puts it, 'Identified with the rational mind, the liberal subject *possessed* a body but was not usually represented as *being* a body. Only because the body is not identified with the self is it possible to claim for the liberal subject its notorious universality – a claim that depends on erasing markers of bodily difference…'[61] However, it should be observed that the observance of commonalities between different people does not necessarily entail the erasure of difference. Nor, in

[61] N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Posthuman Body', p. 245.

point of fact, does an acceptance of the critical importance of reasoned consciousness in the production of the human self of necessity mean that the body is regarded simply as surplus junk, to be dealt with or discarded as required.

Whether or not one accepts that a desire to transcend the limits of human embodiment lurks beneath the surface of humanist philosophy, it is undeniably true that antihumanists have often argued that this is the case.[62] The crucial importance of embodiment in many cyberpunk novels has been cited as a reason for them to be considered, at least partially, as posthumanist texts. As Mary Catherine Harper comments with reference to Case, a character from William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, 'Back in his "meat", he spends the "bulk of his Swiss account on a new pancreas and liver," thus completing the cyborg birth process, and directly eschewing the humanist desire to escape the body and achieve transcendence in a purely rational state. Anti-humanism is evident here in the text's rejection of the humanist/essentialist desire for transcendence of the material body.'[63] Whether or not Case chooses to desert his body for a different existence in cyberspace or not is, unfortunately, not quite the point. It is rather the simple possibility that the choice exists that affirms the rather simplistic reductionist version of humanism to which many posthumanist critics object.[64] The mere fact that consciousness is imagined as separable from the human body is an argument in favour of conscious thought comprising the essential part of

[62] See, for example, Neil Badmington's exegesis on Descartes' dualism in 'Theorising Posthumanism', *Cultural Criticism*, 53, 2003, pp. 10-27, especially pp. 15-17.
[63] Mary C. Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other: A Case for Feminist Cyborg Writers', *Science Fiction Studies*, 22, pp. 399-421, p. 404.
[64] I would add also that it is not necessary, as a humanist, to adhere to a Cartesian dualist model of the self.

human nature. However, Sabine Heuser makes an important point when she suggests that

> *Cadigan and Gibson differ on issues of (dis)embodiment. Cadigan does not accept the throw-away attitude towards the body which Gibson appears to promote… Cadigan consistently and radically questions the Cartesian mind-body split. In sum: whereas Gibson's virtual world of cyberspace primarily provides a form of escape from the constraints of the real world… Cadigan's virtual scenarios are a means of empowerment, a way of developing strategies for a better life in the real world, even if the distinction between real and virtual is not that important.*[65]

It is of interest that although many posthumanists criticise the idea of transcendence within humanist literature, and impute to it a desire to transcend the human condition entirely, few if any are willing to discuss the usage of the idea of transcendence within the paradigm of humanist criticism. The idea of transcendence is, however, a critical idea in humanist readings of texts. Transcendence, in the sense in which it is meant in humanist literature, consists of two distinct parts. Firstly, there is the sense of individual transcendence of individual limits. This idea is best represented by novels of the *Bildungsroman* type. The second type of transcendence often portrayed within humanist works is that of human progress, that of the human species attempting to transcend current limitations.[66]

Cyberpunk undeniably does have significant elements of individual transcendence in the *Bildungsroman* tradition.[67] Characters in cyberpunk works,

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[65] S. Heuser, *Virtual Geographies: Cyberpunk at the Intersection of the Postmodern and Science Fiction*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2003, p. 167.

[66] It cannot be stressed enough that this does not necessarily mean transcendence of the physical in the pursuit of some mythical realm of pure reason or spirit.

[67] Veronica Hollinger has observed that cyberpunk contains *Bildungsroman*-type character development. See Veronica Hollinger, 'Retrofitting *Frankenstein*', in Sherryl Vint and Graham J.

whether it is Case in *Neuromancer* or Gina and Gabe in *Mindplayers*, evolve as individuals, coming into greater knowledge of themselves and the world around them. Sabine Heuser partially affirms this when, commenting on the differences between the writing of Gibson and Cadigan, she observes

> *As far as character development goes, Gibson's heroes usually end up where they started without any significant gain in terms of money, insight or information, because they live simply for the adventure, the risk-taking, and the adrenaline rush… Cadigan's characters follow an entirely different trajectory. Their development resembles the growth encountered in a Bildungsroman: they may not find the final answers to their questions but they gain deeper insight, more knowledge, and better skills.*[68]

Heuser is certainly correct in her analysis of Cadigan's work, but her analysis of Gibson is questionable. Case, for example, begins *Neuromancer* as a burned-out criminal, obsessed with 'the dance of biz,' and quite possibly suicidal, with little care for himself and none for the world and people around him. By the end of the novel, Case has realised that he wants things to change, that for both himself and the world around him, the way things are is simply not sustainable, nor, for want of a better word, *right*. He learns through his struggle to liberate the Neuromancer and Wintermute AIs that he has (to some degree at least – he is still a career criminal) higher ideals than simply making money, that he is capable of more than simply being a drug-using hacker and minor crime lord. The apathetic, self-destructive Case of the start of the novel has, by the climactic sequence, changed enough in himself to know that he wants the world to change.

Murphy (eds.), *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives*, Routledge, New York, 2010, pp. 191-210, especially pp. 200-204.

[68] Sabine Heuser, *Virtual Geographies: Cyberpunk at the Intersection of the Postmodern and Science Fiction*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 2003, p. 168.

Even if Case's actions apparently don't succeed in engendering this change (although it could be argued that if one reads *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* as a direct continuation of *Neuromancer* that his actions actually do change the world for humans, even if not very much), Case himself has altered considerably. From a self-obsessed, self-destructive criminal who could not care much about himself, much less the rest of the world, Case, with a considerable amount of help (usually from Molly), and coercion, has become someone who at least has the ability to recognise that the system he lives in is broken. He has, along with Molly, discovered new truths about the world – to use a phrase not particularly popular at the current moment, he has become 'enlightened'. Similarly, the concept of transcendence of individual limits is raised by the prospect of body modification technology. Despite the suspicion with which many posthumanists hold the idea of progress, technological change undeniably plays a significant role in cyberpunk fiction. Glenn Grant, realising the critical importance of an understanding of transcendence, at least on the individual level, observed that

> *Technological transcendence of human limits, and detourned technology, are pivotal concepts in most cyberpunk works… This concern is often mistaken for an obsession with technological dehumanization, when in fact it is a belief in post-humanization. "Technological destruction of the human condition leads not to future-shocked zombies but to hopeful monsters… Cyberpunk sees new, transhuman potentials, new modes of existence and consciousness." Although these new modes often seem monstrous, they may also be pathways for future evolutionary development.*[69]

[69] Glenn Grant, 'Transcendence Through *Detournement* in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 17, 1990, p. 45.

Whilst Grant is correct in identifying the importance of personal individual transcendence in cyberpunk, his evocation of 'hopeful monsters' and the possibility for new human 'evolution' is, at best, only marginally supported by the texts.[70] Rather, in the majority of cyberpunk works, the possibility for human progress as a species seems to have disappeared. The one significant exception to the general bleakness of cyberpunk worlds is Bruce Sterling's *Schismatrix*. This novel seems to break many of the sub-generic conventions, and as such demands attention throughout this dissertation.

This brings us to the second type of transcendence often apparent in humanist writing. The idea of progress for humans as a whole is one which has obsessed humanist philosophy and literature for the best part of the last five hundred years. The idea that humanity, particularly through technological innovations, but also through changes in our social, political and economic systems, can advance itself, creating improved circumstances for continuing human existence, is one which has been key to the mindset of humanism, both in fiction and philosophy, for a very long time indeed. It is of interest that, although many of the posthumanist critics writing on cyberpunk examine the idea of transcendence, their discussion tends to be limited to a discussion of the alleged humanist desire to transcend the human physical form to achieve some kind of mystical union with pure reason. Few take up the challenge of engaging with the

[70] As Adam Roberts astutely observes, 'Far from being a celebration of technology, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) articulates a distinctively double-edged attitude to the machine. On the one hand, this is a text that delights in the ingenious and fascinating toys its imaginative universe produces, although, given the spy/crime genre Gibson is working in, this delight is expressed chiefly in terms of the damage the technology can do: how effective the weaponry is, how deadly Molly's implants are, and so on. But simultaneously the technology in this imaginative universe is almost always threatening, alienating, a negative quantity.' Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 125.

humanist idea of transcendence on its own terms. Had more cyberpunk critics done so, they would rapidly have discovered a fairly obvious but critically important point. Cyberpunk, for the most part, contains few if any elements of transcendence-for-humanity. Whilst, as has been discussed above, it remains possible for individual characters in cyberpunk novels to transcend their own limits (transcendence as in the *Bildungsroman*) for humanity as a whole the idea of progress seems no longer to function. Taking Gibson's Sprawl trilogy as an example, despite the potentially world-shaking occurrences at the end of *Neuromancer*, the world does not seem to have appreciably changed by the start of *Count Zero*. Similarly, the world of *Mona Lisa Overdrive* is essentially the same as that of *Count Zero*. It is worth repeating Istvan Csicsery-Ronay's apt analysis of the 'change' which takes place at the end of Gibson's Neuromancer,

> *And yet, out of the antihuman evil that has created conditions intolerable for normal human life comes some new situation. This new situation is, then, either the promise of an apocalyptic entrance into a new evolutionary synthesis of the human and the machine, or an all encompassing hallucination in which true motives, and true affects, cannot be known.* Neuromancer*'s myth of the evolution of a new cosmic entity out of human technology is perhaps the only seriously positive version of the new situation* – but even it offers only limited transcendence, since the world is much the same in Gibson's later novel, Count Zero, set some years later.[71]

John Huntingdon, in a similar vein, notes that, although there are various, for want of a better term, 'resistive' activities undertaken by characters in cyberpunk, their acceptance of the technological status quo 'enables a kind of guerrilla activity in the belly of the beast, but at the same time the more ecstatic

[71] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, 'Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism', in Larry McCaffery (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, pp. 182-193, p. 191. My emphasis.

its activity, the more it tends to obscure any political solution. It depicts alienation (which is something different from resistance) as a stable and permanent state.'[72] In other words, despite the frantic actions of the various characters in *Neuromancer*, the best they seem to be able to do is carve out a niche for themselves. Any overarching, systemic change is not only beyond their power, but seemingly beyond their conception. Without change, there can be no progress, and without progress the humanist idea of humanity transcending itself is dead. This simple examination of the humanist idea of transcendence in its own terms could provide posthumanist critics with some of their strongest arguments that cyberpunk is posthumanist writing, and yet a refusal to look beyond their own flawed account of the meaning of transcendence in humanist literary theory has apparently prevented critics from developing this argument. The major exception to the cyberpunk rule of ignoring possibilities for systemic transcendence is Bruce Sterling's *Schismatrix*, where despite his frequent mentioning of the philosophy of 'Posthumanism,' something akin to the humanist idea of the human transcendence of human limits is a more or less continual process. Sterling's motley crew of Mechanists, Shapers and the various other factions in the novel *Schismatrix* and the short stories set in the same universe are involved in a process of becoming smarter, fitter, better adapted to their environments – all in all, a process which looks remarkably like humanist transcendence. It is ironic that this occurs in the only work in the core of the cyberpunk canon which actually mentions posthumanism.[73]

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[72] John Huntingdon, 'Newness, *Neuromancer*, and the End of Narrative', in T. Shippey (ed.) *Fictional Space: Essays on Contemporary Science Fiction*, Oxford, Humanities Press, 1991, pp.59-75, p. 72-73.

[73] See Graham J. Murphy, 'Angel(LINK) of Harlem: Techno-Spirituality in the Cyberpunk Tradition' in Sherryl Vint and Graham J. Murphy (eds.), *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical*

Another thread within cyberpunk which has been recognised as posthumanist is its cynicism as regards to meanings, particularly meanings for humans. Cyberpunk, it has been argued, displays a distinctly postmodern, Lyotardian distaste for grand narratives. The narratives of the Enlightenment, such as development towards capital 'T' truth, progress and, indeed intellectual enlightenment itself are discarded in favour of a valuation of surface, a pursuit of affect over effect. Thus, it is argued, character development in much cyberpunk is minimal, whereas intense description of the surrounds (usually with a liberal mixture of brand names thrown in) is preferred. The headlong plot of much cyberpunk leaves little room for introspective character development, and things rush to their 'conclusion' without any time for grand ideals. Indeed cyberpunk also displays a certain disdain for the idea of conclusions, and for the teleological view of things this must entail. Taking *Neuromancer* as an example, the 'conclusion' reached at the end of the novel is simply that, for the characters we know at least, not very much has changed. Despite the apocalyptic merging of Neuromancer and Wintermute, the final *dénouement* of Case's 'pact with demons', nothing changes very much in the outside world. Case is a little richer, perhaps, but the frantic action of the novel, Case's intense and self-destructive desire to change things, has actually achieved nothing concrete. The merged AIs seem to care little for human existence, and instead are more preoccupied with conversing with another of their own kind. In response to Case's queries '"So what's the score? How are things different? You running the world? You

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Perspectives, Routledge, New York, 2010, pp. 211-227, pp. 213-216 for one of the rare analyses of transcendence in the cyberpunk canon.

God?"', the merged Wintermute/Neuromancer construct replies '"Things aren't different. Things are things.'"[74] The world at the start of *Count Zero*, the next of Gibson's novels in the Sprawl trilogy, is much the same as the world in *Neuromancer*. If meaning plays any part in the conclusion of *Neuromancer*, it is not meaning for humans, the humanist understanding of meaning, but rather meaning for AIs, a completely inhuman meaning.[75]

This negation of meaning in cyberpunk deconstructs, it is argued, traditional humanist assumptions regarding progress, knowledge and the common thread of humanity. The Enlightenment, humanist ideal that humanity progresses in knowledge is discarded in favour of a complete cynicism about the possibility of human knowledge. If the possibility of human knowledge of truths is abandoned, then the idea that these truths can be acquired rationally is, at best, preposterous. Truth and knowledge are simply not issues in cyberpunk, it is argued – at least not for the human characters. Rather, there exists power and the means to use it (or direct it for one's own purposes). The characters in cyberpunk novels simply are not interested in any narrative of common humanity. They lack the time and inclination, and their imagined world does not allow for such luxuries. Cyberpunk, in general, provides a setting where difference is more appreciated and valued than similarity – that which makes characters different to others makes them valuable, and that which might make them similar to the masses they variously exploit or ignore is, well, ignored.[76]

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[74] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, Ace Books, New York, 1984, p. 270.

[75] For an erudite expression of this idea, see John Christie, 'Of AI's and Others: William Gibson's Transit', in *Fiction 2000: Cyberpunk and the Future of Narrative*, George Slusser and Tom Shippey (eds.), University of Georgia Press, Athens (Georgia), 1992, pp. 171- 182, p. 174.

[76] For a reasoned argument as to why difference theory (or *differance* theory) cannot ground a constructive ethics, see R. Wolin, *The Terms of Cultural Criticism: The Frankfurt School*,

Neuromancer remains the most discussed of cyberpunk texts, and it is from Gibson's masterpiece and its sequels which a counter-argument arises. Whilst Gibson's characterisation in *Neuromancer* has been much, and unfairly, maligned, the fast-paced, exciting plot and narrative structure and brilliant use of language in the novel remain its central features. The overarching plot structure and eventual conclusion of *Neuromancer* have been perhaps most often interpreted as the 'posthumanist' part of the novel. It is true that Case, Molly and others are guided, in the end, by inhuman agents for inhuman ends. John Christie has pointed out that

> *As far as human significance is concerned, the catastrophic change represented by the now autonomous AI is, in fact, minimal. Gibson may offer difference rather than depth, but even difference is no big deal. This acute semiotic cynicism is a salutary reminder to the difference mongers whose enthusiasm for difference conceals and revalorises a conventional liberal humanism. It is a cynicism with respect to meaning itself, and in that respect a rigidly posthumanist stance. This ideological register is also left behind as Gibson's work proceeds.*[77]

Like Csicsery-Ronay, Christie clearly believes that as Gibson's work progressed, his writing became consistently less posthumanist, both in intent and in outcome. However, there is another, at least equally valid interpretation of *Neuromancer*'s progression and conclusion. Rather than viewing the apparent meaninglessness of the 'catastrophic' status change of the AIs (at least by human standards) as 'cynicism with regard to meaning itself', it is entirely possible, particularly when

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Existentialism, Poststructuralism, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992, especially Chapter 9, 'The House that Jacques Built: Deconstruction and Strong Evaluation.'

[77] John Christie, 'Of AI's and Others: William Gibson's Transit', in *Fiction 2000: Cyberpunk and the Future of Narrative*, George Slusser and Tom Shippey (eds.), University of Georgia Press, Athens (Georgia), 1992, pp. 171- 182, p. 174.

reading *Neuromancer* in the light of both *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, to argue that Gibson is rather saying that 'meaning for machines' (and undoubtedly their merging is *very* important to both Neuromancer and Wintermute) is only really meaningful when it becomes *meaning for humans*. Rather than a change of tack from the posthumanist to the not-so-posthumanist, *Neuromancer*, *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* can then be read as a contiguous series. Perhaps 'change for the machines,'[78] to steal a phrase from Pat Cadigan, only really matters when we (humans) change for them, not when they change for themselves. In other words, whilst the human impact of the Neuromancer/Wintermute fusion is delayed, only occurring in *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, it is still there, and it is telling that this human impact, in the form of the ongoing Angie/Bobby story, is the tale which Gibson chooses to tell. If there is a cynicism as regards meaning, *Neuromancer* is cynical regarding the import of meaning-for-AIs, not meaning-for-humans.

This chapter has examined the ways in which cyberpunk literature has been considered posthumanist. Predominantly, critics writing about cyberpunk have considered it to be a form of postmodern, posthumanist fiction. They have argued that it is a form of fiction which imaginatively participates in the postmodern fragmentation of the subject, through technological modification of the body and mind. Many of these same critics have also argued that central symbolic devices in cyberpunk act to undermine certain binary splits which they deem to be an essential part of Enlightenment thought. It has been repeatedly argued that the figure of the cyborg, for example, so common in cyberpunk,

[78] Pat Cadigan, *Synners*, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 2001, p. 97.

represents a posthumanist move, an attempt to undermine the coherence of the subject/object binary. The figure of the cyborg is critical in posthumanist readings of cyberpunk fiction, not only for this reason, but because it has also been argued that it radically deconstructs the humanist figure of ‘natural’ man. However, as has been argued in this chapter, the arguments presented by posthumanists based on the figure of the cyborg in cyberpunk fiction are fraught with difficulties. The argument that the cyborg symbolically represents a break with Enlightenment essentialism is dependent on an analysis of humanism not common in critical literature outside the body of cyberpunk critique. It relies, at the last, on arguing that humanist theory has traditionally presented the human body as the essential part of the human in its essentialist narratives. However, this argument is does not accord with most preceding analyses of humanism. Posthumanist attacks on humanism have traditionally argued that humanism pays too little, rather than too much attention to the human body, and with good reason. The Enlightenment enthronement of pure reason did often come at the cost of an understanding of the functioning of embodiment. This understanding of the role of embodiment, hard won in the main by feminist theory, has led to critical re-appraisal of the role of the reasoning consciousness. However, and to the detriment of their readings, many critics of cyberpunk proceed as if earlier critiques of humanism did not exist. If humanist thought had claimed that anything was ‘essential’ to being human, it was the presence of reasoning consciousness, rather than an unadulterated human form. The alleged deconstructive activity of cyberpunk cyborgia can be seen to be at best a deconstruction of a form of humanism which never existed, or at worst a simple critical mistake.

Some critics more aptly identify the reasoning consciousness as the basket into which humanist thought placed its eggs. However, despite the presentation of numerous arguments relating to this topic, posthumanist interpretations of cyberpunk fiction struggle when dealing with the central importance of reason to humanist thought. This chapter has argued that the reason that these posthumanist analyses of cyberpunk have overwhelmingly failed when attempting to argue that the treatment of consciousness in cyberpunk carries deconstructive criticism of humanism is, fairly simply, that it doesn't. Cyberpunk fiction occasionally skirts the edges of questioning the Enlightenment conception of the mind, but does not actually do any real deconstructing. However, the allegation that Gibsonian cyberspace tacitly restates a Cartesian dualist mind/body paradigm is an idea which this thesis must challenge. In a later chapter, 'The "Other" Spaces of Cyberpunk', it will be observed that Gibsonian cyberspace presents a view of the mind/body problem which is anything but Cartesian, and that the charge of dualism, as it so often is, was most likely levelled at Gibson's conception of cyberspace to discredit it amongst critics of a certain persuasion.

This chapter has also examined the alleged cynicism of cyberpunk towards the grand narratives of the Enlightenment. Whilst a few critics have examined this aspect of cyberpunk, on the whole it has been ignored. The importance of the humanist idea of transcendence, of the progress of the human species, has largely been ignored. This chapter has suggested that this gap in the critical literature has largely been the result of critics only examining the concept

of transcendence in the light of the posthumanist conception of what individual transcendence means for humanists. This is a great pity for posthumanist cyberpunk theory, as it is in cyberpunk's attitude towards the grand narratives of the Enlightenment that confirmation of some form of posthumanist outlook can be found. Indeed, the absence of ideas critical to Enlightenment, humanist thought such as progress and human freedoms remains perhaps the most posthumanist aspect of cyberpunk fiction.

This chapter has studied, in particular, posthumanist interpretations of cyberpunk. Whilst understanding and to some degree sympathising with these interpretations, it has discovered that there is room for the contestation of their views. Indeed, whilst the majority of critical writing on cyberpunk deals with its supposed posthumanist qualities, it is strongly arguable that the opposite is true. Despite the overwhelmingly posthumanist outlook of cyberpunk critique, there is a strong case to be put for viewing cyberpunk as humanist literature. Certainly, there is room for critical reappraisal of posthumanist interpretations of the genre. This chapter has therefore been developed in the spirit of Edward Said's description of humanist critique: 'Humanism is the exertion of ones faculties in language in order to understand, reinterpret and grapple with the products of language in history… humanism is not a way of consolidating and affirming what 'we' have always known and felt, but rather a means of questioning, upsetting and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as commodified, packaged, [and] uncontroversial...'[79]

[79] E. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Palgrave, New York, 2004, p. 28.

Chapter Three: "But It Ain't No Way Human": Theories of the Posthuman and Cyberpunk.

> *Science fiction repeatedly insists that humans are not the first, the last, or the most important intelligent beings in the cosmos; that in fact we are only one small part of a vast and alien universe; and that, perhaps, the only appropriate response to this environment is for humans to create, or transform themselves into, alien beings. From this viewpoint, those who continue to focus only on human concerns and human limitations are the ones who are evading reality and responsibility.*
>
> *Even if one accepts the logic of this position, there remain questions as to whether it is desirable, or even possible, for human beings to achieve an inhuman perspective.*
>
> Gary Westphal, '"The Gernsback Continuum" and William Gibson', in *Fiction 2000: Cyberpunk and the Future of Narrative*, George Slusser and Tom Shippey (eds.), University of Georgia Press, Athens (Georgia), 1992, pp. 88-108, p. 105.

The posthuman, as a theoretical construct, has come under scrutiny in recent years. Volumes of critical work have been devoted to the subject.[1] It was inevitable that theories of the posthuman would be deployed in the interpretation of cyberpunk. Firstly, many of the characters present in cyberpunk fiction present, at least on first glance, as beings which could be termed 'post-human'. In other words, due to technological modification of their physical, and sometimes mental, selves they appear to be no longer human – at least in the way we understand 'human' now. Secondly, due to the simple similarity between the word 'posthuman' and the word 'posthumanism', theories of the posthuman were provided with an easy entrance into cyberpunk critique. As theories of the

[1] These include, for instance, N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1999; Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingstone (eds.), *Posthuman Bodies*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995; and Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2002.

posthuman were identified with posthumanism, and cyberpunk had (mostly) already been pegged as posthumanist literature,[2] it became easy (and also quite fruitful) for critics to examine cyberpunk in the light of theories of the posthuman. However, this chapter will argue that the presence of 'posthuman' characters in cyberpunk fictions does not necessarily imply that posthumanist philosophical values are also in play: it will be argued that, in fact, the opposite may be the case.

Within the broad spectrum of discourses of the posthuman, two significantly different positions arise. The first, arising from the discourse of technology, as typified by works such as Ray Kurzweil's *The Age of Spiritual Machines*[3] or Hans Moravec's *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*,[4] maintains a primarily biological or evolutionary definition of the human. Thus, when this technology-focussed idea of the posthuman is deployed, the kind of posthuman under discussion is really that of a successor species to *Homo Sapiens*, whether in the form of massively cyborged post-humans, artificial intelligences, who were not human to begin with, or human consciousnesses downloaded into computer systems, carbon-gone-silicon. This concept of the human, however, is certainly not the only one available to theories of the posthuman. The other major type of portrayal of the human upon which theories of the posthuman depend is rather more philosophical. Texts such as *Posthuman Bodies* and *How We Became Posthuman* deploy and criticise an idea

[2] See the previous chapter, '"Posthumanism With a Vengeance": Posthumanism and Cyberpunk' for description and analysis of the links between posthumanism and cyberpunk.
[3] Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: How We Will Live, Work and Think in the New Age of Intelligent Machines*, Orion, London, 1999.
[4] Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1988.

of the human derived from liberal humanist philosophy. This conception of the posthuman obviously has considerable connections to posthumanist philosophy – after all, a theory which describes that which comes after the 'human' of humanist philosophy will of necessity maintain an interest with that philosophy which proclaims itself as coming after humanism. Out of the plethora of different writings on the posthuman, these two perspectives, in one form or another, predominate. This is not to say that either is an absolute, or to present them as some kind of binary opposition. Such a simplistic approach would not do justice to the ways in which various critical texts deploy these theories, either individually or in tandem, as complements or opposites.

Indeed, the problems of the cybernetic theory of the posthuman have been most consistently and cogently described by N. Katherine Hayles, herself a great advocate of the philosophical posthuman. The problem with the cybernetic theory of the posthuman, from the point of view of Hayles, amongst others,[5] is not so much that it does not consider the philosophical issues raised by the philosophical theory of the posthuman, or that it fails to challenge liberal humanist ideas of the self, but that it relies on liberal humanist understandings of the self to inform and ground its very conception of the posthuman. As Hayles puts it 'One could argue that the erasure of embodiment is a feature common to both the liberal humanist subject and the cybernetic posthuman.'[6] Thus, rather than challenging the 'human' (in the sense of the humanist definition of what it means to be a human being) the cybernetic posthuman, by assuming the correctness of these propositions, tacitly reinforces outmoded and incorrect ways

[5] For views on the liberal humanist foundations of the cybernetic posthuman, see, Elaine L. Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human*, pp. 124-128.
[6] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 4.

of thinking. The philosophical posthuman, on the other hand, does not depend on technological modification to argue for its form of post-humanity. On the contrary, using arguments derived mainly from posthumanist philosophy, philosophical theories of the posthuman argue that we need differing ideas of what it means to be a (post)human being, rather than the assertion that, as a sort of technological continuation to evolution, *homo sapiens* will inevitably give way to post-*homo sapiens*. In other words, the cybernetic posthuman concerns itself with examining what will come after *homo sapiens*, whereas the philosophical posthuman examines alternatives to the humanist conception of what it means to be *homo sapiens.* Many posthumanist critiques of the humanist subject have already been outlined in the previous chapter, so this chapter will confine itself to those critiques which have been elaborated in concert with the idea of the posthuman. Of particular interest will be the dependence of these critiques upon a certain conception of humanism, which gives rise to very concrete ideas about the (liberal) humanist subject (basically the topic of critique for the philosophical posthuman).

Some critics, notably Veronica Hollinger and Scott Bukatman, have tended to treat the raising of the idea of the cybernetic posthuman as if it necessarily entailed the idea of the philosophical posthuman.[7] Without wishing to detract from the critical importance of Hollinger's early works of cyberpunk criticism (it could be argued that Hollinger in many ways set the tone for critics to come), or for that matter from Bukatman's critical contributions, this

[7] See, for example, Scott Bukatman, 'Postcards From the Posthuman Solar System', *Science Fiction Studies*, 18:3, 1991, pp. 343-357; and Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism', *Mosaic*, 23:2, 1990, pp. 29-44.

assumption needs to be justified. Indeed, so divergent are the underlying assumptions of theories of the cybernetic posthuman from those of the philosophical posthuman that they seem, on the face of things, to directly contradict each other.

The difference between the cybernetic idea of the posthuman and the philosophical posthuman has been identified by posthumanist critics themselves. Bart Simon, in the *Cultural Critique* issue on posthumanism, comments that

> *there has been unproductive confusion between what one might call a popular and a more critical posthumanism…This popular posthumanist (sometimes transhumanist) discourse structures the research agendas of much of corporate biotechnology and informatics as well as serving as a legitimating narrative for new social entities…critical posthumanism [is] an interdisciplinary perspective informed by academic poststructuralism, postmodernism, feminist and postcolonial studies and science and technology studies.*[8]

In an article from the same issue, Eugene Thacker also notes the ideological split in 'posthumanism', stating that:

> *I will take "posthumanism" as a wide-ranging set of discourses that, philosophically speaking, contain two main threads in its approach to the relationship between human and machine. The first thread I will refer to as "extropianism," which includes theoretical-technical inquiries into the next phase of the human condition through advances in science and technology… The second thread is a more critical posthumanism, often in response to the first, and includes key texts by contemporary cultural theorists bringing together the implications of postmodern theories of the subject and the politics of new technologies.*[9]

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[8] Bart Simon, 'Introduction: Toward a Critique of Posthuman Futures', *Cultural Critique*, 53, pp. 1-9, p. 2.

[9] Eugene Thacker, 'Data Made Flesh: Biotechnology and the Discourse of the Posthuman', *Cultural Critique*, 53, pp. 72-97, p. 73.

Whilst these critics' recognition that there is a divide in the theory of 'posthumanism' is accurate, this thesis would question precisely how posthumanist Simon's 'popular' or Thacker's 'extropian' versions of the theory can really be. If, as Hayles' insists, these discourses conceal liberal humanist presumptions at their roots, then the use of the term 'posthumanist' to describe them is at best terminologically sloppy, at worst actively misleading.

The technological posthuman is, it appears, a central theme in cyberpunk. Perhaps attributable to Bruce Sterling's description of one of his characters in *Schismatrix*, the term seems to have stuck (like Gibson's most famous neologism, cyberspace). The states of being of numerous characters in various cyberpunk works are discussed as being posthuman – from body modification, to cybernetic implants, to outright translation as cyberspatial consciousnesses. These varied and disparate states all seem to be representative of that slippery condition, the technological posthuman, or, as N. Katherine Hayles terms it, the cybernetic posthuman. Hayles' terminology, and indeed her description of the underlying assumptions of the idea of the cybernetic posthuman, is well worth quoting in full.

> *In the American tradition of cybernetics, the posthuman emerges as a point of view characterised by the following assumptions (this list is not exclusive or definitive; it is meant to be suggestive rather than prescriptive): (1) The posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. (2) It considers consciousness, regarded as the seat of human identity in the Western tradition long before Descartes thought he was a mind thinking, as an epiphenomenon, an evolutionary upstart that tries to claim it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. (3) It thinks of the body as*

> *the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. (4) Most importantly, by these and other means the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines. In this view there are no essential differences between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals.*[10]

Hayles' definition is compelling, and is constructed on the basis of significant examples from what one might call the prophets of a cybernetic posthuman future. These authors usually envision a gradual merging of humans and information technologies, along with the development of working artificial intelligences. In Ray Kurzweil's *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, this is most dramatically represented in the constructed conversations with his imaginary interlocutor, Molly (coincidentally the name of the major female character in Gibson's *Neuromancer*). Most obvious in these conversations is Molly's gradual merger with her cybernetic implants and also the arrival on the scene (and later 'evolution') of Molly's artificial assistant, George.[11] It could be argued that the primary difference between the human and the posthuman in this view is that the human is still largely dependent on its biologically provided apparatus, whereas the posthuman is physically and mentally coming to rely more heavily on cybernetic hardware for survival, communication, productivity and entertainment. Kurzweil, for example, predicts that, in 2099, 'Even among those human intelligences still using carbon-based neurons, there is ubiquitous use of neural implant technology, which provides enormous augmentation of human perceptual and cognitive abilities. Humans who do not utilise such implants are

[10] N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Posthuman Body', p. 242.
[11] Conversations with 'Molly' occur irregularly throughout *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, but the particular discussions referred to are located in Part Three, 'To Face the Future', pp. 236-313.

unable to meaningfully participate in dialogues with those who do.'[12] Earlier Kurzweil forecasts that 'The number of software-based humans vastly exceeds those still using native neuron-cell-based computation.'[13] In other words, the vast majority of humans will be either entirely or substantially cyberneticised (for want of a better term), and that those who are not will be unable to participate in a society and culture dependent on these infrastructures (one does at this point wonder whether Kurzweil has considered people outside the upper classes of wealthy Western countries, but that is a myopia he has in common with cyberpunk). Hans Moravec, in *Mind Children*, also speculates on transferring human minds to computers, and makes arguments very similar to those made by Kurzweil. Moravec argues that moving our minds to a different medium than the human brain will be the only way to keep up with our computation cousins and competitors in the intelligence game, artificial intelligences.[14] Moravec also argues that, given the palpable limitations of human physicality, particularly our ability to manipulate and interact with the outside world, these aspects of being human would also have to change.[15] It would seem, then, that becoming the cybernetic posthuman is indeed a matter of becoming something very different from what we take to be human now.

The cybernetic form of the posthuman is clearly evidenced in cyberpunk, and many critics have observed the posthuman-ness of cyberpunk characters. Cyberpunk characters run the full gamut of what we might term the posthuman spectrum, from Case, the protagonist of Gibson's *Neuromancer*, who is never

[12] Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, p. 293.
[13] Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, pp. 292-293.
[14] Hans Moravec, *Mind Children*, pp. 108-116.
[15] See Hans Moravec, *Mind Children*, p. 102.

described as actually having any physical implants (although he does at various points receive new organs, and there is of course the bio-toxin which 'encourages' him to work for Armitage/Corto in the first place), through to the Mechanists and Shapers of Bruce Sterling's *Schismatrix*, and finally to the digitised consciousnesses of The Dixie Flatline (*Neuromancer*), Bobby and Angie (*Mona Lisa Overdrive*), or Visual Mark/Art/Markt (in Cadigan's *Synners*).

