

**Augmented intimacies: posthuman love stories in contemporary science fiction**

**Amy Jane Christmas**

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## Abstract

Science fiction in the developed world has for centuries provided a fertile space for explorations of human and cultural phenomena, on the one hand underpinning philosophical conceptions of humans and human nature, and on the other acting as a fictive mirror in which the aspects and impacts of our technoscientific cultures are reflected. Between nature and culture stands the figure of the posthuman, whose ancestry can be traced as far back as the Talmudic golems, but whose presence is most keenly felt in the genre since the mid-twentieth century, where the science has caught up with the fiction. Resurfacing in post-industrial, secular society, alongside technologies newly able to render it into being, the posthuman reminds us of our position in relation to evolutionary laws, inviting speculation upon its future, and thus, by default, upon our own. In 2002, Francis Fukuyama used two seminal works of science fiction – Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) – to trace ‘a tale of two dystopias’, or how two fields of technoscience are currently pushing us into a posthuman stage of history.<sup>1</sup> Biotechnology and communications are, as Donna Haraway has put it, ‘the crucial tools recrafting our bodies’ – moreover, they provide the discursive spaces within which we now so consciously write and rewrite our presents, pasts and futures.<sup>2</sup> This thesis follows the dovetailing trajectories of Fukuyama’s ‘two futures’ hypothesis by presenting, in two sections, a range of posthuman figures in contemporary science fiction novels, short stories, comics and films. Beginning with Philip K. Dick’s genre-defining *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and ending just over four decades later with Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman’s milestone Internet documentary *Catfish* (2010), the four textual analysis chapters delineate an evolution of the posthuman in fiction (and reality) from cyborg to cyberpunk, showing how the ground is quickly closed up between the human and the posthuman. Much excellent scholarship, following Haraway’s ground-breaking “Manifesto for Cyborgs” (1985), has been produced on the cyborgian/posthuman figure in science fiction and practice alike; the posthuman as the ultimate Other for our technoscientific world. This thesis takes a new approach in refocusing upon the posthuman in love, responding to the growing insistency in science fiction texts to foreground romantic relationships between posthumans, between humans and posthumans, and between humans enframed by the technoscientific. The close readings of these eleven primary sources are underpinned by four chapters devoted to constructing a philosophical framework which marries the cyborg theory of Haraway and the virtual posthumanism of N. Katherine Hayles with the history of the philosophy of love in the continental tradition, specifically the

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Profile Books 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” (revised chapter version) in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books 1991).

late-twentieth and early twenty-first-century writings of Alain Badiou. Working from Badiou's central tenets of love – *difference*, *disjunction*, and *the encounter* – and analysing the move to posthuman selfhood alongside the seemingly anachronistic pursuit of love in late modernity, this thesis seeks to explore and explain the presence and meaning of love in high-tech society. If the posthuman is an emergent figure portending the end of history, as many postmodern thinkers have argued, then how can we understand its relationship to the love paradigm, which turns on the perpetuation of a conception of metanarrative that, in current modes of criticism, has fallen out of fashion?

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## Introduction

I do know that for the sympathy of one living being, I would make peace with all. I have love in me the likes of which you can scarcely imagine.

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Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

The work so often cited as the first science fiction novel is not only a story about science – it is also a story about love.<sup>1</sup> In 1818, Mary Shelley set the tone for all subsequent treatment of the liberal humanist subject in the genre, and it is Victor Frankenstein's tragic monster who initiates the double-helical interplay of two of the grand narrative arcs – science fiction and romance – in our modern literary tradition. Theodore Roszak writes that 'at the centre of her classic tale [...] Mary Shelley placed a love story, a tragic love story of a marriage – a union, as she always called it – that failed to take place'.<sup>2</sup> Though the novel performs a Gothic inversion of the traditional love story – like Shakespeare through a scanner, darkly – it nonetheless issues from the height of the Romantic period, and in using love to curtail Victor and his creature, Shelley reframes both the monster and the mad scientist as driven and demented by their pursuit of love. Writing about the potency of nesting narratives so characteristic of this period, Beth Newman remarks that the novel's *mise en abyme* encourages us to 'attend [...] to the relations between the stories in the centre and those in the frame', continuing:

frame narratives suggest about storytelling [...] that a story can be cut off from its origin in a particular speaker and tell itself in other speakers, who to some extent are shaped by it instead of shaping it. Such a conception of the narrative act contradicts one of the central tenets of most approaches to narrative theory, the idea that no story exists apart from a shaping human intelligence, and that every story bears the mark of this shaping intelligence.<sup>3</sup>

In *Frankenstein*, not only are narratives held within narratives, but also texts within texts. The concentric frames are further focused through the creature's account of his time spent in exile, and his attempts at self-education and socialisation. Here, the significance of narrative is recursively pointed to, by Shelley through the mouthpiece of her creature, as he relates to Victor

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<sup>1</sup> Among others (Richard Kadrey, Larry McCaffery), Brian Aldiss calls *Frankenstein* 'the first great myth of the industrial age' in *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction* (New York: Doubleday, 1973), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Roszak, 'Frankenstein, Feminism, and the Fate of the Earth: Virtual Reality and Nature', *The Trumpeter: Journal of Ecosophy*, 14.3 (1997) <<http://trumpeter.athabascau.ca/index.php/trumpet/article/view/203/274>> [accessed 23 July 2013] (para. 2 of 5)

<sup>3</sup> Beth Newman, 'Narratives of Seduction and the Seductions of Narrative: The Frame Structure of *Frankenstein*', *ELH*, 53.1 (1986), 141-163 (pp. 141-142).



an episode in which he came across a collection of abandoned texts. With these, the creature taught himself to read, and he explains to Victor how substantially they altered his emotional and cognitive being:

I can hardly describe to you the effect of these books. They produced in me an infinity of new images and feelings, that sometimes raised me to ecstasy, but more frequently sunk me into the lowest dejection. In the *Sorrows of Werther*, besides the interest of its simple and affecting story, so many opinions are canvassed and so many lights thrown upon what had hitherto been to me obscure subjects that I found in it a never-ending source of speculation and astonishment [...] As I read, however, I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition.<sup>4</sup>

Shelley's choice of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) as a conditioning influence on her monster is telling. Goethe's novel is a staple text of high Romanticism, as catalytic for the *Sturm und Drang* movement in Germany as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) would prove to be for post-Revolutionary France, and the Byronic archetypes of narrative poetry for English literature up to the late Romantic novels of the Brontës (1847) and beyond. These core texts marked the greatest paradigmatic shift in the history of romantic writing and its encompassing philosophy since William Shakespeare, in whose sonnets and dramatic works (though issuing from the preceding era of courtly love) can be read early indicators of the impending Romantic puritanism that took hold of the continent so strongly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Romance in contemporary cultural production has, to an extent, fallen out of fashion. No longer so dynamically linked to the heroic narratives of emerging modernism, and problematizing an existential individualism, love stories in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries tend now to be treated superficially with light or absurd humour (exemplified by countless films and television series produced each year in the romantic comedy genre), relegated to the realm of women's escapist fantasy, with the romance distended beyond recognition (Harlequin and Mills and Boon) or else subsumed beneath more overtly erotic themes (melodramatic 'chick lit' and 'airport novels'). In *The Transformation of Intimacy*, sociologist Anthony Giddens charts the twin development of modern subjectivity and the romantic narrative, from the rise of the novel in the Western tradition through to the twentieth century. He observes that, by the late Victorian period, the idealised love so fundamental to the Romantics had become incompatible with a post-industrial (and predominantly masculine) individualist conception of self. Love stories, by the Victorian era, were thus firmly consigned to the domain of women's literature:

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The modern Prometheus* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2005), pp. 152-153.

Avid consumption of romantic novels and stories was in one sense a testimony to passivity. The individual sought in fantasy what was denied in the ordinary world. The unreality of romantic stories from this angle was an expression of weakness, an inability to come to terms with frustrated self-identity in actual social life.<sup>5</sup>

This feminisation of romantic literature may have in some part contributed to our cultural disdain regarding love stories (and perhaps love in general) today. Yet, we continue to produce and consume these stories, however jaded by or suspicious of them we profess to have become.

Helen Fisher, who has spent over thirty years analysing how the intersecting of anthropology and biochemistry sheds light on loving phenomena in human societies worldwide, addresses this continuation of love as an underlying and directive social force by defining it as ‘a universal experience – deeply embedded in the human brain’.<sup>6</sup> In a talk for the Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) conferences in 2008, in light of her experimental research in this area, Fisher summarised:

Around the world people love. They sing for love, they dance for love, they compose poems and stories about love. They tell myths and legends about love. They pine for love. They live for love. They kill for love, and they die for love [...] Anthropologists have found evidence of romantic love in 170 societies. They’ve never found a society that did not have it.<sup>7</sup>

Love is embedded, both biologically and culturally, and in its universality it communicates an engrained sense of metanarrative – one steered and perpetuated by the incessant production of individual myths coalescing as one mythology. In situating her creature within the concentric frames of scientific, loving, and modernising social discourses, as a monster made from stories and led by stories, Mary Shelley created a prescient figure – a modern Prometheus – to trouble the underlying structures of our human traditions. Giddens writes that modernity ‘is essentially a post-traditional order’, characterised at its core by a reflexivity undetected in pre-modern societies.<sup>8</sup> In the industrial and increasingly secularising West that gave rise to the Romantic period, it was initially expected that scientific reason would come to replace the traditional metanarratives handed down by religious and cultural customs. However, as Giddens identifies, modernity’s reflexivity ‘turn[ed] out to confound the expectations of Enlightenment thought –

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (California: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Fisher, ‘What is Love?’, *On Air: BBC International Magazine*, 98 (2004), 12-15 <<http://www.helenfisher.com/downloads/articles/08bbconair.pdf>> [accessed 23 July 2013] (p. 13)

<sup>7</sup> Helen Fisher, ‘The Brain in Love’, TED (2008) <[http://www.ted.com/talks/helen\\_fisher\\_studies\\_the\\_brain\\_in\\_love.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/helen_fisher_studies_the_brain_in_love.html)> [accessed 20/07/13]

<sup>8</sup> Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p. 20. Giddens’s ‘high/late modernity’ equates our postmodern or contemporary period in literary criticism. Outside direct quotations from his scholarship, the latter terms will be substituted.

although it is the very product of that thought'.<sup>9</sup> He continues:

The original progenitors of modern science and philosophy believed themselves to be preparing the way for securely founded knowledge of the social and natural worlds [...] But the reflexivity of modernity actually undermines the certainty of knowledge, even in the core domains of natural science. Science depends, not on the inductive accumulation of proofs, but on the methodological principle of doubt.<sup>10</sup>

Underpinned by rapid progress in science and technology, which in turn radically transformed society at the institutional level, our contemporary period is a time seemingly devoid of mythology. Due to new, co-constitutive relationships between individuals and society – brought on in large part by globalisation and the shifting, uncertain trajectories of self – the stories we once told ourselves were universal have come unstuck, no longer relevant to localised experience. If, as Alain Badiou has claimed, there are four dimensions to our humanity – science, politics, art and love – then in postmodernity we can see a gulf widening between the first three of these ‘conditions’ and the fourth.<sup>11</sup> Once at the behest of metanarrative surety, technoscientific and political cultures are now unerringly reflexive, permanently open to revision and constantly in flux. As expressively tied to cultural change, the arts evolve as quickly, following Ezra Pound’s insistent command to ‘make it new’.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, love has made achingly slow progress: as much can be inferred by the fact that the earliest known romantic writings still resonate with today’s consciousness (such as the Sumerian bridal poetry of c. 8 BC), while modes of government, scientific theorems, and the cutting edges of technology can quickly seem archaic and outdated. Moreover, observing trends in the history of the philosophy of love since Plato reveals no more than four paradigmatic shifts over a two thousand year period – from a love spiritually enframed, to one enacted in the courtly domain, to its idealistic Romantic democratisation, to what Giddens has termed the ‘confluent love’ of the present era.<sup>13</sup> I will return to confluent love and its place and function within contemporary culture presently, but first it is essential to address the sociohistorical context of this study, namely the fields of discourses and practices lending themselves to the visions and revisions of our narratives of self and society. Giddens, among countless other scholars, maintains that technoscience powers postmodernity and thus shapes our social and subjective selves, but warns that ‘science and technology are double-edged, creating new parameters of risk and danger as well as offering beneficent possibilities for humankind’.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, technoscientific discourses simultaneously augment and diminish, write and rewrite, our contemporary

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<sup>9</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Ezra Pound, *Make It New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1934).

<sup>13</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 27-28.

narratives of existence. I now want to take two specific fields of technoscientific production which, in both real-world practices and science-fictional representation, are most significantly rerouting our trajectories of self.

### **Our posthuman future(s)**

A thesis that seeks to investigate the science fiction genre is spoilt with endless choice as to where to begin, and how far back into literary history to extend its line of enquiry. Various scholars have identified the genre's roots taking hold in antiquity, pointing to the writings of Antonius Diogenes (c. AD 2; *Of The Wonderful Things Beyond Thule*), Lucian of Samosata (c. AD 125 – 180; *True History*), and also, in an important move towards linking science fiction with philosophical discourses, Plato's political utopia *The Republic* (c. 380 BC). As scholarship around the subject has grown up, histories have been traced that uncover examples of science-fictional writing in almost every civilisation that has existed, to greater or lesser degrees, retroactively opening up the defining categories of the genre and expanding them to include and mirror further aspects of our social, industrial and technological development.<sup>15</sup> This study, however, concerns itself with the genre from the 1960s onwards, largely due to Francis Fukuyama's 'two futures' hypothesis, the implications of which are rooted in both the science and the science fiction of that decade. Imperative to the context of the thesis are the two main movements of late twentieth-century science fiction: the New Wave and cyberpunk, and the subgenres each produced. In the 1960s, the style of science fiction began to change, as well as its place in critical opinion. Helen Merrick sees the editorial shift at *New Worlds* – 'the British magazine at the heart of the New Wave' – as catalytic to these changes, writing that:

[Michael] Moorcock created a distinctively British space for writers [...] publishing stories which would become synonymous with the New Wave: radical in style and content, often explicit in terms of language and sexual references, and more concerned with 'inner' than outer space.<sup>16</sup>

The influence of the British market on the worldwide scene was 'consolidated and intensified by the impact of the New Wave and the "mainstream" avant garde' and, for the first time, 'feminist and ecological movements'.<sup>17</sup> Merrick continues:

the 1960s certainly saw an increasing number of women writers emerge to both critical and popular acclaim [...] Feminist writers in particular reconceptualised the newly contested sf megatext as a space for alternative ways of thinking about gender, sexuality, and, less often, race [...] Sf seemed to gain a new

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<sup>15</sup> Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 21-63.

<sup>16</sup> Helen Merrick, 'Fiction, 1964-1979', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. by Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint (Oxon: Routledge 2009), pp. 101-103.

<sup>17</sup> Merrick, p. 110.

respectability or at least visibility [...] This was the era of the first sf bestsellers.<sup>18</sup>

If science fiction had, by the 1960s, ‘infiltrated the academy’, then it is in no small part due to the efforts of literary theorist Darko Suvin to bring the genre to the attention of mainstream scholars.<sup>19</sup> By 1979, Suvin had confirmed that ‘the importance of science fiction in our time is on the increase’, bringing the genre into the academic fold by redefining it as ‘the literature of cognitive estrangement’.<sup>20</sup> In later years further clarifications of the genre have been made, but Suvin’s employment of ‘the kindred thesaurus concepts of science for cognition, and fiction for estrangement’ remains at once specific enough to carve out science fiction’s place within wider literature whilst also yielding enough definitional flexibility to write both backwards to the Hellenistic-cum-Roman period and forwards to admit emerging and genre-bending literatures shaped by our current and incipient scientific practices.<sup>21</sup> H. Bruce Franklin takes inspiration from Suvin when he claims that science fiction continues to be:

the major non-realistic mode of imaginative creation of our epoch. Why? Because science and technology are continually changing the conditions of our existence. And because science – not magic or myth or religion – is the principal way modern culture locates us imaginatively in time and space.<sup>22</sup>

This echoes Suvin’s statement that science fiction texts work from a basic premise, presenting either ‘imaginary locality or localised daydream’, and anticipating, some twenty years in advance, the intersection of two future scenarios within both literary and social theory.<sup>23</sup>

American political scientist Francis Fukuyama observed the dovetailing course of cultural consciousness in twentieth-century visions of the future, famously identifying two key areas of concern in our modern technological engagement that continue to frame textual representation of a postulated ‘posthuman stage of history’, writing:

For any person growing up in the middle decades of the twentieth century, the future and its terrifying possibilities were defined by two books, George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (first published in 1949) and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (published in 1932) [...] The two books were far more prescient than anyone realised at the time, because they were centred on two different technologies that would in fact emerge and shape the world over the next two generations.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Merrick, pp. 103-106.

<sup>19</sup> Merrick, p. 103.

<sup>20</sup> Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> Suvin, p. 13.

<sup>22</sup> H. Bruce Franklin, ‘What is Science Fiction - and How it Grew’, in *Reading Science Fiction*, ed. by James E. Gunn, Marleen S. Barr, and Matthew Candelaria (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 25.

<sup>23</sup> Suvin, pp. 5-6.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2002), pp. 3-7.

Twenty years on, Fukuyama's statement is still startlingly relevant, and continues to gain weight as we become increasingly inoculated to and implicated within these two technoscientific disciplines – biotechnology and communications. Just as these two then-emergent fields persist in shaping our world and our position within it, so the two novels have shaped subsequent science fiction, and to an extent our social understanding of and responses to the ramifications of the technologies they portray. The thematic influences of the two works on the genre have in part contributed to offshoot subgenres in later years; the totalitarian information state of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been reprised in such texts as Alan Moore's comics series *V for Vendetta* (1982-1989), which exchanges the backdrop of the Cold War for a none too far-fetched nanny state issuing from the political unrest of the UK in the 1980s. The concept has also been redressed to reflect the changing technologies it draws inspiration from, as with the cyberpunk classic *The Matrix* (1999), wherein the machines have risen and use our virtual technologies to enslave humankind. Parallel to this evolution of the Orwellian dystopia runs the biopunk movement: Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009) is the indirect inheritor of Huxleyan concerns in its depiction of a twenty-third-century Thailand subsisting on the malignant oligarchic control of genetic engineering that determines everything from reliable food sources to claims to civil rights. *Brave New World's* rendition of a resultant caste system stemming from genetic modification and eugenics has been powerfully redeployed in such films as *Blade Runner* (1982), *Anna to the Infinite Power* (1983) and *Gattaca* (1997).

The post-New Wave emphasis on 'inner' and not outer space prompts us to turn our attention to the reconfiguration of the human in the late twentieth century. The body has been the first casualty of technoscientific discourse, and, as later chapters will elucidate, this deconstruction of humanity has been mirrored throughout various strands of postmodernist theory. In titling this thesis *augmented intimacies*, I explicitly invoke the language of the technological, from which many metaphors for thinking and speaking the human condition in contemporary culture have been lifted. My title borrows from the computing technologies that use digital interventions to create a dichotomy between augmented reality – a computer-mediated overlay of a visual field in which digital information is added to enhance what is already present – and its counterpart, what has come to be referred to in these same circles as diminished reality. In the two futures scenario, which has been narrativised in cyborg and cyberpunk writings, two conflicting images of the posthuman body arise and the augment/diminish dyad becomes newly potent. The first is the augmented body, the prosthetically enhanced or cyborgian figure in whom can be read a contemporary performance of Plutarch's ship of Theseus paradox. Many science fiction narratives have made use of this paradox to probe the question of how far we can remain human when our bodies are constantly subjected to biotechnological interventions and improvements. The cyborg thus becomes much

more than a sketch of flesh knitted with machinery, but evolves as a powerful metaphor through which we can gauge the relationship between our organic ‘essence’ and the scientific knowledges we employ to demystify ourselves. The second image is the diminished or escaped body, the *corps obsolète*, which has been resurrected from post-Cartesian prioritisations of the mind over matter and given new lease of life in cyberpunk fictions, performance art (such as the controversial works of Stelarc and Orlan), and continues to overstep artistic boundaries to infect our thinking and conduct in the age of information. Reconfigured by scientific discourses, social practices, and critical theories which converge around and reinterpret the Cartesian split – the relationship and question of the mind/body divide – the body has been shown to be fully deconstructed in present culture. The question remains, then, as to what impact this material deconstruction has had on our conceptions of an immaterial self? Augmented or diminished, do our bodily breakdowns communicate a similar breakdown of self, subjectivity and identity? And what further problems might this pose for our intersubjective relationships?

Fukuyama’s two futures hypothesis depends on the parallelism of biotechnology and communications; these fields give rise in literary representation to cyborg fiction (the prosthetically enhanced descendants of Huxley’s brave new peoples), and cyberpunk fiction (the ‘jacked in’ inheritors of the Orwellian information state, the ‘reality pilots’ navigating present- and future-day cyber stories).<sup>25</sup> To reiterate Suvin, the thematic spaces opened up by these new narratives respect his theory of estrangement: fiction grounded in biotechnology offers us a ‘localised daydream’ when it realises current scientific hope; while cyberpunk depicts the immediately recognisable ‘imaginary locations’ that we have come to call ‘virtual environments’ and ‘cyberspace’ in our everyday lives. Both of these subgenres engage more directly but at the same time much less fantastically with feasible posthuman scenarios than other, perhaps more classic examples of the genre – such as the purely extrapolative narratives of hard, high-tech science fiction, where the focus is turned away from sociocultural values in favour of the industrial themes and vernacular that have long dominated the genre by hardlining the ‘science’ in ‘science fiction’.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Timothy Leary, ‘The Cyberpunk: The Individual as Reality Pilot’, in *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Science Fiction*, ed. by Larry McCaffrey (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 245.

<sup>26</sup> Adam Roberts notes in his *History of Science Fiction* that the Golden Age of hard science fiction (roughly 1940-1960) has been problematically synonymised with the whole of the genre, which ‘valorises a particular sort of writing [...] linear narratives [...] idea-fictions rooted in recognisable science [...] can-do stories about heroes solving problems or overcoming enemies, expansionist humano-centric (and often phallo-centric) narratives, extrapolations of possible technologies and their social and human impacts’ (p. 195). While humans were the central actors in Golden Age science fiction, it was the science and the technology and more importantly human mastery over them that characterised the narratives of this period. Roberts maintains that ‘the period of the 1940s and 1950s, although it contains many masterpieces of SF, is less interesting than the 1960s-1970s’, by which time a conserved effort to move the genre from its pulp roots to a position of ‘literariness’ constituted a shift in both its critical and popular reception (p. 196). While Roberts observes that hard science fiction never truly went away, he holds that ‘the major

Within post-New Wave cyborg and cyberpunk writing, many authors indeed remain well-versed and up-to-date with the technologies framing their fiction, yet differ from many of the pulp stories that have characterised hard and gadget science fiction in two main ways. Firstly, they are for the most part firmly grounded in either the here-and-now or in the not-too-distant future, shedding light on the technologies of today as tools we use and recognise. As they narrativize biotechnology and communications technologies, cyborg and cyberpunk texts communicate a world with which we are already embroiled, foreshortening the uses and purposes of our current technologies in a future we may well grow up into. In this sense, no matter how speculative the cyborg or cyberpunk text may seem at first glance, even the most futuristic of them is rooted in recognisable technological knowledge and artefacts and simply projects the potential for their usage. Secondly, as well as demonstrating fluent and probing engagement with their subject matter, post-New Wave fictions create a space for social commentary that is often glossed over in hard science fiction; where the ‘human’ dimension has often been criticised as glaringly lacking in substance, these less mainstream subgenres are making up ground and borrowing tropes and values from the socially conscious ‘soft’ science fiction tradition to flesh out their technologically framed narratives. In this sense, as well as pushing the boundaries of the genre and developing it both in terms of its thematic scope and its literary validity, cyborg and cyberpunk texts also acknowledge a rich history of speculative writing to which they are heavily indebted and without which they could not have existed. In the dovetailing trajectories of the cyborg and the cyberpunk, who bear witness to new forms of storytelling and world-building, our two posthuman futures are evocatively figured.

### **Cyborgs, cyberpunks, and ‘Other’ lovers**

The term ‘posthuman’, often credited to cultural theorist Ihab Hassan (“Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?”, 1977) but appearing earlier in science fiction (Robert Silverberg’s *Son of Man*, 1971), has proven to be a slippery figure, inspiring as much confusion in its surrounding critical discourses as it has produced rich conceptual value. Though its roots have been traced as far back as the Talmudic golems, its presence is most keenly felt in the mid- to late twentieth century, and around the posthuman today converge such disparate fields as postmodernism, extropianism, and various (anti-, trans-, and post-) humanist movements. Various employed as a reminder of the evolutionary passage to which we may sometimes forget we are bound, or to discern the human among a range of other, nonhuman entities clamouring for attention in science fiction and scientific practices alike, the posthuman posits a unique perspective which, Janus-like, surveys the past even as it reaches into the future.

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fictional achievements of 1960s SF are much less concerned with the props and protocols of Golden Age Hard SF’, moving instead into a culturally conscious, often existential and avant-garde form of literary expression (p. 232).



In his landmark 1998 book *Consilience*, biologist Edward O. Wilson envisages our next stage of history as ‘the full volitional period of evolution’, continuing:

*Homo sapiens*, the first truly free species, is about to decommission natural selection, the force that made us [...] Evolution, including genetic progress in human nature and human capacity, will be from now on increasingly the domain of science and technology tempered by ethics and political choice. We have reached this point down a long road of travail and self-deception. Soon we must look deep within ourselves and decide what we wish to become.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the portentous tone of Wilson’s declaration, and the spectre of the posthuman haunting his subtext, such a statement essentially points back to this critically unique stage that we are currently living through. The posthuman, as either concept or construct, offers us a new method of critiquing the human condition. Coupled with the dissolution of grand narratives and the substitution of reflexive, revisionary technoscientific discourses in their place, the posthuman takes on a new role as a deconstructive tool for contemporary culture. As Mark C. Taylor maintains of the deconstructive method, ‘every structure [...] that organizes our experience is constituted and maintained through acts of exclusion’, and yet, what is excluded ‘does not disappear but always returns to unsettle every construction, no matter how secure it seems’.<sup>28</sup> Neil Badmington argues that the posthuman reconceptualises the human, echoing Jean-François Lyotard’s view of postmodernity as ‘not a new age, but the rewriting of some of the features of modernity’.<sup>29</sup> Working from Jacques Derrida’s ‘every transgressive gesture re-encloses us’, Badmington claims that within a posthumanist framework, ‘every such gesture will have been unconsciously choreographed by humanism’, re-enclosing humanism ‘with a view to the deconstruction of anthropocentric thought’.<sup>30</sup> The posthuman, then, can best be understood as a critical tool or technique, lifted from science-fictional iconography, and increasingly embodied in real-world social practices. Science fiction writers and filmmakers have had an instrumental hand in the conception of these posthumans, in supplementing the narratives of technoscience even as they have drawn from them.

For the purpose of this thesis, the posthuman will be employed as an umbrella term encapsulating a variety of figures from the android to the catfish, and used interchangeably with all. In recent cyborg and cyberpunk writing, the protagonists are fractured by postmodernity, embodying all kinds of dualisms and even pluralisms. The more society is globalised and

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<sup>27</sup> Edward O. Wilson, *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), pp. 301-303.

<sup>28</sup> Mark C. Taylor, ‘What Derrida Really Meant’, *New York Times*, 14 October 2004 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/14/opinion/14taylor.html?pagewanted=print&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/14/opinion/14taylor.html?pagewanted=print&_r=0)> [accessed 22/07/13] (para. 4 of 14)

<sup>29</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Rewriting Modernity’ in *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions* (London: Athlone, 1981), p. 12; Neil Badmington ‘Theorizing Posthumanism’, *Cultural Critique*, 53 (2003), 10-27 (pp. 15-16).

technologically democratised – and scientific progress and communicative means are the underlying forces propelling these changes – the more faceted these characters become. Indeed, in late twentieth-century science fiction, Fukuyama’s dialectic is prefigured by the fictive. Bruce Sterling’s 1985 novel *Schismatrix* enjoins the two futures in his conflicting posthuman races of the Shapers (biotech, cyborg) and the Mechanists (communications, cyberpunk) – in a prefatory story he warns that ‘in another thousand years we’ll be machines, or gods’.<sup>31</sup> Veronica Hollinger describes Sterling’s novel as ‘one of the earliest sf scenarios consciously to construct its characters as ‘posthuman’ and to explore some of the implications of the term’.<sup>32</sup> At base, posthumans are polarised within themselves: the cyborg embodies the cybernetic and the organic; the cyberpunk, high-tech and low-life. Assessing such binary interplay throughout the history of science fiction, we might ask whether representations of technoscientific environments and their ramifications (macro-level) or the character studies of technoscientifically fluent protagonists (micro-level) are bound up with contextualising external influences in play in the societies that produced them, or whether the mood of these texts reflects the opinions of those who created them, or the audiences they created them for. Are we technophiles or technophobes? We no longer flinch at the thought of sentient machines; in fact, our thought experiments have matured to incorporate intimate machines. Our science fiction sociology postulates sexbots and Stepford Wives, emotionally responsive robots and common-law cyborgs. It is fair to assume that, philic or phobic, we are most definitely techno-curious.

The eleven primary texts chosen for this research project were selected for their diverse representations of the posthuman, but equally for the potency of the love relationships in which they are figured. From androids, cyborgs and clones to virtual personae and avatars, these classically othered figures have in recent decades come under intense scrutiny from artists, academics, and the world media alike. They represent our technological prowess, our rapid evolution, and our increasingly ethical nature – but can they stand (in) for anything human? Each author and filmmaker inscribes a different message onto the posthuman body; is it possible to read these meanings as variable tropes within an encompassing frame? Through further layers of more firmly historically-bound theoretical engagement, which strive to keep the thesis culturally relevant and justifiable as arts-based research, the textual readings of these artefacts assess the various incarnations of the posthuman against contemporary figures in the literary tradition, against real-world counterparts and circumstance, and then finally, alongside one another. To further pronounce the interplay I see as crucial to the efficacy of my research, and in keeping with my aim to present a reflexive, sociologically embedded dialogue between the arts and sciences, I would like to pay my dues to an article written by Charlotte Ross on the

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<sup>31</sup> Bruce Sterling, ‘Swarm’, in *Crystal Express* (London: Legend Books, 1991), p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> Veronica Hollinger, ‘Posthumanism and Cyborg Theory’, in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, p. 269.

prevalence of cyborgs in Italian fiction. Ross makes a brief but insightful differentiation between the modern phenomenon of cybersex and what she has termed, for the purpose of her own thesis, 'cyborg sex':

The reference to 'cyborg sex' [...] is meant to indicate both sexed bodies and sex with cyborgs. Unlike 'cyber sex' that involves the wilful shrugging off of gender, sex, and sexual orientation since the vast majority of individuals who enter the virtual dimension of MUDs – Multi-User Domains – do so under an assumed identity [...] representations of 'cyborg sex' often strive to reinforce more normative human practices.<sup>33</sup>

Ross's article conveys a measure of disdain regarding the normativity of cyborg sex as represented in fiction, while seeing the potential for greater freedom and subversion in virtual sexualities. From Fritz Lang's Maria in *Metropolis* (1927) through to the female androids in *Blade Runner* and beyond, there has been a clear feminist concern over the cyborgian figuration of the female as contributing to an ongoing objectification of women which simultaneously reinforces gender norms and perpetuates masculine hegemonies that have reigned in science fictions and technoscientific discourses alike, especially where these cyborgian women have been portrayed as highly sexualised beings. However, this thesis demonstrates an alliance with the view that in our present culture, sex and love can be read and understood as separate phenomena, sometimes co-existent but not always co-dependent, and as having always, but particularly now, played very different roles in the constitution of self. It follows such sociological and philosophical theories that demarcate love and sex, the latter 'at last fully autonomous', largely due to the impact of modern technologies on our 'natural' evolutionary state.<sup>34</sup> Rather than echoing the wealth of existing theory of the sexual construction of the subject, I have chosen to look instead at the other, much less analysed phenomenon of love, in the hope that the theories that have granted sexuality autonomy from love work the other way to grant love that same freedom. The independence of love and sex has been present in philosophy since the writings of Plato, and heavily contested throughout his wake. In the highly controversial writings of both Jacques Lacan and Alain Badiou in the mid-twentieth century, we find that 'it is love which makes the truth of which sex is capable, and not the inverse'.<sup>35</sup> In this thesis the distinction made by Ross will be appropriated to discuss not sex but love, responding to the growing insistence in contemporary science fiction on foregrounding romantic relationships among humans and posthumans. As such, the two halves of this study reflect and are gratefully indebted to Ross's definitions, but find very different meanings in what she has

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<sup>33</sup> Charlotte Ross, 'Creating the Ideal Posthuman Body? Cyborg Sex and Gender in the Work of Buzzati, Vacca, and Ammaniti', *Italica*, 82.2 (2005), 222-247 (p. 223).

<sup>34</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 27.

<sup>35</sup> Alain Badiou, 'The Scene of Two' *Lacanian Ink*, 21 (2003), 42-55 (p. 43).

disparagingly seen as ‘normative’ in terms of the cyborgian self, and ‘radical’ in terms of the virtual self.

Part One – ‘Cyborg Love’ – considers interspecies relationships between human and posthuman, tracing the biotechnological prong of Fukuyama’s two futures hypothesis, classically figured in science fiction by the Hollywood cyborg but evolving to include androids, organic robots and clones. This section is underpinned throughout by the scholarship of Donna J. Haraway, who remains cyborg theory’s subject heavyweight, and draws much from her trope of the cyborgian figure’s ‘weaving’ of narratives, identities, and standpoints. Part Two – ‘Cyber Love’ – focuses on relationships between humans given agency by or communicated through technological channels. whereby the environments in which these relationships are conducted serve to refigure the human as the prototypical posthuman of our next stage of history. This section charts the emergence of the post-cyberpunk communications field, which has produced the largest contributor to our symbiotic existence: the Internet. N. Katherine Hayles, whose theoretical work informs these chapters, argues that we have become posthuman most fully – and most subliminally, almost without noticing – not through our prostheses and medicines, but through our virtuality, our acceptance of cyberspace and all its science fiction into acceptable science fact. From Rachael Rosen in Philip K. Dick’s genre-defining *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) to Angela Wesselman in Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman’s decidedly non-science-fictional documentary *Catfish* (2010), the thesis traces the evolution of the posthuman figure as it slowly emerges from the recesses of the genre, before overstepping its fictional boundaries to walk alongside us, all but unrecognisable. Through this gradual reduction of the space between our selves and these ‘Other’ lovers, I want to readdress the notion of the Other itself, a concept I have found to be hugely troubling for the love paradigm.

Science fiction has long weathered accusations levelled against it, particularly with regard to its adherence to stereotypes, and its tendency to concentrate on plot at the expense of constructing substantial characters. So many science fiction novels and films include a romantic subplot or token love interest, but often these attempts fall flat, as painfully transparent attempts to flesh out otherwise bland, unconvincing characters. However, as this thesis will clearly convey, there are a wealth of authors, screenwriters and directors who are committed to getting underneath the skin of science-fictional lovers – human and posthuman alike – and who have gone to great lengths to foreground the seemingly anachronistic presence of love within high technoscientific cultures. I believe that the ever-increasing richness of science fiction narratives and the recurring presence of the lovers therein are evidence of postmodernity’s contributions to a persistent romantic mythology – that our new love stories will be posthuman.

### **Love: the last metanarrative?**

In 1678, François de la Rochefoucauld wrote that ‘there are some who never would have loved if they never had heard it spoken of’, anticipating the rise of romance narratives in subsequent centuries and their pervasive impact on the cultural consciousness.<sup>36</sup> At essence, Rochefoucauld’s statement perfectly encapsulates a conception of love as steered through social practices by a powerful and regulating metanarrative. Similar sentiments have been reiterated by Western philosophers throughout the centuries, such as those of Plato in his *Symposium* (c. 385-380 BC), wherein love is eulogised through the various speakers’ celebration of Ancient Greek myth and legend. Plato’s division of love into Pandemic Aphrodite (human or earthly love) and Uranian Aphrodite (spiritual love), serves to underpin his Theory of Forms, communicating a love which is individually experienced but also always a movement toward the universal divine. This early distinction passes into the Aristotelian system and is refigured there as *eros* and *agapē*, a dualism which goes on to most significantly inform Catholic doctrine – the tension between human carnal nature and the piety of religious devotion – from as early as the writings of St Augustine of Hippo (his *Confessions*, c. AD 397) through to Christianity worldwide in the present day. Thus, from the personification of the deity Eros in antiquity to the persistence of the covenant of marriage today, love has been channelled and rerouted throughout cultural tradition by grandiose, overarching metanarratives supplemented by an irrepressible flow of minor writings anchoring love to a history of individual experiences and social contexts.

Returning to the Romantics, in whom a keen resistance against religious doctrine begins to be observed, we see a key shift in the narratives of love and the narratives of self which results in their becoming inextricably bound, for better or for worse. In the first instance, the period sees the final push of the democratisation of romance. As Irving Singer writes of the period:

Democracy as we know it is a product of the late eighteenth century and, above all, the French and American revolutions. Thus it overlaps with Romanticism. The ideal of modern democracy is that each person has a right to pursue his or her own happiness in his or her own way, even selfishly and in self-oriented activities that mean most to that person alone [...] In the nineteenth century, and under the influence of the French Revolution, whose ideas of equality, fraternity, and liberty encouraged people to love whomever they wished without parental interference, [romantic love] came into being.<sup>37</sup>

The democratisation of romance is the greatest paradigmatic shift in the history of love, opening up the field to admit all of humanity, and irrevocably altering the course of marriage, family, and sexuality. Though they have been variously accused of perpetuating idealised myths about

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<sup>36</sup> François, Duc de la Rochefoucauld, *Reflections, or, Sentences and Moral Maxims*, Project Gutenberg <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/9105/9105-h/9105-h.htm>> [accessed 23 July 2013] (para. 136 of 504)

<sup>37</sup> Irving Singer, *Philosophy of Love: A Partial Summing-Up* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2009), pp. 36-81.

love and relationships – berated by the likes of Søren Kierkegaard and Arthur Schopenhauer – it is to the British and continental Romantics to whom we owe such a deep-rooted sense of meaning in romantic love today. A second consequence stemming from this period is the emergence of the self, which Giddens links directly to the proliferation of romantic narratives:

Romantic love introduced the idea of a narrative into an individual's life [...] The telling of a story is one of the meanings of 'romance', but this story now became individualised, inserting self and other into a personal narrative which had no particular reference to wider social processes. The rise of romantic love more or less coincided with the emergence of the novel: the connection was one of newly discovered narrative form.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, a thesis wishing to explore love in contemporary culture finds the subject inextricably bound to the trajectory of the self, and accordingly it finds both of these areas hopelessly enmeshed with narrative. It has not escaped notice that the self emerging from Romanticism alongside new methods of writing and new ways of loving emerges as the underlying structures of metanarrative begin to crumble. As Giddens assures us, postmodernity is precisely characterised by its constantly shifting narratives and, as we shall presently see, selfhood is no less mutable. So how, then, after centuries of subsisting through metanarrative, and after arguably producing the self and its particular narrative mode in the Romantic period, can love continue to inform our contemporary world? These issues were at the forefront of philosophical discussion in the early decades of the twentieth century. The dualisms in love metamorphosed through the ages from the two Aphrodites to the human versus the divine, to the post-Cartesian split of body and mind or soul. Finally, in the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and his peers, the dualism came to rest in the resurrected phenomenological dilemma of the subject/object, or self/Other relationship. The notion of the Other remains fashionable, and arguably useful to critical thinking today, but I believe that applying it to the romantic relationship essentially impeded the concurrent development of self, love and narrative that the Romantics originally instigated. I would argue that, when coupled with such negative feminisation of romantic texts and the consequent rise of obliging pulp fictions, the Other troubles the love paradigm beyond use for contemporary explorations of the human condition. It is of little help that philosophers today are unwilling to treat the subject seriously (though in actuality scant few have dealt with it thoroughly in the past), but in the 1970s Alain Badiou brought love back under philosophical scrutiny, and it is his system which provides the main theoretical framework of this study.

In the preface to the English edition of Alain Badiou's 1988 work *Being and Event*, translator and scholar Oliver Feltham succinctly identifies the key factor marking out the Badiouian system from (potentially all of) its predecessors in the field. He writes that 'for millennia, philosophy has attempted to ground itself on One Eternal Necessity such as the prime

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<sup>38</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 40.

mover, or the dialectic of history. Here [in Badiou's thought] it consciously chooses to ground itself on the shifting sands of emergent truths'.<sup>39</sup> These two innocuous remarks acknowledge the entirety of the Western philosophical tradition, while also consolidating Badiou's position within it. Looking back over centuries of writing, in all areas of epistemology we find time and again the need for universality, for the One or the Truth or the Ultimate Idea. This need – and it is a need which pervades secular as well as theological philosophies – has consistently undercut the efforts of the philosophers, whose grand and totalising systems have been easily refuted or utterly torn apart by modern critics. In late twentieth-century thought, postmodernists pronouncing the end of history or the dissolution of metanarratives have for the most part overcome the hurdle posed by universality. While such approaches reflect the essence of a reflexive postmodern era in which technoscience rewrites everything from politics to art, in love – which has precisely subsisted on a universal sense of metanarrative – this approach is ontologically lacking. Badiou elevates love to the highest function, alongside three additional 'conditions' – art, science, and politics – which in their ability to generate truths allow us to learn about humanity. In its scope and relative longevity, remaining unchanged since its initial deployment in his earliest works, the Badiouian conception of love finds a point of accord which acknowledges both its rich cultural history and its contemporary place in a fragmented, reflexive contemporary society. He explains his system as one 'not centred on ontology – which exists as a separate and exact discipline – rather, it circulates between this ontology [...] the modern theories of the subject and its own history':

The contemporary complex of the conditions of philosophy includes [...] the history of 'Western' thought, post-Cantorian mathematics [read: science], psychoanalysis [read: love], contemporary art and politics. Philosophy does not coincide with any of these conditions; nor does it map out the totality to which they belong. What philosophy must do is propose a conceptual framework in which the contemporary compossibility of the conditions can be grasped.<sup>40</sup>

The conditions or, to use his neologism, 'generic procedures', function to 'organise an abstract vision of the requirements of the epoch'.<sup>41</sup> Badiou expands on this notion thus:

What happens in art, in science, in true (rare) politics, and in love (if it exists), is the coming to light of an indiscernible of the times, which, as such, is neither a known or recognised multiple, nor an ineffable singularity, but that which detains in its multiple-being all the common traits of the collective in question: in this sense, it is the truth of the collective's being. The mystery of these procedures has generally been referred either to their representable conditions (the knowledge of the technical, of the social, of the sexual), or to the transcendent beyond of their One (revolutionary hope, the lovers' fusion, poetic ec-stasis). In the category of the generic I propose a contemporary thinking of

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<sup>39</sup> Oliver Feltham, 'Translator's Preface', *Being and Event*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

<sup>40</sup> *Being and Event*, p. 3

<sup>41</sup> *Being and Event*, p. 39.

these procedures which shows that they are simultaneously indeterminate and complete; because, in occupying the gaps of available encyclopaedias, they manifest the common-being, the multiple essence, of the place in which they proceed.<sup>42</sup>

In love specifically, Badiou presents a convincing and systematic refutation of the generations of philosophers that have turned attention to the subject. Beginning with the writings of love in ancient Greece, he compliments the presentation of the lovers in the myth of Aristophanes in *The Symposium*, commending Plato's metaphor of the 'sexed positions [that] are, at the same time, totally disjointed and complementary'.<sup>43</sup> He rejects, however, the Platonic insistence on the transcendent effect of love – one that is directed towards the divine – which formed the basis of later theological philosophies:

Christianity grasped perfectly that there is an element in the apparent contingency of love that can't be reduced to that contingency. But it immediately raised it to the level of transcendence, and that is the root of the problem. This universal element I too recognise in love as immanent. But Christianity has somehow managed to elevate it and refocus it onto a transcendent power. It's an ideal that was already partly present in Plato, through the idea of the Good. It is a brilliant first manipulation of the power of love and one we must now bring back to earth. I mean we must demonstrate that love really does have universal power, but that it is simply the opportunity we are given to enjoy a positive, creative, affirmative experience of difference. The Other, no doubt, but without the 'Almighty-Other', without the 'Great Other' of transcendence.<sup>44</sup>

Both Greek and Judeo-Christian theologies have, for Badiou, laid the foundational ability to conceive of the Other. In *In Praise of Love*, Badiou acknowledges the role of religion in introducing to philosophy 'the acceptance of the experience of love, of the experience of the other, of the gaze raised towards the other' but he takes issue with the notion of a transcendental love, in that, in Neo-Platonic writings in particular, the efforts on the part of earthly lovers are qualified by the move towards the Ideal or the divine; love of the Other 'contributes to this supreme love that is both the love we owe to God and the love that God brings to us' (pp. 64-65). Refiguring the meaning of the universal in Plato for the 'society in which no valence can be ascribed to God's existence; one that lays claim to a vague spirituality', Badiou repeatedly invokes throughout his writings his indebtedness to a Platonic concept of universality, but leaves his own indelible mark on the Idea, calling for a move from transcendence to

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<sup>42</sup> *Being and Event*, p. 17.

<sup>43</sup> 'The Scene of Two', p. 49.

<sup>44</sup> Alain Badiou and Nicolas Truong, *In Praise of Love*, (New York: The New Press, 2012), pp. 65-66. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]



immanence.<sup>45</sup> In addition, in his conception of a ‘finally objectless subject’ in love, Badiou effectively neutralises the subject/object problematic, and with it the troubling Other:

A subject is then a finite moment of such a manifestation. A subject is manifested locally. It is solely supported by a generic procedure. Therefore, *stricto sensu*, there is no subject save the artistic, amorous, scientific, or political.<sup>46</sup>

Each of Badiou’s four philosophical conditions produces its own sketch of subjectivity; art and science produce what he calls ‘mixed subjects’ and politics creates a ‘collective’ subject, but only in love can the subject be truly conceived of as individual.<sup>47</sup> Posing a ‘*scène du deux*’ from which love arises and then operates, Badiou maintains that love is ‘the only available experience of a Two counted from itself, of an immanent Two’, and furthermore shows how this intersubjective Two scene that love so uniquely creates can be appreciated as the only social experience from which a stable sense of individual subjectivity can be derived.<sup>48</sup> Where prior philosophies have fallen down is in either counting the Two as One and thus undermining the subjects’ individualities, or forcing the lovers to enact the subject/object dialectic to preserve the construction of a coherent, liberal humanist self at the expense of the Other. The inherent power-play of the self/Other relationship falsely prioritises one lover while undermining the other, which hardly reflects or satisfactorily explains the love relationship as we aim to experience it. Perpetuating this dialectic are those twentieth-century thinkers, who, following on from Freud, transpose love onto a supposed ‘real’ of sex. Finally, the subject/object relation is even further confused by those theories that proceed from ‘the real stumbling block of the Christian maxim “to love the other as one’s self”’, which, as Badiou clarifies, has ‘always had an initial effect of constraining, by the most formidable means, the presumed other to be like myself, in order for me to be able to love him/her’.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Slavoj Žižek concurs with this point when he states simply that ‘Otherness is not the problem, but rather, the Same’.<sup>50</sup> Common to these various philosophical approaches to love is the way that they all run the risk of subsuming a sense of difference between individuals, which, as Badiou repeatedly argues, is crucial to agential self-construction. In his theory of love, there are three main elements which work to enable and maintain the Two scene, which will be discussed in turn and in greater depth via the textual representations under scrutiny in the thesis. *Difference* is the first of these: an understanding and appreciation of the uniqueness of individuals, upon which the love

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<sup>45</sup> Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, ed. by Peter Engelmann (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), pp. 35-36.

<sup>46</sup> Alain Badiou, ‘On a Finally Objectless Subject’, *Topoi*, 7.2 (1988), 93-98 (p. 93); *Being and Event*, p. 17.

<sup>47</sup> *Being and Event*, p. 392.

<sup>48</sup> ‘The Scene of Two’, p. 55.

<sup>49</sup> ‘The Scene of Two’, pp. 43-45.

<sup>50</sup> Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present*, p. 53.

relationship is absolutely contingent. The Two scene is prevented from collapsing into a conception of the lovers as having merged from two individuals into a singular consciousness by the lovers' very perception of each other's differences – from one another and from others in their wider social milieu. As a dynamic force, difference structures the Two scene and provides a two-way buffer that protects the intersubjective relationship from being subsumed from within or dissolved from without. The second feature of Badiouian love is *disjunction*, which works in constant reflexivity with difference to ensure intersubjective stability. Disjunction simultaneously maintains difference, whilst also relieving the asymmetrical power-play that arises from readings of love which try to overlay the lovers with the subject/object dyad. In *In Praise of Love*, Badiou writes:

Love involves a separation or disjuncture based on the simple difference between two people and their infinite subjectivities. The disjuncture is, in most cases, sexual difference. When that isn't the case, love still ensures that two figures, two different interpretive stances are set in opposition. In other words, love contains an initial element that separates, dislocates and differentiates. You have *Two*. Love involves Two (pp. 28-29).

The final element involved in the construction and perpetuation of the Two scene is *the encounter*, which gives love its temporal quality, and supports a view of love as a verb/process rather than a noun/state. The encounter marks the initial union of the two subjects, and from there is repeatedly re-enacted over the course of the relationship, acting as a reminder which regularly anchors the two individuals to their joint romantic project. These three aspects of the modern romantic relationship render love a conscious and collaborative choice that is made with some degree of anticipation towards a future that two individuals will move into together. Furthermore they distinguish the Two scene from other modes of social intercourse, while preserving the subjects' individual natures over time, and as such call frequent attention to the scene as a space in which three stories – two singular, one combined – can coalesce without threatening either agential autonomy or the growth of love itself.

This thesis draws a significant parallel between love as conceived of in Badiou's system and that proposed by Giddens, and ultimately argues that, after three paradigmatic shifts in the history of love, the fourth can be seen to have emerged in the late-twentieth century by way of what Giddens has termed 'confluent love'.<sup>51</sup> Observing a move from the Romantic conception of love which had dominated Western consciousness for two centuries, to one understood as confluent, Giddens writes:

In the current era, ideals of romantic love tend to fragment under the pressure of female sexual emancipation and autonomy. The clash between the romantic love complex and the pure relationship takes various forms, each of which

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<sup>51</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 61.

tends to become more and more displayed to general view as a result of increasing institutional reflexivity. Romantic love depends upon projective identification, the projective identification of *amour passion*, as the means whereby prospective partners become attracted and then bound to one another. Projection here creates a feeling of wholeness with the other, no doubt strengthened by established differences between masculinity and femininity, each defined in terms of an antithesis. The traits of the other are 'known' in a sort of intuitive sense. Yet in other respects projective identification cuts across the development of a relationship whose continuation depends upon intimacy. Opening oneself out to the other, the condition of what I shall call confluent love, is in some ways the opposite of projective identification, even if such identification sometimes sets up a pathway to it.<sup>52</sup>

Giddens locates the precursory moves to a project of the self in the Romantic period, and in doing so forges a meaningful historical link between reality and fiction when he writes that 'the rise of romantic love more or less coincided with the emergence of the novel: the connection was one of newly discovered narrative form'.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, despite the dangers the ideals of high Romanticism posed for the self by subsuming the differences of the Two beneath the fusional union of the One, in its proponents' efforts to democratise love outside spiritual or social frameworks these ideals 'for the first time associated love with freedom [...] insert[ing] themselves directly into the emergent ties between freedom and self-realisation'.<sup>54</sup> The leading figures of continental Romanticism – Goethe, Rousseau and Schlegel – established their philosophies through widely popular novels, which resurrected the Platonic ideal of merging and entrenched it fully within the European cultural consciousness. Going on to trace the rise of popularity in romance fiction as modernity took hold towards the end of the Victorian period, Giddens identifies these narratives as means of resistance, a way to combat the flattening sociopolitical excesses that Badiou has variously identified as negating individuality – that 'romantic literature was also (and is today) a literature of hope, a sort of refusal'.<sup>55</sup> This resonates deeply with Badiou's belief that contemporary love ought to be reinvented as combative, that it should and does mark out the pockets of resistance in dehumanising social environments. To use Giddens's more forceful terminology, love refuses that dehumanisation outright. Love pre-exists philosophy, of course, but reading the subject from Plato we see an astonishingly slow rate of evolution in its particulars, when compared to other phenomena of human existence. Badiou's three other generic procedures – science, politics and art – have evolved rapidly alongside civilisation, while love has made relatively slow progress. If we are to underpin our understanding of love in postmodernity with the shift that Giddens sees as fundamental to the orchestration of this period, it is to understand that the secularisation and

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<sup>52</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 61.

<sup>53</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 40.

<sup>55</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 44.

democratisation promoted by high Romanticism (which as a European movement in itself was already a resistance in the face of emergent industrialism) produced the emphasis on a narrative-based project of the self which co-evolved with a renewed (if not new) sense of love as metanarrative. A contemporary view of romantic metanarrative in our current culture constitutes a site in which personal narratives were always, but continue to be, supported and validated. The self-narratives of lovers and the metanarrative of love burst forth simultaneously and are reflexively instrumental, because 'love detaches individuals from wider social circumstances'.<sup>56</sup>

In the history of the philosophy of love, though its commentators come to the subject from a diverse range of perspectives and methodologies, we can observe no more than four paradigmatic shifts. The first, which stems from antiquity and dominates readings of love until well into the Middle Ages, treats human love as the earthly dimension of a more holistic, divine move towards the universal. The second, from 'effort[s] to humanise love' in the courtly domain, made the preliminary moves towards the democratisation of love that was eventually championed by the Romantics.<sup>57</sup> High Romanticism has had the most fundamental and lasting effect on our modern conception of love, for better or for worse, and despite the growing suspicion of such purist visions of the romantic relationship, coupled with definite trends in continental thought that prioritise sexuality and desire as affirmative, individuating human qualities, postmodernity has produced a shift of its own. The ideals of the Romantics, though still present to degrees in today's cultural consciousness, were redirected into the arts and, for the most part, subsumed beneath Victorian values and the twin institutions of marriage and the family. In the twentieth century, we see a revival of Romantic democratisation and a further redistribution of its inherent benefits. Love in the current climate turns on the issue of equality, and not just among white Europeans or between men and women, but extends to fight racial prejudice, to campaign for marriage rights for all, and to question customs on the global scale from arranged and forced unions to honour killings and marital rape. This current configuration of love is what Giddens calls 'confluent love':

Confluent love is active, contingent love, and therefore jars with the 'for-ever', 'one-and-only' qualities of the romantic love complex. The 'separating and divorcing' society of today appears as an effect of the emergence of confluent love rather than its cause. The more confluent love becomes consolidated as a real possibility, the more the finding of a 'special person' recedes and the more it is the 'special relationship' that counts.<sup>58</sup>

This echoes Badiou's sentiment that love is not an experience of the Other, but rather of the world from the intersubjective scene of the Two; once the two lovers are seen from this perspective, the lover-as-Other is essentially neutralised. As a powerfully individuating force, it

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<sup>56</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 44.

<sup>57</sup> Singer, *Philosophy of Love*, p. 29.

<sup>58</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, pp. 61-62.

is the relationship itself that is the meaningful construction, for the unique benefits it bestows upon its subjects. Confluent love speaks to a sense of egalitarian freedom that characterises the contemporary period, which essentially translates to the subjects' having given themselves freely in love to one another, in the knowledge that love will nurture and maintain that subjective freedom because of the repeated encounters of the disjunctured differences which prevent their autonomies from being absorbed, by love or by one another.

Reading contemporary love stories through the lens of Badiou's philosophy of love reintroduces the idea that love subsists in our society through a metanarrative which is reflexively enacted in an exchange between a localised finitude and a universal experience. Giddens's confluent love, which demonstrates how romantic metanarrative has become anchored to the self-narratives of individuals, also illustrates how Badiou's exchange is practically enforced. These thinkers help to explain how love not only subsists in contemporary society, but becomes ever more urgent and relevant as a potent source of cultural activism. Moreover, their work provides a stable theoretical framework within which classically othered figures – like those most potently distilled by science fiction narratives – can instead become known and know us, through acts of love.

### **Thesis structure**

The thesis follows the dovetailing two futures hypothesis of Francis Fukuyama, and as such is structured into two sections, each comprising four chapters. Section One considers variations on the Hollywood cyborg, figuring the biotechnological in literature and cinema from Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) to Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005). Arguing that love functions in science fiction to humanise the otherwise dehumanised characters – both human and posthuman alike – through emphasising differences that matter and the awarding of an incontestable subjective position, this section presents original and individual analysis of five posthuman love stories in Chapters One and Three, picking out the main themes and commentaries on the contemporary love paradigm which are later refocused upon and contextualised from the philosophical angle. Part Two uses cyberpunk to trace the development of virtual posthumanity from its fictional roots in James Tiptree, Jr.'s novella 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1973) to its fully-realised social reality in Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman's ground-breaking Internet documentary *Catfish* (2010). Chapters Five and Seven foreground the twin projects of self-construction and the pursuit of love in virtual environments, as represented in texts that go against the grain of the cyberpunk aesthetic by prioritising a treatment of love in a genre otherwise dominated by a thematic emphasis on sexuality.

Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles each put forward a conceptual model of the posthuman as an alternative to what is inferred from their writings as a tired and increasingly useless liberal humanist subject, critically figured in their work as the ontological cyborg

(Haraway) and the virtual posthuman/digital subject (Hayles). The liberal humanist subject is the staple model of subjectivity that has reigned over Western philosophies of the self since the Enlightenment, one characterised by a self-determining individuality, what Frederic Jameson has referred to as a view of the individual as a ‘monad-like container’.<sup>59</sup> Postmodernist theory in the latter half of the twentieth century has largely destabilised this conception of self, has deconstructed but not reconstructed it on satisfactorily pragmatic terms. Haraway and Hayles differ significantly from their contemporaries by each proposing fairly convincing models of subjectivity, which are rendered posthuman by their reliance upon the technoscientific discourses they see as responsible for many of our deconstructions of contemporary selfhood, and by borrowing from these fields potent metaphors and ways of seeing and speaking about self in order to reconstitute their subjects by repurposing the very tools that took them apart. In this sense, *posthumanism* can be understood as a strain of criticism that comes *after* (liberal) *humanism*. Though these two scholars remain the undisputed authorities in their respective fields, and their writings on posthuman constructions of self in technoscientific culture are invaluable to science fiction and science theory alike, neither has applied their theoretical framework to love. By using their thought to enrich the corresponding halves of this thesis – Haraway for ‘Cyborg Love’; Hayles for ‘Cyber Love’ – and also to underpin the chronological development of posthumanism as communicated by the ordering of the primary sources, their work provides a critical bridging between the texts themselves and the wider philosophical discourse that I argue they operate within and thus supplement. Parts One and Two of the thesis each devote four chapters to the exploration of cyborg and the virtual posthuman, respectively, in fiction, and the subsequent development of their corresponding theoretical figures in contemporary technocultural criticism. The thesis takes issue with the ways in which many scholars of technoculture have, in recent years, confused the positions of Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles, and as such, this study effectively performs a comparative reading of the two models of subjectivity proposed in Haraway and Hayles’s central writings, in order to disentangle these two thinkers and restore their respective impacts upon the field.