One way in which the cybernetic posthuman, as imagined in cyberpunk, has been interpreted by critics, is as an attack on the nature/technology dualism. This binary, which critics such as Hollinger claim is a crucial part of humanist doctrine,[16] was discussed in a different light in the previous chapter, under the guise of the subject/object distinction. However, arguments pertaining to the nature/technology distinction are of a different type, and are best accommodated and examined in the light of theories of the posthuman. In any case, it is clear that, although cyberpunk, like most science fiction, extrapolates from present trends in order to imagine a future world, the usage of technology in the imagined cyberpunk future is considerably different from that in our present. Where in most previous genre science fiction the boundary between human and technology is largely maintained (even if it is first problematised), in cyberpunk there is an acceptance of the blurring of the line between human and machine.[17] Technology, in the cyberpunk imagination, crosses the fragile boundary of

[16] The claim, as I understand it, is not so much that any single binary pair is critical to humanist thought, but that all humanist thought is composed of such binaries. See Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions' where Hollinger argues that the human/machine binary is critical to Enlightenment thought. This is also pertinent to the thought of Hayles and Graham, for whom the sustaining of the 'humanist', Cartesian distinction between mind and body reveals the presumptions of the cybernetic idea of the posthuman.

[17] See Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions', p. 30 for a fuller expression of this point.

human skin and becomes, in a more tangible way than in much prior science fiction, a part of the (post)human. Following Hollinger, other critics comment that, rather than redeeming the binary opposition between the natural and the artificial, the relationships between technology and people imagined in cyberpunk act to blur the line between the human and the technological/artificial.[18] This, as we have seen in chapter two, supposedly constitutes a significant deconstruction of the humanist self. The colonisation of the human body by technology decentres the body as inviolable locus of the humanist subject, and fractures the humanist idea of the subject by creating a host of possibilities for subjectivity. The de- (or re-) construction of the human by technological apparatuses is, according to this line of argument, a nail in the coffin of the Enlightenment idea of 'essential' humanity. If the human body can be altered, prostheticised, enhanced and otherwise changed by technology, what remains of the 'essential' or 'natural' human of humanist visions? The answer reached by cyberpunk critics of the posthumanist persuasion is that, truly, nothing remains. The idea of the 'essential' human, invented by humanism, which is philosophically untenable in any case, is firmly and perhaps finally deconstructed by the imagined technological absorption of the human in cyberpunk fiction. If it is still possible, now, to support humanist ideas of the essential self, it surely will not be when the physical part of that self is so malleable as to be unrecognisable as 'human.'

This figure of the prosthetic, altered (post)human has another name - a name which is critical in the discourse of cyberpunk critique. That other name is,

[18] See, for example, Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', *Science Fiction Studies*, 22, 1995, pp. 357-371, and Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other: A Case for Feminist Cyborg Writers', *Science Fiction Studies*, 22, 1995, pp. 399-421.

of course, the cyborg, and much of the critical work on themes surrounding the posthuman has made use of this concept. The term cyborg, however, has critical and thematic resonances far beyond cyberpunk. Some of the most interesting and provocative writing on the idea of the cyborg is that of Donna Haraway, and it was inevitable that critics writing about cyberpunk would begin to examine cyberpunk's cyborgs in relation to Haraway's work. Haraway's conception of the cyborg as a paradigm-shattering presence in the (post)modern world is one which clearly resonates with many posthumanist cyberpunk critics. Indeed, at first blush Haraway's cyborg, as described in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, and cyborgs in cyberpunk seem to have much in common. Haraway's cyborg is

> *A creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense - a "final" irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the "West's" escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space. An origin story in the "Western", humanist sense depends on the myth of original unity, fullness, bliss and terror, represented by the phallic mother from whom all humans must separate, the task of individual development and of history, the twin potent myths inscribed most powerfully for us in psychoanalysis and Marxism…*
>
> *The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the oikos, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. The relationships for forming wholes from parts, including those of polarity and hierarchical domination, are at issue in the cyborg world. Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster, the cyborg 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. The cyborg does not dream of community on the model*

> *of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust. Perhaps that is why I want to see if cyborgs can subvert the apocalypse of returning to nuclear dust in the manic compulsion to name the Enemy. Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not re-member the cosmos. They are wary of holism, but needy for connection- they seem to have a natural feel for united front politics, but without the vanguard party. The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.*[19]

Haraway's cyborg is, like those in cyberpunk fiction, a fictional creature – a dream of the future, extrapolated from the present. It is, in many ways, the bastard offspring of the system from which it derives, commodified, constructed and manipulated by capitalist workings. Haraway holds that the cyborg is a hopeful construct, that its boundary defying properties will allow it new means of opposition, new methods of organisation. As Jenny Wolmark has put it,

> *Donna Haraway's conceptualisation of the posthuman subject as a cyborg, however, rejects these dualisms [specifically those of human/machine and 'dualistic gender identities'], as well as the prescriptive and normative posthuman subjectivity that is sustained by them. She argues that the multiple entanglements of the body with technology facilitate a denaturalisation of the relationship between the body and cultural identity, which in turn destabilises the "structure and modes of reproduction of Western identity, of nature and culture, of mirror and eye, slave and master, body and mind".*[20]

Whether or not one agrees with Haraway's idea of the cyborg, however, it is not necessarily the case that cyborgs in cyberpunk are developed with a similar

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[19] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York, Routledge, 1991, pp. 150-151.

[20] Jenny Wolmark, 'Staying with the Body: Narratives of the Posthuman in Contemporary Science Fiction', in *Edging into the Future*, Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon (eds.), University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2002, pp.75-89, pp. 76-77.

understanding in mind. As Mary Catherine Harper has pointed out 'Haraway's cyborg is a self-declared deconstructor of humanism while Gibson's cyborgs deviate from, then reinstate the humanist position… This is not to say that Haraway's cyborg and the figures in Gibson's cyberpunk novels are necessarily incompatible… They both offer to late 20th-century American culture an imaginative bio-technological form which by its nature undermines the split between humanity and its technology.'[21] Whilst it is true that Gibson's novels frequently manifest a revised (if somewhat pessimistic) version of humanism, to which the Haraway of the Manifesto is clearly opposed, there are other significant differences. Gibson's imagined cyborgs, unlike Haraway's, retain their links to the forces which created them. In a world governed by the movements of capital and information, such as the world of Gibson's Sprawl trilogy, cyborgs are neither created *ex nihilo* nor is their existence guaranteed outside of the system. Whilst Haraway maintains that the cyborg has 'no truck with… unalienated labour', it is Gibson's cyborgs who best embody this idea. They remain, through their very existence as part-commodified machines in a capitalist system, alienated. Whilst Haraway asks us to consider a system in which the utopian idea of unalienated labour has been discarded, Gibson imagines a system in which this has occurred. As John Huntingdon has put it,

> *Neuromancer shares the new wave's dark sense of the overwhelming and self-destroying system, but at the same time it breaks with new wave pessimism by finding a positive value in the alienation of technological competence. The hacker and the game player, far from disavowing technology, glorify it and use it to compensate for the overwhelming power of the world symbolised by the multinational corporations.*

[21] Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other', pp. 403-404.

> *Such an acceptance enables a kind of guerrilla activity in the belly of the beast, but at the same time the more ecstatic its activity, the more it tends to obscure any political solution. It depicts alienation (which is something different from resistance) as a stable and permanent state.*[22]

The problem with Haraway's imagined cyborgs is fleshed out in their Gibsonian counterparts. To insist that the cyborg will not countenance the idea of unalienated labour is all very well, but it entails one of two choices. Either one must deny that labour can be unalienated (in other words argue that all labour is necessarily alienating) or one must argue that the ideas of both alienated and unalienated labour are fruitless. If the first proposition is accepted then Haraway's cyborgs cannot help but become like Gibson's – guerrilla fighters, in a war they cannot win. If the second implication from Haraway's argument is accepted, then another difficulty arises. If we abandon the concept of alienation altogether, then a powerful tool for understanding and opposing capitalism has been lost. This is most likely Haraway's argument, however – that the idea of alienation has failed. The problem with Haraway's cyborg with its 'commitment to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity', rather than to a myth of unalienated labour, is that these approaches are, by definition, partial and non-systemic. Without a systemic understanding and method for resisting capitalism, this thesis contends, one is at least as likely to create a Gibsonian cyborg as a Harawayan one. After all, Gibson's cyborgs *do* resist the system, in their own way. However, they lack the systemic understanding necessary to conceive of opposition to the system as a whole. As a result, as critics have repeatedly observed, in cyberpunk, nothing ever really changes. What Gibson's cyborgs lack, when compared with

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[22] John Huntingdon, 'Newness, *Neuromancer*, and the End of Narrative', in Tom Shippey (ed.) *Fictional Space: Essays on Contemporary Science Fiction*, Oxford, Humanities Press, 1991, pp.59-75, pp. 72-73.

Haraway's, is the sense of optimism implicit in Haraway's Manifesto. Their complicity in the system is not perverse, or rebellious so much as it is escapist. They may not be 'true' to their origins – but neither do they act against them. This is perhaps the greater difference between Haraway's cyborgs and Gibson's. Haraway imagines cyborgs which are somehow both a part of the system from which they spring and yet not a part of it at the same time – Gibson's cyborgs are wholly committed to and complicit in the continuation of the system to which, in a financial sense as much as anything else, they belong. As Cathy Peppers points out, Haraway's

> *cyborg sounds like a deconstructionist's dream come true, but the reality that a cyborg might equally be represented by a fighter pilot plugged into his intelligent headgear as by the "ideal" replicants in Blade Runner, by Robocop as well as by Laurie Anderson in performance, should give us pause. If cyborgs can equally be represented by the technofascist bodies of a Terminator or a Robocop, as by the "women of colour" affinity identities Haraway describes, can the cyborg really be "post-gender"?*[23]

This question can be expanded to ask, simply, if cyborgs are as complicit as they must be in systems of oppression, then to what extent will local acts of resistance actually make a difference? How will partiality and irony serve a 'posthuman' who is, in a very real sense, constructed and owned by the system?

The figure of the cyborg, however, remains salient in cyberpunk critique. Critics focus on the boundary-defying nature of the cyborg - on its apparent blending of nature and technology, of human and inhuman. Veronica Hollinger,

[23] Cathy Peppers, ''I've Got You Under My Skin': Cyber(sexed) Bodies in Cyberpunk Fictions', in *Bodily Discursions: Genders, Representations, Technologies*, Deborah S. Wilson and Christine Moneera Laennec (eds.), State University of New York Press, 1997, pp. 163-185, p. 164.

in a relatively early piece of cyberpunk criticism, put it thus, 'Human bodies too are absorbed into this rhetorical conflation of organism and machine… The human world replicates its own mechanical systems, and the border between the organic and the artificial threatens to blur beyond recuperation.'[24] The result of this blurring of the line between human/natural and technology/artificial is the disruption of one of the binary positions which, it is frequently argued, underpin all Enlightenment thought. The largest, though strangely the least mentioned, of these binary distinctions, is the simple distinction 'human/not-human'. Enlightenment thought has, on the whole, generally held humans to be distinct from all other things, by possession of the capacity for reasoned thought. The figure of the cyborg, it is argued, has the power to dissolve this binary distinction. In essence, the cyborg is a blend of the human and the not-human, or as Mary Catherine Harper puts it, 'the ontological category of 'cyborg' is an oscillation of humanist subject and post-humanist commodity-based subjectivity.'[25] The destabilisation of the natural/artificial binary is, it is argued, a deconstructive activity, particularly when it takes place on the battleground of the human body. ''Cyborg politics'', argues one cyberpunk critic, 'opens the prospect of technological symbiosis as a progressive alternative, rather than a simple masculine fantasy of 'natural' mastery and domination.'[26] Similarly, Veronica Hollinger has argued that

> *In its various deconstructions of the subject carried out in terms of a cybernetic breakdown of the classic nature/culture opposition – cyberpunk can be read as one symptom of the postmodern condition of genre science fiction. While science fiction frequently problematises the oppositions between the natural and the*

[24] Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions', p. 31.
[25] Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other', p. 406. See also Timo Siivonen, 'Cyborgs and Generic Oxymorons: The Body and Technology in William Gibson's Cyberspace Trilogy', *Science Fiction Studies*, 23, 1996, pp. 227-244, p. 227.
[26] Scott Bukatman, 'Postcards From the Posthuman Solar System', p. 347.

> *artificial, the human and the machine, it generally sustains them in such a way that the human remains securely ensconced in its privileged place at the centre of things. Cyberpunk, however, is about the breakdown of these oppositions.*[27]

In other words, the liminal figure of the cyborg, occupying the space between the 'man' and the machine, causes a tear in the intellectual fabric of humanism. Others think similarly, stating that

> *The cyborg is an oxymoron combining the mechanical world of the machine and the 'natural' world of the organic body. Human and machine, culture and nature, subject and object: the thought of the modern West has been traditionally structured around such pairs of opposing concepts… In the immersive nature of cyborg discourse, this dichotomy disappears. The border between human and machine has disappeared, or, at least, it has been problematised.*[28]

The figure of the cyborg, for these critics, represents a deconstruction of the humanist boundaries of the self - firstly, through the breakdown of the nature/technology binary, and also through the rupture of the human/inhuman boundary. One does feel compelled to point out that the actions of Gibson's cyborgs, at least, very rarely have overt political overtones. As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay has perceptively noted,

> *It's hard to see the "integrated" political-aesthetic motives of alienated subcultures that adopt the high tech tools of the establishment they are supposedly alienated from. It seems far more reasonable to assume that the "integrating", such as it is, is being done by the dominant telechtronic cultural powers, who – as cyberpunk writers know very well – are insatiable in their appetite for new commodities and commodity fashions.*[29]

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[27] Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions', p. 30.
[28] Timo Siivonen, 'Cyborgs and Generic Oxymorons', p. 229. For a similar interpretation, see, Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other', p. 406.
[29] Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, 'Cyberpunk and Neuromanticism', in Larry McCaffery (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, pp. 182-193, p. 183.

Scott Bukatman's dream of a liberatory 'cyborg politics' certainly does not seem to be borne out in the imagination of cyberpunk. On the contrary, the cyborgs of cyberpunk seem to be the heirs of modern commodity servitude.

Indeed, there are reasons aplenty to question whether cyborgs in cyberpunk generally, and in the work of Gibson in particular, actually do the boundary-defying job that critics want them to accomplish. It is all very well to say that the very nature of the cyborg makes it a boundary-defying construct, but there are rather deeper issues at play. Humans have always existed in a complex relationship with technology, from fire and the domestication of animals, to information technology and virtual reality. Technology always in some part plays a role in defining what it is to be human, and this is surely also the case with the imagined cyborgs of cyberpunk fiction. However, a critical question, and one which is infrequently asked, is 'Does this actually make them that different from us?' The answer given by many critics of cyberpunk is undoubtedly 'Yes', yet the interaction of characters in cyberpunk novels remains believably human. Whilst the physical nature of many cyberpunk characters is undeniably altered from a pristine biological state, they remain significantly human in the ways they interact with each other and their world. As Norman Spinrad put it, when discussing Bruce Sterling's *Schismatrix,* 'Sterling's nontranscendental rendering of the relatively ordinary and indisputably human psyches of all these physically transmogrified human clades forces us to confront the inevitable alteration of our *body images* by science and technology', or earlier 'The characters, Lindsay in particular, no matter how weird their physiognomies become, are believably

human on a psychological level.'[30] If, as Spinrad thinks, cyberpunk characters can remain 'believably human' despite their varied technological body adaptations, then it becomes apparent that these technological alterations of the physical human do not present the boundary-overcoming synthesis of human and machine that posthumanist theorists have desired. Rather than a synthesis in which the machine plays an equal part with the human in the formation of a new organism, there remains an extension of the dominant relationship of humans to their technology which has characterised the traditional way of thinking about technology for some time.[31] Indeed, even the characters in the technology-heavy worlds of cyberpunk seem to recognise that the gap between humans and their technology still exists. As the Dixie Flatline construct insists, with reference to AI's, they may perform human-like activities, such as writing poetry or cookbooks, 'but [they] ain't no way *human*.'[32]

A final passing comment on the cyborg in cyberpunk critique is necessary before moving on to examine Hayles' ideas concerning the posthuman. It was earlier argued that the cyborgs of cyberpunk are, unlike Haraway's ideal cyborgs, largely faithful to their capitalist origins. This is not necessarily a surprising insight, when one takes into account that it has already been observed elsewhere that 'while postmodern subjectivity itself may seem at first strikingly radical, it

[30] Norman Spinrad, *Science Fiction in the Real World*, 1990, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, p. 120. Emphasis in original text.
[31] There is somewhat of an exception to this rule, namely the role of Artificial Intelligences in Gibson's Sprawl trilogy. For a thought provoking account of the relationship of the human and the inhuman in *Neuromancer*, see Howard Caygill, 'Surviving the Inhuman', in *Inhuman Reflections: Thinking the Limits of the Human*, Scott Brewster, John J. Joughin, David Owen and Richard J. Walker (eds.), Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2000, pp. 217-229.
[32] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, Ace Books, 1984, p. 130. Emphasis in original text.

bears uncanny similarities to the structures of global capitalism.'[33] If, in fact, the cyborg is the literal embodiment of postmodern subjectivity, then it should perhaps not come as a surprise that the cyborgs of cyberpunk seem committed to their capitalist roots. Indeed, whilst the future capitalism of cyberpunk often seems to remain uninterrogated by critics, the unchallenged nature of the capitalist system within the genre should not go unnoted. The association between the cyborg, capitalism and cyberpunk has not passed everyone by, however. David Brande suggests that 'the cyborg is the "consciousness" of the techno-capitalist dream' and also that 'Gibson's fiction… is a dream of late-capitalist ideology.'[34] Fredric Jameson has referred in passing to cyberpunk as a 'romance of finance capital',[35] at the same time suggesting that cyberpunk depicts a kind of utopia – namely, a capitalist one. Tom Moylan has suggested that even the "rebel spaces" of cyberpunk are in fact commodified, and that 'each has found its niche on the planetary market.'[36] Cyberpunk, therefore, suggests that both the worst aspects of the humanist self and the capitalist paradigm can be sustained within the idea of the cyborg. The lack of critical engagement with the capitalist paradigm in cyberpunk is reminiscent of comments made by Terry Eagleton regarding the postmodern left, that 'The power of capital is now so drearily familiar, so sublimely omnipotent and omnipresent, that even large

[33] Laura Bartlett and Thomas B. Byers, 'Back to the Future: The Humanist *Matrix*', *Cultural Critique*, 53, 2003, pp. 28-46, p. 29.
[34] David Brande, 'The Business of Cyberpunk: Symbolic Economy and Ideology in William Gibson', *Configurations*, 2:3, 1994, pp. 509-536, pp. 510-511.
[35] Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Verso, London, 2005, p. 21. In contrast, Brooks Landon has claimed that *Neuromancer* '[parodies] both capitalism and consumerism'. Brooks, Landon, *Science Fiction After 1900: From the Steam Man to the Stars*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p. 162. On the whole, I think Jameson's analysis of cyberpunk is to be preferred, on this point at least. While Gibson may not necessarily romanticise the various corporate entities which are involved in his novels, for example, he undeniably romanticises the arch-capitalist worlds which result from their activities,
[36] Tom Moylan, 'Global Economy, Local Texts: Utopian/Dystopian Tension in William Gibson's Cyberpunk Trilogy', in Sherryl Vint and Graham J. Murphy (eds.) *Beyond Cyberpunk*, Routledge, New York, 2010, pp. 81-94, pp. 90-91.

sectors of the left succeeded in naturalizing it, taking it for granted as such an unbudgable structure that it is as though they hardly have the heart to speak of it',[37] and earlier 'We now find ourselves confronted with the mildly farcical situation of a cultural left which maintains an indifferent or embarrassed silence about that power which is the invisible colour of daily life, which determines our existence… in almost every quarter, which decides in large measure the destiny of nations and the internecine conflicts between them.'[38] In cyberpunk literature and the critical literature about it, this observation rings true.[39] Capitalism is the elephant in the room, demanding our attention yet hardly ever discussed.

Another form which the posthuman takes in cyberpunk is that of the digitised consciousness. There are, of course, different treatments of the subject in different works. One particularly marked difference is that between William Gibson's treatment of digitised human consciousnesses in the *Neuromancer* trilogy and Pat Cadigan's imagining of them in *Synners*. There are strong similarities, of course, not least in the fundamental ideas that the abstraction of human consciousness into digital form is possible. However, in the end results for Bobby and Angie in Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, as opposed to Visual Mark/Art/Markt in Cadigan's *Synners*, there lies a significant difference. Bobby and Angie, despite their abstraction as cyberspatial consciousnesses - in other words, despite the complete removal of their minds from their previous

[37] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1996, p. 23.
[38] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, pp. 22-23.
[39] There are, of course, exceptions to the rule in both the critical literature and the cyberpunk oeuvre itself. Pawel Frelik, in his article discussing the fiction of Richard K. Morgan, observes that Morgan 'discards cyberpunk's political blindness in ways both major and minor.' Frelik is entirely correct in his analysis, and this potentially makes Morgan's novels an interesting new chapter in the history of cyberpunk. See Pawel Frelik, 'Woken Carbon: The Return of the Human in Richard K. Morgan's Takeshi Kovacs Novels', in Sherryl Vint and Graham J. Murphy (eds.), *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives*, Routledge, New York, 2010, pp. 173-190, p. 176.

embodiment - seem to remain fundamentally the same. They continue existence as unitary consciousnesses, with the same sense of themselves as "Bobby" and "Angie" that they had when they were embodied as humans.[40] In *Synners*, however, a different, and messier, story unfolds. As might be indicated by the split naming above, Visual Mark's translation to a cyberspatial embodiment is much more complex. While Mark's merger with the AI Art is necessitated by the overarching plot structure of the novel (it is both Mark's and Art's only way of surviving the virus unleashed into the system by Mark's stroke(s) as he attempts to become a cyberspatial consciousness), the implications of this merger (and the previous stroke) indicate that Cadigan's view of the idea of digitising consciousness is more nuanced than Gibson's. Cadigan complicates the process of digitising consciousness in two ways that Gibson does not. Firstly, Mark's move to cyberspace is fraught with danger in a way that Bobby and Angie's is not; whilst both they and he die in the process Visual Mark's corporeal death releases a dangerous computer virus which endangers many people, his new cyberspatial self included. Their deaths are portrayed as a gradual withering away; his is cataclysmic. Secondly, his cyberspatial consciousness is unable to survive by itself; it (he?) must merge with the AI Art in order to continue. Whilst this could be read as a simple plot mechanism, it could also be read as a warning about the dangers of attempting to abandon our embodiment as humans. Also, whilst Cadigan seems to accept the idea of digitising consciousness, she does not also accept that such a process would leave the mind involved unchanged. Whilst this thesis has argued elsewhere that the digitisation of consciousness entails the

[40] The final chapter of *Mona Lisa Overdrive* is a description of Bobby and Angie's 'life' in the cyberspace of the Aleph construct. Bobby and Angie, as well as The Finn and 3Jane exist within it as discrete consciousnesses. See William Gibson, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Grafton Books, 1989, pp. 313-316.

acceptance of a rather questionable form of materialism, Cadigan complicates the issue by re-raising the problem of embodiment. Sure, you can get the mind out of its current body, she seems to be saying, but don't expect it to remain exactly the same when you put it into a new one. Indeed, by the end of *Synners*, Visual Mark no longer seems to exist as an individual personality – he has merged with the AI Art to become Markt. Through the differing presentation of digitised consciousnesses in Gibson and Cadigan's texts, we can see that, even within generic cyberpunk, the idea of the cybernetic posthuman raises different possibilities – possibilities not yet fully explored in cyberpunk critiques.

Indeed, even within the works of a single author differing attitudes towards digital abstraction are present. In Gibson's work, though, characters remain overwhelmingly similar after their digitisation to themselves before it. They remain, for most purposes, the same subjects; they are simply in different circumstances. As one critic of cyberpunk notes,

> *Gibson's subjectivities are, to be sure, vulnerable and flawed, but they represent individual selves trying to survive, maintain control, and even to preserve honour and dignity in a threatening world. This preservation of individual subjectivity represents a major departure from Baudrillard, for whom the subject is a term in a terminal, lost in the ecstasy of communication.*[41]

The characters who inhabit these strange new worlds remain, quite noticeably, human. Whilst aspects of their physical, mental and social selves seem to diverge considerably from what is currently considered normative, they themselves seem to retain a core of humanity which goes relatively unchallenged. Case, for

[41] D. Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 309.

example, despite his ability to access cyberspace, retains a human, 'meat', body, even though, at Neuromancer's behest, he could have 'lived' forever in cyberspace, or at least in Neuromancer's construct of the beach, in semi-marital bliss with dead 'Linda Lee and the thin child who called himself Neuromancer.'[42] Instead, Case follows Maelcum's Zion dub back to himself – or to his body at least. At this point, it is pertinent to ask why? Why would Case, 'who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace',[43] reject a permanent virtual life in favour of a fragile embodied one? This is not the easiest question to answer. Indeed, Case's successor in the Sprawl trilogy, his spiritual inheritor, Bobby Newmark, makes precisely the opposite choice, choosing to 'live' in the Aleph construct rather than continue to exist in the 'real' world. The answer may well be that Case, unlike Bobby, learned that the outside world had things in it that Neuromancer simply could not replicate – maybe the thrill of hacking, or 'a girl who called herself Michael.'[44] The alternative to Case's decision to remain embodied in *Neuromancer* is imagined through the Dixie Flatline construct, a ROM recording of Case's mentor in hacking, McCoy Pauley. Through Case's discussions with the construct when it is 'switched on', it rapidly becomes apparent that the only thing the construct really wants is to be erased. The Flatline, having worked out 'he' is dead, says to Case, '"Do me a favour, boy…This scam of yours, when it's over, you erase this goddam thing."'[45] The Flatline construct 'knows' that it isn't what it once was, that it isn't McCoy Pauley, and the knowledge of humanity lost is too much for the construct. The

[42] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 244.
[43] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 6.
[44] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 270.
[45] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 106.

Flatline is, unlike Linda Lee, a ghost who knows he's a ghost, and he doesn't like it one bit.[46]

Cadigan's *Synners* also imagines different modes of being. Through the characters of Visual Mark and Gina in particular, two different ways of being in an information age are explored. Mark is, at best, tangentially connected to the physical, 'real' world. He lives for simulation, or synthesisation, and is, in a sense, similar to Gibson's Case. Gina is more like Molly, although, as Bronwen Calvert and Sue Walsh point out, 'Readers of cyberpunk will recognise Gina as paralleling Gibson's Molly in her embodied nature; but whereas Molly never gains access to the transcendental world of cyberspace and consequently never has the opportunity to choose between the flesh and the mind, Gina has and uses the same skills for her work as does Visual Mark; her choice of the body is an informed one.'[47] Both Mark and Case require rescuing by, respectively, Gina and Molly, but whereas Molly provides a purely physical, and, as has been observed by many critics, classically feminised counterpoint to Case's mental activity, Gina moves both in the mental world occupied by Mark and in her own active, physical world. Their separate choices, however, create a stark divide in the novel. Mark, in the end, decides to leave his body behind forever for an existence in cyberspace as a digitised consciousness. Gina, on the other hand, opts to remain human.[48] It is significant that *Synners* concludes with Gina, Sam and

[46] For an interesting discussion of the implications of the digital reincarnation of McCoy Pauley as the Flatline construct, see Chia-Yi Lee, 'Beyond the Body: Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Gibson's *Neuromancer*', *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 30:2, 2004, pp. 201-222.

[47] Bronwen Calvert and Sue Walsh, 'Speaking the Body: The Embodiment of 'Feminist' Cyberpunk', in *Speaking Science Fiction: Dialogues and Interpretations*, Andy Sawyer and David Seed (eds.), Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2000, pp. 96-108, p. 102.

[48] Although it should be observed that Cadigan complicates even this choice – Gina opts to create a digital 'clone' of her consciousness, so that she both chooses to remain embodied and become digital.

Gabe (the characters who opt to remain embodied as humans), rather than Mark/Art/Markt. It seems that, for Gina, Sam and Gabe at least, life continues, despite the upheavals caused by the Spike (a near-global computer virus caused by Mark's stroke as he gradually moved towards becoming a digitised consciousness). All this is reminiscent of a comment made by Gibson in an interview with Larry McCaffery:

> *LM: The cyberpunk/humanist opposition seems way off base to me. There are a lot of scenes in both Neuromancer and Count Zero which are very moving from a human standpoint. Beneath the glittery surface hardware is an emphasis on the 'meat' of people, the fragile body that can get crushed so easily.*
>
> *WG: That's my 'Lawrentian' take on things. It's very strange to write something and realise that people will read into it whatever they want. When I hear critics say that my books are 'hard and glossy,' I almost want to give up writing. The English reviewers, though, seem to understand what I'm talking about is what being hard and glossy does to you.*[49]

Despite the overwhelming presence of technology, be it prostheses, cyberspace, artificial intelligences or any other of the plethora of technologies imagined by cyberpunk authors, there remains, as McCaffery astutely points out, 'an emphasis on the 'meat' of people,' an emphasis, in other words, on the people themselves. Gibson's work in particular maintains this emphasis on what technology does to people, and this examination of the role of the human in an increasingly technologised world is a humanist critique of an increasingly inhuman and anti-human system. As Douglas Kellner has summarised the difference between the philosophy of Jean Baudrillard and the novels of William Gibson:

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[49] Larry McCaffery, 'An Interview With William Gibson', in L. McCaffery (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, pp. 263-285, p. 280.

> *Both Gibson and Baudrillard describe a world where subjectivity, reality and identity are called into question, but Gibson eschews the intense nihilism of Baudrillard and foregrounds a quest for value, identity and expression of human qualities as a main structuring and motivating force of his future universe… As we shall see, Gibson holds onto certain categories that Baudrillard abandons, in particular the notion of a sovereign individual trying to control its environment and maintain its sovereignty in a dangerous and vertiginous world.*[50]

At the core of the philosophical conception of the posthuman lies a piece of posthumanist doctrine; in opposing the humanist conception of the subject as rational and sovereign over itself, posthumanist theory has consistently maintained that the rational subject does not, and never did, really exist. N. Katherine Hayles has argued that

> *The posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogenous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction… the presumption that there is an agency, desire or will belonging to the self and clearly distinguished from the "wills of others" is undercut in the posthuman, for the posthuman's collective heterogenous quality implies a distributed cognition located in disparate parts that may only be in tenuous communication with one another… If "human essence is freedom from the wills of others," the posthuman is "post" not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will.*[51]

Whilst one could argue that certain humanisms (the use of the plural indicating that 'humanism' as the target of posthumanist thinking *never* existed outside the pages of posthumanist philosophical tracts)[52] place significantly less emphasis on

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[50] Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture*, p. 305.
[51] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 3-4.
[52] As Martin Halliwell and Andy Mousley suggest, the plurality of the history of humanism is conveniently 'tidied up' in posthumanist accounts of humanism. See Halliwell and Mousley,

the Hobbesian 'state of nature' model of the subject, it is undeniably true that Hayles' 'distributed cognition' model of the human (or posthuman) represents a significant challenge to the liberal humanist model. Hayles' clear and insightful formulations regarding the philosophical posthuman form the basis for discussion in the following paragraphs. As we shall see, Hayles' analyses of the posthuman in cyberpunk throw up interesting new threads, particularly her suggestion that the contemporary world has undergone an 'epistemic shift toward pattern/randomness and away from presence/absence'.[53] However, Hayles also wishes, whilst imagining the posthuman, to recuperate 'certain characteristics associated with the liberal subject, especially agency and choice'.[54] These attempts at revival, given the status of Hayles' posthuman subject, are fraught with difficulties. Conceptions of the philosophical posthuman in cyberpunk criticism other than Hayles' will also be examined, and this will be facilitated by readings of the primary texts concerned.

Hayles insists early in her book that 'the construction of the posthuman does not require the subject to be a literal cyborg.'[55] This thesis contends that, for the literal (or perhaps literary) cyborgs of cyberpunk, the inverse of this statement is also true; to whit, the construction of a literal cyborg does not require the subject to be a posthuman (at least not in the senses which Hayles intends). It is far from the first time this has been pointed out, however. In the body of works on the cyborg in cyberpunk critique, there are voices of dissent,

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Critical Humanisms: Humanist/Anti-Humanist Dialogues, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2003, p. 3.

[53] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 29

[54] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 5.