Throughout, Alain Badiou’s theory of love provides the thesis with its main philosophical thrust, though care has been taken to cover prior contributions to the topic – such as those by Plato, Georg W. F. Hegel, the Romantics, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Lacan and Jean-Luc Nancy – in order to site the Badiouian system historically and fortify an argument for its employment. Chapters Two, Four and Six deal with the three central tenets of Badiou’s approach to love: *difference*, *disjunction*, and the *encounter*, respectively. Chapter Eight departs from these tenets to discuss further the virtual self he so briefly criticised in relation to the love paradigm. The philosophical chapters are paired with their preceding textual analysis chapters in

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<sup>59</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 10.

order to evaluate the romantic themes comparatively and site them within a wider critical framework that supports the intersection of science fiction and philosophy as a reflexive and fertile means of examining the posthuman condition.

Finally, in response to the claims that our current age is devoid of mythology and grand narratives, and informed by Anthony Giddens's linking of romance and the self project, the thesis questions whether representations of love in contemporary science fiction maintain or destabilise romantic metanarrative. Are our constructions of self in postmodernity at odds with our constructions of love? And if the posthuman is an emergent figure portending the end of history, then how can we understand its relationship to the love paradigm, which turns on the perpetuation of a conception of metanarrative that, in current modes of criticism, has fallen out of fashion?

## Part One

### Cyborg Love

“My dear young friend,” said Mustapha Mond, “civilisation has absolutely no need of nobility or heroism. These things are symptoms of political inefficiency. In a properly organised society like ours, nobody has any opportunities for being noble or heroic. Conditions have got to be thoroughly unstable before the occasion can arise. Where there are wars, where there are divided allegiances, where there are temptations to be resisted, objects of love to be fought for or defended – there, obviously, nobility and heroism have some sense. But there aren’t any wars nowadays. The greatest care is taken to prevent you from loving any one too much.”

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Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932)



## Chapter One

### Love Makes Us Human

Love? said the Commander.  
That's better. That's something I know about. We can talk about that.  
Falling in love, I said. Falling into it, we all did it then, one way or another [...] *Falling in love*, we said; *I fell for him*. We were falling women. We believed in it [...] *God is love*, they said once, but we reversed that, and love, like Heaven, was always just around the corner. The more difficult it was to love the particular man beside us, the more we believed in Love, abstract and total. We were waiting, always, for the incarnation. That word, made flesh.

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Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985)

The term *augmentation* reverberates throughout the literature of science fiction and science theory alike. Most often suggesting a positive action synonymous with improvement, the word has found new significance in technoculture; it is a word employed by scholars, scientists and artists to denote subjects or states that are amplified or enhanced by technological intervention. The first section of this thesis deals with one half of the Cartesian split - the embodied self – that has resurfaced in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century discourses surrounding the technoscientific developments that many see as pushing the human into its next, posthuman stage of evolution.<sup>1</sup> The next four chapters are concerned with how technoscience has intervened on the body, figured in science fiction narratives by the cyborg, who Donna Haraway claimed in 1985 was already ‘a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction’.<sup>2</sup> The augmented body is the staple feature of the biotechnological prong of Francis Fukuyama’s two futures hypothesis. In 2011 Margaret Atwood critically reiterated Fukuyama, showing how science fiction (despite the genre’s various metamorphoses, offshoots and crossovers into other areas of literature) was still being channelled into the twenty-first-century cultural consciousness through the parallel tributaries of biotechnological and communications-based fiction. She describes how ‘in the latter half of the twentieth century, two visionary books cast

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Pepperell, *The Post-Human Condition* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 1995); Natasha Vita-More, ‘Aesthetics: Bringing Art and Design into the Discussion of Transhumanism’, in Max More and Natasha Vita-More (eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader* (West Sussex: Wiley and Blackwell, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p. 149. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

their shadows over our futures [...] *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with its horrific vision of a brutal, mind-controlling totalitarian state [and] *Brave New World*, which proposed a different and softer form of totalitarianism', continuing:

Which template would win? we wondered. During the Cold War, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* seemed to have the edge. But when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, pundits proclaimed the end of history, shopping reigned triumphant, and there was already lots of quasi-soma percolating through society. True, promiscuity had taken a hit from AIDS, but on balance we seemed to be in for a trivial, giggly, drug-enhanced Spend-O-Rama: *Brave New World* was winning the race.<sup>3</sup>

In her 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood traces a biological future, softer and more insidious than the hard immediacies of totalising communications-based dystopias. The novel contains no overtly cyborgian character; Gilead has been variously interpreted as an Amish, orthodox Judeo-Christian, or nativist theocratic society, wherein technological engagement is a relatively downplayed feature when compared with other speculative or science fictions of the time. Nonetheless, the text aligns itself with the biotechnological scenario of Fukuyama's two futures in that its women (and women's bodies) become tools of the trade. Central to the plot is Atwood's own thought-experiment which, like several others before and contemporary to her, experiments with an opposition that has often been utilised in science fiction and which bears relevance to modern philosophical discussion – the divorcing of sex and love. This recurring theme has been employed across modes of science fiction to various ends. Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1967) and Ursula K. Le Guin's assorted gender hypotheses in *The Birthday of the World* (2002) are particularly strong examples of how this technique has found a powerful resonance within female utopian writing, in which attempts to provide alternatives to family and kinship allow the capacities of sex and love to throw off their co-dependency, to then be put to more psychically beneficial and socially valuable uses. Dystopian fictions, too, mine this thematically rich division, with many evoking a sense of horror at the 'doing away' with love in favour of biological determinism. Estranging love, to make use of Darko Suvin's praxis, is a paradoxical technique: for where there is absence there remains a space for discussion that that absence opens up. *The Handmaid's Tale* is prefigured by texts such as John Wyndham's *Consider Her Ways* (1956), in which the absence of love is the main point of conflict between the characters in a biologically totalitarian society in which women are no more than harvested for their reproductive value, and the sexual regulation of *Brave New World*, where love and sex are pharmaceutically disassociated. Atwood estranges love in *The Handmaid's Tale* – the entire dynamic of the heterosexual relationship is commodified and manipulated to fuel the socio-political system of the novel – and yet, the

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination* (London: Hachette, 2011), p 1.

protagonist Offred still finds ways to bring this estrangement to the forefront of the novel, using her memories of free love and its place within familial and sexual relationships to frame the dystopian hijacking of these privileges in the Gileadian society. The enslaved handmaids in Atwood's novel are warned away from their old habits of falling in love: “‘Love, said Aunt Lydia with distaste. Don't let me catch you at it [...] Wagging her finger at us. *Love* is not the point’”.<sup>4</sup> And yet, love is the point, because love has become so imperative to our understanding of the human that to then present alien or posthuman alternatives requires speculation on and often dislocation of love's significance and function. Therefore, when love is estranged, it is ever more noticeable and relevant because of that estrangement. In utopias and dystopias alike, the presence, absence and reconfigurations of the love relationship provide frames of reference between worlds and histories, between fictions and realities.

Michael Levy, referring to science fiction writers themselves and the movements they belonged to, observes that ‘the mid-1980s were a time for manifestos’.<sup>5</sup> This penchant is also mirrored in the critical discourses surrounding the genre: in the same year that Atwood published *The Handmaid's Tale*, Donna Haraway published her ‘Manifesto for Cyborgs’ in the *Socialist Review*. With this essay Haraway became the founder of cyborg theory, and she remains its main proponent and authority. Throughout her academic career, Haraway's work has explored the ways in which literature and the biological sciences interplay and overlap, and her cyborg issues directly from this research as a fitting trope for late twentieth and early twenty-first-century cultural studies. Mapping what she sees as cyborgian ‘couplings’ observed in fields as seemingly disparate as science fiction, medicine, sexuality, production and reproduction, state-political and defence systems, Haraway notoriously claimed in her ‘Manifesto’ that ‘we are all [...] theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics’ (p. 150). Haraway takes the science-fictional figure of the cyborg (the literary or Hollywood cyborg) and transforms it into a trope through which to frame studies of technoculture. To then take that trope and force its focus back onto literature creates a feedback loop allowing for both literature and culture to be reflexively examined, each via the other's frame. As Haraway maintains, in a later publication, ‘life copies art copies technology copies communication copies life itself’.<sup>6</sup> The feeding-back of each discipline into the other also allows other discourses to enter the cycle, to be taken up and made use of – namely, in the case of this thesis, philosophical treatises on love can be admitted into the discursive loop. As such, we can begin to reconstruct the cyborg in science fiction texts as a figure now both understood and bolstered by cultural studies. Where do cyborgs stand in

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* (London: Random House, 2012), p. 232.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Levy, ‘Fiction, 1980-1992’, in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, p. 159.

<sup>6</sup> Donna Haraway, *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan@\_Meets\_OncoMouse*<sup>TM</sup>: *Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 177.

relation to the cultures that continue to produce them? If they have ‘no origin story’ then how do they speak to its own history? And if they are ‘wary of holism, but needy for connection’, can they be of any use when juxtaposed against human lovers? (p. 150).

The language of love, that is, in the artistic, poetic, psychological and philosophical discourses that have treated it, is replete with issues of difference. Philosophies of love in particular have grappled with the problem. Some, such as Søren Kierkegaard and Emmanuel Levinas, have sought to relieve it, as with theological teachings of neighbour-love; ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’. Others, most significantly the poets and philosophers of the Romantic period, have tried to subsume difference beneath a fusional conception of the two lovers merging into a transcendental One. Yet others still, like Georg W. F. Hegel and Jean-Paul Sartre, have exacerbated the problem by forcing the lovers to enact the subject/object dialectic, contributing heavily to the anxiety and scepticism of love that has come to define the majority of continental writing on the subject over the last century. Difference permeates the love paradigm from the ground up: from the most basic (and yet most contested) notions of the biologically sexuated positions; to the social issues underpinning the democratisation of romance; to the highest elevation of a love which transcends all earthly subjective experiences in its pursuit of an absolute, indifferentiated Ideal. Everywhere it seems, from all fronts, we are being offered ways to overcome and eradicate difference completely. Of course, I do not mean to suggest that love as a force for human equality and social altruism is something we as a culture ought not to be fostering, only that romantic love, the love between Two, cannot be adequately understood on the same terms. Popular psychologies prescribe ways to heal and alleviate our differences in love, and yet, what if, in postmodernity, difference is precisely what we require? American performance artist Jill Magid, whose work has explored and experimented with subjective positions in intimate relationships, writes that:

Perception is the cutting away of things in the world, the distinctions we make between one thing and another thing. To perceive someone you have to separate him from the world. Love depends on the ability to separate a someone from the everyone. When the Little Prince tames the fox, he cuts that fox away from foxes-in-general to make the fox His Fox.<sup>7</sup>

That the canonised love stories have stood the test of time, and continue to be reiterated throughout our cultural production and social practices, could be explained by their engagement with this notion of difference as a powerfully individuating force. So many of the great love narratives hinge on the absolute differences between their lovers, as Badiou writes in *In Praise of Love*, ‘where Two are particularly marked out, when the two lovers do not belong to the same class, group, clan or country’ (p. 28). Difference begets them, as with Tristan and Iseult and

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<sup>7</sup> See Jill Magid, ‘Theology of Mirrors’ (2002) <<http://www.jillmagid.net/TheologyOfMirrors.php>> [accessed 24 July 2013] (para. 7-8 of 9)

Romeo and Juliet; or difference becomes them, as with Heathcliff and Cathy. In such cases, Badiou reminds us, ‘we shouldn’t underestimate the power love possesses to slice diagonally through the most powerful oppositions and radical separations’ (p. 29). Though all tragic tales, these narratives continue to inform our modern mythology of love, partly because of their insistence on difference that the love relationship augments and nurtures. Badiou has claimed that love operates within laws unique to itself; moreover, it rescues humanity from the flattening excesses of postmodernity. Love exists as a buffer working in two directions: creating a space in which, as Magid puts it, the lovers differentiate themselves from the world at large, ‘separating a someone from the everyone’; but also they then maintain that space in order to protect the sense that they have been separated, differentiated, or rescued.

I now aim to use this chapter to show how the interspecies relationships of contemporary science fictions contribute to the ongoing construction of our romantic mythology. Due to the way science fiction texts amplify and rely on issues of difference, as well as communicating incredibly potent depictions of a capitalist technoscience that ‘murders possible humanity’, I want to refigure the human/posthuman relationship as the classic ‘star-cross’d’ love story for the contemporary era.<sup>8</sup> Through the analysis of three well-known examples of late-twentieth-century science fiction, this chapter will present the argument that, in depictions of romances between humans and cyborgs, ‘cyborg love’ functions to reaffirm the humanity of characters in technoscientific environments that often cause confusion over this sense of humanity. In short, I argue here that, in science fiction, more pointedly and poignantly than in any other area of literary and artistic production: love makes us human.

### **1.1. There’s something very strange and touching about humans – *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)**

In March 1972, Philip K. Dick delivered a speech at the Vancouver SF Convention at the University of British Columbia, entitled ‘The Android and The Human’. Inviting his audience to speculate further upon a posthuman future than perhaps he had allowed himself to postulate in his novels, he proposed the following scene:

And – here is a thought not too pleasing – as the external world becomes more animate, we may find that we – the so-called humans – are becoming, and may to a great extent always have been, inanimate in the sense that we are led, directed by built-in tropisms, rather than leading. So we and our elaborately evolving computers may meet each other halfway. Someday a human being, named perhaps Fred White, may shoot a robot named Pete Something-or-other, which has come out of a General Electrics factory, and to his surprise see it weep and bleed. And the dying robot may shoot back and, to its surprise, see a wisp of gray smoke arise from the electric pump that it supposed was Mr.

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<sup>8</sup> Alain Badiou, ‘What Is Love?’, *Umbr(a)*, 1 (1996), 37-53, p. 49. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

White's beating heart. It would be rather a great moment of truth for both of them.<sup>9</sup>

This section will analyse Dick's 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, a much-theorised and hugely influential work both within the science fiction genre and wider modern literature. Prior to the publication of the novel, androids were already a familiar presence in Dick's repertoire (*We Can Build You*, 1962; *The Simulacra*, 1963), but, as Ryan Gillis sees it, in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* 'this concept plays itself out most fully'.<sup>10</sup> As arguably Dick's most popular novel – now in its thirty-eighth edition and translated into over eighteen languages – and historically significant in its articulation of fictive engagement with scientific fact, this thesis begins its textual analysis with Dick's central hypothesis that empathy could function as the crucial marker of humanity in an increasingly dehumanised world.

The novel takes place in 'a world progressively peopled – both literally and figuratively – by technological devices', and the narration of hardened bounty hunter Rick Deckard's pursuit of a group of highly advanced, fugitive replicants, plays out against the backdrop of an Earth whose inhabitants have mostly emigrated to colonial Mars, leaving only a percentage of persons ineligible for relocation privileges behind, confined to a dying planet.<sup>11</sup> Those not entitled to a new life on Mars include those unqualified mentally, physically or medically, and those unclassified as 'human' (the androids) – an entire array of subhuman figures, immediately throwing the term into confusion. The book's main concern, amidst a range of issues thrown up by the categorisation of persons and their civil rights, is the loss of human faculties in the face of technological prowess: if artificially intelligent machines can imitate all of our most human processes, where, then, can the line be drawn between the human and the machine? If that line is blurred by evolving machine sentience, is our concept of humanity lost? Dick's replicants are so advanced in physical appearance, intelligence and capability, that the ability to exhibit empathy is the only attribute that divides the human from the android. Gillis notes that 'the problem of telling humans and androids apart is [...] complicated by authentic humans who either do not possess the ability or refuse to act empathically'; *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?* 'tells the story of one individual's gradual acceptance of these changing parameters'.<sup>12</sup> Jill Galvan writes that, in the novel, 'the machine, by declaring its rights to live as an autonomous self, challenges the very categories of life and selfhood – and, in turn, the ontological prerogative of its creators', which necessitates judicial measures put in place to identify the android among the humans, to more clearly reinstate the boundaries between natural embodiment and synthetic

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<sup>9</sup> Philip K. Dick, 'The Android and The Human', *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: Selected Literary and Philosophical Writings*, ed. by Lawrence Sutin (New York: Vintage, 1995), p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> Ryan Gillis, 'Dick on the human: from Wubs to bounty hunters to bishops', *Extrapolation*, 39.3 (1998), 264-269 (p. 265).

<sup>11</sup> Jill Galvan, 'Entering the Posthuman Collective in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*', *Science-Fiction Studies*, 24.3 (1997), 413-429 (p. 413).

<sup>12</sup> Gillis, p. 266; Galvan, p. 414.

imitation.<sup>13</sup> The first obstacle Deckard faces is administering the Voigt-Kampff Empathy test to those persons he suspects to be Nexus-6 models.

In 1950, mathematician Alan Turing proposed a thought experiment that sought to prove the intelligence of computers through a reductive comparison of computer language programs with human verbal behaviour. N. Katherine Hayles opens her study of the posthuman with a brief synopsis of the Turing test: ‘Your job is to pose questions that can distinguish verbal performance from embodied reality. If you cannot tell the intelligent machine from the intelligent human, your failure proves, Turing argues, that machines can think’.<sup>14</sup> The Voigt-Kampff scale echoes the aims of the Turing test, but exchanges intelligence for empathy, which confirms the cultural anxiety of the time that machines could come to rival humans in their intelligence, thus becoming ‘embodied realities’. In Dick’s novel, the reality is empathetic ability, or at least imitated ability, that is embodied by the android. Concerning the androids, confusion arises first with Rachael Rosen and then Luba Luft, as Deckard has problems conducting a definite, indicative test to reveal their true natures. In Rachael’s case, her pre-programmed personality believes itself to be in fact human:

To Eldon Rosen, who slumped morosely by the door of the room, he said, “Does she know?” Sometimes they didn’t; false memories had been tried various times, generally in the mistaken idea that through them reactions to testing would be altered.

Eldon Rosen said, “No. We programmed her completely. But I think toward the end she suspected.” To the girl he said, “You guessed when he asked for one more try.”

Pale, Rachael nodded fixedly.<sup>15</sup>

With Luba, Deckard is uncertain as to whether she knows herself to be nonhuman – ‘She must think she’s human, he decided. Obviously she doesn’t know’ – but it is her ‘semantic fog’, the way she confuses him with a Turing-esque command of language in verbal performance, which obfuscates the test results (pp. 89-90). The encounter with Luba is imperative to the novel’s interpretation of humanity; up until this point the reader is preoccupied, along with Deckard, in differentiating between android and human in order to seek out replicants. Luba poses no real threat to society: she is employed by an opera house, and when we meet her she is performing Mozart’s *The Magic Flute*, so beautifully that it ‘brought tears to Rick’s eyes’ (p. 83). That an android could engage with something so representative of human achievement, and also elicit such a human response, certainly invites speculation on the area of overlap between the realities of programmed performance and emotional experience. Luba is, for all appearances, as ‘human’

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<sup>13</sup> Galvan, p. 413.

<sup>14</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. xi. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

<sup>15</sup> Philip K. Dick, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (London: Orion Books Ltd, 1999), pp. 51-52. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

as is humanly possible. The turning point in the plot comes when she questions Deckard's humanity, inviting the reader to follow suit:

“An android,” he said, “doesn't care what happens to another android. That's one of the indications we look for.”

“Then,” Miss Luft said, “you must be an android.”

That stopped him. He stared at her.

“Because,” she continued, “your job is to kill them, isn't it?” (pp. 86-87).

From this point the novel is not only isolating the android from the humans, but also the human from the androids, as it becomes clear that the inhumanity of human nature distorts the empathic boundary. Luba Luft elicits sympathy and admiration; Rick Deckard kills without flinching.

The inversion of the character roles, and of the reader's expectation, comes with Deckard's retiring of Luba – Sherryl Vint highlights the significance of the scene by drawing attention to its underlying detail. Moments before she is killed by him, Luba requests that Deckard buy her an art print, and when he does so, remarks: “It's very nice of you [...] There's something very strange and touching about humans. An android would never have done that [...] It wouldn't have occurred to him; never in a million years” (p. 115). Vint maintains that here, ‘Deckard's humanity is expressed through his unwillingness to reduce Luba to simply a commodity or allow his interactions with her to be on the level of commodity exchange’.<sup>16</sup> Seconds later, Deckard destroys the artwork, prompting an incredulous response from Resch (“You could have kept that book yourself [...] That cost you –”), at which point Deckard deflects from the act by asking him: “Do you think androids have souls?” (p. 116). This question has provided one of the foundational themes pervading science fiction since *Frankenstein*, distilled in post-Dickian criticism as ‘speciesism’ – bigotry towards the nonhuman redolent of the sociohistorical supremacies evident in racism, sexism and homophobia. Vint writes:

It is not, as often argued, that Deckard risks becoming increasingly like the androids through his work as a bounty hunter; rather, the risk faced by Deckard and the other humans in the novel lies in realising that they already are android-like, so long as they define their subjectivity based on the logical, rational, calculating part of human being.<sup>17</sup>

In cultural practice, bigotry invariably serves to eventually dehumanise the bigots themselves; in terms of the novel, ‘[d]espite the centrality of the human/android distinction to the novel's politics, from the opening pages it is shown to be constructed rather than natural’.<sup>18</sup> Luba's death scene marks the moment of realisation for Deckard, as he and his partner begin to doubt

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<sup>16</sup> Sherryl Vint, ‘Speciesism and species being in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*’, *Mosaic*, 40.1 (2007), 111-121 (p. 117).

<sup>17</sup> Vint, p. 111.

<sup>18</sup> Vint, p. 113.



first their status as non-robots, and then, subsequently, the possibility of their non- and inhumanness. It becomes clear that the Voigt-Kampff scale is not enough:

Rick said, "There is a defect in your empathic, role-taking ability. One which we don't test for. Your feelings towards robots."

"Of course we don't test for that."

"Maybe we should." [...]

"You realise," Phil Resch said quietly, "what this would do. If we included robots in our range of empathic identification, as we do animals."

"We couldn't protect ourselves." (pp. 120-121).

Galvan implores us to consider the Voigt-Kampff test as a tool inextricable from the political framework it lends itself to, commenting on Luba's linguistic performance, her semantic fog:

in subverting language, Luba calls attention to the contrived nature of Rick's human mastery, which only in reality extends so far as the state whose authority he props up. How could language – the Voigt-Kampff scale – do anything but convict the robot, when language has become just one instrument of a government whose business is based on the exploitation of machines?<sup>19</sup>

Put this way, we can clearly see the contextualisation of the Voigt-Kampff against the blossoming AI sector of 1960s science, as well as the cultural anxieties it provoked. Hayles chooses to read the Turing test alongside what she calls the 'Moravec test', stemming from the futurist Hans Moravec's 1988 thought experiment of a downloadable consciousness.<sup>20</sup> Each hypothetical test is bound to its historical context and respective technological inspiration: Turing's reflects the transition of the role of 'computer' as one once attributed to humans and now to machines; Moravec's marks a shift in humanist philosophies – the argument of the mind/body divide – prompted by developments in AI technologies; while Hayles's model of virtuality irrevocably changes the course of the discussion of humanism's liberal subject. Each test has in common the treatment of the issue of embodiment, and each test tries to imagine parameters by which the human might be spared the intrusion of the non-human. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles asserts:

What embodiment secures is not the distinction between male and female or between humans who can think and machines which cannot. Rather, embodiment makes clear that thought is a much broader cognitive function depending for its specificities on the embodied form enacting it. This realisation, with all its exfoliating implications, is so broad in its effects and so deep in its consequences that it is transforming the liberal subject, regarded as the model of the human since the Enlightenment, into the posthuman (p. xiv).

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<sup>19</sup> Galvan, p. 423.

<sup>20</sup> Hans Moravec, *Mind Children: The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 110.

The Voigt-Kampff scale, though issuing from a fictional medium, sits historically between the Turing test and the Moravec test. Of course, as the novel communicates, the scale has its problems, but returning to Hayles's opinion that the 'very existence of the test, however, implies that you may also make the wrong choice', we see that this pre-stipulation rings true for each proposed experiment – for Turing's, for Moravec's, and for Dick's (p. xiii). Hayles continues:

thus the test functions to create the possibility of a disjunction between the enacted and the represented bodies, regardless which choice you make. What the Turing test 'proves' is that the overlay between the enacted and the represented bodies is no longer a natural inevitability but a contingent production, mediated by a technology that has become so entwined with the production of identity that it can no longer meaningfully be separated from the human subject (p. xiii).

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Deckard represents this point of overlay, integral to his own experiences in the novel, but standing for our own experiences at large. As Resch tells him, "“You and I, all the bounty hunters – we stand between the Nexus-6 and mankind, a barrier which keeps the two distinct”" (p. 121). As a social tool, Dick's bounty hunter is the mediator between the enacted embodiment of the human and the representative performance of the android, serving to produce identity by providing a relativistic marker for the two. It is precisely the realisation of this function which shatters Deckard's world picture, helped along by the new unreliability of the Voigt-Kampff test. Galvan writes that:

Philosophy alone will not suffice to make Rick cognizant of his material coextension with the android other. He must rather submit himself to a phenomenological experience – an experience that teaches him an empathy that is unmistakably real, insofar as it grows out of his understood intimacy with his technological environment.<sup>21</sup>

The 'philosophy alone' that Galvan refers to is presumably the socially-prescribed empathy that the novel's spiritual doctrine, Mercerism, is founded upon, and the ways in which this ideology filters down into everyday life (caring for much sought-after animals, even electric ones, reaffirms people's sense of moral humanity) and the judicial system (androids can be tested for empathy, and on failing to exhibit, be guiltlessly disposed of). Deckard's 'phenomenological experience', then, must issue from another source, and his reaction to Luba marks a change in both his self-awareness and his understanding of the androidian position. He admits to Resch:

"I'm capable of feeling empathy for at least specific, certain androids. Not for all of them but – one or two." For Luba Luft, as an example, he said to himself. So I was wrong. There's nothing unnatural or unhuman about Phil Resch's reactions; *it's me* (p. 123).

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<sup>21</sup> Galvan, p. 427.

Though the androids' sexual appeal is an accepted, expected feature of their make-up, still Deckard wonders 'if any human has ever felt this way about an android' (p. 122). Since physical relationships between human and android in the novel are commonplace ("in the colonies they have android mistresses"), Deckard's more visceral reaction to an interspecies attraction, described as 'an odd sensation, knowing intellectually that they were machines but emotionally reacting anyhow', breaches the confines of a prescribed sexual legality (pp. 123, 181).

Dick invites us to draw our own conclusions from the Voigt-Kampff's fallibility: if the test were merely a language test, like Turing's, it would fail at detecting the Nexus-6 replicants, exactly the reason for Dick's substitution of verbal performance for empathic imitation. Language is simply not enough, and it transpires, as Deckard comes to realise, neither is empathy. With what we know now, as humans, with what we have achieved now, with science, what kind of test would a science fiction author or roboticist or computer scientist today propose to differentiate the human from the android? What event is enough to instigate, for Deckard, a phenomenological experience by which he can feel an empathy 'unmistakably real'? Both questions can be addressed with Galvan's belief, which correlates with what this thesis shows, that 'desire might function for Rick as the marker of the autonomous subject'.<sup>22</sup> The insertion of the frame of desire occurs during the death scene, and the subject whose autonomy is under construction is not only Deckard's but also the android's, as Deckard 'cannot see himself as part of a posthuman community until he has abjected himself, in aspects both figurative and literal – until he has horrified himself as a murderer and, by this act, acknowledged himself as a non-subject'.<sup>23</sup> As noted above, his retiring of Luba is enough to provoke a shift of character; he tells Resch, "I'm getting out of this business [...] I can't any more; I've had enough. She was a wonderful singer. The planet could have used her. This is insane" (p. 117). Galvan notes that, in this instance, Resch 'perverts Rick's empathy for Luba Luft into its opposite – into lust, sexual longing: in short, an objectifying desire, which undercuts rather than corroborates Rick's acknowledgement of Luba's position as subject', but even so, the tone is nonetheless set for the remainder of the novel.<sup>24</sup> Through desire (of Luba Luft), and subsequently, love (of Rachael Rosen), Deckard begins to reconstruct himself as subject, alongside his android counterparts.

Once an efficient bounty hunter, Deckard's ability to kill cold-bloodedly is significantly affected by his love for Rachael, an example of the species he is contracted to hunt. Even though this is seduction on her part – 'her victory over him' – his emotional investment in her is nonetheless authentic, and her betrayal is less professional than one characteristic of a lover's infidelity (p. 173). For as he admits before he kills the final android Roy Baty, after shooting

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<sup>22</sup> Galvan, p. 424.

<sup>23</sup> Galvan, p. 426.

<sup>24</sup> Galvan, p. 423.

Baty's lover: "Okay, you loved her [...] And I loved Rachael" (p. 191). The novel's close sees Deckard return to Iran, his wife. Their relationship is rejuvenated, a far cry from their original interaction. Iran, at the start of the story distant and moody, now does not even need to enhance her mood artificially – "I don't need to dial, now; I already have it – if it is Rick" – and as he is welcomed home we are reminded that essentially, everything was done for them: 'And now it's over and I can go back home, back to Iran and the goat. And we'll have enough money, for once' (pp. 206, 191). The fleeting experience with Rachael has rediscovered for him his own emotional drive, and though she is an android, and a traitor, she extricates from him a long-buried ability to love and be loved. Even if their relationship was short-lived, for Deckard all women are now '[o]nly Rachael Rosen, over and over again' (p. 191).

Whether consciously or not Dick makes a brave departure from the convention of employing a female cyborg as merely a conduit for desire, or for the perpetuation of normative, masculine discourses. While desire for Luba is enough for him to begin a reconstruction of his abjected self, if desire were enough to mark out the human, then there would be little need to present him as in love with or as subsequently betrayed by Rachael. Dick has Deckard go beyond base sexual desire to pull from that something meaningful, and though Rachael ultimately lets him down, he doesn't lose heart and instead refocuses his efforts upon his failing marriage. Charlotte Ross sees cyborg sex as upholding normative discourses regarding the relationships between men and women; although *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* arguably fits into her definition, it does so in a surprising way, by fulfilling the love relationship and not the sexual relationship. It is through the desire of one cyborg, which leads to the love of a second, that Deckard is finally able to return to his wife with a renewed interest in their marriage. Rachael and Luba, the sexualised cyborgs, end up supplementing the relationship between Deckard and Iran quite inadvertently. This potential for the female cyborg to cast off her role as sex object and take on a new, instrumental role as loving subject, is hinted at in Dick but seized upon as wholly poignant by the director who remade his novel into the cult film it would later become.

## **1.2. More human than human – *Blade Runner* (1982)**

Released fourteen years after the novel's first publication and hailed by critics as 'a parable of the postmodern condition', Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) offers us a world picture as equally troubled as that of Dick, but perhaps more well-informed, due to its place in historical consciousness.<sup>25</sup> Scott's film builds on and pushes further some of the key ideas evoked by the original novel, choosing to amplify some aspects while abandoning several others. As a result, the film works well as either an expansion of the novel, or as a stand-alone text for analysis. The

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<sup>25</sup> Kevin McNamara, 'Blade Runner's post-individual worldspace', *Contemporary Literature*, 38.3 (1997), 422-423 (p. 422).

major difference between novel and film is the alliance of the text. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Dick plays with the ambiguity of humanity, skirting the line between human and android and raising questions over who is more human. However, equilibrium is restored by the novel's close and all of our previous schematic suppositions, though shaken, are reaffirmed as the characters' 'true natures' prevail. The film is braver with the roles it assigns to its characters, or perhaps simply more attuned to its context: while Dick's novel is speculative as to the role androids might play in society, it might not have seemed in 1968 that artificial life could realistically come to threaten or rival our concept of humanity. By the 1980s, our knowledge of what was potentially achievable through genetic engineering had thrown humanity into question, and thus the philosophical direction of *Blade Runner* is quite different from that of its literary parent. As Judith B. Kerman points out, the film 'comes at a pivotal time in the relationship which tangles together technology, morality, and politics'.<sup>26</sup> This section will analyse some of the extensions of the themes present in Dick's text, as well as explore the independent concerns that Scott's artistic license has allowed for, and the far less ambiguous conclusion offered that 'the difference between the replicant and the human becomes so unrecognisable that they can indeed fall in love'.<sup>27</sup>

The film uses Deckard as its central gauge of humanity from the outset, holding him up as a mirror against the androids he is hired to destroy, chiefly against Rachael Rosen but also the antagonist Roy Batty. Interestingly, the film's title was lifted from another novel by Alan E. Nourse, and an unproduced film-novella William S. Burroughs based on it, before being worked into Scott's film through the characters' dialogue – a 'blade runner' is a street term for the vigilante cop. Galvan, writing about the novel, describes Deckard's role as 'policing the boundaries between human and android'; in the film we see this realised in both literal and figurative terms.<sup>28</sup> Deckard is more clearly attached to the criminal justice system in the film, and his role calls for a very real kind of police-work to prevent the escaped replicants from further violating Earth law. However, the film's more sympathetic portrayal of the replicants lends itself to the configuration of Deckard as mediator, as discussed earlier, of what McNamara calls 'the dissolution of the markers of the human'.<sup>29</sup> The overwhelming amount of scholarship on the subject of doubleness in *Blade Runner*, coupled with the metaphor of Deckard as middleman, evokes the image of the double-edged sword – Deckard is the blade that cuts both ways.

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<sup>26</sup> Judith B. Kerman, 'Introduction', *Retrofitting Blade Runner: Issues in Ridley Scott's Blade Runner and Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* ed. by Judith B. Kerman (Ohio: Bowling Green State University Press, 1991), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (London: Blackwell, 1990), p. 313.

<sup>28</sup> Galvan, p. 414.

<sup>29</sup> McNamara, p. 422.

The romantic relationships in the film are further foregrounded, developed earlier and ascribed more significance than in the novel. Here, duality plays out fourfold, between Deckard and Rachael, and Roy and Pris (the film's variation on Irmgard) – the 'dark inhuman doubles of humanity'.<sup>30</sup> Joseph Francavilla identifies these as relationships defined by the doppelgänger, but one that differs from the Freudian unheimlich double, as this traditionally manifests itself naturally in the individual's subjective consciousness, while the doppelgänger is an objective second entity.<sup>31</sup> He writes that:

The replicants in *Blade Runner* are unique since they are scientifically manufactured doubles [...] neither natural phenomenon nor ancient superstitions. These replicants function as mirrors for people, by allowing examination and scrutiny of ourselves, our technology, and our treatment of other beings, and by defining in their tragic struggle what is truly human.<sup>32</sup>

Dick, in his 1972 speech, says:

Androidization requires obedience. And, most of all, *predictability*. It is precisely when a given person's response to any given situation can be predicted with scientific accuracy that the gates are open for the wholesale production of the android life form. What good is a flashlight if the bulb lights up only now and then when you press the button? Any machine must always work, to be reliable. The android, like any other machine, must perform on cue.<sup>33</sup>

The androids are neither obedient nor predictable, and it is precisely this loss of robotic, programmed faculties, and the simultaneous development of free will and volatility that replace them that mark their evolution from unconscious to conscious entity, from nonhuman to human. Their roles as doubles, doppelgängers, and mirrored images provoke questions about who we ought to be looking at in this mirror: them or ourselves? Jack Boozer reminds us that 'if Batty is a doppelgänger for Deckard, we may see a stronger link between Deckard and Rachael', because 'in traditional Hollywood narrative, the good couple is finally constituted at the expense of the 'bad couple' (Roy and Pris)', continuing:

but this constitution depends upon the example established by Roy Batty, and the blade runner's (spectator's) embrace of that example – the greatest pressure of the narrative has been concentrated there. Deckard does not solve any problems for the community; he serves only as an extreme example of a personal reversal, an odyssey into awareness through risk, pain and involvement.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic Romanced: Consumption, Gender and Technology in Contemporary Fictions* (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), p. 194.

<sup>31</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 141.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph Francavilla, 'The Android as *Doppelgänger*', in *Retrofitting Blade Runner*, p. 14.

<sup>33</sup> 'The Android and the Human', p. 133.

<sup>34</sup> Jack Boozer, Jr., 'Crashing the Gates of Insight: *Blade Runner*', in *Retrofitting Blade Runner*, p. 225.

Marilyn Gwaltney asserts that ‘Rachael is the ‘clincher’ for [Deckard] in the film’ – unlike the novel, the turning point comes not with the death of Luba Luft (Zhora in the film), but with Rachael’s murder of Leon, another of the escaped replicants.<sup>35</sup> Until Rachael physically steps in to help Deckard, it has not yet dawned upon him that ‘the most human figure is the most advanced replicant’.<sup>36</sup> Fred Botting has ventured that the reason for Rachael’s comparative advancement is ‘because of her relation to death. Unlike the other replicants her life-span is uncertain. More significant, however, is that she causes death, killing one of her own kind for the love of a human’.<sup>37</sup> He goes on to emphasise that Rachael ‘kills for love [...] to save the blade runner who is the object of her amorous identification’.<sup>38</sup> From this point onwards, the film departs drastically from the novel’s original plot to concentrate on the relationship between Deckard and Rachael, and pushes much further than did Dick the notion of love as a process of (re)humanisation. The scene in Deckard’s apartment has been the subject of lengthy discussion, especially amongst feminist scholars who have chosen to read the prelude to the couple’s sexual encounter as a rape. In what can be read as a musical substitution by Scott – Rachael’s piano-playing for Luba’s singing – Deckard is lulled to sleep, before awakening to tell her: “‘You play beautifully’”.<sup>39</sup> In the meantime, Rachael has let down her hair, a sign that Kaja Silverman takes to be ‘desire which she clearly manifests’.<sup>40</sup> Staying true to the Hollywood romantic formula, this leads to an embrace, and the following exchange:

DECKARD Say kiss me.  
 RACHAEL I can’t rely on –  
 DECKARD Say kiss me.  
 RACHAEL Kiss me.  
 DECKARD I want you.  
 RACHAEL I want you.  
 DECKARD Again.  
 RACHAEL I want you. Put your hands on me.<sup>41</sup>

Many critics have attempted to provide a reading of the scene based on their variations of the end of Rachael’s unfinished, interrupted sentence. Silverman writes that here, Rachael is:

in effect telling Deckard that she can’t rely upon the desire she is beginning to feel for him [because it] may come from someone else. Deckard responds by seemingly putting words in Rachael’s mouth [...] By inducing Rachael to articulate the desire which she has already manifested, Deckard proves to her

<sup>35</sup> Marilyn Gwaltney ‘Androids as a Device for Reflection on Personhood’, in *Retrofitting Blade Runner*, p. 32.

<sup>36</sup> Fred Botting, *Sex Machines and Navels: Fiction, Fantasy and History in the Future Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 150.

<sup>37</sup> *Sex Machines and Navels*, p. 151.

<sup>38</sup> *Sex Machines and Navels*, p. 190.

<sup>39</sup> *Blade Runner*, dir. by Ridley Scott (Warner Bros., 1982).

<sup>40</sup> Kaja Silverman, ‘Back to the Future’, *Camera Obscura*, 9.3 (1991), 108-132 (p. 109).

<sup>41</sup> *Blade Runner*.

that it is no less urgent or physically real because it comes to her from the larger symbolic order.<sup>42</sup>

Richard Pope agrees with Silverman's substitution of the missing dialogue, adding that 'Rachael's "I can't rely on —" is, most likely, her attempt to express confusion as to the status of her desire'; it is important to recall here that Rachael is suffering the onset of an identity crisis, having only learned a few scenes earlier, from Deckard, that she is not the person she thought herself to be – not even a 'person' at all.<sup>43</sup> Any reading of the supposed rape scene must take into account the earlier scene between the two characters, for the two are entwined both in execution and in their joint contribution to the film's subtext. Rachael has already visited Deckard's apartment, to prove to him that she is not, as the Voigt-Kampff test administered to her has shown, a replicant. She shows him a photograph of 'herself' as a child with her mother, and Deckard, savagely turning on her, quotes at her her own 'memories':

DECKARD Remember when you were six? You and your brother snuck into an empty building through a basement window. You were gonna play doctor. He showed you his, but when it got to be your turn you chickened and ran. Remember that? You ever tell anybody that? Your mother, Tyrell, anybody, huh? You remember the spider that lived in a bush outside your window? Orange body, green legs. Watched her build a web all summer. Then one day there was a big egg in it. The egg hatched –  
RACHAEL The egg hatched –  
DECKARD And?  
RACHAEL And a hundred baby spiders came out. And they ate her.  
DECKARD Implants! Those aren't your memories. They're somebody else's. They're Tyrell's niece's.<sup>44</sup>

Before the inferred brutality of his seduction of her, Deckard has already, as Nigel Wheale points out, 'treated Rachael brutally, letting her know that she is not-human, and he morosely drinks through the evening, alone in his haze-ridden apartment'.<sup>45</sup> This revelation, 'about her constructed psyche', Wheale argues, can be attributed to Deckard's need to 'protect himself from his own emotions in responding to Rachael – he forcibly reminds *himself* that she is a non-human construction by telling her the truth'.<sup>46</sup> In their second scene together, in the same haze-ridden setting, the perceived brutality of the seduction can be understood as a reaction against the circumstances of their previous intimate encounter. Deckard's forceful insistence can be read as a testament to his own construction of the human subject – framed by the urgency characteristic of passionate desire – the reconstruction of Rachael (whose world has fallen down

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<sup>42</sup> Silverman, pp. 128-129.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Pope, 'Affects of the Gaze: Post-Oedipal Desire and the Traversal of Fantasy in *Blade Runner*', *Camera Obscura*, 25.1 (2010), 69-95 (p. 83).

<sup>44</sup> *Blade Runner*.

<sup>45</sup> Nigel Wheale, 'Recognizing a "human-Thing": Cyborgs, robots and replicants in Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*', in *The Postmodern Arts*, ed. by Nigel Wheale (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 109.

<sup>46</sup> Wheale, p. 112.



around her and whom he is now partly responsible for saving) and, simultaneously, the reconstruction of himself. As Botting notes, ‘compassion and love, which [Deckard] also shares for Rachael, marks the inclusion and recognition of replicants in a human order, making the difference between them undecidable’.<sup>47</sup> The roughness with which the two characters submit to one another, rather than conveying overtones of rape or sexual domination, instead stem from his need to prove to her that she is in fact as human as she can be, as she thought herself to be, and, through his love, in relation to her, as he himself is. And to this, as M. Keith Booker has put it, ‘she begins to respond’.<sup>48</sup> Within the space of ten scenes, Deckard has destroyed both their characters and the foundations on which those characters were built, and then decided to rebuild them both. In the novel, a similar moment of crisis occurs following his murder of Luba; here, it is a combination of his action and his reaction to his emotions towards Rachael that coalesce to provide the catalyst for his change of course. The violence read into the seduction of Rachael belies only the projected anger Deckard feels towards himself, the realisation that he has, as Vint puts it, abjected himself through the act of murder, but also through the act of character assassination. His comprehension of this fact signals a crisis point at which his immediate reflex is to project that abjection onto Rachael, deconstructing them both, but almost immediately performing a self-edit to begin the reconstruction of both of their selves as subjects through the physical act of love – ‘the collapse of human and replicant consciousnesses into one another’.<sup>49</sup>

The romantic relationship portrayed by Rachael and Deckard, that Scott was so insistent on evolving beyond the limitations that Dick placed upon it in his novel, serves to align the film’s loyalty to the potential of the android and the notion that, as Galvan says of the original text, love imbues the subject with its autonomy. The Nexus-6 genus of replicant has begun to develop its own emotional sphere, its own notions of abstract concepts such as love, trust, and loyalty based on its cognitive experience of the world around it and those who populate it. Gwaltney says of this that ‘the book locates the defect (of the androids) in the lack of empathy; the film more cogently locates the defect in the lack of maturity or developmental experiences which remain with us through memory’.<sup>50</sup> This defect in memory is the crux of Rachael’s personal crisis, the unseating of her personhood through memory loss; and, by his relation to that fact and the part he plays in revealing it to her, the root of Deckard’s crisis as well. Pope draws attention to the way in which Deckard ‘help[s] her to realise that simply because her structuring memories are false, her feelings are still valid’, a validity that has become as

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<sup>47</sup> *Sex, Machines and Navels*, p. 188.

<sup>48</sup> M. Keith Booker, *Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture* (Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2006), p. 175.

<sup>49</sup> McNamara, p. 429.

<sup>50</sup> Gwaltney, p. 35.

important to him by this point as Rachael needs it to be for herself.<sup>51</sup> Memory loss and the implanting of false memories is a recurring element in science fiction, widely employed by authors and even more extensively discussed in the genre's criticism, bringing to the forefront of humanist discussion whether or not memory is a serious contender in terms of what constitutes human beings. However, in a comparative study of *Blade Runner* and Alex Proyas's *Dark City* (1998), Deborah Knight and George McKnight explore the issues regarding the central protagonists' reassessments of their respective realities after the falsehood of their personal subjectivities come to light, concluding that 'both films suggest that memory is far less important in any decision about agency or personhood than are the emotions and the desires that prompt action'.<sup>52</sup>

Stripped of memories that frame personal experience, in Rachael's case, or of prior convictions that shape a world picture, in Deckard's (which come to amount to the same thing, in the film), both characters are left with only feelings to go on. Love, it seems, as a driving emotion, can overstep boundaries that confine it to experience or memory or ideology – allowing for agency, allowing for action. David Desser confirms that 'redemption comes to Deckard and Rachael from the humanistic idea of transcendence through love amidst one's own existential condition', while Nick Land corroborates his view when he writes that the 'transcendental unconscious is the auto-construction of the real'.<sup>53</sup> In *Blade Runner*, the existential condition that is communicated through Deckard's oft-quoted demand of Tyrell – "How can it not know what it is?" – is reprised by the film's close:

DECKARD All he'd wanted were the same answers the rest of us want. Where did I come from? Where am I going? How long have I got?<sup>54</sup>

In the end, the only sureties, in lieu of reliable memory and an unfailing worldview, are the here-and-now of existence, and empathic self-affirmation and confirmation of the other's same – in short, the only thing left, for Deckard and Rachael, is love.

### **1.3. I am a magician who seduced a machine – *He, She and It* (1991)**

*Blade Runner*'s depiction of the female android at once sexually empowered and romantically empathic paved the way for subsequent portrayals of cyborgian women, particularly as they were taken up in the predominantly male-oriented cyberpunk genre. But these dovetailing characteristics – sexuality and romance – perform different roles in self-construction, something

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<sup>51</sup> Pope, p. 83.

<sup>52</sup> Deborah Knight and George McKnight, 'What Is It to Be Human?', in *The Philosophy of Science Fiction Film*, ed. by Steven M. Sanders (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 2008), p. 35.

<sup>53</sup> David Desser, 'The New Eve: The Influence of *Paradise Lost* and *Frankenstein* on *Blade Runner*', in *Retrofitting Blade Runner*, p. 61; Nick Land, 'Machinic Desire', *Textual Practice*, 7.3 (1993), 471-482 (p. 471).

<sup>54</sup> *Blade Runner*.

Dick and Scott both suggest in their texts. While desire is constitutive of subjective autonomy, the ability to love and be loved oversteps the boundaries of self to communicate with another, to create an intersubjective scene. Post-Cartesian philosophers of self, having convinced themselves of the self's existence via the *cogito ergo sum*, have continued to worry over the existence and significance of others. No relationship presents the self in relation to another at such intensely close quarters as the love relationship, and as these relationships are entered into with the view of maintaining them over long periods of time, it follows that a large and continuous part of our self-construction is deferred, if not to the other, then to the relationship itself.

The cyborg – in love or out of it – has been a staple feature of science fiction written by men, often figured as a passive conduit for male desire, one which reinforces normative masculine discourses of scientific and sexual prowess alike. It is perhaps for this reason that the cyborg, in its classic sense, has been largely absent from science fiction written by women. Desire and sexuality, on the other hand, has not. While women have long participated in the speculative tradition, in science fictions utopian and dystopian, Adam Roberts observes that it was not until after the 1960s that science fiction and feminism became a deliberately conjoined project, when female writers began to use the genre to actively seek out a 'sense of gender solidarity'.<sup>55</sup> It is possible that a shaping female influence has always been a part of the genre, if only latently; as Anne K. Mellor sees it, with *Frankenstein* 'science fiction was initiated with a woman's critique of scientific or technological development within a patriarchal society'.<sup>56</sup> Susan Magarey writes that, in the mid-twentieth century, 'feminist utopian fiction [...] connects with a second nonfeminist tradition of writing', that is, science fiction, which points to women during this period as consciously working towards a reclamation of what had otherwise been a classically male-dominated genre.<sup>57</sup> Up until the 1960s, science fiction had been a genre not only male-friendly or largely male-oriented, but one in which female characters had been readily exploited at the hands of men, thus perpetuating the gender norms that by that time, socially, politically, artistically and culturally, women were beginning to tire of and tire of very vocally. In a decade when women's writing began to challenge the masculine tradition across genres, Magarey notes that 'like all expressions of cultural and political disruption in their times, the specifically feminist utopias/science fictions emerged from an activist women's movement'.<sup>58</sup> Part of this activism included fictive sketches of worlds, women and societies in which familial and kinship structures were reimaged, and alternative social structures were experimented with. Naturally, the redistribution of power within sexed and gendered roles

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<sup>55</sup> *The History of Science Fiction*, p. 256.

<sup>56</sup> Anne K. Mellor, 'On Feminist Utopias', *Women's Studies*, 9.3 (1982), 241-261 (p. 244).

<sup>57</sup> Susan Magarey, 'Dreams and Desires: Four 1970s Feminist Visions of Utopia', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 22.53 (2007), 325-342 (p. 326).

<sup>58</sup> Magarey, p. 326.

throughout these alternative visions of society mirrored the kinds of countercultural movements that emerged and grew to define Western culture in the 1960s and early 1970s. Efforts to subvert the traditional family, as with communal ‘hippie’ lifestyles, and to rebel against the institution of marriage, as with free love, greatly shaped the range of projected societies and human relationships depicted in female and feminist utopias in the mid-twentieth century. Desire and sexuality were newly rendered fertile ground from which to extrapolate fresh configurations of self – particularly the female self – and yet love has proven to be somewhat trickier to reinvent during this period. While writers from Joanna Russ to Ursula K. Le Guin have experimented with every facet of sexuality – from sexual dimorphism and androgyny to fierce matriarchies and the ‘lesbian solution’ – uniting these thought experiments is the common need to constitute women and womanhood on terms determined by women themselves. Reflecting the emancipatory movements they sprung from, feminist utopian narratives foreground the reclamation of self through the reclamation of sexuality, and as such desire, the propellant of sexual expression, is also repossessed as a self-determining emotional force. Love in these utopias, and in feminine utopias since Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915), has not been ignored, but has certainly been played down in relation to desire and sex. The reason for this may be that sex and desire, as self-actualising identity practices, were the most obvious and immediately available aspects of the self to recolonize because they could belong to the self completely. Love, on the other hand, demands input from two people. It involves cooperation with, understanding of, and exposure to another lover. The social climate of mid-twentieth-century feminism prompted more women to self-actualise outside the confines of the love relationship than to treat those relationships themselves; the 1960s and 1970s were a time for freer love, spiritual development, and a measure of self-reliance in women’s experience at least. To confront the love relationship, so engrained and tied up with hegemonies from politics to religion, and promising shackles for women on all fronts from marriage to childrearing, was to worry at the roots of a much older tradition. Thus, in female utopias, and especially those that follow *Herland* by imagining women-only or matriarchal societies, romantic love is increasingly downplayed and redistributed into a kind of encompassing sisterhood or feminine mysticism. Of course, changing the style of love was this decade’s effort to reinvent it – mirrored in the communal, free-love practices of grassroots movements in the developed West.

Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It* (1991) has been variously described by critics as ‘a parable’, ‘a love story’, an homage to William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984), to Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975); a novel ‘less angry’, and ‘more hopeful’ than her earlier, more famous work *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976).<sup>59</sup> Publishing from the late 1960s onwards, Piercy’s work issues from the New Wave of science fiction (with her first novel released just a year after

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<sup>59</sup> Peter Fitting (1985), M. Keith Booker (1994), et al.

*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*), a period which also sees her marked out (or in) as part of the feminist science fiction movement of that era. New Wave science fiction is credited with making the shift in the genre from hard to soft science fiction, opening up the field to include a plethora of writers whose focus was more attuned to issues of society and humanity, rather than narratives concentrated on high-tech, gadget-based science. In this kind of fiction, feminist authors excelled, and while subsequently the 1960s and 1970s became the decades of the century most prolific for less technologically driven but more socially conscious feminist utopias, M. Keith Booker has pointed to Piercy's uniqueness within her field for treading the waters between these two spheres. He commends her style as 'particularly interesting because of its ability to maintain clear links to the tradition of feminist utopias while at the same time opening important dialogues with the masculine utopian classics and with the traditionally masculine dystopian genre'.<sup>60</sup> Piercy also stands out from her fellow feminists of the 1970s due to the evolution her work has undergone over the years. The wealth of critical attention on Piercy is predominantly focused around *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and though Piercy's reaching for utopia in her first major novel undoubtedly shaped the issues raised in *He, She and It*, the stark contrast in the novels' portrayals of relationships has, for the most part, been critically unexamined.

*He, She and It* opens with a portrait of the modern family: father, mother, infant son. We are told of an ill-conceived marriage, a misbegotten child, an ugly divorce. All are identifiable, sympathetic concepts, yet this familial unit sits firmly in the grasp of the corporate family of hypercapitalist company Yakamura-Stichen, and their domestic melodrama is thus translated into the business vernacular, played out in a *Brazil*-esque circus of bureaucracy. In 2059, marriage customs persist almost exclusively within the company enclaves, and Y-S strongly encourages employees to marry, promoting quasi-Victorian family values enforced through strict regulation of all sexual conduct, relationships, and parenthood. These values, however, have evolved to reflect the pragmatism of the business world (rather than rooting themselves in human emotional need), and so marriages are contracted, with no obligation on either party to renew after five or ten years. Patriarchal laws have reinstated certain glass ceilings for female workers, who claim no parental rights on account of their gender, but rather on their professional rank. As such, the novel begins in the midst of a legal battle between Shira and her ex-husband Josh, which culminates in him being awarded full custodial care of their young son. Utterly defeated and failed by the company, Shira abandons her life at Y-S, and the opening note of broken love is immediately echoed as she returns to the Jewish free town of

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<sup>60</sup> M. Keith Booker, 'Woman on the Edge of a Genre: The Feminist Dystopias of Marge Piercy', *Science-Fiction Studies*, 21.3 (1994), 337-350 (p. 339).

Tikva – ‘a home she had fled, not from an unhappy childhood but from too early and too intense love, paradise torn’.<sup>61</sup>

Piercy’s vision of the future is wildly hyperbolic in its eco-political concerns, and yet uncannily rooted in familiar social contexts. Shira has grown up in a world reeling from the aftereffects of global-scale environmental disaster. In the emergent society, capital is almost completely expressed as technoscientific production: information is the main commodity, and under corporatocratic control:

There were twenty-three great multis that divided the world among them, enclaves on every continent and on space platforms. Among them they wielded power and enforced the corporate peace: raids, assassinations, skirmishes, but no wars since the Two Week War in 2017 (p. 12).

Corporate employees above a certain rank are housed in their respective enclaves, domed cities protected from the toxicity of the planet and set apart from the ‘crowded violent festering warren of the half-starved Glop [...] slang for the Megalopolis that stretched south from what had been Boston to what had been Atlanta, and a term applied to other similar areas all over the continent and the world’ (p. 8). Piercy’s depiction of the Earth’s future extrapolates all-too-recognisable points of conflict from late twentieth-century society – widening class divides, ideological wars, capitalist seizing of world resources from energy to water, the destruction of the environment, the ubiquitous presence of a lulling, distractive media – and stretches them to breaking point to produce a world in turmoil, at once far-flung but not inconceivable. Set against the backdrop of a world coming to terms with high technology, one learning to mediate between an accelerated boom in technocultural production and devastating post-war depression, Piercy plays with a hypothetical scenario of history repeating itself in the mid-twenty-first century society of her novel. In the technoculture she depicts, almost anything is possible in terms of scientific production, but one worldwide law prevails: automata cannot be created in the image of humans. Shira’s grandmother Malkah, the narrator of the golem story, muses on her part in the creation of an illegal cyborg named Yod, comparing her role to that of the Rabbi Judah Loew, Maharal of Prague. She explains that ‘for a human being to make another is to usurp the power of ha-Shem, to risk frightening self-aggrandisement. It is to push yourself beyond the human. It is dangerous to the soul, dangerous to the world’ (p. 39). Evoking historical conflicts between machines and their creators, Piercy’s protagonist Shira recalls an instance in her youth where she questioned this covenant: ‘She had never seen a robot shaped like a person. It was illegal to make one that way, just as it was illegal to create robots with human-level intelligence’ (p. 63). She receives the following in answer from her house computer:

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<sup>61</sup> Marge Piercy, *He, She and It* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 51. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

People found the first humanoid robots cute, fascinating and then quickly disturbing. Riots and Luddite outbreaks of machine bashing occurred. People were afraid that machines would replace them, not in dangerous jobs but in well-paid and comfortable jobs [...] People sometimes fear intelligent machines, Shira, particularly people who have not grown up with a sophisticated computer. Or they don't mind a stationary computer but are afraid of one that has a body and can move around. I consider such laws important to make people feel secure (p. 66).

Once restored to the home of her grandmother, Malkah, and employed in the service of Avram Stein, Shira finds herself given the task of socialising the cyborg that Malkah and Avram have co-created. The plurality of narrative expands to include their blossoming love story: 'Shira's gradual declaration of independence from her conventional past and exploration of her own emotional and intellectual capabilities', and her instruction of Yod in 'how to handle his functions'.<sup>62</sup> Shira is a character who, throughout the novel and even at its end, is almost entirely constructed through her relationships with men. We are told that she is one who has made 'conventional choices', and tends to 'love too hard' (pp. 263, 75). Because of this tendency, Shira has been damaged by a string of failed relationships. Unable in her adolescence to accept a relationship with Gadi that was not founded on total, reciprocal, unending monogamous devotion ("I've got to get out, Shira. We're dying, the two of us. We're dying together. Don't you feel it?"), she abandoned Tikva for the multis (p. 78). In her adult life, marrying Josh to 'make him happy' and to save their relationship only results in its destruction, at which point she departs from her professional life to return to the freetown (p. 14). Though intelligent and capable in her own right, Shira's life choices have always been determined by the choices she has made in her romantic relationships, and the choices their failures have imposed upon her; even a decade later, at home again, she is still tormented by Gadi and their early co-dependence. Gadi is equally damaged, as Malkah tells her: "He's dead the same way you are, my Shira. He can't commit to any woman, and you can't really love any other man" (p. 101).