[55] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 4.

ready to insist that certainly not all cyborgs in cyberpunk are examples of doing away with the humanist subject. Mary Catherine Harper, for example, has argued that 'Gibson's cyborgs deviate from, then reinstate, the humanist position'.[56] Cathy Peppers, in a similar vein, argues that:

> *The cyborgs Gibson constructs, while they do disrupt the boundary between man and machine, are not what I would consider "radically deconstructed subjects." While his constructions of bodies traced literally by technology are seductive, and there are moments when boundaries between subjects blur pleasurably, we are, in the end, presented with the same fantasy of transcendence beyond the body, the feminine, and racial "otherness", with the masculine rather firmly reinscribed at the centre of this newly constructed, and quickly colonised, space.*[57]

Whilst this thesis has clearly not agreed with some of the assumptions critics have made about the humanist subject (specifically their attachment to the Hobbesian model of the 'state of nature', or their insistence on the radically centred subject), it appears that the figure of the cyborg has more than one fate in cyberpunk critiques, even for those authors who agree that something similar to Halliwell and Mousley's description of liberal humanism is *the* humanist paradigm. Hayles argues that the posthuman, in the contemporary world, is a contested paradigm; cyberpunk, it could be said, is the version of the posthuman where the bad guys won. Hayles herself intimates this, citing Gibson's construction of Case's virtuality in *Neuromancer* as 'a division between an inert body that is left behind and a disembodied subjectivity that inhabits a virtual realm.'[58] However, whilst Hayles chooses the extreme form of the technological posthuman in cyberpunk to illustrate her argument, one suspects that she could

[56] Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other', pp. 403-404.
[57] Cathy Peppers, ''I've Got You Under My Skin'' p. 175.
[58] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 290.

equally have selected the cyborg subjectivity of Molly to support her case. Cyberpunk is replete with precisely the kind of imagined future posthumans Hayles fears: technologically posthuman, yet philosophically liberal humanist. As Jenny Wolmark has put it:

> *Cyberpunk, for example, depicts the new and revised bodies that have emerged from the imaginative engagement of sf with information and virtual technologies… While predominantly masculinist cyberpunk narratives recognised the startling possibilities of the boundaries between human and machine, the disembodied posthuman subject in cyberspace nevertheless retained its unitary identity, thus failing to dislodge what Anne Balsamo describes as "the obsessive reinscription of dualistic gender identity in the interactions between material bodies and technological devices.*[59]

Hayles does well, therefore, to found her theories of the posthuman in such a way as to not require 'literal cyborgs'. This is more than a clever rhetorical trick, however. Hayles' analyses and arguments penetrate beneath the surface play of biological human vs. technological posthuman, into the territory of genuine philosophy about the nature (or not) of humans (or posthumans). Hayles constructs her arguments so as to challenge both liberal humanist models of the human and the foundational concepts of the cybernetic posthuman, especially where, as she points out, they are one and the same. Hayles' observations on this point are most apt – and have interesting results for those accounts which imply that that the presence of cybernetic posthumans in a text necessarily imply the deployment of posthumanist philosophy within that text. Indeed, Hayles observes that many of the ideas underpinning the conception of

[59] Jenny Wolmark, 'Staying with the Body', p. 76-77.

the cybernetic posthuman are directly derived from liberal humanist philosophy, or rather, that the cybernetic posthuman results from the 'lethal… grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist view of the self.'[60]

Hayles' primary issues with the liberal humanist conception of the human seem to accord with Martin Halliwell and Andy Mousley's identification of the three main poles of liberal or 'classical' humanism. In particular, Hayles takes issue with the first of these presumptions, namely the supposed sovereignty of the subject. The liberal humanist subject was encoded as unitary, self-sufficient and sovereign over itself; Hayles, in contrast, holds to a theory which proposes that, internally, the self consists of 'a posthuman collectivity, an "I" transformed into the "we" of autonomous agents operating together to make a self',[61] and that, externally, cognition should be attributed to systems as much if not more than it should be attributed to the humans acting within them.[62] This has some profound implications, not least for Hayles' proposed project of salvaging the idea of agency from the wreck of the liberal humanist self.

Before confronting these, and other issues raised by Hayles' work, however, this chapter must confront two assumptions which Hayles makes, in common with many other post/antihumanist authors. The first concerns the term 'liberal humanist'; this thesis has insisted previously that *liberal* humanism is far from the only option available to humanists, and now the time has come to

[60] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 286-287.
[61] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became* Posthuman, p. 6.
[62] See N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became* Posthuman, pp. 288-290.

discuss other humanisms. The plural form is used following Halliwell and Mousley, in whose excellent book *Critical Humanisms* the diversity of humanist worldviews is aptly summarised. This thesis, however, will only examine a single alternative to 'liberal' humanism; that expressed in the work of Jürgen Habermas. Abandoning the metaphysical self of earlier humanisms, and decrying the use of instrumental rationality beyond its sphere, Habermas returns to a form of Kant's theory of lifeworlds in order to advance his social philosophy. Habermas proposes that thinking can be divided into three broad spheres; the rational/scientific, the social/political and the aesthetic/cultural. He argues that the problem of the Enlightenment was not rationality *per se*, but the misapplication of the mode of instrumental rationality, the form of rationality appropriate to the sphere of the rational/scientific, to the other domains. He then argues (and this is the main thrust of his project) that another form of rationality is appropriate to the social/political sphere – a type of rationality Habermas calls communicative rationality. As Halliwell and Mousley have summarised Habermas' response to totalising critiques of reason, 'Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action* responds by differentiating communicative rationality from its instrumental counterpart.'[63] However, the reason for raising Habermas' ideas here is not to discuss them in depth; but rather to argue that humanism is not the monolithic beast, unresponsive to critique, that it is often made out to be in posthumanist theory. In fact, as Thomas McCarthy has pointed out regarding Habermas' work,

> *Habermas agrees with the radical critics of enlightenment that the paradigm of consciousness is exhausted. Like them, he views reason*

[63] Halliwell and Mousley, *Critical Humanisms*, p. 90.

> *as inescapably situated, as concretised in history, society, body and language. Unlike them, however, he holds that the defects of the Enlightenment can only be made good by further enlightenment. The totalised critique of reason undercuts the capacity of reason to be critical. It refuses to acknowledge that modernisation bears developments as well as distortions of reason.*[64]

Elsewhere, criticising both humanism and the posthumanist tendency towards an uncritical triumphalism, Neil Badmington has compared humanism to the mythological Lernean hydra.[65] Despite the negative connotations the simile has, it is apparent that Badmington has grasped the great potential of the humanist project for change and renewal. Indeed, as Halliwell and Mousley were at pains to point out, singular references to 'the Enlightenment project' or 'the humanist project', or, of course, 'humanism', do not do justice to the diverse and dynamic nature of humanist thinking.[66] Considering all humanist thought as if it were congruent with 'liberal humanism' is either shoddy philosophy or a very poorly disguised form of straw man argument. Either way, the richness and diversity of the humanist tradition is eclipsed by a construction, a simulacrum if you will, which bears little relation to the original.

The second presumption is one of which both humanist and posthumanist thinkers have both at times been guilty. It is a presumption which takes the nature of a binary division, in this case a bifurcation in theories of the self. That

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[64] Thomas McCarthy, 'Introduction', in Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (trans. Frederick Lawrence), The MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.), 1990, pp. vii-xvii, p. xvii.

[65] Neil Badmington, 'Theorizing Posthumanism', *Cultural Critique*, 53, 2003, pp. 10-27, pp. 10-11.

[66] For another commentary on the diverse meanings of the word 'humanist', see Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, pp. 128-130.

various humanisms have manifested binary thinking is undebatable. However, as Terry Eagleton has pointed out, postmodern (and posthumanist) thought has a tacit traffic in binarism itself. Like its much-disparaged straw-man, liberal humanism, posthumanist thought has a distinct tendency to draw up artificial binaries and then simply privilege one side over another. Eagleton comments that:

> *To try to think both sides of a contradiction simultaneously is hardly their [postmodernists'] favourite mode, not least because the concept of contradiction finds little place in their lexicon. On the contrary, for all its talk of difference, plurality, heterogeneity, postmodern theory often operates with quite rigid binary oppositions, with "difference", "plurality", and allied terms lined up bravely on one side of the theoretical fence as unequivocally positive, and whatever their antitheses might be (unity, identity, totality, universality) ranged balefully on the other… It [postmodernism] knows that knowledge is precarious and self-undoing, that authority is repressive and monological, with all the certainty of a Euclidian geometer and all the authority of an archbishop.*[67]

The point at hand, regarding the fractured (or not) nature of the self is, one suspects, a small case of this general problem. The standard liberal humanist presumption about the self is that it is united, self-contained and sovereign; the standard posthumanist response has simply been to posit the reverse, namely that the self isn't 'the self' – it is rather an agglomeration of multiplicitous subjectivities. Speaking of these new models of subjectivity, Hayles states that she 'now finds [herself] saying things like "Well, my sleep agent wants to rest,

[67] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p. 26.

but my food agent says that I should go to the store."'[68] In an examination of Hayles' example, it will become apparent that the apparent either/or distinction between these two models of consciousness (the 'humanist' and the 'posthumanist') is artificial; there remains plenty of conceptual room for reconciliation. In other words, it is, in fact, possible and most likely fruitful to argue that both models of consciousness have something right. Such a reconciliatory model may look something like this. Let us imagine that, as in Hayles' example, two different agents (or drives) are pulling in different directions. So, at the same time, I am both hungry and sleepy. Under the pure rationalist model, this situation is meaningless (which serves if nothing else to indicate the innate problems of the model); I will reach a conclusion based on rational grounds. Under the mulitplicitous subjectivities model of hard posthumanism, however, we could simply say that there is no 'I' to make a decision; the action which is undertaken (sleeping or going to the shop) is simply a result of the victory of one urge or another. A reconciliatory model, however, might propose that the two drives (hunger and tiredness) establish a conceptual space. They create a moment of choice. This conceptual space, and myriad others like it, are the conceptual space within which the rational consciousness (the self) makes decisions. So the rational self, unlike the self of liberal humanism, is not unaffected by its material situation; indeed, it is this very situation which gives it the reason, as it were, to reason. This, one imagines, is by no means the only such reconciliatory model which could be developed.[69] It is also, obviously, brief in nature. The point that is being made is not so much that this model is correct, but more to simply observe that such a model could exist. That being said, this

[68] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 6.
[69] See also Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, pp. 90-92, for other reasons why the alleged opposition between 'humanist' and 'decentred' subjects may be a false dichotomy.

reconciliatory model of consciousness has some explicatory power; it may even manage to fulfil Hayles' desire to maintain an idea of agency without recourse to the problematic liberal humanist conception of the self.

Hayles' specific discussions of texts within the cyberpunk canon are limited. She makes brief mention of *Neuromancer*, and devotes a short but clear analysis to Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*. The interest, for the purposes of this chapter, in Hayles' analyses is in her identification of cyberpunk (particularly *Neuromancer*) with the cybernetic conception of the posthuman, but *not* with her more philosophical model of the posthuman. This is hardly surprising, when one considers that early in her book Hayles states that:

> *If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognises and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival.*[70]

Hayles' nightmare, she concludes, is 'the grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist model of the self.'[71] As we have observed, this is the usual model for presentation of the posthuman in cyberpunk – cyberpunk, with a few exceptions,

[70] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 5. Hayles 'nightmare' in particular puts me in mind of a more recent contributor to the science fiction field, Richard K. Morgan, in whose works consciousness is recorded in 'cortical stacks' and bodies (referred to as 'sleeves') are routinely changed.
[71] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, pp. 286-287.

sticks closely to the cybernetic model of the posthuman. The one cyberpunk text which Hayles devotes significant analysis to is Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, and this is perhaps because it is in this text (rather than works by Gibson, Sterling or Cadigan) that Hayles finds points of interest for her discussion. Having devoted space to a critical analysis of Hayles' reading of *Snow Crash* in the previous chapter, it would be redundant to repeat such criticisms now. It is sufficient, here, to simply repeat the conclusion of that analysis: that Hayles' argument that 'We should value the late evolutionary add-ons of consciousness and reason not because they are foundational but because they allow the human to emerge out of the posthumans we have always already been',[72] in fact allows a countering response. This response is that if consciousness and reason allow the human to emerge from the posthuman, then these attributes can indeed be argued to be foundational – not of our existence as posthumans (or perhaps prehumans might be a better term at this point, given the drift of Hayles' argument), but of our existence as humans.

No discussion of Hayles' ideas on the posthuman would be complete without an examination of her use of the embodiment paradigm. Hayles' use of the idea of embodiment is strategic; she deploys the concept of embodiment in order to counteract the disembodying rhetorics of liberal humanism and the cybernetic posthuman. Both of these systems, argues Hayles, privilege mind over body to the point of wishing to discard the body altogether. This is not entirely a new point, nor is the strategy of re-introducing embodiment as a paradigm a new

[72] N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Posthuman Body', pp. 265-266.

response to disembodying rhetorics. However, there is, this thesis contends, a double-foundationalist move inherent in Hayles' use of the embodiment paradigm. Thomas Foster notes that Hayles' deployment of embodiment within her works smacks of foundationalism, but quickly dismisses Hayles' usage as necessary (given the extreme nature of the disembodying rhetorics with which she engages) and strategic (in the sense, one suspects, that we can dismiss the charge of foundationalism against Hayles because she is simply proposing her embodiment foundationalism as a tool to combat rhetorics of disembodiment).[73] It is not certain, however, that the importance of her foundationalist account can be quite so easily glossed over when examining Hayles' work. Indeed, since Hayles' argument against the aforementioned disembodying rhetorics depends largely on her maintaining the critical importance of embodiment, and of material presence in a material world, her foundationalism is central to her alternative view of the posthuman. The very word embodiment encapsulates two concepts – the body, and that which is embodied. Whilst this could be termed a strict denotative interpretation of the word, even its connotative usages still carry these implications. It is possible to read Hayles' usage of the term embodiment as carrying a new and complex form of foundationalism; one which insists it is not only the reasoning mind nor only the material body which are foundational to the experience of being human, but the (possibly inseparable) combination of the two. Terry Eagleton has commented that 'the new somatics restores us to the creaturely in an abstracted world, and this represents one of its enduring achievements; but in banishing the ghost from the machine, it risks dispelling

[73] See Thomas Foster, 'Review: The Reappearing Body in Postmodern Technoculture', *Contemporary Literature*, 42:3, 2001, pp. 617-631, p. 630.

subjectivity itself as no more than a humanist myth.'[74] It is to Hayles' great credit that, rather than a simple story of body-essentialism or mind-essentialism, she manages to maintain, as Eagleton puts it, that 'the truth of the body does not lie, as the liberals like to think, somewhere in between, but in the impossible tension between these two versions of bodiliness, both of which are phenomenologically just. *It is not quite true that I have a body, and it is not quite true that I am one either*.'[75] Hayles' double-essentialist story walks the fine line, the impossible tension which Eagleton describe, and does it well. Whilst it could be argued that Hayles' is far from any traditional foundationalist account of the human, to argue, as does Foster, that Hayles' foundationalism is simply not that important, is to miss a critical opportunity.

Hayles' complex embodiment paradigm is key to her critical response to what she views as the dominant notion in the discourse of the cybernetic posthuman. This is, on her understanding, the 'epistemic shift towards pattern/randomness and away from presence/absence'.[76] This is prefigured by the dominance of Claude Shannon's information theory, which 'reified information into a free-floating, decontextualised, quantifiable entity'.[77] The problem, Hayles argues, is not so much that the disembodied, informational paradigm of pattern/randomness actually eclipses the material paradigm of presence/absence, but that this supposition is often made. As Hayles put it, 'The pattern/randomness dialectic does not erase the material world; information in fact derives its

[74] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p. 75.
[75] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p. 75. My emphasis.
[76] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 19
[77] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 19

efficacy from the material infrastructures it appears to obscure. This illusion of erasure should be the *subject* of inquiry, not a presupposition that inquiry takes for granted.'[78] Hayles is insightful in making this claim; as she has observed elsewhere, it makes no sense whatsoever to speak of disembodied minds,[79] and it equally makes little sense to speak of dematerialised information. However Hayles' observation of the dominance of the pattern/randomness dialectic in informatics is of critical importance in cyberpunk. This is particularly true of the ways in which cyberpunk deals with consciousness. The mind, in cyberpunk, is generally imagined to be informational pattern, only contingently embodied in human form. Thus, for example, Case's 'flatlined' EEG in a sequence near the end of *Neuromancer* does not indicate the cessation of his cognitive function; the 'substance' of his mind is elsewhere, captured in the informational flows of cyberspace. Similarly, as has been noted earlier, in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* Bobby and Angie both translate their consciousnesses into cyberspatial forms. It could be argued, however, that not all cyberpunk is as simplistic in its acceptance of the dominance of the informational paradigm. Speaking of Pat Cadigan's *Synners*, for example, Bronwen Calvert and Sue Walsh have observed that 'For Cadigan, information has to have meaning…For information to have meaning it needs what Gina calls "context", the context of 'social relationships with cultural reference and value.' Anne Balsamo suggests that Cadigan writes with an understanding of information "as a "state of knowing" which reasserts a knowing body as its necessarily materialist foundation".'[80] Gina, despite having been a 'synner', or a producer of synthesised experiences, insists on her rootedness in

[78] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 28. Hayles' emphasis.
[79] See N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Posthuman Body', p. 252.
[80] Bronwen Calvert and Sue Walsh, 'Speaking the Body: The Embodiment of 'Feminist' Cyberpunk', in *Speaking Science Fiction: Dialogues and Interpretations*, Andy Sawyer and David Seed (eds.), Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2000, pp. 96-108, p. 104.

the material, stating that 'Only the embodied can *really* boogie all night in a hit-and-run, or jump off a roof attached to bungi cords.'[81] It could also be argued that, in the character of the Rei Toi (the artificial personality construct whose manoeuvres form part of the plot of Gibson's *Idoru*) Gibson himself makes a statement regarding embodiment. In spite of her digital incarnation as an *idoru*, the Rei Toi opts for incarnation as a human in the concluding sequence of the novel. Whilst in one sense this simply affirms priority of informational pattern over material instantiation (in that the Rei Toi somehow becomes human – if Gibson isn't dealing in some sort of mystic trick, then her body would have to have been somehow assembled according to code), in another, very important sense it does just the opposite. It could be argued that, in the reverse transcendence of the Rei Toi, her deliberate 'fall' into embodied humanity, Gibson is making the argument that there is something critical about embodiment to being human. Indeed, this seems to be the point of view of the Rei Toi. Tama Leaver has argued that:

> *Her eventual decision to leave the digital realm for the material world shows Gibson's ultimate allegiance is to the embodied material form as a necessary and significant site of identity. Moreover, as the virtual disembodied Rei could be considered the ultimate expression of the bodiless existence, her desire and decision to become materially embodied illuminates Gibson's thorough rejection of the "will to virtuality."*[82]

[81] Pat Cadigan, *Synners*, Four Wall Eight Windows, New York, 1991, p. 433.
[82] Tama Leaver, '"The Infinite Plasticity of the Digital": Posthuman Possibilities, Embodiment and Technology in William Gibson's Interstitial Trilogy', *Reconstruction*, 4:3, 2004, http://reconstruction.eserver.org/043/leaver.htm.

Whether one accepts this argument or not it is clear, as Hayles herself recognises, that cyberpunk 'takes informatics as its central theme.'[83] Given that this is the case, Hayles' powerful approach to the discourses of information technology can, and does, provide illuminatory readings of cyberpunk texts.

In examining the concept of the posthuman, both in critical literature specifically related to cyberpunk and in more general texts, this chapter has attempted to untangle the often confused critical skeins of the subject in cyberpunk critique. As has been observed, there are two significant and diverging typologies of the posthuman at work, in both general literature and cyberpunk critique. The foundational assumptions of these differing ideas of the posthuman are radically different; it has been the contention of this chapter that this difference is unresolvable. The cybernetic conception of the posthuman depends, as Hayles points out, mainly on liberal humanist presumptions about the nature of the human self. As such, it is questionable whether such an account can be amalgamated with the approach to the posthuman which this thesis has dubbed the philosophical posthuman. As the philosophical approach to the posthuman derives much of its critical impetus from posthumanism, a way of thinking which largely evolved as a critical response to the problems of liberal humanism, it becomes obvious that the two competing theories of the posthuman are just that: competing. Given the radically conflicting nature, of both their foundational assumptions and the resulting accounts, the cybernetic and philosophical theories of the posthuman cannot be accommodated with one

[83] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 30.

another. This chapter has further contended that critical confusion between the two modes of the posthuman has led to a lack of clarity in cyberpunk criticism. Whilst it is obvious that cyberpunk deals thematically with the cybernetic posthuman, it is not at all necessary that this means it approaches the philosophical posthuman. As the previous chapter contended that arguments regarding the posthumanist nature of cyberpunk are flawed, so it is the contention that, despite dealing with the idea of the cybernetic posthuman, cyberpunk remains determinedly humanist in it philosophical outlook.

In short, then, the posthuman both is and is not a key critical theme in cyberpunk. It is, in the sense that cyberpunk authors frequently deploy the cybernetic idea of the posthuman in their characters and worlds. It is not, in the sense that, despite critical accounts to the contrary, the posthuman in cyberpunk more often than not bears no trace of what this chapter has termed the philosophical posthuman. In other words, the deployment of the posthuman in cyberpunk more often resembles Hayles' 'nightmare' than her 'dream'. Cyberpunk is most often set in worlds where the worst aspects of liberalism, capitalism and technophilia have created a place which is certainly anti-human, but is in no way posthumanist.

Chapter Four: Cyberpunk Spatiality: The 'Other' Spaces of Cyberpunk.

In recent times, spatiality has become something of a buzzword in academic studies. Without wishing to denigrate the concept, this popularity is perhaps attributable to the 'fuzziness' of the idea of spatiality; it encapsulates concepts of geographical space, ideas of place and belonging, and the sense of space associated with things which are at best debatably actual spaces, such as cyberspace.[1] Nonetheless, because the concept of spatiality allows all of these discursive threads to be drawn together under the same rubric, it has considerable rhetorical power. This chapter will work in a similar way, drawing together different threads of cyberpunk critique related to the concept of spatiality. It will explore thematic and analytic similarities and differences between various examinations of cyberpunk's places, and will illuminate both critical successes and critical impasses within these analyses.

Critical interpretations of cyberpunk which deal with concepts related to spatiality can be examined in two main groupings. These, unsurprisingly, are related to the different spaces which they interpret. Firstly, there are those readings which deal with that much discussed *novum* of cyberpunk: cyberspace. Whilst the status of cyberspace as a 'space' could be contested, it undeniably functions as a 'space' in cyberpunk fiction. However, it is its functional similarities to and differences from physical space which have provoked the most interesting and provocative analyses. Within this broad theme of cyberspace

[1] For a discussion of the 'spatial' characteristics of cyberspace, see Jonathan Taylor, 'The Emerging Geographies of Virtual Worlds', *Geographical Review*, 87:2, 1997, pp. 172-192.

spatiality, however, there are multiple interpretive strands. Secondly, and more recently, critics have begun to discuss cyberpunk spatiality in terms of conceptions of the 'interstitial' space. These discussions, perhaps triggered by Gibson's own comments on the interstitial,[2] have largely revolved around Gibson's second, 'Bridge', trilogy, consisting of *Virtual Light*, *Idoru*, and *All Tomorrow's Parties*. Whilst there is a clear differentiation between the different 'spaces' being examined in these threads of cyberpunk critique, there are also considerable critical linkages.

It is impossible to discuss cyberpunk and its critical literature in any great depth without an analysis of the role of cyberspace. It remains one of the great conceptual innovations of the genre – indeed, many critics recognise it as *the* crucial narrative device native to cyberpunk.[3] It is of no surprise, therefore, that discussion of cyberspace in cyberpunk criticism is intense and complex. Analyses of cyberspatial spaces and their meanings fall into three main categories. Firstly, there are those critics who argue that the cyberpunk conception of cyberspace is presented within a Cartesian dualist account of the self. Secondly, there are those critics who agree that cyberpunk cyberspace is Cartesian, but only in its spatial/mathematical format (it is important to draw this

[2] See, for example, Gibson's comments in Cory Doctorow, 'William Gibson Interview Transcript', http://craphound.com/nonfic/transcript.html, viewed 23/02/09.

[3] See, for example, Sabine Heuser, *Virtual Geographies: Cyberpunk at the Intersection of the Postmodern and Science Fiction*, Rodopi Press, New York, 2003, p. 5; Victoria De Zwaan, 'Rethinking the Slipstream: Kathy Acker Reads *Neuromancer*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 24:3, 1997, pp. 459-470, p. 460. For another very interesting analysis of 'newness' and *Neuromancer*, which contests this position, see John Huntingdon, 'Newness, *Neuromancer* and the End of Narrative' in George Slusser and Tom Shippey (eds.), *Fiction 2000: Cyberpunk and the Future of Narrative*, University of Georgia Press, Athens (Georgia), 1992, pp. 133-141.

distinction because one does not imply the other).[4] Lastly and perhaps most influentially there are those critics who have argued that cyberspace in cyberpunk is a literary affirmation and representation of Jean Baudrillard's theories regarding the hyperreal and simulacra. Whilst these three strands of interpretation of cyberpunk may intertwine, it seems that mostly they do not – either one speaks of cyberspace as Cartesian in the dualist sense, Cartesian in the mathematico-spatial sense, or as a projection of Baudrillard's vision of the simulacral society. This strange lack of intersection between the different modes of interpretation in the critical literature becomes more explicable when it is observed that, at least in the cases of Cartesian dualist readings and Baudrillardian readings, there is also a stark judgemental distinction. Those critics who argue that cyberpunk cyberspace (and particularly Gibsonian cyberspace) imagines the self on a dualist model tend to condemn that conception of the self (and hence the cyberpunk idea of cyberspace), whereas those who argue that cyberspace is a literary recognition of Baudrillardian hyperreality often celebrate that 'fact' (both in its literary incarnation and in its alleged real-world truth).

One of the most common and insistently repeated arguments in the critical interpretation of cyberspace in cyberpunk is that it represents 'a sustained meditation, unrivalled in contemporary culture, on the Cartesian mind/body dichotomy.'[5] This thesis contends that, whilst it is true that the various depictions

[4] One can agree, for example, that we reside in a space which can be mapped within a Cartesian point-grid system, without necessarily agreeing that our mind and bodies are composed of fundamentally different substances.

[5] Kevin McCarron, 'Corpses, Animals, Machines and Mannequins: The Body and Cyberpunk', in *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk*, Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (eds), Sage Publications, London, 1995, pp. 261-273, p. 261.

of cyberspace in cyberpunk often act to place the mind at a distance from the *human* body, this is not the same as a simple Cartesian postulation of the radical separation of mind from *materiality*. However, prior to making this argument, it would be best to attend to the various ways in which cyberspace has been read as a meditation on Cartesian dualism. At first glance, the connection between cyberpunk depictions of cyberspace and Cartesian dualism are obvious. Both, after all, argue that the mind is separable from the body. Descartes repeatedly expresses himself as 'having' or 'owning' a body:[6] in other words being a consciousness which *is in possession of* a material form. This, on the face of it, accords with the disparaging tone regarding the physical body adopted in much cyberpunk. Indeed, cyberpunk may in fact take this derogation of the physical further than does Descartes. For whilst Descartes does insist on a radical separation of body and mind, he does not condemn the physical as mere 'meat'. It is this way of seeing the body as 'bio-flesh… grossly disgusting, a collection of physical parts whose utility may have already been superseded',[7] inherent in much cyberpunk (though not necessarily all of it – characters in Pat Cadigan's work, and also Gibson's later work, are more tempered in their views on their physical existence), which has most likely led to the conclusion, drawn by many critics, that cyberpunk imaginings of cyberspace, and indeed cyberpunk in its entirety, were 'a discourse conducted under the unquestioning hegemony of a dominant Cartesian dualism' and that '"escape from the meat" into the realm of the mind was exposed for its abandonment of the discourses of the body-as-

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[6] See for example René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations* (trans. John Veitch), Prometheus Books, New York, 1989, pp. 113-114.

[7] Louis J. Kern, 'Terminal Notions of What We May Become: Synthflesh, Cyberreality and the Post-Human Body', in *Simulacrum America: The USA and the Popular Media*, Elisabeth Kraus and Carolin Auer (eds.), Camden House, Rochester, 2000, pp. 95-106, p. 98.

knowledge and power.'[8] In keeping with contemporary academic fashion, anything even vaguely tainted by association with Cartesian dualism is also deemed to be profoundly reactionary. It is of interest to note, however, that an artificial and unproductive binary opposition in the critical literature of cyberpunk has also contributed to this condemnation of cyberpunk. This artificial binary has been created between what we could term the 'embodiment' paradigm of human nature and strict Cartesian dualism. That the two are conflicting views of human nature is not in question. However, it seems as if critics reading cyberpunk have begun to assume that these are the only possible accounts of consciousness and the body. Whilst this thesis has clearly expressed sympathies with the embodiment paradigm, this does not mean that any and all other conceptions of human nature and consciousness, be they academic/philosophical or extracted by analysis from the pages of a literary texts, can simply be dismissed as 'dualist', and therefore reactionary or beneath our consideration. The prospect, raised in cyberpunk imaginings of cyberspace, of human consciousness being transferable from its original medium (the human body and brain) into another medium (the processors of a computer) simply is not the same as arguing, as does Descartes, that mind is of a fundamentally different substance to body (or matter). It is rather the case that, as Russell Blackford has pointed out 'that *all* of the cyberpunks… radically reject that Cartesian account of the self. The philosophical position assumed… in cyberpunk is functionalist rather than Cartesian: i.e., mind is seen by the cyberpunks as dependent on the functioning of matter – rather than as separable from it. Descartes would not have been pleased by Gibson's work, though some of his contemporaries, such as Hobbes

[8] Ross Farnell, 'Posthuman Topologies: William Gibson's "Architexture" in *Virtual Light* and *Idoru*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 25:3, 1998, pp. 459-480, p. 460.

and Gassendi, might have been.'[9] Thus the difference between an 'embodiment' account of human consciousness and the 'cyberpunk' account of consciousness amounts less to a debate between materialist and dualist accounts of human nature and more to a disagreement between factions of materialists; one school which insists that human consciousness is dependent in very real ways on being embodied *as a human*, and another which does not discount the fact that the functioning of consciousness is dependent on matter, but insists that the exact nature of that matter is not of such critical importance.[10] The argument that cyberpunk presentations of cyberspace are a tacit reintroduction of dualist themes appears, once this is realised, as more of a form of convenient labelling. The consciousness paradigm clearly in play in cyberpunk is one which differs from the currently popular model of embodiment; it is convenient, rather than conducting time-consuming and difficult arguments regarding the difference between different materialist accounts of the self, to simply condemn the cyberpunk model of consciousness as 'Cartesian', and leave it to rot. Blackford observes that Gibson may be 'the victim of a contemporary penchant for literary scholars to spot Cartesian dualism everywhere, and to treat it as a kind of sociopolitical enemy.'[11] With the possible exception of Abelard Lindsay's transcendence at the conclusion of Bruce Sterling's *Schismatrix*, cyberpunk imaginings of consciousness tend to support Blackford's point. Even those consciousnesses which are translated completely from their human bodies into other forms (such as 3Jane, Bobby Newmark, Angie and The Finn in Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive* and Visual Mark in Cadigan's *Synners*) remain dependent

[9] Russell Blackford, 'Review: Reading the Ruined Cities', *Science Fiction Studies*, 31:2, 2004, pp. 264-270, p. 269. Emphasis in original text.
[10] For a fuller explanation of similar arguments, see Chapter 3, 'But it Ain't No Way Human: Theories of the Posthuman and Cyberpunk.'
[11] Russell Blackford, 'Review: Reading the Ruined Cities', p. 270.

on the functioning of matter for their continued existence. Gibson emphasises this near the conclusion of *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, when Slick Henry converses with Molly. The conversation is about the continued existence of Bobby, Angie and 3Jane in the cyberspace of the *aleph* biosoft. The point is made, however, that their continued existence is dependent on the continued functioning of the biosoft, when Slick asks:

> *'What happens if you just cut the power?'*
> *She [Molly] reached down and ran the tip of her index finger along the thin cable that connected the aleph to the battery…*
> *'Hey, 3Jane,' she said, her finger poised above the cable, 'I gotcha.'*[12]

In *Synners*, the continued existence of the consciousness/es of Art Fish and Visual Mark are contingent upon the continued functioning of their material environment. The precariousness of their situation (contained within the memory unit of a modified insulin pump attached to Sam) highlights this dependence on materiality. In the light of these examples of cyberpunk examinations of human nature and consciousness, it is plain that those critics who insist that the model of consciousness deployed in cyberpunk is dualist do so in the face of the textual evidence.

A possible argument, though one as yet unconsidered in the critical literature, against the presentation of the mind/body problem in cyberpunk, arises from the work of N. Katherine Hayles. Hayles' theses on the shift from a material (presence/absence) dialectic to the informational (pattern/randomness) paradigm in recent years seems to apply well to cyberpunk imaginings of

[12] William Gibson, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Grafton Books, 1989, pp. 309-310.

cyberspace and consciousness.[13] Consciousness in cyberpunk does appear to be imagined within the second paradigm – the material circumstances of a particular consciousness appear not to matter so much as the continued existence of the informational pattern which describes it. There are many examples of this in various cyberpunk works (one could argue that any time a character enters cyberspace/the Metaverse/the matrix is just such an example), but the single best examples are from William Gibson's 'Sprawl' trilogy. These are the various instances in which characters in the series have their consciousnesses transferred completely into cyberspace – thus completely altering the material in which they are contained, without, it is apparent, altering their informational pattern. Notably, despite this privileging of something which, it could be argued, is immaterial, over the matter in which it is conveyed, Hayles does not specifically refer to dualism. This because, as Blackford has observed, cyberpunk imaginings of cyberspace (and the broader technophilic dreams of cybernetics) are not, strictly speaking, dualist. However, Hayles' analyses provide a good reason to critique the cyberpunk discarding of the body. Without wishing to prefigure the later chapter on feminism and cyberpunk, the notion of consciousness as *embodied information*, with privilege being applied to neither term, is a useful standpoint from which to examine cyberpunk. The problem with cyberpunk imaginings of cyberspace is not so much that they disembody information or consciousness (a dualist problem) but that they assume that consciousness-as-informational-pattern can be transferred relatively easily between media without information loss. This assumption is problematic at best. Against such a context-negating approach to information, we might do well to insist, with Carolyn

[13] See N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1999, p. 290 for Hayles' very brief view on Gibsonian cyberspace. It is largely condemnatory.