Shira is by no means the quintessential heroine of the feminist utopian fictions which contextualised Piercy's earlier works. *He, She and It* differs from the *Woman on the Edge of Time* and other novels which characterise the period in several ways, the most significant of which is bound up with macrological themes that pervade women's science fiction of the time, the contextual frames from which they were produced and that are more often than not potently communicated in their narratives. Peter Fitting writes that:

Utopian visions are essential to the struggle for human emancipation because they help us to articulate what we understand by a qualitatively different society, something we sometimes lose sight of in the midst of our day-to-day

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<sup>62</sup> Booker, 'Woman on the Edge of a Genre: The Feminist Dystopias of Marge Piercy', p. 346; Martinson, p. 60.

lives, and also because these visions reach beyond the restricted public of the already politicised and speak to a wider audience which often seems no longer to believe in the possibility of desirable or feasible alternatives to the fundamental insufficiency of the present.<sup>63</sup>

The issue of ‘human emancipation’ translates largely into the third-wave feminism with which female (and also numerous male) authors were ideologically and intellectually enmeshed in everyday life, work and politics. Indeed, in Booker’s opinion, ‘in *Woman on the Edge of Time* Piercy draws the line between utopia and dystopia quite clearly, and the resultant dialogue between the two is an important source of energy for her book’.<sup>64</sup> Of course, the source of energy for the entire subgenre of feminist utopias came from the same critical engagement with sexual inequality and the opportunity to utilise science fiction as a working-out space to imagine alternative solutions to the problems of mid-twentieth-century gender politics. Two main trends emerged in utopian thought experiments: the complete segregation of gender, and the drastic merging of it. Authors experimented with alternative modes of community, such as *Whileaway* in Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man*, or the women-only communes in Sally Gearhart’s *The Wanderground* (1978) – taking source inspiration from such female utopian novels as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915). In other depictions, including *Woman on the Edge of Time*, gender roles are so radically subverted as to make conflict based on sexuality almost impossible. Fitting notes that in the utopian future society of Piercy’s earlier novel, even the language is transfigured in purpose, so that ‘the generic noun *man* and the gender differentiated pronouns *his* and *her* have been replaced by the word *per* (as in person)’.<sup>65</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin has expressed her regret that she did not employ a similar lexicon when writing her 1969 novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. In an essay written in 1976 entitled “Is Gender Necessary?” Le Guin explains that, ‘I call Gethenians ‘he’ because I absolutely refuse to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for ‘he/she’ – but by 1989 her revised version of the essay includes the following self-edit:

This ‘utter refusal’ of 1968 restated in 1976 collapsed, utterly, within a couple of years more. I still dislike invented pronouns, but now I dislike them less than the so-called generic pronoun he/him/his, which does in fact exclude women from discourse [...] If I had realised how the pronouns I used shaped, directed, controlled my own thinking, I might have been ‘cleverer’.<sup>66</sup>

Such a brave destabilisation of sexuated being and gendered performance has not been lost on Piercy’s contemporaries, no less on her audiences and critics, but interestingly her move

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<sup>63</sup> Peter Fitting, ‘So We All Became Mothers: New Roles for Men in Recent Utopian Fiction’, *Science-Fiction Studies*, 12.2 (1985), 156-183 (p. 156).

<sup>64</sup> ‘Woman on the Edge of a Genre: The Feminist Dystopias of Marge Piercy’, p. 340.

<sup>65</sup> Fitting, p. 165.

<sup>66</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, ‘Is Gender Necessary? Redux’, in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), pp. 14-15.



towards the elimination of conventional gender roles in her science fiction is one she had seemingly revoked by the time *He, She and It* was released. Elissa Gurman has noted that traditionally gendered values, alongside those of humanism and religion, are ‘endorsed and recapitulated, rather than revised’, as one might expect of such a forward-looking novel.<sup>67</sup> Likewise, as both Neil Badmington and June Deery have identified, *He, She and It* reinstates a heteronormative bias to the ‘old-fashioned tale of boy (borg?) meets girl’ by ‘polaris[ing] masculine and feminine traits in a fairly traditional manner’.<sup>68</sup> In this novel, perhaps uniquely in her body of work (which is largely understood to be an exemplary oeuvre of, as well as an important contribution to, feminist utopian fiction), Piercy’s deliberate redistribution of roles shows a departure from the New Wave concerns of solving the gender problem (texts such as Le Guin’s Ekumen series, 1966 onwards; Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, 1975), or problems of race or class (Robert Heinlein’s *Stranger in a Strange Land*, 1961; Walter Tevis’s *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, 1963). She instead turns her attention to the impact of technology on humanity, how these technologies shape and define us, and in this way her work can be seen to be ‘opening dialogues’ with older, male-dominated examples of the genre whose social contexts did not provide the conditions for thought-experiments into the experience of marginalised groups in the same way as the mid-twentieth century decades of emancipation on so many fronts provided.

The thematic shift her work undergoes in *He, She and It* therefore aligns Piercy more closely with recent authors who have bypassed (to a large extent) the question of gender in favour of the question of humanity, resurrecting much older issues, but framing them with postmodern context and concerns. Such works as Kathleen Ann Goonan’s *Nanotech Quartet* (1994-2002) and J. C. McGowan’s *The Big God Network* (2007) update both the social commentary on technoculture and the actual technologies informing their narratives, showing a break away from feminist concerns in favour of plots that document the increasingly human experience of characters whose makeup promotes the redefinition of humans and humanness. These works – like Piercy’s, like the New Wave – are heavily indebted to the construction of androids in both Dick and Scott. Though critics have made much of Piercy’s earlier ability to delineate clear boundaries within what have come to be understood as binaries traditional to the science fiction genre – e.g. male/female; human/nonhuman; natural/synthetic; nature/nuture; good/evil – in *He, She and It* her presentation of a world better informed by its technological engagement, where dystopia bleeds into utopia and men into machines, is more attuned to the

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<sup>67</sup> Elissa Gurman, “‘The holy and the powerful light that shines through history’”: Tradition and Technology in Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It*’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 38.3 (2011), 460-477 (p. 460).

<sup>68</sup> Neil Badmington, ‘Posthumanist (Com)Promises: Diffracting Donna Haraway’s Cyborg Through Marge Piercy’s *Body of Glass*’, in *Posthumanism*, ed. by Neil Badmington (New York: Palgrave, 2000), p. 90; June Deery, ‘Ectopic and Utopic Reproduction: He, She and It’, *Utopian Studies* 5.2 (1994), 38-49 (p. 42).

concerns of postmodern science fiction regarding the (post)human condition. Martinson writes that in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, ‘Piercy’s characters are able to clearly distinguish human from machine. By the time she writes *He, She and It*, the distinguishing features are no longer obvious’.<sup>69</sup>

Shira’s gradual acceptance of her love towards Yod runs parallel with the developments in her work; Fitting has noted that an imperative feature in marking out science fiction’s utopian or dystopian societal values is ‘the valorisation of all forms of human activity’ beginning with ‘a fundamental transformation of work itself [...] to more rewarding and largely self-determining activities’.<sup>70</sup> Throughout the novel, Shira’s personal development is propelled by her engagement with her work; her career moves have been invariably made for her depending on the romantic relationships she pursued or abandoned. However, in the employment of Y-S, work has served to dehumanise Shira: ‘she had begun to doubt her own talent. She had decided she was lacking in ambition and drive. Yet her innovations had been quietly picked up and used throughout Y-S without her knowledge, without her receiving any benefits – even psychological’ (p. 380). Back in Tikva, Shira’s self-confidence is rebuilt through her ‘self-determining activities’: her work on the socialisation of the cyborg that, quite literally, determines his self as well as her own in relation to it. Still, Shira’s self-worth remains tied to her worth in the eyes of others, including Malkah and her recently returned mother, but predominantly males:

Discovering that her work was actually highly original and that only Y-S corporate politics had kept her pinned in position, she found herself taking her own ideas far more seriously. She had a brisk confidence that expressed itself in a new level of mastery [...] Still, she was lonely for Yod (pp. 486-487).

Being in love with a cyborg, transgressing that taboo, is something that Shira repeatedly strives to rationalise by drawing comparisons between the human body and its cyborg double. This process of self-convincing sees her lessening the distance between humans and machines, by performing a balancing act of the objectification of humanity and the humanisation of the cyborg, a task made all the easier for her own dehumanising experiences and her perception of the world in which she exists – a technoculture in which everything, everyone, is essentially flattened under commodification. As she ruminates on their sexual relationship, she contrasts their biological and machinic natures:

I was making love, she told herself, with something built of crystal, chips, neural nets, heuristic programs, lab-grown biologicals. She could not cook up disgust. After all, her own interior was hardly aesthetically pleasing. Were biochips more offputting than intestines? She thought no more in bed about

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<sup>69</sup> Martinson, p. 58.

<sup>70</sup> Fitting, p. 158.

what was inside the skin of a human male than she really cared about what was inside Yod (p. 224).

Shira can easily relate to the dehumanising effect of technoculture, and has herself been a victim of social depersonalisation – the most painful source of which occurs in her romantic relationships. Nonetheless, she seems resigned to the fact that she remains a woman defined in relation to men, consciously and voluntarily by the end of the novel, as Yod places no demands on her in the way other men have done by their nature, and yet she clings to her love for him as an integral part of her own being. By her own admission, she is ‘for better or worse a woman who, if she loved someone, was shaped to receive that loved one and perhaps only that one’; as she takes care to remind the reader, it ‘had taken a decade to free herself of Gadi’ (p. 557). Throughout the novel Piercy makes a point of constructing Shira through her memories of men, and through her experience of the cyborg, repeatedly juxtaposing the two to portray a woman dehumanised, desexualised and depersonalised by flattening excesses of male dominion (‘Perhaps her sexuality had been so impacted that nothing had tempted her. Now she was frighteningly awake, aware’), but one who is reconstructed by falling in love on her own terms, in an orchestrated accident as she teaches a cyborg – and by extension, herself, to feel (p. 285).

In departing so radically from her initial feminist premise to present a fairly conventional ‘borg meets girl’ romance, one might wonder if Piercy had abandoned the cause she so obviously fought for in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. However, I feel that there is more at work in *He, She and It*. Firstly, her strong female characters are not entirely dispensed with, and Shira does eventually come to strength, though in her own way. Throughout, Shira’s third-person narrative is balanced with Malkah’s first-person account, which insists on a comparative reading of the two women. Malkah is concerned by Shira’s tendency to fall in love and fall in love deeply, and Malkah herself is depicted as a former femme fatale, who took lovers for pleasure or sport but never attached too much importance to them. Malkah defines herself best through her work, and repeatedly advises that Shira act similarly, rather than making love her priority:

It occupies the centre and squeezes out your strength. If you work in the centre and love to the sides, you will love better in the long run, Shira. You will give more gracefully, without counting, and what you get, you will enjoy.

Malkah did not know what love was. Shira refused to argue (p. 75).

Malkah, presented throughout the novel as wholly content with her solitary life, clearly stands for the feminist concern as she tries to impart to Shira the dangers of relying on others – especially men – to create a valid sense of self. Piercy is careful, however, to balance this perspective with a more progressive view of the romantic relationship that brings Shira into line with Giddens’s confluent lover. Shira’s determination to find the right kind of love supports the hypothesis for contemporary, confluent love as able to create and support a valid, self-

actualising subjective scene. I have argued that love creates a space for self-construction, one which is ever-more required in an increasingly technocultural, capitalist world; in Piercy's hypercapitalist society, love is precisely the place where Shira is trying to be. When Malkah advises her to find herself through her work, of course, this is sound advice, especially when that work ceases to be determined by the corporation and begins to be determined by Shira herself. But the workspace, no matter how rewarding or self-valorising, remains a space tied to the superstructural terms of a capitalist society, and as such is neither as free nor as pure as the love relationship. In addition, it is Shira's work that eventually leads her to Yod, and though it continues to give her pleasure, cannot compare to the satisfaction she gains from a fulfilling romantic relationship. Rather than have Shira follow in her grandmother or mother's footsteps – both of whom have turned away from conventional monogamous relationships in favour of their work – Piercy runs Shira through a lifelong gauntlet in pursuit of the perfect love. In doing so, Piercy also inadvertently 'tests out' several types of relationship over the course of Shira's life. Badiou writes in *In Praise of Love* that there are three main interpretations of the love relationship, each of which he sees as false:

First, there is the romantic interpretation that focuses on the ecstasy of the encounter. Secondly [...] the interpretation based on a commercial or legalistic perspective, which argues that love must be in the end a contract [...] Finally, there is the sceptical interpretation that turns love into an illusion (pp. 21-22).

The romantic interpretation Badiou aligns elsewhere with the high Romantic myth of the lovers merging to become one. Shira goes through this stage during childhood with Gadi; in her adolescent delirium she described them as 'fated [...] bound':

Other people wandered the earth their whole lives looking for their twin, their lover, their other self who would complete them and answer their deepest hungers, but she and Gadi had found each other so early that no one could ever slip between them (p. 43).

Badiou has called this perpetuation of the Romantic merging – itself a continuation of a myth retold in Plato – beautiful, but also existentially lacking (p. 31). It can also, Piercy warns, be existentially dangerous. After the relationship ends, Shira is deadened sexually, and attributes her subsequent failures in love to such deep co-dependency with Gadi. Gadi too, is emotionally marred, and at the novel's opening is in disgrace with his corporation for pursuing a sexual relationship with a fifteen-year-old girl. Malkah sees this as him 'seeking [Shira] at fifteen', which cements the lasting impairment on his self that his first relationship exacted. Shira later enters into a contractual relationship with her husband, Josh, the terms of which are dictated by the corporation they both work for. Though she professes to Malkah to have loved Josh in the beginning, implicit in her story of their relationship is a sense that a reliance on the corporation's hand in her marriage would have prevented her from falling as deeply in love as

she had previously. Of course, this also means that the love relationship does not develop organically between them. Where Badiou has stressed that love must operate on its own terms, rather than those externally – socially or politically – set, Shira’s marriage is in fact determined by and brought into line with company policy. There is no sense that the two are in it for love, or for themselves, and ultimately the marriage fails.

Such harrowing experience might be enough to convince Shira of Badiou’s third interpretation – that love is merely an illusion – and indeed she is surrounded on all fronts by people who consider a monogamous, lasting commitment to be distractive at best. She recounts how, early on in life, she and Gadi were conscious of keeping their relationship a secret because the freetown ‘outlawed and demeaned’ such an outdated custom as pair bonding (p. 43). Her mother, grandmother and various friends keep no long term romantic partners in their houses, procreate alone by way of in-vitro fertilisation, and maintain large, extended kinship groups based around a communal work spirit. The freetown of Tikva itself reads very closely to the feminist utopias of the previous two decades, and yet Piercy does not allow Shira to find her self-valorisation in work and friendship alone. Badiou treats these three fallacious interpretations through his own sketch of the Two scene, which he claims ‘cannot be reduced to any of these approximations and is a quest for truth’ (p. 22). Giddens, similarly, has argued that the confluent love of the contemporary age prioritises the nature of the love relationship over the lover themselves, that people actively seek out the perfect relationship, rather than the perfect person.<sup>71</sup> Though Malkah encourages Shira to determine herself through her work and not through her lovers, it is not the other person from whom Shira is looking for validation, it is the relationship which will ease her existential anxiety and offer her the truth of herself. As Atwood wrote in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, ‘the more difficult it was to love the particular man beside us, the more we believed in Love, abstract and total’.<sup>72</sup> Piercy presents a modern heroine, a confluent lover, in whom feminism is not betrayed but is momentarily held aside. Rather than align her with Malkah or the other females in the text whose sexual expressiveness and claims on their own desires construct them as individuals, Shira is instead searching for the truth of herself that may be found in the love relationship, not just any relationship with any person, but the right one. Instead of retreading earlier, more classic feminist ground of developing subjective autonomy through a reclaiming of sexuality, Piercy pushes Shira to reclaim herself through love.



Dick, Scott and Piercy foreground a common trope of science fiction narratives: that of the technoscientific society as an essentially dehumanising environment. We cannot extricate technoscience from capitalism; the two are resolutely bound. Our increasingly mechanistic

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<sup>71</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 62.

<sup>72</sup> *The Handmaid’s Tale*, p. 226.

natures are shown to us – through a glass, darkly – by the artificial life-forms science fiction writers place alongside us. This technique is not new to the genre, neither has it been relegated to its history; one sees its deployment as early as *Frankenstein* and as recently as *Prometheus* (2012). Where these three texts persist, however, is in their reframing of that trope beneath the lens of love. Deckard and Shira are both utterly dehumanised by the roles handed to them in their respective technocultures, but both find ways to reconstruct themselves through love with beings that have traditionally troubled the claim to humanity. The following chapter will explore the reasons for these successful reconstructions, linking them via the Badiouian concept of *difference* to the redemptive construction of the love scene.

## Chapter Two

### Les preuves d'amour

CAPTAIN KIRK: And you'll learn something about men and women, the way they're supposed to be. Caring for each other, being happy with each other, being good to each other. That's what we call... love. You'll like that, too, a lot.

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*Star Trek: The Original Series* (1966)

In 1968, in the episode 'Plato's Stepchildren', *Star Trek: The Original Series* screened American television history's first scripted interracial kiss. Screenwriter for the series David Gerrold wrote afterwards about the show's representation of minority ethnic groups, and concluded that *Star Trek* and the pioneering of equal rights naturally went hand-in-hand – the crew of the *Enterprise* 'had to be interracial because it represented all of mankind. How can the human race ever hope to achieve friendship with alien races if it can't even make friends with itself?'.<sup>1</sup> This question, aside from still being relevant to human rights concerns throughout the world today, is repeatedly invoked in senses both literal and figurative throughout first contact, invasion and exploratory science fiction. Texts scatter alliances around the issue: commercial blockbusters such as Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* (1996) use alien invasions to more firmly demarcate the boundaries of self and Other in order to unite a common humanity against a resolutely unsympathetic alien race; while other, more courageously probing narratives such as Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War* (1974) extrapolate social contexts from the Vietnam War period into settings so far-flung that the focus is dragged back around – the self then alienated, the Other's position privileged. While these latter approaches are the most conducive to the creation of narratives of acceptance, N. Katherine Hayles for one warns against the simple inversion of tactics when trying to counter the opposition, in that to define oneself solely by what one revolts against 'the revolutionary ends up looking like his opponent reflected in a mirror'.<sup>2</sup> In many first contact and invasion narratives, the self/Other dichotomy is precisely the catalyst upon which the plot turns; such texts serve to further reinscribe the subject/object problematic upon the genre. Of course, in postcolonial readings of science fiction texts, such as those offered by Andrew Milner and

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<sup>1</sup> David Gerrold, *The World of Star Trek* (New York: Blue Jay Books, 1984), p. 152. His words echo those of Captain Kirk from this very episode, who archly explains: "where I come from, size, shape, or colour makes no difference, and nobody has the power".

<sup>2</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 209. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, again this is where the action of such narratives lies.<sup>3</sup> At risk in these readings, however, is an oversight regarding the much more subtle, more sublimated comingling of self and Other as enacted within a single subject. To commit to a ‘for’ or ‘against’ standpoint in terms of our empathic readings of alien figures is to also commit to a (re)configuration of the human counterpart as essentially antithetical. Aliens who meet the traditional expectations of the antagonistic Other sustain the hegemony of humanity, while human error exposed by a benign or morally superior alien race may make trades on our sympathies, but the self/Other dichotomy, though subverted, remains intact. While these texts may succeed in their deconstruction of the actors who lay claim to the subjectivities of self and Other, and in a percentage of portrayals may well overturn expectations and destabilise our presuppositions, a mere inversion of the roles does little to challenge the way we conceive of these potent relationships. When we commit to the subject/object dyad in these narratives, we run a bipolar risk. Either we vilify the Other for the sake of a superficially affirmative subtext (*Independence Day*; *War of the Worlds*, 2005; *Battle: Los Angeles*, 2011) without pausing to speculate for a second on the existential implications of a close encounter for the human race, or conversely, we demonise the Other to the extent that we then abject ourselves, to the point it becomes hard to watch. Several recent films, such as *District 9* and *Avatar* (both 2009), play on the emotive strength of this inversion as they exploit and extrapolate painful parallels with historical atrocities. Writers and filmmakers who harness the dramatic energy of the subject/object dialectic leave little to no middle ground, or else that middle ground is quickly closed up in the interests of equilibrium and closure. Traditionally, within alien narratives especially, there is a desperate need to reinstate the self and its Other by the narrative’s close. We seem to require a fixed idea of an exteriorised Other, one to be kept at arm’s length.

More recently, however, science fiction authors in particular have been working towards the sticky middle ground, using various investigative techniques in content-rich explorations that directly interrogate the self/Other dyad as distilled in the human/alien encounter. Ted Chiang’s novella ‘Story of Your Life’ (2002) sets up the classic binary, and depicts conflict between humans and a visiting alien race through approaches to language and the physical sciences: ‘when the ancestors of humans and heptapods first acquired the spark of consciousness, they both perceived the same physical world, but they parsed their perceptions

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<sup>3</sup> Milner’s *Locating Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012) provides an impressive rundown of the genre by geographic region, dedicating a portion to the fictions coming out of the various European empires. He writes that in particular, ‘Western accounts of the Orient were [...] primarily an effect of the West’s own fantasies about the Eastern Other [...] The obvious implication for SF is that its constructions of alien Others will tend to function in analogous fashion’ (p. 157); thereby showing how science fiction has invited retroactive postcolonial readings. Spivak has applied her theory of the subaltern to *Frankenstein*, deeming it a critique of the ‘axiomatics of imperialism in substance and rhetoric’, in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards a History of the Vanishing Present* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 115.



differently; the world-views that ultimately arose were the end result of that divergence'.<sup>4</sup> By learning the heptapods' language, the protagonist of the novella not only comes to empathise with their world view, but takes on enough of it that she is able to modify her conscious understanding of her own. China Miéville's 2011 novel *Embassytown*, in which humans live alongside the indigenous Ariekei, is also grounded in language. Each race's experience of the other's mode of expression, and thereby thought and means of constructing reality, undercuts the significance of language to the point that it creates a social revolution. Both human and alien, by learning to speak to each other, metamorphose and irrevocably alter the trajectory of their co-evolution. Miéville has his characters re-enact colonial narratives of settlement and co-adjustment, and as such the novel goes far beyond the simple dialectical interplay of self and Other, as it transposes the lessons of racial integration in human history onto an envisaged interspecies society. In order to achieve social cohesion, *Embassytown*'s citizens must learn to see themselves each through the other's eyes, to speak with each other's language. In this way, the polarised dichotomy of self/Other is rescued from the alien encounter and redistributed equally, on the subjective level. For Patrick Parrinder, 'aliens in SF invariably possess a metaphorical dimension'; at base, the alien stands for the most othered of Others.<sup>5</sup> The most sophisticated deployments of the alien metaphor come not from first contact or invasion narratives but push beyond them to configure interracial and interspecies societies, wherein the metaphorical aspects of alien selfhood are worked through in juxtaposition with human metaphysics. Miéville's *Embassytown* and also his Bas-Lag series (2000-2004) issue from the relatively small but thematically rich subgenre of planetary romance, and draw inspiration from sources as diverse as C. S. Lewis's *Space Trilogy* (1938-1945), Frank Herbert's *Dune* series (1965-1985), Le Guin's *Hainish Cycle* (1966-2000), Anne McCaffrey's *Dragonriders of Pern* series (1967-2011), and George Lucas's *Star Wars* film franchise (1977-2008). These texts, extrapolated to the farthest reaches of the science-fictional imaginary, actively engage with aliens and alienation as figurative techniques. Their methodical expositions of interspecies societies hinge on their interrogation and reconfiguration of difference, not only in the way they set in motion a constant back-and-forth between othering the self and making the Other known, but that in doing so, they force a conception of the subject that holds both self and Other as equal and integral parts of a single and coherent claim to agency.

The *Star Trek* franchise (1966-2013) consistently initiates similar grounds for debate, as it repeatedly places its landing party within alien contexts, and amplifies the anthropological dimension to exploratory science fictions. It is here that the genre finds its most significant intersection with philosophy. Explorers and indigenes, immigrants and natives, humans and

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<sup>4</sup> Ted Chiang, 'Story of Your Life' in *Stories of Your Life and Others* (Massachusetts: Small Beer Press, 2010), p. 191. Google ebook.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Parrinder, *Science Fiction: A Critical Guide* (London: Longman 1979), p. 155.

aliens: these relationships, which turn on the axis of difference, rewrite the philosophical dilemma of self and Other – of subject and object – but enframed and updated by technocultures that place demands on our present and ask us how we wish to proceed into our future. When *Star Trek* screened its interracial kiss between Kirk and Uhura in 1968, it epitomised the philosophical reach of the science fiction text, at once reiterating the self/Other problematic whilst directly addressing the issue of racial prejudice in American society. The episode also implicitly directs its audience towards the roots of a philosophical system that deals with difference between selves and Others through the frame of love. ‘Plato’s Stepchildren’ are thus explained by an inhabitant of the planet providing the scene of the episode:

KIRK                   Who are the inhabitants of this planet?  
ALEXANDER   Oh, Platonians. I’m sure you’ve never heard of us. Our native star is Sahndara. Millennia ago, just before it went nova, we managed to escape. Our leader liked Plato’s ideas. Plato, Platonius. See? In fact, our present philosopher-king, Parmen, sometimes calls us Plato’s children, although we sometimes think of ourselves more as Plato’s stepchildren.<sup>6</sup>

The insistence on ‘stepchildren’, rather than ‘children’, begs the question: who might be considered as Plato’s stepchildren? The philosophy of love begins with Plato’s Socratic dialogues, most famously in *The Symposium* (c. 385-380 BC). Though the essence of the text is Plato’s retelling of the thought of Socrates on love, he allows us to experience other interpretations of human relationships across a range of voices and storytelling styles. If nothing else, in the face of Socrates’s own views as he challenges one after another, this technique informs us that love was indeed a subject worthy of academic consideration as early as the Classical period, and that human nature as defined by human interaction did give rise to discussion and debate. In addition, the position occupied by myth and narrative within our experience and understanding is emphasised even here, which suggests that we have always produced texts in order to express ourselves, and that these texts contribute in turn to subsequent constructions of self. In the dialogue, significant distinctions are made between the types of love, which set up a framework for subsequent readings of love throughout the Western tradition. The speech of Pausanias highlights the difference between a love characterised by its humanness and the love reserved for religious purposes:

surely there are two kinds of Aphrodite? One of these is older and is the daughter of Uranus [...] we call her Uranian or Heavenly Aphrodite. The younger one is the daughter of Zeus and Dione: we call her Pandemic or Common Aphrodite.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Plato’s Stepchildren’ (season 3, episode 10), *Star Trek: The Original Series*, NBC, 22 November 1968.

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *The Symposium* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1999), p. 12.

This division of Aphrodite evolves into later notions of *eros* and *agapē*, the kinds of love found in human desire and spiritual experience respectively, expanded upon and cemented in the philosophical tradition by Neoplatonist and Scholastic thinkers. The conclusions drawn by Socrates come from the ‘mysteries’ of Diotima, a priestess with whom he has previously engaged in a dialogue that he recounts as part of his contribution to the discussion. Socrates defines love as a ‘state of deficiency or need’ which is fundamentally relational, in that it is directed towards something the lover lacks.<sup>8</sup> Using Diotima’s mysteries to develop his argument, Socrates goes on to identify the motive of love as ‘the desire to have the good forever’, and concludes that the purpose of such love and motivational desire is reproduction, through which one can gain immortality:

All human beings are pregnant in body and in mind, and when we reach a degree of adulthood we naturally desire to give birth [...] There is something divine in this process; this is how mortal creatures achieve immortality, in pregnancy and giving birth.<sup>9</sup>

Diotima concludes her explanation (and thus Socrates’s) by reiterating that if ‘the object of love is to have the good always, it follows that that we must desire immortality along with the good’, and therefore the purpose of love is to achieve this immortality.<sup>10</sup> Plato’s delineation of scholarly thought concerning love takes us from mythical metanarrative through to the academic extraction of meaning from representation, and its resulting pragmatism. As Irving Singer summarises: ‘we start with the primitive myth of Aristophanes and end up with the first highly sophisticated conclusion of Plato’s erotic philosophy: ‘love is the desire for the perpetual possession of the good’’.<sup>11</sup>

In *The Symposium*, several important foundations are laid that carry over into and throughout all subsequent thinking on love over the next two thousand years. Though Socrates presents the defining argument on the subject, echoes of Plato’s ideas are worked out and through the dialogue’s other contributing voices, such as Pausanias’s dualistic framework of Pandemic and Uranian Aphrodite which can be traced clearly throughout the history of Western philosophy. Aspects of other speeches (Agathon, Phaedrus) are used to flesh out the allegories Plato introduces in *The Symposium* (Diotima) and develops throughout his other middle dialogues *The Republic* (c. 380 BC) and *Phaedrus* (c. 370 BC), which set up his theory of Forms as a means to explore human nature – the pursuit of idealised universals guiding our earthly conduct, which provides the basis of the Platonic system overall.<sup>12</sup> The speech of Aristophanes

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<sup>8</sup> *The Symposium*, p. xxviii.

<sup>9</sup> *The Symposium*, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> *The Symposium*, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> Irving Singer, *The Nature of Love Volume One: Plato to Luther* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 53.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *The Republic* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 189.

is also significant, as it reiterates a mythical narrative about the origins of love which has survived the other counter-arguments of the text to become one of the most well-remembered representations of love in Greek literature, one that oversteps its context to be revisited in later culture. It explains that humans in their current state are half-beings, halves of a whole that they are constantly trying to restore:

That's how, long ago, the innate desire of human beings for each other started. It draws the two halves of our original nature back together and tries to make one out of two and to heal the wound in human nature.<sup>13</sup>

In this image, love is the desire between the two halves to recombine themselves, 'the name for the desire and pursuit of the wholeness', while sex is the closest process to 'healing' that can take place, offered by the gods as compensation.<sup>14</sup> As Singer identifies:

For Aristophanes, as for Plato, sex is a physical makeshift. It is needed for procreation in our divided state; it may provide a rudimentary union with another person; but in itself it does not explain the nature of love. Far from being sexual, love is the search for that state of wholeness in which sex did not exist.<sup>15</sup>

There is, then, even in antiquity, even before Christian ideals begin to direct our moral valuation of intimacy, a definite prioritising of love over sex. Sometimes linked, sometimes mutually present within human relationships and complementary, love and sex are phenomena that in other instances can occur relatively independently of one another. Sex as a by-product of love is a concept not only represented here in the Platonic dialogue, but one that prefigures later Romantic notions of intimacy, and has continued to influence much more recent thinking in the social sciences. Singer maintains, somewhat contentiously, that 'psychiatrists who revise Freud by emphasising a nonsexual instinct for oneness are actually closer to the myth of Aristophanes. Closer yet are those Romantic philosophers who speak of an elective affinity between the lover and his fated soulmate'.<sup>16</sup> The myth of Aristophanes has been the vessel for perhaps the most powerful portrayal of love in human nature: its image of the matching halves of a human continues to fuel romantic narratives even today, while one's 'other half' has become common parlance. In Aristophanes's speech, Plato also underscores the magnitude of tragi-romantic emotion, which explains how this myth continues to breathe life into our current love stories:

Since their original nature had been cut in two, each one longed for its own half and stayed with it. They threw their arms round each other, weaving themselves together, wanting to form a single living thing. So they died from hunger and from general inactivity because they didn't want to do anything apart from each

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<sup>13</sup> *The Symposium*, p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> *The Symposium*, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> *The Nature of Love*, p. 52.

<sup>16</sup> *The Nature of Love*, p. 52.

other. Whenever one of the halves died and one was left, the one that was left looked for another and wove itself together with that. Sometimes the one it met was half of a whole woman (the half we now call a 'woman'), sometimes half a whole man. In any case, they kept on dying in this way.<sup>17</sup>

At the beginning of what transpired to be two millennia of philosophical writings on love, we have Plato, his *Symposium*, and the halved beings that are his 'stepchildren', the figures surrogated from the myth of Aristophanes. These early lovers convey an understanding of individuality and difference as being illusory and circumstantial, as merely the result of cleavage from their original wholes, and furthermore imply that love has the power to erase difference, that it is healing and restorative. Aristophanes concludes that 'our human race can only achieve happiness if love reaches its conclusion, and each of us finds his loved one and restores his original nature'.<sup>18</sup> At the other end of history, in 'What Is Love?', Alain Badiou's definition distils two millennia of thought in a proverb for postmodernity, a near-inversion of the myth of Aristophanes to reinstate the halves of the whole within humanity and human experience: 'love is an enquiry of the world from the point of view of the Two' (p. 49).

Badiou discusses love most specifically in a chapter of his *Conditions* (1992; revised and translated into English as 'What Is Love?' in 1996) and then in his 2009 book *Éloge de l'amour (In Praise of Love)*, 2012), though the subject is treated back and forth throughout his writings since the publication of his defining work, *L'être et l'événement (Being and Event)*, 2005), and is held as one aspect of his four-pronged philosophical system. Where Badiou departs most drastically from his predecessors is in his elevation of love to such a dominant function in human existence. Where scant few have explored the phenomenon to such depths, Badiou holds love up to the philosophical lens as a condition as important and imperative for humanity as art, as science and as politics. Perhaps ironically, the closest philosophical system regarding love to Badiou's, is Plato's. Indeed, in *In Praise of Love*, Badiou agrees with the Platonic system insofar as it 'has universal implications: it is an individual experience of a potential universality, as Plato was the first to intuit' (p. 17). What he takes issue with is the divine rendering of the universal, for the pursuit of the universal to mean an active move towards a God or gods, and for the universal to exist in any sort of realm that is abstracted further than through philosophical abstraction. Universal love, in its infinite and yet conceivable form, is completely dependent on collective contemplation and convocation. The dialectic is concretised on the micro-level by its reliance on a localised subjectivity, that is, in its lovers whose repeated experiences of love are the same and yet totally unique, which communicates once more with the concept of universality. Love also stands apart from other human conditions

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<sup>17</sup> *The Symposium*, p. 24.

<sup>18</sup> *The Symposium*, pp. 26-27.

in that it hinges upon, as its central aspect, ‘the idea that you can experience the world from the perspective of difference’ (p. 17).

This chapter will examine this first key area of Badiou’s philosophy of love, and will bring the texts from the previous chapter beneath a comparative theoretical lens. As well as siting these texts within earlier discussions of the self and the Other – namely Georg W. F. Hegel’s master/slave dialectic – this section will ultimately argue that Badiou’s theory of *difference* brings to full potential these prior dichotomies and, moreover, that the human/cyborg relationships portrayed in the texts lend themselves well to the reification of his ideas. To further supplement the framework, Donna Haraway’s cyborg theory will be brought into line with Badiou’s philosophy. This chapter will show the ways in which the two thinkers tessellate in many areas, with Haraway’s work bridging the gap between Badiou’s intellectual premise and the cyborgian narratives discussed herein, whose human/posthuman relationships can help to shed light on the questions Badiou raises in his most recent romantic treatise:

What kind of world does one see when one experiences it from the point of view of two and not one? What is the world like when it is experienced, developed and lived from a point of view of difference and not identity? (p. 22).

## 2.1. Difference

Badiou repeatedly invokes his philosophy of love as one grounded in difference; he writes that:

the amorous scene is the only genuine scene in which a universal singularity pertaining to the Two of the sexes – and ultimately pertaining to difference as such – is proclaimed. That is where an undivided subjective experience of absolute difference takes place.<sup>19</sup>

This is an idea that is neither new to romantic narratives in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, nor one more prevalent in science fiction than in any other genre. In novels as contemporary and ‘mainstream’ as Jeffrey Eugenides’s *Middlesex* (2002), we find the narrator ruminating: ‘Men and women, tired of being the same, want to be different again’.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, traces of Aristophanes’s myth continue to permeate the love paradigm, having been fully entrenched in cultural consciousness by the high Romantic novels in which the restorative merging of the lovers had been powerfully resurrected. Badiou declares that he finds such tales as *Tristan and Iseult* ‘mortifying nocturnal fusions’, and he maintains throughout *In Praise of Love* that statements such as Goethe’s ‘the eternal Feminine takes us Above’ are ‘rather obscene’ (p. 26).<sup>21</sup> However, if difference – its construction and its prioritisation as a necessary and fortifying dimension of the love paradigm – is of such imperative value to the

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<sup>19</sup> *Philosophy in the Present*, p. 33.

<sup>20</sup> Jeffrey Eugenides, *Middlesex* (London: Macmillan, 2002), pp. 478-479.

<sup>21</sup> ‘The Scene of Two’, p. 44.

Badiouian system, I therefore propose that cyborg fiction configures and represents that difference to the most fully realised degree. Posthuman love stories, in general, provide an antithetical body of textual representation that rivals the ‘existentially lacking’ narratives of high Romanticism, to which Badiou in his latest work stands resolutely opposed (p. 31). Badiou’s understanding of the value and role of love in society is the way in which it ‘takes us into key areas of experience of what is difference and, essentially, leads to the idea that you can experience the world from the perspective of difference’ (p. 17). On the surface of things, one might argue that love seems the most vague and inconsequential of the four generic procedures with which Badiou proposes to glean truths from the world. Yet in *In Praise of Love*, he insists: ‘look, in love, at the absolute difference that exists between two individuals, one of the biggest differences one can imagine, given that it is an infinite difference, yet an encounter, a declaration and fidelity can transform that into a creative existence’ (p. 64).

How can we understand his view that the difference between two persons in love is the ‘biggest difference’, when surely relationships and marriages are founded on common ground and similar interests? Quite to the contrary, for Badiou has argued in various works and lectures that loving differences overshadow political differences in terms of their end goals, making frequent reference to notions of duration and proximity. In love, two individuals – with ‘all of their infinite subjectivities’ – commit to a relationship which then projects itself towards the idealised timeframe of the eternal whether that relationship stands the test of time or not (p. 28). Love is temporally enacted, constantly constructed (and reconstructed) as a non-static process, and looks towards a future which is determined by and still includes the original Two. This, Badiou argues, is a far cry from political difference, wherein the objectives of the group are defined by collective, social interests, and not (inter)personal, loving interests. We maintain political affiliations to different ends than we do our romantic relationships. Moreover, our proximity to our fellow state subjects, with all their infinite subjectivities, will never resemble the closeness of our lives with our lovers. We do not have to love our politicians, nor our fellow statesmen. Thus, the difference between the lovers is far more pronounced because of its continuous presence, its incessant reminders, and its temporal endurance. This is also not to suggest that difference dissipates over time, or is subsumed into routine; though some differences get easier to live with, others may become harder to ignore. Exactly because people do not remain static, because they grow and evolve and shift over time, those of us who are not eternally preserved in a state of initial harmony (Romeo and Juliet show us that a double suicide is the only way to achieve this preservation) are constantly required to re-declare ourselves as lovers and to work at the truths of our respective relationships, producing a ‘combatant love’ which renders us ‘militants of truth’ (p. 69).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Being and Event*, p. xiii.

Badiou sits surprisingly well with Haraway's cyborg theory; each, in their own way, foreground notions of fluidity and partiality. In Haraway's 'Manifesto', the cyborg trope is presented as 'an ironic myth', with the further clarification that this irony 'is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary or true' (p. 149). She insists on the ability of cyborg theory to fill the gaps in cultural consciousness that have been left by modern philosophies:

Cyborg imagery can help express two crucial arguments [...] first, the production of universal, totalising theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality, probably always, but certainly now; and second, taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts (p. 181).

Here Haraway's 'major mistake' echoes the Badiouian 'disaster', his call for philosophy to remove itself from the confines of its conditions, conditions it more properly ought to be objectively commentating upon by circulating throughout.<sup>23</sup> Also key in Badiou's lexis is his use of 'a truth' (indefinite article) and 'truths' (plural), which aligns his thought with Haraway's 'incompatible things' and underpins the partiality that the cyborgian figure champions. It invokes once more the relationship between the universal and the particular; for Badiou, we cannot conceive of the truth of any given situation that can be accepted or understood by anyone and everyone, rather, the only universality of truth is that the non-tangible idea of truth is something that we can all grasp philosophically. Truths are produced consistently, instantiated in the personal sphere, and are localised and realised in the subject. A truth about love in one relationship is unlikely to resemble at all a truth received in another. Moreover, because love is an evolving construction that plays out temporally, a truth may not endure even for the same two people. Haraway's 'permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints' are welcomed into play here; the Badiouian philosophical actant and the cultural cyborg have many things in common (p. 154).

Situating the implications of her cyborg within a wider philosophical milieu of which she is fairly critical, Haraway writes that:

certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systematic to the logics and practices of domination [...] of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self. Chief among these troubling dualisms are self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilised/primitive, reality/appearance, whole/part, agent/resource, maker/made, active/passive, right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man. The self is the One who is not dominated, who knows that by the service of the other, the other is the one

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<sup>23</sup> *Being and Event*, p. 94.



who holds the future, who knows that by the experience of domination, which gives the lie to the autonomy of the self. To be One is to be autonomous, to be powerful, to be God; but to be One is to be an illusion, and so to be involved in a dialectic of apocalypse with the other. Yet to be other is to be multiple, without clear boundary, frayed, insubstantial. One is too few, but two are too many (p. 177).

The ‘dialectic of apocalypse’ mentioned here by Haraway is presumably the master/slave dialectic as set out in Georg W. F. Hegel’s ‘Independent and Dependent Self-Consciousness: Lordship and Bondage’ (1807). Hegel proposed that in order for an individual to achieve self-consciousness, it must be recognised by another, but on experiencing this, the self is threatened by a lack of control and power in the Other’s presence, becoming Other itself in the perception of the second entity. The I cannot destroy the Other, for that would remove the recognition of selfhood, and so the only solution is for the I to enslave the Other, so that it may retain both the position of power and self-recognition. The independent consciousness thus becomes a dependent one. This dialectic is useful when considering the relational position of humans and technology, and also the shift in status of the human throughout history. Prior to the current circumstances of human control of technoscience, it could be argued that religion and humanity fit the roles of the master and the slave. Hegel states:

the formative activity has not only this positive significance that in it the pure being-for-self of the servile consciousness acquires an existence; it also has, in contrast with the first moment, the negative significance of fear [...] Without the discipline of service and obedience, fear remains at the formal stage, and does not extend to the known real world of existence. Without the formative activity, fear remains inward and mute, and consciousness does not become explicitly *for itself*.<sup>24</sup>

In earlier times in the Western tradition, God occupied the role of master, and humanity was enslaved by its adherence to strict religious doctrine. Quoting Meister Eckhart, Hegel writes that ‘the eye with which God sees me is the eye with which I see him’, which illustrates the means by which humanity knew its place in society.<sup>25</sup> However, as technological progress contributed to an increasingly secular world view, the human moved into the role of absolute I, and once in this position, required an Other to validate its selfhood once more. Technology, specifically intelligent machines, can take on the role of the validating Other, because they fulfil the criteria by which the human can differentiate itself as superior and, by contrast, human. Enslaved, as humans were when governed by religious belief, machines created for servility direct the ‘fear’ inwards, at themselves, while humanity moves up a level to replace God. Hegel notes that the active exchange between the master and the slave is work, which ‘is desire held in check,

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<sup>24</sup> Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishing, 1998), pp. 118-119.

<sup>25</sup> Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart, Teacher and Preacher* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1986), p. 270.

fleetingness staved off; in other words, work forms and shapes the thing'.<sup>26</sup> The 'thing', that is, the objectified slave, is defined and given purpose by the requirements of it, as imposed by the master. Applied to nonhumans in servitude, this correlates with Philip K. Dick's opinion of androids' unpredictability: if work is the factor that 'staves off' other, self-motivational qualities – as religious obedience previously took precedence over humans' free will – it acknowledges that these qualities are in fact potentially present within the thing (android), but are being suppressed by their purpose as slaves.

Healthily, the only way for the Hegelian dialectic to be resolved is for the Other that the self so requires to be always enslaved, as to break these bonds would threaten the supremacy of the self. We can trace lordship and bondage throughout history with varying marginalised groups (gendered, racial, sexually-oriented), where the category of the Other is fulfilled in the interests of the I. Since the abolition of slavery, however, and the various sexual emancipation and civil rights movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is generally held to be unethical that the position of the Other be occupied by humans: humans validating humans. Earlier ages, religious societies, and clear-cut boundaries between civilised cultures and primitive ones: all have shaped the category of 'the human', all have validated an I at the expense of an Other. Hegel, then, was prescient in his dialectic, which can be read as more meaningful in today's secular, ethical, egalitarian First World. What, essentially, is at stake in the master/slave problem? The successful construction of the self as subject, one that cannot exist merely in the world of objects, but requires the balance of an intersubjective scene. What humans need is either another kind of subject (one living but not 'alive'), or another kind of subjectivity. Hegel's paradox is resurrected by twentieth century science, something Haraway alludes to in terms of not just cyborgs, but also primates. Post-Darwinian biology has all but killed off the divine in the developed world, or at least relegated it to a seat far back enough to keep it from playing more than a minor role in our philosophical and scientific constructions of self. In *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, Haraway explores the kinship of these figures, and terms them 'odd boundary creatures [...] all of which have had a destabilising place in the great Western evolutionary, technological, and biological narratives' (p. 2). The liberal humanist subject is caught between and thrown into question by these entwining narrative strands, crowded by the artefacts and archetypes which populate the biotechnocultural stories we tell ourselves. Moreover, Haraway observes that 'the cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed', continuing:

Late twentieth-century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms

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<sup>26</sup> Hegel, p. 118.

and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert (p. 152).

When Haraway contextualises the cyborg as a product of post-WWII Western culture she differentiates its inception as both myth and tool – which in her opinion ‘mutually constitute each other’ – from its mechanical ancestors (p. 164). When she writes that ‘pre-cybernetic machines could be haunted; there was always the spectre of the ghost in the machine’, she invokes yet another philosophical system which points to the grave implications of the cyborg for humanity’s trajectory in postmodernity (p. 152).

To understand why cyborgs, as Anna Martinson writes in terms of Piercy’s novel, ‘are at the centre of the debate about where to draw the line between human and machine’, requires a recap of much earlier modern philosophy to explore the ways in which the cyborgian figure can be seen to violate the Cartesian subject.<sup>27</sup> Sherryl Vint identifies:

The version of the human self that emerges in [*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*] can be traced back to Descartes’s *cogito*, which marks the entrance of a number of important distinctions that have structured modernity. Descartes conceptualised the human self as separate from nature, including the nature of its own body [...] Descartes used such distinctions to insist that the cogito, or thinking self, was distinct from all other life. Dick, on the other hand, critiques the *cogito* and emphasises the fragility of such demarcations.<sup>28</sup>

René Descartes, in his *Discourse on Method*, employs mechanical metaphors to rationalise his anatomy of the human, metaphors which bear much more weight today than they did at the time of his writing, when human-imitative automata were still very much confined to parlour games. Though he repeatedly invokes such sentiments as ‘the rules of mechanics [...] are the same as the rules of nature’, in 1637 Descartes still had God on his side, and ultimately he reconciles his various comparisons of the human body with animals and automata by way of the divine – ‘consider this body as a machine [...] made by the hands of God’.<sup>29</sup> The extent to which Descartes actually upheld Christian beliefs has been highly contested by later philosophers and historians, some of whom are assured that his machinic model of the human can be read as a conscious and deliberate precursor to the secular sciences. Gaby Wood notes that immediately following Descartes, ‘the idea of the soul as the source of human life was to become very contentious, and the atheist philosophers of the eighteenth century stretched Descartes’s beast-machine premise to include human beings as well’.<sup>30</sup> Wherever Descartes’s true sympathies did lie, the notion of a spiritual soul – as either resolute belief or get-out clause – is nonetheless presented as the faculty demarcating the human from other organisms, be they natural or

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<sup>27</sup> Martinson, p. 58.

<sup>28</sup> Vint, p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations* (London: Penguin, 1968), pp. 72-73.

<sup>30</sup> Gaby Wood, *Living Dolls* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 7.

mechanical. Indeed, Marvin Mirsky points out that ‘in the Western tradition religion has [...] accepted, even required, the existence of a ‘soul’, though its precise nature or function remains often marvellously, even elegantly, ambiguous’.<sup>31</sup> While the increased secularisation of science and philosophy has impacted drastically on the religious conception of the soul, there still remains a grey area in its wake that the sciences have been unable to resolve fully. Culturally, remnants of this spiritual hangover continue to be invoked in the artistic and social explorations of what exactly separates the human from the animal, and from the machine. A substitution for soul is perhaps needed now more than ever, especially as science fiction authors seem so bent on blurring the boundaries further in their transgressive cyborgian figures. Fred Botting, in his analysis of *Blade Runner*, writes that ‘meat and machine retain an excess that cannot be reduced to a rational or logical definition’.<sup>32</sup> He continues:

the former connotes something other than the lumps of flesh remaining after inorganic information has been encoded as data; the latter, also, signifies more than efficient, predictable units without consciousness or feeling. The terms, though opposed, turn on an element of emotional energy which cannot be rationalised or explained.<sup>33</sup>

This echoes the 1748 essay *Man a Machine* by Julien Offray de La Mettrie, which critiques the post-Cartesian philosophers who ‘have rather spiritualised matter than materialised the soul’.<sup>34</sup> The first casualty of secular thought and scientific practice is the human itself: stripped of its claim to agency via divine rights, or the existence of soul, the Cartesian subject is thrown into quandary as its defining boundaries dissolve (at the behest of technoscientific developments) into meat or machine or both. In Dick’s novel, Deckard is as transgressive a figure as the androids he hunts; both occupy the area of overlap, though ultimately Deckard stands for the human and the replicants for the nonhuman. Jill Galvan maintains that the self/Other dyad ‘affirms a persistent human mastery over the mechanical landscape’: this landscape is one which is technoculturally produced, a hyperbolic version of our current society which, in its total submission of religion in favour of scientific progress, has rendered both human and cyborg equally constructed products of their environment.<sup>35</sup> Though the *cogito ergo sum* revolutionised humanist philosophy and changed forever the way humans have thought about themselves as thinking things, it also laid the foundations for the secular sciences which, robbed of divine reasoning, have been left wanting in ethical areas pertaining to AI, genetic engineering and biotechnologies. The Cartesian subject still carries weight today in the discussion

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<sup>31</sup> Marvin Mirsky, ‘Notes on Reading Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*’, *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*, 49.4 (2000), 628-630 (p. 630).

<sup>32</sup> *Sex, Machines and Navels*, p. 162.

<sup>33</sup> *Sex, Machines and Navels*, p. 162.

<sup>34</sup> Julien Offray de La Mettrie, ‘Man a Machine’, *Early Modern Texts* <<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdf/mettmanm.pdf>> [accessed 31 July 2013] (p. 1)

<sup>35</sup> Galvan, p. 414.

surrounding these fields; ‘neither the idea that men are machines, nor, conversely, the machines that were constructed to look like men, can be properly understood without [Descartes]’.<sup>36</sup> Michael Denton’s view of the Cartesian system supports this, as he writes: ‘despite occasional setbacks ever since, Descartes’s biological science has followed by and large along mechanistic lines and nearly all the major advances in knowledge have arisen from its application’.<sup>37</sup>

## 2.2. Locating the self in technoculture

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*, empathy is proposed as the faculty by which humanity can be measured; confirmed in the novel by the replicants themselves – “‘it would seem we lack a specific talent you humans possess. I believe it’s called empathy’” (p. 106). The more advanced Nexus-6 models have evolved the capacity to imitate empathic behaviour, but the film is braver, and in its version of Rachael we are left in no doubt that the androids’ imitation is in fact embodied reality. Further complicating the matter is the dehumanised nature of the human characters (Deckard, Iran, Tyrell): Vint has provocatively suggested that ‘most of Dick’s audience would fail the Voigt-Kampff’ – the empathy hypothesis is proposed, but ultimately the experiment is a failure, which creates further doubt regarding the androids’ claim to Cartesian subjectivity and consequently the humans’ sense of self in relation to the androidian position.<sup>38</sup> Thus, as Kevin McNamara writes, the texts become ‘a quest for an uncontested essence of human being that separates “us” from the ever more human-seeming androids’.<sup>39</sup> Dick himself has admitted the fallibility of empathy and the empathy test: in an essay published after the release of both texts, he writes that ‘a human being without proper empathy or feeling is the same as an android built so as to lack it’.<sup>40</sup> If empathy cannot truly replace the soul as the marker of the human, is there anything that can? Consciously or unconsciously, Dick has Rachael answer this question: “‘I love you,” Rachael said. “If I entered a room and found a sofa covered with your hide I’d score very high on the Voigt-Kampff test’” (p. 166).

Piercy also explores the capacity for love as the constructive agent of subjectivity in *He, She and It*, arguing more persuasively for the cyborg’s claim to personhood than Dick’s novel or Scott’s film, but like them framing that claim within the allowances made by our cognition of our own humanity. By the early 1990s the Human Genome Project was underway, AI research had reached unprecedented heights in comparison to the 1960s, and while biological knowledge of the human demystified layer after layer of humanity, equal measures of research into the

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<sup>36</sup> Wood, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Denton, ‘Organism and Machine: The Flawed Analogy’, in *Are We Spiritual Machines? Ray Kurzweil vs. the Critics of Strong A.I.*, ed. by Jay W. Richards (Washington: Discovery Institute, 2002), p. 81.

<sup>38</sup> Vint, p. 114.

<sup>39</sup> McNamara, p. 422.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Man, Android, and Machine’, in *The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick*, p. 147.

abstraction of mind, spirit, or whatever Descartes and pre-Cartesian philosophy had understood as soul had yet to express a human being in its totality. Critics such as Marilyn Gwaltney have done away with questioning the ‘humanity’ of cyborgs in science fiction, and instead consider their claim to ‘personhood’, which carries with it certain social and political connotations of presence, value, and place within wider society.<sup>41</sup> Piercy’s novel follows a similar pattern: the concept of Yod’s presence is returned to more than once; as Shira begins to understand it, ‘Yod has a presence, perhaps what Malkah had meant by calling it a person’ (p. 103). This recognition of the cyborg’s rights to that presence in turn impacts on the surrounding human characters in two ways: those who recognise and support Yod’s personhood (his claim to subjectivity) are presented as wholly more empathic and positive characters than those who deny him. His creator, Avram, though intellectually brilliant, evokes the dehumanised figure of Victor Frankenstein as he stands outside human morality in his pursuit of technoscientific goals. On more than one occasion, Avram sharply reminds Yod of the nature of their relationship: “‘Are you bargaining with me? I can dismantle you’” (p. 385). These exchanges illustrate the paradoxical challenge of the cyborg in our contemporary fictions, whereby not only do cyborgian figures pose a threat to our humanity, but a refusal to admit them into our society then further undermines our claim to human(e)ness. If we take Gwaltney’s ‘self’ as not just consciousness, ‘but reflexive consciousness: consciousness conscious of itself’, then there is no question as to whether Dick’s replicants or Piercy’s cyborg can claim Cartesian selfhood.<sup>42</sup> They exhibit painfully human traits: love, lust for life and one another, crisis of identity, and a sense of the comic, the tragic, and themselves – “‘I think, therefore I am’”, says the replicant, as it takes firm ownership of the Cartesian ego and mocks the boundaries which the cyborg has violated, in fiction and philosophy alike.<sup>43</sup>

The Hegelian master/slave dialectic arguably bears far more weight today than it did at the time of its writing. We can clearly read a number of potential social scenarios into the problem – capitalism, class and gender struggles, globalisation and multicultural integration; as well as several possible enslaved subjects – animals and nature; machines and technology; ethical use of scientific subjects; the commodified subject, whomever that may pertain to. The question that ought to precede all attempts at resolving the dialectic, however, is why the lordship-bondage relationship should even still exist in today’s society? Have we not proved to ourselves, through civilisation and progress, that we are thinking beings thinking? Has two thousand years of philosophy, social scholarship and scientific study not reassured us of our worldly position? Do our daily, increasing, and global encounters with other humans not reinforce our subjective autonomies? We have left our mark on every inch of the planet and

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<sup>41</sup> Gwaltney, p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> Gwaltney, p. 35.

<sup>43</sup> *Blade Runner*.

have begun to leave marks on others. What do we have to be insecure about? The answers to these questions lie in the questions themselves. Each and every human development is its double-edged sword: civilisation and progress come with their prices – war, colonisation, racial tensions, social unrests – and to be a thinking being is to know that the more we learn the less we know. Philosophical and scientific developments create as many new problems as they solve – our globalised, media-saturated, information-saturated environments confuse as they enlighten, cloud as they illuminate. It is no little wonder that existentialism grew out of modernism, the pre-World War West, out of affluent, privileged social circles. The two scientific fields which characterise the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are communications and biotechnology, which Haraway designates in her ‘Manifesto’ as ‘the crucial tools recrafting our bodies [...] enforc[ing] new social relations’ (p. 164). Haraway insists further that ‘these sciences indicate fundamental transformations in the structure of the world’, and we can read the anxieties regarding these transformations, and their ramifications for the human subject and its conception of itself, quite meaningfully through the master/slave dialectic (p. 165). In the post-WWII First World – after such dehumanising atrocities, after expansion and mobilisation on a global scale, and after a boom in technologies that developed faster over five decades than they did over five centuries – technoscience has refigured everything about the way we look at the world from space travel to subatomic particles, from celestial bodies to the human body. Communications and biotechnology, at base, amount to two very simple facts: we are closer together and we are able to (inhibit) change. Biotechnology especially, with its AIs, genetic engineering and prosthetic modification, has changed the way we see ourselves. We have evolved from monkey to man-machine in relatively no time at all, if understood as the period of time it took us to understand natural selection to our application of its principles to eugenics. Simians and cyborgs flank the human; the boundaries between the three suddenly become enticingly permeable. We understand what came before us, and we see what might come afterwards, and this kind of foresight throws into question the markers of humanity. It is a humbling, even frightening age to be a part of, and one completely orchestrated by ourselves. This identity crisis is auto-engineered.

Badiou argues that this is precisely why love is necessary. In ‘What Is Love?’ he declared that ‘there is only one humanity’, and then went on to explore what humanity signifies ‘in a non-humanist sense’:

The term cannot be founded by any objective predicative feature, which would be idealist or biologicistic (and, in any case, irrelevant). By ‘humanity’, I understand that which provides the support for the generic procedures [...] Humanity is thus attested to if and only if there is (emancipatory) politics, (conceptual) science, (creative) art, or love (not reduced to a mixture of sentimentality and sexuality). Humanity is what *sustains* [*soutient*] the infinite

singularity of truths that inscribe themselves in these types. Humanity is the historical body of truths (p. 41).

This is philosophy for a new era of subjectivity, the aforementioned subject who is ‘cleaved, a-substantial [...] ir-reflexive’.<sup>44</sup> Badiou acknowledges the threat of loss of identity that characterises postmodernity: in ‘What Is Love?’ he observes that ‘under the injunction of Capital [...] the social *roles* are indiscriminated’; our society flattens individuality, subjectivity, and ‘murders possible humanity’ (p. 43). Here, ‘indiscrimination’ is an ambiguous word for our current culture: in one sense it points to the positive, when applied to such holistic concepts as race and gender; in Badiou’s usage we can see how it underpins the capitalist control of our human conditions. Politics ought to be indiscriminate, unbiased, egalitarian; the inverse function of political indiscrimination is the loss of face within the body politic. However, in political situations we are prepared for this effect, we are prepared to be counted as majority or minority and always as collective. In non-political social life, however, indiscrimination has demeaning pitfalls. Biotechnologies and communications (propelled by a commodifying capitalism) key into the problem of indiscrimination and, ironically, take as much away from the subject as they give to it. Inherent in both is the potential to further the understanding and the capacity of the human: biotechnology ought to concretise our knowledge of our selves, ought to promise a measure of control over our bodies and bodily lives; while communications can provide us with the environments and the means to reach out across greater distances than ever before, to perfect the social relation which is dependent on and grounded in communicative ability. Instead, we see the commodification of both, in the first instance, further pronouncing on our identity crises. Biotechnologies, and access to their benefits for humanity, will never be equally distributed. They also harbour the danger of reproducing class and caste systems, of inadvertently (or perhaps not) creating ‘the GenRich and the GenPoor’.<sup>45</sup> As a recent article pointed out: ‘like nearly every online service, Google’s greatest sleight of hand was to make us all think of ourselves as Google customers, when in reality *we* [...] are Google’s product’.<sup>46</sup> We also run the risk of re-reducing ourselves to statistics, as subjects whose only boundaries are those that are ethically contested, in relation to the medical sciences, for instance. Ridding philosophies of the self and then the self itself of soul has its drawbacks: we are no longer sacred vessels. Arguably, the means cannot be always blamed for the particular ends: time and again we return to the propelling force of capital gain and control, but without capital (in the sense of funding and consumerism alike; all are interrelated) these technologies would be neither so widespread nor so pervasive and culturally sublimated in present society. This is, in a sense, what Badiou means

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<sup>44</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p. 185.

<sup>46</sup> Nick Pickles, quoted in Jane Wakefield, ‘Google Glass – will we love it or hate it?’ *BBC Technology Review*, 6 May 2013 < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-21699307> > [accessed 7 May 2013] (para. 15 of 26)



when he writes that it is capital which murders humanity. Love fights the flattening effect of postmodernity by restoring difference to its subjects, and in that way rescues humanity from indiscriminate. In love, we need to be different, in order to be a 'someone separated from the everyone'. We need to be able to discriminate, not on the grounds of race or gender or from negative agendas, but affirmatively, to ensure that in our gazes our lovers are reminded of their individuality. This is the nature of the intersubjective love relationship: it exists against the backdrop of a society that in most other areas is careering towards a total obliteration of autonomous importance; it is paradoxical in its existence exactly because of that tension and yet it endures universally.

### 2.3. Towards a new subjectivity

Haraway argues that this is precisely why the cyborg is necessary. The cyborg is 'a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self' which recognises that our contemporary identities are 'contradictory, partial, and strategic' (pp. 163, 155). Strategy is key here if we take Badiou's view that love is a construction, that truth is also truths and that these truths are always partial, and only communicate to the whole in the mere fact that they are. The cyborgian frame of mind is one unafraid of permanent partiality; the cyborgs in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *Blade Runner* and *He, She and It* have this to teach their human counterparts, and they teach it through love. To return to the seduction scene in *Blade Runner*, and to reiterate Nigel Wheale, Deckard 'forcibly reminds himself that [Rachael] is a non-human construction by telling her the truth'.<sup>47</sup> What 'truth' is this? That she is a replicant, even though she has lived her life believing herself to be human, with human memories that bolster her own set of 'truths'. If getting to the truth of the situation were as simple as this, if truth were in fact an immutable thing, there would be no further relationship between them. There may be seduction, there may be sexual desire, but there would be no construction of a love relationship as the two so clearly intend to undertake at the film's close:

DECKARD Do you love me?  
RACHAEL I love you.  
DECKARD Do you trust me?  
RACHAEL I trust you.  
DECKARD (V. O.) *I knew it on the roof that night. We were brothers, Roy Batty and I! [...] We were the new people. Roy and me and Rachael! We were made for this world. It was ours!*<sup>48</sup>

The replicants, Roy and Rachael particularly, challenge Deckard's humanity which has fallen into question through his social role – a role ascribed to him in the interests of technocultural capital. The romantic affinities which develop between Deckard and Rachael, and between

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<sup>47</sup> Wheale, p. 112.

<sup>48</sup> *Blade Runner*.

Shira and Yod in *He, She and It* further exploit these doubts, and align them with the environments in which the characters are enmeshed. Judith B. Kerman points out that ‘persons and industrial processes have merged in the replicants’, which suggests that humans’ reluctance to admit inorganic intelligences to the human paradigm, as well as the dehumanised character of Deckard (and Shira, extended to signify ourselves), are consequences of a burgeoning technoculture that has its roots in early industrialisation.<sup>49</sup> As noted earlier, the liberal humanist subject is challenged by the evolutionary, technological and biological narratives that coalesce in the mid-twentieth century. Prior to this, a stable sense of the autonomous self in conjunction with technocultural capital had prevailed since the eighteenth-century reformation of industry, with liberal humanism holding sway in developed societies relatively unchecked. To return to Hegel’s dialectic, for over two centuries in societies that gradually secularised but swiftly technologized, the enslaved technologies validated and reinforced human domination. Science fiction narratives that depict the rise of the machines underscore the growing anxieties regarding the omnipresence of machines. Though the post-WWII years have seen a democratisation of technology (carefully engineered by capitalist consumerism), Hayles has observed that social engagement with technologies takes place for the most part completely superficially. Most people in Western societies interact with technology daily, but remain at the surface level during these interfaces, with little or no knowledge of how the machines they encounter (from ATMs to medicines to personal computers) really operate. As well as demonstrating the obvious methods of control in these practices, wherein necessity and ignorance are harnessed to ensure that the user/consumer remains at the ‘mercy of large corporations that in effect tell him what to think, deciding what he wants and what is good for him’, Hayles, in *My Mother Was a Computer*, also points to the effects of far more sublimated agendas on our constructions of self in technocultural ideologies:

As is true for other forms of ideology, the interpolation of the user into the machinic system does not require his or her conscious recognition of how he or she is being disciplined by the machine to become a certain kind of subject. As we know, interpolation is most effective when it is largely unconscious (pp. 126, 61).

Not only are our agencies being refigured daily by our domestic use of technology, but, from the perspective of liberal humanism, being completely undermined by the ways in which we employ the technological to understand ourselves. Both the fields of the physical and the life sciences have made revolutionary leaps over the last century, guided and made possible by progress in the technologies we employ to study them. Though Descartes used the mechanical to express the man, his writings were largely figurative. In twentieth-century biotechnology, and

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<sup>49</sup> Judith B. Kerman, ‘Technology and Politics in the *Blade Runner* Dystopia’, in *Retrofitting Blade Runner*, p. 18.

largely due to the contributions of cybernetics, our understanding of human anatomy, neurology and psychology has realised Descartes's rhetoric, and our current models of the human have been expressed by and through technological means. In short, simply by using the machine to understand the human, we render the boundaries between the two permeable and unstable. This juxtaposition gives way to an uneasy alignment, with fears being fuelled across cultural modes of representation, wherein depictions of intelligent, teleological, and autonomous machines (like Dick's androids, like Piercy's cyborg) threaten to invert the master/slave relationship at the cost of human selfhood. Hegel's dialectic, however, is enframed by the capitalist society that dictates how all of this will play out. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *Blade Runner* and *He, She and It*, characters both human and nonhuman are flattened to the same extent by capitalism without any real regard for their biological status. Of course, this is a symptom not unique to science fiction and can be read across our histories and our presents, but it is an issue that almost all science fiction texts engage with by degrees, due to how inextricably tied up political economies and technocultures have proven to be.

In this sense, Badiou sits well within the philosophical issues raised by texts. We are human because we are scientific, artistic, political, and because we love. Of course, science and politics have contributed heavily to a capitalist technoculture, and when appraised in terms of their macrological position, the social environment their output has created 'murders possible humanity'. Our scientific faculties mark us as human, but our science has led to a mechanisation in our nature that mirrors our technologies; our political tendencies have founded civilisation and its support of the individual, but the body politic relies on a collective and muted consciousness. Love, for Badiou, can rescue humanity from the flattening excesses of political society and technoculture. Art, too, appears to be immune to a negation of the individual, and so to adhere to Badiou's prescription of a coupling of truth-procedures for maximum efficacy, it follows that these representations of love in art (literature, poetry, film) function as cultural reminders, which balance subjective humanity with its impersonal environment. In the three texts, all four of Badiou's truth-procedures can be seen clearly in play: in both societies, the macrological dystopia is expressed through politics and capital grounded in technoscientific production; both human protagonists are inextricably linked to the political scene. Deckard through his role within the criminal justice system and Shira's as a freedom fighter (the local politics of the freetown versus the hyper-capitalism of the multis); both are dehumanised by their labour. In addition, both characters are reconstituted in their sense of self as they come to it through the frame of love. Finally, art is repeatedly presented as a thematic device which reveals humanity, as well as working metatextually to remind us of the power and the cultural role of representation. The turn in Dick's novel is underlined by Luba's artistic engagement, the seduction scene of the film is preceded by Rachael's piano-playing, and Piercy's novel is littered with artistic references that support the Badiouian view of art as a marker of humanity –

as Yod tells Shira: “‘I read novels as if they were the specs to your makeup. I study them to grasp the forces underlying your behaviour’” (p. 442).

The cyborgs in the three texts teach their human lovers how to deal with a dehumanising technoculture by adopting the cyborgian mindset. Dick, Scott and Piercy all frame this teaching within the love relationship that foregrounds difference, and celebrates it. Haraway explains that the cyborg narrative ‘is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions’, stating that ‘we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling’ (p. 154). Here, her ‘resistance’ is essentially political (the cyborg trope arising out of her search for an alternative feminist politics), but read in conjunction with Badiou, the cyborg in love communicates – to Deckard, to Shira, to the reader – that through love the subject can resist indiscriminate treatment at the hands of a technocratic yet capitalist culture. The cyborg teaches the human to be human, re-humanises the human, is ‘more human than human’.<sup>50</sup> Both Rachael and Yod deploy this learning by allowing themselves to be the difference by which Deckard and Shira measure themselves, and eventually, the humans offer themselves up similarly. Haraway shows us that in cyborgs ‘there is no drive to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction’ and furthermore argues for a move towards a ‘*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction’ (pp. 150, 181). In light of this, Badiou’s philosophical actant, who circulates fluidly forever throughout conditions and histories, who promotes difference as not only necessary to the constitution of being (in love more so than anywhere) but celebrates it as a point of joyful human experience, is also cyborgian in nature. Rachael and Yod – quite implicitly, just by being, and by being different – imbue their lovers with the sense of being Other; they other the other, and require on the grounds of love that their lovers other them also.

Shira’s coming-to-being through love is a lifelong process, as Piercy narrates and Badiou would approve of, and is full of false starts along the way. Shira learns valuable lessons about individuality: that she cannot exist or define herself without a relationship does not necessarily equate a lack in personal capacity (as many modern feminists or staunch individualists might argue). Rather, she had simply been working on the wrong constructions. Shira was unable to find love with Josh because they were far too dehumanised from the beginning, having met under the terms of a flattening capital which murdered their differences and made it impossible for them to recover. In her earlier relationship with Gadi, she tried to merge, and when the reality of merging fell short of its Romantic myth, the disillusionment created more pain than if she had actually been torn bodily apart like the unstitched lovers in Aristophanes. Instead, the successful configuration of the love paradigm comes when she comes to see, know, and love herself through the eyes of a subject who is almost irreconcilably

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<sup>50</sup> *Blade Runner*. Tyrell Corporation motto.

different. Love slices through the diagonal when realisation dawns on her; she comes to realise she loves Yod through her reassurances of him; time and again, when offering him guidance and understanding, she realises that she is talking to herself, about herself, as much as she is speaking to him. We can read a similar conclusion reached by Deckard in Dick's novel: 'Rachael Rosen, over and over again' could be read a number of ways (p. 191). Instead of merely alluding to his fixation with her, and the painful memories that will surely endure despite the way their relationship ended, because the sentence comes at the point of reuniting with Iran, and we know that their, Deckard's and Rachael's, mutual self-construction was built from the point of difference, rather than of similarity, we can infer that he now sees women in the 'correct' light, as individual beings, whose differences demarcate their humanity. 'Rachael Rosen' is a localised subject but 'over and over again' is an allusion to the universality of love; 'over and over again' refers to the Nexus-6 mould, but 'Rachael Rosen' refers to an individual. At base, the lesson Deckard has learned is one of difference.



Running through these three texts is a common theme of otherness, of the ability to see oneself as Other, and implicit links to the idea that we may in fact need to be othered by others. Love, for Badiou, is the saving grace of humanity, precisely because it restores the difference that we as humans need to know we are in the eyes of at least one other. In this sense, love does make us human, more so than any of the other four generic procedures, because it couples up with the imperative micro-level construction of subjectivity. Haraway's theory of the cyborg plucked an icon from artistic production to explore its rich conceptual value in social reality; this chapter has shown that the results of that thought experiment can be fed back through the filter of the cyborg trope and reinstated in science fiction. Through difference and an active othering of the self who feared its boundaries confused if not dissolved completely by capitalist technoculture, the cyborg teaches the human that love is the key to being, remaining and becoming human once more. Badiouian love provides a renegotiation of the master/slave dialectic because it rejects the dynamics of power inherent to the self/Other binary and advocates the construction of an intersubjective relationship, one which is uniquely subject/subject, or self/self. Haraway's cyborg manages to circumvent the dialectic of apocalypse by rejecting the coherent self of liberal humanism, and opts instead for an identity based on partiality, on weaving together incompatible truths. Love makes us human because it transcends a self/Other dichotomy that, on the personal level, is a localised reflection of the positional consciousness of humanity in relation to capitalism. Self/Other becomes subject/object and has reinforced both desire and sex and, as such, has confused love with that binary interplay. Through Badiou, we learn that love can never be understood on these terms; through Haraway we see that a posthuman subjectivity is a cyborgian assemblage of contradictory subjectivities. In marrying the two, in texts that portray cyborgs in love, we see how the self must be prepared to be othered, the Other must be

able to become known, and that love in the technocultural age is informed and underpinned by this constant exchange of knowing and difference that the lovers enact. As J. F. Sebastian tells the replicants: ““There’s some of me in you””.<sup>51</sup> In Badiouian terminology, these are ‘*les preuves d’amour*’ (the proofs of love): proofs, plural, that harbour truths, again plural, held by the cyborgian mind and taught to the human lovers so that they might construct themselves as localised subjects within a subject/subject relationship – an intersubjectivity – that better befits postmodernity in its ability to maintain ‘permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints’.<sup>52</sup> However, as the next two chapters in the section will show, within the realities of science fiction, *les preuves d’amour* may be enacted by ‘any subject whatsoever’.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Blade Runner*.

<sup>52</sup> *Being and Event*, p. 254.

<sup>53</sup> *Being and Event*, p. xxix.

## Chapter Three

### Love Makes *Them* Human

You are a robot, Andrew reminded himself sternly. You are a product of the United States Robots and Mechanical Men Corporation.

And then Andrew would look at Little Miss and a sensation of great joy and warmth would spread through his positronic brain – a sensation that he had come to identify as ‘love’ – and he would have to remind himself, all over again, that he was nothing more than a cleverly designed structure of metal and plastic with an artificial platinum-iridium brain inside his chrome-steel skull, and that he had no right to feel emotions, or to think paradoxical thoughts, or to do any other such complex and mysterious human thing.

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Isaac Asimov and Robert Silverberg, *The Positronic Man* (1992)

One of the central issues that Philip K. Dick and Marge Piercy both grapple with, and which Ridley Scott also kept at the forefront of *Blade Runner*, is the ethical quandary of a claim to posthuman rights. While technoscience is a force harnessed for human control, while these machines are created for specific servile purposes, the Hegelian dialectic remains (im)balanced and safe. The human continues in its role as master, its social position and humanness are ‘recognised’, or at least defined, by the fact that there is an entity against which it can measure itself, an entity it has enslaved for its own gain. The machine carries out its work in the expected capacity, as dictated by the master, and it poses no threat as its own actions remain entirely concerned with work. The projected crisis for this situation arises when the slave wishes to achieve the same recognition of self-consciousness as the master receives from him. In the creation of intelligent machines away from the service industry, for instance, wherein the slave’s volitional desire is no longer held in check by work, we can see the fears of science fiction writers coming close to realisation. In 1942, in a short story entitled ‘Runaround’, Isaac Asimov devised a set of rules to bypass these anxieties in his fiction, the ‘Three Laws of Robotics’, which stipulate:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey any orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.<sup>1</sup>

However, if the machines manage to overthrow the morally binding codes, then we can see an artificially-created history repeating itself – mirroring our own struggle with coercive religious doctrines. If they succeed, they will become conscious ‘for-themselves’, rather than simply at the behest of the master, and their volition takes us back to the beginning of Hegel’s dialectic, where two Is compete for recognition. Past science fiction literature and film has relied on this dichotomic struggle, with much contemplation of the possibility that intelligent machines will then take on the role of master, subsequently enslaving the human. The Laws not only guide the robot characters in Asimov’s own body of work, but go on to pervade science fiction for decades, and their weight is still felt in the genre today. Asimov, perhaps more so than any of his contemporaries or successors, is astute to the social anxieties surrounding the post-war mechanisation of labour, not only in his adopted America but on the global scale. Though the last century was devoid of any radical backlash among workers who were gradually replaced by industrial robots and Fordian assembly lines (compared to the Luddite revolts of the early nineteenth century), much of the era’s hard science fiction concerned itself with depictions of futures that turned on these very fears. Asimov’s Laws provided science fiction with a failsafe device that functioned to protect humanity from the threat that machines would rise up and claim subjectivity, in the event of them achieving sentience.

*The Positronic Man*, which goes further than Asimov’s earlier works by allowing Andrew a loophole in the Laws, does so by tempering the threat of the sentient machine with the organic fallibility of humanity.<sup>2</sup> Though Asimov’s writing is unlikely to be considered particularly romantic, it is nonetheless the capacity for love and creativity that marks Andrew out and provide the basis for his claim to (post)human rights. Enacting Plutarch’s ship of Theseus paradox, Andrew submits to a series of biotechnological interventions on his robot body, which gradually replace his synthetic components with organic versions so that he might eventually achieve mortality and die. On these grounds, he is rewarded with civil freedom and a state-recognised claim to personhood. The narrative ends by merging these themes – mortality, humanity and love – completely and co-constitutively, as Andrew lies on his deathbed:

Andrew’s thoughts were slowly fading [...] Desperately he seized at them. Man! He was a man! He wanted that to be his last thought. He wanted to dissolve – die with that [...] She was fading in his eyes as the last of his thoughts trickled

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Asimov, *I, Robot* (London: Panther Books, 1967), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *The Positronic Man* is a novel-length expansion of Asimov’s 1976 Hugo and Nebula Award winning novella “The Bicentennial Man”, fleshed out by Robert Silverberg. Though the themes of love, abstract emotion and creativity as defining qualities of the human are present in the original text, it is Silverberg who foregrounds these themes and works through them more rigorously. The above opening extract can be attributed to Silverberg, as it only appears in the novel.



away. But before she faded completely, one final fugitive thought came to him and rested for a moment on his mind before everything stopped.

“Little Miss,” he whispered, too low to be heard.<sup>3</sup>

Though Asimov allows his robots sentience, the Laws still bind nonhuman characters to their place, adding fuel to the fire of debate over which criteria of humanity can most properly be understood to demarcate the human and the nonhuman. His linking of humanity and love is provocative, but both the original novella and Robert Silverberg’s rewrite imply that, in terms of the laws, Andrew’s case is an unrepeatable anomaly. The narratives resolve with the preventative measures taken by the robotics corporations, in that no more self-reflective robots in Andrew’s line will be created, thus re-establishing the status quo in favour of the Laws, and so to humanity’s benefit. Despite this restoration, the underpinning of Andrew’s claim to personhood with his capacity for love brought Asimov, however briefly, in line with the plethora of mid-twentieth-century writers who employ science fiction as a philosophical sounding board, one which reflected metaphysical anxieties over the liberal humanist subject in technoscientific societies. The cyborg, interpenetrating both science and science fiction, became the figurehead of this postmodern interrogation of a normative humanism, one which troubled the paradigm greatly. As Haraway’s ‘Manifesto’ observes, ‘far from signalling a walling off of people from other living beings, cyborgs signify disturbingly and pleasurably tight coupling’ (p. 152), suggesting that through the cyborgian mindset we might come to understand ourselves. As a by-product of redeploying the Hegelian dialectic via the anxieties surrounding the mechanisation of labour (or the hyperbolic rendering of humanity as enslaved by its creations), science fiction implicitly confronts the notion that, in our likeness to machines, the underlying issue is the destabilisation of liberal humanism by capitalist enslavement. Essentially, desperate attempts to differentiate ourselves from our machines in order to protect a humanist conception of subjectivity – one which is, by the late twentieth century, collapsing beneath its own weight – simply detract from the reality of a situation in which society dictates the terms of our subjectivities, not ourselves, and certainly not our increasingly intelligent machines.

In a post-spiritual, industrial world, the need to identify the replacement for soul, that quality that demarcates humanity from a range of clamouring subjectivities, has resurfaced throughout metaphysics, art and the social sciences. Mind, rationality, language, memory, empathy: all of these qualities have been explored to great lengths by philosophers, artists and psychologists. The problem, propagated by the need to preserve liberal humanism, lies in the usage of human-as-adjective. As we have seen, love relieves the problematic of a dehumanising capital by restoring a subjective scene to individuals via the love relationship; love constructs the subject through maintaining a resistant sense of difference that the modern world is bent on

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<sup>3</sup> Isaac Asimov, ‘The Bicentennial Man’, in *The Bicentennial Man and Other Stories* (London: Millennium, 2000), p. 173.

stripping them of. In *The Positronic Man*, Asimov grants Andrew agency over the narrative: as a self-reflective robot capable of emotion, Andrew is individuated by the love which differentiates him from other machines and consequently imbues him with subjective rights. John Stephens and Mio Bryce insist that ‘blurring of the concepts “human” and “cyborg/mechanoid” develops a new slant when subjectivity and narrative point of view are attributed to a mechanoid character’.<sup>4</sup> Each of the texts in this chapter depicts a variation on the nonhuman – a cyborg, a mechanoid computer, and a clone – all of whom come to terms with love through learning it from others. All three texts also prioritise the narrative perspective of the nonhuman, either over or alongside the point of view of a human counterpart, and in each text Asimov’s Laws are overruled in order to explore more fully the ethical implications and potentials such a removal creates. Essentially, this chapter argues that love also serves to humanise the nonhuman other, by creating a free space which overrides both the Laws of Robotics and the Hegelian master/slave dialectic. As Stephens and Bryce enquire: ‘mechanoids freed from the laws of robots and attributed with subjective agency challenge our concepts of humanity and posthumanity: if such an entity performs humanity, and that performativity embodies subjective agency, why is she/he/it not a human’?<sup>5</sup>

### **3.1. We’re all unnatural now. We’re all cyborgs – *He, She and It* (1991)**

The incessant plurality of storytelling techniques in Piercy’s novel not only serves to further pronounce the tensions between binaries traditional to the science fiction genre, but furthermore provides a polyphonic, multidimensional narrative in which a host of central characters, aside from the protagonist, achieve fully realised development. Piercy bolsters her plot by aligning religious and cybercultural mythologies, pasts and presents, first- and third-person narration, realities and fictions – all of which are represented by and in the lovers of the main narrative thread: Shira and the cyborg Yod. Though Yod is not awarded an opportunity to engage in a first-person account (no more than is Shira), his prominence in the story means that the reader is given an intimate experience of his construction of a subjective scene. The love affair between Yod and Shira is entwined with this coming-to-subjectivity, occurring in their shared discursive space, and underpinned by the dialectical tension inherent to the understanding of socialisation as programming. This section will now turn focus to the character of Yod; it will analyse the function of love in making the Other known.

Yod’s right to personhood is heavily debated: first in the secretive discussions that take place between those who created him (Avram, Malkah, and later by their inclusion, Shira); and later on, in terms of his citizenship, amongst the townspeople of Tikva, as his true nature is

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<sup>4</sup> John Stephens and Mio Bryce, ‘“Nothing dirty about turning on a machine’: Loving your Mechanoid in Contemporary Manga’, in *Papers: Explorations into Children’s Literature*, 14.2 (2005), 44-54 (p. 46).

<sup>5</sup> Stephens and Bryce, p. 47.

revealed to them. Yod's claim to citizenship, however, is of secondary priority compared to his claim to be a man, one worthy of Shira's attention and love. From the outset, Avram makes clear the intended purpose for Yod: he is to be a weapon – "Yod will be our security, our protector. If we can't have weapons, now we have a one-man army" (p. 95). Shira contests this in terms of Asimov's Laws, pointing out that robots are "programmed to self-destruct before they injure anyone" (p. 95). Avram reveals:

Yod's a cyborg, not a robot – a mix of biological and machine components. He's programmed to protect us – our town, its inhabitants, our Base. That's his primary duty. But to perform it he cannot be as naïve and awkward as he is now. That's where you come in (p. 95).

Thus Shira is admitted to the undisclosed security project as sociologist, to naturalise Yod's pre-programmed knowledge, abilities and language skills so that he might pass for human. At this early stage, Yod's purpose renders him an object, a tool, in the eyes of both Avram and Shira, though Avram refers to the cyborg as 'him'. Shira objects to his use of the word: "You call the cyborg 'he', I notice. Isn't that anthropomorphising? I would like us to proceed objectively, not in terms of wish fulfilment" (pp. 95-96). Her initial objectification of Yod soon becomes a point of conflict, as she learns more about his conception and programming. Malkah, who helped create him, explains to her: "He is a person, Shira. Not a human person, but a person" (p. 103). She continues:

Avram made him male – entirely so. Avram thought that was the ideal: pure reason, pure logic, pure violence. The world has barely survived the males we have running around. I gave him a gentler side, starting with emphasising his love for knowledge and extending it to emotional and personal knowledge, a need for connections (p. 192).

To begin with, Shira remains resolute in her belief that Yod 'isn't male, he's a machine', and challenges Avram on the cyborg's anatomical design (p. 192). Gradually, however, Shira's attitude towards Yod's claim to personhood is mollified by her dawning realisation of the cyborg's capacity for desire, though this is underpinned by Yod's learning of linguistic 'performance' in the first instance. Like the androids in Dick's novel, in whom imitation and embodiment become increasingly confused performances, Yod's performance of subjectivity is gradually blurred with his construction of an authentic subjective scene. Shira's proximity to him, as his educator, renders her instrumental to this process in several interrelated ways. Firstly, in teaching him to imitate human subjectivity, she suspends her disbelief that he can ever actually achieve this. Here, her imitation is paralleled with his. Because she needs to keep up this pretence, as the primary actor in an intersubjective scene from which his subjectivity will proceed, she becomes the first person to award him recognition as his own 'I'. Deeply bound up with this performance as Yod emerges from it, his humanisation takes place almost

without Shira realising it. Where she was initially suspicious of his ability to claim personhood, in being the one to teach him how to imitate humanity, Shira inadvertently becomes the first to believe that he is human.

Jean Baudrillard, who writes that simulation is ‘at the gates of the unconscious’, might argue that Yod’s coming-to-subjectivity is therefore psychosomatic.<sup>6</sup> Working from Émile Littré, Baudrillard writes:

To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn’t have. One implies a presence, the other an absence. But it is more complicated than that because simulating is not pretending: “Whoever fakes an illness can simply stay in bed and make everyone believe he is ill. Whoever simulates an illness produces in himself some of the symptoms” (Littré). Therefore, pretending, or dissimulating, leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the “true” and the “false”, the “real” and the “imaginary”. Is the simulator sick or not, given that he produces “true” symptoms? [...] Psychosomatics evolves in a dubious manner at the borders of the principle of illness. As to psychoanalysis, it transfers the symptom of the organic order to the unconscious order: the latter is new and taken for “real” more real than the other.<sup>7</sup>

Brian Massumi has written fairly critically of Baudrillard’s apocalyptic view of simulation, which he terms ‘one long lament’, and instead urges us, from a postmodernist perspective, to see in the simulacrum a contingent power.<sup>8</sup> Massumi argues that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s approach to simulation, following the explosion of the hyperreal in the twentieth century, offers a more fertile discourse from which to proceed into contemporary techno- and virtual cultures wherein hyperreality and Baudrillard’s ‘precession of simulacra’ have found their optimum roles.<sup>9</sup> Massumi claims that: ‘a copy is made in order to stand in for its model. A simulacrum has a different agenda, it enters different circuits’, continuing:

The terms copy and model bind us to the world of representation and objective (re)production. A copy, no matter how many times removed, authentic or fake, is defined by the presence or absence of internal, essential relations of resemblance to a model. The simulacrum, on the other hand, bears only an external and deceptive resemblance to a putative model.<sup>10</sup>

Noting that resemblance suggests an inherent dynamism of its own, Massumi commends Deleuze and Guattari’s positive reading of the simulacrum, wherein they see that ‘a thing [...] in order to become apparent, is forced to simulate structural states and to slip into states of forces

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<sup>6</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Massumi, ‘Realer than Real: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari’, *Copyright*, 1 (1987) <[http://www.anu.edu.au/hrc/first\\_and\\_last/works/realer.htm](http://www.anu.edu.au/hrc/first_and_last/works/realer.htm)> [accessed 15 September 2013] (para. 18 of 18)

<sup>9</sup> *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Massumi, (para. 5 of 18)

that serve it as masks'.<sup>11</sup> Building on their thoughts, Massumi expands this to conclude that 'resemblance is a beginning masking the advent of whole new vital dimension. This even applies to mimicry in nature [...] Mimicry [...] is camouflage. It constitutes a war zone'.<sup>12</sup> Of *Blade Runner*'s replicants, Massumi writes that their power comes not from their ability to imitate, but to harness themselves through their commitment to the imitative performance. This is also patently clear in the way Yod comes gradually to his subjective scene through honing his performative ability; Massumi says of this process that 'imitation is only a way-station en route to an unmasking and the assumption of difference', the difference that will eventually constitute individuality.<sup>13</sup>

M. Keith Booker remarks that key to Yod's humanisation is his endowment 'with a very human-like capacity for abstraction and even emotion', suggesting that the two are intrinsically linked.<sup>14</sup> Though it must be kept in mind that Shira teaches him to develop these abilities, her role is essentially to tease out the potential for these capacities from his pre-programmed data and contextualise them in human society, making relevant the knowledges with which Avram and Malkah have imbued him. While the argument on the one hand is quite obvious: Yod remains non-human, a machine, the mere representation of humanity, because all of his traits and abilities are either pre-programmed or taught and then replicated; the provocative suggestion is that all human learning follows a similar model. Once Yod has been taught enough by Shira to successfully mediate between the preloaded data, and the contexts that this data pertains to in daily life, he manages to turn the paradigm on its head. Malkah no longer has to present the case for the cyborg-as-person, as Yod takes over the cause himself. In much the same way that Dick's androids or Turing's computers run semantic rings around their human subjugators, so Yod fights back against his own set of prejudices, using the finer points of his language acquisition to argue his position to Shira: "Aren't you programmed too? Isn't that what socialising a child is? I enjoy, Shira, never doubt that. If I've been programmed to find your pleasure important and fulfilling, don't women try to reprogram their men that way?" (p. 435). Indeed, earlier in the novel Shira herself has resorted to the same use of metaphor to express her relationship with her ex-husband – 'She wished she could have reprogrammed Josh' – and even Gadi employs the same figurative language to insult her: "being married to that cybernerd prepared you for a real robot" (pp. 98, 284). The characters' consistent use of these referents serves to further reinforce this notion of programming-as-socialisation, which in turn complicates the distinction between the human and the cyborgian figure. As Yod confirms: "My programming isn't an absolute any more than your education" (p. 285). Indeed, by

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<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (New York: Viking, 1977), p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> Massumi, (para. 6 of 18)

<sup>13</sup> Massumi, (para. 7 of 18)

<sup>14</sup> 'Woman on the Edge of a Genre: The Feminist Dystopias of Marge Piercy', p. 346.

subverting his programming to overstep the confines of his intended purpose, Yod manages to escape the original/copy dualism in order simultaneously unmask the human situation as one which also operates beneath the terms of this struggle, and, by identifying that parallel, is able to draw from it a subjective scene which is realer than real, more human than human.

A meaningful interaction, which signals the turn in the relationship between Shira and Yod, occurs early on in their lessons together. The scene serves three imperative purposes, all of which depict language (and, as a pervasive secondary theme, love) as a means to personhood, in differing yet interrelated ways. Yod is taken outside Avram's lab for the first time, so that he might put his understanding of objects to the test in the real world, and beginning with 'a rose', Shira begins to address the gap between Yod's intellectual awareness of certain objects – "from the dictionary program" – and his actual subjective experience of them. Shira puts similar concepts to him, with the same results: Yod is able to define 'a rose' ('a block', 'a dog', 'fruit') on an intellectual level, but having never encountered these objects in actuality, his comprehension of them is fairly limited. Shira tells him: "I brought you to experience the rose" – Yod extended a hand gingerly. It took hold of one rose and deftly plucked it, bringing it towards its face. "It has colour, fragrance and form, just as my memory instructed me" (p. 123). This is the first instance in which we witness Yod's move from objective knowledge to subjective experience of that knowledge: the application of internalised, pre-programmed information to the external world. Just as Yod's linguistic ability far surpasses the average human capacity, but requires a contextual grounding for it to be of any use, so this scene conveys the same message regarding the understanding of concepts which remain mere abstractions if not grounded in experience. This exchange in turn reifies the process that Yod must undergo, facilitated (quite unwittingly, at this stage) by Shira he must move from being an object viewing the world objectively, to a subject with a right to subjectivity. The second function of the scene is to emphasise the importance of figurative language in Piercy's linguistic model of the human. Returning to the chapter's opening, Shira administers several language and aptitude tests to determine the rubric for Yod's education:

In some aspects of intellectual development and ability, Yod scored vastly above the human range; in others, it was well within ordinary human parameters. It was like a bright child, perhaps the sort of child Josh had been, forward in its command of the sciences and of mathematics but quite retarded in its grasp of human relationships and the subtler values. Metaphorical thinking seemed to stymie it. It tended to interpret discourse literally (pp. 118-119).

In order to illustrate metaphor, Shira uses poetry, reciting the first stanza from Robert Burns's "My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose", explaining: "You're going to have to learn to use metaphor and simile, Yod, if you're ever to sound halfway human" (p. 120). The use of figurative language in human linguistic performance not only underpins the relationship

between the abstract and the concrete – and so by extension, between the represented and the embodied, objective and subjective experiences – but it also highlights a category of nouns that are abstracted in human usage and understanding – emotions. Though, at this point in the narrative, Shira is primarily concerned with assisting Yod’s imitation of figurative speech in order to render that imitation more convincing, we see a marked change in Yod’s comprehension of emotion as it arises naturally out of practice. Inviting Yod to juxtapose his programmed understanding of ‘a rose’ with his new subjective experience of the object itself, Shira poses the question of metaphor to him again:

“Do you recall the Robert Burns poem?”  
Yod recited it with a perfect imitation of her inflection.  
“Now, what did he mean?”  
“He meant that the woman was beautiful, like this flower, and that she smelled of perfume, perhaps.”  
“How do you know the rose is beautiful?”  
“My base tells me it’s so regarded by humans: that flowers are beautiful.”  
[...]  
“There’s more implied in the poem. Do you know how long roses last?”  
“No.” Yod cocked its head and waited.  
“Flowers are mostly creatures of a moment. That rose is already beginning to wilt. If you put its stem in water, it will last a couple of days.”  
“Therefore a flower comparison implies short duration.”  
“Correct.”  
It frowned. “Then it’s a sad poem.”  
“Not exactly. But there’s an undertone of mortality. With us there is often an undertone of mortality.”  
“I am mortal too, Shira. I can be turned off, decommissioned, destroyed.”  
(pp. 123-124).

That Yod’s understanding of figurative language comes through the frame of a love poem is no coincidence. The reader’s attention is constantly wrenched back to the idea of emotions as the markers of (in)humanity and, again, the boundaries between the categories are blurred. This exchange not only marks the point at which Yod externalises his knowledge through experience of objects, but also the moment where he makes the transition from object to subject in Shira’s eyes, thereby realising a third function of the scene. Ending their session on poetics, Yod offers an original interpretation of Burns’s metaphor:

“But the poem you taught me is ambiguous. How do you know he is speaking of the woman? ‘My love is like a red, red rose’ could mean his own feelings for her. They could be what he is praising as beautiful and announcing as transitory.” He raised an eyebrow at her and waited, smiling slightly.  
“I never thought of that.” She stopped and stared at Yod. “Frankly, I’d like the poem less if I thought that was what Burns meant. That probably was true of that relationship, the way it is of most, but not a cause for celebration. You changed the subject.” (p. 125).

Not only does Yod assimilate her teaching quickly enough to challenge her own knowledge, but this challenge results in the immediate substitution of the pronoun 'it' for 'he'; from this point in the novel to its close, Shira thinks of Yod as male, quite literally 'changing the subject'.

Ironically, once Shira sees Yod as a subjective entity, and begins to prepare herself for arguing his claim to citizenship to the town, Yod falls victim to an identity crisis. Though Yod has proved his own personhood, once accepted by her, Shira must reassure him of her recognition. These insecurities, however, are all played out in relation to his love affair with Shira, marred by the little jealousies and tribulations so characteristic of the human love story. His discomfort is provoked by Gadi, who, jealous himself over Yod and Shira's intimacy, likens him to Frankenstein's monster. This comparison plunges Yod into depression, as he tells Shira, "I hope I die":

"Why do you want to die? What's wrong?"

"That's assuming I'm alive. I read *Frankenstein* and then many other versions of this story, from novels to books of crudely drawn cartoons. I watched flat projections called films. Then I entered two stimmies."

"Yod, I told you to forget all that. What has a fantasy of the nineteenth century to do with you?"

"Dr Frankenstein was a scientist who built a monster. I am, as Gadi said, just such a monster. Something unnatural." (p. 202).

In the preface to her 'Manifesto', Haraway turns the monstrosity of the cyborgian body on its head, noting that the 'word shares more than its root, to *demonstrate*. Monsters signify' (p. 2). She contextualises this signification by reminding us that monsters 'have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations' (p. 180). In *Frankenstein*, the monster hovers on the edge of civilised society, a liminal spectre haunting the interstices of liberal humanist dualisms. Haraway sees Shelley's monster – as a distant ancestor of the twentieth-century cyborg – in expectation of its 'father'/Victor to 'save it through a restoration of the garden [...] through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos', but I would argue that here she somewhat overstates the demands the monster places on Victor Frankenstein (p. 151). In Shelley's text, the monster is completely willing to make trades on his social inclusion and to disappear into the night, in exchange for a lover he can take with him. Director Danny Boyle has said of the novel that 'Shelley wrote a creation myth for the science age [...] the first that didn't use God to rationalise the human'.<sup>15</sup> Neither, here, did science – Victor's totally irrational use of it leads to his ultimate downfall. Instead, love underscores the rationality (or lack thereof) of humanity; as in *Blade Runner*, the romance of Victor and Elizabeth is darkly mirrored by that of the monster and his hoped-for companion. When Victor destroys his second creation, the monster destroys Elizabeth. Though Haraway

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<sup>15</sup> 'Frankenstein: A Modern Myth' Channel 4, 31 October 2012.



maintains that her cyborgs do not seek origin stories, Yod nevertheless does, and is discomfited by what he finds in Shelley's myth. While Shira tries to divert his attention away from this particular identification, certain parallels nonetheless surface that prove difficult to ignore. Elissa Gurman observes the gauge of Yod's humanity as 'free participation in community [...] and [his] ability to fall in love'; but more than that, he re-enacts the deal offered in *Frankenstein* by prioritising the latter over the former.<sup>16</sup> Repeatedly Yod reminds Shira that loving her and having that love reciprocated matter more than acceptance into the human community; his fears that she will see him as he briefly comes to understand himself, that is, as a descendant of Shelley's progeny, show Haraway's demonstrative signification at its most powerful. Love comes to elicit a subjective scene from Yod, but this is only fully realised and thus fully constitutive through Shira's return and recognition of that scene. As she reassures him: "we're all cyborgs, Yod. You're just a purer form of what we're all tending towards", and "unlike the monster's friend in *Frankenstein*, I don't need to be blind to like you" (pp. 203-205).

As noted in Chapter One, Shira is led to Yod through her work, and likewise, as the subject of her work, Yod is led to her. Piercy nods to Hegel's dialectic here, by suggesting that the terms of work stave off the successful construction of subjectivity, not only for the cyborg but also for Shira. While work can function as a self-actualising practice, neither of the lovers in *He, She and It* are content to be defined solely by their utilitarian roles. Yod is not satisfied to gain civic rights based solely on his role as the town's protector; Shira cannot follow Malkah's example and 'work in the centre' and 'love to the sides' (p. 75). The workplace, inextricably bound to the macro-level capital, is not a pure space and thus cannot produce a pure subject. Love, on the other hand, creates a space 'between-us', as Magid has put it, outside the terms of capital and wholly dedicated to the recognition and validation of the lovers' subjectivities.<sup>17</sup> In this space, which Giddens calls the 'pure relationship', true subjectivity can be derived from the intersubjective relation.<sup>18</sup> The relationship is pure, Giddens argues, because it is constructed outside any wider social context, the lovers have chosen one another based on qualities deemed suitable for love and love alone. Their subjectivities are validated, because they are held up against each other's, and accepted. The someone is separated out from the everyone, and this separation can only take place because of perceived differences that the love relationship then works to foreground, cherish and maintain. The incongruence between Yod and his lover, and Frankenstein's creature and his, is that Yod and Shira's relationship is founded on difference, while the creature bade Victor create him a mate in his own image. In light of Hegel's dialectic and Asimov's Laws, we can see how cyborgs in fiction and the anxieties they produce are less anxieties about the humanisation of machines and more about the depersonalisation of humans.

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<sup>16</sup> Gurman, p. 461.

<sup>17</sup> Jill Magid, 'Recognising Desire', *Threshold*, 19 (1999), 72-76 (p. 75).

<sup>18</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 49.

Work, and more specifically the capitalist framework it is tied to, reduces humans and cyborgs alike to so many cogs in the wheel of labour. When humans and cyborgs fall in love, they are marked together in the same fight. Love makes them human, by differentiating one against the many, but love makes us human, because the cyborgs are able to perform that same role in return.

### **3.2. Don't fall in love with her, she'll only make you cry – *Chobits* (2001-2002)**

The richest area of science fiction for love stories is unarguably the manga and anime tradition that originates in Japan, and due to the accessibility and popularity of these comics across all classes and age groups, their readership points to the fact that romantic metanarrative is culturally engrained from a young age and continues to be reinforced into adulthood. Writing about the global success of the 'sf romantic comedy' in Japanese popular culture, Sharalyn Orbaugh maintains that the genre has been consistently underpinned by a fundamental presence in manga and anime, the country's 'most significant artistic exports', in which science fiction narratives 'have reached levels of great sophistication and depth'.<sup>19</sup>

Japanese comics have their own national history, one which reaches much further back into the country's artistic tradition than its Western counterparts in sequential art, a history that is entwined with other visual and also performative arts, including kabuki theatre and waka poetry. The birth of modern manga, Jean-Marie Bouissou writes, 'owes much to the second encounter of Japan with the West [...] during the Meiji era (1868-1912) the rich tradition of Japanese graphic narration was to meet the Western one' – an exchange which has remained successfully in place ever since, as Toni Johnson-Woods affirms: 'nowadays, the 'flow' [of both influences and of marketable texts] goes both ways'.<sup>20</sup> Manga, like comics around the world, has always been a textual mode that seeks to push boundaries, causing 'moral panics' over its characteristically gratuitous content 'even though it grapples with deep philosophical questions'.<sup>21</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising, owing to Japan's global presence as a technocultural superpower, that one of the most popular categories of manga for all ages is a subgenre of science fiction called 'mecha', depicting a range of automata that includes robots, cyborgs, and sentient computers, more often than not incorporated within male adolescent love stories. Orbaugh argues that 'the nature and consequences of our transformation from the human to the cyborg is explored more thoroughly in Japanese popular culture than in any other venue'.<sup>22</sup> The sexualised cyborg has long been a feature of adult comics in Japan, such as Major Motoko

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<sup>19</sup> Sharalyn Orbaugh, 'Manga and Anime', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, pp. 112, 118.

<sup>20</sup> Jean-Marie Bouissou, 'Manga: A Historical Overview', in *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Toni Johnson-Woods (New York: Continuum, 2010), p. 21; Toni Johnson-Woods, 'Introduction', in *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Johnson-Woods, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Orbaugh, p. 121.

Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell* (1989-1991), ‘a character configuration that [...] originated in cyberpunk and was thence taken up in manga’.<sup>23</sup> These refigurations of female gender roles in Japanese science fiction narrative modes have been read as feminist reactions to the burgeoning cyberpunk genre of American fiction and film of the early 1980s; indeed, figures such as Kusanagi or Tima (*Metropolis*, 2001) echo William Gibson’s Molly from the genre-defining *Neuromancer*. With such trends in mind, an apparent regression in the mecha genre by the turn of the millennium comes as something of a surprise, as Kumiko Sato points out: ‘female cyborgs and androids have been safely domesticated and fetishized into maternal and sexual protectors of the male hero’.<sup>24</sup> John Stephens and Mio Bryce have gone as far as to say that:

the reaffirmation of traditional social values under threat is underpinned by a more or less explicit dependence throughout boy-meets-mecha stories on an ancient folktale motif, that of the *heavenly bride*, or swan maiden, and hence the stories can be seen as cyborg-age fairy tales.<sup>25</sup>

This suggests that, like their science fiction counterparts in the West who went from reconstituting women on the grounds of sexual emancipation to constructing both men and women on equal, humanistic terms, Japanese comics have now also moved beyond gender and onto the inclusive question of humanity. A renewed interest in the quest for the perfect love relationship implies also that, across the many modes of science fiction narrative, the route to the subjective scene is to be found through love.

The manga series *Chobits* (Clamp, 2001-2002; anime broadcast April-September 2002), along similar lines to Piercy’s novel, reinscribes romantic mythology from a technocultural angle, and weaves throughout a cyborgian origin story.<sup>26</sup> Though originally published in Japanese, *Chobits* has achieved unprecedented popularity with Western audiences, and is to date Clamp’s bestselling comic in the United States. The narrative begins by presenting the protagonist, Hideki Motosuwa, whose complaints about his life (“‘Cram school!’”), his work (“‘Dead end job!’”), and his lack of money (“‘Cheap-ass parents!’”) set the scene of the manga’s depicted society.<sup>27</sup> Hideki muses that “‘people say the world has become an easier place to live. I guess they’re right. It’s because of an invention that’s changed just about everything... The *persocom*’” (I, p. 5). Persocoms are humanoid computers initially built for the business sector, though the latest models have become so advanced and so lifelike that they have overstepped the confines of such usage to become household and companion robots, and in

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<sup>23</sup> Stephens and Bryce, p. 44.

<sup>24</sup> Kumiko Sato, ‘How information technology has (not) changed feminism and Japanism: Cyberpunk in the Japanese context’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 41.3 (2004), 335-355 (p. 349).

<sup>25</sup> Stephens and Bryce, p. 44.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Clamp’ are an all-female manga artist collective, led by Nanase Ohkawa and comprising various other members since the group formed in the mid-1980s.

<sup>27</sup> Clamp, *Chobits: Volume I* (Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 2010), p. 12. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

some cases, romantic partners. Clamp depicts a world none too far from the one we recognise as our own, one whose technologies have come about through reasonably plausible lines of development which correspond to the cultural mores of modern high-tech society: those who can afford persocoms have them; those who are (relevantly) educated understand them. There is, initially, no techno-melodrama to their narrative and no particular excesses to their vision of the persocom. Rather, Clamp's persocoms exist within a very domesticated world picture which attributes human form to the technological objects with which we are enmeshed in our daily lives, consequently rendering them evocative figures within the paradigm of the love story.

For Stephens and Bryce, romance gains new weight within the frame of technoculture, explaining the prevalence of such boy-meets-mecha narratives:

The idea of the 'perfect match' [...] exists as a powerful metanarrative, particularly in [Japanese] girls'/women's literature, although it seems to have increased in prominence for the affluent younger generation, which has grown up surrounded by the simulacra and distanced from their own corporeality, emotions and individual subjectivities. Love, as a profound interaction with another integral, individual subjective agent, is a remote ideal.<sup>28</sup>

Chi, like Yod in *He, She and It*, undergoes an object-to-subject awakening in the manga, a metamorphosis reliant on the recognition of herself as self and not merely enslaved Other. Found by Hideki, discarded along with household rubbish, Chi is an apparently defective persocom without an operating system or software, though she is able to move and communicate when Hideki turns her on. This first scene between them is comic (as Hideki grows progressively frustrated at being unable to find her power switch, before it dawns on him that it is located in a symbolically intimate place – “the one place I haven't checked”) but also imperative in setting the tone of the narrative (I, p. 21). Increasingly uncomfortable about 'checking' the anatomical location of Chi's power button, Hideki tells himself: “she's just a machine, right? Nothing dirty about turning on a machine. Everyone needs a computer! Right?” (I, p. 21). Hideki's discomfort and embarrassment at his proximity to the female form ought to be ridiculous, as the persocom is not a 'real girl', but he cannot think fully outside the human-machine dialectic, or shake the feeling of the uncanny enough to proceed with his relationship with Chi in a purely utilitarian fashion. His inability to maintain the perceived boundaries between Chi-as-machine and Chi-as-person is repeatedly utilised in the manga as a point of conflict, often for comedic value, but it always diverts the reader back to the question of humanity. Viviane Casimir writes that 'the cyborg not only becomes a metaphor for the blurring of any dichotomy, but also stands for the discursive space where a crisis occurs'.<sup>29</sup> Hideki's contemporaries are far better equipped to handle persocoms, and constantly express

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<sup>28</sup> Stephens and Bryce, p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> Viviane Casimir, 'Data and Dick's Deckard: Cyborg as problematic signifier', *Extrapolation*, 38.4 (1997), 278-291 (p. 279).

exasperation with his ignorance, or ridicule his anthropomorphising of Chi – “Naming her, treating her with respect – you’re well on your way to becoming a heavy user, my friend!” – suggesting that the gap between them and their technologies is almost non-existent; a result of their consistent engagement with the evolution of technology (I, p. 54). His friends, Hiromu Shimbo and Minoru Kokubunji, fully entrenched in technoculture, have never been distanced enough from technology to perceive Casimir’s crisis space. Hideki comes from a less privileged rural background, one that has not evolved seamlessly alongside technological development, and therefore, when coming into contact with Chi, opens up that very space of crisis via his unfamiliarity. That Chi is possibly one of the legendary ‘Chobits’, an urban-mythical model of persocom, creates a gap in knowledge and experience that even the technophiles of the manga can recognise. Consequently, even Minoru and his fellow *otaku* are admitted to the crisis space as their preconceptions regarding persocoms and their status are challenged, alongside Hideki’s, alongside our own.

Stephens and Bryce write that ‘[t]he story’s various relationships function as commentary on the emerging love between Hideki and Chi’; these characters, too, embody the range of views on the status of the persocom.<sup>30</sup> Shimbo represents a healthy, utilitarian consumption of technology: his persocom is a doll-sized laptop model, which he readily gives up to prove his love for Takako Shimizu, who mistrusts all persocoms since her husband left her for his. Yumi Omura, Hideki’s high school-age co-worker, has had a similarly damaging experience with persocoms, and feels inadequate and imperfect next to them (in much the same way women may compare themselves unfavourably to the objectified or unattainable standards of femininity in magazines or pornography). These varying responses to the pervasiveness of the persocom all play their part in further confusing the lines drawn between humans and mecha, especially as their opinions are expressed via their respective experiences of romantic relationships, with which persocoms are gradually becoming more involved. The character from whom Hideki learns most about the persocom is the prodigious Minoru, who becomes something of a mentor to him, and whose own opinions begin to change based on the relationship between Hideki and Chi. Minoru initially tries to warn Hideki against becoming too emotionally attached to his persocom, telling him, “I respect the fact that you haven’t become so involved with your persocom that you forget about people” (I, p. 259). Hideki is surprised, as Minoru is a classic example of the *otaku*, largely removed from society and favouring the company of his persocoms to that of his peers. Minoru tells him that “with the new models, it’s hard to tell who’s human these days”, and while he agrees with Hideki’s observation that differences between humans and their computers remain, “it’s easy to forget” (I, p. 260). He continues: “The more human our computers become, the less need we feel to give our love to

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<sup>30</sup> Stephens and Bryce, p. 47.

humans. But as an expert programmer of persocoms, I can tell you this... our love is wasted on them” (I, p. 260). Hideki finds this objective advice he inherits from Minoru difficult to reconcile with his subjective experience of Chi. Moreover, he is locked in a teacher-student relationship with her, an exchange that has never been requisite with models prior to the Chobits. Other persocoms benefit from preloaded software that dictates their functionality and knowledge capacities, affording the possibility for the most minimal of personal interactions with their owners. Chi, on the other hand, existing without data, passively imbues the humans around her with the active role of educator. In trying to solve the question of her origin – while also battling the unique problem of a persocom that needs, much like a child, to be educated – Minoru begins to draw parallels between the persocom and the human: “We’re all programmed in one way or another. We receive so many instructions: our DNA, our upbringing, our culture”.<sup>31</sup> Stephens and Bryce assert that ‘*Chobits* effectively posits that here the distinction between computer code programming and DNA programming dissolves’, a notion that clearly resonates not only with Piercy’s alignment of the terms ‘programming’ and ‘socialisation’, but with many cognitive models of the human made fashionable within psychological disciplines influenced by the fields of biotechnology and cybernetics.<sup>32</sup> Hideki’s education of Chi echoes the socialisation of Yod in *He, She and It*, especially in terms of language acquisition, albeit in a more infantile and formulaic manner. Once initialised, Chi’s only word for some time is ‘Chi’, which Hideki takes to be her name. Until Minoru teaches Hideki how to manage Chi’s self-learning software properly, her response to every question and every new object she encounters is simply ‘Chi’. As her name, her repetition of the word amounts to a subjective assertion of ‘I, I, I’, as existing being within the world. The two run into similar difficulties when she learns her second word – ‘Hideki’ – and object after object (rice cooker, table, light bulb) is declared as ‘Hideki’. Gradually, Chi’s lessons make sense of the world of objects, and they differentiate the external world from her internal experience of it. This concept plays out in full by the beginning of the second volume, when Chi tells Hideki: “Chi is Chi, because Hideki named me Chi!” (II, p. 102).

Throughout, the narrative is supplemented by two subplots unique to Chi, one of which is a recurring dreamlike sequence in which a double of herself appears to guide her in her waking life. We eventually learn that these visions are the realisation of the Chobits legend, and the manifestation of her previous memories. The Chobits were created by the inventor of the persocoms, before his death, as surrogate children for his wife, Chitose Hibiya. As Hibiya explains to Hideki, “my husband used the most advanced technology to create her. He made her with love. He wanted to create a daughter for me who could be loved, and could love

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<sup>31</sup> Clamp, *Chobits: Volume Two* (Oregon: Dark Horse Comics 2010), p. 388. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

<sup>32</sup> Stephens and Bryce, p. 47.

someone in return” (II, p. 490). The first Chobit, Freya, fell in love with her own father, before Oedipal guilt overcame her and she died. Freya’s younger twin Elda convinced her mother to reset and then abandon her, so that the same thing could not happen again. Hibiya reluctantly agreed, and when Elda was discovered and rebooted, she became Chi, though suppressed memories of herself as Elda intermittently overrode her programming to come to the forefront of her consciousness. In these ‘visions’, Freya implores Chi to seek out the ‘someone just for her’ so that she might fulfil her programming, not only to fall in love but to have someone fall in love with her. Thus, the ‘cyborg fairytale’ takes on a duality whereby either Chi or Hideki can be read as protagonist or questing hero, and Clamp invest them with equal agency by allowing both characters sway over the narrative. In Chi’s tale, the object of the quest is true love, the successful acquisition of which will realise the aims of her programming. Reading the narrative with Hideki as the main character changes the object of the quest: for Hideki, the truth of Chi’s origins is the main objective, but this truth can only be revealed in exchange for love. Throughout the manga, Hideki’s growing feelings for Chi challenge his views on the nature of humanity, the nature of persocoms, and the overlap between the two.

If Minoru is the mentor figure in Hideki’s technological education, then his former employer Hiroyasu Ueda contributes enormously to his emotional understanding of the persocom. Ueda himself was once married to a persocom, before she malfunctioned and ‘died’. Up until this revelation, Hideki tries to rationalise his relationship with Chi, constantly catching himself and correcting his own terminology in relation to them – “‘Persocoms can’t die. They’re not even alive, right?’”; “‘I guess I shouldn’t say ‘living.’ I mean, they *are* just machines” (I, pp. 382, 473). Ueda offers Hideki another way to think about the issue:

that depends on the person. To some people they can be much more than that [...] It took me a while to understand what I felt for her, that it was no different than loving a person [...] What I learned about persocoms was this. You can debate whether they’re alive like we are, or whether they die like we do. But I’ve seen people die, and the feeling was no different [...] The same reason I married her, is the same reason I mourn her. I loved her. I loved her voice, her face. I loved the good times with her and the bad. And I’ll never forget any of it. You feel the same, right, Motosuwa-kun? Even if Chi didn’t remember, you would remember, wouldn’t you? If Chi suffered, you wouldn’t forget it, would you? (I, pp. 712-735).