Marvin, that 'information cannot be said to exist at all unless it has meaning, and meaning is only established in social relationships with cultural reference and value.'[14] In other words, information can only be said to be information when it informs *someone*, and that, as the body may well provide critical context for who that person is, we may want to very carefully consider the consequences of discarding that body.[15]

Even if it is concluded that the virtual places of cyberpunk, and the consciousnesses contained therein, do not represent a tacit reintroduction of Cartesian dualist themes, these spaces remain Cartesian in another way. The nature of the spaces themselves is Cartesian in a mathematical sense; they consist of grid-point spaces, extending infinitely in three dimensions. One of many descriptions of cyberspace in these terms is also probably the first, in Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Cyberspace (in this case the cyberspace of the Sense/Net library vault) is described as:

> *an infinite blue space ranged with colour-coded spheres strung on* a tight grid *of pale blue neon. In the nonspace of the matrix, the interior of a given data construct possessed unlimited subjective dimension; a child's toy calculator, accessed through Case's Sendai, would have presented limitless gulfs of nothingness hung with a few basic commands.*[16]

Relatively few critics have discussed the Cartesian nature of cyberpunk cyberspace, at least in comparison to the multitude who have examined the allegedly dualist nature of the cyberpunk model of consciousness. This is perhaps

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[14] Carolyn Marvin, 'Information and History', in *The Ideology of the Information Age*, Jennifer Daryl Slack and Fred Fejes (eds.), Ablex Publishing Corporation, Norwood, pp. 49-62, p. 51.
[15] Further examination of the embodiment paradigm and cyberpunk will take place in a later chapter on feminism and cyberpunk.
[16] William Gibson, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Grafton Books, 1989, p. 63. My emphasis.

not surprising, as an analysis of the mathematical substructure of cyberpunk cyberspace offers considerably less space for railing against the evils of humanist models of the self. However, the Cartesian nature of cyberspatial spaces in cyberpunk does bear more examination. Scott Bukatman has, albeit briefly, examined the Cartesian spatial nature of cyberpunk cyberspaces, and has made a couple of very important points regarding them. Firstly, Bukatman has observed that cyberspace is 'an *abstraction* of the data in all the computers in the human system, a reprogramming which reduces the complexity to avoid an overload and permit the[ir] assimilation by human perception…'[17] Secondly, Bukatman has observed that while the foundation of cyberspace is the infinite space of the Cartesian grid, Gibson

> *transformed the virtual field of the Cartesian coordinate system into the Newtonian spaces of concrete forces and forms… This is no idle transformation; it reduces the infinite abstract void of electronic space to the definitions of bodily experience and physical cognition, grounding it in finite and assimilable terms. Merleau-Ponty once raised objections to the detachment of Cartesian coordinate space by noting that he is inside space, immersed in it; space cannot be reconstructed from an outside position. Cyberspace, with its aesthetic of immersion, maintains the mathematical determinism of the coordinate system, but it superimposes the experiential realities of physical, phenomenal space upon the abstractions of this Cartesian terrain.*[18]

It is the contention of this thesis that Bukatman has insightfully recognised the key components of Gibsonian cyberspace. Gibsonian cyberspace is, on this model, a quasi-physical abstraction of purely electronic data (which, it should be pointed out, are represented in their original form in purely mathematical

[17] Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1993, p. 152.
[18] Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, p. 152.

statements). However, Bukatman also observes that this does not invalidate the mathematical underpinnings of the data, and similarly the phenomenological experience of embodiment in cyberspace does not supersede its Cartesian underpinnings. These observations will be of considerable importance when examining those critical writings which have envisioned cyberpunk's cyberspaces as literary confirmation of Jean Baudrillard's theories of simulation. Before moving towards an analysis of the relationship which Baudrillard's theories have with cyberpunk, however, it is necessary to mention that there is some dissent over the Cartesian nature of cyberspace. Marie-Laure Ryan, in 'Cyberspace, Virtuality and the Text', mentions several ways in which cyberspace is different to physical space. Whilst Ryan is discussing cyberspace as we know it (the Internet) her comments seem to apply equally to cyberpunk cyberspaces. The differences are, as Ryan notes them:

> *It [cyberspace] is travelled by jumps and seemingly instantaneous transportation… rather than being traversed point by point like Cartesian space. It is not finite, but infinitely expandable: claiming a territory as one's own… does not diminish the amount of cyberspace available to others. Being non-physical, it is equidistant from all points in the physical world… Since it expands and changes continually, it cannot be mapped.*[19]

Whilst Ryan is right in arguing that these points do to some degree differentiate cyberspace from physical space (although one could argue that real space is infinite too – it is simply the case that we cannot get access to most of it) they do not, as Ryan inaccurately puts it, distinguish cyberspace from Cartesian space. Cartesian space and cyberspace have much in common – not least their infinitely

[19] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Cyberspace, Virtuality and the Text', in *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1999, pp. 78-107, p. 86.

expandable, mathematical basis. It is important to note, however, that Ryan's observations cannot be mapped perfectly onto cyberpunk cyberspaces. At the very least, our perceptions of cyberspace (the Internet-as-it-is) do not have the same phenomenological outcomes as cyberpunk's electronic spaces – the same perceptions of physical emplacement, movement etc. Scott Bukatman has described the cyberspaces of science fiction as 'produc[ing] a unified experience of spatiality and thus social being,'[20] but cyberspace-as-we-know-it is yet to provide such experience.

The view that the worlds of cyberpunk are imagined within 'Baudrillard's new millennium, as hyperreality dominates'[21] is the last presentation of cyberspace to be examined in this chapter. It is unsurprising that Baudrillard's theories would be raised in the context of cyberpunk criticism. Firstly, as most critics who have written about cyberpunk have written from a postmodernist/posthumanist perspective, it is to be expected that Baudrillard's name should be mentioned. Secondly, and more importantly in the context of this chapter, Baudrillard's theories relating to the hyperreal and simulation seem remarkably apt for adoption by critics wishing to examine the use of cyberspace in cyberpunk. Before proceeding further with an analysis of the ways in which Baudrillard's theories have been utilised in cyberpunk criticism, however, some examination of his theories of simulation is necessary.

It is safe to say that Baudrillard's theory(ies) of simulation, the simulacrum and the hyperreal are at best a little unclear. However, once one has

[20] Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, p. 156.
[21] Graham Murphy, 'Post/Humanity and the Interstitial: A Glorification of Possibility in Gibson's Bridge Sequence', *Science Fiction Studies*, 30:1, pp. 72-90, p. 74.

sorted through the apocalyptic debris which clutters much of Baudrillard's work, one thing at least becomes apparent. The 'real' is dead; in fact, according to Baudrillard, it 'is not just dead (as God is), it has purely and simply disappeared.'[22] It has been supplanted by a hyperreal procession of simulacra. In order to establish this point, Baudrillard examines various phases of the image. In 'The Precession of Simulacra', from *Simulations*, Baudrillard argues (or perhaps states; there seems to be relatively little actual argument) that the image goes through several phases until it reaches the point of simulation, namely:

- *it is the reflection of a basic reality*
- *it masks and perverts a basic reality*
- *it masks the absence of a basic reality*
- *it bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum.*[23]

It is the contention of this chapter that, in establishing these principles of the process of simulation, the foundation of his argument that society has already become hyperreal, Baudrillard fundamentally confuses aesthetics with general philosophy. In other words, he traces a path which initially deals with art, that human activity which is most purely to do with representation, and overextends his point, taking it to places where it frankly makes very little sense. Even if Baudrillard's system makes some sense when one considers it with relation to, for example, a 'painting'(and the cogency of Baudrillard's argument could be questioned even at this level), when one considers a more mundane, and yet pervasive object, such as a brick, the chain of simulation begins to disintegrate.

[22] Jean Baudrillard, *The Vital Illusion*, ed. Julia Witwer, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000, pp. 61-62. See also Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil: Or the Lucidity Pact*, Berg, Oxford, 2005, trans. Chris Turner, pp. 26-27 for a pithy summary of Baudrillard's views on the Real and the Virtual.
[23] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, Semiotext(e), New York, 1983, p. 11.

For at all levels of Baudrillard's chain of simulation a brick remains exactly that. It is intended, for the most part, to be piled on top of other bricks, with interspersing layers of mortar, for the construction of buildings. It does not particularly matter whether it is produced according to the principle labelled 'counterfeiting', or that labelled industrial 'production', or produced according to a code ('simulation').[24] This is, largely, because bricks, unlike works of art (paintings, books, photographs etc.) *are not primarily intended to represent anything*. This is not to deny that they both do represent things and are represented, but rather to argue that their primary function is other than representation (in the case of bricks, they are for building things!). Despite Baudrillard's dazzling rhetoric, there is never any justification for a founding, if unstated part of his argument, namely that all the things created by humans in our world are an attempt to represent something. Either Baudrillard must argue that representing (or simulating) something is exactly the same as actually making it (one might say that in this case he must argue that taking a photo of a brick has the same purpose as the brick itself) or he must argue that representation is always the primary function of any activity or creation (that the primary function of a brick, for example, is to look like a brick – not to physically be a brick). As he does not satisfactorily do either, there remains a worrying hole in his argument, one which must cast a negative light on those who depend on his theories for their own interpretive efforts with regard to cyberpunk. However, since few if any cyberpunk critics writing about simulation and cyberspace have, as it were, swallowed Baudrillard whole, there is still valuable critical discussion to be had.

[24] For Baudrillard's usages of these terms, see Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 83.

The links drawn between the work of Jean Baudrillard and cyberpunk have been extensive. Scott Bukatman goes so far as to describe Baudrillard's later works as 'cyberpunk philosophy'[25] and asserts that Baudrillard is 'quintessentially cyberpunk,'[26] the most explicit connection drawn between the two by any critic writing on the subject. Victor Margolin agrees, although he inverts the comparison, arguing that '*Neuromancer* is a fictional depiction of Jean Baudrillard's world of the simulacrum.'[27] The links between the philosophy of Baudrillard and cyberpunk are, it must be said, not difficult to discern. Particularly in the work of William Gibson and Pat Cadigan, cyberpunk explicitly deals with themes that concerned Baudrillard in his works on simulation. The role of the media in creating a hyperreal universe of simulacra, a reproduced and simulated layer of information and images which obscures reality (or, as Baudrillard would have it, a lack of reality) is an overt theme in many cyberpunk novels. Indeed, one could say that the questioning of reality was an obsession in cyberpunk fiction from the start; that the cyberpunk conception of cyberspace as an immersive experience is itself a meditation on Baudrillardian themes of hyperreality. After all, cyberspace is a world unto itself in cyberpunk; a world in which simulation has indeed supplanted reality. However, it is not only this which raises the idea of the hyperreal in relation to cyberpunk. As Lance Olsen puts it, in the fictional worlds of cyberpunk, 'the artificial and the real are fused and confused'.[28] It is precisely this confusion, the inability to clearly distinguish between the 'real' and the simulated, the authentic

[25] Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, p. 7.
[26] Scott Bukatman, 'There's Always Tomorrowland: Disney and the Hypercinematic Experience', *October*, 57, pp. 55-78, p. 72.
[27] Victor Margolin, 'The Politics of the Artificial', *Leonardo*, 28:5, pp. 349-356, p. 353.
[28] Lance Olsen, *William Gibson*, Starmont House, Mercer Island, 1992, p. 108.

and the reproduced, which is at the heart of Baudrillard's ecstatic/despairing work on simulation and the hyperreal. Indeed, Olsen's formulation is strikingly similar to the entry on Baudrillard from the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*, where Baudrillard's simulacral society is described as a place where 'the boundaries between reality and unreality blur, [and] the "artificial" becomes "realer" than the "real" itself.'[29] Nowhere in cyberpunk is this fusion of reality and virtuality examined in more depth than in Pat Cadigan's *Tea from an Empty Cup*. In short, in *Tea from an Empty Cup*, a police officer investigates a series of strange deaths of AR (artificial reality) users, which turn out to be a series of orchestrated murders, committed in AR, which also leave the victims dead in the real world. This would seem to be the archetypal situation of the confusion of the real and the artificial, or simulated, experience. Other incidences in cyberpunk have also been viewed by critics as confirmation of Baudrillard's hypotheses. Graham Murphy, for example, has said regarding the character Rez in Gibson's second, 'Bridge', trilogy that:

> *Rez's transformation enacts a shift from corporeal presence to digital pattern as the celebrity stardom of the Rez-pattern takes on a life of its own. The corporeal Rez conforms to the rock-god pattern rather than the pattern conforming to Rez.*
>
> *Essentially, the physical presence of Rez is lost amidst the corporate patterns surrounding his iconic status. As Laney says, "That isn't a person. That's a corporation… I don't know who he is. I can't make him out against the rest of it. He's not leaving any traces that make the patterns that I need". The traces Laney needs are the patterns left behind by the presence of an individual. Because Rez is an iconified product packaged for mass consumption, the hyperreal patterns that circulate in, around and through him indicate that nothing but*

[29] Steven Best, 'Baudrillard, Jean', in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*, Irena R. Makaryk (ed.), University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1993, pp. 246-248, p. 247.

> *pattern exists anymore. In essence, Rez has become Baudrillard's simulacrum.*[30]

Whilst it is important to point out that, in *Idoru*, not only does Rez still exist as a physical person, and not simply as a simulation of himself-as-rock-god, and that Laney's inability to work his magic on the data stream surrounding Rez at this point stems from only knowing the Rez/corporation/simulacrum and not Rez the *person*, Murphy still makes an interesting point. To the majority of the people in the world, Rez only exists as a media-filtered (or media-manufactured) image. Indeed, it might be appropriate to say that this simulacrum-Rez is more real than the real Rez, since it seems that there is in fact more evidence of it! Finally, at the most extreme end of simulation sympathisers, there are those, like David Porush, who seem to think that Baudrillard does not go far enough, that he is afraid to plunge into the abyss which he had identified. Thus Porush writes of Baudrillard and cyberpunk:

> *Cyberspace, hyperreality, virtual space, threatens to unseat the dominion of the Logomatrix of mere words and grammars, projecting it into the frothing uncertainties and romance of direct cognitive access and neurology. Of course the high priests of words like Baudrillard are upset at the imminent demolition of their temple of the text. If you take a moment to reflect on the visions projected by Gibson (for instance) you will see that the possibilities for transcendence are definitely not sterilised; they are multiplied, and re-fertilised. Gibson tells us as much, I think, in Neuromancer (1984) when Case asks Wintermute/Neuromancer after the latter is apotheosised by Case's intervention: "So what are you now, God?"*
>
> *Stop rattling the bars of your cage, Jean. You're weeping in the ruins.*[31]

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[30] Graham Murphy, 'Post/Humanity and the Interstitial', pp. 75-76.

[31] David Porush, 'The Architextuality of Transcendence: In Response to Jean Baudrillard', *Science Fiction Studies*, 18:3, 1991, pp. 323-325, p. 325.

It is not so certain, however, that at the end of *Neuromancer* the possibilities for transcendence have, in fact, been 'fertilised'. After all, the full quote which Porush paraphrases is (Case talking with Neuromancer/Wintermute):

'"So what's the score? How are things different? You running the show now? You God?"

"Things aren't different. Things are things."'[32]

If anything, the conclusion of *Neuromancer* defuses any option for change, and it seems apparent that transcendence requires alteration of present circumstances in order to take place.

Against the proposition that cyberspace in cyberpunk, and indeed more generally the idea of virtuality in general offers support for Baudrillard's ideas on hyperreality, this thesis will contend that a fundamental error has been made. The mistake stems from considering the virtual not to be 'real'. This confusion stems from a dual usage of the word real. On the one hand, real is used to denote the opposite of unreal – for example, 'Dinosaurs were *real*. They actually existed.' On the other hand, 'real' and 'virtual' are opposed – for example 'Have you *really* met? No, but we have chatted on the web.' In the first case, to reverse the claim, to state that dinosaurs were not real, is a total negation of the stated fact. One would have to make the opposite claim, namely that dinosaurs did not exist, that they were not real. However, in the second case, denying that we have 'really' met a person because we have not met physically does not actually negate the statement that we have met online, or spoken on the telephone. We would, in making such a statement, neither intend to imply that the experience of

[32] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, Ace Books, 1984, p. 270.

chatting to someone online never happened, nor to imply that it was some kind of fake experience (whilst people may be more able to lie online, this is no indication that they will not do so in a face-to-face meeting), but rather implies that a different category of real-world experience has taken place. The critical mistake lies in treating virtual experiences (from representations such as paintings through to simulations and virtual reality) as if they were intended to be fakes of real things, rather than as actually beings things in their own right.[33] They may, of course, be both: a flight simulator used for pilot training, for example, is clearly intended to be a very close facsimile of actually flying a plane. Upon emerging from such a simulator, however, it might be equally correct to say that one had the 'faked' experience of flying a plane, or to say simply that one had had the experience of operating a flight simulator. It would not, however, be correct to say that the flight simulator, or the experience derived from it, were in some way not real. Indeed, whenever we board a plane, we rely on the real experiences gained by the pilot in such simulations. The point being made is that it makes no more sense to treat that flight simulator as a fake plane than it does to treat the Mona Lisa as a fake woman. To draw a contrast between virtual experience and 'real' experience is, similarly, to create a false dichotomy. This is even more so in the worlds of cyberpunk, where cyberspace can be just as dangerous as the physical world. One might well pose the question, 'If you can die there, how hyperreal is it?' As Marie-Laure Ryan puts it, in response to Michael Heim:

> *To these theoretical arguments, Michael Heim opposes a gut feeling. The difference between real and virtual worlds resides in three*

[33] Marie-Laure Ryan distinguishes at least two potential explanatory models for the virtual in 'Cyberspace, Virtuality and the Text', in *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.), pp. 78-107, esp. pp. 88-100.

> *constraints that 'anchor' us in the real world: our inevitable mortality, the irreversible direction of time, and a sense of precariousness arising from the possibility of physical injury. It is, in other words, the final character of evil that provides the ontological proof of the difference between real and virtual worlds: if I die or get injured in a computer-generated reality, I can always exit the system, rewind time and start all over again. This argument is valid for currently available simulation systems, but it would not stand against Laudal's objections: one can conceive of a VR system in which time would be irreversible and death final, because users would be locked in.*[34]

The recognition that cyberspace, both in our world and the imagined worlds of cyberpunk, is in fact a part of reality, not separate from it, has been made by some authors.[35] Gibson himself has intimated as much in recent interviews, expressing an idea of 'ubiquitous computing',[36] in which the 'real' and 'virtual' worlds become indistinguishable. This to some degree mirrors the views of Baudrillard who has said that 'We have moved, then, from objective reality to a later stage, a kind of ultra-reality which puts an end to both reality and illusion.'[37] It is the contention of this thesis that the 'virtual' has since its creation been a part of the real – however, that does not mean that its importance has not shifted. What critics have seen as an indicator of the dominance of the hyperreal in cyberpunk, be it from the overwhelming media saturation that is often a part of cyberpunk worlds or the very device of cyberspace itself, is not an indication of the death of the real – it is rather an indication that a new part of reality is

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[34] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Cyberspace, Virtuality and the Text', in *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1999, p. 91. See also Dani Cavallero, 'The Brain in a Vat in Cyberpunk: The Persistence of the Flesh', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 35:2, 2004, pp. 287-305, p. 302.

[35] See, for example, Amy Novak, 'Virtual Poltergeists and Memory: The Question of Ahistoricism in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 6:1, 2000, pp. 55-78.

[36] See, for example, Andrew Leonard, 'William Gibson, The Rolling Stone 40th Anniversary Interview', http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/story/17227831/william_gibson_the_rolling_stone_40th_anniversry_interview, viewed 23/02/09.

[37] Jean Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil: Or, the Lucidity Pact*, trans. Chris Turner, Berg, Oxford, 2005, p. 27.

asserting itself. In doing so, it will change the ways in which people respond to the rest of the world (Case's disgust for the 'meat' world being an extreme example of this), but it neither denies nor supplants the existence of the rest of reality. Some critics have recognised this, and warned of the dangers of a Baudrillardian celebration of the technological sublime. Michael Heim, for example, advises that, 'As we suit up for the exciting future in cyberspace, we must not lose touch with the Zionites, the body people who remain rooted in the energies of the earth. They will nudge us out of our heady reverie in *this new layer of reality*. They will remind us of the living genesis of cyberspace…'[38] N. Katherine Hayles, in a similar vein, warns that:

> *The borders separating simulations from reality are important because they remind us of the limits that make dreams of technological transcendence dangerous fantasies. Hyperreality does not erase these limits, for they exist whether we recognise them or not; it only erases them from our consciousness. Insofar as Baudrillard's claims about hyperreality diminish our awareness of those limits, it borders on a madness whose likely end is apocalypse.*[39]

In arguing that the 'hyperreal' is a part of the real, albeit a new and rapidly growing part, one is making a similar point to Hayles'. An obsession with hyperreality, to the point of the occlusion of the rest of the real (that bit where we do things like eat, sleep, and reproduce!) is not only dangerous, but also makes the fundamental mistake of arguing that the 'hyperreal' world of simulation *can completely replace the rest of the real*. It is the contention of this thesis that, even in the simulacral worlds of cyberpunk, this is patently not the

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[38] Michael Heim, 'The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace', in Michael Benedikt (ed), *Cyberspace: First Steps*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts), 1992, pp. 59-80, p. 80.
[39] N. Katherine Hayles, 'In Response to Jean Baudrillard: The Borders of Madness', *Science-Fiction Studies*, 18, 1991, pp. 321-323, p. 322.

case. In case anyone was going to make the mistake that Porush does, and see the virtual realm as a wonderful place, full of transcendent possibilities, Gibson reminds us that, regarding the 'When It Changed' mythology which grew up to surround the time of the events described in *Neuromancer* (specifically the fusion of Wintermute and Neuromancer) that 'it would be more accurate, in terms of the mythform to say that the matrix *has* a God, since this being's omniscience and omnipotence are assumed to be limited to the matrix', and that 'Cyberspace exists, insofar as it can be said to exist, by virtue of human agency.'[40] In this passage Gibson too seems to imply that that virtual world is not a substitute for the physical world, but rather an addendum – and one which is dependent on the physical world for its existence at that.

Lastly, some authors have observed that whether or not Baudrillard is right about simulations and simulacra may not matter. This is because, they argue, simulation and virtual reality are two different things, with different organising principles and different outcomes for observers/participants. Mark Poster, at least, believes that the fundamental difference between virtual reality and simulation is the interactiveness of the medium of VR:

> *What distinguishes VR from simulation is its transformational structure: subjects and objects interactively/immersively construct cultural spaces and events. They do not do so in the present/absent dialectic of the first media age but in the informational logic of pattern/noise of the second. The cultural space of VR is not preceded*

[40] William Gibson, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, Grafton Books, London, 1989 (first published 1988), p. 138.

> *by the model as in simulations but is continually invented and reinvented through the material parameters of the media apparatus.*[41]

Whilst this continues a kind of binary thinking regarding stereotyped views of the passive observer/active participant which postmodern reading theory rightly called into question, Poster does make an important point. Specifically, his 'even-if' argument is ultimately successful, as he provides an adequate distinction between forms of electronic media. Graham Murphy, examining Gibson's 'Bridge' sequence, finds that Gibson draws a similar distinction between passive reception of simulations and hyperreality and active participation in virtual reality (and 'real' reality) creations.[42]

It is one of these virtual spaces, specifically the 'Walled City' of Hak Nam (not the actual place, which has been destroyed, but rather an online version of it, a kind of hacker's castle) in William Gibson's *Idoru*, which is frequently cited as an example of a different type of place, celebrated in more recent cyberpunk critiques as 'interstitial spaces'. The idea of the interstitial space has its roots in sociology, and has undergone an interesting transformation as it has moved through time, and across disciplines. The term is first used in Frederic M. Thrasher's *The Gang: A Study of 1,313 Gangs in Chicago*. Thrasher's usage is clearly pejorative – he states that

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[41] Mark Poster, 'Theorizing Virtual Reality: Baudrillard and Derrida', in *Cyberspace Textuality: Computer Technology and Literary Theory*, Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.), Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1999, pp. 42-60, p. 50.
[42] Graham Murphy, 'Post/Humanity and the Interstitial', p. 85.

> gangland represents a geographically and socially interstitial area in the city. *Probably the most significant concept of the study is the term* interstitial *– that is, pertaining to spaces that intervene between one thing and another. In nature foreign matter tends to collect and cake in every crack, crevice and cranny – interstices. There are also fissures and breaks in the structure of social organisation. The gang may be regarded as an interstitial element in the framework of society, and gangland as an interstitial region in the layout of the city.*[43]

Thrasher's study, amongst other things, concludes that gang behaviour (which is largely anti-social) diminishes as gang members are integrated into general society, through employment, marriage or whatever else. The point here is not so much to discuss the Thrasher's conclusions as to give some idea of the intellectual roots of the idea of the interstitial.

The idea of the interstitial space began a course of intellectual re-evaluation in the 1940s through to the 1960s. Without specifically referring to the areas they dealt with as 'interstitial' (recalling that this is Thrasher's largely derogatory term) books such as William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society*, Herbert J. Gans' *The Urban Villagers* and Maurice R. Stein's *The Eclipse of Community* began to develop a more nuanced understanding of the places and people to which and to whom Thrasher had given the term 'interstitial.' As William Foote Whyte put it in the conclusion of *Street Corner Society*, 'The trouble with the slum district, some say, is that it is a disorganised community. In the case of Cornerville such a diagnosis is extremely misleading… Cornerville's problem is not lack of organisation but failure of its own social organisation to

[43] Frederic M. Thrasher, *The Gang: A Study of 1, 313 Gangs in Chicago*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1937, p. 3. Emphasis in original text.

mesh with the structure of the society around it.'[44] Herbert J. Gans also emphasised that there were positive aspects of society inside interstitial zones – that 'life in the area resembled that found in the village or small town'[45] in its sociability and overall neighborliness. Interestingly, Gans also states that, within the area of his study, 'Deviant behaviour… was, of course, highly visible. As long as the West Enders were not affected personally, however, they were highly tolerant.'[46] This tolerance of 'deviant' behaviour seems to be a generally acknowledged feature of interstitial spaces. The difference is in the way this tolerance is interpreted. For Thrasher, this is an almost entirely negative aspect of the function of interstitial spaces, whereas Gans is less judgemental. It is plain that this tolerance for difference is a part of why interstitial places are valued, both by Gibson and critics writing about cyberpunk. As Gibson said in an interview with Cory Doctorow, 'The absence of the interstitial I find unbearable. But not as unbearable as the idea that [the] interstitial is necessarily as banal as the infrastructure, so I think of what I do with that stuff as a glorification of possibility.'[47] Gibson certainly places a value on the ability of the interstitial space to sustain lifestyles different to the everyday; and this theme is unsurprisingly developed by critics.

However, in order to reach the unashamedly laudatory discussions of the interstitial which take place within cyberpunk critique, the concept had to

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[44] William Foote Whyte, *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1955 (Enlarged Second Edition: First published 1943), pp. 272-273.
[45] Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans*, Macmillan, New York, 1962, p. 15.
[46] Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers*, p. 14.
[47] Cory Doctorow, 'William Gibson Interview Transcript', http://craphound.com/nonfic/transcript.html, viewed 23/02/09.

undergo a further revision. This re-evaluation took place, unsurprisingly, with the advent of posthumanist theory. Postmodernism and posthumanism have both placed emphasis on the margins of things – they have often valorised these margins, at the expense of the centre. The notion of the interstitial space has undergone a similar transformation – from being the place (at the margins of the dominant culture) where, baldly put, bad people went and bad things happened, to being the place (still located at the margins of the dominant culture) which had both positive and negative aspects, yet was internally relatively cohesive, to a final stage in which both the isolation of the interstitial space from general society and its internal development of a cohesive, if markedly different, society and culture came to be viewed as positive. One does not intend to disparage the achievements or the importance of the recognition of traditionally marginalised groups within the context of Western society; Terry Eagleton has astutely argued that one of the most important achievements of the postmodern epoch has been the gradual recognition of the histories and rights of such groups.[48] It is, however, in the context of the theorising of these achievements that the revalorisation of the idea of the interstitial space takes place. In particular, in the work of Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha on the place of the diasporic intellectual, that place which is between cultures and between nations, the notion of the interstitial is re-evaluated. Bhabha, in the introduction to *The Location of Culture*, strongly associates the idea of interstitiality with those of hybridity, multiculturalism and the role of the diasporic intellectual. Specifically of the idea of interstitiality, however, Bhabha states,

[48] See Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1996, p. 121.

> *What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the elaboration of cultural differences. 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.*
>
> *It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experience of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.*[49]

Bhabha's reading of the interstitial not only draws the concept in a more positive light; it also serves to expand the idea so that conceptual as well as physical spaces can legitimately be described as 'interstitial'.

It is in this new, positive light which the idea of the interstitial is raised within cyberpunk criticism. In particular, critics identify spaces within cyberpunk texts as interstitial when they fulfil certain characteristics – specifically, that they stand apart from the mainstream world physically and socially, and that they offer cultural protection (difference) from mainstream hegemony. Two cyberpunk spaces in particular are referred to as interstitial by critics. Both are spaces from William Gibson's second, 'Bridge' trilogy. The first of these is the ruin of the San Francisco Bay Bridge itself. It plays an important part throughout the trilogy as a haven for the sympathetic characters within the scripts. The other, the Walled City in *Idoru*, is also a haven of sorts, although, being 'of the net, but not on it',[50] the Walled City does not qualify as a physical space. However, since one of Gibson's characters refers to it as 'interstitial', and given Gibson's

[49] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 2-3.
[50] William Gibson, *Idoru*, Berkley Books, New York, 2003 (first printing 1996), p. 225.

expressed interest in interstitial spaces, it stands to reason that critics interested in the interstitial would make reference to the Walled City. It is of interest that both the Walled City and the Bridge are 'places' where there are, effectively, no laws – the constraints of normative society simply do not apply. In the case of the Bridge, the police will not go there; in the case of the Walled City, as it exists outside the bounds of ordinary cyberspace, they cannot get in. These outlaw spaces are of critical importance for cyberpunk as a genre; not only because its plots tend towards those of the heist/detective story, or that its protagonists are frequently criminals, but also because these spaces help to lend cyberpunk its edge of (trendy) transgressiveness.

This chapter contends that interstitial spaces serve multiple purposes, both within cyberpunk writing and within the critical literature. They at once serve as spaces within the system of late capitalism and without it; they provide critique, it will be argued, without the threatening posture of modernist/Enlightenment critical thought (particularly, it will be argued, without raising the spectre of Marxist theory). It will also be argued that the largely laudatory commentaries on interstitial spaces given by critics and the largely beneficial roles assigned to them within cyberpunk are dependent on a fundamentally libertarian *and* entrepreneurial view of the way societies should work. This view is largely characterised by a distrust of government and large corporations, and an invocation of individual freedoms and small business. Interstitial spaces also allow postmodern aesthetic theory to reclaim some of the critical distance which modernist aesthetics assigned to the individual work of art. Terry Eagleton has argued that 'Modernism is amongst other things a

strategy whereby the work of art resists commodification',[51] in other words, a strategy by which the dialectical and critical tension between creation and commodification is maintained, whereas postmodernism consists of a collapse of this dialectical tension in favour of commodification. Eagleton sums up the postmodern attitude, 'If the work of art is really a commodity then it might as well admit it, with all the *sang-froid* it can muster.'[52] The result of this collapsing of dialectical tension in postmodernism is a concurrent degradation of the ability for sustained cultural critique within art.[53] Thus postmodern theory can no longer depend upon the elitist, high cultural critical capacities of modernism; it must turn to other sources, and other places for its alternatives. It is perhaps unsurprising that postmodernism turned to precisely the opposite places to those which modernism utilised. Thus the interstitial space (otherwise known, it should be pointed out, as a ghetto or slum[54]), which could be described as the place where the lowest of low culture takes place, supplants the role which high cultural art and critique played within the modernist aesthetic paradigm. However, within cyberpunk, as well as in the real world, interstitial places do not seem to fulfil quite the resistant, critical role ascribed to them by critics. In the real world, it is important to remember that a slum (or interstitial space) is largely where one resides if one is too poor to live elsewhere – even if poverty increases one's resistance to systemic pressures (and this is questionable), this is no reason to valorise being poor.

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[51] Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', *New Left Review*, 152, pp. 60-73, p. 67.
[52] Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism and Postmodernism', p. 68.
[53] For an excellent discussion of the role of the work of art in cyberpunk see Sherryl Vint, '"The Mainstream Finds its Own uses for Things": Cyberpunk and Commodification', in Sherryl Vint and Graham J. Murphy (eds.), *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives*, Routledge, New York, 2010, pp. 95-115.
[54] See, for example, Francesco Cordasco and Rocco G. Galatioto, 'Ethnic Displacement in the Interstitial Community: The East Harlem Experience', *Phylon*, 31:3, pp. 302-312, esp. p. 302.

Gibson, as well as those writing about interstitial spaces in cyberpunk, seems to recognise that these zones also serve another purpose within the structure of capitalism. Capitalism, as others have observed, is an endlessly dynamic and boundary-defying creature; it consumes novelty and emits product. Terry Eagleton notes that 'there are now a whole range of competing cultures, idioms and ways of doing things, which the hybridising, transgressive, promiscuous nature of capitalism has itself helped to bring into being.'[55] 'Autonomous zones', 'bohemias' and 'interstitial spaces' seem to be the places where such novelties evolve, at least in the universe of Gibson's 'Bridge' cycle.[56] As early as *Neuromancer*, in fact, Gibson recognises that this is an integral part of such outlaw zones: 'He [Case] also saw a certain sense in the notion that burgeoning technologies require outlaw zones, that Night City wasn't there for its inhabitants, but as a deliberately unsupervised playground for technology itself.'[57] Capitalism requires the new in order to continue the dynamic drive to profit; interstitial, hybrid spaces provide the new without too much risk of broader social contamination.[58] Note that the recognition that such resistant spaces are essential to the continuation of a dominant capitalism does not leave one with only the lapse into silence and apathy *a la* Baudrillard[59] as a method of resistance to systemic hegemony. Rather, the recognition that such spaces still

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[55] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p. 39.
[56] See William Gibson, *All Tomorrow's Parties*, Berkley Books, 2003 (first published 1999), pp. 209-210. Scott Bukatman mentions that a similar sector appears in Bruce Sterling's *The Artificial Kid*. See Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity*, p. 169.
[57] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 11.
[58] See Tom Moylan, 'Global Economy, Local Texts: Utopian/Dystopian Tension in William Gibson's Cyberpunk Trilogy', in Sherryl Vint and Graham J. Murphy (eds.) *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives*, Routledge, New York, 2010, pp. 81-94, p. 91, where Moylan states that 'in terms of economic structures and practices the heroes and enclaves [of Gibson's fiction] become little more than useful cogs in those larger machines [of corporate capitalism].'
[59] See Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 89.

exist within the broader system should provide critics with the will to examine systemic issues, rather than give up on the majority for the sake of the exceptional few. This argument, that interstitial spaces in cyberpunk serve a crucial role in the continuance of capitalist hegemony as well as, or possibly rather than, offering an alternative to it, is one which critics have been loath to acknowledge. Ross Farnell, for example, argues that 'Gibson develops the Bridge motif as the last place of resistance to all pervasive consumer consumption and privatisation,'[60] and that the society of the Bridge is 'a place of Otherness that represents a "war on totality," a heteropology and paraspace that imagines "radical alternatives to late capitalism."'[61] With respect, this not only ignores the express role that the 'villain' capitalist of the Bridge sequence assigns to the Bridge (noticeably one which fulfils a requirement of late capitalism) but also wilfully ignores the fact that social fragmentation does not necessarily conflict with the needs of the capitalist order. Whilst this chapter does not seek to deny that interstitial spaces in cyberpunk do to some degree play the role which critics desire them to (providing protective safe havens for those who differ from normative social expectations) their other roles are equally important.