Here, Ueda suggests that loving a persocom is enough to validate the human-mecha relationship, a view that Hideki mulls over before correlating within his own frame of reference. Clamp also imply here that intersubjectivity is a prerequisite for the love relationship. Hideki tells Shimbo: “‘if Chi is feeling pain, I know I can erase those memories from her [...] but I’ll remember [...] her memories may not be ‘real’, but they’re real to me. And as long as I remember, her memories won’t just go away” (II, p. 46). By this logic, whichever course of action the human takes produces similar results: if the human chooses to erase memories from

the persocom because he would rather the persocom not have to ‘live’ with them, then the altruistic action suggests that the mecha is perceived to possess a subjectivity experience on a par with that of the human; if he chooses not to exercise that power over the persocom, it implies that the human respects the mecha’s rights to its own subjectivity, whether the mecha can actively claim for those rights or not. As Hideki puts it: “I don’t want to have to erase any bad memories for her” (II, p. 540). In both cases, the persocom attains full personhood in the eyes of the human, and the reason for either protecting the mecha from painful memories or protecting the capacity for memory itself, is in Ueda’s view, because of and proof of love. Minoru, once so sure of the human-mecha distinction, also echoes this sentiment: “I’m not sure I believe in the proverbial ghost in the machine [...] but perhaps my own feelings are proof enough” (II, p. 398). Hideki constantly reassesses his relationship with Chi, in light of his growing education in technology, love and Chi’s own development:

When I look at Chi, I can’t help it. I just want to smile and comfort her. I told Yumi-chan once that Chi is just a household appliance. But it’s not like I get emotional over my rice cooker. I don’t want to fool myself. I know she’s not a person. But at some point I stopped thinking of her as a machine. So what am I supposed to think about her? (I, p. 601).

Ueda, again, plays a large part in the answering of this question. Following the death of his wife, his next relationship is with Hideki’s co-worker Yumi; Ueda’s love for another woman, coupled with the fact that that woman was a persocom, complicates his romance with Yumi and contributes heavily to her sense of insecurity over how she compares to what she perceives as the perfect woman. Hideki and Chi witness their reconciliation, during which Ueda makes it clear to Yumi that when he married his wife, “I never wanted to marry [her] because she was a persocom. I was in love with her for who she was” (II, p. 258). Moreover, Ueda insists that loving someone for ‘who she was’, that is, as an individual, undermines Yumi’s misconceived view of the persocom as a perfected version of humanity:

I know how you feel about persocoms [...] how you feel like they’re superior beings. But you have to see them for what they are, not just what you think they are. There are things only they can do because they’re persocoms, and then there are the many things that they can’t do because they’re persocoms. It’s just like people. There are things we can do and things we can’t (II, pp. 259-260).

Highlighting the deficiencies of the persocom aligns them more closely with their human counterparts; identifying imperfections or points of difference that mark them out from each other helps to consolidate their individuality.

Irving Singer maintains that ‘perfections must always remain unattainable’ and moreover do not truly exist in any concrete sense or embodiment of such, but exist instead as the benchmarks of human love:



they are merely essences that lead us on; they cannot be realised and would not be perfect if they were. In effect, the ideal objects [those we fall in love with] are but the offspring of aspiration itself. They issue from the imagination of creatures who live in the realm of matter as well as in the realm of spirit [...] Without the imagination [...] there could be no love. Imagination not only fabricates human ideals but also enables one to subsume the beloved under them.<sup>33</sup>

Imagination is the primary capacity that makes possible the shift in perspective from mecha-as-object to mecha-as-subject, the imagined projection of the self's humanity onto the Other. As Ueda tells Hideki: “‘It’s only natural [that you care]. Even if they aren’t alive, you are. You care because *you’re* alive, because *you* have a heart’” (II, p. 473). Without the ensuing identification of the imperfections and points of difference, the individual remains as impersonal and unattainable as the objectified images of magazines – ‘love always requires a process of idealisation, the idealising of what would otherwise merely be an object in nature’.<sup>34</sup> Ueda certainly offers Hideki food for thought, and subsequently we see this philosophy put into practice within his own world view. Infuriated by one of the *otaku* constantly referring to Chi as ‘it’, he explodes: “‘Would you stop talking about her like she’s a machine?! Persocom this, persocom that – Chi has a name! If you say she’s so different [...] then use her name!’” (II, p. 319). The concept of difference is the final and most important factor in Hideki’s realisation that he is in fact in love with Chi. This is patently conveyed by the way he separates her from the everyone – “‘Other persocoms, other people [...] they don’t matter. Only my feelings. The someone just for me, is you, Chi’” (II, pp. 621-622). Here, humans and persocoms are designated without preference to form the ‘everyone’, while Chi is foregrounded without regard to her humanness or her machineness, but simply on the grounds of her own individuality – “‘She’s someone different’” (II, p. 542).

The two quests that dovetail by the narrative’s close see both Hideki’s and Chi’s goals achieved simultaneously, and, crucially for the emphasis on the intersubjective scene, that this realisation is interdependent and brought forth by one another. Hideki, who has risen to the challenge dictated by the Chobits myth, and also to his own self-administered challenge, is rewarded with the truth behind the legend. The legend, it appears, runs so deep into the consciousnesses of humans and mecha alike that even the Chobits themselves do not realise the full extent of their own nature. Hideki is faced with Freya, who communicates with him from the recesses of Chi’s earlier programming, and who is convinced of the legend’s fiction:

‘Chobits’ is just what our Daddy used to call us. But we’re no different from his other persocoms. Our love, too, is a consequence of our programming. That legend about us came from wishful thinking. If something had genuine

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<sup>33</sup> *The Nature of Love*, p. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Singer, *The Nature of Love* p. 27.

emotions, then that thing would be just like a human. If it were just like a human, it wouldn't be wrong to love that thing. It wouldn't be a sin. The Chobits legend is a lie that stemmed from people's desire... and from their guilt. Even knowing that... will you still love Chi? (II, pp. 644-645).

Hideki's final obstacle, in the face of this claim that Chi in fact remains an object, and cannot experience true love, is to declare his love regardless. Throughout the narrative, the concept of Chi's 'someone just for her' has been presented in tandem with her seemingly built-in refusal to allow anyone to touch her intimately (as Hideki did when switching her on). She repeats as if a mantra: "The only person who can come inside me is the someone just for me". The paradox of this situation, however, lies in the fact that the someone who can touch Chi will then reset her, erasing her memory and, in effect, her selfhood. Freya poses this eventuality to Hideki, telling him that in order for him to prove his love, he must perform that final action:

"You won't complete your love for Chi?"

"You have that wrong. I love her too much for that. I know what I feel now... and I can't erase all of Chi's memories."

"Even though Chi isn't alive?"

"Yes."

"Even though Chi's heart is only a program?"

"You have that wrong, too. Chi's heart is real, it beats inside of me... You want to call it a program, or a heart, it doesn't matter now. I don't care where it comes from, what matters is, I share it." (II, pp. 650-652).

Hideki's refusal to make love to/reset Chi concludes the final test: the suppression of desire and with it self-interest/gratification, to prove true love. In one sense, Hideki has always possessed Chi as an object and with that ownership possessed the ability to desire her as an objectified being. Rather than settling for possession, Hideki instead chooses to set Chi free. As a result of his prioritising Chi's needs over his own, he awards her the subjective agency she requires to override the program that reinitialises her every time her reset button is pressed. Chi herself achieves her goal of true love, because Hideki chooses her emotional subjectivity over his own, which to some extent reinforces the traditional fairytale values of the piece that Stephens and Bryce identify.

The world picture that Clamp sketch conveys a culture seemingly balancing its human dimension with its increasingly mechanised labour force – as befits the image of Japan that has infected popular culture. More is at work beneath this superficiality, however, which at first read this cutesy boy-meets-mecha fairy tale may appear to gloss over. Firstly, it conveys strong disparities between class and class privileges – those 'in control' of the persocoms (Minoru; his *otaku* brethren) are generally portrayed as upper class, with access to knowledge, wealth, and consequently the sort of colonial power that has thought up these humanoid workers. By contrast, Clamp align their lower-class human characters – Hideki, Ueda, Yumi – as shoulder-to-shoulder in the workforce with their robotic counterparts. Rather than attributing anxiety to

the persocom going unnoticed in human society, and posing an internal threat this way, Clamp instead highlight the ways in which high technocultures blend humans with the world of machines. Unlike *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *Blade Runner*, and *He, She, and It*, the persocoms are surprisingly docile, but in their melding with human society serve to refigure the humans as docile also.

Love treats this docility, what Badiou means when he says that in contemporary society, love ought to be reinvented as combative. Unlike Shira in Piercy's novel, Hideki does not engage in self-valorising work, and as such is figured as more of an everyman. In the current age, far more people are in employment that answers only to the terms of capital by keeping them adrift in the modern rat-race. Work can be conducive to identity, but in as many if not far more cases mutes individuality in favour of the collective. By foregrounding the intersubjective relationship and the fairy tale-like quest for love, Clamp update romantic mythology to agree with Giddens's confluent love – in which the love scene allows subjects to stand outside all other social contexts and responsibilities that bear heavily down upon them. The love relationship therefore becomes an active space, a commitment to the other to extricate them from their socially depersonalising backgrounds. Like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *Blade Runner* and *He, She and It*, *Chobits* continues a line of inquiry into subjectivity and intersubjectivity that, framed by love, creates routes into spaces in which to be free.

### **3.3. Poor creatures. What did we do to you? – *Never Let Me Go* (2005)**

Like *Chobits*, Kazuo Ishiguro's sixth novel deals with issues of freedom in technoculture, and specifically the role love has to play in setting the terms of that freedom. *Never Let Me Go* (2005) marks Ishiguro's first foray into science fiction, and due to his more traditional literary background, *Never Let Me Go* initially caused some consternation among reviewers and scholars as to whether it ought be considered as science fiction proper. In a review for *Arena* the following year, columnist Simon Cooper suggested that 'we might turn to narrative fiction to see if it can explore the question of our post-humanity outside the limits of genre fiction or the visual spectacle', which aligns Ishiguro with other novelists who have experimented with crossovers between their native literary fictions and science-fictional or speculative themes, such as Margaret Atwood and Italo Calvino.<sup>35</sup> More recently, academics have been prepared to admit Ishiguro to the science fiction canon in the light of *Never Let Me Go*, in which an alternate vision of 1990s England sees the social advantages of cloning technologies brought to full realisation. Kathy H., the novel's narrator, is herself a clone and carer to others of her kind, and she relates the story of her upbringing in a boarding school, in what Keith McDonald terms

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<sup>35</sup> Simon Cooper, 'Imagining the Post-Human' *Arena*, 81 (2006) <<http://www.arena.org.au/2006/02/imagining-the-post-human/>> [accessed 25 July 2013] (para. 1 of 13)

a 'speculative memoir'.<sup>36</sup> Ishiguro's clones are created for the specific purpose of organ harvesting, and in Rachel Carroll's view the text can therefore be read as 'a normalising narrative of human cloning' – one which is further 'internally normalised by the donors themselves, typified in the figure of Kathy, who remains passively in the grip of her duty as carer, embodying the relentlessly bleak tone of the novel'.<sup>37</sup> Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis write that *Never Let Me Go* 'fits in a recent genre of "outsider science fiction" by operating within a sci-fi register and exploiting the techniques of defamiliarization associated with that genre, but without conforming to its rules'.<sup>38</sup> I would argue that, while Ishiguro himself cannot be categorised as the quintessential science fiction author, *Never Let Me Go* is nonetheless a text informed by the rich history of science fiction in the Western tradition, one which evokes other autobiographical narratives in the genre such as Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), the journal dimensions of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), and even Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The most accurate description of the novel, relative to the field it takes inspiration from, is surely Liani Lochner's, which states:

While *Never Let Me Go* cannot be read as an explicit commentary on the ethics of biotechnology – it contains virtually no scientific details – the norms and discourse of science form a powerful undercurrent that shapes both the characters and the narrative. Ishiguro does not demonise scientific creation; rather, the text's focus emphasises the naturalisation of instrumentalist ways of seeing the world, its impact on social relations and on the very conceptions of what it means to be human.<sup>39</sup>

The concluding section of this chapter will foreground the plot's romantic narrative, which serves to communicate Ishiguro's own admission that, bleak though the novel's macrological portrayal of society may be, 'we're raising the issue of what human nature is and we're putting out a fairly optimistic view'.<sup>40</sup>

The narrative unfolds in three parts, loosely corresponding to the three stages of the characters' lives (though allowing for the temporality of biographical memory): their formative years at Hailsham boarding school; a two-year transitional period at the Cottages (from, we infer, around ages sixteen to eighteen); and their professional adulthood, either employed as carers, as is narrator Kathy until the novel's close, or called up to become organ donors, as are Tommy and Ruth, Kathy's childhood friends. The tripartite structure also corresponds to the

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<sup>36</sup> Keith McDonald, 'Days of Past Futures: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* as "Speculative Memoir"', *Biography*, 30.1 (2007), 74-83 (p. 74).

<sup>37</sup> Rachel Carroll, 'Imitations of life: cloning, heterosexuality and the human in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*', *Journal of Gender Studies* 19.1 (2010), 59-71 (p. 62); McDonald, p. 78.

<sup>38</sup> Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis, 'Introduction', in *Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels*, ed. by Sebastian Groes and Barry Lewis (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Liani Lochner, "'This is what we're supposed to be doing, isn't it?': Scientific discourse in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*", in *Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels*, p. 227.

<sup>40</sup> Nick James, 'The Art of Letting Go (An interview with Kazuo Ishiguro)', *Sight and Sound*, 21.3 (London: British Film Institute, 2011), p. 39.

stages of their understanding and acceptance of who and what they are: instead of a dramatic turn or spectacular revelation regarding the characters' true natures, we are instead drip-fed the information gradually, mirroring the Hailsham students' own experience of being 'told and not told' the reality of their being.<sup>41</sup> During the Hailsham years, as Kathy recounts, their characters are shaped by their sheltered life experiences coupled with the beginnings of theories formulated regarding their eventual roles in life. At the Cottages, no longer under the supervision of their 'guardians', these theories are discussed at length, crystallised and weathered alongside new information and myths from the non-Hailsham students they share their lives with. Finally, in their professional adulthood, as either carers or donors, their theories are finally put to the test, their purposes realised and any lingering illusions finally dissolved.

Hailsham, and other schools like it, have been set up for the purpose of providing humane environments for the upbringing of clones. We learn from Miss Emily, the former headmistress whom Kathy and Tommy visit to resolve the questions they still have as adults, that she initially got involved with "a small but very vocal movement" that "challenged the entire way the donations programme was being run" (p. 256). Whether the original aims of these activist groups were to eventually put an end to organ harvesting, or simply to provide a kinder treatment of the clones themselves, is neither concentrated upon nor developed. Miss Emily's explanation towards the end of the novel is kept strategically vague regarding the clones' position in the social conscience:

by the time people became concerned about... about *students*, by the time they came to consider just how you were reared, whether you should have been brought into existence at all, well by then it was too late [...] people did their best not to think about you. And if they did, they tried to convince themselves that you weren't really like us. That you were less than human, so it didn't really matter (pp. 257-258).

Like the implied scientific practices in the book, and the clones' complicity in the donations programme (even under full disclosure), Ishiguro leaves much to the imagination regarding the agenda of Miss Emily and her contemporaries. Even Kathy herself, whom Bruce Robbins has called 'a character of limited consciousness', seeks no greater truths or justices than are immediately relevant to her own personal experience – she remains 'immersed in concerns and anxieties that one cannot confidently call trivia', but 'prefers not to contemplate the Big Picture'.<sup>42</sup> Though it certainly raises ethical issues regarding the clones and subsequently, in a more general sense, cloning practices in our current society, the novel does not mire itself in the moral unravelling of these practices. Ishiguro's audience and critics are left to draw their own

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<sup>41</sup> Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p. 79. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

<sup>42</sup> Bruce Robbins, 'Cruelty is Bad: Banality and Proximity in *Never Let Me Go*', in *Novel*, 40.3 (2007), 289-302 (p. 293).

conclusions on these matters, while he concentrates the text on more specific issues of humanity, and one which has been enormously overlooked by critics – a love story that plays out between the two main characters.

*Never Let Me Go* differs from the other texts under analysis in this section of the thesis in that the juxtaposition of the human and the nonhuman takes place across a much more pronounced distance. The intellectual line drawn between the humans in the novel and the clones is undeniably clear, and remains clear throughout. The two worlds of the novel, the constructed inner ecosystem of the clones and the external society benefitting from its existence, are presented as both co-existing and co-dependent, at once occupying the same space but in reality worlds apart. There is no meaningful area of overlap, no real connection with the outside world and no hint of or exhibited will on the part of the clones – outside their fantasies – to remove themselves from their impending fates. The clones exist outside human society, reared and schooled away from prying eyes, and even into their professional lives, the fundamental role of their service to society as carers seems to somehow take place outside social consciousness. Kathy makes frequent reference to her nocturnal comings and goings, which suggests a state of alterity in which the clones – carers and donors – operate:

I kept us on the most obscure back roads I knew, where only our headlights disturbed the darkness. We'd occasionally encounter other headlights, and then I'd get the feeling they belonged to other carers, driving home alone, or maybe like me, with a donor beside them. I realised, of course, that other people used these roads; but that night, it seemed to me these dark byways of the country existed just for the likes of us (p. 67).

By the end of the narrative, nothing has changed, no one has been freed – the ideologies of both clone and human have not been challenged or affected to any extent that would alter the world Ishiguro portrays. It is for these reasons, presumably, that so many critics have come to the novel and declared it bleak, pessimistic, and wholly dystopian. Another major difference is that the love relationship in *Never Let Me Go* is not one that plays out between a 'straight' cyborgian character and one wholly human: the clones in the novel – who can surely be read as cultural cyborgs rendered into being by the interfacing of the medical sciences and the organic humanity it is supposed to improve – develop no lasting bonds with the humans that keep them in place, or indeed, in existence. Rather, the love occurs between the clones themselves, and is to their own understanding what constitutes the truth and meaning of their own being. In much the same way as the Hailsham guardians campaign against the mainstream societal perception of the clones, so we see this struggle mirrored in Kathy and her fellow students – though, by the novel's close, both fights are abandoned and amount to the same fruitlessness. The plight of the clones, however, takes place much more internally, bearing relevance only within the world they inhabit and the relationships they conduct. As so many critics have despaired of the novel,

the clones are frustratingly resigned, expressing no real desire to escape their fate – Wai-chew Sim notes that ‘the chains that hold them in place are primarily ideological or mental’ – and so the focus is increasingly turned away from the outside world, progressively more focused on their internal affairs.<sup>43</sup> This is thematically reiterated in the background detail of Kathy’s narration; for example in the first part of the novel, when documenting their schooldays, Kathy recounts many instances from their lessons, in the history and geography of the outside world they do not and will never know. By the time the students are of school-leaving age, these details have dropped off in favour of more descriptive accounts of conversations and Kathy’s own internalised experience of her life; once she and her friends make the transition to the Cottages, all of the students appear incredibly introspective, taking long walks alone and working on individual academic projects that create further gaps between themselves and reality. In addition, this heightened introspection and shelteredness is emphasised by their awkwardness on the rare occasions they do venture into society, unprepared and for the most part unable to conduct themselves comfortably outside the confines of their inner social structure. Carroll claims that the clones ‘constitute an alternative form of kinship [...] of a fragile constitution’, and of course, this surrogate familial unit is not unique to Ishiguro, nor to science fiction.<sup>44</sup> The boarding-school formation of kinship features most prominently in children’s fiction, such as Enid Blyton’s *Mallory Towers* or *St Clare’s* series; Margaret Atwood has described *Never Let Me Go* as ‘the Enid Blyton schoolgirl story crossed with *Blade Runner*’, which aligns both elements of the clone and the child in the formation of subjective identity.<sup>45</sup> Carroll draws a heavier line beneath this similarity, saying that Ishiguro’s novel ‘recalls the ways in which child and teen identities are mapped out through peripheral social territories’, which in turn could be seen to account for McDonald’s observation that, in the novel, such formative events characteristic of the teenaged narrative that pertain to their shared emotional, quasi-familial space are foregrounded with the utmost seriousness and magnitude – as he puts it: ‘adolescent crushes become monumental affairs’.<sup>46</sup> The fact that Kathy and her friends continue to give the same reverence to their romantic relationships even as they mature into adulthood – to the extent that Kathy is still musing over these relationships with the same attention to detail – is evidence of something else at work in Ishiguro’s text.

As clones, the characters have every last detail of their lives set out and controlled from the very beginning, from their education and their future careers, to their eating and sleeping regimes, and eventually, even their death is dictated to them. The only room they have in which

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<sup>43</sup> Wai-chew Sim, *Kazuo Ishiguro* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p. 82.

<sup>44</sup> Carroll, p. 65.

<sup>45</sup> Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p. 168.

<sup>46</sup> Carroll, p. 62; McDonald, pp. 78-79.

to manoeuvre is in the spaces they create between themselves; the only control they will ever exert is over their own relationships. As Carroll points out:

Living outside conventional family and kinship structures, they affirm a collective identity defined against those they term the 'normals' [...] However, strategies of assimilation cannot enable them to escape a fundamental condition of their existence: the denial of their right to agency and self-determination on the grounds of their status as less than human.<sup>47</sup>

By their very existence the students are marked out, and actively mark themselves out in return, as different from humans. In order to compensate for their lack of familial kinship they have constructed a tight network of identification, with those of their 'own kind', to use Kathy's words; 'significantly same' to use Carroll's.<sup>48</sup> The catch implied here is that the closer the students band together in their cloneness, affirming that aspect of their identity against the humans they serve, the harder it is to define themselves outside their 'significant sameness'. Friendships and, to a far more concentrated degree, romantic relationships, help them to re-establish their individualities based on the perceived differences between them that their love or hatred of one another helps to underline. Of course, the line between love and hate is a fine one, especially within the adolescent sphere, and Robbins calls attention to the frequent 'moments of gratuitous emotional violence' and scenes of 'inexplicable cruelty between people who love each other'.<sup>49</sup> Occurring in the shared space of the love triangle that develops between Kathy, Tommy and Ruth, these acts could be put down to the cruelties of childhood, if they did not overstep the confines of that childhood to continue into their period at the Cottages. Kathy is tortured by the love she never acted upon for Tommy, and tormented by Ruth, who knows that the two would be a better match but cannot bear the thought of being abandoned by them. Ruth fluctuates between pulling away from Kathy and the shared, assimilating history she represents (so as to carve out her own identity in the eyes of the others they share their lives with at the Cottages), and the inability to reject that early kinship completely.

In the space created by the love relationship, Ruth finds ways to validate her identity away from the outside world she is not yet required to be a part of (but which promises integration as her future as organ donor approaches) and also away from Hailsham, which has defined her up until now. Kathy observes her painfully conscious performance of love, as a performance to be viewed – 'she set about changing how [she and Tommy] did things in front of people' (p. 119). Lydia R. Cooper notes that 'to [Ruth], loving someone means to be seen by others as being in love'.<sup>50</sup> Though seemingly bent on creating trouble and discord among her

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<sup>47</sup> Carroll, p. 59.

<sup>48</sup> Carroll, p. 65.

<sup>49</sup> Robbins, pp. 298-299.

<sup>50</sup> Lydia R. Cooper, 'Novelistic Practice and Ethical Philosophy in Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and *Never Let Me Go*', in *Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels*, p. 62.



closest friends, Ruth's acts of 'emotional violence' can be understood as desperate attempts at self-salvation, as she tries to assert her position on her own terms. In a cruel attempt to convince Kathy (and perhaps herself) that it is she and not Kathy who is rightfully deserving of Tommy's love, she manipulates the tension between Kathy's love for Tommy and her newfound and confusing desire for sexual contact – "what you have to realise is that Tommy doesn't see you like that [...] doesn't like girls who've been with... well, you know, with this person and that" (p. 197). Unsurprisingly, it is Ruth for whom the reality of their status as clones becomes all too much to cope with. One of the myths that circulates throughout the various schools in the country is that of the 'possibles': sightings of people on the outside whose resemblance to a certain student might suggest the original they were copied from. On a day trip with some fellow students, orchestrated because someone claimed to have seen Ruth's possible, the prospect of her future – all of their futures – weighs heavily upon her. She snaps at her friends: "we all know it. We're modelled from trash [...] If you want to look for possibles, if you want to do it properly, then you look in the gutter" (p. 164). Ruth's desolation and fear at her predestined life, at the futility of her earlier attempts to enact and embody a subjective individualism, validated in the eyes of others, are sharply conveyed in this scene. She never managed to construct a meaningful identity at Hailsham, surrounded by clones all embroiled in similar struggles for self-assertion; she knows that her future only holds a world in which her body will amount to no more than the sum of its parts; and she has utterly failed to redeem herself through love, because she chose Tommy (who is in love with someone else). From Kathy we learn that in later life Ruth is sincerely repentant – "I kept you and Tommy apart [...] That was the worst thing I did" – and even manages to see the irony and find some consolation in her final identity construct: "I was pretty much ready when I became a donor. It felt right. After all, it's what we're supposed to be doing, isn't it?" (pp. 228, 223).

Kathy, on the other hand, though plagued by similar concerns, enacts a far more successful assertion of her identity, though for her the process develops gradually over time. Whereas in *He, She and It* and *Chobits* (and also Dick's novel, Scott's film, and many other cyborg narratives), the protagonists (Yod, Chi, Rachael et al) gradually achieve the object-to-subject transformation, validated by the recognition of their significant others, in *Never Let Me Go* the clones are initially under the impression that they are recognised subjects. Their world picture is irrevocably altered by the knowledge that they are in fact medical artefacts, and from thereon in their struggle is to reconstruct the identities they have lost, but their reconstruction of self can serve no other purpose than their own self-satisfaction. It can make no real impact on their futures, and so the clones' struggle becomes nothing more than either acquiring a sense of self-worth before it is too late, or resigning themselves to their inescapable fate. Krystyna Stamirowska comments that:

One change that determines the ethical shift is the emphasis away from self-centeredness to a clear focus on the Other. Kathy's identity is defined by her awareness of the reality of other people [...] Consequently, her discourse constitutes itself as an act of reaching outside to the Other, rather than of expressing her own ego.<sup>51</sup>

Kathy realises from an early age that it is not merely down to oneself to be assured of one's identity, but that that identity must be co-constructed by others. She realises her own instrumental role within her social groups – recounting instances in which she was required as a listener, an audience or a co-conspirator – and also the complicit aspect of friendship, particularly relevant to her relationship with Ruth. Consciously or not, during her school years Kathy has repeatedly acted in ways which validate those around her: Ruth, Tommy, other minor companions – playing roles that facilitate the expression of other people's selves. It is precisely this nature, this ability to 'reach outside to the Other', that makes her, by her own admission, a good carer. She relates to the reader, somewhat defensively: 'it means a lot to me, being able to do my work well [...] There's no way I could have gone on for as long I have if I'd stopped feeling for my donors every step of the way' (pp. 3-4). Several critics have analysed the linguistic composition of this introduction to the text, the repetition of the words 'carer' and 'donor', the banality of the tone and the futility of little victories won, in light of what is to come in the novel. Their analysis amounts to the identification of a dual function of Kathy's discourse: in the first instance the repetition of the innocuous term 'carer', issuing as it does from a socially engrained medical welfare lexicon, suggests a 'hermeneutical uncertainty'.<sup>52</sup> Anne Whitehead explains that the novel not only 'call[s] attention to the word itself, but also [...] draw[s] out the inherent tensions and ambivalences that reside within it, between discourses of competency and professionalism, on the one hand, and languages of affect and feeling, on the other'.<sup>53</sup> Kathy's repetition of the term not only implies the depersonalising value of the word, in terms of the way it situates her within a contested discursive space – here, Whitehead refers to 'Ishiguro's deliberate suspension of Kathy's presentation of the carer between a bureaucratised efficiency and compassion' – but also foreshadows the thematic connotations of 'care' itself that underpin the narrative at varying levels of intellectual and emotional depth.<sup>54</sup>

Whitehead also argues that 'empathy is rendered morally ambiguous by Ishiguro, so that it no longer represents [...] an inherent virtue', leading 'as readily to exploitation and

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<sup>51</sup> Krystyna Stamirowska, 'Putting one's convictions to the test': Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World* in Japan', in *Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels*, p. 50.

<sup>52</sup> Anne Whitehead, 'Writing with Care: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*', *Contemporary Literature*, 52.1 (2011), 54-83 (p. 60).

<sup>53</sup> Whitehead, p. 63.

<sup>54</sup> Whitehead, p. 63.

suffering as to more altruistic behaviours'.<sup>55</sup> Whitehead's reading of empathy resonates with the issues thrown up in Dick's novel and then worked through more attentively in Scott's film: all three texts suggest that empathy is not a stable enough category on which to base or measure definitions of the human. If we back out of the Ishiguro's narrative in order to speculate on the macrological 'Big Picture' that we as readers are implicated in the construction of – as the particulars of the social landscape of the novel Kathy is unable or unwilling to divulge – we see that empathic and altruistic action in fact contribute to the medical sciences that require these clones in the first place. Miss Emily neatly summarises this issue when she asks: “how can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable [...] to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days?” (p. 257). Empathy is not what makes Kathy human; not in our eyes, and not in her own. If anything, her role as carer only situates her more firmly within the human/clone dialectic that defines her as categorically nonhuman. Yet, by the end of her narrative, she manages a full reconstitution of the subjective identity and right to agency that the text strips her of in her adolescent years. The inception of this process of reconstruction is brought about while she, Ruth and Tommy are still at the Cottages, instigated by another myth that is related to them by Chrissie, a fellow student:

We heard something else, something about Hailsham students. What they were saying was that some Hailsham students in the past, in special circumstances, had managed to get a deferral [...] if you were a boy and a girl, and if you were in love with each other, really, properly in love, and you could show it, then the people who run Hailsham, they sorted it out for you. They sorted it out so you could have a few years together before you began your donations. (pp. 150-151).

The Hailsham students have never heard this myth before, about the deferrals or their special status, and the matter is eventually dropped. In later years, when Kathy becomes Tommy carer and finally his lover, they begin to go over their earlier theories together. Kathy recalls the emphasis Hailsham placed on the arts and humanities, both greatly prioritised over other academic and sporting subjects. As Whitehead notes, ‘their literary and artistic education seems to underpin their undeniably close affective bonds and their altruistic behaviour toward one another’.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, the social impact of their artistic production is incontrovertible: their art is at once an expression of their individuality and a measure of their worth. Sim concurs that:

The art-items are obviously important because they allow the clones to assert their individuality. They use them to personalise their environment, and this is also the means by which they challenge subconsciously their assigned status as expendable things [...] With the prospect of the human body entering the circuit

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<sup>55</sup> Whitehead, p. 63.

<sup>56</sup> Whitehead, p. 56.

of exchange [...] the question of what really typifies humanity becomes critical.<sup>57</sup>

The art that the students create is then entered into the quarterly Exchanges – ‘a kind of big exhibition-cum-sale of all the things we’d been creating in the three months since the last Exchange’ – where their work is valued by the guardians for a token currency which can be redeemed against other students’ artworks (p. 15-16). Kathy explains: ‘Looking back now, I can see why the Exchanges became so popular to us. For a start, they were our only means [...] of building up a collection of personal possessions’ (p. 16). To Ishiguro’s readers, the miserable irony of the clones’ position within a wider, outside culture of commodification is clearly reinforced in the portrayal of the Exchanges; their acquisitiveness mirrors the consumerist society in which the clones themselves are also commodities. Patricia Waugh has also highlighted the way the clones’ world eerily mirrors the one outside; unbeknownst to them ‘they are commodities in culture of exchange, the fetishization of things and possessions, sales and tokens’.<sup>58</sup> Of course, this angle of the narrative is only available to the reader; neither do the clones have any awareness of this and nor would the guardians be teaching it to them. Rather, Hailsham education values artistic production, for reasons that eventually become clear, and this sense of value filters down and is replicated by the clones in their own rustic fashion.

The concept of their artistic value becomes a site of conflict at one stage, as Kathy remembers. Mysteriously, an affiliate of the school known only as ‘Madame’ visits Hailsham periodically to collect their best artworks. This event becomes known as ‘getting something into the Gallery’, and Kathy remarks that ‘by the time we were ten, this whole notion that it was a great honour to have something taken by Madame collided with a feeling that we were losing our most marketable stuff’ (pp. 38-39). Again, the students’ acquisitiveness is not grounded in any monetary context, but rather conveys the deep-rooted sense of expressive value that their artwork holds. Losing pieces to Madame’s gallery means losing powerful tools from the shared sphere in which all of them enact a reflexive self-determination. The students rely on their artworks and each other to feel that sense of self-worth gained from having someone else want their work, and the sense of individualism gained by acquiring certain works with which to personalise themselves. As Kathy puts it, so succinctly, ‘if you think about it, being dependent on each other to produce the stuff that might become your private treasures – that’s bound to do things to your relationships’ (p. 16).

Kathy and Tommy, going over these memories together, align their theory of the deferrals myth with their presumed reasons for Madame taking away their artwork. Tommy himself had never been ‘creative’ at Hailsham, for which he was the source of much scorn and

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<sup>57</sup> Sim, p. 88.

<sup>58</sup> Patricia Waugh, ‘Kazuo Ishiguro’s Not-Too-Late Modernism’, in *Kazuo Ishiguro: New Critical Visions of the Novels*, p. 23.

ridicule for his classmates. Miss Lucy, the guardian who had given the speech informing them of their future roles as organ donors, had told him that it didn't matter if he wasn't creative, despite what Hailsham values or the opinion of the other students might suggest. Kathy finds this unbelievable, but then recalls an encounter with Tommy in which he told her about a second conversation he and Miss Lucy had had about the importance of artwork, wherein the guardian had referred to the students' art pieces as 'evidence' (p. 106). This advice had seemed unfathomable at the time, but as adults the two combine this with the myth of the deferrals to sketch out the following theory:

[Miss Lucy] told Roy that things like pictures, poetry, all that kind of stuff, she said they revealed what you were like inside. She said they revealed your soul... there has to be a way to judge whether they're really telling the truth. That they aren't just saying they're in love, just to defer their donations. You see how difficult it must be to decide? Or a couple might really believe they're in love, but it's just a sex thing. Or just a crush. You see what I mean, Kath? It'll be really hard to get it right every time. But the point is, whoever decides, Madame or whoever it is, they need something to go on. (pp. 173-174).

With their theory worked out and themselves convinced of the feasibility of the deferrals myth, they decide to contact Miss Emily to 'apply', and Tommy works furiously on new artworks in the hope that too little will not be too late. Whitehead writes that 'in holding open the status of the clones, Ishiguro seems to (re)direct us to the question of whether we can, or should, rely on such absolute categories of difference as 'human' and 'nonhuman'', an issue that is re-imposed upon the narrative at this point. On meeting Miss Emily, Kathy and Tommy believe steadfastly in the authenticity of their love, and the ability of their artwork to demonstrate it. However, their gross misreading of the importance of their artwork soon becomes apparent: their artwork is not used to reveal the nature of their souls' compatibility, but "to prove you had souls at all" (p. 255). Of course, there are no deferrals, the myth remains a myth. The guardians' use of the students' artwork is 'purely utilitarian (it can provide ontological evidence of the clones' humanness that will then be used to secure the guardians' own political ends or gains); for them, it serves no higher or more redemptive purpose'.<sup>59</sup> Miss Emily's revelation appears to hit Tommy much harder than it does Kathy, perhaps due to the fact that the only opportunity he has seized to construct his identity on his own terms turns out to be impossible in the end. While Tommy rages and sulks, Kathy remains calm, almost resigned, but not in the same way that Tommy, like Ruth before him, eventually concedes the ironic identity of his fate: "I'm a pretty good donor", he tells her (p. 223).

Where her friends have been let down – by themselves, betrayed by one another, their guardians, their artwork, and even their conceptions of love – Kathy instead has been humanised by her ability to love, to go beyond empathy and altruism and to love,

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<sup>59</sup> Whitehead, p. 66.

unconditionally, and for the sole purpose of loving, rather than for the purpose of redemption or self-salvation. She manages to reconstruct herself, just in time to be physically deconstructed by society as she is called up to become a donor, and that reconstruction is made possible for her through her eventual experience of true, free and intersubjective love. As Ishiguro himself declares, Kathy is ‘not absolutely shattered because she’s got the one thing she always wanted – she wanted to know that Tommy loved her’.<sup>60</sup>



These three texts, though diverse in their inception and content, clearly depict an object-to-subject awakening and support the thesis that love is a humanising force, not only benefitting a reconstitution of human selves in depersonalising technoscientific settings, but also the subjectivisation of the nonhuman figures that increasingly populate contemporary fictions. In dissolving the boundaries between the human and the posthuman, the authors highlight the impracticality of employing the ‘human’ as a descriptor, in anticipation of a potentially exclusive ethics. By refusing to mark out difference in terms of biological make-up (or lack thereof), the much-needed sense of difference in love can begin to be constructed on other grounds – these posthumans do not claim to be human, but they do claim subjectivity, and they insist that their individual identities be accorded as such. This in turn draws attention to the issue of the Other when viewed through the frame of love, which the following chapter will treat in terms of Badiou’s theory of *disjunction*, a feature of the Two scene which works to neutralise the self/Other dialectic. Rather than posing a Hegelian challenge to autonomy, Piercy, Clamp and Ishiguro instead employ love to salvage subjectivity by opening up individuated spaces as a respite from the flattening excesses of postmodernity. Cyborgs offer us new ways to think about self and selves, subjective experience and intersubjective scenes, arriving just in time to shoulder the weight of the collapse of liberal humanism in the second half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>60</sup> James, p. 39.

## Chapter Four

### We Are All Chimeras

PRINCESS LEIA: I love you.  
HAN SOLO: I know.

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*Star Wars Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)

In his 1990 essay ‘Shattered Love’, Jean-Luc Nancy writes that ‘whatever my love is, it cuts across my identity’.<sup>1</sup> Far from being a superfluously poetic statement, Nancy’s insistence throughout that ‘there is this ontological fissure that cuts across and disconnects the elements of the subject-proper’ expresses with full analytical force what had only been implied by prior philosophies of the self/Other relationship – that the dyad falls apart beneath the lens of love (p. 261). The subject/object problematic, extended to signify the self/Other in the continental tradition, has provided an excellent dialectical framework for epistemologies ranging from theology to politics, linguistics to psychoanalysis. Moreover, the dialectic can easily be transposed onto the sexual relationship, as well as desire, both phenomena of human social experience that often crop up in (but further problematize) the love paradigm. For, as Nancy reminds us, ‘desire is not love’:

Desire lacks its object – which is the subject – and lacks it while appropriating it to itself (or rather, it appropriates it to itself while lacking it). Desire – I mean that which philosophy has thought as desire: will, appetite, conatus, libido – is foreign to love because it sublates, be it negatively, the logic of fulfilment. Desire is self-extending toward its end – but love does not extend, nor does it extend itself toward an end [...] Desire is unhappiness without end: it is the subjectivist reverse of the infinite exposition of finitude. Desire is the negative appropriation that the dialectic tries indefinitely to convert into positivity (p. 263).

Dualisms within love have resurfaced incessantly throughout the history of its philosophical treatment, beginning, as we have seen, with Plato’s division of Uranian and Pandemic Aphrodite. Through the further and more rigorous taxonomies of Aristotle that carried over into the foundations of the Catholic theology of the Scholastic period, we see this division refined into *eros* and *agapē*, as an attempt to temper the fact of human sexuality with the moral framework of monotheism.<sup>2</sup> The strict demarcations between carnality and spirituality that feature most prominently in the writings of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas (some 850 years apart) are inherited from antiquity, but more firmly imposed in Christian doctrine that has,

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press 1991), p. 266. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 200.

arguably, evolved little further since. The stress placed on the division of body and soul in the Greek and Catholic systems prefigures the mind/body dualism so integral to the Cartesian subject and modern continental philosophy, and is increasingly propelled by social evolution in a steadily secularising world, underpinned by Descartes's assertion of the *cogito* as the seat of human consciousness. After the Renaissance, there is a re-emergence of the concept of merging seen in Plato (coinciding with a social move from courtly love to democratised romance), and the acceptance and rejection of this produces two further divergences arising within humanist philosophies of love in the Romantic era, as Irving Singer has identified – puritanism and pessimism.<sup>3</sup> With their roots in the sixteenth-century philosophy of Descartes and Michel Montaigne (whose writings on human relationships in *Passions of the Soul* and “On Friendship” respectively influenced later humanisms), eighteenth-century European thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Friedrich Schlegel moved away from the religious partitioning of love. Instead, the writers of the Romantic period united *eros* and *agapē* within the encompassing, eternal loves of literary narratives which, in their popularity, were hugely influential not only on other authors but on the audiences who assimilated their representations into the cultural consciousness. By contrast and in response, such pessimists as Arthur Schopenhauer provided a commentary on the futility of love and its illusory nature, and accused their predecessors of purveying romantic ideals that were unattainable and served only as fictional veils for the fact that sexual desire propelled and shaped humanity due to its survival function. Romantic pessimism, and the predilection for philosophies of sexual relationships and the function of desire for the construction of self, prevailed well into the twentieth century. In the wake of Sigmund Freud's psychosexual theory and the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, through to structuralism and postmodernism in the latter half of the century, the subject/object problematic has snowballed throughout epistemologies whose frameworks are tightly bound up with deconstructions, reconstructions and crises of selves – and a host of varying, changeable bodies marked as their ‘Others’. In our most recent scholarship, love – as transcendent, immanent, nonsexual or at least not defined solely by sex – has somewhat fallen by the wayside in favour of philosophical fashions which are guided by increasing liberalism in Western culture.

In ‘What Is Love?’, Badiou refuses to perpetuate the trend of employing theories of sex or the desiring-subject as a means to understanding love, and rejects what he terms ‘the ‘superstructural’ or illusory conception of love, dear to a pessimistic tradition of French moralists’ (p. 39). Such a conception, he argues, leads to the (fallacious) understanding that ‘love is merely an ornamental semblance through which passes the real of sex, or that desire and sexual jealousy are the foundations of love’, both of which are inadequate in explaining either

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<sup>3</sup> Singer, *Philosophy of Love*, p. 35.



the phenomena of love or the loving-subject(s) themselves (p. 39). Why, then, this evasion in academia on the subject of love? Why the downplaying of its part in the human condition, especially as it enjoys fairly consistent – not to mention global – levels of popularity across all modes of cultural entertainment? To use an analysis from Schopenhauer from almost two centuries ago, one which remains accurate today:

Love is of such high import, because it has nothing to do with the weal or woe of the present individual, as every other matter has; it has to secure the existence and special nature of the human race in future times; hence the will of the individual appears in a higher aspect as the will of the species; and this it is that gives a pathetic and sublime import to love-affairs, and makes their raptures and troubles transcendent, emotions which poets for centuries have not tired of depicting in a variety of ways. There is no subject that can rouse the same interest as love, since it concerns both the weal and woe of the species.<sup>4</sup>

Though avowedly anti-love in his philosophy, perhaps this close relationship Schopenhauer observed between the pathetic and the sublime proves too awkward for modern thinkers. One cannot help but wonder at the jarring of high- and low-brow cultures, between the academic elite of modern philosophical discourse and the pulp fictions of incessant romantic comedy films, of formulaic Mills and Boon novels, and of repetitive soap operas. It is true that the great love stories – the myth of Aristophanes, *Tristan and Iseult*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wuthering Heights* – are timeless, but such canonical examples are relatively few and far between.

Reading the development of the philosophy of love since Plato is to trace the metamorphosis of a dualism that begins with the two Aphrodites, continues to resurface in appropriated versions of *eros* and *agapē*, before awkwardly settling into the self/Other dialectic in twentieth-century continental thinking, where it gives way for the most part to philosophies of the sexually constructed subject. Where Badiou and Nancy depart from their predecessors most radically is in their shared implication that the dichotomy of selves and Others, when framed by love, requires a complete overhaul. To reiterate Nancy, desire is not love, and to appraise love in terms of the desirer and the desired – or the lover and the beloved – is to perpetuate the subject/object problematic in a way that neither satisfactorily explains nor enhances our understanding of one of the most persistent phenomena in human history. Much excellent groundwork has been done around the topic – by Descartes, by Hegel, by Sartre, to whom present configurations of the dialectic are heavily indebted and would not exist without. But to approach love from the same angle, to force the lovers to fit into the roles of subject and object, is to undermine the lovers completely and thereby love itself. In ‘Shattered Love’, Nancy acknowledges the binary interplays littering the history of love, but rather than allow them to

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<sup>4</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, ‘Metaphysics of Love’, in *Essays of Schopenhauer* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2010), pp. 229-230.

problematize the paradigm, he invokes them directly to show the unique power inherent to the turn of paradox:

Love is double, conflictual, or ambivalent: necessary and impossible, sweet and bitter, free and chained, spiritual and sensual, enlivening and mortal, lucid and blind, altruistic and egoistic. For all, these oppositional couples constitute the very structure and life of love, while at the same time, love carries out the resolution of these very oppositions, or surpasses them. Or more often, it simultaneously surpasses them and maintains them: in the realisation of love, the subject of love is dead and alive, free and imprisoned, restored to the self and outside the self (p. 251).

Furthermore, the self is completely deconstructed as a result of love cutting across its identity; the interplay of the two lovers as two subjects must be redeployed as new configurations of both self and Other, which are defined by and turn on the cut:

Love re-presents *I* to itself broken (and this is not a representation). It presents this to it: he, this subject, was touched, broken into, in his subjectivity, and he *is* from then on, for the time of love, opened by this slice, broken or fractured, even if only slightly. He *is*, which is to say that the break or the wound is not an accident, and neither is it a property that the subject could relate to himself (pp. 260-261).

The 'break' allows for the intersubjective position which love initiates to arise and take hold, and brings 'an end to the opposition between gift and property without surmounting and without sublating it' (p. 260). The lovers relieve the master/slave dialectic through love which 'operates in an identical manner between all the terms in play: the access and the end, the incomplete being and the completed self, the one and the other, the identical and the different' (p. 250). The loving subject is one who, quite uniquely, can hold these conflicting terms within a coherent construction of an agency that is irrevocably altered by the act of loving. Nancy repeatedly pushes this point: he holds that the 'love break simply means this: that I can no longer, whatever presence to myself I may maintain or that sustains me, pro-pose myself to myself (nor im-pose myself on another) without remains, without something of me *remaining*, outside me' (p. 261). The lover is both self and Other, constituted by the other lover who is rendered likewise and, moreover, 'if I return to myself within love, I do not return to myself *from* love (the dialectic, on the contrary, feeds on the equivocation)':

*I* do not return from it, and consequently, something of *I* is definitively lost or dissociated in its act of loving. That is undoubtedly why *I* return (at least if the image of a return is appropriate here) but *I* return broken: I come back to myself, or I come out of it, broken. The 'return' does not annul the break; it neither repairs nor sublates it, for the return in fact takes place only across the break itself, keeping it open (p. 260).

The image of the willingly shattered subject(s) maintaining the break of love, through which they construct and communicate their intersubjective relationship, consolidates within the love paradigm the process of subjectivisation in Badiou's earlier writings, afterwards distilled in his specific philosophy of love as disjunction. To love, the subject must admit the other and reciprocate, must welcome the break and work at keeping it open, and at keeping themselves partly and permanently exposed.

Oliver Ware sites a discussion of the lovers' declaration within Nancy's writings, the structural linguistics of Roland Barthes, the performative theories of J. L. Austin and Judith Butler, and intertextual representations from a range of popular sources as diverse as Shakespeare's tragedies, the novels of Jeanette Winterson, Adrian Lyne's *Fatal Attraction* (1987) and George Lucas's *Star Wars Episode V* (1980). Arguing, from Nancy, that love is 'the radical exposure of self to other', Ware pinpoints the declaration of "I love you" as 'precisely what brings such exposure into being [...] one is not in love until such exposure becomes manifest':

Defining love as exposure means that one can't love in private or within the confines of one's ego [...] in saying "I love you" the speaker makes himself completely vulnerable to the other. Love speech deconstitutes the speaker in the moment of its utterance. So in saying "I love you" the I presents itself broken before the you. And by rendering the speaker defenceless, both in relation to the language he speaks and to the other he addresses, love speech is an event, a creation or re-creation, of love's asymmetry.<sup>5</sup>

The asymmetry of subject deconstitution Ware attributes to the love address, and thereby loving in general, can be rectified by reciprocation. Roland Barthes notes that linguistically, 'to love does not exist in the infinitive (*aimer*)', showing how this most familiar of phrases – imperative to the romantic relationship – unites self and other and transcends the boundaries of syntax within all language structures: 'There would be "me" on one side, "you" on the other, and in between a joint of *reasonable* (i.e. lexical) affection [...] the subject and the object come to the word even as it is uttered'.<sup>6</sup> Within spoken and written language, love (as a verb) unites subjects and objects, whether they are first or third person, and performs a semantic merging. Ware goes on to argue that 'perfect reciprocity would be the fulfilment of love speech, its supreme end. It

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<sup>5</sup> Oliver Ware, 'Love Speech', *Critical Enquiry*, 34.3 (2008), 491-508 (p. 499). While the declaration of love is vitally important both in theory and practice, I would have to agree with Badiou that the declaration can remain latent, functioning figuratively to signify the lovers' conscious recognition of their situation as a loving one. Ware's essay, though perhaps not intentionally, implies that the lovers are not in love until they declare it verbally; whereas I would counter that the declaration cannot be made until the lovers are in love. Badiou writes that the declaration 'isn't necessarily a one-off; it can be protracted, diffuse, confused, entangled, stated and re-stated' (*In Praise of Love*, p. 43). Love speech, especially at its initial, confessional declaration, no doubt marks an important instance of the Two scene (as an encounter; see Chapter Six), but is only one of many such instances. It is fair to say that lovers have begun to construct a relationship before the inevitable verbal declaration of their love to one another.

<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), p. 147.

would consist of two lovers attaining transparency through the declaration of their love; I say, “I love you”, and you say, “I love you, too”<sup>7</sup>. From his array of examples, Ware offers Han Solo’s response to Princess Leia’s declaration as masked non-reciprocity – ‘Han responds flatly: “I know”, which relieves him of the emotional burden of having to affirm his love for her. He doesn’t have to sacrifice his tough-guy image’.<sup>8</sup> I would counter here that when we analyse love speech in terms of the Badiouian system (and especially in terms of the encounter, which will be discussed at length in Chapter Six), the “I know” response to “I love you” restores symmetry to the exposure to an almost greater degree than the mere echo of the same words. Han Solo and Princess Leia are the infamous romantic couple of the space opera, and frequently appear in viewers’ polls alongside lovers from mainstream cinema. The scene of Two, in Badiou, characterised by subjectivised disjunction, is constantly redeployed throughout the relationship. The love address is just one of the more commonplace examples of this redeployment, and what the lovers are searching for in their addresses is the recognition that the other is still on the same wavelength. Han Solo’s “I know” is equivalent therefore to an “I love you”, but goes further, even. It is “I am here”, “I recognise your love”, “I love you still”.

Through a combination of Barthes, Nancy and Badiou, we see how, with regard to the lover’s discourse, elements of Plato are still dispersed throughout the philosophy of love. In an open lecture in 2002 Badiou shows how writing back to the universal produces as important a dialectic as that which is generated by Plato’s world of objects/world of Forms, one that far better fits our contemporary secular culture:

Someone in love can say, and they generally do say, “I will always love you”, which is the anticipating hypothesis of the truth of infinite love. From this hypothesis, he or she forces the other to come to know him or her and to treat him or her differently – a new situation of the becoming of love itself is created. The construction of truth is made by a choice within the indiscernible; it is made locally within the finite, but the potency of a truth, not the construction, but the potency, depends on the hypothetical forcing. The construction of a truth is, for example, “I love you”. It’s a finite declaration, a subjective point, and a pure choice, but “I will always love you” is a forcing and an anticipation. It forces a new bit of knowledge in the situation of love. So in a finite choice there is only the construction of a truth, while in an infinite anticipation of complete truth there is something like power.<sup>9</sup>

In *In Praise of Love*, Badiou reiterates the relationship between the finitude of the individual experience of the subject and the truth of that experience within the infinite scope of a universal experience of love. He writes that: ‘if “I love you” is always, in most respects, the heralding of “I’ll always love you”, it is in effect locking chance into the framework of eternity’ (p. 47).

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<sup>7</sup> Ware, p. 503.

<sup>8</sup> Ware, p. 504.

<sup>9</sup> Alain Badiou, ‘On the Truth-Process: An Open Lecture’, *The European Graduate School* (2002) <<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/alain-badiou/articles/on-the-truth-process/>> [accessed 31 July 2013] (para. 2 of 24)

Additionally, in ‘What Is Love’, an essay which more sharply keys in to the structuralist method, he observes that: “I love you” brings together [*accole*] two pronouns [...] that cannot be brought together [*inaccoler*] as soon as they are returned to the disjunction’ (p. 45).

In this chapter, the five texts from this section will be brought into line with the philosophical framework, and conclude the section by refocusing upon the depicted relationships via the Badiouian concept of disjunction. Analysing the unique, chimerical space of intersubjectivity that the love relationship initiates and insists upon, and drawing parallels between the reconfigured loving subjects and Haraway’s cyborgian partialities, I will argue that the augmentation of difference and disjunction inherent in science fictional representations of the human/cyborg relationship ultimately assists and enhances our understanding of (post)humanity.

#### **4.1. Disjunction**

In presenting his theory of disjunction in the love relationship, which supplements the key concept of difference, Badiou begins to treat the thesis of ‘What Is Love?’ by rejecting several recurring principles of earlier philosophies. The first is the ‘fusional conception of love’, which he precludes on the grounds that love ‘is not that which makes a One in ecstasy through a Two supposedly structurally given’ because the existence of two persons as one is a ‘suppression of the multiple’ (p. 38). Fusion, or merging, has been a fundamental thematic presence in philosophies, fantasies and fictions of love since it was inaugurated in Plato. The literary reifications of fusional love are not to be ignored or denied importance, but, as Badiou argues later in *In Praise of Love*, in practice this view pioneered in high Romanticism runs the risk of ‘absorb[ing] love in the encounter’ (p. 30). The ‘superstructural conception of love’ is also rejected. Extracting himself from the extreme optimism of the Romantics, but also refusing to accept the reductivist view of love as a product of will, Badiou vehemently criticises above all other preconceptions the modern continuation of a pessimistic line of enquiry that takes love to be ‘no more than an imaginary canvas painted over the reality of sex’ (p. 22). Contemporary continental philosophy, Badiou has repeatedly argued, falls into the trap (inspired by Romantic pessimism) of ‘see[ing] in love only an empty parade whose sexual desire is the only real’.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, the ablative nature of love is declined:

Love is not a prostration of the Same on the altar of the Other. I will maintain [...] that love is not even an experience of the Other. It is an experience of the world, or of the situation, under the post-evental condition that there were two (p. 39).

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<sup>10</sup> Badiou, ‘The Scene of Two’, 47.

This essentially reconfigures the existential subject favoured by Sartre, as we shall presently see. Badiou has clarified elsewhere that the contemporary subject is ‘void, cleaved, a-substantial, and ir-reflexive’, and above all, is determined by various conditions impacting upon its being.<sup>11</sup> After calling for a ‘finally objectless subject’, which he argues love creates through the process of subjectivisation, Badiou then offers a number of ‘declarations’ which form the basis of his theory of ‘What Is Love?’. First he asserts that ‘there are two positions of experience’ within the love relationship, and that ‘the two positions are absolutely disjunct’, that is, the two individuals in love do not, in any reality, merge to become one being (p. 40). They remain separate, and furthermore, their love ‘fractures the One according to the Two’ (p. 46). In addition, it is stressed that ‘there is no third position’, which in effect cancels out the need for an ‘imaginary function’ such as God (p. 40).

Already we have seen that in love a unique, intersubjective space is created in which two individuals can find respite from the dehumanising cultural excesses that negate their individualities in a more general sense. Disjunction is both pronounced by love and in turn makes love possible: it simultaneously resists the collapse of two individuals into a single consciousness, and ensures their subjective equilibrium. It completely nullifies the subject/object dialectic: love is ‘emptied of the object relation’.<sup>12</sup> Looking back at how Nancy aligns the oppositional movements that he sees love as both surpassing and maintaining, coupled with his willingly shattered subjects who commune across a break they work to keep open, we can fortify an argument for the overhaul of the lovers’ relationship – the intersubjective relationship, the subject/subject relationship. The break is the disjunction; the lovers are complicit in its conservation. Nancy’s reading, rather than seeking to make sense of or evade the paradoxical nature of love, instead foregrounds that nature as dynamically characteristic. Similarly, Badiou understands love as ‘the treatment of a paradox’, as he relates in ‘What Is Love?’:

Love is exactly the place where this paradox is negotiated [*traité*].

Let us take the measure of this statement [*énoncé*]. It signifies above all that love is an operation articulated within a paradox. Love does not relieve [*relève*] this paradox but treats it. More precisely, it makes truth of the paradox itself (pp. 42-43).

In love, seemingly contradictory notions, movements, and perspectives can be held and enacted by the lovers who have been rendered contradictions themselves. Of imperative value here is Badiou’s statement that love ‘fractures the One according to the Two’: the loving subjects are at once self and Other, identical and different; ‘shattered’, in Nancy’s terminology, ‘fractured’ in

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<sup>11</sup> Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Sigi Jöttkandt, ‘Love’, in *Alain Badiou: Key Concepts*, ed. by A. J. Bartlett and Justin Clemens (Durham: Acumen, 2010), p. 73.

Badiou's. Oliver Ware uses this idea to pose a second probing question about the self that love illuminates, when he asks:

Does the experience of love, rather than break the I, show that the I was always already broken? Does love constitute the actual shattering of the self in its exposure to the other, or is it in love that the self comes to recognise that it was shattered beforehand, split at its core from the beginning, through its anterior relations to language and to others?<sup>13</sup>

To unpick these questions, we can now refocus the five texts from this section via the twin frames of Badiouian disjunction and Haraway's cyborgian partialities.

#### **4.2. The metamorphosis of freedom**

In her 'Manifesto', Haraway observes that:

By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of 'Western' science and politics – the tradition of racist, male-dominant capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as resource for the productions of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other – the relation between organism and machine has been a border war (p. 150).

We have seen how this border war has been cease-fired in texts that seek to show humanity as cyborgian, and 'cyborgian' as not only a material instantiation but a way of approaching the world. The cyborg is not only a myth but also a tool, and 'the two mutually constitute each other' in both textual and scientific practices (p. 164). In science fiction, we cannot avoid the fact that cyborgs are a constant presence, presences that continually overstep the confines of metaphor to communicate quite clearly with social reality. Cyborgs are repeatedly constructed as subjects in their own right, as the previous chapter has shown, and so can we theorise their depictions in science fiction texts merely as reflective technique? Or do they speak to a world beyond science fiction, to the world of science fact? Ought we to listen to their stories? Haraway's cyborg, plucked from its evocative and somewhat troubling position at the intersection of mid-twentieth-century biotechnological practices and their enveloping discourses, is redeployed as political rhetoric to address the gaps in contemporary humanisms. Acknowledging the fears produced by the perspective that cyborgs denote just another chapter in a white capitalist history of masculine domination and control, Haraway instead poses cyborgian politics as a corrective measure, as an antidote to the supremacism of exclusive and totalising worldviews thrust upon humanity in post-industrial society. She declares that 'the

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<sup>13</sup> Ware, p. 500.