It is with this in mind, as well as with the history of the idea of the interstitial in consideration, that this thesis suggests that interstitial spaces have been a part of cyberpunk from the start. Night City in *Neuromancer* could be described as an interstitial space; as could (although this is more debatable) the Freeside spindle. Freeside is a particularly interesting case in point, however. We could call it an interstitial space as it fulfils several of the criteria for becoming

[60] Ross Farnell, 'Posthuman Topologies', p. 464.
[61] Ross Farnell, 'Posthuman Topologies', p. 466.

such a space. Firstly, it exists physically outside the ordinary spaces of society. Secondly, it exists legally outside the normal spaces of society; this makes it very similar to other interstitial spaces, which are *de facto* outside normal law, whereas Freeside is *de jure* outside normal law. Lastly, within its society, normative rules which differ greatly from those of general society prevail. It is debatable, however, whether the interstitial zone which is Freeside has any significant benefits; its protection of difference may simply be the protection of that which is justifiably considered dangerous and potentially criminal. The bizarre cloning program of the Tessier-Ashpool family appears to have led to abuse and insanity; without wishing to appear judgmental, these can hardly be good outcomes for the participants in this interstitial society. The problem with contemporary writings on the interstitial is that, in keeping with the discursive modes of recent times, they have a tendency to treat difference as unquestionably good; this has the effect of casting normative behaviours as bad. These are both problematic assumptions; one would rather suggest that normative society is by no means all bad (there are often good reasons for normative rules – try imagining a city where which side of the road people drove on was left to individual choice), and that difference from normative rules can be either or both good or bad. As Terry Eagleton has put it, regarding the postmodern tendency to celebrate marginality, 'One could envisage much celebration of the marginal and minority as positive in themselves – an absurd enough view, since margins and minorities currently include neo-Nazis, UFO buffs, the international bourgeoisie and those who believe in lashing delinquent adolescents until the blood runs down their thighs.'[62] Neither normativity nor difference are unalloyed goods, and

[62] Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism*, p. 3.

to treat them as such is to underestimate the manifest complexity of contemporary society. The same can be said of interstitial spaces; spaces where the disciplinary gaze of normative society is blocked are not necessarily either beneficial or detrimental. In a failure of vision which is common to much recent theorising, cyberpunk critics have latched onto Gibson's rhapsodic portrayals of interstitial spaces perhaps too quickly; in a critical mindset where difference is always valorised, and the potential for systemic change of mass society continually underplayed, there is no need to consider the system as a whole.[63] As long as somewhere still exists which qualifies as 'interstitial', things must be going along alright. However, one must ask whether such tiny islands in the vast sea of oppression are, in fact, enough. For some critics, at least, they are not. John Huntingdon, for example, has questioned whether cyberpunk is capable of envisioning 'any political solution' to 'the overwhelming power of the world symbolised by multinational corporations.'[64] Ross Farnell's proposition that the society of Gibson's Bridge be considered a case of neo-regionalist reterritorialisation is an interesting one.[65] However, whereas Farnell seems to treat this as a positive move, the alternative interpretation is more likely correct: namely, that such reterritorialisation only becomes necessary when a systemic alternative to late capitalism can no longer be conceived. In other words, neo-regionalism only looks good when we have abandoned the world at large to capitalist domination. This thesis argues that we can do better than hunt the fringes of the capitalist world for places to hide – and that the message we should

[63] Once again, this idea has its genesis in Terry Eagleton's *The Illusions of Postmodernism.*
[64] John Huntingdon, 'Newness, *Neuromancer*, and the End of Narrative', in Tom Shippey (ed.) *Fictional Space: Essays on Contemporary Science Fiction*, Oxford, Humanities Press, 1991, pp. 59-75, pp. 72-73.
[65] Ross Farnell, 'Posthuman Topologies', p. 466.

likely take from cyberpunk is one which is critical of the dominance of capital in contemporary society.

Chapter Five: Women, Men and Machines: Feminist Cyberpunk Criticism.

From the very beginnings of cyberpunk critical writing, feminist criticism of cyberpunk has provided important and arresting contributions. Indeed, there has often been lively debate within feminist criticism about the nature and role of cyberpunk fictions, with critical perspectives running across a broad track of theoretical interpretations. Critics have insisted that cyberpunk is everything from active feminist writing to the worst kind of misogynist literature. As will be observed in this chapter, there are good reasons for this diversity of feminist responses to cyberpunk. These differences in critical response can be attributed to a number of factors. Most obviously, individual critics will always have differing responses to a given text or group of texts. To expect feminist critics to all have the same or similar responses to cyberpunk writing is foolish. Indeed, this thesis has elsewhere observed that an unproductive critical unity has all too often eventuated in critical literature about cyberpunk, and has argued that room needs to be made for alternative interpretations. This certainly cannot be said of the lively community of debate which characterises feminist responses to cyberpunk.

There are, however, other, less prosaic factors which lead to the wildly differing interpretations which feminist critics have given to cyberpunk. Firstly, different critics seem to place different weightings on critical/interpretive ideas. The allegedly antihumanist nature of cyberpunk writing is one key paradigm in

certain feminist critical discussions of cyberpunk.[1] Some critics place significant weight on the deconstructive activities undertaken in cyberpunk texts, and argue that these activities, of necessity, constitute a form of feminist discourse.[2] There are, of course, other critics who take issue with this particular form of interpretation – and with good reason. Another interpretive device oft-deployed in cyberpunk criticism is the embodiment paradigm.[3] In feminist theory, the embodiment paradigm carries different tones than it does in more general criticism. Nevertheless, it remains a centre of critical focus in feminist discussions. Some critics maintain that cyberpunk visions of different modes of embodiment constitute a form of feminist discourse – others disagree. It is likewise impossible to discuss feminist interpretations of cyberpunk without raising the monstrous figure of the cyborg – or at least Donna Haraway's vastly influential examination of it.[4] This, it would seem, is one of the places where cyberpunk imagination and feminist theory most obviously intersect. It is no surprise, then, that the idea of the cyborg as expressed in cyberpunk fiction has also spawned feminist critical debates.

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[1] Since I have already devoted a chapter of this thesis to discussion of post/antihumanist interpretations of cyberpunk, I feel it is unnecessary to reproduce the bulk of my arguments from that chapter here. It will suffice to say that I believe that the problems with more general antihumanist accounts of cyberpunk hold true for antihumanist feminist accounts of cyberpunk.

[2] See, for example, Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other: A Case for Feminist Cyborg Writers', *Science Fiction Studies*, 22:3, 1995, pp. 399-421; Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', *Science Fiction Studies*, 22:3, 1995, pp. 357-371. Arguably both these authors conflate antihumanism and feminism, leading to the conclusion that (for them) anything which undermines humanism must also undermine patriarchy.

[3] See, for example, Vivian Sobchack, 'Beating the Meat/Surviving the Text, or How to Get Out of this Century Alive', in *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk*, Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (eds.), Sage Publications, London, 1995, pp. 205-214. Sobchack emphasises the importance of the body as a counter to disembodying rhetorics.

[4] It would be impractical to attempt to list all of the authors who reference Haraway here. Suffice to say that 'The Cyborg Manifesto' is a continual presence in feminist cyberpunk criticism, from Sharon Stockton, ''The Self Regained': Cyberpunk's Retreat to the Imperium', *Contemporary Literature*, 36:4, 1995, pp. 588-612, through to the most recent feminist writing on cyberpunk, for example, Helen Merrick, *The Secret Feminist Cabal: A Cultural History of Science Fiction Feminisms*, Aqueduct Press, Seattle, 2009.

Before proceeding with a more specific discussion of feminist criticism as it relates to cyberpunk, some preliminary examination of feminist science fiction criticism is desirable. Feminist criticism about science fiction definitely precedes cyberpunk, and as a result of its rich history, feminist criticism about cyberpunk exists within the broader disciplinary discourse of feminist science fiction criticism. Feminist science fiction criticism, cast in the role of disciplinary discourse, has, obviously, profoundly effected feminist criticism of cyberpunk fiction, and, critically, feminist cyberpunk criticism has been a very important part of the overall critical community for cyberpunk. Many of the programmatic ideas in cyberpunk criticism have their intellectual genesis in feminist writing about cyberpunk.

Feminist cyberpunk criticism was not, however, born whole and complete unto itself. It follows on from a venerable tradition of feminist science fiction critique which dates back almost as far as the genre itself. In order to gain a greater hermeneutic understanding of feminist cyberpunk criticism, this chapter will briefly illuminate some key phases and ideas in the history of feminist science fiction critique. This will, of necessity, be a fairly truncated discussion, as to claim that one could represent the full richness of feminist contributions to science fiction criticism in a few paragraphs would either be reductionist, arrogant or both. However, in order to prepare the ground for a discussion of feminist contributions to cyberpunk criticism, some of the background of feminist science fiction criticism must be examined.

Feminist criticism of science fiction more generally has a history which, arguably, dates back almost a far as generic science fiction. Helen Merrick, in *The Secret Feminist Cabal*, discusses in some depth the 'sex scandal' of science fiction in the 1920s and '30s. Merrick makes a number of important points in her examination of the science fiction critical culture of the early-to-mid twentieth century. The first, is, most obviously, that opposition from women readers of science fiction to the hackneyed and misogynistic gender portrayals in the genre literature (and, for that matter, in the critical literature) was extant from the '20s onwards.[5] The second point that can be inferred from Merrick's work is an understanding that will not be novel to anyone familiar to the field of science fiction criticism. If we wish to understand science fiction criticism prior to the 1960s, we must look outside the academic circuit. Prior to the '60s, science fiction was largely unexamined by academics – and as a result such critical debates as existed largely took place in the pages of science fiction magazines and fanzines. It is of great importance that, in touching upon the history of feminism and science fiction, these early, fannish contributions to the history are not lost.

Despite the importance of these early contributions, Merrick is justified in observing that feminist criticism within science fiction went through a period of growth in the 1960s and '70s. Merrick associates this with the 'sociopolitical debates [of the time] … the impact of the women's liberation movement, as well as a result of trends within the field itself.'[6] This last could be taken to either mean the emergence of more radical feminist science fictions (such as Joanna

[5] See Helen Merrick, *The Secret Feminist Cabal*, pp. 34-39.
[6] Helen Merrick, *The Secret Feminist Cabal*, p. 34.

Russ' *The Female Man*), or potentially the gradual emergence of academic science fiction criticism creating a new conceptual space within which feminist science fiction criticism could be written. Either would be true. The boundaries between fans, authors and academic writers at this point in time seem to be blurred (as indeed they may still be), with many people seeming to occupy more than one of these positions. Joanna Russ' critical contributions seem to move freely between academic papers and contributions to magazines, for example – and Russ was actively writing science fiction at the time as well.

The critical work of Joanna Russ is a better place than most to start any discussion of the veritable explosion of feminist science fiction (both criticism and writing) which took place in the 1970s. In a piece entitled 'What Can a Heroine Do or, Why Women Can't Write', Russ herself provides some explanation for why generic science fiction (along with a list of other marginalised, non-realist genres) provides a useful space for feminist speculation. Having heavily criticised the literary myths which realist fiction has inherited as innately sexist, Russ, late in the paper, argues that 'science fiction, political fiction and the modes (if not the content) of much medieval fiction all provide myths for the kinds of experiences we are actually having now, instead of the literary myths we have inherited, which only tell us about the kinds of experiences we think we ought to be having.'[7] Of the traditional roles and myths used by convention in realist fiction, Russ scathingly concludes:

> *Our traditions, our books, our morals, our manners, our films, our speech, our economic organisation, everything we have inherited, tell us that to be a Man one must bend Nature to one's*

[7] Joanna Russ, 'What Can a Heroine Do, or, Why Women Can't Write', in Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995, pp. 79-93, p. 92.

> *will – or other men. This means ecological catastrophe in the first instance and war in the second. To be a Woman, one must be first and foremost a mother and after that a server of Men; this means overpopulation and the perpetuation of the first two disasters. The roles are deadly. The myths that serve them are fatal.*
>
> *Women cannot write – using the old myths.*
>
> *But using new ones - ?*[8]

This line of argument bears a striking resemblance to those which conclude that science fiction bears a special relationship to philosophy. It is science fiction's innate (though not always realised) capacity to explore new ideas, and create new myths, that both feminism and general philosophy find attractive. Sarah Lefanu also argued that the mode of science fiction lends itself to feminist projects, stating that:

> *[I]t lets writers defamilarise the familiar, and make familiar the new and strange. These twin possibilities, apparently contradictory (but SF is full of contradictions), offer enormous scope to women writers who are thus released from the constraints of realism. The social and sexual hierarchies of the contemporary world can be examined through the process of 'estrangement', thus challenging normative ideas of gender roles; and visions of different worlds can be created, made familiar to the reader through the process of narrative.*[9]

Science fiction is uniquely useful to feminist authors because it has the power of 'what if' – what if things were not as they are now?

Whilst Russ' observations belong to the first part of published academic feminist science fiction criticism, Lefanu's book belongs in what might rightly be termed a second, consolidating phase. As Merrick comments, 'Feminist

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[8] Joanna Russ, 'What Can a Heroine Do, or, Why Women Can't Write', p. 93.
[9] Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction*, The Women's Press, London, 1988, pp. 21-22.

criticism did not become an established presence in sf scholarship, however, until the 1980s, when it became more common in the sf journals, the first edited collections on women in sf appeared, and the first two monographs on feminism and science fiction were published.'[10] Indeed, in a footnote Merrick lists Lefanu's book as one of these two early monographs on feminism and science fiction, the other being Marleen S. Barr's *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*. Whilst neither of these texts discuss cyberpunk, their dates of publication (Lefanu, 1987 and Barr, 1988) are not far removed from the first frenetic period of academic discussion of cyberpunk fiction, which largely took place in the late '80s and early '90s. This may go some way to explaining the consideration given by feminist critics to cyberpunk. As feminist science fiction criticism emerged from the academic wilderness, a place to which it had no doubt been relegated by a largely conservative and patriarchal critical establishment, cyberpunk was the newest, hippest form of science fiction around.

An intellectual thread which is particularly germane to discussion of cyberpunk fictions is the ways in which feminist science fiction and, more importantly, feminist science fiction criticism have related to technology. Joanna Russ once again has a formative opinion on the subject of technology. In her paper 'SF and Technology as Mystification', Russ elaborates an argument that discussion of technology has become a substitute for discussion of other things – politics and economics are the specific examples Russ gives.[11] Drawing on

[10] Helen Merrick, *The Secret Feminist Cabal*, pp. 14-15.
[11] Joanna Russ, 'SF and Technology as Mystification', in Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995, pp. 26-40, particularly pp. 34-39.

Rebecca West, Russ argues that discussions of technology taking place in an abstract way, without reference to real lives, represent a masculine 'lunacy.'[12] Russ does not associate technology and masculinity *tout court* – she is too skilled a critic to do such a thing – but the association between the reification of technology and a masculine, sexist outlook is clearly there in her analysis.

The association between misogyny and technology is also present in much of the feminist science fiction work of the time, with a contrast being drawn between pastoral, feminist societies and high-tech, dirty, sexist counterparts. In another article discussing 'Recent Feminist Utopias', Russ made the observation that, 'Without exception the stories are ecology-minded. Such concern is common in science fiction nowadays. However, many of the stories go beyond the problems of living in the world without disturbing its ecological balance into presenting their characters as feeling a strong emotional connection to the natural world.'[13] Marleen S. Barr observes something similar about Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Barr notes that 'The exaggerated "feminine" humanistic concepts prevailing in Mattapoisett are certainly better than the exaggerated "masculine" technological concepts prevailing in the novel's dystopian future.'[14] Whilst Barr's use of hyperbolic quotation marks around "feminine" and "masculine" in her analysis indicates that she must have some suspicions regarding the association of the masculine with technology and

[12] Joanna Russ, 'SF and Technology as Mystification', p. 34.
[13] Joanna Russ, 'Recent Feminist Utopias', in Joanna Russ, *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1995, pp. 133-148, p. 137.
[14] Marleen S. Barr, *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1987, p. 55.

the feminine with the natural world, the association is still undeniably there in this piece of analysis (and in the novel itself). This reciprocal relationship between a pernicious masculinity and hard technology is one which later, cyberpunk inspired, feminist criticism would come to question.[15]

Cyberpunk fiction and contemporary feminism have a number of intersecting interests – or, to put it another way, they often seem to be discussing similar ideas, if in different modes. Feminist critical interpretations of cyberpunk often consist of the working through of these apparent intersections, and the examination of the similarities and differences in the ideas proposed in theory and imagined in cyberpunk. It should come as no surprise that this process of working through feminist concerns in cyberpunk has raised issues relevant to the critical process more broadly. Indeed, it is apparent when reading much of the feminist criticism relating to cyberpunk that some of the key conceptual developments within cyberpunk criticism have emerged from feminist discussions.

Academic feminist discussions of cyberpunk begin with Joan Gordon's article 'Yin and Yang Duke it Out', which was originally published in *Science Fiction Eye* in 1991, in which Gordon proposed not so much that cyberpunk was actively feminist, but that cyberpunk had something to offer feminist science fiction. Gordon's criticism of the extant canon of feminist science fiction was that 'virtually every feminist SF utopia dreams of a pastoral world, fuelled by

[15] An interesting article on the negative association of women with the natural world prevailing in masculinist science fiction is Scott Sanders, 'Woman as Nature in Science Fiction', in *Future Females: A Critical Anthology*, Marleen S. Barr (ed.), Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green, 1981, pp. 42-59.

organic structures rather than mechanical ones, inspired by versions of the archetypal Great Mother.'[16] Gordon's problem with such fictions is not so much that they do not have value, but that the far future worlds imagined in such feminist science fiction typically struggle to extrapolate their meanings back into contemporary society. Gordon argues that 'cyberpunk may be feminist SF's salvation.'[17] This, Gordon argues, is largely due to the gritty, near-future settings of cyberpunk; as she puts it, 'It isn't likely that the earth will pull back from its movement towards high technology and the Sprawl for a long time, if ever. Cyberpunk, with all its cynicism, shows a future we might reasonably expect, and shows people successfully coping, surviving and manipulating it.' Further, Gordon observes that, 'I for one am not convinced that I am an earth mother. What else might I be? If science fiction can show what it means to be female in the world toward which we hurtle, I want to read it.'[18]

Gordon draws a distinction between overt and covert feminist science fiction, stating that, 'Overt feminist science fiction always grapples with the definition of femaleness and at least implies the possibility of a world whose values support a feminist definition of female identity. Covert feminist science fiction ignores the definition, showing a sexually egalitarian world; furthermore, its values often ignore specifically feminist issues, making its morality more of a generally applied one.'[19] In the part of her argument which has induced the most intense analysis and debate, Gordon goes on to argue that cyberpunk writing constitutes covert feminist science fiction, that 'On that night foray into the

[16] Joan Gordon, 'Yin and Yang Duke it Out', in Larry McCaffery (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*, Duke University Press, 1991, pp. 196-202, p. 199.
[17] Joan Gordon, 'Yin and Yang Duke it Out', p. 197.
[18] Joan Gordon, 'Yin and Yang Duke it Out', p. 200.
[19] Joan Gordon, 'Yin and Yang Duke it Out', p. 196.

underworld which is the central experience of what we conveniently call cyberpunk, men and women travel as equals.'[20] Citing Molly from Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Deadpan Allie from Cadigan's *Mindplayers* as examples, Gordon argues that they '[perform] the covert feminist act of entering the human army combat-ready and on equal footing.'[21]

It is this component of Gordon's argument which has triggered the greatest debate amongst feminist critics of cyberpunk. Gordon herself comments that cyberpunk 'seems to be overt masculinist science fiction – men are men, waving guns and knives, competing like all getout and plugged up to the gills with pollutant technology.'[22] Despite this appearance, Gordon maintains that cyberpunk in fact constitutes a form of covert feminist science fiction. Other critics, most prominently Sharon Stockton and Nicola Nixon, disagree.[23] They both argue, in different ways, that the appearance of cyberpunk texts is not deceiving – that if it walks like a sexist text, and quacks like a sexist text, then it probably is a sexist text. Of course, their arguments are vastly more involved than this, and their interpretations have each left a lasting impact on cyberpunk criticism, so some explanation of these arguments is merited here.

Nicola Nixon's 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?' is another early and important piece of feminist criticism of cyberpunk. In it, Nixon takes issue with the 'revolutionary' tone of

[20] Joan Gordon, 'Yin and Yang Duke it Out', p. 196.
[21] Joan Gordon, 'Yin and Yang Duke it Out', p. 197.
[22] Joan Gordon, 'Yin and Yang Duke it Out', p. 196.
[23] See Sharon Stockton, ''The Self Regained': Cyberpunk's Retreat to the Imperium', *Contemporary Literature*, 36:4, 1995, pp. 588-612; Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?', *Science Fiction Studies*, 19:2, 1992, pp. 219-235.

much discussion of cyberpunk, be it the propaganda produced by genre writers, or the adoption of a similar tone by critics. Nixon stresses that 'If we are to take such promotion seriously as something other than hyperbolic advertisement, we need to examine cyberpunk contextually – not only as an SF "movement" in the wake of, and contemporaneous with, particular forms of political, feminist SF, but also as a response to (or perhaps a reflection of) the Reaganite America of the '80s.'[24] Nixon here emphasises that cyberpunk did not emerge in a cultural vacuum – and also that its cultural context *must* be of importance when assessing the nature of cyberpunk texts. Nixon proceeds with a commentary on the much discussed omission of feminist texts from Bruce Sterling's list of cyberpunk's influences. Nixon comments that

> *his [Sterling's] elision of specific '70s texts seems even more striking when we consider that William Gibson's novels, for example, inscribe quite overt revisions of the very texts which form the potentially (anxiety producing?) absent referent in Sterling's delineations of cyberpunk's origins. Russ's dauntingly powerful (and emasculating) Jael in* The Female Man*, for example… is effectively turned into Molly, a "razor-girl" who sells her talents (razor implanted fingernails) to the highest bidder in Gibson's "Johnny Mnemonic" and* Neuromancer*, or into Sarah, the dirtgirl/assassin… in Walter Jon Williams'* Hardwired*. Explicit reworkings of an antecedent female character, Molly and Sarah are effectively depoliticised and sapped of any revolutionary energy.*[25]

Whilst Nixon's argument undeniably has a core of truth (the physical parallels between Jael and Molly only reinforce their jarringly different circumstances) she has overstated the point. To claim, on the basis of this, that *Neuromancer* is a covert reworking of *The Female Man* is to do both texts a grave disservice. *The*

[24] Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?', p. 221.
[25] Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?', p. 222.

Female Man can hardly be reduced to the single character of Jael; nor can *Neuromancer* legitimately be cast as purely a chauvinist reworking of *The Female Man*.

It is entirely possible that feminist criticism of cyberpunk could have continued along these separate lines of development for some time, but this would have required that cyberpunk as a sub-genre remain unchanged in itself. This was not the case. Almost as if in response to Gordon's call for feminists to engage with the cyberpunk imaginary, new feminist cyberpunk authors began to emerge in the early 1990s, challenging the previously male-dominated regime of cyberpunk writing (Pat Cadigan came on to the cyberpunk scene earlier than this, of course, but her writing is often considered as somewhat of a special case by feminist critics).[26] Authors such as Laura Mixon, Mary Rosenblum and Melissa Scott began to construct fictions which were both cyberpunk in setting and overtly feminist in intent. In *Trouble and Her Friends*, for example, Scott constructs a narrative in which patriarchal hegemony in the online world is contested by a central character who is both female and queer – precisely the type of subject position which is almost completely absent from earlier cyberpunk.

This period of change in cyberpunk writing also precipitated a change in the critical literature. As these new, overtly feminist fictions came into being, feminist critics began to discuss the politics of these new contributions at least as

[26] Jenny Wolmark, for example, distinguishes Cadigan from the other, male, early cyberpunk authors. See Jenny Wolmark, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, 1994, pp. 121-127. Sherryl Vint does likewise in *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2007, pp. 111-118.

much as those of earlier cyberpunk. It is the goal of the remainder of this chapter to examine feminist discussions of cyberpunk in a thematic way, but with an awareness of the changing nature of cyberpunk writing. Cyberpunk writing and feminist criticism about cyberpunk will be observed to exist in a complex symbiosis. Themes which are explored in one strand are often adopted or absorbed into the other.

Feminist criticism about cyberpunk often revolves around key thematic components. In this respect feminist criticism is no different from other forms of critical literature – each form of criticism tends to bring its own interpretive matrices to the project of reading literature. Despite this, some of the interpretive ideas key to feminist criticism about cyberpunk will be recognisable from previous chapters of this thesis. Donna Haraway's idea of the cyborg, for example, is such a pervasive theoretical construct in cyberpunk criticism that it has escaped the circle of feminist criticism and become a fixture of cyberpunk criticism in general. The same is true of other feminist interpretive models. The embodiment paradigm, in particular, is a feminist theoretical matrix which has been deployed in cyberpunk criticism more generally. Whilst both of these, and other of the key thematic components of feminist discourse about cyberpunk have been discussed elsewhere in this thesis, it will be observed through the course of this chapter that the feminist uses of these paradigmatic concepts, whilst obviously bearing significant similarities to the more general deployment of them, maintain unique and focussed applications which differentiate their usage from the ways in which these concepts are used in cyberpunk criticism more generally.

It was perhaps inevitable that Donna Haraway's theoretical conception of the cyborg would become a central feature of feminist writing about cyberpunk. Firstly, Haraway's importance as a feminist theorist meant that her theoretical frameworks were unlikely to be ignored by feminist critics. Secondly, the presence in the cyberpunk imaginary of a veritable plethora of cyborgs of a variety of descriptions gave at least a *prima facie* case for the application of Haraway's theoretical construct in the analysis of cyberpunk texts. Lastly, Haraway's conception of the cyborg is contemporaneous with the rise of cyberpunk as a sub-genre. With such a confluence of factors impelling the use of Haraway's interpretive explorations in the understanding of cyberpunk, it would have been a surprise if feminist critics had not deployed Haraway's model in their critical work. As it is, it is almost impossible to read feminist criticism about cyberpunk without encountering various discussions of the idea of the cyborg.

Haraway's initial positing of her idea of the cyborg seems to be a method of grappling with the tendency in Western philosophy to express problems in terms of subject unities and binary oppositions. For example, one (allegedly) united category might be that of women (or perhaps worse, 'Woman') – the united subject of (some) feminist theory. A most apposite binary opposition, given the topic at hand, might be that problematic opposition between male and female. While it has been the case that feminist theory has often turned its attention towards the analysis of this binary distinction, and the undeniable privilege which Western cultures have attached to the male half of this binary,

Haraway's cyborg theory seeks not only to contest the privileges attaching to the male, in other words to contest patriarchal oppression, but to undermine the structure of the binary itself. Haraway's conception of the cyborg is a sort of theoretical wedge – a way of breaking up the categories which have structured Western thought in an attempt to find a new way of theorising our existence.

It is the boundary-defying nature of Haraway's cyborg which has led to its popularity as a theoretical metaphor, and its continual deployment as an interpretive tool. Debate in feminist analyses of the cyborgs of cyberpunk imaginings has centred not so much on whether they are cyborgs (this seems beyond dispute) but rather on whether these cyberpunk cyborgs have all that much in common with Haraway's model of the cyborg. Haraway's idea(l) of the cyborg is one way in which the cyborg may be imagined as a 'hopeful monster,'[27] to steal a phrase from Bruce Sterling, a promise of future understandings divorced from systems of oppression. However, it may be that there are other meanings to the cyborg metaphor, interpretations which have far more sinister overtones. Haraway herself acknowledges this, when she states that 'The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism.'[28] As we have seen, it remains debatable whether the cyborgs of cyberpunk are, like those of Haraway's imagination, unfaithful to their oppressive heritage, or instead contribute to the systems of domination from which they stem. There is certainly a divergence of opinion in the feminist

[27] Bruce Sterling, *Schismatrix Plus*, Berkley, New York, 1996, p. 225. (*Schismatrix* first published 1985)
[28] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York, Routledge, 1991, p. 151.

critical community as to the nature of cyberpunk's cyborgs. This divergence arises as much from which cyberpunk texts critics choose to analyse as from an actual divergence of critical interpretations – it is important to note that the cyborgs of cyberpunk do not always have the same representative value. However, there are still significant differences of opinion regarding the liberatory power of the image of the cyborg as it is deployed in cyberpunk texts, and these debates will be examined below.

Early examinations of the figure of the cyborg in cyberpunk fictions often do not directly examine whether cyberpunk figurations of the cyborg can be considered feminist. Thus Veronica Hollinger's seminal piece 'Cybernetic Deconstruction: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism' considers feminist science fiction, cyberpunk and posthumanism – but does not consider whether or not cyberpunk could be considered feminist fiction. She does, however, foreshadow later contributions to the cyberpunk/feminism debate, concluding her article by raising Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto as 'one of the most brilliant visions of the potential of cybernetic deconstructions.'[29] It is significant that Hollinger also concludes that 'the critique of humanism in these [cyberpunk] works remains incomplete…'[30] It should be noted that there are similarities between the proposition that the relationship between humans and technology in cyberpunk (particularly as figured through the cyborg) represents an attempt to deconstruct the 'humanist' binary distinction between human and technology and the claim

[29] Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions: Cyberpunk and Postmodernism', *Mosaic*, 23:2, 1990, pp. 29-44, p. 42. Cybernetic deconstructions is the term which Hollinger uses to describe the interactions between humans and technology in cyberpunk.
[30] Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions', p. 41.

that the figure of the cyborg as deployed in cyberpunk represents a deconstruction of the masculine/feminine binary.

The figure of the cyborg is key to any understanding of cyberpunk. By any measure, almost all the characters in cyberpunk novels are cyborgs – to varying degrees enmeshed in cybernetic technologies, from access to cyberspace (by whatever name individual authors give it), to body modifications and implanted technologies. Given the key nature of the idea of the cyborg to understandings of cyberpunk, it is unsurprising that various critics wish to claim this figure as support for their own interpretations of the sub-genre. A common claim in feminist criticism about cyberpunk is that the cyborg is *essentially* a figure of boundary disruption. Take, for example, Mary Catherine Harper, who, having discussed potential disjunctures between Haraway's ideal of the cyborg and the fictional cyborgs of William Gibson, states that 'This is not to say that Haraway's cyborg and the figures in Gibson's cyberpunk novels are necessarily incompatible… They both offer to late 20th-century American culture an imaginative bio-technological form which *by its nature* undermines the split between humanity and its technology.'[31] While this is not different from much of the posthumanist rhetoric which abounds in cyberpunk criticism, Harper also links the figure of the cyborg, and its attack on humanism, to feminism. Later in the same article, Harper posits that: 'Even in its simplest form, the ontological category of "cyborg" is an oscillation of humanist subject and post-humanist commodity-based subjectivity. Most importantly, cyborgs, through similarly embracing the post-apocalyptic body… share close kinship with the Feminine

[31] Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other: A Case for Feminist Cyborg Writers', *Science Fiction Studies*, 22:3, 1995, pp. 399-421, pp. 403-404. My italics.

Other, that gendered, slippery discursive body given the power to effect, and perhaps unbind, humanist dreams of escape from the body and entry into the vast world of the mind.'[32] It is obvious that Harper considers the cyborg's status as deconstructor of humanist paradigms to be strongly linked to its power as a theoretical tool for feminism. This is no doubt linked to the boundary-defying, binary-thought breaking nature of the cyborg figure – although this thesis, as discussed in earlier chapters, remains unconvinced by this argument.

Cyborgs are, in fact, complex creatures – and it could be argued that 'by their nature' they are nothing in particular. They are rather what they are made to be. This seems to be the position taken by the bulk of feminists examining cyberpunk and its cyborg characters. Karen Cadora, for example, argues that there is a difference between masculinist cyberpunk and feminist cyberpunk, and that the cyborgs they portray embody, so to speak, this difference. As Cadora puts it,

> *What is often ignored about the cyborg is that it arose out of Haraway's desire "to build a political myth faithful to feminism, socialism and materialism". Masculinist cyberpunk is faithful to none of these. In fact, one might say that it builds itself in opposition to these concepts…This apparent contradiction resolves itself when one considers that there is more than one way to be a cyborg… the image of the cyborg is one of both hope and terror.*[33]

Having drawn this distinction between masculinist and feminist cyberpunk, and the cyborgs which they respectively portray, Cadora goes on to argue that feminist cyberpunk authors such as Mary Rosenblum and Laura Mixon 'depict

[32] Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other', p. 406.
[33] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', pp. 359-360.

female characters who find ways to work around or within the system.'[34] What matters most, according to Cadora, is not so much that cyborgs are present within a work, but what kind of cyborgs these beings are – what they do, and, thematically, what they represent.

Other feminists have also recognised the problem with adopting the metaphor of the cyborg wholesale, of maintaining that the boundary disruptions imputed to the figure of the cyborg must of necessity be *good* disturbances. It is worth restating Cathy Pepper's warning regarding Haraway's 'post-gender' cyborg, to whit that it

> *sounds like a deconstructionist's dream come true, but the reality is that a cyborg might equally be represented by a fighter pilot plugged into his intelligent headgear as by the 'ideal' replicants in* Blade Runner, *by Robocop as well as by Laurie Anderson in performance, should give us pause. If cyborgs can equally be represented by the technofascist bodies of a Terminator or a Robocop, as by the "women of colour" affinity identities Haraway describes, can the cyborg really be "post-gender"?*[35]

While Peppers' question is stated generally, its relevance to the cyborgs of cyberpunk is obvious. With this question in mind, it cannot be taken for granted that the cyberpunk cyborgs act to disrupt the boundaries of gender in positive ways. Cyberpunk texts cannot be read as feminist texts simply because they contain cyborgs – a point which occasionally seems to have been lost from Haraway's 'Manifesto'. Haraway herself warns that 'the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the "West's" escalating dominations of abstract

[34] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 359.
[35] Cathy Peppers, ''I've Got You Under My Skin': Cyber(sexed) Bodies in Cyberpunk Fictions', in *Bodily Discursions: Genders, Representations, Technologies*, Deborah S. Wilson and Christine Moneera Laennec (eds.), State University of New York Press, 1997, pp. 163-185, p. 164.

individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space.'[36] It is with warnings such as these in mind that one imagines Lauraine Leblanc commenting that 'Writers such as Gibson and Cadigan present female-gendered cyborgs undertaking a role-reversal into masculinity; in many senses these are transgendered representations, rather than radical revisions of gender.'[37] Later in the same piece, Leblanc states that 'Molly's character can best be described as a reversal of traditional gender roles… No longer human through technological augmentation, she is in no sense a 'woman,' in that she participates in none of the traditional female-gendered roles nor presents any feminine characteristics. In this sense, Gibson has presented us with a nominally female character, but one who uses her cyborg identity not to rethink what it is to be a woman, but rather one who does little but take on a masculine role.'[38] With respect, Leblanc may in fact give Gibson more credit that he deserves here – Molly does indeed function in numerous traditionally feminine roles in *Neuromancer*, not the least as Case's lover. Molly exists as an objectified and sexualised character – most pointedly indicated by the scene in which Riviera creates a holographic (and pornographic) image of her for a restaurant full of fascinated viewers. Riviera states, appropriately enough, that 'The title of the work is "The Doll".'[39]

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[36] Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century', in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York; Routledge, 1991, pp.149-181, pp. 150-151.
[37] Lauraine Leblanc, 'Razor Girls: Genre and Gender in Cyberpunk Fiction', *Women and Language*, 20:1, 1997, pp. 71-76, p. 72.
[38] Lauraine Leblanc, 'Razor Girls', p. 73.
[39] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, Ace Books, 1984, p. 138.

Mary Catherine Harper has commented that 'cyberpunk can be said to invite a critique of humanist subjectivity as well as to suggest the possibility of liberation from the constraints of such oppositional categories as masculinist rationality and feminised meat.'[40] Whilst this may or may not be true of other cyberpunk fictions, to read *Neuromancer* and in particular the central characters of Molly and Case this way requires a very liberal interpretation indeed. Case, with his hacker skills and casual contempt for the 'meat,' is very much a character who prides himself on his ability to become disembodied – to lose himself in the abstractly rational world of cyberspace. Molly, on the other hand, is all body – her skills pertain purely to the physical world. Harper is too subtle to fall into such a trap, arguing for a distinction between Haraway's vision and Gibson's imagination: 'Haraway's cyborg never stops resisting the series of narratives it produces while Gibson's, however initially critical of humanist tenets, succumbs to the pattern of the humanist rebirth narrative.'[41]

Harper, however, considers many texts other than *Neuromancer*, and many authors other than Gibson. This is most appropriate, as cyberpunk, and particularly feminist cyberpunk, cannot simply be reduced to the work of William Gibson. For Harper, novels such as Pat Cadigan's *Synners*, Misha's *Red Spider White Web* and Laura Mixon's *Glass Houses* typify feminist cyberpunk. Each of these novels engage with the technological near-future environment of the cyberpunk imaginary, but infuse their narratives with feminist values. In particular, the technological disruption of boundaries which is inherent in the

[40] Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other', pp. 399-400.
[41] Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other', p. 405.

cyberpunk imagination is employed, argues Harper, by feminist cyberpunks to undermine stable humanist binaries such as self/other, and subject/object. For example, Harper discusses Gina from Cadigan's *Synners*, stating that, 'Gina is a hybrid, existing as both Subject and Object, perhaps as both in each of her two worlds, the virtual and the biologic. Thus she exhibits both similarity to and difference from the instrumental rationality that Lloyd discusses.'[42] Harper argues that rational agency, in feminist cyberpunk texts, is presented as one of numerous options for embodied subjectivities, a marked break from the Enlightenment model of the rational subject, where being a Subject and rational agency were logically inseparable. Rather than presenting the subject as a singular and unchanging unity, feminist cyberpunk transmits 'the knowledge that subjectivity is an interchangeable and mutable set of identities, powers and strategies.'[43] The cyborg is an excellent vehicle for such a message, since among its strategies of subjectivity is the power to alter its physical self, the physical self which is the visible sign of the human subject.

There are similar interpretations of cyberpunk cyborgs in other feminist criticism of the sub-genre. Karen Cadora also distinguishes between the 'masculinist' cyberpunk of Gibson and Bruce Sterling, and the feminist cyberpunk of Pat Cadigan and later feminist cyberpunk authors. Cadora comments, in reference to masculinist cyberpunk, 'That Haraway's cyborg has become the metaphor of choice for such a movement is both strange and

[42] Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other', p. 413.
[43] Mary Catherine Harper, 'Incurably Alien Other', p. 417.

ironic.'[44] While observing that the cyborg is hardly a concept which is uncontested, and that Haraway's model of the cyborg is simply one of the interpretations contesting the figure of the cyborg, Cadora's comment still stands. The cyborgs of early, masculinist cyberpunk do sit very much at odds with the liberatory potential of Haraway's vision. The cyborgs portrayed in the work of Pat Cadigan and later, overtly feminist cyberpunk authors are, however, another matter entirely. Cadora maintains, in common with Veronica Hollinger, that feminist cyberpunk inherits from its sexist predecessor the potential for the disruption of the human/machine boundary. However, Cadora argues that feminist cyberpunk also undertakes numerous other disruptions of binary distinctions. The inclusion of positive blurrings of the animal/human boundary in texts such as *Glass Houses* and Mary Rosenblum's *Chimera*, argues Cadora, 'represents a significant departure from traditional cyberpunk.'[45] Cadora continues by arguing that, in feminist cyberpunk, cyborgs transgress one final boundary – that between the real and the unreal.[46] Cadora's interest in this blurring of the line between reality and unreality is not so much in the blurring itself, but rather in its result, leading her to claim that 'The blurring between real and unreal has profound implications for notions of identity. Stable, coherent concepts of self are impossible if there is no universally consensual reality upon which to ground them.'[47] While it could be said that the key feature of the 'real' world, as opposed to the virtual world, is that it remains real without our consent, and consequently that virtual reality actually constitutes the first-ever form of

[44] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', pp. 359-360.
[45] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 366.
[46] This thesis has examined the inherent terminological problems facing those trying to describe cyberspatial experience and/or cyberspatial forms of being, particularly in the context of the cyberpunk imaginary, in Chapter Four, 'Cyberpunk Spatiality: The 'Other' Spaces of Cyberpunk.'
[47] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 368.

consensual reality (a reality established quite literally by the consensual participation of its members), Cadora's point is essentially that 'Feminist cyberpunk is full of fragmented and partial selves.'[48] These fragmented selves are 'just the kind of identities with which feminism must come to terms… Feminist cyberpunk writers have gone far in demonstrating what a cyborg, a multiply-positioned subject, might look like. More than that, they show how cyborgs can function in the world.'[49] These fragmented, multiply-positioned, cyborg subjects are at the core of feminist cyberpunk – and their ability to function within the imagined worlds of cyberpunk, argues Cadora, presents new visions for feminist appropriation.

Cadora also briefly touches on another key concept in understanding feminist criticism of cyberpunk fictions, namely the idea of embodiment. Embodiment as a paradigm is at once a feminist response to both the disembodying rhetorics of Enlightenment rationality and postmodern abstraction. Its main purpose is to remind purveyors of both radical transcendence and radical deconstruction that there remains an undeniably physical, material component to being human – and that, frankly, no amount of rational thinking or deconstructionist apocalyptic discourse can actually remove this component of being human. On this note Anne Balsamo has asked

> *Is it ironic that the body disappears in postmodern theory just as women and feminists have emerged as an intellectual force within the human disciplines? ... Faced with the prospect of being strategically eclipsed within the modern episteme once*

[48] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 368.
[49] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 370.

> *again, feminists have a political stake in constructing and critiquing theories of the body within postmodernism… The final fate of "the body" should not be left entirely to the panic postmodernists – that is, Jean Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, and Arthur Kroker.*[50]

Restating the importance of embodiment, in the face of various attempts to ignore, write off, or deconstruct the body, is critical to many feminist understandings of cyberpunk fictions.

The links between a discussion of cyborgs in cyberpunk and an examination of embodiment are obvious. Indeed, Balsamo has argued that 'By reasserting a material body, the cyborg rebukes the disappearance of the body within postmodernism… The cyborg connects a discursive body with a historically material body by taking account of the ways in which the body is constructed within different social and cultural formations. Ultimately, the cyborg challenges feminism to search for ways to study the body as it is at once both a cultural construction and a material fact of human life.'[51] While this could be said to be the function of the cyborg in feminist theory, it is not necessarily the function of cyborgs within cyberpunk fictions. As will be examined below, an analysis of discourse about embodiment within cyberpunk criticism reveals that the cyborgs of cyberpunk are not immune to disembodying rhetoric. In fact, according to some critics at least, some cyberpunk fictions actually affirm ideas of disembodiment.

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[50] Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1996, p. 31. For a similar argument, see N. Katherine Hayles, 'The Posthuman Body: Inscription and Incorporation in *Galatea 2.2* and *Snow Crash*', *Configurations*, 5:2, 1997, pp. 241-266, p. 245.
[51] Anne Balsamo, *Technologies of the Gendered Body*, p. 33.

Feminist interests regarding embodiment in cyberpunk fictions have largely centred on the construction of its cyberspaces. This is unsurprising, because the way in which a particular cyberpunk text implements cyberspatial concepts obviously contributes to whether the novel can be said to be supporting a holistic view of the embodied mind, or a view which proposes that mind and body can be (or should be) separated digitally, by the translation of a person into a cyberspatial consciousness. This thesis has elsewhere defended even the most extreme forms of cyberspatial disembodiment in cyberpunk from the charge of Cartesian dualism,[52] but that, one suspects, is not crucial to the feminist case against radical disembodiment in certain cyberpunk texts. It is rather that, in the case of incidences of disembodiment in cyberpunk novels, such as the digital translation of Bobby Newmark and Angie Mitchell in Gibson's *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, such disembodying rhetorics encourage a forgetfulness regarding the material foundations of consciousness, and the situations of oppression within which many cyberpunk characters reside. However, there are also those critics who consider the employment of overtly feminist embodiment paradigms in cyberpunk. As was the case with the figure of the cyborg, cyberpunk uses of disembodiment and/or embodiment paradigms defy simple affirmation as feminist fiction or simple deriding as masculinist propaganda. The final interpretation of a given critic depends not just on his or her own critical position, but also on which texts they choose to examine as representative of cyberpunk as a whole. This means that feminist critical literature on dis/embodiment in cyberpunk runs a gamut from affirming the feminist

[52] See Chapter Four – Cyberpunk Spatiality: The 'Other' Spaces of Cyberpunk.

credentials of (some) cyberpunk to condemning the bulk of the genre as reinstated sexism.

When critics assail cyberpunk for its rhetoric of disembodiment, it is William Gibson's first, 'Sprawl,' trilogy and particularly *Neuromancer* which are selected as the primary target. Karen Cadora, for example, states that 'For women, the realities of the flesh are all too present in the imperfect world of cyberpunk. Because of this, embodiedness is a central issue in feminist cyberpunk in a way that it is not in masculinist cyberpunk. In *Neuromancer*, for example, Case moves through cyberspace as a disembodied gaze which sees from nowhere.'[53] In a similar vein, and referring back to the problem of deconstructionism which Balsamo touched on, Cathy Peppers has stated that:

> *Cyberpunk fiction could be seen in the context of the host of radical disruptions of white male privilege in the 1970s. If it is a fiction obsessed with dissolving boundaries, it is also possible to see the genre's emergence as the privileged site for postmodern subjectivity as a re-enactment of Susan Bordo's description of deconstructionist postmodernism's embrace of a "disembodied view from everywhere" as a way to remain indifferent to concerns about gender, and to the women writers who brought that concern to science fiction.*[54]

It is undeniably true that Gibson, in *Neuromancer* at least, appears to follow what Sherryl Vint has termed the 'misogynistic heritage' of Cartesian dualism.[55]

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[53] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 364.
[54] Cathy Peppers, ''I've Got You Under My Skin'', p. 169.
[55] Roger Luckhurst observes that, 'Although there are signs of more ambivalence about the body in *Neuromancer* than is generally credited, Gibson works unquestioningly with a Cartesian dualism of mind and body.' Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 208. This thesis finds reason to question the generally held view that Gibson specifically, and

Inside this paradigm, Vint explains, 'The transcendence of the pure mind is available to the male subject, while the female subject must remain immanent, absorbing all the limits of materiality that man has cast off in his construction of his own subjectivity.'[56] On first glance, the main characters of *Neuromancer* seem to be the very image of this paradigm – Case, the male hacker who had 'lived for the bodiless exaltation of cyberspace,'[57] and Molly, the warrior and assassin who, as far as we know from the novel, does not even have access to that realm.

Vint's reading of *Neuromancer*, however, moves past this surface impression of the text, and discovers that such a simplistic interpretation of *Neuromancer* is unsatisfaactory. In an important piece of analysis, Vint argues that the scene in the novel where Case is offered a cyberspatial existence with his dead girlfriend, Linda Lee, and refuses it, means that Case 'still insists on a reality based in bodily existence. His love for and connection with Linda cannot be valued if it exists only in a virtual world.'[58] With reference to Cadora's comment regarding Case moving through cyberspace as a disembodied gaze which sees from nowhere, it would also seem that this passage refutes that claim. Not only does Case have a cyberspatial body, a location from which he views cyberspace (at least sometimes) but he is capable of being trapped in it. It is also apparent that he has at least as much distaste for this condition as for the state of

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cyberpunk more generally, hold to a Cartesian model of consciousness. See Chapter Four 'Cyberpunk Spatiality: The 'Other' Spaces of Cyberpunk.'

[56] Sherryl Vint, *Bodies of Tomorrow*, p. 104.

[57] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 6.

[58] Sherryl Vint, *Bodies of Tomorrow*, p. 108.

being trapped in the 'prison of his own flesh.'[59] There are also other passages in *Neuromancer* where it is apparent that Case has a cyberspatial body – a sense of location which denies the 'disembodied view from nowhere,' not least the final hack of the novel, where, engaging the Kuang program, Case 'had the strange impression of being in the pilot's seat in a small plane.'[60] Gibson is too subtle a writer to produce a text which simply advocates doing away with the body. His attitude towards disembodiment in *Neuromancer* and his other, later, works is far more ambivalent. As Vint puts it:

> *Gibson's novel articulates a particular type of subjectivity that is interested in repressing the body, and it suggests why this stance would be desirable: the subject wishes to sustain a construction of mastery and the body undermines this construction. Despite the appeal of this fantasy, the body is continually shown to be an inescapable part of Case's subjectivity and the actual condition of being without a body is shown to be an absence of subjectivity.*[61]

One might also add that Case's desire for escape from embodiment in *Neuromancer* might have at least one other source: namely, a desire to escape from the actual oppression in which that physical body finds itself. Heather J. Hicks has made a similar observation with regards to James Tiptree Jr's *The Girl Who Was Plugged In*, commenting that, 'In Tiptree's vision, human subjectivity is sufficiently contingent upon the social status of the subject's body that those who have suffered the ordeal of the "worthless" body willingly flee to a more validated one. Disembodiment, then, is not about the body ceasing to "matter" –

[59] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 6.
[60] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 256.
[61] Sherryl Vint, *Bodies of Tomorrow*, p. 109.

it is about the body mattering so much that it becomes uninhabitable.'[62] For many of the heroes and heroines of cyberpunk fiction, and even some of its villains (Virek in Gibson's *Count Zero* for example), this is definitely the case.

Returning to a point which was raised but not discussed in depth earlier, another critical paradigm which has emerged from feminist criticism of cyberpunk is the examination of the subject positions portrayed in cyberpunk fictions. It has become academically fashionable to advocate the idea of the multiply-positioned subject – a view of the human subject where identity is neither stable nor unitary, but rather fluid, fractured and determined. The opposite view – that human subjects are unitary, stable, and autonomous – has been attributed to humanist arrogance, often using the rather ugly fused term 'liberal humanism.'[63] The debate in feminist cyberpunk criticism has therefore centred around whether or not cyberpunk can be said to be portraying characters who are suitably multiplicitous – with positive interpretations of cyberpunk arguing that it does portray such characters, and more negative criticism arguing that it does not.

Early criticism about cyberpunk quickly began to identify the fracturing of the subject within its texts. Veronica Hollinger alludes to, but does not

[62] Heather J. Hicks, '"Whatever it is That She's Since Become": Writing Bodies of Text and Bodies of Women in James Tiptree, Jr.'s *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* and William Gibson's "The Winter Market"', *Contemporary Literature*, 37:1, 1996, pp. 62-93, p. 71.

[63] This thesis has elsewhere argued, in Chapter Two: "Posthumanism With a Vengeance": Cyberpunk and Posthumanist Literary Criticism, that the resources available to a humanist thinker are not reducible to a liberal or libertarian paradigm, and as such those who reduce humanism in this way are making critical argumentative mistakes.

directly discuss, such fragmentation, when she refers to the 'radical decent[ring] … of the essential self'[64] in cyberpunk fictions. Brian McHale also identified cyberpunk with the postmodern deconstruction of the unitary self, claiming that 'For the most part, fragmentation and dispersal of the self occurs in postmodernist fiction at the levels of language, narrative structure and the material medium (the printed book), or between these levels, rather than at the level of the fictional world'[65] and later that

> *Cyberpunk practice, here as elsewhere, is to actualise or literalise what in postmodern poetics normally appears as a metaphor at the level of language, structure or the material medium. Where postmodernism has figurative representations of disintegration, cyberpunk texts typically project fictional worlds which include (fictional) objects and (fictional) phenomena embodying and illustrating the problematics of selfhood: human-machine symbiosis, artificial intelligences, biogenetically-engineered alter egos, and so on.*[66]

In other words, for McHale, cyberpunk realises at the fictional level of character and narrative the disintegration of the unitary self which postmodernist writing preferred to place at the metafictional level of language and structure.

The first specifically feminist responses to the claim that cyberpunk depicts characters with partial and/or fragmented selves predominantly contest this claim, and posit the reverse. Nicola Nixon, for example, in 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?', points out that cyberpunk novels depict the 'exceptionally talented, very masculine hero… pitting his powerful individualism against the collective, domesticated

[64] Veronica Hollinger, 'Cybernetic Deconstructions', p. 29.
[65] Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, Routledge, New York, 1992, p. 254.
[66] Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism*, p. 255.

feminised… Japanese "family" corporations.'[67] Nixon also points out that 'It seems telling that the icon of the cowboy, realised so strongly in Reaganite cowboyism, the quintessence of the maverick reactionary, should form the central heroic iconography in cyberpunk.'[68] While Nixon does not specifically contest the idea that cyberpunk depicts or supports the idea of fractured subjectivities, it is fairly clear from her argument that she considers that it in fact does quite the opposite, instead narrating and valorising a powerfully individualist, quite reactionary subject.

Sharon Stockton agreed, stating that:

> *Veronica Hollinger, for example, argues that cyberpunk is "anti-humanist", and Brian McHale claims that the multiple realities and inset points of view of cyberspace "entail a model of the self which is correspondingly plural, unstable and problematic". My own sense is that the genre of cyberpunk does not go so far, and I would take issue with the argument that it portrays a schizophrenic, "Baudrillardian" subject. It seems clear to me that it is cyberpunk's project to remythologise an earlier, powerfully autonomous subject through a literary form that is, in effect, a latter-day version of adventure/romance.*[69]

Unlike Nixon, however, Stockton examines both Kathy Acker and Pat Cadigan as feminist reworkings of cyberpunk generic writing, noting that 'As is not the case with cyberpunk generally, it is a part of Acker's project to destabilise the narratives of regained (masculine) subjectivity'[70] and that 'Pat Cadigan… puts into question the status of the matrix apparently available for inscription in the

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[67] Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?', p. 225.
[68] Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?', pp. 224-225.
[69] Sharon Stockton, '"The Self Regained"', p. 588.
[70] Sharon Stockton, '"The Self Regained"', p. 603.

fiction of authors like Gibson and Stephenson, and… she makes explicit the connections between the enabling "matter" of cyberspace and the enabling female body.'[71] Stockton clearly distinguishes between masculinist cyberpunk and female/feminist responses to and critiques of it – a distinction which became increasingly important in feminist analysis of cyberpunk fictions.

Later feminist critics writing about cyberpunk have begun to associate the portrayal of such unstable, partial selves with specifically feminist cyberpunk. Karen Cadora, for example, in identifying the fiction of Mary Rosenblum and Pat Cadigan as feminist cyberpunk, specifically states that 'feminist cyberpunk is full of fragmented and partial selves.'[72] Following on from this comment, Cadora point out that 'this novel [*Chimera*] gives that construction of identity a moral imperative. All the 'good guys' – David, Jewel, Flander, Susana, Serafina – are patchwork people… The 'bad guy' in this novel, Harmon Alcourt, is the one who can't let go of his rigid notions of identity.'[73] Cadora also comments on Cadigan's work, particularly *Mindplayers*. Cadora observes that at the climax of the novel, the heroine, Allie, 'comes to realise that she must "Choose: a whole self, or just an accumulation of elements that soon wouldn't be more than the sum of their parts. Madness. Fragmentation." Allie chooses the state of existence that is her "whole self," even though, in reality, it is a conglomeration of different parts and different people.'[74] There is certainly something in Cadora's commentary on these texts – the models of subjectivity portrayed in them do

[71] Sharon Stockton, '"The Self Regained"', p. 605.
[72] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 368.
[73] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 368.
[74] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 369.

differ from the completely unitary subject which is (apparently) the focus of humanist thought. However, particularly in the case of Cadigan, one cannot help but wonder whether the point was rather that each individual subject is a union made up of parts, rather than an unstable mass of different people's perceptions waiting to fly apart at the drop of a hat.

Cathy Peppers also distinguishes between masculinist and feminist cyberpunk, arguing, with reference to early, predominantly male-authored cyberpunk that:

> *Cyberpunk could be seen in the context of a host of radical disruptions of the security of white male privilege in the 1970s. If it is a fiction obsessed with dissolving boundaries, it is also possible to see the genre's emergence as the privileged site for postmodern subjectivity as a re-enactment of Susan Bordo's description of deconstructionist postmodernism's embrace of a "disembodied view from everywhere" as a way to remain indifferent to concerns about gender, and to the women writers who brought that concern to science fiction.*[75]

What is interesting about Pepper's analysis here is her explicit disentanglement of deconstruction, deconstructed subjects and feminist concerns. Indeed, Peppers seems to be making the point that not only can such deconstructionist activities be seen as not necessarily feminist, they can in fact sometimes be deliberately anti-feminist. Peppers illustrates this with an analysis of William Gibson, stating that,

> *Ultimately, then, I find that the cyborgs Gibson constructs, while they do disrupt the boundary between man and machine, are not what I would consider "radically deconstructed subjects." While*

[75] Cathy Peppers, ''I've Got You Under My Skin'', p. 169.

> *his constructions of bodies traced literally by technology are seductive and there are moments when boundaries between subjects blur pleasurably, we are, in the end, presented with the same fantasy of transcendence beyond the body, the feminine and racial "otherness," with the masculine rather firmly reinscribed at the centre of this newly constructed, and quickly colonised, space.*[76]

Continuing to draw the distinction between reactionary, masculinist cyberpunk and feminist cyberpunk, Peppers concludes that 'what is at stake for women in the deconstruction of the subject is more than a mere philosophical play with boundaries; what is at stake are the very terms under which we know our bodies. The women writers of cyberpunk show why we should not be in a hurry to leave those bodies behind.'[77] The points made by Cadora, Peppers and others are valid critiques of both deconstructionist postmodernism and of early, masculinist cyberpunk. The erasure of the body in cyberpunk's cyberspaces and its deconstruction have similar outcomes: both result in a blindness to the ways in which people's physical being determines them. This blindness in turn allows a wilful refusal to consider feminist contributions to both science fiction and philosophical debate. Alluquere Rosanne Stone acerbically but very accurately points out, in response to the wilful ignorance of the body common to much cyberpunk, that, 'it is important to remember that the virtual community originates in, and must return to, the physical. No refigured virtual body, no matter how beautiful, will slow the death of a cyberpunk with AIDS. Even in the age of the technosocial subject, life is lived through bodies.'[78] Feminist cyberpunk authors perhaps have the same task within the genre as do feminist academics within academic discourse – to point out, as forcefully as possible,

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[76] Cathy Peppers, ''I've Got You Under My Skin'', p. 175.
[77] Cathy Peppers, ''I've Got You Under My Skin'', p. 182.
[78] Alluquere Rosanne Stone, 'Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories About Virtual Cultures', in Jenny Wolmark (ed.), *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1999, pp. 69-98, p. 94.

that it may neither be an easy nor a good thing to attempt to do away with, or even to ignore, the body. This has, in fact, already occurred. One could argue that Visual Mark, from Pat Cadigan's *Synners*, in many ways parallel the various console cowboys of Gibson's Sprawl trilogy. He has the same fervent contempt for his own physical being, and is similarly obsessed with spending as much time as possible in cyberspace. His digital apotheosis differs considerably, however, from that of Bobby Newmark, whom he most closely resembles. Where Bobby seems to be offered the free ride, his consciousness and character remaining almost entirely unaltered by his digital translation, Mark suffers strokes, malignant versions of himself attempting to control the Net, compression of his data self, and finally a merger with the AI Art Fish. Leaving the meat, for Mark, is an apocalyptic experience which endangers both himself and the rest of the world, and does not result in something which is merely a digital copy of the old, physical Mark. One suspects that Cadigan deliberately emphasised the danger inherent in the process to highlight that bodies *matter*. Kaye Mitchell makes precisely this point regarding embodiment in Cadigan's fiction, observing that, 'The hotsuit suggests the irreducibility of the body, which becomes here a receptive surface through which information is transmitted in both directions. Rather than being left behind, the body is the point of transfer and contact between AR and RL, between the "human" and the machine/computer – it is through the body, and the senses, that AR is experienced by the user.'[79]

[79] Kaye Mitchell, 'Bodies that Matter: Science Fiction, Technoculture and the Gendered Body', *Science Fiction Studies*, 33:1, 2006, pp. 109-128, p. 121.

A last interesting piece of feminist analysis of cyberpunk has been feminist examinations of the nature of cyberspace. In her critically important early article, Nicola Nixon, amongst her many other valid criticisms of genre cyberpunk, made the point that 'The computer matrix, a construct culturally associated with the masculine world of logic and scientific wizardry, could easily constitute the space of the homoerotic. But it doesn't… the matrix itself is figured as feminine space.'[80] Nixon goes on to argue that it is against this feminised background that Gibson's masculine heroes demonstrate their mastery; that 'their very masculinity is constituted by their success both within and against it.'[81] In other words, in order to restate a hackneyed story of powerful masculine hero succeeding in a difficult quest, and proving his mastery over both world and women, masculinist cyberpunk must figure cyberspace as feminine, dangerous and, ultimately, conquerable. Sharon Stockton both agrees with and expands upon Nixon's arguments: to Nixon's comments about the gendered nature of cyberspace in cyberpunk, she adds an examination of its mythic roots in early capitalism. Stockton's argument is deeply nuanced, and difficult to summarise with any accuracy, but she does argue that simply to examine the gendered nature of cyberspace or to examine its capitalist/imperialist roots without examining the other theme is to miss a critical point. This point is that the 'rhetoric of phallic projection and passive field [which] encompasses Western paradigms of both gender and capitalism – is precisely the structuring base of cyberpunk fiction. The protagonist hackers "project" into a feminised field; the

[80] Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?', p. 222.
[81] Nicola Nixon, 'Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?', p. 228.

plot complication consists in the revolt of this terrain which should be passive.'[82] Stockton's explicit linking of feminist critique and Marxist critique is both welcome and apposite; and the analysis which results from it is complex and rewarding.

There are, however, feminist critics who disagree with the stance taken by Nixon and Stockton. Karen Cadora, for example, agrees that cyberspace as it is portrayed by Neal Stephenson and William Gibson is a feminised space, but argues that this does not complete the story of cyberpunk's cyberspaces. In keeping with the division she draws between masculinist and feminist cyberpunk, Cadora argues that in feminist cyberpunk cyberspace is often either an androgynous space or is in fact associated with the male body. Cadora argues that masculinist cyberpunk is a 'genre which lacks female characters' and that in such a genre 'it is necessary to construct a feminine space in which male heroes can establish and assert their masculinity. The feminisation of cyberspace is necessary to insure that these male characters remain heterosexual.'[83] Cadora observes that, in Cadigan's *Synners*, both gender identity and sexuality are more fluid than in, for example, Gibson's work. Referring to Visual Mark's fluid gender identity following his digital translation, his relationship with the AI Art Fish, and the androgynous nature of the AI itself, Cadora comments that in *Synners*, 'If cyberspace is associated with androgyny, then it is not automatically a feminine space reserved for heterosexual male domination.'[84]

[82] Sharon Stockton, ''The Self Regained'', p. 591.
[83] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 361.
[84] Karen Cadora, 'Feminist Cyberpunk', p. 362.

When this chapter is read as a part of the whole of this dissertation, the true impact of feminist criticism on genre cyberpunk criticism becomes apparent. There are almost no paths which cyberpunk criticism has taken where feminist critics have not brought significant new and important ideas to the field. Foremost amongst these, of course, has been the feminist idea of the cyborg, stemming from the work of Donna Haraway. The discussion of cyberpunk's cyborgs, and cyberpunk generally, would be inconceivable without a significant examination of the role and impact of this model on critical discussions. Similarly, it is difficult to imagine how discussions of cyberpunk's cyberspaces would (could?) have progressed without feminist contributions. Discussions of embodiment and disembodiment are one of the logical outcomes of the separation of human consciousness from embodied human which cyberspace inevitably raises; and feminist criticism, due to its ongoing concern with the body, and its varying fates in postmodern theory, capitalism and, of course, in cyberpunk literature, has provided both the base from which many of these discussions have built and the structure of these discourses as they have progressed. It is also apparent that feminist critics have very rarely absorbed without questioning cyberpunk's self-promotion. As a consequence, feminist criticism has often projected useful questions into the field of cyberpunk criticism - a field which at times seems absorbed with the positive potentials of the worlds portrayed in cyberpunk fictions, to the detriment of a balanced critical community. The true impact of feminist contributions on cyberpunk criticism as a whole is difficult to assess - however, it would not be stretching the point too

far to say that there is no avenue of inquiry into cyberpunk which has not been in some way or another impacted by the ideas of feminist critics.

Chapter 6: A Future Without a Past: Cyberpunk and History.

In a thesis examining the intellectual history of cyberpunk it is perhaps inevitable that a chapter seeking to place cyberpunk criticism in historical context, and examine the issue of historicity in both the fiction and the generic critical literature, would come to be written. Historicity has a number of potential meanings, and these must be disentangled before proceeding with the analytic component of this chapter. Literary scholars, for example, tend to mean something slightly different to historians when they use the word historicity. This chapter follows Fredric Jameson in taking historicity to be the general sense of historical time passing, the ability of a society to place its events in historical time, and the capacity of that society to place itself in historical context. In order to place cyberpunk criticism and fictions in historical context, both cyberpunk fictions and the generic critical literature will be read in the light of three contemporaneous historical theories. These theories - Francis Fukuyama's 'End of History' thesis, Fredric Jameson's ideas pertaining to the waning of historicity in postmodernity, and Jean-François Lyotard's arguments relating the death of grand narratives in postmodern culture - are linked in having a certain millenarian temperament. All of these theories, in their own way, express the feeling that something is drawing to a close – that there are fundamental differences between the postmodern and the modern which necessitate the termination of modernist understandings of the world. Despite Bruce Sterling's comments regarding cyberpunk's 'boredom with the

apocalypse,'[1] these strangely millenarian sentiments also run deeply through the heart of much cyberpunk fiction. As an example of this millenarianism, in William Gibson's *Virtual Light*, the character Yamazaki muses, '*We are come not only past the century's closing… the millennium's turning, but to the end of something else as well. Era? Paradigm? Everywhere, the signs of closure.*'[2] This chapter will argue that these sentiments situate both the theories referred to above and cyberpunk fiction firmly in historical time. Neil Easterbrook quotes Gibson as saying that 'science fiction is always, really, about the period it is written in.'[3] This chapter aims to prove that this is equally true of cyberpunk as it is of any other science fiction, and to draw conclusions about the nature of cyberpunk and its critique. This chapter differs somewhat from the previous parts of the dissertation, in that it contains more direct criticism of the cyberpunk source material, and less meta-critical analysis of the extant cyberpunk critical literature. This was necessitated by the relative dearth of critical material discussing cyberpunk and history. Despite the high quality of most discussion of cyberpunk and history or historicity, the relatively low volume of discussion means that this chapter often has to fill in the interpretive blanks.

The first of these theories is overtly about history, and will be easily recalled by any historian working in the last 20 years: Francis

[1] Bruce Sterling, 'Preface', in William Gibson, *Burning Chrome*, Voyager, London, 1995 (first published 1986), pp. 9-13, p. 12.
[2] *Virtual Light*, William Gibson, Bantam, 1993, p. 105. Emphasis in original text.
[3] Neil Easterbrook, 'Alternate Presents: The Ambivalent Historicism of *Pattern Recognition*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 33:3, 2006, pp. 483-504, p. 485.

Fukuyama's (in)famous 'End of History' thesis.[4] While there had been previous attempts to declare that History (the capital 'H' is intentional) had in some way finished, Fukuyama's thesis hit home powerfully in 1980s academic culture. Fukuyama's thesis, and the ensuing controversy, ensured that debates about the 'End of History' would continue for some time. This chapter will make the claim that there are strong affinities between Fukuyama's claims and the world view of cyberpunk. It will seek to examine these connections, and in the process will situate cyberpunk firmly in historical context.

A theory which makes a less overt statement about history itself, but is rather about our understanding of the historical process, is Fredric Jameson's complicated idea about the disappearance of historicity in postmodern culture.[5] Historicity, understood as the sense of history, the understanding that the present is a part of a chain of historical events, has faded, Jameson argues. Postmodern culture is unable either to interpret the present as a succession to a heroic past (as in the early modernist historical novel) or as the past of an imagined future (as in the late modernist science fiction of the 'Golden Age').[6] While postmodern culture continues to crave historicity, and still desires to understand itself

[4] Fukuyama's original thesis can be found in *The National Interest Special Reprint*, 'The End of History?', pp. 1-16, National Affairs, Inc, Washington D.C., 1989. His considerable expansion of his original thesis takes the form of a book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992.