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' (p. 151). The liberal humanist subject (with all the positivity those three terms suggest – freedom; human/humaneness/humanity; agency) is a privileged position. Issuing from a Cartesian assertion of self and underpinned in its development by a post-Enlightenment emphasis on human knowledge, liberal humanism relies on access to education, the secularisation of society and the replacement of religious values with moral frameworks in order to maintain and progress civilisation. Thus imperialism, colonialism, the class system, labour, economy and politics – all are geared toward the preservation of the elite at the expense of a constantly replenishing cast of 'Others', so that the illusion of the liberal humanist subject might prevail for a fortunate few. As Haraway remarks, 'humanity has a generic face, a universal shape. Humanity's face has been the face of man', clarifying this 'man' as:

the Enlightenment figures of coherent and masterful subjectivity, the bearers of rights, holders of property in the self, legitimate sons with access to language and the power to represent, subjects endowed with inner coherence and rational clarity, the masters of theory, founders of states, and fathers of families, bombs, and scientific theories – in short, Man as we have come to know and love him in the death-of-the-subject critiques.<sup>14</sup>

When we speak of liberal humanism in contemporary society, we must keep in mind that we are thinking in terms of a philosophical model for the developed world, whose values are neither equally distributed nor in any intended process of becoming so. The Western, Eurocentric, or First World self is constituted at the expense of a range of subjugated others. Haraway's 'Manifesto' also notes that where these others have mobilised in order to contest the hegemonies that oppress them, individuality has been inadvertently subsumed under an oppositional body politic, that 'the effort to construct revolutionary standpoints, epistemologies as achievements of people committed to changing the world, has been part of the process showing the limits of identification' (p. 157). Using Marxist/socialist feminisms to illustrate her point, she claims that 'the production of a theory of experience, of women's identity [...] achieves its end – the unity of women – by enforcing the experience of and testimony to radical non-being' (pp. 158-159). These counter movements, though completely unintentionally, nonetheless erase 'polyvocal, unassimilable, radical difference', by playing further into the hands of a normative patriarchal (or capitalist, or imperialist, or racially supremacist) model of culture (p. 159). Enter the cyborg, who proclaims that we 'do not want any more natural matrix of unity and that no construction is whole' (p. 157). Implicit in Haraway's discourse is the

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<sup>14</sup> Donna Haraway, 'Ecce Homo, Ain't (Ar'n't) I a Woman, and Inappropriate/d Others: the Human in a Posthumanist Landscape', in *The Haraway Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 47-48.



notion that, by the twentieth century, claims for an essentialist or natural self – or even of a definitive concept of ‘human nature’ – are ineffectual, ungrounded, and alienated from social reality. Rather, cyborg politics embraces ‘partial, contradictory, permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves’ (p. 157). The ‘permanently unclosed construction’, the self as contingent, fluctuating process, can free us from the totalising theory of identity in hegemonic and emancipatory politics alike, as well as from the weight of the illusion of liberal humanism. It signals the birth of a new kind of subject, one reliant on a revised model of subjectivity, which is propelled by emergent knowledges and interventions that have made that move both possible and necessary. Cyborgian partiality allows subjects to construct an identity within a world that regularly requires that identity to be muted in favour of collective consciousness (as with politics), or redistributed more permanently (as with the family unit). Cyborg identity recognises that it is fractured from the start and continues to fracture as a consequence of social interaction, and moreover it does not regard its essentialist self as having been compromised by this ongoing process, because the only essential conception of self is that its essence is fluid, malleable, and reflexive.

Disjunction is the break holding open the possibility for intersubjective experience, and works as an incessant reminder of the infinite difference between subjects, thus individuating them in the love relationship. Love does not function merely to perpetuate the self at the expense of the Other. Rather, it neutralises the Other through subjectivisation, and in these five texts we see how, through love, classically othered Others are awarded the subjective scene through their participation in the love relationship. To understand how, in Badiou and Nancy, such a revolutionary intervention was made on the account of the lovers, and how they were rescued from the subject/object dialectic, is to show how this gap was bridged in part by Jean-Paul Sartre. In his 1943 book *Being and Nothingness*, the conflict of Hegel’s paradox is partially resolved through the existential notion of ‘being-for-others’, which in turn lays the foundation for Badiou’s disjunctive Two scene. Issues of free will and individuality inform much of the work of Sartre, who dedicates a large portion of his scholarship to the relationship between subject and object, between I and Other, and assesses the contributions this relationship makes to our constructions of self, identity and consciousness. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre identifies an imperative need for a relationship with the Other, for an object in relation to the self’s subject, as, following Hegel, the only means of affirmation of consciousness is for one to be perceived from outside the self by another. This perception produces self-awareness and thus validates the Cartesian ego: ‘I need the Other in order to fully realise all the structures of my being’.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, he states that ‘I am the one who constitutes the Other in the field of his experience’, which confirms the status of this relationship as one not only prerequisite for

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<sup>15</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), p. 246. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

existential experience but crucial in its mutuality (p. 255). Going further than Hegel, Sartre extends the grounds of the self/Other dialectic, claiming that ‘what I constantly aim at across my experiences are the Other’s feelings, the Other’s ideas, the Other’s volitions, the Other’s character. This is because the Other is not only the one whom I see but the one who sees me’ (p. 252). Thus not only the presence of the Other is necessary, but also his or her experience. The emotional sphere of the Other – his intellect, opinion, esteem – becomes an important factor in self- and projected-perception. Being-for-others, then, is a hugely important aspect of experience, as we exist in the eyes of others and we provide those eyes in return. The conflict arises due to what Singer labels ‘Sartre’s emphasis upon the unavoidable separateness between human beings’.<sup>16</sup> Our need for a reciprocal self-validation that is to be found in relationships of proximity with one another jars with our ‘natural’ state of individualism: ‘everyone wants to have autonomy, and yet people also want to bind themselves to others. They want to be intimate, even though intimacy with someone else means sacrificing one’s freedom in some regard’.<sup>17</sup> Sartre identifies the ‘diverse consciousnesses’ of the self and the Other as being separated by ‘a sort of original space’ (p. 254). Their bodies are the ‘necessary intermediaries’ and ‘the Other’s soul is therefore separated from mine by all the distance which separates first my soul from my body, then my body from the Other’s body, and finally the Other’s body from his soul’ (p. 247).

Having established the need in the fundamental relationship of the I and its Other, in spite of the spaces they perceive between them, Sartre turns his attention to the construction of ‘concrete relations with others’ (p. 383). The origins of these relations are ‘wholly governed by my attitudes with respect to the object which I am for the Other [...] reveal[ing] to me the being which I am’ (p. 385). Here, Sartre moves away from the Hegelian view of an enslaved consciousness and promotes the Other to an equal ground which permits a reflexive relationship between the two, which allows both agents to co-create meaning within their relationship, meaning which pertains to their identities that are each revealed to themselves through the other. This sophisticated move towards reflexivity between self and Other indicates the first signs of an impending paradigmatic shift: Sartre comes to realise that when ‘the Other *looks* at me and as such he holds the secret of my being, he knows what I *am*. Thus the profound meaning of my being is outside me, imprisoned in an absence’ (p. 385). The significance of the Other’s experience is accepted; the exploration of the concrete relation takes place within the space of overlap between the two consciousnesses that reciprocate each other’s meaning. Though this conclusion is an early indicator of a move to intersubjectivity, Sartre is unwilling to modify his discourse in the way that Nancy and Badiou eventually take great pleasure in doing, which can be put down to such a move undermining too radically the tenets of existentialism. Being-for-

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<sup>16</sup> *Philosophy of Love*, p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> Singer, *Philosophy of Love*, p. 89.

others is an exciting milestone in Sartre's philosophy as it paves the way for the eventual overhaul of the lovers' relationship. That Sartre refuses to enact this overhaul and empty love of the object relation in his own writing points to his faithfulness to his own epistemology, hence the theory, though relieving to some extent the Hegelian paradox, ends on an unresolved note.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, his study develops several interesting ideas that unsettle the subject/object problematic sufficiently for Nancy and Badiou to later dissolve it completely. Elsewhere, rejecting both Hegelian enslavement and the Nietzschean will to power, Sartre also isolates love from notions of possessive control when he asserts that 'if Love were in fact a pure desire for physical possession, it could in many cases be easily satisfied' (p. 388). This leads to the most profound contribution of Sartre's thinking to the philosophy of love, and one which goes on to provide support for Giddens's confluent love: the 'metamorphosis of freedom'. Observing that 'the lover wishes to capture a consciousness', but not 'as one possesses a thing; he demands a special type of appropriation [...] to possess a freedom as a freedom', the question of freedom that arises in existential thinking becomes a new, defining feature of love (pp. 388-389). No more can love be prescribed by society, or ascribed to God, instead it must develop between individuals who are free to modify that freedom in order to incorporate one another into their lives – 'the Other's freedom must be absolutely metamorphosed in order to allow me to attain the state of being loved' (p. 392).

In *He, She and It*, *Chobits*, and *Never Let Me Go*, the coming-to-subjectivity of the nonhuman characters is framed by a wider sense of a freedom which permits them to do so. All three texts interrogate the issue of ownership: Yod and Chi initially function quite conventionally within the constraints of the subject/object dialectic; they are presented as 'things', things with a clear sense of belonging to an uncontested subject. Yod is built by Avram, who intends to give over ownership to the townspeople, and who frequently scorns the cyborg for wishing to be independent:

"I want to end the threat to this town. I want to be free then, free to live as I want and choose," Yod said, standing rigidly.

Avram snorted. "That's romantic nonsense. I created you to accomplish a task, so how can you be quote free unquote to live?" (p. 384).

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<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, Sartre believes that 'the lover's freedom, in his very effort to make himself be loved as an object by the Other, is alienated by slipping into the body for others'. Later: 'the more I am loved, the more I lose my *being* [...] the Other's awakening is always possible; at any moment he can make me appear as an object'. He concludes that 'the problem of my being-for-others remains therefore without solution', showing how the existential conception of self is always mistrustful of placing itself at the behest of another subject (*Being and Nothingness*, pp. 397-399). Moreover, the other subject in Sartre is always the beloved, the Other, thus the object. Though Badiou has called love an 'existential project', his system frees love from the pessimism and doubt of the other by redefining the subject/object as intersubjective Two scene, as we have seen.

Chi is found discarded, though implicit in that remains the sense of ownership. Throughout, Hideki's inability to isolate the position of owner from that of teacher, user, friend and keeper is repeatedly utilised to further confuse the subjective boundaries between them. In both texts, the cyborgs' human counterparts arrive at the conclusion that ownership is inappropriate; both Shira and Hideki know too well the experience of operating under a limited freedom. Yod complains to Shira that, as a cyborg, his role in society is determined by others, while hers is decided freely on her own terms. Shira counters that this is not necessarily the case: "When I worked for Y-S, I governed little in my own life. I certainly didn't set my own goals at work, and I wasn't in control at home" (p. 204). Hideki, removed to the city from a rural background outside technocultural society, displays an incessant reaction to the persocoms as uncannily similar to humans. His inexperience of owning anything, let alone an intelligent humanoid computer, contributes enormously to his unease as master to Chi's slave. This is reinforced by his peers' constant exasperation over the ways in which he anthropomorphises Chi, second-guesses her nature and supplies context to her emotions. In contrast, those in the financial position to have always owned persocoms, like Minoru, enact the master/slave relationship quite effectively. Hideki's social status – as student worker – aligns him more closely with service robots than with his privileged friends. That the humans can identify themselves with the cyborgs on the grounds of freedom (or lack thereof) communicates, in the extrapolated method of science fiction, situations that we may find all too recognisable in our social reality.

Piercy and Clamp show us, in no uncertain terms, that to exist in modern, technocultural society, is to carve out spaces in which to be free. Love is imperative to the contemporary human condition because it provides a space within which we can escape the flattening excesses of postmodernity and reassert our individuality, if only through the eyes of our lovers. Human existence can be visualised as a series of concentric circles; we will not experience freedom at every level. We enter into the social contract quite acquiescently, with our expectance of reduced freedom and room for subjectivity at the level of the body politic assuaged by the opportunities in which to reinstate ourselves as differentiated selves. *He, She and It* depicts this situation most clearly, when it marks out the social scenes corresponding to levels of collective consciousness. For example, if Yod's claim to subjectivity is accepted by his small group of creators (Avram, Malkah, Shira), it must still be re-claimed in terms of his citizenship in Tikva. Though he is found by the town council to have rights to that effect, in the eyes of society outside the freetown he remains very much an object, and an illegal one at that. In *Chobits*, Ueda's experience of marrying a persocom functions similarly, to show the circles within which one might move as an individual and the limits imposed upon that individuality. We cast off our autonomies to co-exist in collective societies, but are able to make peace with this because of the precise spaces that counteract the effects of social depersonalisation. These pockets of resistance take many forms, but the purest of them is undoubtedly the intersubjective space of

the love relationship. Ishiguro's novel, on the surface, is the least overtly science fictional of them all. Yet, in its suggestive, ambiguous portrayal of a domesticated biotechnological future, it is perhaps the most speculative regarding the impact of technoculture on social freedoms. The clones are not free, and yet they carve out subjective spaces on which their identities hinge, on which they can claim for a sense of satisfaction and self-worth in a world which denies them both. If the truth sets us free, as the old adage goes, it is because in practice, as Badiou has shown, the truth is locally produced by its subjects. Sartre calls for a metamorphosis of freedom, a shift in the understanding of what freedom can mean in a world that requires us to concede it and concede it willingly. *Never Let Me Go* implies a metamorphosis of the truth of freedom, which is brought forth by the space created by love within which the truth of the situation – between Kathy and Tommy – is constructed. The characters' lives throughout are a struggle, though this struggle subverts expectations. In other dystopian narratives which enforce such constraints of life-span or purpose on their subjects – and I think here of such texts as *Logan's Run* (1967), *The Island* (2005) and of course *Blade Runner* – the emphasis is on the subjects' escape into a state of more consensually normative freedom. Where critics of *Never Let Me Go* have found the text hopeless is in the clones' inability or unwillingness to strive for 'freedom', and in Ishiguro's evasion of a political or ethical discussion of the chains which keep them in place. Rather, his focus is reversed upon the seemingly futile situation that the clones accept as their lot, and he works within those limitations to ask much more introspectively probing questions about the reality of persons who are categorically not free. Kathy and her peers do not spend their time planning an elaborate escape from their fates; instead they channel their energies into constructing love relationships that afford them the space in which to force a little bit of freedom, a little bit of eternity. We see how Ruth is devastated by the novel's close, but we read this through the frame of an unsuccessful love, rather than through the injustices of cloning practices. If Ishiguro sees optimism in his own novel, it is because the relationship between Kathy and Tommy, though frustratingly delayed, is eventually constructed in time to afford them subjective freedom in a world that has disallowed them both from the beginning. Through love, they have reclaimed themselves.

In *Blade Runner*, J. F. Sebastian, the designer for Tyrell Corp, muses on first meeting one of 'his' replicants: "there's some of me in you".<sup>19</sup> This sentiment is prefigured by Resch in the novel, who implores Deckard to wake up and face himself, tacitly gesturing to the dark doubles of the replicants in whom the human characters must see themselves, reflected in a mirror-process integral to love. As Sartre puts it:

Love relations are a system of indefinite reference – analogous to the pure 'reflection-reflected' of consciousness – under the ideal standard of the *value*

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<sup>19</sup> *Blade Runner*.

‘love;’ that is, in a fusion of consciousnesses in which each of them would preserve his otherness in order to found the other (p. 398).

This last observation is revolutionary in its implications for the status of self in the modern love relationship. The sense of the other being Other – of its difference – is a prerequisite for the referential intersubjectivity of the love relationship, or in Sartre’s precursory terms: ‘each one is alienated only to the exact extent to which he demands the alienation of the other’ (p. 398). Badiou’s theory essentially neutralises the self/Other relationship by taking the quality that renders an other ‘Other’, that is, difference, and creating, through the disjunction, a means of maintaining those differences permanently so that the subjects may differentiate themselves from the de-individuating world. All five texts operate against a backdrop of technoculture that depersonalises its inhabitants, environments which, more than being peopled with machines increasingly human, populate their narratives with humans increasingly mechanised. They communicate the fact that anxieties over the self in the face of the biotechnological Other are completely misplaced; rather, humans and cyborgs alike are bound to the Hegelian dialectic by technoscientific capitalism. To paraphrase Badiou in ‘What Is Love?’, and to substitute his sexual difference for one based on species and appropriate to the cyborgian narrative: ‘the more the disjunctive law is stripped away [by capital], without protocol or mediation, the more the *species* (practically indifferenced) nevertheless continue to die in their own way’ (p. 43). The flattening of humanity, of subjective individualism, is a by-product of techno-political environments. Science fiction dystopias represent this concern hyperbolically, but discerningly: their humans are mechanistic shadows of their pre-industrial selves; their cyborgs are cast from a single mould.

In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*, Dick and Scott present their technocultural societies bearing down heavily on humans and androids alike. Both species, with the disjunctive law stripped away, are flattened by the ‘injunction of Capital’ and ‘continue to die in their own way’. In Dick’s text the intervention of cyborgian consciousness on that of Deckard forces him to rethink the role of love in the world he lives in, which ultimately leads him back to the marriage he had been neglecting. In Scott’s version, Deckard and Rachael fight back by rescuing each other’s narratives, after each is complicit in the destruction of the other’s. Underpinned throughout by the motif of the replicants living in the undetected, illegal interstices of a society that forbids and hunts them, as they desperately try to carve out spaces for self-narratives to stick, Deckard and Rachael succeed where they ultimately fail, arguably because their resistance is facilitated by love. In *He, She and It*, the spaces conducive to self-narrative and to love are more literally demarcated: Yod and Shira may pursue their relationship, and with it their constructions of self, within the limits of the freetown. Outside these boundaries, or in the corporate enclaves, they are, like Deckard and Rachael, transgressive fugitives. Similarly, in *Never Let Me Go*, the spaces of alterity Kathy perceives as eerily

working to accommodate the clones within human society even as they exclude them from it – ‘these dark byways of the country exist[ing] just for the likes of us’ – eventually come to signify the spaces in which they are permitted to enact their meagre projects of self (p. 267). In *Chobits*, the coming-to-subjectivity of the persocom is mirrored in Hideki’s adolescent self-project; like Piercy’s novel, the text is intertextually laced with narratives from computer code to fairy tales. Chi, like Yod and the clones, must sort through the various narratives impinging on her conception of selfhood, and within them mark out a space in which to be truly free. In all five texts, love provides that freedom, because it awards the lovers the intersubjective scene that simultaneously separates them, from the world and from each other.

Implicit in Badiou’s ‘What Is Love?’ is the notion that a love relationship works to restore the idiosyncrasy of individuality: ‘it is not only necessary to understand that love makes truth of the disjunction under the emblem of the Two, but that it makes it *in the indestructible element of the disjunction*’ (p. 48). A metamorphosis of freedom opens the floodgates for the metamorphosis of terminology itself: freedom is redefined as a locally attributable, situated truth, one which we can offer each other within a world where society is built on the negation of freedoms. The Other is recast as subject within the love relationship, not rendered same and subsumed under a fusional love but instead retaining that aspectual difference that serves to consistently underpin their worthiness as a someone separated out from the world.

#### **4.3. The ritual of bodies**

Giddens writes that, in the contemporary period, the self is a reflexive project. He argues convincingly for a conception of identity as determined by social environments which render subjects complicit in their own construction, which is maintained and understood through the ongoing and conscious creation of what he terms ‘self-narrative’:

Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by the individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography [...] A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self.<sup>20</sup>

Working from Giddens’s theory, we can see how the variously hypothesised features and characteristics of the ‘human’ – self-awareness (Descartes), language and discursive performance (Turing), empathy (Dick), memory and mortality (Gwaltney) – begin to fall into place beneath the umbrella of narrative, as dynamic elements which facilitate an autobiographical process of being. This emphasis on self-narrative becomes crucial within

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<sup>20</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 53-54.

modern technoscientific societies, which have not only depersonalised subjects across the board but have instigated fundamental shifts within cultures that, since the Enlightenment, have been simply refining an exclusive (and excluding) model of liberal humanism. The first half of the twentieth century saw a breathtaking acceleration of progress in communications and mobility technologies, equally astonishing development in the newly secularised sciences, as well as two of history's greatest wars fought, record rates of immigration, and first-wave feminism and the roots of civil rights in the West. From this melting pot coalesced a new, larger, and altogether more conflicted world picture that not only began to worry at the roots of the established European societies, but began to interfere with and derail the narratives that its subjects had inherited from normative sources based on gender, social status, race or religion. Moreover, as Giddens observes, 'modernity's reflexivity refers to the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge'.<sup>21</sup> Knowledge, in terms of access and acquisition, is at an all-time high in contemporary society. Consequently, the process of self-narrative is at the forefront of existence, and our biographical trajectories are being constantly recalculated. Exposure to information requires us to readdress and realign our identities at the behest of newly implemented knowledges; as Oliver Feltham writes of Badiou's framework, in postmodernity our ontologies ground themselves 'on the shifting sands of emergent truths'.<sup>22</sup>

We can see Giddens's project of the self at work within the previous five texts, equally attributed to both human and cyborgian characters, all of whom have their self-narratives at stake. In addition, the texts present narratives nesting within narratives, a technique which recursively speaks to the instrumentality of its own mode. *He, She and It* exercises this to its full potential, by comprising first- and third-person narration, several personal histories and spiritual mythologies, and the origin stories of both Yod and the ancestral golem Joseph. Within Yod's education, he consistently redeploys his self-narrative around his developing experience of the world, which is informed by acquired and imparted knowledges that interpenetrate both. Shira, on the other hand, has never managed to create a self-narrative that sticks or is sufficient to ascertain a sense of self-worth, with the exception of motherhood (though even this, from conception to birth, is determined by her corporate employment, which intervenes further to deny her custody and subsequently remove her son from the planet). Reeling from her failed relationship with Gadi, which drove her out of her hometown, and then again from the breakdown of her marriage, which sent her back, Shira follows a path largely laid out for her. Only back in Tikva, in a state of relative freedom (compared to her life at Y-S) and upon realising that her previously prescribed narratives were set with their own agendas, is Shira able to begin the process of constructing a self-narrative. In this sense, she and Yod are as new to the

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<sup>21</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Feltham, p. xxiii.



world as one another; both are *tabulae rasae*. Their approaches to learning are mirrored throughout, and heavily intertextual: Piercy combines the Net bases and the cybernetic programming logs with songs, folklore, Hebrew scripture, poetry and novels to underscore the complex weavings of knowledge and narrative and their importance in shaping our stories of self. Similarly, in *Never Let Me Go*, Kathy's memoir – a referential nod to the self-projects therein – is interspersed with childhood lessons in history, geography, and biology, which locate the clones in time, space and culture. In addition, modern mythologies are received and recycled as the clones draw potential stories of self from films, novels and magazines. The need to create a workable self-narrative is expressed in urgent terms: the clones are searching for meaning within such a short space of time that the way they grasp for stories becomes wildly desperate, and results in the myth of the 'possibles', the rumours of the deferrals, and sadly futile attempts to carve out their identities from the limited influences they encounter. Ruth is the best example of this, as she perpetuates the false hopes of others, propels a fruitless search for her original blueprint, and copies traits and mannerisms from television and those she deems more settled and authentic in their constructions of self. Urgency also underscores the self-narratives of Rachael and her fellow replicants in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and *Blade Runner*, as they grope for meaning and autonomy within their pitiful four-year lifespans. As Roy demands of Tyrell in the film, "I want more life, fucker", because time is precisely what is needed to engage in a reflexive project of the self. Deckard, too, more prominently in the novel, undergoes crisis as the strands of his self-narrative begin to unravel.<sup>23</sup> Unable to separate androids from humans – murder from bounty-hunting, prescriptive spirituality from the opium of the masses – he is no longer able to protect himself, not only from the 'threat' of the replicants but from the complete dissolution of his own identity.

Giddens warns that an inability to hold together conflicting aspects of narrative, or when self-narrative jars with external knowledge sources, forms the bedrock of existential crisis. Similarly, Haraway has called for a renewed focus on 'discourses of suffering and dismemberment', and insists that our 'historical narratives are in crisis now, across the political spectrum, around the world'.<sup>24</sup> Out of this discursive confusion she brings to the forefront the 'disarticulated bodies of history as figures of possible connection and accountability', and aligns traditionally marginalised bodies – women, workers, migrants, ethnic 'minorities' – with twentieth century subjects newly displaced and betrayed by metanarratives which are unpeeling from liberal humanism.<sup>25</sup> Haraway clearly upholds that postmodernity renders us accountable for our own mythologies, kinships, and reasons for being. Biotechnological practices offer new discourses and knowledges through which we can renegotiate our subjective positions and

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<sup>23</sup> *Blade Runner*.

<sup>24</sup> 'Ecce Homo', p. 46.

<sup>25</sup> 'Ecce Homo', p. 46.

trajectories, without offering metanarratives in place of those which have been lost – the story of science mirrors our stories of self, in that it is in a constant reflexive process of readdress and experimentation. Cyborgs, at the other side of the Darwinian eclipse, help to reconstruct those bodies and selves which, in a post-traditional, post-industrial and secular scientific world, have been thoroughly deconstructed and left floundering. The ‘Manifesto’ offers a way out of the chaos of postmodernism:

Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other. The tools are often stories, retold stories, version that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalised identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture (p. 175).

Of utmost importance in self-construction in postmodernity, then, is the idea of narrative as constitutive of coherent trajectories of identity, the plurality of received narratives and knowledge sources as replacing inherited metanarratives, and a move towards subjects’ complicity in their creation and configuration. Giddens’s reflexive project of the self is wholly complementary to Haraway’s radical shift to a cyborgian ontology: his emphasis on self-narratives echoes her resolute belief that ‘writings are always technologies for world building’, and that ‘stories are always more generous, more capacious, than ideologies’.<sup>26</sup> In addition, unwittingly echoing the spectre of Badiou’s murderous capital, Haraway sees in a cyborgian project of the self a way to circumvent its effects, those of the ‘Eurocentric productionism and anthropocentrism that have threatened to reproduce, literally, all the world in the deadly image of the Same’.<sup>27</sup> In place of these liberal humanist ideologies, Haraway argues instead for a history or histories that ‘can have another shape, articulated through differences that matter’.<sup>28</sup>

Sartre’s metamorphosis of freedom in being-for-others and Badiou’s disjunctive Two-scene correlate with Giddens’s depiction of the ‘pure relationship’, which, although it evokes a Romantic turn of phrase, is nonetheless held as a progressive and socially contingent form of romantic love. Romantic love, for Giddens, had ‘always been thoroughly skewed in terms of power’.<sup>29</sup> In fact, this imbalance in the romantic relationship stretches throughout history as far back as antiquity and prevailed until as recently as the late Victorian period, with gendered power dynamics perpetuated by social custom ‘all too often leading to grim domestic subjection’.<sup>30</sup> Confluent love, which emerged from the various emancipatory movements of the early twentieth century, treats these incongruities and ‘presumes equality in emotional give and

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<sup>26</sup> Donna Haraway, ‘A Kinship of Feminist Figurations’, in *The Haraway Reader*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>27</sup> Donna Haraway, ‘The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others’, in *The Haraway Reader*, p. 66

<sup>28</sup> *Ecce Homo*, p. 46.

<sup>29</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 62.

<sup>30</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 62.

take' and moreover extends its egalitarianism to include those previously excluded from or left disenchanted by the Romantic paradigm. Here is where confluent love manages to enact its paradigmatic shift, in its bringing together previously incompatible factors, such as the fact of homosexual love and the place of erotic desire within the pure relationship. With regard to sexuality, throughout history Giddens observes the removal of the *ars erotica* from the romantic relationship (by men) to a more manageable distance, that is, away from the home. Responding to female emancipation and increasing liberalism in the West regarding sexual orientation and the emergence of a 'plastic sexuality' that, uncoupled from its reproductive role, has come to play a significant role in the development of autonomous identity, confluent love unites all factors in play in the romantic and sexual lives of subjects, on a level of equality and subjective freedom.<sup>31</sup>

Badiou has little to say on the subject of sex, outside his criticisms of philosophies which take love to be 'merely something the imagination constructs to give a veneer to sexual desire', though when pressed by Nicolas Truong for *In Praise of Love*, he deigned to give the following in response (p. 34). Working from Jacques Lacan's provocative declaration that 'there is no such thing as a sexual relationship', Badiou clarifies that:

Sex separates, doesn't unite. The fact that you are naked and pressing against the other is an image, an imaginary representation. What is real is that pleasure takes you a long way away, very far from the other. What is real is narcissistic, what binds is imaginary [...] In love the individual goes beyond himself, beyond the narcissistic. In sex, you are really in a relationship with yourself via the mediation of the other. The other helps you to discover the reality of pleasure. In love, on the contrary, the mediation of the other is enough in itself (pp. 18-19).

Such a view, combined with that of Nancy – that desire is not love – and embedded in a culture wherein sexuality has thrown off the trappings of the long-term, monogamous or romantic relationship in order to become a fully-fledged phenomenon in its own right, consolidates a belief that sex cannot be used to understand love. However, as Nancy points out, love is conflictual, and turns on the paradox. This is not lost on Badiou, who does relent to admit sex back into the love paradigm, but as an expression and a proof of the encounter:

I would like to refer to my own experience. I know, I think, like almost everyone else, about the drive and insistence of sexual desire. Age doesn't let me forget that. I also know that love inscribes the fulfilment of this desire within the course of its own development. And this is important, because, as the literature says from time immemorial, the fulfilment of sexual desire also functions like one of those rare material proofs, totally linked to the body, that love is more than a mere declaration of words. A declaration of the "I love you" kind seals the act of the encounter, is central and constitutes a commitment. But surrendering your body, taking your clothes off, being naked for the other,

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<sup>31</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 11.

rehearsing those hallowed gestures, renouncing all embarrassment, shouting, all this involvement of the body is evidence of a surrender to love. It crucially distinguishes it from friendship [...] Love, particularly over time, embraces all the positive aspects of friendship but love relates to the totality of the being of the other, and the surrender of the body becomes the material symbol of that totality [...] I would maintain that, within the framework of a love that declares itself, this declaration, even if it remains latent, is what produces the effects of desire, and not desire itself. Love proves itself by permeating desire. The ritual of bodies is then the material expression of the word, it communicates the idea that the promise to reinvent life will be fulfilled, initially in terms of the body. But even in their wildest delirium, lovers know that love is there, like their bodies' guardian angel, when they wake up in the morning, when peace descends over the proof that their bodies have grasped that love has been declared (pp. 35-37).

Here, the body, sexed or otherwise, is momentarily foregrounded – 'that word, made flesh' – as the augmentation of love.<sup>32</sup> The 'ritual of bodies', this brief acknowledgment of love's material proof, marks its end-point as the localised finitude of an immanent, rather than transcendent, continuation of love's metanarrative. In this, Badiou's embodied nature of love redresses the Platonic balance between *eros* and *agapē* for a post-Romantic contemporary period, in agreement with the emergence of Giddens's era of confluent love.

Love today actively works to accommodate contemporary subjectivities by admitting self-narratives woven from partial standpoints that turn on difference, and allows the lovers to become known and othered as combatants of the high technocultures that threaten to rewrite their bodies out of their own grasps. Nancy provides exhaustive evidence of love's conflictual nature, and that these dualisms and pluralisms can be held within the material symbol of the body points to an insistence on embodiment and embodied experience which is fully distilled in the cyborgian figure. Cyborgs, at base, communicate the bodily. Enhanced, augmented – yet the initial trope of meat knitted with machine stands for much more in our contemporary culture. It is a narrative, biotechnologically steered, for the modern age. In high-tech culture, as Haraway proposed by way of her 'Manifesto', we find ourselves to be 'hybrids, mosaics, chimeras'; we are myriad weavings of interconnected parts that are only to a certain extent metaphysical (p. 177). Our identities are now as systematically assembled as our bodies have proven to be: philosophy and biotechnology have deconstructed and rewritten us fully by the mid-twentieth century.

To return to Oliver Ware's question – 'does the experience of love, rather than break the I, show that the I was always already broken?': the answer, in short, is no.<sup>33</sup> Confluent lovers and ontological cyborgs are historically specific figures, who emerged in response to the shape Western societies began to take on in the twentieth century. They are postmodern beings, though they may have featured in the dreams of science fiction writers and the nightmares of the

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<sup>32</sup> Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*, p. 237.

<sup>33</sup> Ware, p. 500.

beneficiaries of liberal humanism long before they were brought forth by current culture. The cyborg is the weaving together of incompatible parts – of the organic and the inorganic, of the real and the imaginary, of nature and culture – able to assemble from these a coherent self-project to carry it through the dissolution of grand narratives and totalising philosophies. The lovers, similarly, who turn on the disjunction, are material proofs that love enacts a paradox at odds with postmodernity. The I may have always been potentially able to be broken – just as the cyborg may always have existed latently within us all – but both are historically contingent, they are signs and symbols of the times.

If postmodernity signals the end of metanarrative – if race and place are areas to be stepped out of and work is no longer the site of valorisation, and God has been, to use Bruno Latour's phrase, 'crossed out' – then I argue that love is the last great metanarrative.<sup>34</sup> It survives because it is the only pure space in which to be, because it is inextricably tied up with and continues to support the self-narrative in creating meaning. It is able to mediate between conflicting stories – consists of conflicting stories – and subjects in constant opposition, precisely because its status as metanarrative is mutable and contingent on the individuation of subjects. This is why it continues to play a role, even in science fiction, perhaps especially in science fiction, in narratives that figure us as posthuman and nonhuman. 'Humanity', with all its conceivable prefixes, is not at issue here, rather it is subjectivity and its preservation which is key. Cyborgs who love assuage anxieties regarding an impending posthuman era, in that they recognise, and take care to maintain, the intersubjective Two-scene that has become the only space for true freedoms to be found and where autonomy is enacted and validated. Haraway writes that 'the greatest origin stories are about love and knowledge'.<sup>35</sup> If this is so, then it is because love engenders and encourages self-knowledge, in relation to the self-narrative, and that, in Badiou's terms, these are the central conditions which determine our modern humanity. Giddens warns that 'in a post-traditional order, the narrative of self has in fact continually to be reworked, and life-style practices brought into line with it, if the individual is to combine personal autonomy with a sense of ontological security'.<sup>36</sup> Posthuman and postmodern subjects, cyborgs and 'Other' lovers wend their way through the 'shifting sands of emergent truths', the incessant revisions of knowledges, and 'embrace the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts'.<sup>37</sup>



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<sup>34</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 32.

<sup>35</sup> Donna Haraway, 'Morphing in the Order: Flexible Strategies, Feminist Science Studies, and Primate Revisions', in *The Haraway Reader*, p. 199.

<sup>36</sup> Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 75.

<sup>37</sup> Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto', p. 181.

Cyborgs appear in our vernacular, and begin to be meaningfully portrayed in fiction, in a time of increasing uncertainty regarding human identity and subjectivity. The liberal humanist subject, the accepted primary model of Western subjectivity since the Enlightenment, is shown to be unstable and increasingly irrelevant in the postmodern era as it is itself subjected to revisionary discourses that deconstruct our sense of a unified self. In the biotechnological sciences particularly, our bodies have been broken down by knowledges that continue to shift, and our subjectivities have faced the challenge of a self-image that may amount to little more than the sum of its newly compartmentalised parts. In postmodern theory, as the following chapters will show, this deconstructive trend is mirrored, yet offers little in the way of solution. Cyborgs, I feel, especially the model Haraway proposes, can treat this dilemma. They deconstruct, naturally, but they also actively work to reconstruct a subjective scene reinforced against a postmodern culture that threatens to dissolve or fragment our sense of individual identity. We can still be individuals in a posthuman era, but that individuality is shown to be something quite different from what it meant beneath the liberal humanist paradigm, if indeed liberal humanism supported any such thing at all. More than anything, as the cyborgs in these fictions show, our subjective stability will be reliant on the love scene.

This is why I feel that cyborg love has a place, a powerful role to play in the continuation of romantic metanarrative. If other grand narrative arcs have dissolved by the postmodern era, it is because they were too rigid to evolve. Love, by contrast, with its snail's pace progress, evolves, reinvents, and metamorphoses to admit paradigmatic shifts in politics and social culture. It progresses recursively, never truly dropping any of its features, but reshaping them and recycling them into its renewed body of truths. It can do this because it has always been a universal story made up entirely of the stories of others; an Idea, composed of countless individual ideas; a Word, made flesh. That Sumerian bridal poetry still resonates emotionally with us today, or that the myth of Aristophanes continues to drive our ideals of romance, or that love has never stopped – all of these are proofs that love, as metanarrative, intends to persist. Indeed, love is certainly changed, but it is always a positive force. We cannot speak about 'bad love', we can only lament it when it fails to materialise. Love has never been abandoned, stopped short, or put on hold. It only evolves, and it only improves.

The cyborg, too, is an inherently positive figure. Juxtaposing the human with the cyborg in contemporary fictions has much less to do with probing fears of the mechanical or the biotechnological, and more to do with encouraging us to see ourselves as ontological cyborgs. It is not so much about the melding of flesh and machine as it is about the weaving together of seemingly incompatible fragments that previously troubled the concept of a finished or perfected unified self. In the fragmentary postmodern era, the cyborg shows us how to deal with the world constructively. Its weave remains loosely gathered, able to admit new knowledges, and its tapestry is never finished. Dominic Pettman has written that to love in the posthuman age

is 'to love his or her pattern', a notion that sits well with Haraway's cyborg as perpetual weaver of strands.<sup>38</sup> It suggests an interconnectedness with the weave of the world, but most powerfully communicates the way we approach the particular weaves of others, and incorporate them into our own. We never give up our own self-projects, but can significantly augment them by interlocking some of the strands of our self-narratives with the strands that are loose in those of others.

The ontological cyborg and the confluent lover are both underpinned by the body. Deconstructed, perhaps; rewritten, reexplained, and represented to ourselves, certainly. But the body constitutes a site where the resistance of the cyborg and the activity of combative love, take place and are proven to have been. The cyborg metaphor is wholly reliant on the image of the body, augmented and enhanced; the newly emancipated confluent lover is for the first time able to indulge in all aspects of romance at once, with both body and mind. With so many postmodern theories intent on writing our bodies out of the picture, I feel the cyborg mentality lays new claim on the body as the site from which resistance and agency can proceed, and perhaps more importantly, return to. Giddens implores us to reconvene with all of our parts, with all of the strands of our self-narrative. Likewise, Haraway prescribes a conscious movement to weave our conflicting aspects of self together. The body underpins the self-project as the place from which all of these strands must protrude and where they must be knotted back together. And love underpins the self-project, giving subjects a reason to keep hold of their stories and themselves. Confluent love is, therefore, refigured for the posthuman era as a cyborgian practice, supporting the new model of selfhood as it emerges from the rubble of liberal humanism. Subjects in the contemporary era are all potentially cyborgs, are all latent lovers. Love in the posthuman age is cyborg love.

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<sup>38</sup> Dominic Pettman, *Love and Other Technologies: Retrofitting Eros for the Information Age* (California: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 204.

## Part Two

### Cyber Love

“We may be together for another six months – a year – there’s no knowing. At the end we’re certain to be apart. Do you realise how utterly alone we shall be? [...] We shall be utterly without power of any kind. The only thing that matters is that we shouldn’t betray one another, although even that can’t make the slightest difference.”

“If you mean confessing,” she said, “we shall do that, right enough. Everybody always confesses. You can’t help it. They torture you.”

“I don’t mean confessing. Confession is not betrayal. What you say or do doesn’t matter: only feelings matter. If they could make me stop loving you – that would be the real betrayal.”

She thought it over. “They can’t do that,” she said finally. “It’s the one thing they can’t do. They can make you say anything – *anything* – but they can’t make you believe it. They can’t get inside you.”

“No,” he said a little more hopefully, “no; that’s quite true. They can’t get inside you. If you can *feel* that staying human is worthwhile, even when it can’t have any result whatsoever, you’ve beaten them.

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George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)



## Chapter Five

### Bodies Otherwise Imagined

MOUSE: To deny our own impulses is to deny the very thing that makes us human.

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*The Matrix* (1999)

In some definitions of computer-mediated reality, experts hold augmentation as more accurately perceived as a *diminishing* process: in other words, where augmentation takes place, ultimately something else is removed and lost as a result. This either happens literally, as with AR programmes that can remove objects from view, or in the sense that where augmentation overlays what is seen, our engagement with reality is obstructed or impaired. Transposing this perspective onto representations of romantic intimacy, we see the effect of negative action, in that, by lessening the degree of presence, our awareness and expectation are both raised proportionately regarding absence. As we shall presently see, estranging love in science fiction further pronounces on the dislocation of normative human values and experience. Part One has considered one half of Francis Fukuyama's two futures hypothesis, using Haraway's cyborgian figure of biotechnological discourses and practices to explore self and subjectivity through the frame of love in science fiction texts. Part Two now turns its focus to the second half of Fukuyama's scenario, and the next four chapters will analyse (post)human relationships which are instigated, enacted and maintained within the virtual environments of communications technologies. Margaret Atwood saw a *Brave New World*-esque future edging ahead by the end of the twentieth century, propelled by the extensive progress made in the biotechnological field, but she remarks that 'that picture changed too, with the attack on New York City's Twin Towers in 2001'.<sup>1</sup> She continues:

Thoughtcrime and the boot grinding into the face could not be got rid of so easily after all. The Ministry of Love is back with us, it appears, though it's no longer limited to the lands behind the former Iron Curtain: the West has its own versions now.<sup>2</sup>

Where biotechnology made interventions into the body, the information revolution – stemming from advances in our communications technologies – has drastically altered the way we understand and use the mind. By the turn of the second millennium computing and virtuality were facts of the social fabric, but our reception of these technologies had been anticipated and, to a large extent, shaped by the speculative predictions of cyberpunk literature. The Internet in

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<sup>1</sup> Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *In Other Worlds*, p. 1.

particular had been hypothesised in various fictional formats long before it was the ubiquitous reality it is today: long-distance connection between users, the use of virtual platforms as sounding-boards for the self, even cybersex – all were common tropes of cyberpunk before finding their way into our daily lives. Communications technologies in the age of information have transformed almost every aspect of our society, and perhaps none more significantly than the way we interact with one another. This section turns its focus to the relatively recent phenomenon of cyber love, the construction of the romantic paradigm in the era of the Internet, and the limitations of its translation from embodiment to virtuality.

For theorists of cyberculture, Haraway's sketch of contemporary subjectivity has taken on new meaning in recent decades, as many choose to read into her cyborgian figure our current, computer-generated identity practices. In the years following the publication of the "Cyborg Manifesto", and no doubt in response to such powerful cyberpunk imagery as William Gibson's computer hackers – their brains physically plugged into virtual realities – theorists across the academic board have re-embodied the cultural cyborg to stand for the symbiotic relationship between humans and their computing devices. In cybercultural psychology, the cyborg quickly became a meaningful symbol to express the modern computer user, and features increasingly throughout the writings of Sherry Turkle, who wrote in 2006 that 'our new technologically enmeshed relationships oblige us to ask to what extent we ourselves have become cyborgs, transgressive mixtures of biology, technology, and code'.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars, such as Kevin Warwick of the University of Reading's Department of Cybernetics, and Andy Clark, professor of philosophy and author of *Natural-Born Cyborgs* (2003), argue for a return to a very literal method of thinking cyborgian nature. Warwick, whose longitudinal study at Reading involved the implantation of various microchips and sensory augmentations into his own body, said of his "Project Cyborg" that:

I was born human. But this was an accident of fate – a condition merely of time and place. I believe it's something we have the power to change [...] [F]ew people have even had their nervous systems linked to a computer, so the concept of sensing the world around us using more than our natural abilities is still science fiction. I'm hoping to change that.<sup>4</sup>

Like Warwick, Clark also sees himself as cyborgian, by virtue of the depth of our engagement with computing devices that enhance and extend our biological selves. He writes that, although he had previously 'encountered the idea that we were all cyborgs once or twice before, but usually in writings on gender or in postmodernist (or post postmodernist) studies of text [...]

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<sup>3</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (London: Phoenix, 1997), p. 21. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

<sup>4</sup> Kevin Warwick, 'Cyborg 1.0', *Wired*, 8.2. (2000), 145-150 (pp. 144-147).

what struck me in July 1997 was that this kind of story was the literal and scientific truth'.<sup>5</sup> From these 'post postmodernist' readings too, however, has gradually emerged a less conceptual employment of the cyborg, tied to the kinds of digital cultures and practices that have been pulled from their various fictional positions and concretised into our everyday lives. As Zoë Sofoulis explains it: 'Haraway's poetic claim that the cyborg "gives us our ontology" captured the imagination of many who were beginning to experience prolonged interactions with computers, and starting to explore new identities and forms of social life and community made possible by the Internet'.<sup>6</sup>

The course of such thinking has surely been influenced, to greater or lesser degrees, by the model of posthumanity that directly followed Haraway's cyborg – the virtual posthuman as imagined by N. Katherine Hayles. In much the same manner as Haraway made the case for our latent cyborgian natures in her 1985 essay, in 1999 Hayles provocatively informed us that we had already become posthuman – through our deep and sustained relationships with cybernetic machines. The striking feature of Hayles's sketch of virtual posthumanity (termed later, by her 2006 book *My Mother Was a Computer*, 'digital subjectivity') is her central concept of the 'splice'. The splice both explains how we engage with technological devices, and the resulting effects of this engagement upon our identities; the term, as Hayles employs it, is an expressive descriptor for how subjectivity and identity are in so many ways ruptured by computational intervention. Hayles's first book on virtual posthumanity, *How We Became Posthuman*, is charged by the tension between the posthuman and its predecessor, the liberal humanist subject. Tracing the emergence of posthuman subjectivity from the burgeoning cybernetics field of the early 1940s to its ubiquitous role in today's computer culture, Hayles notes the irony of the earliest forays into cybernetics, describing how initially, the field 'was a means to extend liberal humanism, not subvert it' (p. 7). Eventually, however, as humans and their machines fell into a reflexive state of rapid evolution, late twentieth-century high cyberculture began to demand a mode of subjectivity that posed a significant challenge to the long-established liberal humanist paradigm. In aligning the human so closely with its environment, in order to show the ways in which informational processes are mirrored in the machinic and in the biological, cyberneticians ultimately ushered in the posthuman era.

Like Haraway's cyborg, Hayles's model of posthuman subjectivity issues from concerns regarding the destabilisation of a unified sense of self by the fragmentary nature of postmodernity. Both the cyborg and the virtual posthuman have in common a recognition of their natures as essentially fractured, to a great extent compartmentalised. Haraway's cyborg, as

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<sup>5</sup> Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Zoë Sofoulis, 'Cyberquake: Haraway's Manifesto', in *Prefiguring Cyberculture: An Intellectual History*, ed. by Darren Tofts, Annemarie Jonson and Alessio Cavallaro (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), p. 101.

we have seen, deals with this fragmentation by consistently working at the weaving of identity around contradictory aspects and practices of self, ensuring that subjective stability is maintained by regularly and repeatedly re-addressing the relationships between all of its parts, so that a coherent self-narrative can prevail. Hayles's posthuman subject also acknowledges its unfinished, processual nature, its 'collective heterogeneous quality', but what Haraway would identify as points of contradiction (that reflect or are caused by postmodernity's fractures), Hayles sees as splices in subjectivity (p. 3). Hayles describes how, in the twenty-first century, our 'habits, postures, enactments, perceptions' are increasingly spread out across a range of mediums, enabled by a variety of devices.<sup>7</sup> There is offline life and online presence, but there is also seepage from each of these realms into the other. Devices themselves, and the shifts we make between them, constitute the instances in which our subjective selves are spliced across different modes of experience, different nodes of connection. Postmodernity fragments, certainly, and this fragmentation has been widely understood as an unbalancing feature of social existence that threatens the notion of the unified self. But to hold that we as individuals are fragmented by our culture, to our detriment, pins us as passive; by refiguring this process of fragmentation as splicing, and linking it to a cyberculture we are enthusiastically complicit in producing and consuming, Hayles manages to reclaim our roles as active and even positive. The splice becomes a site of power, of control and of consent. Her posthuman gives up, to an extent, the myth of the unified or finished self, and instead moves into a cohesive relationship with its environments – biological, mechanical and virtual – where to evolve it must stop resisting fragmentation and instead come 'to depend on the splice' (p. 290).

Hayles draws from Haraway in several places over the course of her analyses, in one essay even calling for the cyborg to be 'updated' to reflect the information technologies which were, at the time of Haraway's writing, merely on the cusp of inundating mainstream culture to the extent we are familiar with today.<sup>8</sup> Certainly, there are many similarities to be observed between the ontological cyborg and the virtual or digital subject, parallels which would in themselves explain why many cybercultural theorists following both Haraway and Hayles exhibit a tendency to blur the two thinkers and their conceptual figures. But are these two thinkers as complementary as they seem, or is the difference between cyborgian weaving and virtual splicing one which subtly gestures to deeper divergences between these two posthuman figures? The symbiotic figure of the virtual posthuman is a seductive image, in part due to the fact that many of its elements can be recognised in the ways in which we now use or try to integrate technology in our daily lives. But how far do the representations of digital subjects in

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<sup>7</sup> Hayles, 'Flesh and Metal: Reconfiguring the Mindbody in Virtual Environments', *Configurations*, 10.2 (2002), 297-320 (p. 299).

<sup>8</sup> Hayles, 'Unfinished Work: From Cyborg to Cognisphere', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 23.7 (2006), 159-166 (p. 159).

cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk literature and film align with Hayles's model? How far do the fictional and theoretical portrayals speak to the truth of our wired existence? Is the virtual posthuman, spliced across computer systems, synonymous with Haraway's powerful image of postmodern identity? Is the cyberpunk a type of cyborg? Part Two of the thesis now begins to trace the emergence of virtual or digital subjectivity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, as best depicted in cyberpunk texts and as underpinned by N. Katherine Hayles's influential theories. While the posthuman characters under analysis in this section appear in range of guises – from virtual constructs and simulacra to computer hackers and computer users both habitual and recreational – all converge around the subjective model as proposed by Hayles. The following four chapters acknowledge the wealth of theory that has drawn on both Haraway and Hayles, but resist the temptation to present or to understand these two thinkers as seamlessly congruent, and instead will present an informed comparison of the virtual posthuman with the ontological cyborg already explored in Part One. While observing many similarities between Haraway's cyborg and Hayles's virtual posthuman – which go a long way to explain why so many current thinkers continue to use these two figures interchangeably – the following section also uncovers several significant instances of divergence between the two, which have been drawn to the surface of the comparative study through analysing both cyborgs and digital subjects in love.

It can often be difficult to locate love in cyberpunk; the sexual dimension to human experience has proven to be the richer, more fashionable topic in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century texts. At root, however, both cyborg and cyberpunk fictions communicate the body: it is enhanced or eradicated; it is the ship of Theseus or the *corps obsolète*. Meanwhile, in commercial terms that speak to its entertainment value, sex has always sold. Yet, as the previous section has shown, within certain modes of storytelling – particularly novelistic prose – science fiction authors in recent decades have begun to turn their attention to the project of (de)constructing the love paradigm in their narratives. Some films follow suit, underpinning their characters with romances that not only fortify their plots, but offer fertile contributions to the discussion of both love and self in modern critical contexts. As we have seen, *Blade Runner* made several conscious departures from Dick's novel in order to foreground the relationship between Deckard and Rachael. More recently, in the screen adaptation of *Never Let Me Go*, director Mark Romanek stayed faithful to the love story to the point that the film's science-fictional elements were considerably downplayed in its marketing as a romantic drama.

The cyberpunk genre – beginning as a slipstream offshoot that paralleled traditional modes of science fiction but also rewrote, undermined and deviated from it in many ways –

came to prominence in literature in the 1980s and in cinema the following decade.<sup>9</sup> Michael Levy writes that while the cyberpunk movement was ‘never the complete break from earlier sf that it claimed to be’, the cyberpunks ‘were the biggest thing to hit sf since the New Wave’.<sup>10</sup> Ushered in by the communications technologies that saturated society and popular culture with a pervasive scope that the physical sciences had never enjoyed, the cyberpunk movement was characterised by several features previously unseen in the genre. For one thing, to speak of ‘the cyberpunk’ is to refer to either a generic character archetype that issues from these fictions, namely the ‘computer hacker or game player who loses his or her body in the real world, but continues to exist in and through his mind in the virtual space’, or to the writer of the cyberpunk narrative themselves.<sup>11</sup> Not only are cyberpunk authors ‘the first SF generation to grow up not only within the literary tradition of science fiction but in a truly science-fictional world’, but many of the movement’s most prolific proponents are also active scholars, researchers and engineers in the fields that inspired and continue to be inspired by the genre.<sup>12</sup> Rudy Rucker and Neal Stephenson have both interspersed their fictions with their academic research in computational and mathematical theory; while Gibson, in coining the term ‘cyberspace’ in his 1982 short story ‘Burning Chrome’, continues to be cited as the single most important author in shaping both the science fiction genre in the late twentieth century as well as the cultural embedding of virtual technologies in play in today’s society.<sup>13</sup> The cyberpunk authors are well-versed in the technologies they depict, and fully entrenched in the burgeoning information age that they fictionalised and reified from the 1980s onwards. The emergence of the Internet for public access is the key feature linking diverse examples of cyberpunk writing, with prototypes of the World Wide Web and a range of variations and improvements on the designs of cyberspace figuring prominently throughout all major works. The second recurrent element is the cyberpunk archetype best understood as the technofluent, liminal computer hacker, and in this character the tensions between ‘high-tech and low life’ are balanced and realised. Of course, in the early days of the genre, before the complete saturation of society by Internet culture, the metaphors of cyberpunk fiction seemed speculatively stretched. Virtual realities, information rendered as traversable datascares, new claims to spatial and temporal embodiment – all of these concepts have grown into themselves in the past three decades. We are now acutely aware of such phenomena as hackers and hacker communities, e-militaries and digital economies,

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<sup>9</sup> Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Post-Modern Science Fiction* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 9; Michelle Chilcoat, ‘Brain Sex, Cyberpunk Cinema, Feminism, and the Dis/Location of Heterosexuality’, *NWSA Journal*, 16.2 (2004), 156-176 (p. 156).

<sup>10</sup> Levy, p. 159.

<sup>11</sup> Chilcoat, p. 156.

<sup>12</sup> See Bruce Sterling ‘Preface’, in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, ed. by Bruce Sterling (London: Paladin, 1988), p. ix.

<sup>13</sup> Scott Thrill, ‘March 17, 1948: William Gibson, Father of Cyberspace’, *Wired* (2009) <[http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/news/2009/03/dayintech\\_0317](http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/news/2009/03/dayintech_0317)> [accessed 25 July 2013] (para. 12 of 13)

debilitating computer viruses and the virtual (but very real) threats facing nations' infrastructures worldwide. And yet, cyberpunk has also taught us about the strengths and uses of metaphor for reality, for not only were these writers the first to grow up in a science-fictional world, they also were the first generation to witness the abstraction of the concrete world into the information society. Within their lifetimes, and within a relatively short space of time, concepts such as knowledge, money, commerce and connection took on new forms and meanings, existing in informatic, digital and theoretical formats. As Bruce Sterling writes, for them 'the techniques of classical "hard SF" – extrapolation, technological literacy – are not just literary tools but an aid to daily life. They are a means of understanding, and highly valued'.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, these techniques and technologies overstep their fictive boundaries to speak in clear and certain terms to the first generation of humans redefining the social sphere, and with it their sense of individualism, through the application of communications technologies to their relationships. As Heather J. Hicks observes:

the significant interest directed toward the cyberpunk genre in the 1980s reflected not merely the topical appeal of computer adventure for readers, but also an interest its technologically inclined readers felt *as writers* – individuals already trying to write themselves into the global network.<sup>15</sup>

The release of Andy and Larry Wachowski's *The Matrix* at the very end of the twentieth century distilled in cinematic format the cyberpunk aesthetic that had dominated literary science fiction during the previous two decades. In the film, the quintessential cyberpunk hacker Neo is a Byronic hero for the information age – the Gibsonian console cowboy – interpellated from his marginal social position to one of integral importance for humanity. Though the film traverses ground already laid and well-trodden in 1980s cyberpunk, in transposing the themes and moods of these fictions cleverly onto the screen it still finds space to open dialogues with other areas of culture. The action-adventure, theological and mythological narrative are all implicitly referenced in the film, which returns us in part to the cyberpunk method, its hyperlinking ethos of interconnectedness and reflexivity. The film not only successfully manages to translate the reified datascares of literary cyberpunk (through the benefits of cinematographic presentation), but also, as artefactual evidence, communicates the extent to which, just seventeen years after the word 'cyberspace' first appeared in print, popular culture had become so familiar with the concept as to allow *The Matrix* to become a global commercial success. The film lifts the reality versus virtuality dialectic straight out of novels such as Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992) and Cole

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<sup>14</sup> Sterling, *Mirrorshades*, p. ix.

<sup>15</sup> 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), 62-93 (p. 68).

Perriman's *Terminal Games* (1994), using the familiar exposition of the interstitial hacker leading a double life between his corporate day job (reality) and his nightly forays into the informational underground (virtuality) to demarcate the boundaries between these two spaces that we, as spectators and fellow Internet users, feel we recognise. The film then quickly inverts the binary, so that the real world becomes the virtuality of the Matrix: a computer programme which is being run to keep humanity subdued and enslaved by the AI race that has risen to power. The computer screen-as-window to the virtual world through which Neo has been communicating with other hackers becomes an actual window to the world outside the Matrix, where he is taken aboard a rebel ship crewed by other escaped humans who are planning the revolution.

As befits the Hollywood blockbuster, love is never far from the focus of the narrative. The tension between worlds is underpinned throughout by the developing romance between Neo and fellow guerrilla-hacker Trinity, and at the film's climax she re-enacts the classic lovers' resurrection, bringing him back from certain death in the Matrix to embodied reality with a kiss. In fact, Neo's fulfilment of his role as the prophesised One hinges on his relationship with Trinity, who has been told by the Oracle that the One would be the man she fell in love with. Thus, love not only determines Neo's survival and miraculous re-embodiment, but also constitutes the terms and the success of the revolution. The other allusion to intimacy in the film is far more minor and relatively inconsequential to the plot, and yet it is telling when situating the film within technocultural discourses. Mouse, one of the ship's programmers, is bragging to Neo about his creation of the Woman in the Red Dress, part of the training programme the revolutionaries use. He explains: "I designed her. She doesn't talk much but if you'd like to, you know, meet her, I could arrange a more personalised milieu". When the others mock him ("the digital pimp hard at work!"), Mouse ignores them, telling Neo: "pay no attention to these hypocrites [...] To deny our impulses is to deny the very thing that makes us human".<sup>16</sup> Of interest here, despite the film's obvious statement that the 'soporific virtual world' can blind us from the 'ruined real world', is the implication not only that human urges in the embodied world can be satisfied via virtual means, but that this virtually-mediated satisfaction is also essentially constitutive of the human itself.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it also suggests, in opposition to the argument laid out in the previous section, that it is sexuality which makes us human, rather than love. In order to lay the foundations for the argument that will be developed over the next four chapters, I want to suggest two readings of this scene in *The Matrix* that will help to more sharply delineate love from sex, as well as underscore the intersection of cyberpunk fiction and lived experience that are amplified through contemporary technocultural discourses.

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<sup>16</sup> *The Matrix*, dir. by Andy and Lana Wachowski (Warner Bros., 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Sean Redmond, 'Film since 1980', in *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, p. 138.



Firstly, if we follow Jacques Lacan's provocative declaration that 'there is no such thing as a sexual relationship', we may conclude that if sex contributes to our humanness, then it does so by constituting our autonomous self.<sup>18</sup> Badiou uses Lacan's statement to reinforce his own theory of the encounter in *In Praise of Love*, arguing that: 'in sex, you are really in a relationship with yourself via the mediation of the other [...] In love, on the contrary, the mediation of the other is enough in itself' (p. 19). I have already suggested, in terms of the feminist reclaiming of the self that informed much of the New Wave science fiction, that sexual expression and desire are essentially self-actualising emotive practices, while the pursuit of love points to an intimation of the lover into the process of subjective construction by deferring some of that responsibility to the intersubjective scene. In light of both Lacan and Badiou, it seems sensible to consider sex and love as increasingly divergent phenomena in contemporary culture. In sex, we are pursuing the self and self-gratification; in love, we are pursuing, not the other, but a meaningful relationship with the other. In the sexual encounter proposed by Mouse in *The Matrix* (which remains a hypothetical proposition), human 'impulses' are catered for with regard to sexuality, but through simulation, which Lacan might argue is as real a sexual connection with another person as one could ever hope for. Mouse's insistence that our sexual impulses make us human points to a prioritising of embodied experience, located in bodily need, and so the focus is turned away from the other – virtual or embodied, for at this stage there is little difference between the two – and projected back in a narcissistic figuration of the self. If sex is simply self-gratification, then virtuality and embodiment have no bearing on its successful execution.

The second approach to Mouse's paradox is biologically based. Since the early 1980s, biologists have linked sexual activity to other basic drives issuing from the hypothalamus functions that control such homeostatic faculties as eating, sleeping, and body temperature control.<sup>19</sup> When comparing sexual gratification to the need to eat, both stem from biological needs driven by primal urges, both have been partially cleaved from their original rituals and purposes, and both have been enculturated by social practices that are often at odds with our animalistic natures (sex for pleasure; fine dining). To then conclude, as Mouse does, that denying our impulses is to deny what makes us human requires a reconsideration of the verb 'to make': eating makes us human, or rather, keeps us human, in that it contributes to keeping us alive. If we group sex with other such necessary gratification/preservation behaviours such as eating, drinking and sleeping, we can read them as processes which help to make us human by keeping us physically and mentally healthy.

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<sup>18</sup> Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Balon and J. Allan Hobson, 'Basic Drives: Eating, Sleeping, and Sex', in Floyd E. Bloom et al (eds.), *The Dana Guide to Brain Health* (2007) <<https://www.dana.org/news/brainhealth/detail.aspx?id=10068>> [accessed 28 September 2013]

The dispersal of human sexual need across sources of gratification without predilection for either the virtual or the embodied points simultaneously to the cyberpunk figure as one so narcissistically insular that human connection ceases to be of great importance in a posthuman future, while also implying that desire can overstep the focused intersubjectivity of the Two scene to reach out endlessly through the virtual realities to meet an infinity of multiple subjectivities. Mouse's statement also recursively signals a key feature of cyberpunk: that love is often absent or under-developed in the genre, while sexualities – embodied and performed – abound in cyberspace. In this, *The Matrix* speaks volumes to its cultural context. Cybercultural researchers in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have explored the worldwide phenomenon of cybersexuality; to date there is an impressive body of scholarship on the psychological impact of the Internet on interpersonal relationships and the use of the World Wide Web as receptacle and vessel for sexual desires, practices and conduct.<sup>20</sup>

This chapter will begin to pick apart some of the contextualising threads of virtuality in three cyberpunk novellas: James Tiptree, Jr.'s 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1973), David Marusek's 'The Wedding Album' (1999), and Ted Chiang's 'Liking What You See: A Documentary' (2002). These three texts have in common a refusal to sidestep the complex problems that love throws up in the era of virtuality; they tackle the issue head-on. Each text also portrays an environment that offers a way into seeing and understanding virtual worlds, exploring how they construct us even as we construct them.

### **5.1. I am not what thou lovest – 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' (1973)**

James Tiptree, Jr.'s novella 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' has been anthologised by Pat Cadigan alongside other 'root stories' – from Alfred Bester, Cordwainer Smith and Philip K. Dick – which serve as precursors to the cyberpunk movement proper as it emerged in the early 1980s.<sup>21</sup> Scott Bukatman also cites Tiptree's novella as 'an important proto-cyberpunk work', going on to complement her repertoire of 'ambivalent, densely structured texts that participate in the technologized and estranging language structures of science fiction, undermining the authority of these structures while retaining the imbrication with "science" and "technology" as experiential and ideological categories'.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, this dialectic is still invoked in science fiction today, paying respect to the field of cybernetics which emerged as a backdrop to these early

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<sup>20</sup> Chiefly, the work of Sherry Turkle (*The Second Self*, 1984; *Life on the Screen*, 1996; *Alone Together*, 2010), Monica Whitty (*Cyberspace Romance*, 2006; *Truth, Lies and Trust on the Internet*, 2008), and Aaron Ben Ze'ev (*Love Online*, 2004), but also Zygmunt Bauman (*Liquid Love*, 2003), Patrick Carnes (*In the Shadows of the Net*, 2007), Lori Kendall (*Hanging out in the Virtual Pub*, 2002), Susan Barnes (*Online Connections*, 2001), Felicia Wu Song (*Virtual Communities*, 2009), and Nancy K. Baym (*Personal Connections in the Digital Age*, 2010), to name but a few richly investigative texts of the last few decades.

<sup>21</sup> Pat Cadigan, 'Not a Manifesto', in *The Ultimate Cyberpunk*, ed. by Pat Cadigan (New York: iBooks, 2002), p. x.

<sup>22</sup> Bukatman, pp. 316-320.

stories, and enabled scientists, philosophers and writers alike to rethink the human subject that got caught and still hangs in the balance. As Benjanun Sriduangkaew assesses the situation: ‘cybernetics concerns the intersection and interaction of flesh and ideas’.<sup>23</sup> Caught, then, between experience and ideology, embodiment and abstraction, is the dual female protagonist of Tiptree’s narrative, P. Burke who is also Delphi.

P. Burke is plucked from the streets of a ‘city of the future’ as she ambles around idolising ‘godlings’ – beautiful, synthetic people of reality television and advertising.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to their perfection and position of central privilege, P. Burke is a ‘rotten girl’, deformed and on the social margins from where she looks in adoringly, ‘jammed among bodies, craning and peering with her soul yearning out of her eyeballs’ (p. 74). Melissa Stevenson describes her, though biologically human, as ‘someone who has been located outside the category of the human’:

P. Burke is excluded from the human, and the female, not biologically, but through the intercession of her grotesquely ‘inhuman’ form. She is shunned and maltreated by other human beings [...] abused, injured, and ignored. She is the perfect subject for corporate control because she is not tied to her world through bonds of love or friendship.<sup>25</sup>

The corporate control comes in the form of GTX, a transmissions company which, in a society where advertising is now outlawed, uses the godlings as strategic devices for product placement. As Mr Cantle, a GTX executive, tells her: “‘advertising as it used to be is against the law. A *display other than the legitimate use of the product, intended to promote its sale*” (p. 84). GTX explain that they would like P. Burke to work for them, but that if she agrees, “‘it means you never see anybody you know again. Never, *ever*. You will be legally dead” (p. 79). P. Burke is to be reintroduced into society as Delphi, a beautifully-constructed cybernetic body which she will be taught to control remotely from an underground research facility. Re-embodied as a godling, P. Burke will finally be inducted into the world she had envied, living life through her new form:

Little Delphi is going to live a wonderful, exciting life. She’s going to be a girl people watch. And she’s going to be using fine products people will be glad to know about and helping the good people who make them. Yours will be a genuine social contribution. (p. 86).

GTX frame their offer through a proposal that P. Burke, previously banned from meaningful social interaction and resigned to adoring her ‘gods’ from the sidelines, will get the chance to

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<sup>23</sup> Benjanun Sriduangkaew, ‘Annex’, *Clarkesworld Magazine*, 79 (2013) <[http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/sriduangkaew\\_04\\_13/](http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/sriduangkaew_04_13/)> [accessed 25 July 2013] (para. 33 of 133)

<sup>24</sup> James Tiptree, Jr., ‘The Girl Who Was Plugged In’, in *The Ultimate Cyberpunk*, pp. 74-75. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

<sup>25</sup> Melissa Colleen Stevenson, ‘Trying to Plug In: Posthuman Cyborgs and the Search for Connection’, *Science Fiction Studies*, 34.1 (2007), 84-105 (p. 95).

become the adored. That P. Burke accepts implies not only that love continues to play a significant role in a high-tech, post-virtual world, but that it is essentially constitutive of a subject ‘conceptually human’, and worth sacrificing one’s autonomy for. In their separate readings of Tiptree’s story, Stevenson, Bukatman and Veronica Hollinger have all highlighted the paradox of P. Burke’s re-embodied existence: Hollinger notes that P. Burke’s ‘performance of femininity’ is ‘at once perfect and completely unnatural’; Bukatman uses the trope of advertising to show how ‘Delphi literalises the alienated spectator – the split subject – as well as the surrogate reality of the spectacle’.<sup>26</sup> Stevenson writes that her ‘cyborg identity [...] is both freedom and cage’:

It allows her to be human for the first time in her life, but it simultaneously blocks her away from the consummation of her now fledgling human desire. She finally has access to the possibilities of being human, but she has bartered away her agency for that access.<sup>27</sup>

For while GTX ensnare her complicity through their veiled interpretation of consumer and labour equality through advertising, their bargain hinges on P. Burke’s need to love and be loved, which they happily exploit in exchange for her body. Tiptree anticipates her reader’s expectations for resolution, alluding to fairy tale narratives of ‘rags-to-riches’ for her protagonist before cruelly stripping her story of the possibility for such outcomes – ‘You thought this was Cinderella transistorised?’ (p. 33). The reader perhaps half-expects some sort of redemption for P. Burke, especially when the narrative intersects with a romance on the part of Delphi, but the only moral Tiptree has to offer is one regarding the pursuit of happiness under false pretences. Midway through the story Delphi falls in love with Paul, who becomes determined to free her from the clutches of the corporation, not guessing her true nature. ‘That’s what he thinks is being used on Delphi, something to *control* her [...] Of waldo-bodies and objects like P. Burke he has heard nothing’ (p. 110). On arriving at the research facility and demanding that Delphi be released from ‘her’ contract, Paul is led to the control room by a deranged P. Burke who has deluded herself into thinking that it is she that he has come to free:

And inside that cabinet is a poisoned carcass to whom something wonderful, unspeakable, is happening. Inside is P. Burke the real living woman who knows that HE is there, coming closer – Paul whom she had fought to reach through forty thousand miles of ice – PAUL is here! – is yanking at the waldo doors –  
The doors tear open and a monster rises up.  
“Paul darling!” croaks the voice of love and the arms of love reach for him.  
And he responds.

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<sup>26</sup> Veronica Hollinger, ‘(Re)reading Queerly: Science Fiction, Feminism, and the Defamiliarization of Gender’, in *Future Females, the Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Science Fiction Criticism*, ed. by Marleen S. Barr (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 206; Bukatman, p. 318.

<sup>27</sup> Stevenson, p. 99.

Wouldn't you, if a gaunt she-golem flab-naked and spouting wires and blood  
came at you – clawing you with metal-studded paws –  
“Get away!” He knocks wires (p. 116-117).

Defending himself against this ‘attack’, Paul dislodges wiring keeping P. Burke alive, and as she dies her ‘eyes find Delphi, fainting at the doorway [...] Now of course Delphi is dead, too’ (p. 117).

Tiptree’s sad little morality tale, though predating cyberpunk proper by half a decade, remains strongly resonant within the science fiction of today. Its prescience concerning the represented virtual world and its uses – the pervasiveness of advertising, the portrayal of corporatocratic vice and the control of virtuality and its complicit role in the reinforcing of normative capitalist hegemonies – are all recognisable features of the information society. Additional features are the desperate, and disparate, attempts to forge connections by today’s posthuman subjects through the virtual means available to them. A retrospective reading of the text aligns it with the cyberspatial narratives of Gibson, Stephenson and their contemporaries. Bukatman concurs that ‘comparisons to *Neuromancer* are [...] farfetched neither on the level of plot nor rhetoric’, pointing to the obvious lexical connection between Tiptree’s ‘plugged in’ girl and Gibson’s ‘jacked in’ cowboys.<sup>28</sup> At issue, he discerns, is the question of agency in the virtual realm:

in ‘The Girl Who Was Plugged In’, a human body is ‘jacked in’ to a computer system which permits the user an extended mobility, a heightened phenomenal awareness, and an entry into a previously closed realm of experience [...] There is a careful ambiguity in Tiptree’s provocative title as to whether ‘the girl’ has plugged *herself* in or whether she has been plugged in by others. This points to the limited agency which Burke has, compared to Case [the protagonist of Gibson’s novel].<sup>29</sup>

P. Burke’s agency is unarguably limited, but it is agency that has been willingly compromised as a result of the deal made with GTX, a deal she entered into freely. As Delphi, she enjoys more freedom but less control, everything is within reach though none of it can truly be hers, and the world opens up to her but closes forever to P. Burke, who cannot return to it. Paradoxically, P. Burke exercises her free will in order to give it up, to become Delphi. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson famously described cyberspace as a ‘consensual hallucination’: the ‘consensual’ denotes the informed position of the user in his or her construction of a ‘hallucinated’ virtual space which is, in practice, one co-created by a multitude of users.<sup>30</sup> A positivist reading of the text could be tentatively proposed, in that P. Burke is finally given the opportunity to escape her marginalised position, one she seemingly had no chance of

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<sup>28</sup> Bukatman, p. 319.

<sup>29</sup> Bukatman, p. 319.

<sup>30</sup> William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (London: Voyager, 1995), p. 67.

circumventing without the intervention of GTX in her narrative trajectory. As P. Burke/Delphi, 'living in and on the splice', her new cyberpunk subjectivity is given a second chance and free rein of a virtual world.<sup>31</sup> This virtual world is the only one which matters in Tiptree's version of the future: it determines fashion, wealth, popularity and social acceptance. This much is established in the opening passages as we see the pre-spliced P. Burke wistfully yearning from the sidelines:

In the crowd over there, that one gazing at her gods. One rotten girl in the city of the future [...] The funky girl on the street, she just loves. Grooving on their beautiful lives, their mysterioso problems. No one ever told her about mortals who love a god and end up as a tree or a sighing sound. In a million years it'd never occur to her that her gods might love her back (pp. 74-75)

P. Burke, and others like her, in their adoration of the glamour of the constructed virtuality, constitute its meaning and its privileged status over the embodied reality which has consigned them to its margins. Indeed, we may infer that P. Burke's agreement to the GTX deal must be motivated as much by resentment of the constraints of her embodied lifeworld as by a need to create social relationships, that her lifeworld precisely bars her from initiating. One set of constraints are thus exchanged for another: social exclusion with 'eyes yearning out of her soul' for the voyeurism of Delphi who 'lives, every warm inch of her'; P. Burke's embodied imprisonment for Delphi's vicarious spirit (p. 83). Moreover, the joy that Delphi finds in her new life is magnified by the splice in their shared consciousness, emotionally amplified by P. Burke's sense of wish-fulfilment and underpinned by her new set of constraints. Of course, the corporation are counting on her appreciation of this re-embodiment for her compliance in the project, but the joy and freedom P. Burke perceives as Delphi is quite authentic, nonetheless. For a time, P. Burke 'is totally un-self-aware and happy as a clam in its shell', while Delphi lives and 'helps keeps things orderly, she does what you tell her to' (pp. 88, 92). Tiptree even hints that Delphi is somehow an essential part of P. Burke, the part of herself that she never had the chance to be, that 'somewhere in that horrible body is a gazelle, a houri who would have been buried forever without this crazy chance' (p. 80). Even the mission statement of GTX – 'find a creature like P. Burke and give her Delphi' – implies an aspect of the exchange at odds with total corporate control (p. 92). Surely P. Burke has relinquished her personhood to the project, and with it her rights to ownership? She is no longer the owner of her own body, and yet the GTX executive deems it appropriate to say that Delphi has been given to P. Burke, that P. Burke retains some sort of agency simply because she is inhabiting Delphi's body, though both agencies are ultimately limited by the corporation. In the most minor of agential victories, though P. Burke's input (her body) and Delphi's output (her life) are controlled by GTX at both ends, the corporation is willing to concede that P. Burke retains the right of ownership to the

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<sup>31</sup> Stevenson, p. 89.

splice itself, the dividing of herself between two subjective positions. Tiptree's reference to the myth of Narcissus, in light of this, bears more weight on the intersubjective struggle of P. Burke/Delphi. As Narcissus falls in love with his reflection, so P. Burke falls in love with hers, in the same way that she had loved the godlings in her pre-spliced life. Unable to leave their reflections, like Narcissus, P. Burke/Delphi eventually dies. By the end of their story, P. Burke and Delphi are so enmeshed, so mutually constitutive of each other, that neither can survive alone. A second strand of the Narcissus myth, also alluded to by Tiptree, is the nymph who is reduced to an echo by Narcissus's rejection of her. Being in love with a godling, Tiptree warns early on, will turn a girl into 'a sighing sound'. In love with her new self and in love with that life, yet unable to see that love through, P. Burke/Delphi becomes little more than a series of reverberating echoes, self-reflecting mirrors so imbricated in one another that an original source is lost.

As a precursor to Gibsonian cyberspace, and also to the virtual environments we engage with regularly today, Tiptree's story serves as a warning with regards to the dissolution of self in virtuality. Like countless Greek myths, 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' runs into crisis when love is introduced to the narrative. Until Paul falls in love with her, P. Burke/Delphi is enacting a relatively successful cyberpunk consciousness, spliced one across two, fulfilling the wildest dreams of the former in the perfectly constructed virtuality of the latter. Tiptree keeps wrenching the reader's attention back to the cost of this splice: P. Burke's visceral incarceration with its reminders of the messiness of embodiment; Delphi's reduced sensory capacities at the behest of 'only so much bandwidth' (p. 89). Bukatman writes that:

Burke's state is not 'bodiless exultation'. The reader is always aware of Burke's deformed flesh hovering just out of view: 'And again Delphi proves apt. Of course it's really P. Burke down under Carbondale who's doing it, but who remembers that carcass? Certainly not P. Burke, she hasn't spoken through her own mouth for months. Delphi doesn't even recall dreaming of her when she wakes up.' This very disavowal renews our awareness of Burke, preventing the reader from surrendering to the cathartic fantasy of her spectacular incarnation as Delphi.<sup>32</sup>

The 'cathartic fantasy' of disembodied being is one that has continued to inform fictions of virtuality, and also, to a more astonishing extent, the cultural embedding of virtual and information technologies in social consciousness and practice. In Tiptree's story, Delphi is a material body – "They grow 'em," Joe tells her [...] "PDs. Placental decanters. Modified embryos, see? Fit the control implants in later. Without a Remote Operator it's just a vegetable" – not an 'avatar', a term which has come to befit disembodied subjectivities in virtual environments (p. 82). Yet the dichotomy set up between P. Burke's incarcerated reality (both prior to her plugging in and afterwards), and the world in which Delphi moves (through

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<sup>32</sup> Bukatman, p. 319.

remote cybernetic control as a fetishized and surveilled subject of subversive advertising), is eerily prophetic of our modern tensions between online and offline environments. With our frames of reading encouraged by the adoption of Tiptree's text by cyberpunk proponents and informed by retroactively situating the text within discourses of virtuality, and alongside other similar representations (*Neuromancer*, *Snow Crash*, et al), we cannot help reading into 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' the tensions more explicitly depicted in Gibson and Stephenson. Hayles has written on the text from the same perspective, noting in *My Mother Was a Computer* that 'Tiptree's fiction constructs a sharp contrast between an informational realm and a "real" world of severe constraints that operates according to the laws of conservation' (p. 79). She continues:

in Tiptree's story both spaces are real. Indeed, in some respects Delphi lives a more 'real' life than P. Burke in her secret niche within the research complex, for Delphi moves in a socially constructed space that, filmed by the media and beamed out to communication networks throughout the world, represents the epitome of the autonomy, freedom, and agency of the liberal subject [...] The issue, then, is not which world is real [...] Rather, the focus is on the connections that make the two bodies into an integrated cybersystem – the kinds of discipline, surveillance, and punishment to which the bodies are subject, and the distribution of agency between these two different sites in the cybersystem (p. 80).

Through the retrospective frame of inferred virtuality, we can read the socially constructed, media-saturated world that Delphi inhabits as an early vision of the online environments we participate in daily. Tiptree's story is not only proto-cyberpunk, it is also proto-virtual, and Delphi is a prototype of the cyberpunk personae, avatars, and spliced subjectivities that we consciously construct to navigate virtual spaces. In this sense, P. Burke communicates back to the undercurrent of subdued positivism apparent in the early part of the novella; as a prophet of the coming age, she represents the user who escapes the confines of the physical world and enters the virtual domain to realise her full potential, potential that could otherwise never be fully attained in the offline, embodied 'reality'. Delphi moves through the informational realm with ease and technofluency, the model citizen of the information society.

Tiptree swiftly curtails Delphi's high-flying life on the splice by introducing a romantic interest that problematizes virtual subjectivity. Stevenson notes that as Delphi, P. Burke 'finally participates in the social mesh that is so determining in the nature of the human [...] Her involvement and interactions with Paul make a woman out of her in that they humanise her'.<sup>33</sup> Love begins to act accordingly, humanising the cybernetic Delphi (who has never been human) and rehumanising the abjected P. Burke (who perhaps may have never been truly human either, being as she was barred from initiating the social 'interactions', distilled here as love). Tiptree

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<sup>33</sup> Stevenson, p. 99.



has already implied that it is love, no less (though a heavily commodified form of it), that sets the terms for this future society. Social inclusion and pride of place for the godlings and beautiful people are determined by their place as objects of adoration; lack of love and the inability to connect dehumanises and excludes – ‘Love! This whole boiling megacity, this whole fun future world loves its gods’ (p. 74). For the chance to love and be loved, P. Burke casts off her body, cedes her agency, and splices herself across two subjectivities. The dilemma she then faces is how to resolve her posthuman self with the non-spliced self of her lover; love places demands on embodiment even as it helps to construct or augment it. Delphi is already two people before she meets Paul, while he remains unspliced and singular – the numbers do not add up. Stevenson downplays the significance of love in the story; for her, it is not ‘the romantic relationship that is necessary to this act of [humanisation], but the fact of interaction, of interpersonal contact [...] P. Burke’s goal is not to be loved without the intermediary of her Delphi flesh, but *‘to become Delphi’*’.<sup>34</sup> I feel there are serious problems with this part of her analysis. The ‘fact of interaction’ reads as a wholly sterilised, watered-down evasion of the romantic encounter which not only inarguably takes place, but takes centre stage as the point of conflict on which the narrative turns. To dilute the full force of the ‘fire of P. Burke’s savage heart’ to a safer, platonic ‘interpersonal contact’ is to miss the searing tragedy of the piece, the tragedy that clings to the underbelly of all great love stories (p. 104). The explosive final scene when the monstrous P. Burke is revealed to Paul as the true beating heart beneath his doll-like Delphi is redolent of Frankenstein’s creature as he witnesses his ideal mate torn apart limb from limb. The tragic end of P. Burke, of Delphi, of Paul’s romantic dream, and of Tiptree’s novella, hangs on the reception of the tale as a love story. The text is replete with the language of love, viscerally, but not sexually, enframed:

Really you can skip all this, when the loving little girl on the yellow-brick road meets a Man. A real human male burning with angry compassion and grandly concerned with human justice, who reaches for her with real male arms and – boom! She loves him back with all her heart.

A happy trip, see?

Except.

Except that it’s really P. Burke four thousand miles away who loves Paul. P. Burke the monster, down in a dungeon smelling of electrode-paste. A caricature of a woman burning, melting, obsessed with true love. Trying over twenty-double-thousand miles of hard vacuum to reach her beloved through girl-flesh numbed by an invisible film. Feeling his arms around the body he thinks is hers, fighting through shadows to give herself to him. Trying to taste and smell him through beautiful dead nostrils, to love him back with a body that goes dead in the heart of the fire (pp. 103-104).

On realising her ‘SHAME. *I am not what thou lovest*’, P. Burke in her love-induced delirium indeed tries in ‘one dumb protoplasmic drive to fuse with Delphi’ (p. 104). But if, as Stevenson

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<sup>34</sup> Stevenson, p. 99.

insists, she wants to ‘become Delphi’, it is because she has found someone worth getting off the splice for. Fusing with Delphi does not amount to being Delphi and no longer P. Burke: it means here a complete and seamless merging of the two subjectivities – the heart-driven mind that is P. Burke into the body of Delphi, which both P. Burke and Paul love for different reasons. If P. Burke’s goal is ‘not to be loved without the intermediary of her Delphi flesh’, then she – happy as a clam in her shell and ‘gone into Delphi like a salmon to the sea’ – has already fulfilled that relationship (p. 93). In fact, her intermediated relationship with Paul is thrown into question when she misreads his understanding of her true nature:

“Oh my god... *Delphi*.”

And his hard fingers are digging in her thick yellow hair. Electronically knowledgeable fingers. They freeze.

“You’re a *doll*! You’re one of those. PP implants. They control you. I should have known. Oh God, I should have known.”

“No, Paul,” she’s sobbing. “No, no, no –”

“Damn them. Damn them, what they’ve done – you’re not *you* –”

He’s shaking her, crouching over her in the bed and jerking her back and forth, glaring at the pitiful beauty [...]

“I’ll *kill* the man that’s doing this to you.”

He’s still saying it afterward but she doesn’t hear. She’s sure he hates her now, all she wants is to die. When she finally understands that the fierceness is tenderness she thinks it’s a miracle. *He knows – and he still loves!*

How can she guess that he’s got it a little bit wrong? (pp. 109-110).

After all, there is no Delphi for P. Burke, as P. Burke is the only person for whom Delphi cannot exist as an (illusory) individual being. Delphi only exists for everyone but P. Burke, including Paul. For P. Burke there is only P.Burke/Delphi, spliced together – P. Burke is Delphi (though Delphi is not P. Burke). And of course, once spliced they cannot be unspliced, and in a cruel imitation of the fusion that P. Burke so desperately needs, Tiptree presents the perils of unmasking the splice.

‘The Girl Who Was Plugged In’ shows science fiction at its prescient best, decades ahead of its time as it sets up the dispersion of subjective identity across virtual environments whilst also refusing to retreat from the conflict the posthuman subject poses for love. Paving the way for cyberpunk, posthumanist critical theory, and online cultures alike, the story takes on new meaning when read as an urgent and hyperbolic morality tale for the destabilising clash of online and offline selves. Tiptree predicts two features of the impending virtual world: that love between Two will suffer, and that desire will be at risk of commodification and dispersal, not only across a spliced subjectivity, but across the vaster realm of celebrity and commerce.

## 5.2. Close but not touching – ‘The Wedding Album’ (1999)

In the decades following Tiptree’s publication, as the cyberpunk movement emerged from its proto-roots to coalesce in and take hold of the cultural imaginary, we see a pronounced

substitution of romantic themes for an emphasis on virtual sexualities. From Gibson's *Sprawl* trilogy (*Neuromancer*, 1984; *Count Zero*, 1986; *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, 1988) and the important short stories that preceded it to situate him firmly as the genre's 'father' ('Johnny Mnemonic', 1981; 'Burning Chrome', 1982; 'The Winter Market', 1986), emerge highly sexualised and sexually empowered female cyberpunks – 'razor girls' and 'simstim stars' such as Lise, Molly Millions and Angela Mitchell – cybernetically enhanced women who navigate cyberspatial environments with ease of command and wield their sexuality as a tool to barter with on their own terms. Technofluency in information technologies bolsters the position of these women in relation to male characters, enhancing their sex appeal while also honing it for specific purposes and gains. Connection in the information underground relies on having connections; social relationships are read through the frame of commodity exchange. In cyberpunk, success is who you know. Across the genre, writers have taken heed of Gibson and modified their female cyberpunks accordingly, in ways of which Haraway would no doubt strongly approve. From Masamune Shirow's *Motoko Kusanagi* (*Ghost in the Shell* manga, 1989-1990) and Paul Preuss's *Sparta* (*Venus Prime* series of novels, 1987-1991), to Riva and Nili in *He, She and It* and Trinity in *The Matrix*, female characters have enjoyed a sense of re-embodiment. Through their engagement with and mastery of virtuality, these characters' 'technologically enabled expressions of self' put them on par with their male counterparts.<sup>35</sup>

The absence of love in cyberpunk narratives may be explained in part by the refigured role of the woman in post-1980s culture: the overwhelming majority of cyberpunk writers are male, and the engagement with high-tech discourses and practices has been criticised by some scholars as gender-exclusive and retreading paths forged by Golden Age hard science fiction. As P. J. Rey sees it:

Cyberpunk authors in general [...] view technology as contributing to a decline in centralised authority, which is supplanted by a patchwork of various organisations that are, at the same time, both more local and more global (i.e. 'glocal') than traditional states. The lack of a central government produces a Wild West type atmosphere, where danger and violence are pervasive, creating the conditions for a particularly masculine breed of heroism. This recourse to male-centred, rugged individualism is, undoubtedly, the movement's weak spot.<sup>36</sup>

Science fiction has been, since its earliest periods, accused of perpetuating gender stereotypes.<sup>37</sup> It could therefore be argued that, while women in cyberpunk are increasingly portrayed positively and as equal to men, that very equality poses problems for romantic metanarrative as

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<sup>35</sup> Hicks, p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> P. J. Rey, 'How Cyberpunk Warned Against Apple's Consumer Revolution' *Cyborgology/The Society Pages* (2011) <<http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/12/01/how-cyberpunk-warned-against-apples-consumer-revolution/>> [accessed 24 April 2013] (para. 12 of 13)

<sup>37</sup> Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 93.

it transposes gender norms in male writing onto cyberpunk. This would fit with observations of narrative production in the late twentieth century: the ‘decline in centralised authority’ Rey notes as key to the cyberpunk aesthetic can be critically and historically sited within a major cultural shift occurring towards the end of the twentieth century. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have expressed this phenomenon as a move from the ‘arboreal’ to the ‘rhizomatic’.<sup>38</sup> Hayles, adapting their theory for cyberculture, has pinpointed these terms as corresponding to the decline in print culture and subsequent rise of electronic media, which have in turn engendered shifts from the copyrighted authority of the authorial voice to the polyphonic co-creation of the ‘Work as Assemblage’, and from traditional ‘analogue’ to new digital subjectivities.<sup>39</sup> These features, which are not unique to the cyberpunk genre but key into and foster important cross-dialogues with postmodernist thought and texts, give credence to the perception of postmodernity as a time devoid of mythology and increasingly mistrusting of metanarrative. Philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard – who defines the postmodern as ‘incredulity towards metanarratives’ – have demonstrated an alliance with this view of our current culture, shot through from every angle by revisionist technoscientific discourses, as one hostile to the preservation of overarching and universal story-structures.<sup>40</sup> Fredric Jameson, though himself critical of the postmodernist ethos, nonetheless arrives at a similar conclusion, through a bottom-up approach. In employing the figure of the cyberpunk to illustrate the contemporary destabilisation of metanarrative, Jameson calls attention to the emergence of a new model of selfhood – that Hayles takes up as the virtual posthuman or digital subject – that echoes the competitive individualism of early modernism but differs in that it finds ways to assert its autonomy on its own terms, from means not socially prescribed or approved, but from underground or countercultural sources.<sup>41</sup> Scott Bukatman, in the interests of furthering discussion on the issue, diplomatically bridges the gap between Lyotard’s postmodernist approach and Jameson’s Marxist critique when he writes that ‘the master-narratives have ceased to operate as privileged forms (or are no longer privileged in the same way)’, and that each argument ‘locate[s] a potential upheaval in societal self-regulation’.<sup>42</sup> Love, as one of the great metanarratives, can thus appear to jar with technocultural narratives of co-creation that foreground the decentralising, destabilising, and splicing of the virtual subject. Due to the way in which love and the high technocultural subject refuse to tessellate, without making the interrogation of the tension the main focus of the story, cyberpunk narratives seem on the whole

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<sup>38</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> *My Mother Was A Computer*, pp. 105-108.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxiv.

<sup>41</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Bukatman, p. 106.

content to leave the issue to other modes of fiction, dropping the meaningful construction of the love relationship in favour of greater emphasis on non-committal, empowering, and weaponised sexualities – all of which better correlate with its thematic trajectories. As a result, the conspicuous stories in the cyberpunk genre, in relation to a proposed continuation of romantic metanarrative in the posthuman era, are those like ‘The Girl Who Was Plugged In’, which make a conscious resolve to treat the issue.

David Marusek’s ‘The Wedding Album’ is another such example of the consciously interrogative narrative with regard to the relationship between the contemporary love relationship and the virtually figured lovers. In this complex and beautifully rendered novella, Marusek presents a domesticated picture of virtuality running parallel with the embodied lifeworld. The story begins on Anne and Benjamin Malley’s wedding day, and it follows their marriage and then the courses of their separated lives. The reader is thrown into the virtual premise of the novella immediately with a twist that subverts the expectations of both audience and protagonists alike. Like all newlyweds, the couple are posing for their wedding album shots, ‘but this was a professional simulacrum, not some homemade snapshot’.<sup>43</sup> Not a page in, the characters quickly realise that they are ‘sims’ – simulated copies of Anne and Benjamin whose ‘lives’ will now go no further than the moment they were photographed (simographed) for the wedding album. Being caught in the ‘unconditionally happy’ mood of their simograph, the couple take this realisation fairly well. Though the guests rejoin the simulated versions of the couple, this first scene continues to focus on the sims’ experience, rather than the real Anne and Benjamin’s. Anne in particular conveys the full weight of Marusek’s existential experiment:

*Funny, she thought, I’m not afraid. Ever since she was little, Anne had feared that some day she would suddenly realize she wasn’t herself anymore. It was a dreadful notion that sometimes oppressed her for weeks: knowing you weren’t yourself. But her sims didn’t seem to mind it. She had about three dozen Annes in her album, from age twelve on up. Her sims tended to be a morose lot, but they all agreed it wasn’t so bad, the life of a sim, once you got over the initial shock. The first moments of disorientation are the worst, they told her, and they made her promise never to reset them back to default. Otherwise, they’d have to work everything through from scratch. So Anne never reset her sims when she shelved them. She might delete a sim outright for whatever reason, but she never reset them, because you never knew when you’d wake up one day a sim yourself. Like today (p. 6).*

In this passage, Marusek sets up his virtual premise that underpins the rest of the narrative. Of course, kinetic interpretations of the static photographic image have been a staple feature of speculative fictions from as early as Jules Verne’s *La Stilla* in *The Carpathian Castle* (1893), and the diminutive ‘holo’ (from hologram) is repeatedly invoked throughout contemporary

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<sup>43</sup> David Marusek, ‘The Wedding Album’, in *Getting To Know You* (New York: Del Ray Books, 2008), p. 4. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

science fiction and fantasy texts. Binding these examples, however, are the physical constraints that prevent these captured bodies from escaping the confines of the represented image. In Marusek's novella, consciousness is left intact after the simulation, thereby imbuing the simulated versions of Anne with their own varying degrees of agency. Each sim retains its memory up until the moment of simulation, and because they can also communicate with the original Anne when she goes back to view them, they can be filled in on their post-simulated lives. 'Waking up as a sim', being essentially caught in a moment but retaining all previous memories, effectively reads as the sim's consciousness splitting off from its original embodiment to be held indefinitely in time – the sims are 'fresh and pristine and would remain so eternally' (p. 6). The tension between the agencies of both copy and original is wonderfully elucidated in the exchange between Annes, as the bride surveys her sim as one would a digital photo, to decide whether to do a retake. Marusek explains that 'sometimes a sim didn't take. Sometimes a sim was cast while Anne was in a mood, and the sim suffered irreconcilable guilt or unassuageable despondency and had to be mercifully destroyed. It was better to do this immediately, or so all the Annes had agreed' (p. 7). The power of this decision not only rests on Anne's approval of the quality of the sim – "'Sister," said the other Anne, "this has got to work out. I need you" – but also on the sim's opinion of herself – "I know," said Anne, "I'm your wedding day"' (p. 8). That 'all the Annes had agreed' at an earlier time suggests that even from within their simulated environments, the sims are able to overstep the boundaries of their captured states to express their agency and influence the trajectory of the original. In addition, that Anne refers to her sims as sisters convokes the etymological link between the 'holo' and the 'holon' of Arthur Koestler's philosophical psychology. Working from Descartes and Gilbert Ryle, Koestler proposed the holon as a 'Janus-faced entity' to describe components of hierarchical systems that in all cases 'have two faces looking in opposite directions: the face turned towards the subordinate levels is that of a self-contained whole; the face turned upward towards the apex, that of a dependent part'.<sup>44</sup> The holon is both self-referential and works across disciplines, able to look inwards to psychology and outwards to biology; sociological employment of the concept has demonstrated how, when understood as holons, individual agents are simultaneously conceived of as part and whole, interconnected and wholly co-dependent. Reading the sim in Marusek's novella as both holo and holon poses significant challenges to traditional, Cartesian perceptions of agency, as Anne's agency becomes agencies, distributed among her simulated selves that continue to constitute and affect her original autonomy and claims to that autonomy itself. The novella aligns itself with Koestler's view that 'wholes' and 'parts' in this absolute sense just do not exist anywhere, either in the domain of

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<sup>44</sup> Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 861. Kindle ebook.

living organisms or of social organisations'.<sup>45</sup> Every time that Anne is subject to the simograph, her agency is spliced across another self that emerges from the simulation.

There are cultures around the world with innate aversions to being the subjects of photography. These fears have been observed in Native and Central American populations, as well as in Australian aboriginal groups. Carolyn J. Marr relates an encounter between artist Paul Kane and members of the Cowlitz tribe in 1847, writing that 'the Cowlitz believed that any image made of a person stole away his soul'.<sup>46</sup> This poetic notion not only highlights the staggered evolution of metaphysics in pre- and post-technological societies, but also illustrates how technological artefacts inscribe new mythologies onto the cultures exposed to them, often in dovetailing ways which illuminate each culture to the other. Here we can read the camera (as the central icon of photographic image-making, preceded by portraiture and succeeded by filmmaking, holography, etc.) as the axis to a certain strain of mythology. At one end of the spectrum we have the pre-technological cultures who, though experientially uninformed and unexposed, extract from photography the fear that their soul (read: essential self) may be captured, split, or diluted through the copying process. At the other we have the technocultural imaginary of Marusek's story, fully informed by the history of image-capturing and speculations for its future, but still entrenched in the inferred ideas that so troubled the Cowlitz. Simography in 'The Wedding Album' harnesses the full potential of both photography and the anxieties of image-capturing: operating from the other side of the myth, Marusek depicts the realisation of Cowlitz anxieties, but in a society where engagement with the enabling technologies is now so commonplace that the characters are relatively unconcerned about the splicing of themselves across virtuality. Indeed, Anne and Benjamin deal with the repercussions in very different ways: Anne never resets her sims in honour of the agreement she made with them; Benjamin, on the other hand, resets his regularly to keep them 'fresh' – 'it was his belief that sims were meant to be static mementos of special days gone by, not virtual people with lives of their own' (p. 11). We might infer that Benjamin's attitude to his sims is the healthier, especially as tensions arise between Anne and hers. When the couple find themselves re-enacting their wedding pose for a second time, it becomes clear that Anne has begun to reset her sims: "'Four years? You've shelved me for four years?'" (p. 11). The original Anne admits the truth to the accusing sim, who reminds her: "'I never reset my sims. I never have'" (p. 11). It is the sim who speaks here, of her own past that she shares with the original, in which neither of them resets a sim. But the original Anne now does, putting her self at odds with her simulated self – the self-referential 'I' is used by both (and all) Annes without a suggestion that any one of

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<sup>45</sup> Koestler, p. 862.

<sup>46</sup> Carolyn J. Marr, 'Photographers and Their Subjects on the Southern Northwest Coast: Motivations and Responses', *Arctic Anthropology*, 27.2 (1990), 13-26 (p. 14).

them might have less of a claim to the agency that their 'I' denotes. Until, that is, the tension between them reaches breaking point:

“Are you going to reset me?”

The pregnant Anne shrugged her shoulders.

“But you *can't*,” Anne said. “Don't you remember what my sisters – our sisters – always say?”

The pregnant Anne pressed her palm against her forehead. “If you don't shut up this moment, I'll delete you right now. Is that what you want? Don't imagine that white gown will protect you. Or that big stupid grin on your face. You think you're somehow special? Is that what you think?” (p. 12).

The sisterhood of Anne's sims, the splicedness of their shared subjectivities, has become so strained that the selfhood of the original Anne is imperilled. The second part of the story takes place in the non-virtual world, some years after Anne and Benjamin have been married, and Anne's mental health has seriously deteriorated. Benjamin returns home one evening to find her in the house, having checked out of a psychiatric ward, going through her history of sims. One by one, despite the protests of Benjamin and her earlier selves, she unlocks and deletes each file. The scene is brutal:

“As for the rest of these, who needs them?”

“I do,” snapped [the sim]. “They belong to me as much as to you. They're my sim sisters. I'll keep them until you recover.”

Anne smiled at Ben. “That's charming. Isn't that charming, Benjamin? My own sim is solicitous of me. Well, here's my considered response. Next file! Delete! Next file! Delete! Next file!” One by one, the files blinked out.

“Stop it!” screamed the girl. “Make her stop it!”

“Select *that* file,” Anne said, pointing at the young Anne. “Delete.” The sim vanished, cap, gown, tassels, and all. “Whew,” said Anne, “at least now I can hear myself think. She was really getting on my nerves. I almost suffered a relapse. Was she getting on your nerves, too, dear?” (p. 21).

Treading carefully, Benjamin removes his own files from her reach, as well as their common files that contain sims of them both. Anne informs him: “I already cleaned those”, prompting him to check (p. 22). In every simograph of their shared memories – even the birth of their child – Anne has been removed from the scenes. Benjamin is horrified, but Anne can now ‘hear herself’, suggesting that her actions were a conscious effort to protect herself from any further splitting, to rescue herself from the cacophony of subjectivities she had created and thus dispersed herself across. We can see both viewpoints clearly: Benjamin has always related to his sims as mere objects over which he has the ultimate control – “Does the refrigerator get a say? Or the car? Or my shoes? In a word – no”; whereas Anne has consistently viewed her own sims as sisters, as holons, as integral parts that work to constitute her historical and future identity. Horrified at his objectification of her ‘sisters’, she asks her husband: “Is that how you see me, like a pair of shoes?” (p. 13). Benjamin resets his sims to maintain their truth of representation;



Anne makes deals with her past selves, imbuing them with deferred control over her present. Not only does this affect Anne's mental state, it also signals the beginning of the end of hers and Benjamin's marriage. The state of their relationship at any point in the present is increasingly compared to and defined by the moments spent together in their past, and at all times a multitude of selves stand between them. Most significantly, the breakdown of their relationship points to the tensions inherent in the ways in which we employ technologies for our individual self-interest, and how these interests may then conflict with our interpersonal goals. Many of the interviewed subjects in studies conducted by Sherry Turkle and Monica Whitty complain of the new threats their relationships and marriages face in the information age, largely due to the conflicting motivation between romantic partners in their use of their technologies and their reasons for accessing virtual worlds. In a wildly speculative version of the domestic scene in the virtual era, Marusek plays on the notion of technoculture as an essentially threatening environment for the love paradigm, breeding mistrust and driving new wedges between couples. In this sense, his story anticipates the impact of current social media and online networking, which have radically altered the psychological bedrock of loving relationships.

The remainder of the narrative is taken over once more by the sim of Anne from the wedding album. This particular file is the only one Anne did not delete, and the corporeal Anne eventually commits suicide. The Anne that outlives the rest is a copy, existing only in the virtual world. The terms of this world are also redefined: the sim is reactivated in a world in which simography is about to be outlawed, having been determined as a form of human slavery given that the simulations have a claim to agency. Anne listens to this announcement in an auditorium that ought to have been filled with the sims of herself and her husband; however, as all her other sims had been erased, she is the only version of Anne that remains. Looking around the auditorium, she sees that she is 'surrounded by Benjamins, hundreds of them, arranged chronologically – it would seem – with the youngest in rows of seats down near a stage [...] Row-by-row, the Benjamins grew greyer and stringier until, at the very top, against the back wall, sat nine ancient Benjamins like a panel of judges' (p. 25). Invoking the ubiquity of digital imaging and virtual personae in the modern technocultural consciousness, Marusek playfully points to the crush of selves created by virtuality; a lifetime of Benjamin adds up to an auditorium full of people. Indeed, this is an issue for debate that is raised by the Benjamins themselves: "Do you have any *idea* how many sims, proxies, doxies, and daggers there are under Sol? [...] there's *three hundred thousand trillion* of you nonbiologiks! Can you fathom that?" (p. 27). The irony of Benjamin's sims' attitude towards their own freedom is telling, as they inform the sims of other originals: "all of you are *things*, not people! You model human experience, but you don't *live* it" (p. 26). His sims see themselves as the property of the original Benjamin – no doubt due to the 'healthy' relationship that barred them from encroaching on his reality – and want no part of the transmigration of virtual people over to a

specially created ‘Simopolis’ which “‘will consume *all* the processing and networking capacity everywhere [...] mean[ing] we *real* humans will suffer *real* deprivation” (p. 27). Anne, who has outlasted her original and thus is the only ‘real’ Anne left, eventually fails the test for right of passage into the new virtual freedom, because the depth of her relationship with her original had left all the copies scarred and defective. We can infer that, in Anne’s willing dispersion of her identity across her sims, in her allowing them claims to their respective agencies, her humanity has been so diluted, so corroded at its core, that no one sim can be truly autonomous enough as a result. Caught between embodied reality and re-embodied virtuality, unfixable and unfixed, forever detached from her original, Anne is consigned to the limbo in between, fated, in a Miss Havisham-esque homage, to eternally repeat her wedding pose.

Roland Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, observes that ‘what the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially’.<sup>47</sup> In ‘The Wedding Album’, Marusek has his characters enact Barthes’s existential impossibility, in a way which speaks volumes to our modes of conduct in virtual environments. The depiction of the auditorium full of Benjamins, or the anxiety over the trillions of sims, concretise quite ephemeral statistics for real-world experiences of virtuality. Marusek asks us to visualise the materialisation of every online persona and avatar created, and what the repercussions of self replication might be if these myriad selves could somehow co-exist. If we think of how many simulations of ourselves are created today through social media, dating and business profiles, chat room handles and blogging accounts, then this crush of virtual subjects all clamouring for autonomy creates a claustrophobic portrait of contemporary culture. These are real-world examples of the ways we engage daily with life on the splice, interacting online as part of consensual hallucinations and distributed cognitive systems. Aside from so many selves suffocating the world, Marusek warns that this kind of mass-level dispersion may lead to a dilution of self, a self that cannot then – as P. Burke finds in ‘The Girl Who Was Plugged In’ – reincorporate all of those selves successfully back into a coherent whole. In ‘The Wedding Album’, the lasting sim – the one that is saved, the one that is strong enough to endure – is the simograph cast in love. If the equilibrium of the Romantic metanarrative were to be restored, Marusek might allow Anne redemption through the enduring love of her sim. Sadly, as we have seen, romance and virtuality jar viciously, and love is simply not enough.

### **5.3. Seeing beauty feels like love – ‘Liking What You See: A Documentary’ (2001)**

Constance Penley observes that science fiction ‘is now more hyperbolically concerned than ever with the question of difference’, which, as we have seen, is also key to both the understanding

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<sup>47</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), p. 4.

and construction of love.<sup>48</sup> Irrevocable differences, difference to an unmanageable degree, may also affect love negatively. In this sense, difference can become distance (real or perceived), and science fiction tropes and technologies – from wormholes to videochat, from teleportation to virtual sex – have long been employed to deal with and mediate the spaces between lovers. Science fiction narratives have this in common with love stories: each seek ways to heal the chasms in temporal and spatial distance. A particularly moving example can be found in Joe Haldeman's 1974 novel *The Forever War*, in which Corporal Marygay Potter is left behind by a lover gone off to fight so many light-years away that by the time the battle is over the world he is fighting for will have long since disappeared. Marygay finds a way to combat the gulf between them by exploiting the time dilation of a collapsar to her relationship's advantage, in a romantic gesture of truly epic proportions. Bruce Sterling, in 2002, explores the erasure of distance and difference in his short story 'In Paradise', in which a Latin-American man and an Iranian girl meet and fall in love through the mediating technology of voice-translating phones. Unable to speak each other's language except when speaking directly into their phones, the lovers find a world of possibilities and newly opened avenues when their linguistic differences are removed from the equation. That life throws up barriers is a great fact of the love story, and science fiction has long been equipped with the tools to circumvent difference and distance for the benefit of its characters. But these are superficial, circumstantial differences that must not be confused with the instrumental sense of difference that the Badiouian love scene requires. This final section looks at erasure and difference in the love relationship, and some of the catches to the technologies promising to level the human playing field.

Like 'The Wedding Album', Ted Chiang's 2001 novella, 'Liking What You See: A Documentary', has also been described as post-cyberpunk. Chiang depicts a less exaggerated yet still high-tech society wherein information technologies have been democratised and domesticated, which draws parallels with our ever-increasing engagement with computer-mediated realities in present society. Thomas Foster writes that the text 'constitutes an intervention in the post-cyberpunk subgenre sometimes called "hard character SF", which, drawing on evolutionary psychology, sociobiology, neurology, and cybernetics, takes a scientifically materialist approach to the representation of psychological states and social interactions'.<sup>49</sup> The issues faced in Chiang's story are far more subtle and ambivalent than in either Tiptree or Marusek, and envision a near-future world picture grounded in the concerns which surround the visual imaging technologies of today. The narrative, presented in interview

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<sup>48</sup> Constance Penley, 'Introduction', in *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*, ed. by Constance Penley, Elisabeth Lyon, Lynn Spigel and Janet Bergstrom (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. vii.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Foster, 'Faceblindness, Visual Pleasure, and Racial Recognition: Ethnicity and Technicity in Ted Chiang's "Liking What You See: A Documentary"', *Camera Obscura* 70, 24.1 (2009), 135-175 (p. 139).

format, takes place on an American university campus and follows a period of campaigning to introduce a new technology called ‘calliagnosia’.<sup>50</sup> Inspired no doubt by the wealth of medical literature based on research into agnosic disorders such as prosopagnosia (the impaired recognition of faces), Chiang’s fictional calliagnosia (or ‘calli’) is a procedure whereby the specific ‘neural circuitry’ that responds to facial attractiveness is isolated and modified to stimulate ‘an associative agnosia, rather than an apperceptive one’ (p. 336). One of the recurring interviewees, neurologist Joseph Weingartner, explains that ‘a calliagnosic perceives faces perfectly well; he or she can tell the difference [...] He or she simply doesn’t experience any aesthetic reaction to those differences’ (p. 336).

In the society Chiang depicts, calliagnosia has been adopted by special interest parenting and schooling groups in certain areas of the country, but has yet to become either widespread or mandatory through institutional policy. Pembleton University is the first college campus to be actively campaigning for its compulsory introduction, as the head of the campaign explains, in order to combat ‘lookism’:

For decades people’ve been willing to talk about racism and sexism, but they’re still reluctant to talk about lookism. Yet this prejudice against unattractive people is incredibly pervasive. People do it without even being taught by anyone, which is bad enough, but instead of combating this tendency, modern society actively reinforces it (p. 335).

The narrative follows the period of campaigning from its inception to the final polls, in which calliagnosia, having fluctuated between majority and minority support, is ultimately voted against as a mandatory requirement for the Pembleton student body. The ethnographic style brings a variety of voices to the forefront of the debate, from pro- and anti-calli students, campaigners on both sides, faculty members and external medical professionals, and finally private sector figures whose corporate interests have been snared by the student movement. Reactions to the proposed initiative repeatedly hinge on calli as a metaphorical blindness to reality, but interpretations of ‘seeing’ are varied among those debating the issue. One anti-calli activist argues that: ‘Of course it’s wrong to judge people by their appearance, but this “blindness” isn’t the answer. Education is’ (pp. 347-348). A direct respondent counters: ‘even with the best intentions in the world, people haven’t stopped practicing lookism [...] Calli doesn’t blind you to anything; beauty is what blinds you. Calli lets you see’ (pp. 348-349). One self-consciously attractive student thinks that ‘it’d be a relief if everyone had calli’, relating previous experiences with boyfriends so preoccupied with her looks that they ‘didn’t see the real me’ (pp. 356-357). At the other end of the scale, another female student thinks that ‘this calli thing is a terrible idea. I like it when guys notice me, and I’d be really disappointed if they

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<sup>50</sup> Ted Chiang, ‘Liking What You See: A Documentary’, in *Stories of Your Life and Others*, p. 334. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

stopped' (pp. 355-356). Formalising the rights of such a claim into a feminist framework, yet another female student accuses the movement of 'spreading the propaganda of all oppressors: the claim that subjugation is actually protection [...] It's yet another patriarchal strategy for suppressing female sexuality' (p. 370).

From the male voices Chiang includes in his repertoire, opinions are stretched across the board to underscore ideologies from the overtly misogynistic: 'I want to date good-looking girls. Why would I want something that'd make me lower my standards?'; to the identification of the root of the problem: 'What's changed is how I interact with advertising [...] Calli freed me from that distraction'; to the quiet reinstating of self: 'I've always hated how I look [...] But with calli, I don't mind as much [...] I feel better just by not being reminded that some people are so much better-looking than others' (pp. 369, 371, 359). Through the ethnographic technique, Chiang offers us a holistic, polyphonic response to calliagnosia as concept and practice; his work is embedded within experiential, moral and political frameworks, without overtly prescribing a 'right' way of looking at the issue. Most interesting is how the majority of polarised viewpoints hinge meaningfully on differing interpretations of a central principle, such as, 'seeing', 'blindness', 'natural', 'reality' and so forth. For example, in the student debate that takes place on campus, one student argues that calliagnosia simply blocks out a reality shaped by lookism that really education ought to be employed to handle, while his opponent argues that the failure or unwillingness of education to combat lookism as capitalised upon by the advertising sector and consumerism places demands on society to take education into their own hands by adopting calliagnosia as a preventative measure against a reality oversaturated with unrealistic images of beauty. Walter Lambert, president of the National Calliagnosia Association, tries to mediate between these views by directly tackling the underlying issue of hyperreality created by virtual technologies in the hands of advertising companies:

thanks to advertisers [...] you've got pharmaceutical-grade beauty, the cocaine of good looks [...] We become dissatisfied with the way ordinary people look because they can't compare to supermodels. Two-dimensional images are bad enough, but now with spex, advertisers can put a supermodel right in front of you, making eye contact. Software companies offer goddesses who'll remind you of your appointments. We've all heard about men who prefer virtual girlfriends over actual ones, but they're not the only ones who've been affected (pp. 352-353).

Running parallel to the ongoing debates and reforms are the recurring interviews of one Pembleton student, Tamera Lyons, who grew up with calliagnosia, having attended one of the first schools to make it a requirement for enrolled pupils. In her first interview, she expresses dismay at the campus's initiative: after looking forward to being able to legally opt-out of calliagnosia, Tamera feels 'scammed' at the prospect of having to keep it (p. 334). Through Tamera, we receive an experiential account of calliagnosia that is for the most part untouched

by the societal issues in play in the narrative. Though her parents explain their humanitarian choices in raising their daughter in a calliagnosic school, Tamera's recollection of this period shows what their belief system amounted to in terms of her everyday life:

it's not a big deal when you're young; you know, like they say, whatever you grew up with seems normal to you [...] It's when you get older that it starts to bother you. If you hang out with people from other schools, you can feel weird because you have calli and they don't. It's not that anyone makes a big deal out of it, but it reminds you that there's something you can't see. And then you start having fights with your parents, because they're keeping you from seeing the real world. You never get anywhere with them, though (pp. 338-339).

Having planned to have her calliagnosia turned off on her eighteenth birthday, the interviewers follow her as she does just this, and over the following days document her reaction to seeing beauty in others' faces, and finally in her own. In a scene that evokes the Lacanian mirror stage, Tamera, convinced that she is neither beautiful nor ugly but 'exactly average', tells of making eye contact with a beautiful girl across the room, before realising it is actually her own reflection (p. 343). At eighteen years of age, she has to 'relearn' her self-image, and though this is a positive experience for her, we are left wondering how traumatic this would have been if she had hated her appearance. In relation to the debates, both student and societal, that are taking place elsewhere in Chiang's narrative, Tamera exhibits difficulty in asserting an objective perspective within the wider ideological arguments presented by her peers. She repeatedly contradicts herself, or says such things as 'I don't want people to vote for it – but people shouldn't vote against it for the wrong reason' (p. 367). She also shows how the assertion of her autonomy (in deciding against calliagnosia) creates a conflict of interest in the intersubjectivity of the romantic relationship. Here, Chiang draws the reader's attention to a clear demarcation between desire and love, as love eventually emerges as the main problematizing force on the experiential level of calliagnosia. With a new claim on the rights of her selfhood, Tamera is having fun 'looking at good-looking guys around campus', and is 'dealing with it fine [...] because seeing beauty is fine' (pp. 349, 367). Tamera's assertion of self based on her non-calli world picture, especially as she links that to a new appreciation of flirtation and her understanding of her own sexual attraction, configures desire as an expression of autonomy. Her new sense of reality, however, runs into difficulty when she tries to apply it to her relationship. In a scene which throws her developing world picture into question, a friend expresses amazement on seeing a photo of Tamera's ex-boyfriend, that he broke up with Tamera – 'Ina said she couldn't believe someone who looked like him would break up with someone who looked like me. She said that in a school without calli, he probably wouldn't have been able to get a date with me. Like, we wouldn't be in the same league' (p. 358).

In reading Tamera's very personal story of living with calliagnosia and her documented account of having it removed, we begin to pick up on similarities in other students' accounts.

Love is the recurring element which motivates arguments on both sides of the debate: some are resolute in their belief that calliagnosia clears a path for a more real, essentialist kind of love unfettered by cultural standards of beauty; others highlight the self-confidence that allow them to approach people they wouldn't have prior to adopting calliagnosia. Still others argue that, in removing their aesthetic appeal, they feel diminished and cheated out of their holistic selves. Tamera observes that: 'love is a little bit like calli. When you love someone, you don't really see what they look like. I don't see Garrett the way others do, because I still have feelings for him' (p. 358). Even without calliagnosia, Garrett remains attractive to her, but thrown up here is the question of whether love can be successfully constructed through a mode of blindness, and whether that blindness ought to be consciously induced or surrendered to. Indeed, what also becomes apparent is how virtuality, despite its potential to level the playing field, is not often employed to achieve this goal. As Gibson famously put it: 'the future is already here – it's just not evenly distributed', and even within equal-access spheres, such as Western university campuses, the technologies are not used to the same ends.<sup>51</sup> Rather than employing these virtual technologies in ways which promote equality, the students' engagement with them is shown to be opportunistic and self-serving.