[5] For Jameson's explication of the disappearance of history in postmodern culture, see Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, pp. 283-287.

[6] Note that interpreting science fiction as a late modernist phenomenon is my own adaptation of Jameson's ideas. Jameson generally characterises science fiction as postmodern; I struggle to understand 'Golden Age' science fiction under any philosophical paradigm but that of the Enlightenment. Hence my decision to characterise this science fiction as modernist.

historically, it is incapable of actually doing so. Instead it substitutes artefacts of history and pastiches of historical images to satisfy its historicity craving. Jameson argues that, under postmodernism, historicity passes entirely. This may not necessarily be the case. It may be more accurate to say that the modernist (or Enlightenment) understanding of history has waned. This understanding of temporality and historicity is essentially holistic, causational and uni-directional – it argues that history can be understood as a series of contiguous events, which progress in a single direction and can be understood as a whole. In contrast to this modernist understanding of history, Jameson argues, essentially, that postmodernism has no historicity at all.[7] However, there is a sense in which postmodernism has historicity. In keeping with the general postmodern suspicion of all things holistic and Enlightenment, this sense of historicity is almost exactly the opposite of that described above. It is, in a sense, historicity – but it is almost completely unrecognisable from a modernist viewpoint. This atemporal, ahistorical postmodern form of historicity is also internally incoherent, as well as bearing little resemblance to the way we actually perceive and interpret events-in-the-world. However, for Jameson to argue that in postmodernism, historicity has died completely is to miss the critical opportunity to examine the sense of temporality and historicity that postmodernism does contain.

[7] This, to my mind, is one of the key observations of *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. If it is indeed true that, under the sign of postmodernity, people perceive both time and history in a fundamentally different manner, then this is a truly great intellectual upheaval – one which must be accounted for and examined.

This chapter will demonstrate that Jameson has reason to be concerned for the passing of modernist historicity, at least as far as cyberpunk is concerned. It will be argued that cyberpunk displays a marked inability to locate its texts in historical time; events in cyberpunk novels seem to take place in a kind of eternal present, devoid of historical context. Whilst this is not necessarily always the case, and cyberpunk does display some ambivalence regarding the role of both history and historicity, in general terms significant support for Jameson's ideas can be found in cyberpunk fiction. This, in turn, means that Jameson's work provides an ideal critical tool for both the analysis of cyberpunk and, oddly enough, its contextualisation in history.

The last theorist from the 1980s whose work will be used to illuminate cyberpunk is Jean-François Lyotard. Whilst Lyotard's theories about the postmodern bear perhaps the least immediately obvious relevance to history and historical theory, this chapter will contend that Lyotard's claims constitute a historical theory. In particular, his ideas about the death of 'grand narratives' of legitimation in postmodern culture constitute an attempt to theorise the shift from modernism to postmodernism. Whilst this thesis retains its scepticism as to whether our world can actually be said to be postmodern (or could legitimately have been said to be postmodern in the 1980s), it is undeniably true that Lyotard taps a strong vein of criticism, and that his arguments are, at times, persuasive. Lyotard, in particular, argues that the legitimation narratives of the Enlightenment have failed in postmodern culture; that,

for example, the doing of science can no longer justify itself in terms of the pursuit of "Truth." Lyotard extends his theory to include other, and eventually *all* grand narratives – in other words, he argues that no global or holistic narrative offers explicative value in postmodern culture. Whilst it could be (and probably should be) argued that Lyotard's argument in and of itself constitutes a grand narrative of sorts, making this argument is not the purpose of the chapter. Instead, as with Jameson and Fukuyama, Lyotard's theories will be used to judge the 'spirit of the times,' for want of a better phrase. The chapter will examine cyberpunk for evidence of the vanishing of grand narratives (in so far as one can find evidence of an absence). It will be observed that, although as far as cyberpunk is concerned Lyotard is often correct, both Lyotard and generic cyberpunk often suffer from a problematic failure to understand the centrality of the function of capital. It will be argued that for contemporary society (society contemporaneous to the writing of most cyberpunk and, indeed, society today) and in cyberpunk fiction, capital functions as both foundation myth *and* legitimation narrative. Capital is the be-all and end-all; it is the alpha and the omega; it is cause, purpose and justification all in one. Whether or not this is right or justified is another issue.

Before proceeding with the analysis which combines these theories with cyberpunk criticism, however, it is appropriate first to examine the theories themselves. Debate surrounding these theories, particularly Fukuyama's 'End of History' thesis, has at times been

intense, and can be of significant assistance in positioning each of these theories, both in intellectual and temporal terms. In understanding these debates, we will be able better to place cyberpunk within an intellectual tradition – and the similarities which can be observed between the cyberpunk mode of thought and other intellectual traditions contemporaneous with it will become obvious.

Debate surrounding both Fukuyama's original article and the later book *The End of History and the Last Man* was intense. Criticism flew from both the academic Left and Right – the Left often accusing Fukuyama of an unjustified capitalist triumphalism, and the Right of seeing a victory where none had, as yet, been won.[8] There were, of course, many critics who failed to grasp Fukuyama's argument altogether, and subsequently argued at cross purposes to him, putting forth arguments demonstrating the continuance of events and so forth. It is of the utmost importance to state (as Fukuyama does in commentaries subsequent to his original essay)[9] that Fukuyama is referring to a specific type of historical process. This capital 'H' history, history conceived of as ideological conflict, as a battle for control of the historical process *tout*

[8] There is a good edited collection of responses to Fukuyama's thesis, which also includes his reply to those critiques. See Timothy Burns (ed.), *After History: Francis Fukuyama and His Critics*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 1994. Saul Friedlander made an interesting argument that the very nature of modern consciousness may preclude an 'end of history'. See Saul Friedlander, 'The End of Innovation? Contemporary Historical Consciousness and the "End of History"', *SubStance*, 19:2/3, pp. 29-36. For an example of scholarly cautions about triumphalism, see Jerry W. Sanders, 'Retreat from World Order: The Perils of Triumphalism', *World Policy Journal*, 8:2, 1991, pp. 227-250.

[9] See, for example, Francis Fukuyama, 'Reflections on the End of History: Five Years Later', *History and Theory*, 34:3, 1995, pp. 27-43, p. 31.

court, is the history which Fukuyama wished to claim had ended.[10] He in no way attempts to claim that, in some strange (perhaps Baudrillardian) way *all* events no longer happen – such a claim would be at best frivolous. Fukuyama's claim is anything but frivolous. Fukuyama makes a serious statement about the nature of historical process in the twentieth century. His claim is, essentially, that in the battle of ideologies which characterised twentieth century history, one economic practise and one political system have emerged as victors – the twins, liberal capitalism and liberal democracy. This is a most serious claim, and one that, in the 1980s and 1990s, seemed to have some validity. Communism had collapsed in Eastern Europe, and statist and autocratic regimes throughout South America and South-East Asia appeared to be struggling at best.

Having said this for the credibility of Fukuyama's thesis, it must also be said that any thesis which claims that the 'End of History' has happened is never likely to lack for detractors (not least from the ranks of historians). Critics of every political persuasion emerged to savage Fukuyama's work. As far as examining these critical debates goes, the point must be made that one could devote an entire thesis simply to this process. As a result, this thesis must restrain itself to a small sample of the critical commentaries on Fukuyama's work. This small sample will be constituted mainly by critics from the Left. This is largely because Leftist critics of Fukuyama's thesis have written most of the material

[10] Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest Special Reprint*, National Affairs, Inc, Washington D.C., 1989, pp 48-55, p. 1-2.

which is particularly germane to this thesis – their points bear the most relevance not only to Fukuyama's ideas but interlock best with the intellectual history of cyberpunk and its criticism.

Responses to Fukuyama's thesis from the political Left have varied from robust denunciation to wary acceptance. Alex Callinicos, for example, takes Fukuyama to task on a variety of issues, not least for Fukuyama's dismissal of 'Ruritanian' conflicts in Eastern Europe, Africa and other less developed parts of the world. Fukuyama maintains that such conflicts are not important – that they are a sort of historical hangover and will not effect the closure of history in any way. Callinicos makes the point that not only is maintaining that such conflicts are unimportant to the progress of history a chauvinist Western view, such conflicts are, in the case of trouble in Eastern Europe particularly, a little too close to home to dismiss in such a way. As Callinicos himself puts it: 'Fukuyama's claim is about History with a capital H, that is, "history understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process."… Fukuyama doesn't deny that conflict is likely to persist in the "New World Order," but he tends to see it as a hangover, a reflection of backward, "historical" societies in the Third World, "Ruritanias," as he dismissed them in an extraordinary article written after the end of the Gulf War.'[11] Callinicos' argument is, one suspects, that if history continues anywhere then it continues everywhere – that we cannot insulate the West from the

[11] Alex Callinicos, 'Liberalism, Marxism and Democracy: A Response to David Held', *Theory and Society*, 22:2, 1993, pp. 283-288, p. 283. Fukuyama's original claim was that 'Clearly, much of the Third World remains very much mired in history… But let us focus on the larger and more developed states of the world, who after all account for the greater part of world politics.' Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', p. 13.

growing pains of the rest of the world. This, in turn, is likely to instigate changes in the economic and political forms of the West – the supposedly triumphant, and eternal, liberal capitalism and liberal democracy.

In a very different response to that of Callinicos, Perry Anderson examines seriously, from a Marxist perspective, whether Fukuyama may actually be correct. Anderson astutely realises that Fukuyama makes no claim that the systems he identifies as finishing history actually solve all of the world's problems. Fukuyama in no way claims that liberal capitalism and liberal democracy provide us with a utopia – he rather argues that they have exhausted all systemic competition. This means that pointing out the problems in the liberal/capitalist system does not suffice as a rebuttal of Fukuyama's argument. As Anderson himself puts it: 'Quite expressly his [Fukuyama's] schema did not require the suppression of every significant social conflict or the solution of every major institutional problem. It simply asserted that liberal capitalism is the *ne plus ultra* of political and economic life on earth. The end of history is not the arrival of a perfect system, but the elimination of any better alternatives to this one.'[12] In response to the differing argument (that European-style social democracy represents a genuine alternative to capitalism) Anderson is stinging. He reminds the reader that the underlying economic system of a social democratic system on the contemporary European model remains capitalist by any definition. To present such economies as a genuine alternative to capitalism is to

[12] Perry Anderson, 'The Ends of History', in Perry Anderson, *A Zone of Engagement*, Verso, London, 1992, pp. 279-375, p. 336.

misrepresent their structure in the search for a hiding place from the outcome of Fukuyama's arguments. Indeed, Anderson ends up condemning the attempt to escape the finality of Fukuyama's thesis through the attempt to define capitalism out of existence (by arguing that, as all capitalist economies are functionally different, and more or less social-democratic) as 'fruitless, a search for a nominalist bolt-hole in the sand… Fukuyama's inventory of the world seems unpalatable: but if it is difficult to find forces capable of altering the world, why not change the inventory. With the wand of a redescription, we can dispose of capitalism and reassure ourselves of the growth of socialism.'[13] In the section which contains these analyses, Anderson also deals with a few other major objections to Fukuyama's argument – namely the continuing role of nationalism in the less developed world and the existence of fundamentalism (particularly Islamic fundamentalism). He dismisses these arguments against Fukuyama in a similar style to those above. However, for the purposes of the argument of this chapter, it is Anderson's commentary on socialism and utopianism which are important.

Anderson goes on to argue that Fukuyama's argument is, at its core, about the failure of socialism in the battle between socialism and capitalism. In a sense, Anderson argues, the end of history can be reduced to the end of socialism. As Anderson puts it: 'If the end of history has arrived, it is essentially because the socialist experience is

[13] Perry Anderson, 'The Ends of History', pp. 240-241.

over. Much of the intuitive appeal of Fukuyama's argument comes, indeed, from the sense that we are witnessing across what was once the Soviet bloc a gigantic historical upheaval that for the first time in history seems to bear no new principle within it, but rather to move as in a vast dream where events are already familiar before they happen.'[14] For if there is no systemic alternative to capitalism and liberal democracy, then, under the terms of Fukuyama's argument, we must be at the end of history. Anderson points out that the popular view in many circles (including academia) is that socialism has become increasingly less relevant. However, Anderson briefly interrogates this common view, and finds that there may be life in the Marxist corpse yet. The challenge (and Anderson frames it as a challenge) is for socialism to make itself, once again, the genuinely systemic alternative to capitalism that would disprove Fukuyama's thesis. This is a point to which this thesis will return when examining the relationship between cyberpunk and the 'End of History.'

Fredric Jameson's landmark text *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* establishes a systematic, thorough and magisterial understanding of the operation of postmodern culture. One of Jameson's many observations throughout the book is that, with the arrival of postmodernity, our ability to understand things historically, to place the present within historical time, has become blocked. Historicity is denied within postmodern culture. This is, of course, a completely

[10] Perry Anderson, 'The Ends of History', pp. 351-352.

different argument to that put forward by Fukuyama. Fukuyama argues that History (Fukuyama later uses a deliberate capital 'H')[15] has come to a close; Jameson is not speaking of the historical process itself, but rather of our ability to understand things as a part of that historical process. Jameson draws parallels between the emergence of science fiction as the privileged narrative form of postmodernism and the historical novel in the early nineteenth century. In doing so, he relates the downfall of the historical novel, claiming that 'the historical novel… has fallen into disrepute and infrequency, not merely because, in the postmodern age, we can no longer tell ourselves our history in that fashion, but because we also no longer experience it that way and, indeed, perhaps no longer experience it at all.'[16] This inability to imagine the present as the continuance of a heroic past may have a corollary in an inability to see the present as the past of an imagined future – though Jameson is more ambivalent towards this prospect, musing that

> *If catastrophic "near future" visions of, say, overpopulation, famine and anarchic violence are no longer as effective as they were a few years ago, the weakening of these effects and the narrative forms that were designed to produce them is not necessarily due to overfamiliarity and overexposure... Perhaps, however, what is implied is an ultimate historicist breakdown in which we can no longer imagine the future at all, under any form – Utopian or catastrophic. Under those circumstances, where a formerly futurological science fiction (such as so-called cyberpunk today) turns into mere "realism" and outright representation of the present, the possibility that Dick offered us – an*

[15] He does this in order to distinguish between history seen as a series of events, and his Hegelian definition of History as the clash of ideas. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, p. xii.
[16] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, pp. 283-284.

> *experience of our present as past and as history – is slowly excluded.*[17]

What the dearth of historicity in postmodern culture causes, amongst other things, Jameson argues, is a kind of 'historicity craving,' where, despite the inability to actually achieve historical thinking, people still desire historicity. In postmodernism, historicity hunger pangs are satisfied with the artefacts of historical thinking – images, writings etc. However, these are positioned in such a manner as to provide a blank pastiche (another famous postmodern trope). In Jameson's words,

> *nostalgia art gives us the image of various generations of the past as fashion-plate images that entertain no determinable ideological relationship to other moments of time: they are not the outcome of anything, nor are they the antecedents of our present; they are simply images. This is the sense in which I describe them as substitutes for any genuine historical consciousness rather than as a specific new form of the latter.*[18]

There is a problem, of course, for Jameson in attempting to situate postmodernism historically in this way. Due to its own inability to comprehend things in a historical manner, postmodernism is incredibly resistant to such temporal categorisation. In an interview with Anders Stephanson Jameson suggests that his project constitutes an attempt to 'outflank' postmodernism, and to return a sense of historicity through the back door.

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[17] Fredric Jameson *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, pp. 285-286.

[18] Anders Stephanson and Fredric Jameson, 'Regarding Postmodernism – A Conversation with Fredric Jameson', *Social Text*, 21, 1989, pp. 3-30, p. 18.

> *AS: The historical dimension counteracts the postmodernist immersion in the present, the dehistoricising or nonhistorical project. In That sense it goes outside the postmodernist paradigm.*
> *FJ: That is essentially the rhetorical trick or solution that I was attempting: to see whether by systematising something which is resolutely unhistorical, one couldn't force a historical way of thinking* at least about that. *And there are some signs that it is possible to go around it to* outflank *it.*[19]

This could be said to be en extension of Jameson's exegesis of the postmodern valorisation of the synchronic over the diachronic. Jameson notes that:

> *One's occasional feeling that, for poststructuralism, all enemies are on the left, and that the principal target always turns out to be this or that form of historical thinking, could conceivably lead to something other than impatience and exasperation if we drew a rather different kind of consequence. For it does not follow, for that tireless and implacable search-and-destroy mission of poststructuralism that finds traces and contaminations of the diachronic with more precision than any previous theoretical or philosophical technology, that it is synchronic thought that is thereby privileged. Synchronic thought is not particularly vindicated by the deficiencies of the diachronic; indeed, it remains peculiarly contradictory and incoherent (the demonstration of this is often referred to as the "critique of structuralism"), with this difference: unlike the diachronic, the conceptual antinomies of the synchronic are at once obvious and unavoidable; synchronic "thought" is a contradiction in terms, it cannot even pass itself off as thinking, and with it the last traditional vocation of classical philosophy vanishes.*
>
> *What results then is the paradox that the diachronic becomes coterminous with thinking itself… If "poststructuralism," or, as I prefer, "theoretical discourse," is at one with the demonstration of the necessary incoherence and impossibility of all thinking, then by the virtue of the very persistence of its critiques of the diachronic, and by way of the targeting mechanism itself, which consistently finds temporal and historical*

[19] Anders Stephanson and Fredric Jameson, 'Regarding Postmodernism', p. 30. Emphasis in original text.

> *conceptualities positioned at the centre of its objective the attempt to think "history"… at length becomes identified with the very vocation of thought itself.*[20]

It is on the basis of this preference for synchronic "thought" that Jameson argues that postmodernism is incapable of historicity. However, as briefly mentioned above, this may be a slight critical inaccuracy. Postmodern culture does have historicity of a sort – however, in common with the sense of history one would expect from a philosophical project so resolutely opposed to historical thinking, it is a profoundly incoherent historicity. The theme of historicity, in the sense in which Jameson means it, is one to which this chapter's commentary linking Jameson's work and cyberpunk fictions will return.

Last of the theorists of postmodernity whose works will be used in this chapter, Jean-François Lyotard, and his theories, remain a critical part of our understanding of postmodern culture. In *The Postmodern Condition*, and later works, Lyotard argues that Enlightenment narratives of legitimation have failed. Indeed, this argument expands, to become an 'incredulity toward [all] meta-narratives.'[21] In an argument that can be at times persuasive, Lyotard concludes that the epistemological bases of such meta-narratives is no longer firm. As a result, the narratives themselves no longer have the legitimation power they once had. In the place of Enlightenment ideas of truth and the pursuit of knowledge,

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[20] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, pp. 217-219.
[21] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1984, p. xxiv.

Lyotard argues, contemporary science now pursues technological advance as an end in itself. This 'false' legitimation story has led to the corruption of the purpose of scientific inquiry.[22]

Without wishing to engage vwith the debates which surrounded Lyotard's work (as with the Fukuyama debates, one could write a tome of intellectual history purely about these discussions), a number of problems with Lyotard's thesis should be pointed out. Firstly, whilst decrying the explicatory power of meta-narratives in the postmodern age, it is immediately apparent that Lyotard himself constructs a meta-narrative;[23] in doing so, he assists in our understanding of postmodernism. This would seem to lead one to a slightly different conclusion than the one which Lyotard describes: namely, that rather than drawing from the fact that Enlightenment meta-narratives now lack explicatory and legitimatory power the conclusion that *all* meta-narratives must lack such power, we should possibly conclude that the systemic understandings developed in a previous age will at the very least need to be revised to remain relevant in this one. Secondly, and Lyotard's theory has much in common with cyberpunk fictions on this point, the role of the narrative of capitalism as a meta-narrative in postmodern societies is glossed over in Lyotard's work. These points will be expanded upon in later analysis.

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[22] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. 45-46.

[23] See, for example, Andreas Michel, 'Differentiation vs. Disenchantment: The Persistence of Modernity from Max Weber to Jean-François Lyotard', *German Studies Review*, 20:3, 1997, pp. 343-370, p. 343.

When the critical literature about cyberpunk refers to history at all (which is, in terms of the volume of criticism written about cyberpunk, not often), Fredric Jameson's name is usually not far behind. This correlation should come as no surprise. Jameson is recognised as perhaps the foremost commentator on postmodernism; he has also written extensively on science fiction generally and, very rarely and briefly, on cyberpunk in particular; and, as this chapter will go on to detail, his theory regarding the dearth of historicity in postmodernism resonates strongly in cyberpunk fictions. There are a few critics who devote whole articles to this topic, usually in relation specifically to the works of William Gibson, and more who mention historicity in passing. In addition to examining this somewhat sparse body of criticism, the following analysis will also conduct original critical and historical investigation. In particular, it will be argued that the Jamesonian lack of historicity apparent in many cyberpunk texts in fact helps us to locate cyberpunk temporally – that is to say that, ironically, the very *ahistoricity* of cyberpunk situates it historically.[24]

The treatment of history and historical artefacts in cyberpunk texts varies, of course, from author to author, but also within the oeuvre of the same authors across time. William Gibson is a particularly good example of this variation, and a close reading of Gibson's cyberpunk works, with Jameson's theory of historicity and the postmodern in mind, offers

[24] For observations about post-historical time and Gibson's later work, *Pattern* Recognition, see Veronica Hollinger, 'Stories about the Future: From Patterns of Expectation to Pattern Recognition', *Science Fiction Studies*, 33:3, 2006, pp. 452-472, pp. 462-463.

significant analytic revelations. In *Neuromancer*, on the surface at least, Gibson displays almost precisely the attitude to history and historical artefacts which one would expect having read Jameson. *Neuromancer*'s attitude towards history and historicity is summed up and conveyed through the character Julius Deane. Established by Gibson as being more than a century old, Deane is in this way himself a kind of historical object. Deane is Case's go-to-man for information: specifically, for historical information. When Case wishes to know about the history of the Screaming Fist commando raid into Russia, he asks Deane for the information. Deane's response includes the line 'Don't they teach you history these days?'[25] Clearly, this is a use of a rhetorical line, delivered from the old to the young since time immemorial, but it could be argued that it has a deeper meaning in this context. It is as if historical knowledge itself is, like Deane, a semi-comical relic; something which ultimately has no place in the (post)modern world of biz.

The meaning of Deane as a character, and its implications for *Neuromancer*'s approach to history, are further complicated by the surroundings in which Deane is placed. Specifically, Deane surrounds himself with historical artefacts:

> *His* [Julius Deane's] *offices were located in a warehouse behind Ninsei, part of which seemed to have been sparsely decorated, years before, with a random collection of European furniture, as though Deane had once intended to use the place as his home. Neo-Aztec bookcases gathered dust against one wall of the room where Case waited. A pair of bulbous Disney-style table lamps perched awkwardly on a low Kandinsky-look coffee table in scarlet-*

[25] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, Ace Books, New York, 1984, p. 35.

> *laquered steel. A Dali clock hung on the wall between the bookcases, its distorted face sagging to the bare concrete floor…*
>
> *… If the furniture scattered in Deane's makeshift foyer suggested the end of the past century, the office itself seemed to belong to its start.*
>
> *Deane's seamless pink face regarded Case from a pool of light cast by an ancient brass lamp with a rectangular shade of dark green glass. The importer was securely fenced behind a vast desk of painted steel, flanked on either side by tall, drawered cabinets made of some sort of pale wood… The desktop was littered with cassettes, scrolls of some yellowed printout, and various parts of some sort of clockwork typewriter, a machine Deane never seemed to get around to reassembling.*[26]

At first blush this might appear to contradict the previous paragraph's claim of a marginalised place for historicity in *Neuromancer*. However, looking more carefully at these historical artefacts, we begin to understand that they are precisely the sort of postmodern past(iche) which Jameson identifies in *Postmodernism*. That is, they are things from the past which actually in no way represent the past. As Jameson said in an interview with Anders Stephanson, 'Finally, historicity and historical depth, which used to be called historical consciousness or the sense of the past, are abolished. In short, *objects fall into the world and become decoration* again; visual depth and systems of interpretation fade away, and something peculiar happens to historical time.'[27] Cut adrift from any ideological connection to a real or imagined past, and even from each other, they are jumbled together in an ultimately meaningless mess which spans centuries. John R. R. Christie makes a similar observation about the treatment of historical artefacts in *Neuromancer* (albeit a different set of historical artefacts) when he observes that:

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[26] William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, pp. 12-13.
[27] Anders Stephanson and Fredric Jameson, 'Regarding Postmodernism', p. 4. My emphasis.

> *As Case nears the end of his mission, he finds himself amid the vast historical and cultural collections of the industrial clan of Tessier-Ashpool. In these collections is a library; but Case does not know what it is, for books are unknown to him, as indeed are all the historical and cultural treasures of the collection. Jumbled and juxtaposed, these artefacts of civilisation are now only a residuum, recognisable for readers, but lacking meaning and content for the text's actors. In this sense, they are torn loose from history, from cultural memory, from depth of being, obliged by necessity to live in the perpetual present of electronic reality.*[28]

Claire Sponsler, too, has observed that, 'Tellingly, many of these objects are seen as the detritus of civilisation, decaying remnants of an otherwise demolished, meaningless and inaccessible past. This treatment of found objects from the past is clearly an instance of the "past as pastiche" typical of the postmodern sense of history so persuasively analysed by Jameson.'[29] The critical consensus (and indeed the analysis of this section) concludes that the historicity of Gibson's early texts (or the lack thereof) makes them decidedly postmodern.

Jameson, in his interview with Anders Stephanson, briefly analyses the way in which historical images proliferate in postmodernism, without any real connection to history itself. The question and response are as follows:

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[28] John R. R. Christie, 'Science Fiction and the Postmodern: The Recent Fiction of William Gibson and John Crowley', in T. Shippey (ed.) *Fictional Space: Essays on Contemporary Science Fiction*, Oxford, Humanities Press, 1991, pp. 34-58, p. 47.

[29] Claire Sponsler, 'Cyberpunk and the Dilemmas of Postmodern Narrative: The Example of William Gibson', *Contemporary Literature*, 33:4, 1992, pp. 625-644, p. 630.

> *AS: Despite the disappearance of a sense of history, there is no lack of historical elements in postmodern culture.*
>
> *FJ: When I talked about the loss of history, I didn't mean the disappearance of images of history, for instance, in the case of nostalgia film. The increasing number of films about the past are no longer historical; they are images, simulacra and pastiches of the past. They are effectively a way of satisfying a chemical craving for historicity, using a product that substitutes for and blocks it.*[30]

This is precisely the status of the historical artefacts described in the Sprawl trilogy. They exist as a sort of cover for the fact that the books take place in an atemporal eternal present, whose past is indistinct and future seems unreadable. One critic, however, has raised objections to this Jamesonian interpretation of historicity in Gibson's work.

Amy Novak has attempted to re-frame the cyberpunk/historicity debate by asking if 'the proliferation of media representations, providing us with diverse images of the past, articulate a new relationship between the past and the present?'[31] Novak argues that the postmodern pastiche of images of the past created in cyberspace constitute, rather than a flattened spectacle stripped of ideological reference points, a genuine new form of historical narrative. As Novak puts it:

> Neuromancer *demonstrates that postmodern simulacra of the past created by the culture of the spectacle does not simply create a pervasive cultural amnesia, as Jameson argues, in the inability to think historically, or, as Baudrillard claims, in the dissolution of history. Memory is not devalued or lost here. The 'semiotic ghosts' produce an alternative present within the cyberspace matrix, reminding the present of the*

[30] Anders Stephanson and Fredric Jameson, 'Regarding Postmodernism', p. 18.
[31] Amy Novak, 'Virtual Poltergeists and Memory: The Question of Ahistoricism in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*', *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, 6:1, 2000, pp. 55-78, p. 59.

> *space of the past. But this alternate plane of existence does not reside separate and apart from 'reality.' Instead, it penetrates and haunts 'reality.'…Incessantly circulating, the 'semiotic ghosts' of virtuality and a media culture haunt the memory of the present and continually force it to renegotiate the process of historical representation.*[32]

Novak's approach is original, and offers considerable insights into the workings of what this chapter has termed postmodern historicity. In particular, Novak's analysis supports the idea that, *contra* Jameson, there is a definite sense of history at work in postmodernism. However, the bulk of Jameson's arguments regarding postmodern historicity still stand. His point, one suspects, was not so much that in postmodernism we forget the past completely (this sort of 'cultural amnesia' is difficult to imagine) but rather that we forget the organising principles of history. The events and people of history may be *re*membered, but in a very real way history is *dis*membered – the problem of postmodern historicity lies in its inability to organise historical happenings in a temporally consistent fashion. It is actually possible for Novak's 'ghosts' to co-exist with Jameson's 'death of historicity.' Indeed, perhaps we should not be surprised that the dead choose to inhabit the graveyard; endlessly haunting the present, but unable to communicate their messages of the past to us, because we no longer possess the tools with which to interpret them.

Whilst the remainder of the Sprawl trilogy (*Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*) largely continue in this ahistorical, even anti-historical,

[32] Amy Novak, 'Virtual Poltergeists and Memory', p. 74.

fashion, the approach to historical thinking in Gibson's work does soften over time. In his second, 'Bridge,' trilogy, a markedly different attitude towards history can be seen. This concurs with the impression given by the critical literature about Gibson's work that his writing moved away from postmodernity as time went on.[33] In the Bridge trilogy, in contrast to the Sprawl trilogy, artefacts of historical importance appear with their contexts intact; they still have historical meaning. In the last work of the Bridge trilogy, *All Tomorrow's Parties*, this old-become-new-again take on history surfaces particularly strongly. Through the characters of Laney and Fontaine (and various support characters), Gibson in fact raises two (possibly competing) meta-historical theories.

With the character of Laney, chemically altered by exposure to the drug 5-SB, Gibson raises a holistic, teleological approach to history. This kind of historical thinking posits that history not only has a pattern but that it may be possible for us to discern it; that there is a master story through which all history can be understood; that there is not just a journey but a definite destination. Laney states that:

> *His compulsive study of Harwood and things Harwoodian had led him to the recognition that history too was subject to the nodal vision, and the version of history that Laney came to understand there bore little or no relation to any accepted version.*
>
> *He had been taught, of course, that history, along with geography, was dead. That history in the older sense was an historical concept. History in the older sense was*

[33] For the genesis of this ongoing theme in cyberpunk criticism, see Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., 'Antimancer: Cybernetics and Art in Gibson's *Count Zero*, *Science-Fiction Studies*, 22, 1995, pp. 63-86.

> *narrative, stories we told ourselves about where we'd come from and what it had been like, and those narratives were revised by each new generation, and indeed always had been. The digital had not so much changed that as made it too obvious to ignore. History was stored data, subject to manipulation and interpretation.*
>
> *But the "history" Laney discovered, through the quirk in his vision induced by having been repeatedly dosed with 5-SB, was something very different. It was that shape comprised of every narrative, every version; it was that shape that only he (as far as he knew) could see.*[34]

That Laney is convinced of the rectitude of his historical account is undeniable; that Laney is not fully sane is, by this point in the novel, also a sad truth. The most important part about this, for the purposes of the present chapter, however, is not whether Gibson could be said to support such a meta-narrative for history, but that historical thinking enters his text.

The other kind of historical thinking which Gibson entertains in *All Tomorrow's Parties*, is a much more localised, social history, form of historical thinking. Raised through the character Fontaine, this form of historical knowledge is content to relate the individual stories of ordinary lives – which, of course, is a powerful form of historical narrative. Fontaine does this through the collection of historical artefacts. For example:

> *Fontaine was crazy about old things, and sometimes, he'd bring different pieces over, show them to Skinner.*

[34] William Gibson, *All Tomorrow's Parties*, Berkley, New York, 2003 (first published 1999), pp. 198-199.

> *Sometimes she'd thought he'd done that to get the old man started, and then Skinner's own stories would come out. He hadn't been much for stories, Skinner, but turning some battered treasure of Fontaine's in his hands, he'd talk, and Fontaine would sit and listen, and nod sometimes, as though Skinner's stories confirmed some long-held suspicion.*
>
> *Made privy to Skinner's past, Fontaine would then handle the objects himself with a new excitement, asking questions…*
>
> …
>
> *Everything, to Fontaine, had a story. Each object, each fragment comprising the built world. A chorus of voices, the past alive in everything, the sea upon which the present rose and tossed.*[35]

The difference between the mute, decontextualised historical artefacts of *Neuromancer* and Fontaine's understanding of historical artefacts as the bearers of context, as the containers for the stories that make up history, could not be more pronounced. However, Fontaine's way of looking at history also differs strongly from Laney's. Once again, the difference between the Gibson of *All Tomorrow's Parties* and the Gibson of *Neuromancer* is obvious. In *Neuromancer*, historicity is a dead thing, represented in the novel by other dead things, with the exception of Julius Deane, who is established as a kind of anachronism, stretched out beyond his time by medical treatments. By the time of *All Tomorrow's Parties*, however, Gibson has changed enough that not only does historicity play a central role in his text, but he also uses the pages of his novel to stage a debate between two differing historical theories. Neil Easterbrook's analysis of Laney's position on historicity (and through

[35] William Gibson, *All Tomorrow's Parties*, pp. 190-191.

the character of Laney, Gibson's position) is that, understanding 'history as a shape, *a figure of all narratives*, may be the historicist position *par excellence*, yet here too Gibson's scene demonstrates a profound ambivalence, for Laney thinks that he is surpassing the "old history" that he has been taught, though this "old history" similarly resembles a historicist understanding of history.'[36] That there is significant ambivalence in this scene is debatable. Easterbrook is correct in arguing that Laney thinks he is surpassing one historicist understanding of history, when he is simply replacing it with another, essentially, identical understanding. Does this not, then, simply establish historicist understandings of history as the unsurpassable end of a discipline? It could easily be argued that, in order to have any real understanding of history at all, from the history of ordinary lives to the most abstract political and diplomatic histories, the common thread must be the ability to place these events, large and small, into a broader historical context. In other words (and through Laney, Gibson certainly seems to be in agreement with this) to have any understanding of history as history, rather than as a non-causational series of temporally disparate events, our understanding must be historicist.

Some of the critical literature about Gibson's work has picked up on this change in tone from the Sprawl trilogy to the Bridge sequence. In particular, James H. Thrall has observed the importance given to

[36] Neil Easterbrook, 'Alternate Presents: The Ambivalent Historicism of *Pattern Recognition*', *Science Fiction Studies*, 33:3, 2006, pp. 483-504, pp. 494-495. Note that Easterbrook's usage of the term historicist and the associated concept of historicity are a little different to the way in which they are used by Jameson and in this chapter.

historical artefacts in the Bridge trilogy. As Thrall puts it: 'What has history and some heft, it would seem, is always worth something, especially when made into something new.'[37] Later in the same paragraph, Thrall observes that 'The master of cyberspace, it would seem, wants to suggest that his readers, too, should "like the sound of" such an interplay between change and the concrete, with some emphasis on the concrete.'[38] Thrall observes that Gibson creates an apparent dynamic tension between the high-speed perpetual present in which his characters exist and the historicity in which the Bridge and its community are encased. Thrall states that, through the figure of the Bridge, 'Gibson seems to create yet another tension…, describing and lamenting the loss of history, acknowledging the plastic nature of all memory while simultaneously suggesting how the importance of history – even invented history – as the defining metaphors for a community might be preserved.'[39] It could be argued that the passage in which Fontaine and Skinner interact (quoted above) implies that Gibson believes history to be a little more 'solid' than a series of mutual myths. For Fontaine, at least, it is in the intersection of solid object (artefact) and story (narrative) that history is realised. It is the contention of this thesis that this is ultimately the kind of history-telling (or history-making) that is privileged in the Bridge sequence.

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[37] James H. Thrall, 'Love, Loss and Utopian Community on William Gibson's Bridge', *Foundation*, 91:3, 2004, pp. 97-115, p. 104.
[38] James H. Thrall, 'Love, Loss and Utopian Community on William Gibson's Bridge', p. 104.
[39] James H. Thrall, 'Love, Loss and Utopian Community on William Gibson's Bridge', pp. 105-106.

A further interesting aspect of the progress of Gibson's work (which continues into his most recent novels, which only the bravest critic would term cyberpunk) is his gradual progression towards a present day setting. This seems, at first glance, to be innocuous enough. As Neil Easterbrook reveals, in an interview on Gibson's website, regarding his then newly released novel *Pattern Recognition*, when Gibson is asked 'Why did you decide to set this novel in the present, unlike your previous novels?' he responds: 'I've been threatening to do it for a while. The last three books felt more to me like "alternate presents" than imaginary futures. Science fiction is always, really, about the period it is written in, though most people don't seem to understand that.'[40] One has to wonder whether Jameson's comments about a 'futurological' cyberpunk turning into a form of 'realism' have been prophetic. In other words, we must wonder whether Gibson's increasing tendency towards present-set writing is indicative of a temporal blockage – precisely that deficit of historicity which Jameson described.[41] The answer to this question depends on perspective, one suspects. It is interesting to note that Gibson's cyberpunk novels seem to become more involved with history as they increasingly approach present setting. This would seem to indicate that, as Gibson increasingly writes the present, he becomes more

[40] Neil Easterbrook, 'Alternate Presents', p. 485.

[41] Veronica Hollinger has, in her usual perceptive manner, also observed this, stating that 'Gibson's move from near-future sf in novels from *Neuromancer* to *All Tomorrow's Parties* to the present-tense "sf realism" of *Pattern Recognition* seems inevitable – at least in the hindsight of pattern recognition. The novel freezes in the face of the sheer impossibility of extrapolation, the sheer opacity of the future.' Veronica Hollinger, 'Stories about the Future: From Patterns of Expectation to Pattern Recognition', *Science Fiction Studies*, 33:3, 2006, pp. 452-472, pp. 462-463.

aware of its historical context. This seems to contradict Jameson's musings about the descent of science fiction into realism.

Historicity (or the lack thereof) also plays a part in the work of other cyberpunk writers. Pat Cadigan, for example, despite differing form the bulk of (male) cyberpunk writers in the connectedness of her characters, in her refusal to glorify lone, ultra-masculine heroes, tends to follow the pattern of other early cyberpunk when it comes to the sense of history in her works. The past is either fundamentally uninteresting, or frankly inaccessible, for characters in her novels. They exist in the kind of eternal present in which Case and Molly find themselves in *Neuromancer*; whether or not they wish to have some understanding of the past, or to think historically, doesn't matter. The ability to frame the present in a historical way (historicity) is simply unavailable.

Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, on the other hand, is a novel which is continually historically aware. Indeed, its very plot is dependent, above all, on an understanding of the Sumerian myth of Enki and Asherah. While the events of *Snow Crash* appear to take place in the recognisable post-government, corporation dominated societies which are also the setting for Gibson's cyberpunk world, the difference in Stephenson's case is that this does not seem to necessitate them also being post-historical. Despite starting out as a high-tech character resembling Case in *Neuromancer*, Hiro Protagonist in *Snow Crash* must evolve in a different direction. His computer skills are, of course,

required, but he is also asked to evolve a sense of history, an understanding that the present is a continuation of a chain of events and ideas that began in the past and continues into the future. Most notably, this involves his development of the understanding that the snow crash drug/virus/meme is actually a way of reversing the linguistic development of mankind first caused (mythologically speaking) by Enki. In this way the past (in the form of Sumerian myth) is brought back into the present and its relevance restated. This, it could be said, is the heart of historicity.

This is not the only way in which historicity permeates Stephenson's novel, however. The personal histories of some of his characters (and indeed their families) intertwine in a way which makes the reader acutely aware that the present is always a moment which was shaped by moments past; even if our ability to sense such a thing fails, it is, in fact, always true. In particular, the story of Hiro's father and that of Raven's father (the fathers, respectively, of the main male heroic protagonist and a significant antagonist) intertwine with the stories of their sons. The stories told by the two men of their fathers serve to remind the reader of the links between the past and the present. Raven's story, of his own life and his father's life before him, is used in the plot of the novel to explain his almost maniacal desire to inflict destruction on the United States of America (even though it can barely be said to exist anymore). As Raven puts it late in the novel, 'My father got nuked twice

by you bastards.'[42] Hiro's personal history, as the son of a black Army sergeant major and a Korean, is described as the cause of Hiro's 'general disorientation.'[43] Of course, the life stories of Hiro and Raven's fathers intersect as well – they participated in the same prisoner of war escape in the Second World War (Raven's father deliberately – Hiro's father caught up in events). The importance that Stephenson's narrative places on these stories is markedly different to the characterisation of, for example, Case and Molly in Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Their family pasts are murky – an unknown, for the text places no value on such things.

These reminders of the flow between the past and the present also exist in the writing of Bruce Sterling. Sterling is often celebrated in the critical literature about cyberpunk as the most postmodern of cyberpunk authors. For example, in a pioneering review piece, Istvan Csisery-Ronay states that 'Two of Ross' concrete models of cyberpunk are Gibson's fiction and the role-playing game *Cyberpunk*. The first is a natural choice, even though I believe by now it is apparent there is more postmodern c-p [cyberpunk] to be found in Sterling and SF film than in Gibson, who more and more seems to me to be, as an artist, a "late modernist."'[44] This thesis has contended that there is reason to question this assessment of Sterling's work, and an examination of the role of historicity in his stories only serves to further reinforce such questions. In particular, Sterling's novel *Schismatrix*, hailed as his most posthumanist text, seems to be, when the

[42] Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*, Bantam, 2008 (reissue), first published 1992, p. 448.
[43] Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*, p. 61.
[44] Istvan Csisery-Ronay, Jr., 'Review: Postmodern Technoculture, or the Gordian Knot Revisited', *Science Fiction Studies*, 19:3, 1992, pp. 403-411, p. 408.

role of historicity is examined, perhaps one of the *least* postmodern and posthumanist texts of the whole cyberpunk movement. If the absence of a sense of history is one of the defining marks of the postmodern (as per Jameson's theory) then *Schismatrix* is a long way from being postmodern. For one thing, the novel displays both internal and external understandings of history. By this it is meant that the novel is able to see events both within the logic of its own train of events *and* it is able to place them within the history of the human race as a whole. Despite occasionally viewing the past as dead (and the humans and posthumans of its worlds as better off for that) *Schismatrix* never displays the inability to manifest historical thinking that one might expect of a postmodern book.

On the other hand, there is a certain ambivalence in the attitude to history displayed in *Schismatrix*. Despite its clear sense of its own history, of the century-spanning nature of the plot, Sterling, in *Schismatrix*, at times displays what can only be described as a dismissive or even disgusted attitude towards understandings gained from knowledge of the past. Early in the novel, for example, in a discussion between Lindsay and Ryumin, Ryumin states of languages that:

> *"I speak four[languages] myself," Ryumin said. "But then, I don't clutter my mind with their written forms."*
> *"You don't read at all?"*
> *"My machines can do that for me."*
> *"Then you're blind to mankind's whole cultural heritage."*
> *Ryumin looked surprised. "Strange talk for a Shaper. You're an antiquarian, eh? Want to break the interdict with Earth, study the so-called humanities, that sort of thing?"*[45]

[45] Bruce Sterling, 'Schismatrix', in Bruce Sterling, *Schismatrix Plus*, Berkeley, New York, 1996, pp. 1-236, p. 20.

What is of interest here is Ryumin's casual dismissal of Lindsay's interest in the past of the human people as an 'antiquarian' obsession. This section seems to display a "proper" postmodern disaffection for historicity; however, the fact that Sterling locates the strange desire for historical understanding in the (relatively) sympathetic and heroic character of Lindsay serves to complicate the issue. Further muddying the waters, Lindsay sometimes considers his personal history to be an inescapable horror, as the following passage illustrates:

> *The attenuated blossoms of the Shaper garden mildewed and crumbled at the touch of raw humanity. The vegetation took strange forms as it suffered and contorted, its stems corkscrewing in rot-dusted perversions of growth. Lindsay visited it daily, and his very presence hastened the corruption. The place smelled of the Zaibatsu, and his lungs ached with its nostalgic stench.*
>
> *He had brought it with him. No matter how fast he moved, he dragged behind him a fatal slipstream of the past.*[46]

However a sense of historicity in which the past is a horror is still one in which that past is both understood and given a sense of importance.

One of the reasons for the postmodern inability to place the present in the chain of historical events is the corollary inability to imagine progress, or even significant change. Thus when Darko Suvin says of Gibson, 'His work does not accept the values of the black, closed world he evokes with such skill: he hates the status quo. But his balancing act accepts the status quo a bit too readily as inevitable and

[46] Bruce Sterling, 'Schismatrix', p. 103.

unchanging,'[47] what he is talking about is, in part, the lack of historical thinking. It is impossible to think historically, to understand the historicity of a moment in time, without the understanding that it must be in some way different from other moments in time. In the attempt to overthrow the progress narratives of the Enlightenment, it is the contention of this thesis that postmodernism throws the baby that is historicity out with the bathwater of the idea of progress. Returning from this digression to *Schismatrix*, it is apparent that Sterling does not do this. Indeed, in *Schismatrix* the Enlightenment narrative of technological advance being equated to progress itself is reasserted. This in and of itself necessitates the novel's historical thinking; for one cannot imagine progress without thinking historically. As *Schismatrix* moves towards its conclusion, Lindsay and some companions pay a clandestine visit to Earth (long since a forbidden zone to those who live in the Outer Solar System). In an extended section of text, Lindsay muses on the fate of the humans left on Earth:

> *"Stability," he said. "The Terrans wanted stability, that's why they set up the Interdict. They didn't want technology to break them into pieces, as it's done to us. They blamed technology for the disasters. The war plagues, the carbon dioxide that melted the ice caps…. They can't forget their dead."*
> *"Surely the whole world isn't like this," Vera said.*
> *"It has to be. Anywhere there is variety there is the risk of change. Change that can't be tolerated."*
>
> (And later)
>
> *But life moved in clades. Lindsay knew it as a fact. A successful species always burst into a joyous wave of*

[47] Darko Suvin, 'On Gibson and Cyberpunk SF', in Larry McCaffery (ed.) *Storming the Reality Studio*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991, pp. 249-365, p. 357.

> *daughter species, of hopeful monsters that rendered their ancestors obsolete. Denying change meant denying life.*
> *By this token he knew that humanity on Earth had become a relict.*[48]

It is clear that Lindsay considers those humans remaining on Earth to be a failed branch of the tree of (post)humanity. Whilst one can doubt the excessively rationalist association of technological change and progress which *Schismatrix* seems to affirm, it is easy enough to see that with no change, there can be no progress. Change is something which can only be seen through the lens of historical thinking – and *Schismatrix* abounds with precisely this kind of thought.

It is with both thinking historically and the idea of progress in mind that we come to the next of the theorists this chapter wishes to relate to cyberpunk: Francis Fukuyama, whose famous 'End of History' thesis changed historical discussion and philosophy of history dramatically beginning in the 1980s and continuing through the 1990s. Fukuyama's is perhaps the most millenarian of the theories being used in this chapter; the idea that history has come to an end, even if that end is a predominantly positive one, cannot avoid such overtones. Fukuyama argues in both his original article and the book *The End of History and the Last Man* that, with the conclusion of the ideological conflict between Soviet socialism and Western democracy and capitalism, and the collapse of the Soviet Union, liberal democracy and capitalism have been left without any serious, globally viable competitors as an

[48] Bruce Sterling, 'Schismatrix', pp. 222-226.

economic/political system.[49] The triumph of capital is a theme which also runs throughout generic cyberpunk, though the worlds of cyberpunk novels are hardly the moderately successful ones which Fukuyama imagines for the future after the end of history. What is really of interest, however, is the inability of cyberpunk writers to see beyond capitalism to any other future economic system.[50] They certainly hold this cognitive impasse in common with Fukuyama.

What marks a difference between Fukuyama and a broad swathe of cyberpunk is the fate of liberal democracy. Fukuyama holds that liberal democracy is the political system of the capitalist world; that, in other words, liberal democracy and capitalism not only can coexist but to some extend predetermine each other. Cyberpunk literature, on the other hand, abounds with the presence of capital, but very rarely mentions the topic of governance, and, when it does, it is usually in the past tense. Nation-state governments, in cyberpunk fictions, are usually a thing of the past, done away with by the forces of capital. This thesis contends that, ultimately, the cyberpunk view is more realistic than Fukuyama's; in a world where there is no systemic resistance to the dominance of capital, eventually even governments will fall before it.

This seems particularly to be the view of William Gibson. His two cyberpunk trilogies (the so-called 'Sprawl' and 'Bridge' sequences)

[49] See, for example, Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', p. 12.
[50] Richard K. Morgan's Takeshi Kovacs novels may be an exception, but Morgan is a relatively recent addition to the cyberpunk spectrum – one might even be tempted to term him 'post-cyberpunk' were the term not so thoroughly ugly.

feature worlds in which corporate greed rules. Governments largely seem to have collapsed or fragmented (the USA in the Bridge sequence seems the most obvious example of this). Nothing, in these novels, is allowed to stand in the path of capitalism and technological advance. It is apparent that, in the context of the deregulation politics of the 1980s (Reagan and Thatcher in the USA and the UK, respectively, whilst here in Australia the Hawke Labor government pursued similar deregulatory schemes) capital-rule penetrated into the cyberpunk imaginary. Regulation is bad for business, the theory went – and in cyberpunk, this seems to have been extended to its logical extreme: regulators are bad for business. It could be argued, and it seems Gibson takes this tack, that the only way to have a truly free market is to get rid of all the institutions which might stand in the way of the market – including institutions of governance. Whether one accepts that this is a good thing or not is not necessarily the point. The point made by Perry Anderson about Fukuyama's thesis is of use here as well; it need not be a utopia, or even a pleasant place, to offer a realistic view of an 'end of history' future. Gibson's world has in common with Fukuyama that it sees no economic alternative to capitalism; the difference is that where Fukuyama sees capitalism and liberal democracy as mutually compatible and even supportive, Gibson's vision proclaims them to be, ultimately, enemies, and even predicts a victor. The same is true of the world of Stephenson's *Snow Crash*. Most global governments are referred to in the past tense, with the possible exception of China. The USA seems to have collapsed and fragmented under the weight of its own hubris – in fact, the Government of the

United States of America has been reduced to the 'largest, and yet the least efficient, producer of computer software in the world.'[51] Set (physically, at least) almost entirely within the bounds of what is presently the USA, *Snow Crash* portrays a world where the only effective form of governance is provided by corporations. Policing seems to be a largely privatised matter; the internal policing of the 'burbclaves' (suburban enclaves, usually owned and controlled by one of the corporations) seems to be entirely so. There is no effective form of democracy.

If Gibson and Stephenson give us a world after the end of history (the cyberpunk end, rather than the Fukuyaman one) then Cadigan differs in that she presents us with a world in the process of political collapse. The same forces seem to be at work in Cadigan's novels as in Gibson's or Stephenson's. The rampant corporate greed in *Synners*, for example, and the unethical behaviour of the corporations portrayed in the novel, mirror the behaviour of corporate players in Gibson's novels. However, in Cadigan's novels it is obvious the state still exists, to a degree which it clearly does not in Gibson or Stephenson's work. In *Synners*, Gina is at one point remanded to appear before a court – and no matter how overworked that court appears to be, this is clear evidence of the kind of state-based, centralised justice system which is clearly absent from *Neuromancer* or *Snow Crash*. Even more obviously, the protagonist from *Tea from an Empty Cup* and *Dervish is Digital* is a policewoman – and a

[51] Neal Stephenson, *Snow Crash*, p. 437.

state police officer, rather than a rent-a-cop, or private security guard. Despite the clear presence of nation-states and their apparati in her texts, Cadigan (with the possible exception of *Synners*) seems to hold out little more hope than Gibson for the future of the nation state – her governments are continually outmanoeuvred by their corporate opposition and seem to survive by luck as much as anything else. It is on this basis that Pat Cadigan's worlds can be described as worlds on the slide towards the cyberpunk end of history, rather than, as in Gibson's Sprawl Trilogy or Stephenson's *Snow Crash,* books about events taking place after the final end of history.

In Bruce Sterling, cyberpunk has an author who pushes out the other side of the end of history. In *Schismatrix*, one feels that the author had the idea that history was over – but didn't really want that to be the case. In order to re-start history, therefore, Sterling takes the huge step of removing his *dramatis personae* to outer space. This is relatively odd in a cyberpunk text, most of which are resolutely confined to earth-orbit activities. This has a couple of advantages for Sterling in re-starting the engine of history. It enables him the re-write Enlightenment narratives of colonisation, expansion and heroism in the *tabula rasa* of the outer Solar System. It also allows him (with the narrative trick of an interdict between Earth and Space) to cut off the moribund body of Earth history. The combination of these two effects – the removal of the dead heart of human history and the opening up of a new space in which history can be written – enables Sterling to overcome posthistory, and to begin the

historical process over again, in a new sphere. In keeping with the theme of resurrection of older science fiction ideas in Sterling's work, the idea of a moribund Earth, and a vibrant external galactic/solar/colonial culture is far from new in the History of science fiction. Novels of this type can be traced back a considerable way in science fiction.[52] The representation of the colonial renewal process in space is to some degree an apologetic for the excesses of white colonialism; it also can be seen as a representation of post-colonial hatred for the stale regimes and culture of Europe. *Schismatrix* continues in the vein of many of these novels, insisting that to progress (white?) humanity must transcend its boundaries, physical and technological, and conquer new territories.

History is, of course a narrative (although whether that means it is subject to the same kinds of analysis as fictional narrative is another debate) and it is with narratives that the last theorist whose work will be used in this chapter concerned himself. Jean-François Lyotard wrote *The Postmodern Condition* shortly before cyberpunk began to emerge as a genre of science fiction. In *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard posits the theory that all the explanatory and legitimatory grand narratives of the Enlightenment either have broken down or are breaking down. Enlightenment ideas such as truth/knowledge (epistemology), tolerance/justice (law) and especially Marxism, with their pretence

[52] See, for analysis of examples of this literature, Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint, *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction*, Routledge, Abingdon, 2011, pp. 71-73. Roger Luckhurst observes that interplanetary travel represents 'the vehicle of transcendent possibility' in the work of Arthur C. Clarke. The corollary of this is that the Earth itself comes to represent stagnation – precisely the situation in Sterling's *Schismatrix*. See Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2005, pp. 134-135.

towards total explication, have failed, and in postmodernism have been discarded. Particularly of interest to this chapter is the role which capital plays in Lyotard's theories. For Lyotard, the collapse of the Enlightenment narratives of legitimation of science (the pursuit of knowledge for its own ends) enables the corruption of science in the pursuit of capital accumulation (the pursuit of technology to further monetary profit). Andreas Michel associates Lyotard's views on technoscience with the narrative of disenchantment stemming from Horkheimer and Adorno. As Michel puts it:

> *In unison with Horkheimer/Adorno's view of the purely instrumental character of science and technology in modernity, Lyotard claims that, with the onset of technoscience, science's former preoccupation with truth has turned into cohabitation with and therefore justification of power – which is at the same time its only legitimation. At fault is the criterion, or language game, of efficiency whose sole purpose consists in output maximisation. Disconnected from pursuits of truth and justice (ends), the goal of output maximisation is a cynical one because technoscience, as an end in itself, now services nothing but the needs of its own apparatus. Thus, Western society has replaced the loss of legitimation with practices of false, de facto legitimation in the guise of technological progress.*[53]

Lyotard is particularly concerned, argues Michel, with the rationalisation of the knowledge process. By this he means that Lyotard feels that knowledge is increasingly not valued as an end in itself – it instead has been twisted to serve the purposes of instrumental rationality.[54]

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[53] Andreas Michel, 'Differentiation vs. Disenchantment', p. 357.

[54] See Andreas Michel, 'Differentiation vs. Disenchantment', pp. 358-359, for Michel's argument and supplementary quotes from Lyotard. For an argument against the Lyotardian position, and in favour of continuing the processes of modernity and rationalisation, see Harry F. Dahms, 'Democracy and the Post-Enlightenment: Lyotard

In general terms, cyberpunk fiction seems in accord with Lyotard on this front. There would be nothing so incongruous as the classic picture of the lab-coated boffin pursuing his/her arcane knowledge, inserted into the fast-paced, high-tech cut and thrust of most novels in the cyberpunk genre. In cyberpunk, on the contrary, technology is pursued both as an end in itself and, frequently, as a pathway to the accumulation of capital. The idea of 'pure' research in a cyberpunk setting is, frankly, laughable. The black clinics of Chiba City are the archetype for research in the cyberpunk world. They conduct unethical (and incredibly expensive) experimentation on their subjects in the hope of striking the motherlode – the next big medical patent. Similarly, in Pat Cadigan's *Synners*, ethical concerns about the new technology being developed throughout the novel are usually swept away by the massive potential for profit the new implants entail. This is the model of science in cyberpunk – research always conducted towards commercialisation, towards profit. In this way, cyberpunk fictions seem to concur with Lyotard's assessment of the failure of Enlightenment legitimation stories for science (the grand narrative of the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself).

However, this thesis contends that Lyotard, in *The Postmodern Condition* and later works, greatly underestimates the role of capital as a legitimation narrative, and indeed as the last grand narrative of the

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and Habermas Reappraised', *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 5:3, 1992, pp. 473-509.

Enlightenment left untouched by postmodernism. Profit, as we can see in economics lecture theatres everywhere, is a legitimation narrative all on its own. In cyberpunk it is capital, through the guise of growth and/or profit, which has stepped in to fill the blanks left in scientific research by the failure of previous legitimation narratives. The results of this are dire. In our contemporary world, there are many who make the claim that the market can and will solve all ills – who attribute the same miraculous power to the invisible hand that Adam Smith did centuries ago. As far as cyberpunk is concerned, the evidence is against this. In cyberpunk novels, the authors frequently imagine a future in which all regulatory environments have failed: either the regulators have disappeared, or they are simply too slow to keep pace with the changes engendered by technology. Without the restraint provided by regulation (which, whether the grand narrative of justice is dead or not can continue to function) capital is free to pursue its own ends. These ends, as imagined in cyberpunk novels, have nothing to do with truth, justice, or fairness. Epistemology and ethics are closed books, and quite possibly buried books, in the arch-capitalist worlds portrayed in cyberpunk fictions. In their place is an exploitative environment where profit is the only motivating factor in people's lives. The imagined worlds of cyberpunk are certainly exciting – but one imagines that they would be quite poor places to live. The overarching role played by capital in their societies is one of the reasons for this. If Lyotard is correct in stating that the meta-narratives of the Enlightenment have failed (and this thesis questions that he is) then he surely underestimates the impact of capital rushing in to

fill the gap. In cyberpunk fictions, we see Lyotard's vacuum of legitimation filled by a tide of capitalist greed – and the worlds presented are bleak, indeed. Still, there are significant ways in which Lyotard's discussion of the death of grand narratives bears upon cyberpunk fictions.

All three theorists discussed in this chapter share a certain sense of ending, a millenarianism which they have in common with cyberpunk fictions. This is deferred in the work of Jameson – whereas Fukuyama and Lyotard argue that certain things have actually come to an end (History and meta-narratives respectively), Jameson merely argues that our ability to think in a certain manner has become blocked. Nonetheless, all three accounts have significant resonances in cyberpunk fictions. Cyberpunk, when placed in its historical context, acts very much like an intellectual and cultural barometer. Like its historiographical counterparts, cyberpunk is obsessed with a sense of ending without apocalypse, a sort of drawn-out barrenness at the end of historical time. This intellectual tendency, so readily identifiable, allows for the historical contextualisation of cyberpunk. Its inverted millenarianism, and indeed its ahistoricity, allow us, at last, to historicise cyberpunk. It remains, as do all fictions, a product of its times.

Conclusion.

Throughout its length, this thesis has borne witness to the depth and diversity of cyberpunk criticism. The critical literature which forms the basis of this intellectual history is neither monolithic nor unitary; instead it speaks with many voices, from many different perspectives. This is to be expected, given the multiplicitous backgrounds and interests of the many critics writing about cyberpunk. Despite this diversity, however, certain key intellectual threads may be identified in the overall progress of cyberpunk criticism, and this thesis has identified and examined those threads. It has related them back to broader movements in philosophy and intellectual culture, and in doing so explained why cyberpunk criticism is the way it is. No critical 'school' (for want of a better term) is created *ex nihilo*; cyberpunk criticism, as an intellectual trend, is no different to any other in this respect. This dissertation has contended that cyberpunk criticism has emerged primarily from a postmodern and posthumanist intellectual milieu, and that at times a blind adherence to the philosophical project of posthumanism, or the cultural legacy of postmodernism, has led to critical inaccuracies and infelicities.

The first substantive chapter of this dissertation, '"Posthumanism With a Vengeance": Cyberpunk and Posthumanist Literary Criticism', examined the links between posthumanist philosophy and cyberpunk criticism. It is quickly recognisable that cyberpunk burst onto the literary field at a time in which post- and anti-humanist sentiment was particularly strong in the Western academic sphere. It was also apparent, at the time, that cyberpunk was different to much

preceding science fiction. Certainly, it contained much less of the imperial certainty of Golden Age science fiction. It also lacked the utopian instincts of the pastoral science fictions of the '70s. Here, proclaimed posthumanist critics, was the dirty new science fiction for the dirty new age of posthumanism. Gone, the unitary self, the untainted body, and the unchallenged empire of reason. Welcome in the new sense of fractured being, body modification, and the assault on instrumental rationality. '"Posthumanism With A Vengeance"' as a chapter delved into the critical literature which identified cyberpunk with posthumanism, and quickly found that, despite surface similarities, cyberpunk is nowhere near as posthumanist as many critics would have liked. Instead, this chapter concluded that, despite a surface affiliation with posthumanism, the philosophical roots of cyberpunk fictions lie in the humanist tradition; even in models of humanism which many contemporary humanists find questionable.

The next chapter, '"But It Ain't No Way Human": Cyberpunk and Theories of the Posthuman' examined an idea which is frequently very closely linked to posthumanism – the posthuman. It found that the posthuman, while potentially a very useful interpretive category, was confused as an idea. Following the enlightening work of N. Katherine Hayles this dissertation insisted that a division be drawn in ideas of the posthuman, between the 'cybernetic' posthuman and its more 'philosophical' counterpart. Having noted that this division *ought* to be drawn, it quickly became apparent that in cyberpunk criticism it largely had not been. As a result, evidence of the cybernetic posthuman (which abounds in cyberpunk fictions) was largely being taken, in the critical literature, as evidence of support by the genre of the philosophical

posthuman. Again drawing upon Hayles' work as a critical resource, this thesis suggested that not only was this not necessarily the case, but that the presence of the cybernetic posthuman might also *preclude* the presence of the philosophical posthuman (which has strong links to posthumanist philosophy) and may instead entail a model of self which even many humanists find troubling. This chapter concluded that, despite the great critical potential entailed within theories of the posthuman, and their relationship to cyberpunk, the failure to adequately elaborate precisely what the posthuman actually is often makes the resulting critiques suspect.

Chapter Four, 'Cyberpunk Spatiality: The "Other" Spaces of Cyberpunk', examined two kinds of space in cyberpunk which are discussed in some depth in the critical literature: cyberspace, the critical *novum* of cyberpunk; and the idea of interstitial spaces, which William Gibson in particular holds close to his heart. Despite the significant volume of discussion of cyberspace as a construct, this chapter concluded that almost all of the analysis which has been done on cyberpunk's fictional cyberspaces is seriously flawed. It has often been concluded that the presence of cyberspace in cyberpunk fictions indicates that they maintain a dualist model of the self; with respect, this is demonstrably untrue. Whilst cyberspace, in the manner in which it is usually put in cyberpunk, may be indicative of a version of materialism which many would find unattractive, it at no point seriously raises the idea that mind is contained in or composed of a substance which is fundamentally different to that which composes everything else. Similarly, those who hail cyberpunk's cyberspaces as the confirmation of Jean Baudrillard's theories of the hyper-real have a tendency

to leave massive questions unanswered in their quest to support the master's work. This chapter made the case that, in Baudrillard's work as well as those who deploy his ideas on their criticisms, fundamental mistakes have been made, not least the deployment of the idea that the virtual (cyberspatial) environment is in some way 'unreal'. If the alternative case is put, that cyberspace be treated as a real virtuality, rather than a fake, 'unreal', reality, then Baudrillardian interpretations of cyberspace founder. This chapter argued that this is precisely the interpretation of cyberpunk's cyberspaces which we should consider; and that we ought to be very dubious about Baudrillardian apocalypticism. In a similar vein, this chapter examined the intellectual history of interstitial spaces. Despite the tendency of both cyberpunk fiction and criticism to valorise the interstitial, this chapter found significant reasons to doubt that the interstitial can play the role that both authors and critics desire of it.

It was the contention of the next chapter, 'Men, Women and Machines: Cyberpunk and Feminist Criticism', that feminist discussions of cyberpunk proved to be the most fruitful terrain of cyberpunk criticism. This was not mere happenstance; it was due to the fact that feminist critics displayed less of a tendency to uncritically accept both cyberpunk self-promotion and the enthusiasm of other academics, and instead manifested more of a tendency to engage in debates regarding the status of cyberpunk. One thing which feminist critics did, and do, much better than critics of any other persuasion is continually examine and interrogate the role of the body in cyberpunk fictions. Whether it is through the lens of Donna Haraway's cyborg theory, or via a more general notion of embodiment, feminist critiques of cyberpunk literature often powerfully

reminded the critical community of the danger of disembodying rhetorics. It was the contention of this chapter that, primarily through the analysis of the body politics of cyberpunk, feminist critics made contributions to cyberpunk critique without which an enlightening critical discussion would have foundered, or perhaps not even have begun, given the import of some early feminist critical contributions.

In the final, and most historically minded, chapter this thesis examined themes of history, historicity and cyberpunk fiction and criticism. In particular, 'A Future Without a Past: History, Historicity and Cyberpunk' examined three historical theories in relation to cyberpunk: firstly, Fredric Jameson's proposition that postmodern culture suffers from a deficit of historicity, an inability to place events in historical time; secondly, Francis Fukuyama's famous 'End of History' thesis; and finally Jean-François Lyotard's ideas regarding the death of Enlightenment grand narratives under postmodernism. Whilst the direct impact of any of these ideas on cyberpunk criticism (or cyberpunk fictions) is questionable, raising them was never intended to propose such direct links. They were instead raised as models of academic thought contemporaneous to the production of much cyberpunk fiction and criticism. The examination of the critical literature in the light of these theories was thus intended to elucidate a certain intellectual milieu. This chapter identified that milieu as a certain millenarianism, a sense of ending, which is present in the historical theories, cyberpunk fictions and cyberpunk criticism. It proposed that it is precisely these

qualities which allow us to locate cyberpunk and its critical discussions in historical time and historiographical context.

Overall, then, this dissertation has been conceptualised as a meta-critique. Its intention was to examine the intellectual history of cyberpunk criticism, to locate and examine key ideas, to place cyberpunk criticism historically, and to illuminate critical successes and failures. In the process of doing so it has, perforce, been called upon to examine some of the key intellectual threads of the last twenty-five years. The rise of postmodernism and posthumanism as cultural and philosophical movements has, in significant part, been contemporaneous with the rise of cyberpunk as a genre, and subsequently with cyberpunk criticism. The interrogation of posthumanism has therefore been a constant theme throughout this thesis; it could even be said that it was *the* constant theme. This thesis has often found cause to celebrate the success of cyberpunk critique. It has found that novel and significant interpretive contributions have been made by many academics, and that the vibrant community of discourse about cyberpunk has generated a depth of critical opinion which is both fascinating and, often, praiseworthy. However, it has also found that cyberpunk criticism is a discourse which has become bound within certain intellectual traditions - those of postmodernism and posthumanism, respectively. It has concluded that, due to these limits in the disciplinary discourse, cyberpunk criticism frequently displays an intellectual myopia concerning alternative methods of interpretation. An unwillingness on the part of the majority of critics to engage in any real way with the intellectual resources provided by the Enlightenment (be it humanism, Marxism, or modernist critical

paradigms) has caused cyberpunk discourse to miss key opportunities to broaden our understanding of the genre literature. This thesis has not only sought to observe these lacunae in the critical literature, but where possible it has also attempted to begin the process of filling these interpretive voids. Cyberpunk is too important to be left solely to critics of the posthumanist persuasion, however valuable their critical insights have proven.

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