Chiang highlights a range of problems as he speculates upon the outside interests that could be sparked if a technology such as calliagnosia were to become available for public use. Predictably, the voices that come from outside the university are tied up with the advertising sector, and calliagnosia, though a biotechnological intervention, is situated among other emergent virtual and visual imaging technologies. Students at Pembleton all use 'spex': glasses or headsets through which they can check email, connect to the Web or campus intranets, and through which they also participate in the augmented/diminished realities of advertising and VR programmes.<sup>52</sup> One campaigner remarks that the calliagnosia initiative is in part a response to the Visage software that allows users to enhance the appearances of people they are looking at through the spex. Lambert expresses his fear regarding the levels of manipulation virtual and visual imaging technologies may reach; he is concerned about 'the prospect of corporations being able to generate that effect with software' (p. 381). 'Liking What You See' takes virtual engagement and the ubiquitous social presence and power of advertising to new, frightening levels. While corporate manipulation of public interests is taking place on the macro-scale, Tamera is unconsciously enacting her own abuse of virtuality on a personal level. She decides to try and persuade Garrett to have his calliagnosia turned off too:

And I've been thinking that maybe there's a way I can get back together with Garrett. Because if Garrett didn't have calli, maybe he'd fall in love with me

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<sup>51</sup> William Gibson, 'The Science in Science Fiction', *Talk of the Nation*, NPR, 30 November 1999.

<sup>52</sup> Spex are a staple feature of science fiction, and are coming close to realisation in Google's Glass, projected for consumer release in 2014.

again. Remember how I said before that maybe calli was what let us get together? Well, maybe calli is actually what's keeping us apart now. Maybe Garrett would want to get back with me if he saw what I really looked like (p. 363).

Garrett, now at a college where fewer people have calliagnosia, is finding it hard to meet other girls – ‘He was kind of embarrassed about it, but eventually he said that he was finding it harder to, like, really become friendly with girls in college, harder than he expected. And now he's thinking it's because of the way he looks’ – and Tamera, arguing from the position of ‘informed decision’, convinces him to have his calliagnosia removed (p. 372). Momentarily, it looks as if her plan is working. Talking over videochat, Garrett sees her for the first time without calliagnosia and is impressed with the way she looks. She relates that she ‘could see him react. It was like his eyes got wider [...] We talked for a while on video, and all the time I was really conscious of him looking at me. That felt good’ (p. 370). Her attempts to rekindle what they once had but through the terms of an unmediated reality, however, backfire when Garrett decides to have his calliagnosia reactivated. Unhappy with how he looks, perhaps unhappy at realising how much less attractive than Tamera he always was, he resigns himself to reverting to the state of not-knowing. Tamera is incredulous to begin with, but in light of the topics of debate going on at Pembleton, she quickly comes to realise that her manipulation of Garrett is not much different to the corporate manipulation of advertising:

what it made me realise was, I was doing the same kind of thing to Garrett. Or I wanted to, anyway. I was trying to use my looks to win him back. And in a way that's not playing fair [...] I shouldn't be trying to gain an advantage in the first place. If I get him back, I want it to be by playing fair, by him loving me for myself (pp. 383-384).

In acting out of love, Tamera inadvertently finds herself in the same problematic position occupied by the advertisement companies, as she asserts her sense of self at the cost of Garrett's own. In coercing him to join her in an unmediated reality, Tamera shatters Garrett's claim to autonomy, his subjectivity that was always his own (though mediated through calliagnosia), and now he is painfully affected by how others view him, whether in a positive light (Tamera) or negative (other girls at his college). In addition to the experiential level of this new reality, Garrett may also find himself vulnerable to secondary virtualities intermediating his new, non-calliagnosic reality in the form of advertising that creates, amplifies and preys on those very insecurities. The romantic relationship ought to be a safe, affirmative space kept separate from the onslaught of industry that dehumanises and destroys the conception of self, but, as the narrative warns, the insistency of virtuality on reality, the former's overlaying of the latter, could ultimately destroy the love paradigm ‘by interfering with our relationships with other people [...] The more time any of us spend with gorgeous digital apparitions around, the more our relationships with real human beings are going to suffer’ (p. 353). This correlates with



feminist research, such as that of Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon, which has pointed to image culture, and particularly pornography, as conditioning not only male expectations of women, but female expectations of themselves.<sup>53</sup>

Chiang demonstrates that even a relationship between individuals like Tamera and Garrett, who having grown up with the mediated reality provided by calliagnosia and therefore stand the best chance of loving one another unaffected by virtuality, is not immune to the power of virtual and visual imaging technologies and the capitalist cult that has grown up around them. Firstly, we can infer that virtuality was already such a problem that their parents chose to raise them 'blind' to it, acting in their own interests but impairing their holistic subjectivities all the same. Secondly, as with Tamera, calliagnosics may feel inferior or marginalised by non-calliagnosics, prompting them to have the procedure reversed so that they may fully participate in their peer culture. This awards them a decisive autonomy but exposes them to the environment that their parents wanted them inoculated against; they now have to deal with it at a much later and more difficult age. Third, they run the risk of destabilising the selves they have managed to construct outside any given cultural framework, and consequently the strength of the relationship between these selves. Tamera represents the best possible outcome: she is pretty by cultural standards, and thus she is happy with her self-image; she incorporates this knowledge into her ongoing self-construction. Garrett, on the other hand, is wholly disappointed with his physical appearance, which is reinforced by the way he (perceives he) is treated by others, and therefore presents a new obstacle which disrupts the sense of self he thought he had. A non-calli world picture is, for Garrett, a new obstacle for his process of self-construction to find a way around. With all this then directed back upon the love relationship, Tamera and Garrett find themselves on a new, uneven footing. The only way to combat this inequality is to revert back to the calliagnosic state, but the ambiguity Chiang leaves the narrative with at its close implies that the damage, at least in their specific case, has already been done. In the cases of other relationships, other problems are raised for the reader to contend with. As one student points out: 'it didn't seem like [calli] would help unless everyone else did it too; getting it all by myself wouldn't change the way others treat me'; while another comments that total enforcement, as the only way to level the playing field completely, would be 'Orwellian' (p. 371).

'Liking What You See' speaks in no uncertain terms to the way in which society is oversaturated with virtual and visual imaging technologies, offering a preventative solution in the form of a biotechnological tweak. As with many medical inoculations, the cure mimics the disease in part, and calliagnosia very closely comes to represent a version of mediating reality

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<sup>53</sup> Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1989); Catherine A. MacKinnon, 'Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: Pleasure under Patriarchy', *Ethics*, 99.2 (1989), 314-346.

that it is precisely employed to combat. Where advertising through virtual means augments, calliagnosia diminishes; both reconfigure what it is to see and see clearly, and both pro- and anti-calli stances necessitate a willingness to voluntary blinding and self-censorship, either to beauty itself or to its social role. Like many virtual technologies, in mediated realities there are deep implications for inequality of engagement and purposes. While calliagnosia provides the opportunity to construct a sense of self outside the frameworks dictated by culture, this self is seen to be challenged by the love relationship because of its lack of transparency. Some students report that they feel they can be seen for themselves, apart from their physical appearance; others feel that with their appearance removed, they feel less than their complete selves. Unless a general consensus were to be reached in Chiang's society on whether facial beauty is constitutive of self – an impossibility – then his calliagnosia will always run into ethical difficulties. In terms of romantic interactions, without full disclosure on whether the parties involved were calliagnosic or not, even foundations of the love relationship cannot be laid.



Each of these three texts work from an ambivalence about the material to narrate the eradication of the body in today's virtual environments; Tiptree, Marusek and Chiang all highlight the potentially liberatory effects of virtuality for the construction of self in posthuman scenarios. Each, however, shows simultaneously that the posthuman subject runs into difficulty when faced with the question of love. This chapter has delineated literary responses to the emergence of virtuality from the late-twentieth century to the early years of the new millennium. The following chapter will unpick further the implications these cyberpunk authors foreground in their texts. In addition, it will explore Badiou's most recent thoughts on romance in virtual environments, in order to further address the problem of the posthuman in love.

## Chapter Six

### The (Re)Birth of the World

It's easier to desire and pursue the attention of tens of millions of total strangers than it is to accept the love and loyalty of the people closest to us.

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William Gibson, *Idoru* (1996)

Jean Baudrillard, whose theories of hyperreality and the simulacrum (1976) have found their pragmatic niche in today's cyberculture, wrote that beyond the end of the second millennium is 'virtual reality, that is to say, the horizon of a programmed reality in which all our physiological and social functions (memory, affect, intelligence, sexuality, work) gradually become useless'.<sup>1</sup> His predictions remain to be seen through to their ends, to that ultimate uselessness of our faculties, but it is fair to say that not one of these functions has passed through virtuality untouched by its effects. The demands on human memory, for example, have been alleviated by computer storage capacity and Internet browser caches.<sup>2</sup> Work has been redefined in the era of e-commerce and computability.<sup>3</sup> Intelligence is at once bolstered by the information society and dumbed down by participation in it.<sup>4</sup> And our emotional and sexual selves have found new modes of expression in virtual environments. As Mark Zuckerberg, the founder and CEO of Facebook, asserts, the Internet 'is the most powerful tool we have for creating a more open and connected world'.<sup>5</sup> If biotechnologies and communications are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies, then communications, in the form of the Internet, has edged ahead in technocultural reconfigurations of the subject. In her 'Manifesto', Haraway writes that:

Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of spectrum, and

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard, 'In the Shadow of the Millennium', *The European Graduate School* (1998) <<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/in-the-shadow-of-the-millennium/>> [accessed 31 July 2013] (para. 10 of 25)

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Gabriel Ganascia and Ivan Briscoe, 'When Computers Chip Away at Our Memories', *UNESCO Courier*, 52.1 (2000), 44-45; Robin Parker, 'A Different Kind of Memory: Examining the Effect of Technology through the Ages', *Dalhousie Journal of Interdisciplinary Management*, 4 (2009), 1-13.

<sup>3</sup> Katherine R. Lozier and Paul D. Warner, 'The Internet and Intranet in the Workplace', *CPA Journal*, 67.2 (1997), 72-75; John Tozzi, 'Gov 2.0: The Next Internet Boom' *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 27 May 2010 <<http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2010-05-27/gov-2-dot-0-the-next-internet-boombusiness-week-business-news-stock-market-and-financial-advice>> [accessed 31 July 2013]; Shравan Rungta, 'Digital Media: To Be or Not To Be - An Advertiser's Dilemmas', *Advances in Management*, 6.4 (2013), 10-13.

<sup>4</sup> Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, 'Is Technology Making Us Stupid (and Smarter)?', *Psychology Today* (2013) <<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/mr-personality/201305/is-technology-making-us-stupid-and-smarter>> [accessed 29 September 2013]

<sup>5</sup> Mark Zuckerberg, statement against SOPA, *Facebook* (2012) <<https://www.facebook.com/zuck/posts/10100210345757211>> [accessed 31 July 2013]

these machines are eminently portable, mobile – a matter of immense human pain in Detroit and Singapore. People are nowhere near so fluid, being both material and opaque. Cyborgs are ether, quintessence (p. 153).

Here Haraway anticipates Hayles's virtual posthuman: the cyborg as digital subject; the Hollywood monster all but disappeared into the bowels of the computer. At the time of Haraway's initial publication, cyborgs and humans were close but discernible cousins; just over a decade later and the technological First World is peopled with the realisations of her figure of rhetoric. Moreover, complicit in the creation of 'seed, chip, gene, database, bomb, foetus, race, brain, and ecosystem', humans themselves are transfigured by the end of the second millennium.<sup>6</sup> By the time Hayles published *How We Became Posthuman*, as the tense of her title suggests, the debate over whether we had was already well underway. The use of increasingly omnipresent and sublimated computational devices, as Hayles observes in *My Mother Was a Computer*, results in the unconscious interpolation of users into their machines, which in turn discipline them into 'becom[ing] a certain kind of subject' (p. 61). Running parallel to this democratisation and domestication of information and communications technologies, that ensnare the subject subconsciously through their engagement with them, are the powerfully adept subcultures that have quickly grown up around ICT – the hacker and *otaku* communities that have been seduced by virtuality and willingly subjectivised by it, who realise the cyberpunk portrayals that prefigured them and predicted their coming. For while people still are 'material and opaque', the potential to escape the 'meatspace', offered by engagement with virtual environments, allows them to take on, if only through consensual hallucination, a little of that ethereality.<sup>7</sup> Michelle Chilcoat identifies the key feature of cyberpunk as 'the fantasy of detachment of the human mind from the mortal body so that it can live on indefinitely in cyberspace', and indeed, when we update the cyberpunk aesthetic to include our present technologies and practices, we can see how users propagate this mythology.<sup>8</sup> These domains include immersive online games and world-building software (such as *World of Warcraft* and *Second Life*) and the pervasive social media whose profiles place demands on our time and necessitate constant oversight and maintenance (Facebook; Twitter), to the creation of peer-to-peer economic systems (BitCoin) and open-source platforms and file-sharing communities whose commitment to collaborative benefit in the virtual world seeks to undercut the rigidity of consumerism and commodification in the real world. As Scott Bukatman sees it:

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<sup>6</sup> Haraway, *Feminism and Technoscience*, p. 12

<sup>7</sup> 'Meatspace' was most likely coined in response to Gibson's 'cyberspace' to denote the embodied offline world that the body (the 'meat') remains in while the mind is jacked in to virtuality. Origins of the term have been variously pinpointed in online discussion forums; the general consensus is that it was first set down in print on 30 October 1995 in the *Seattle Times*.

<sup>8</sup> Chilcoat, p. 156.

Whether Baudrillard calls it *telematic culture* or science fiction writers call it *the Web, the Net, the Grid, the Matrix*, or, most pervasively, *cyberspace*, there exists the pervasive recognition that a new and decentred spatiality has arisen that exists parallel to, but outside, the geographic topology of experiential reality.<sup>9</sup>

Informing both science fictions and social realities, then, is a growing sense of virtuality as a space in which actions count, selves exist, and the symbolic order can compete with, challenge, or undercut our offline reality. As a result, Internet users today, willingly or not, find their ‘minds and selves spread across biological brain and non-biological circuitry’.<sup>10</sup>

Sherry Turkle has written extensively on the impact of computing on the human self and relationships alike; she observes that ‘ours is a culture of narcissism [...] we search for new ways to see ourselves. The computer is a new mirror, the first psychological machine. Beyond its nature as an analytical engine lies its second nature as an evocative object’.<sup>11</sup> And of course now, beyond that, lie the virtual worlds that these psychological machines are intrinsic in producing, though at the time of Turkle’s initial study these environments were still the burgeoning domain of a relative handful of specialist users; their ubiquity still very much the stuff of cyberpunk fiction. Turkle’s *The Second Self* remains an oft-cited and invaluable contribution to the field of cybercultural research as it introduces a third strand to the critical narrative of communications technologies. While cyberpunk was taking hold of the cultural imaginary and shaping the way users responded to the technologies as they were plucked out of fiction and turned into fact, Turkle was conducting research into a third, somewhat overlooked area. Emergent cybercultural practices, at the time, were generally confined to adult experience. Cyberpunk writers and early filmmakers in the genre promised a virtual space in which the mind could escape the body and distribute itself over infinite personae, and their promises were made good by the manufacturers who managed to briefly break even and replicate the technologies wished for in fiction. On the one side there was reality, the meatspace populated by consumer bodies and those with the means to feed their demand; on the other, science fiction and then, suddenly, cyberspace, and all the potential of the disembodied lifeworld that those fictions had told of. Between the two, mediating reality and virtuality, was the computer itself. The machine enabling the spaces, negotiating the relationship and signalling the divide, has often been overlooked both in fiction and in fact. Cyberpunk narratives concern themselves more with the worlds beyond the machine; the computer is a necessary portal and threshold but, after all, simply a means to an end. As we have seen in Hayles, and know from experience, proficiency in navigating virtual worlds has ceased to be (if it ever was) synonymous with an

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<sup>9</sup> Bukatman, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Sherry Turkle, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), p. 280. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

advanced technical knowledge of the computational devices that usher us into those worlds. Turkle, however, working from the premise that the object itself holds epistemological power, interviewed children from as young as four years old as she observed them playing with computers and computerised toys. These were the first generation of children to grow up with computing, to experience hardware in the classroom. They were the generation who lived through the information revolution and the genesis of, as Sterling put it, 'a truly science-fictional world'.<sup>12</sup> Most likely, some of them will be the computer programmers of today. In the preface to the book's reissue, twenty years since its original publication, Turkle anticipates that a rereading of her work:

will afford its readers a chance to engage in an intellectual *dépaysement*: not only to (re)experience the now almost-foreign computer culture of the late 1970s and early 1980s but to view our contemporary computer culture from a new perspective [...] what it was like to experience the personal computer as a problematic object, one that defied easy categorisation and troubled the mind (p. 4).

I would venture that one of these new perspectives hoped for is how the children in Turkle's study mirror the recreational computer user of today, the everyday consumer shifting back and forth between reality and virtuality in a relative state of blissful ignorance regarding the machine they use to enable and enact this passage. Working from the developmental psychology of Jean Piaget, Turkle establishes the child as philosopher, and uses computers to elicit and frame their early constructivist approaches to reality. She relates a discussion among children aged between six and eight, after they were asked whether they believed a computer that had beaten them in a game had done so by cheating: 'What is important here is not the yes or no of whether children think computers cheat or even whether computers are alive. What is important is the quality of the conversation, both psychological and philosophical, that the objects evoke' (p. 34). The study is full of beautifully elucidated descriptions and interpretations the children give when confronted with the computer as a psychological object: the computer is, variously, "certainly not alive like a cat" but it is "sort of alive"; "in the middle of its thinking"; or it "feels proud"; "spells better than me"; and "it thinks"; "it remembers"; "it knows" (pp. 49-107). Turkle's child philosophers verbalise what we as avid but ignorant users sometimes (or perhaps often) are thinking. That the computer has a mind of its own, that it is playing up, that we cannot tell what it may be 'thinking'. But these anthropomorphic projections really say nothing about the machines as much as they say about ourselves, that we are transfigured by our engagement with computers; and if that transfiguration begins to take place from the moment we sit down in front of the screen, then it says much about what is going on when we plunge right through it. In her updated preface, Turkle notes the astounding rate of

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<sup>12</sup> *Mirrorshades*, p. ix.

development in the technologies since her original study: that their miniaturisation, portability and sublimation into daily life have truly rendered us virtual cyborgs, cyborgs that ‘testify to the effects of the technology on a very different register’:

[Users] say that wearable computers change their sense of self. For one, “I become my computer. It’s not just that I remember people or know more about them. I feel invincible, sociable, better prepared. I am naked without it. With it, I’m a better person”. Over the past twenty years, there have been several revolutions in computer hardware and software, but the projection of self onto computational media is as consistent as it is dramatic. In 1984, referring to the computer as a ‘second self’ was provocative. Today, it does not go far enough. To be provocative, one is tempted to speak not merely of a second self but of a new generation of self (p. 5).

When Turkle first wrote about the computer as evocative object, as a mirror for the projection of self and self-construction, it was the object she referred to as the second self. The new generation she alludes to in her updated preface is the generation framed and refigured by virtuality, a domain contingent on the user’s acquiescence in creating a ‘second self’ through which he or she gains access to these environments. A second self would be the bare minimum for virtual participation today, as merely the pioneering first excursion into virtuality. Continual virtual engagement requires and produces myriad selves, avatars and handles. Turkle’s new generation of self is the generation of new selves.

In William Gibson’s *Idoru* (1996) the plot centres on the planned marriage of two celebrities: Rez, a world-famous rock star, and Rei, the novel’s titular *idoru*.<sup>13</sup> The major point of conflict: Rei is a personality construct. In a near-future society where, carrying on from his *Sprawl* trilogy, everyone is jacked into cyberspace and all maintain virtual personalities with which to conduct their business and social lives, Gibson raises once more the question of self and selves in virtual environments. For a writer whose works and characters patently champion the Cartesian split – the dream of ‘leav[ing] the meat behind [...] to become distilled in a clean, pure, uncontaminated relationship with computer technology’ – Gibson has Rez’s friends, colleagues and entourage express uncharacteristic and conservative shock over his decision to act upon that dream by marrying a virtual subject who has no anchor in reality.<sup>14</sup> The cyberpunk trope of the *corps obsolète* is repeatedly invoked in the genre’s scholarship. The performance artist Stelarc has commented that ‘the significance of the cyber may well reside in the act of the

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<sup>13</sup> *Idoru* (アイドル) is the Japanese for ‘idol’, used to describe the sensationalised young media personalities in Japanese popular culture. Prescient as ever, Gibson’s novel predates by fifteen years Glico’s creation of CGI-rendered Aimi Eguchi, a fictional member of the pop idol group AKB48.

<sup>14</sup> Deborah Lupton, ‘The Embodied Computer/User’, in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. by David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (Oxon: Routledge, 2007) p. 424.

body shedding its skin [...] Information is the prosthesis that props up the obsolete body'.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, as Allucquère Rosanne Stone observes, 'the discourse of visionary virtual world builders is rife with images of imaginal bodies, freed from the constraints that flesh imposes', while Kevin McCarron aligns the genre with the prior philosophies it takes pains to update, noting that 'much of cyberpunk's appeal lies in its Puritanical dismissal of the body', which he describes as a 'Cartesian accident'.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, virtual environments, be they role-playing video games or anonymous chat rooms, allow users a sense of escape from the everyday realities to which their bodies anchor them. Kai Dröge and Olivier Voirol have designated the Internet as 'a neoromantic media', and explore the tension between embodied and disembodied experience by asking why 'people might choose a form of interaction which is mediated through technical interfaces to establish such an intimate relationship'.<sup>17</sup> Picking apart the conflicting arguments surrounding the topic, they eventually come down on the side of those arguing for virtuality as a validly intimate space:

Many classic views are based on the assumption that the reduction of communication channels in the text-based online conversation would lead to a certain kind of impersonality. Given the fact that direct body language is completely absent and hard to be recreated in computer networks, it seems to be particularly difficult to convey emotions. [The Internet] did not seem intended at all to build up intimate, close and long-term interpersonal relationships [...] Nevertheless this position has been criticised early on, among others by the proponents of 'virtual communities' (Rheingold 1993) on the net. The critics pointed to the fact that this emerging media has always been used not only for business or scientific purposes but also as a place to build up personal, intimate relationships (Jones 1995; Walther 1996). We would go even further and argue that the Internet [...] fosters specific characteristics of interpersonal relationships [...] digital interfaces can support the specific form of intersubjectivity that the ideal of romantic love implies – despite the fact that this interaction seems so distant and impersonal in the first place. For this form of intersubjectivity, mutual self-disclosure plays a crucial role, and the Internet fosters this in a particular way.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Stelarc, 'From Psycho-Body to Cyber-Systems: Images as Post-human Entities', in *Virtual Futures: Cyberotics, Technology and Post-Human Pragmatism*, ed. by Joan Broadhurst Dixon and Eric J. Cassidy (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 116.

<sup>16</sup> Allucquère Rosanne Stone, 'Will the Real Body Please Stand Up? Boundary Stories about Virtual Cultures', in *Cybersexualities: A Reader on Feminist Theory, Cyborgs and Cyberspace*, ed. by Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 94; Kevin McCarron, 'Corpses, Animals, Machines and Mannequins: The Body and Cyberpunk', in *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, ed. by Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (London: Sage Publishing, 1998), p. 262.

<sup>17</sup> Kai Dröge and Olivier Voirol, 'Online dating: the tensions between romantic love and economic rationalisation', *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung - Journal of Family Research*, 23.3 (2011), 337-357 (p. 344).

<sup>18</sup> Dröge and Voirol, pp. 344-354.



Jean-Claude Kaufmann writes that ‘anyone who goes online has great freedom. They can say things that they have never dared say before. They can cheat and, most important of all, they can break off the relationship when they see fit. They don’t even need to apologise. It is the consumerist dream of modern times: take without being taken in’.<sup>19</sup> Aaron Ben Ze’ev’s description of this kind of romantic conduct reverberates throughout the literature: he calls it the ‘stranger on a train phenomenon’, and likens it to situations wherein ‘people sometimes share intimate information with their anonymous seatmate’.<sup>20</sup> Refiguring this encounter to frame the Internet dating exchange, he observes the paradoxicality of a reduced self-disclosure which nonetheless produces its own form of closeness, before concluding from this that ‘since anonymity in cyberspace is greater than on a train [...] it is also easier to fall in love on the Net’.<sup>21</sup> On the surface, it would appear that constructing love in these safe, virtual environments fits around our economical approaches to life in the twenty-first century. Few of us may live in the interstices with a conscious desire to overcome our meatbodies and disappear into the ether, as with Gibsonian cyberpunk figures, but we nonetheless experience the cyberpunk aesthetic daily, albeit on a less aggressively countercultural level. Many scholars have deemed online dating and the pursuit of self and selves a healthy response to the terms of the world we inhabit: experimentation online, away from the messiness and unpredictability of the real world can be understood as an efficient management of our time, as a practical approach to love which better reflects our needs and pace of life in the information age. The Internet is a space in which we not only search for likeminded others, a space to form community, but also acts as a sounding board for our self-expression. Online, one can gain instant access to unlimited information and outlets for every preference (suppressed or otherwise), a wealth of forum communities, and support groups for every lifestyle, medical condition, perversion, taste, background, orientation and locality. The potential for total anonymity on these sites makes the Internet the perfect tool for learning and experimentation. Of course, the variation in user self-disclosure is a double-edged sword: where anonymity can produce fertile ground for experimental constructions of self and then room for trial-and-error presentation of that self in a relatively safe, simulated social setting, it can also lead to situations in which users are misled or deliberately mislead others, with the results ranging from the comically unfortunate to the seriously criminal. The literature is teeming with accounts of people having fallen in love via dating sites and chat rooms, only to find out the other person had wildly exaggerated their appearance, age, or even gender, while the much more severe cases of deception have littered the media in recent years in connection with grooming and paedophilia.

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<sup>19</sup> Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *Love Online* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Aaron Ben Ze’ev, *Love Online: Emotions on the Internet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> *Love Online*, p. 36.

The issue of misrepresentation in online environments hinges on the relationship between the virtual projections of self or selves and the embodied reality those selves refer back to, and in this sense, life mirrors art in that cyberpunk fictions foreground this precise tension. *Idoru*, a text replete with characters that live the best part of their lives as avatars and wilful constructs, also keys into the issue of celebrity and the capitalisation of desire in contemporary mass media. Rez, as a real-world musician, is adored by millions. As is Rei, who is programmed to interact with her fans' online activity for a more personalised experience which mimics intimacy. She is not one *idoru* but many, a database which intelligently responds to the demands and preferences of those participating in her fan club. American performer Amanda Palmer, speaking at the Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) conference in February 2013, keenly observes that 'celebrity is about a lot of people loving you from a distance'.<sup>22</sup> Implicit in the increasing popularity of blogging, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube is the sense that the Internet offers all its users the potential to become micro-celebrities, as a platform not only for self-expression but also self-presentation – a place to be adored. The power of viral marketing is no longer just a tool for corporate gain, but, in its open-source nature, also a means for little-known artists, performers, and thinkers to gain exposure. One only has to browse crowd-funding sites to see how the Internet is revolutionising the relationship between producers and consumers, and redefining the criteria as to who can become famous, if only for fifteen minutes. Moreover, we crave the kind of intimacy that the Internet uniquely cultivates, such as the communicative potential between celebrities and audiences afforded by sites like Twitter. Hayles has linked Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 'desiring flows' to our conduct in virtuality, and I would stress further that the Internet itself can be reduced to just three strands of desire: for information, for consumerism, and for connection. We have the most powerful communications tool ever built at our immediate disposal, through which we can learn ourselves, learn about others, present ourselves and allow others to present themselves to us. Surely, then, love ought to be the easiest thing in the world to achieve through orchestration? This resonates with Sherry Turkle's early hopes for the human/computer interface, when in 1984 she concluded that:

The computer offers hackers something for which many of us are hungry. Hysteria, its roots in sexual repression, was the neurosis of Freud's time. Today we suffer not less but differently. Terrified of being alone, but afraid of intimacy, we experience widespread feelings of emptiness, of disconnection, of the unreality of self. And here the computer, a companion without emotional demands, offers a compromise. You can be a loner, but never alone. You can interact, but never need feel vulnerable to another person (pp. 279-280).

This chapter will now turn its focus to the third feature of Badiou's theory of love – the *encounter* – which is framed in *Éloge de l'amour* by the construction of love in virtuality that

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<sup>22</sup> Amanda Palmer, 'The Art of Asking', TED (2013) <[http://www.ted.com/talks/amanda\\_palmer\\_the\\_art\\_of\\_asking.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/amanda_palmer_the_art_of_asking.html)> [accessed 31 July 2013]

provoked him to readdress the psychology and philosophy of his own stance in the light of this twenty-first-century phenomenon. The three novellas from the previous chapter will be sited within the Badiouian encounter and read via Hayles's seminal contribution to posthumanist theory, in order to illuminate the tension between the virtual subject and the love paradigm this subject so significantly troubles.

### **6.1. The encounter**

In 2009 Badiou published a short text, based on a staged conversation with *Le Monde* journalist Nicolas Truong that took place the preceding summer at the Avignon Festival's 'Theatre of Ideas'. Prior to the release of *Éloge de l'amour* (translated into English in 2012 as *In Praise of Love*), Badiou's theory of the encounter as an intrinsic feature of his philosophy of love had been outlined as follows:

An amorous encounter is what allocates descriptively a double function to the atomic and unanalysable intersection of the sexed positions: that of the object, where desire finds its cause, and that of a point from which the Two are counted, thus initiating an investigation of the sharing of the universe.<sup>23</sup>

In a sense, the Badiouian encounter can be read in terms similar to those of Sartre's temporal relation, but goes further to argue that while the primary encounter initiates the scene of the Two by aligning the prospective lovers, that scene is consciously redeployed throughout the relationship by the lovers themselves as part of their obligation to co-construct and maintain love. In this constant redeployment – which Badiou variously attributes throughout *In Praise of Love* to the repetition of the declarations of love, 'sexual desire in all its facets, including the birth of a child', jealousy in love and the presence of competing lovers, and 'a thousand other things' – the tension in Sartre's concept of temporal relation is relieved by figuring the encounter as something consciously entered into, as a claiming and reclaiming of the uniquely intersubjective position of the two loving subjects (p. 23). Where Sartre worries over the imbalance of perception between known self and inferred Other – 'they would still remain two times unrelated since for each of them the unifying synthesis of moments is an act of the subject' – Badiou's Two scene mitigates the discrepancy by overriding the self/Other dyad completely (p. 251). This is not to suggest that the construction and subsequent reconstructions of love are easy tasks for the subjects to undertake: that love exists temporally and is to be endured requires many redeployments of the encounter, reassertions of the Two scene that provide check-points (or, to link this notion back to computer language, what we could conceive of as 'savepoints') wherein the lovers actively reassess their intersubjective position to ensure that they are both still willing to continue in their relationship. Peter Hallward writes that the

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<sup>23</sup> Badiou, 'The Scene of Two', p. 51.

‘difficult, continuing exercise of love is the living of this irreducibly double function, the maintaining of a single split desire’.<sup>24</sup> Thus we have the initial encounter in which the lovers meet – ‘not destined, or predestined, by anything other than the haphazard passage of two trajectories’ – which sets the tone for the relationship and draws the subjects into spatial and temporal alignment that is informed by difference and disjunction:

Before this chance encounter, there was nothing but solitudes. No two pre-existed the encounter, in particular, no duality of the sexes. Inasmuch as sexual difference is thinkable, it is only so from the point of an encounter, in the process of love, without our being able to presuppose that a primary difference conditions or orients that encounter. The encounter is the originary power of the Two, thus of love, and this power that in its own order nothing precedes is practically beyond measure.<sup>25</sup>

The primary encounter, that ‘first, absolutely essential point’, inaugurates a series of consciously redeployed encounters which both mimic the first but also transcend it, each surpassing the last. For, as Badiou takes pains to express in *In Praise of Love*, love cannot be reduced to the first encounter ‘because it is a construction [...] Love isn’t simply about two people meeting and their inward-looking relationship: it is a construction, a life being made, no longer from the perspective of One but from the perspective of Two’ (pp. 29-31).

Anchored firmly in reality, Badiou deemed it necessary to reiterate the significance of the encounter in 2008, as a specific response to rising trends in online dating services. Expressing deep frustration with the advertising campaigns of Meetic in Paris, Badiou criticises the role virtuality claims to play in the construction of the love paradigm by simulating the terms of or orchestrating the encounter.<sup>26</sup> Siting the problematic of a risk-free approach to love alongside other ideological frameworks of which he is equally highly critical (Romantic mythology and the sexually-oriented, sceptical moralism of twentieth-century continental thought), Badiou claims that while ‘the world is full of new developments and love must also be something that innovates’, this innovation should not be at the cost of depriving love of its risk, adventure or sense of wonder (p. 11). Sites like Meetic and its ilk have taken the Internet by storm, by capitalising upon the virtual spaces that were already being used to similar ends, and directing users through specifically repurposed environments that promise to reduce the inherent risks in the search for love – for example, the levels of personal disclosure, and transparency in

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<sup>24</sup> Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 189.

<sup>25</sup> Alain Badiou, ‘L’écriture du générique’, in *Conditions* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), p. 357. Trans. by Peter Hallward, quoted in *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, p. 187.

<sup>26</sup> The dating site Meetic was founded in France in 2001 by Marc Simocini; by 2009, the year Badiou released *Éloge de l’amour*, the site had acquired the European divisions of Match.com and swelled to a membership of over 30 million users. The company’s slogan is ‘Les règles du jeu ont changé’ (‘The rules of the game have changed’); the previous slogans Badiou took issue with included: ‘Get love without chance!’, ‘Be in love without falling in love!’ and ‘Get perfect love without suffering!’  
<<http://www.meetic.fr/>> [accessed 14 November 2012]

the aims and objectives of both the sites and their users. As put forward earlier, and as several scholars have argued, surely this harnessing of virtuality's potential, this specific engineering of fully disclosed, candid services for those seeking connection, complements our pace of life in contemporary society? Not so for Badiou, who argues that the minimisation of risk denies both the importance of love and the willingness of lovers to expose themselves to it:

I believe that this hype [of online dating strategies] reflects a safety-first concept of 'love'. It is love comprehensively insured against all risks: you will have love, but will have assessed the prospective relationship so thoroughly, will have selected your partner so carefully by searching online – by obtaining, of course, a photo, details of his or her tastes, date of birth, horoscope sign, etc. – and putting it all in the mix you can tell yourself: "This is a risk-free option!" That's their pitch and it's fascinating that the ad campaign should adopt it. Clearly, inasmuch as love is a pleasure almost everyone is looking for, the thing that gives meaning and intensity to almost everyone's life, I am convinced that love cannot be a gift given on the basis of a complete lack of risk (pp. 6-7).

Noting that 'liberals and libertarians converge around the idea that love is a futile risk', which would in itself explain the popularity of online dating services, Badiou goes on to imply that the real futility lies in bothering to try to orchestrate the primary encounter at all (p. 10). Chance is the crucial force which ushers in the encounter: 'an event that can't be predicted or calculated in terms of the world's laws. Nothing enables one to pre-arrange the encounter [...] the moment you see each other in the flesh, you see each other, and that's that, and it's out of control!' (p. 31). Even where sufficient groundwork has been done to ensure that various factors such as age, sex, and interests are theoretically compatible, right down to the temporal and spatial alignment of a location for the encounter to take place in, on meeting, the prospective lovers are essentially giving themselves up to chance, which will determine the outcome. Time spent perfecting the prelude is only delaying the inevitable. From the chance encounter (or the chance outcome) the Two scene may (or may not) arise, to instigate 'an existential project [...] to construct a world from a decentred point of view' (p. 25). This move from the uncertainty of a temporary temporal alignment in which love may or may not stick, to the compossibility of the consensually enacted and willingly co-created Two scene, 'curbs chance [...] locking it into a framework of eternity' (pp. 43-47). As Jean-Luc Nancy determines love as able to conceive of and hold polarised notions, so Badiou adds the conflicting concepts of chance and destiny to that juxtaposition – 'that is how chance is curbed: the absolute contingency of the encounter with someone I didn't know finally takes on the appearance of destiny' (p. 43). This conversion, from the random nature of the encounter to the enduring nature of love, is enacted via the active participation of the lovers in their Two scene. Love, between two, is always wilfully engaged in, always consciously constructed. The primary encounter, in aligning the two by chance, offers the subjects the potential for a convergence that incorporates both into the 'paradox of an identical difference [...] this unique Subject', which enables them to experience the truth of the

world from the point of view of love (pp. 25-26). Fidelity to that truth, fidelity to one another, is the 'commitment to construct something that will endure in order to release the encounter from its randomness' (p. 45). Thus, the chance encounter is invested with weighted meaning: reinscribed to agree with endurance, a 'transition from random encounter to a construction that is resilient, as if [the chance] had been necessary' (p. 44). The encounter therefore prevails within the relationship through consistent reinscribing, what Badiou has variously referred to as the 're-playing' of the Two scene, the 'reinventing' of love between the lovers, the 're-making' of a point. Declarations of love, sexual intercourse, marriage, the birth of child: all of these are examples of the ways in which the subjects redeploy themselves regularly around their relationship. An "I love you", a sexual advance, a marriage proposal, choosing to start a family: these acts flag up the progress of the construction, and signal savepoints from which arise the choice of two possible trajectories. Either the lovers break apart at these stages, or they reconfirm their positions.

The encounter and the subsequent redeployment of the Two scene around life's events agrees with an understanding of love not as noun-state but as verb-process, as also demonstrated by Nancy in 'Shattered Love' when he writes that: 'what is offered is the offered being itself: exposed to arrival and to departure, the singular being is traversed by the alterity of the other, which does not stop or fix itself anywhere, neither in "him" nor in "me", because it is nothing other than the coming-and-going' (p. 262). The constant movement back and forth between subjects, and the constant renewal that takes place over the course of the relationship, points to love as a self-regulating process with no end point or aim other than to self-perpetuate. From their prior positions as non-loving subjects, the lovers are transfigured by their engagement with and co-construction of the Two scene. Love cannot in any way be construed as selfish, in that it is always extending towards the other lover, and admits the other's reciprocated extension. In this way, love-as-process is distilled in practice as a series of consciously enacted encounters which act as markers of narrative carrying the Two scene. As Giddens sees it: 'in literature, as in life [...] the capturing of the heart of the other is in fact a process of the creation of a mutual narrative biography'.<sup>27</sup> As previously stated, romantic narratives and the narratives of self are dynamically involved, historically framed by the democratically individuating scene of Romanticism. Linking the evolution of modern agency with the roots of confluent love, Giddens sees the rise of the novel as integral to both: 'the connection was one of newly discovered narrative form'.<sup>28</sup> What Giddens comes to refer to as the 'pure relationship' in the late twentieth century hinges on the disassociation of love from its social context, that is, the free pursuit of a relationship not determined by cultural customs, as a relationship that exists in and for itself. Narrative performs several functions in the pure relationship. Firstly, it acts in the interests of

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<sup>27</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 46.

<sup>28</sup> *The Transformation of Intimacy*, p. 40.

the lovers themselves, by providing them with a guaranteed audience to receive their personal self-narrative, and a reason to have a story. The lovers validate the worth of one another's stories by being the one interested enough to listen, and to potentially become the next chapter. Difference, as we have seen, is key here, as it creates the space in which the lover's narrative is detached from its wider context, foregrounded against a wall of noise, which separates and individuates the subject. Secondly, the disjunction between the two lovers prevents two self-narratives from collapsing into one another by maintaining the sense of equality and autonomy even within the intersubjective scene. Finally, the series of encounters the subjects redeploy their love around anchors the joint narrative at various intervals to the individual self-projects. Through these functions, we can see why love fails, or why it might not take root in the first place. As Badiou notes in *In Praise of Love*, irregularities in the encounter can produce 'violent existential crises' (p. 51). Giddens reduces the identity crisis quite simply to the jarring between personal narratives and those externally sourced, including the one coproduced by the intersubjective scene. Both thinkers identify risk as a defining feature of postmodern society, one which permeates our culture from the individual to the institutional level. Using Erving Goffman's notion of the *Umwelt*, which he repurposes as 'a 'moving' world of normalcy which the individual takes around from situation to situation', Giddens here lends credence to the notion that subjects in postmodernity must actively carve out spaces within which to enact their identities – spaces that, as we have seen, are none the more supported than through love.<sup>29</sup> In addition, Giddens implicates the lovers in assisting one another in their preservation of the *Umwelt*: 'this feat depends also on others who confirm, or take part in, reproducing that world'.<sup>30</sup> Trust, a key factor in the committed love relationship, underpins the lovers' sense of security in their shared, intersubjective space. I have already argued that love creates pockets of resistance against dehumanising social forces; turning on relations of trust, Giddens observes what he terms 'the protective cocoon' which safeguards against risk and 'makes possible the sustaining of a viable *Umwelt*'.<sup>31</sup> Through loving encounters, and through upholding one another's narratives, we preserve ourselves through the plurality, rather than preserving ourselves at the expense of love. In this sense, Giddens's sociological perspective can be seen to bolster Badiou's argument in *In Praise of Love*, that love treads risk in order to engage in 'an existential project: to construct a world from a decentred point of view other than that of my mere impulse to survive or reaffirm my own identity':

The fact is she and I are now incorporated into this unique Subject, the Subject of love that views the panorama of the world through the prism of our difference, so this world can be conceived, be born, and not simply represent

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<sup>29</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 128.

<sup>30</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 128.

<sup>31</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 126.

what fills my own individual gaze. Love is always the possibility of being present at the birth of the world (pp. 25-26).

The birth and rebirth – the primary encounter and all subsequently replayed encounters – of the world expresses, quite beautifully, the gravity of the encounter for love. Badiou felt compelled to restate this significance in 2008, in response to the increasingly widespread practices of finding love online. While love, in his words ‘cannot be a gift given on the basis of a complete lack of risk’, and while in its support of subjective and intersubjective narratives it structures the cocoons required to navigate postmodernity, I would go further to claim that risk constitutes exactly the terms under which love operates (p. 7). I have argued that love functions to protect subjects from the flattening excesses of a capitalist technoculture, which, in Giddens’s view, has revised Western society as a ‘post-traditional social universe, reflexively organised, permeated by abstract systems [...] in which the reordering of time and space aligns the local with the global’.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in response to this ‘existential terrain’, the self ‘undergoes massive change’.<sup>33</sup> Acutely aware of risk, and moving through abstract systems, the virtual posthuman emerges at the point of their intersection.

## 6.2. Life on the splice

At the same time that critics and filmgoers were thinking about *The Matrix*, N. Katherine Hayles was writing about the matrix: her acclaimed book *How We Became Posthuman* was published the same year. Paying her dues to Gibson and his peers, but moving their literature into her own theoretical framework which observed intrinsic links between narrative, culture and technology, she writes:

cyberspace is the domain of virtual collectivity, constituted as the resultant of millions of vectors representing the diverse and often conflicting interests of humans and artificial intelligences linked together through computer networks [...] Cyberspace is created by transforming a data matrix into a landscape where narratives can happen [...] Narratives become possible when this spatiality is given a temporal dimension by the pov’s movement through it. The pov is located in space, but it exists in time. Through the track it weaves, the desires, repressions, and obsessions of subjectivity can be expressed (pp. 38-39).

This description not only pertains to Gibsonian cyberspace, but also to the datascares of *The Matrix* and to most of the reified virtual environments in all of the texts in between. No doubt it will continue to serve as an adequate working model for decades to come, and its emphasis on virtuality as supportive of narrative practices points to a potent space around which prior theories of discursively constructed identities may converge. In *How We Became Posthuman*,

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<sup>32</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 80.

<sup>33</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 80.



Hayles places great importance on a reflexive relationship between the subject and its environment. Her history of cybernetics shows how developments in the field, particularly the theory of feedback loops within and between organisms (both human and nonhuman) and the environments they inhabit, undermine liberal humanism to the point that '*Homo sapiens* are so transfigured in conception and purpose that they can appropriately be called posthuman' (p. 11).

In an essay in 2006, Hayles referred to Haraway's cyborg as an 'unfinished work'; not a statement that put her own model of the posthuman into immediate conflict with the former, but one which called for an updating of the cyborg to reflect the progress made in technoscience in the years between their respective publications (1985-1999).<sup>34</sup> In an earlier publication, where she set out the cultural parameters for posthumanity, Hayles observes that:

Living in a technologically engineered and information-rich environment brings with it associated shifts in habits, postures, enactments, perceptions – in short, changes in the experiences that constitute the dynamic lifeworld we inhabit as embodied creatures [...] The number of people who have implants is likely to remain minuscule, at least for the immediate future. Greater numbers will be affected by the continuing development and expansion of pervasive computing.<sup>35</sup>

Though complimentary of the way in which Haraway managed to pluck the cyborg from the grasp of capitalist technoscience and refigure it as a trope of resistance, Hayles nonetheless sees limitations in its iconographic contexts, to which she argues it is historically bound. Haraway's ontological cyborg continued to resurface in her work and to challenge normative conceptions of humanist subjectivity, but her last book-length study on the subject appeared in 1996. By the time virtuality as a concept and a social reality had entrenched itself in culture, Haraway had moved on from the cyborg, and as such its critical reach and application has largely been left to the hands of likeminded theorists. As Hayles sees it, 'contemporary formations [of the subject and society] are at once more subtle and more far-reaching than the figure of the cyborg allows', and she deduces from this that 'much important cultural work remains to be done, especially in networked and programmable media'.<sup>36</sup>

On the heels of the cyberpunks, then, Hayles ventures a model of the posthuman for the information age, and figures this new subject through a four-point definition in *How We Became Posthuman*. In the virtual posthuman information is privileged over matter, consciousness is seen as epiphenomenon, the body is the original prosthesis and is able and willing to be seamlessly articulated with machines (pp. 2-3). These 'machines', however, build on the biotechnological augmentations of the Hollywood cyborg and reach beyond them to admit computers and their inherent abstract systems and practices. Perhaps ironically, in tracing the

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<sup>34</sup> 'Unfinished Work', p. 159.

<sup>35</sup> 'Flesh and Metal', pp. 299-301.

<sup>36</sup> 'Unfinished Work', p. 160.

roots of her virtual posthuman back to the emergent field of cybernetics in the mid-1940s, Hayles uncovers the conceptual ancestry of Haraway's cyborg. The term was first coined by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in 1960, a portmanteau to describe a 'self-regulating man-machine system' that 'deliberately incorporates exogenous components extending the self-regulatory control function of the organism in order to adapt it to new environments'.<sup>37</sup> Initially, as Hayles relates, cybernetics was an effort to preserve liberal humanism in the twentieth century, 'the point was less to show that a man was a machine than to demonstrate that a machine could function like a man' (p. 7). Seizing upon an idea that had featured only implicitly in Descartes's rhetoric, Hayles foregrounds the analogical relation as 'a universal exchange system that allows data to move across boundaries [...] the *lingua franca* of a world (re)constructed through relation rather than grasped in essence':

If meaning is constituted through relation, then juxtaposing men and machines goes beyond bringing two pre-existing objects into harmonious relation. Rather, the analogical relation constitutes both terms through the process of articulating their relationship (pp. 92, 98).

The methodology that produced the cyborg also produced the cyborgian frame of mind, predating both Haraway and Hayles by several decades: arguably, we became *cyborg* the moment we began to use *cybernetics* to understand the *organism*. Clynes and Kline's emphasis on the relationship between the human and its environment, itself the bedrock of cybernetics, is not lost on Haraway, who extends her cyborg symbolism to weave together much more than mere meat and machinery, as we have seen. Still, it is in Hayles, who promotes the role of the environment to such equal importance in postmodernity, that we see a more decided attempt to destabilise liberal humanism via the posthuman subject. The environment in which this subject operates is of course the computational information society. Echoing Haraway, perhaps intentionally in her move to update the cyborg, Hayles writes in *My Mother Was a Computer* that by the twenty-first century, computation is at the forefront of human existence, 'as technology, ontology, and cultural icon' (p. 3). In more pointedly applying the principles of cybernetics to her philosophical sketch of a new mode of subjectivity, Hayles introduces the concept of spliced consciousness to her posthuman, a feature engendered by both the natural and virtual environments in which it moves. Cybernetics explained the human organism as a collection of progressively smaller organisms, down to the cellular level. Once we begin to see ourselves in this way, Hayles argues in her earlier book, then traditional conceptions of an essential self with finite boundaries become unworkable, with 'an 'I' transformed into the 'we' of autonomous agents operating together' (p. 6). She fleshes out this perspective by contrasting it with the liberal humanist conception of a unified self, which is 'undercut in the posthuman,

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<sup>37</sup> Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline, 'Cyborgs and Space', *Astronautics*, 14.9 (1960), 26-27 (p. 27).

for the posthuman's collective heterogeneous quality implies a distributed cognition located in disparate parts that may be in only tenuous communication with one another' (pp. 3-4). This view situates the posthuman firmly within the cultural interzones of biology and communications. Cybernetics saw the human as a biological collective of informational processes, inferred by practitioners' replications of these processes in machines, and its prioritising of information flows inevitably rendered the perceived boundaries between organisms, and between organisms and their environments, as permeable and reflexive. Subjectivity, then, instead of being housed in one, essentialist self 'defined by epidermal surfaces', is spliced across agencies both within and without the body (p. 84). Early twentieth-century understanding of the natural world fostered this conception of posthuman selfhood, but virtuality reinforces it to a powerful degree. Hayles claims that a clinging on to the liberal humanist sense of identity as 'an autonomous self with unambiguous boundaries [...] independent of the environment' will inevitable cause panic over our evolutionary passage in postmodernity, but that if the human is 'seen as part of a distributed system, the full expression of human capability can be seen precisely to *depend* on the splice rather than being imperilled by it' (p. 290).

Following Haraway, many scholars have taken pains to update her cyborg for the virtual age, no doubt informed by Hayles's vigorous model of posthuman subjectivity. Andy Clark, for one, confuses the close kinship ties between cyborg, cyberpunk and digital subject when he writes:

My body is an electronic virgin. I incorporate no silicon chips, no retinal or cochlear implants, no pacemaker. I don't even wear glasses (though I do wear clothes). But I am slowly becoming more and more a Cyborg. So are you. Pretty soon, and still without the need for wires, surgery or bodily alterations, we shall be kin to the Terminator, to Eve 8, to Cable [...] Perhaps we already are. For we shall be Cyborgs not in the merely superficial sense of combining flesh and wires, but in the more profound sense of being human-technology symbionts: thinking and reasoning systems whose minds and selves are spread across biological brain and non-biological circuitry.<sup>38</sup>

In Tiptree's story, the synthesis of P. Burke's meat ('that carcass') and Delphi's machine ('the waldo cabinet'), seems at first glance an incarnation of the Hollywood cyborg aesthetic (pp. 98, 90). However, that P.Burke/Delphi is subjectively spliced one over two, rather than woven two into one, belies the fact that at work here is a precursor to Hayles's virtual posthuman. Melissa Stevenson, who proposes a reading of P.Burke-as-cyborg which she argues problematizes the love relationship with Paul, explains that:

The cyborg, sf's most liminal creature, offers the promise of being able to speak in multiple tongues, Haraway's 'powerful infidel heteroglossia', but the

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<sup>38</sup> *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, p. 3.

problem remains of finding individuals with whom she can carry on a conversation, with whom she can build the necessary collective. Her weaving together of categories and collectives is always in danger of failure; the suture may not be made or, if made, it may not hold. By the very nature of her location on the cutting edge, betwixt and between traditional boundaries determining concepts of self and identity, the cyborg is at risk of being cut out and cut off from intercourse, both literal and figurative, with the other selves in her environment.<sup>39</sup>

To better understand the point Stevenson is making requires a re-establishment of the distinctions between posthuman figures, as well as their critical positions in the theories of Haraway and Hayles, which I feel Stevenson uses slightly too interchangeably for clarity in her analysis. Haraway's cyborg is lifted from science fiction iconography and continues to invoke it even as it abstracts the categories of flesh/machine into reality/fiction, nature/culture, and so on. Her framework goes on to employ the trope of the cyborg to express other, technologically constructed, historically contingent subjects. Her cyborg (like the cyborgs of the previous section) is biotechnologically rendered, insistent on embodiment, and reiterates a claim for agency on the part of the body marked out as Other. Hayles's virtual posthuman (or digital subject) recognises intrinsic links between subject and environment and responds accordingly to such radical interventions made on that environment (and thus, unavoidably, on the subject also) by technologies that are fast changing the course of history. The most relevant, immediate, and wide-reaching of these are information and communication technologies, and so her subject is virtually realised, and by undermining liberal humanism calls for an overhaul of agency in the information age. As the thesis has established, love functions to relieve the tension inherent to the self/Other dialectic embodied by the cyborg (and mirrored in the human), thereby normalising the biotechnologically cyborgian figure through the twin frames of difference and disjunction. Where Stevenson identifies an anxiety inherent to the cyborg's inability to forge meaningful connections that hold across the splice, this is better read through an alignment of P. Burke with the virtual posthuman, as the spliced or distributed cognition is the central feature on which Hayles's posthuman hinges. Stevenson makes the error of synonymising Haraway's 'weaving' with Hayles's 'splice'; while they both express the faceted nature of postmodern subjects and subjectivities, they are really working from opposite angles – Hayles's posthuman celebrates and 'depends on the splice' while Haraway's cyborg champions partiality and weaves together seemingly contradictory standpoints into a reconstituted whole. Stevenson's observation that 'the suture may not hold' is a useful frame through which to interrogate the conflict Tiptree introduces into her narrative via the love relationship, but it is more pertinent to a reading of P. Burke as virtual posthuman and precursor to the cyberpunk. If nothing else, her subjectivity is far more accurately understood as spliced – 'the new forty-thousand-mile

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<sup>39</sup> Stevenson, p. 89.

parenthesis in her nervous system’ – than it can ever be understood to be successfully woven (p. 89).

While Tiptree writes on the splice between P. Burke and Delphi, Marusek plays with splices to the infinite power, estimating three hundred thousand trillion simulated selves for his near-future world population. Implicit in his use of the Two scene – Anne and Benjamin’s marriage – to provide a comparative space in which to analyse the effects of simography, is the notion that it is not the splice itself which imperils the self, but a prolonged and meaningful engagement across it with the other claimants to subjectivity. Benjamin engages with his sims sporadically and superficially, as one would intermittently return to old photograph albums. Between viewings, he resets them, which limits their scope for individuation to the extent to which, even thousands of years later, his hundreds of simulated selves are still in agreement – “*we’re the sims!*” [...] like a room of unsynchronised cuckoo clocks tolling the hour’ (p. 24). Anne, by contrast, places great significance on the relationships she consciously enters into and maintains with her ‘sisters’. The intersubjective scene she nurtures, instead of that of her marriage, is the one which branches between herself and her ‘three dozen Annes [...] from age twelve on up’ (p. 6). In a world which clearly runs parallel to and overlaps with the telematic domain, Anne, like P. Burke, enacts an initially successful form of posthuman subjectivity – far better than Benjamin’s, in fact – in the way she distributes herself over her parts, foregrounding and depending on the splice. In this she embodies Koestler’s holon, looking outwards and inwards, a composite of Janus-faced entities. Cybernetics, which applied the principles of homeostatic feedback loops to biological organisms and then extended them to reach through and into and back from abstract systems, was adapted for psychology by Koestler. His conception of the holarchy – which merged atomism with holism to bring them into their own holarchic relation – makes possible Hayles’s proposed posthuman subjectivity, which enhances our understanding of virtual engagement as a distributed cognitive practice, or set of practices, which turn on the splice. Benjamin and Anne are set in opposition: while he represents a traditional liberal humanist sense of self, she is wholly posthuman. Their irreconcilable reactions to the splice – his refusal to be compromised by it and her increasing dependence upon it – begin to come between them. Though Marusek provides a literal depiction of virtuality, with actual splicing taking place, his story points to the ways in which our online practices affect our offline relationships. In a study conducted in 2011, Louise Nadeau reports that cyberdependence, and in particular excessive use of social networking sites, has come to be cited as a ‘new’ and pervasive cause of relationship breakdown and divorce in Western societies.<sup>40</sup> Sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and their prototypes (Friendster; Friends

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<sup>40</sup> Louise Nadeau, ‘La cyberdépendance, état des connaissances, manifestations et pistes d’intervention’, Centre Dollard-Cormier: Institut universitaire sur les dépendances (2012) <<http://www.nouvelles>.

Reunited) bring into immediate alignment not only reality and virtuality, but past and present, the local and the global, while anonymous text-based chat rooms and cybersex sites more pointedly gesture to domains in which online engagement may trouble, confuse, or even jeopardise real-world relationships. Sherry Turkle has observed that some of the virtual practices made possible by our computational devices have seriously affected our sense of normalcy, that ‘some of the things we do now [...] only a few years ago we would have found odd or disturbing’.<sup>41</sup> This much is evident when we consider such changing opinions as those charted by Monica Whitty, whose study of online infidelity found that, across 1,117 respondents, cybersex outside a relationship was practically indifferentiated from actual sexual intercourse, while ‘sharing deep emotional and/or intimate information online’ consistently rated higher than visiting strip clubs or viewing pornography in what constituted cheating.<sup>42</sup>

I have suggested that, following Turkle, our induction into online environments necessarily creates a ‘second’ self – the first of many, if virtual engagement is consistent and takes place across a range of domains. Spliced across social media, these environments provide the means and also the reason to maintain a host of selves: the Internet as ‘neoromantic media’ offers fertile ground for these selves to take root and expand, and often take on ‘lives’ of their own that significantly differ from the trajectory of the self in the real world. Cyberpunk writers have made much of this tension: in a recent story Elisabeth Adams expresses the spliced selves as ‘subversions’, a neat play on words that reflects the faceted nature of virtual subjectivity but also deviates from traditional, essentialist conceptions of selfhood. Adams’s protagonist, Eduardo, visits a psychologist to contest an application for emancipation filed by Art, one of his subversions, who has been living a nearly independent life. The psychologist chastises Eduardo for contravening social policy by branching off too many subversions, some of these at well below or dangerously above the legal density of self. The narrative breaks down into an argument between the original Eduardo and Art, who wants to continue a relationship with the girlfriend Eduardo wants to break up with. Reprimanding him for consistently breaking protocol, the psychologist reminds him: “we strongly recommend against having more than four subs at a time [...] Having too many threads often leads to, ah, complicated reconciliations”.<sup>43</sup> This emphasis on reconciliation as a safeguard would seem at first to be at odds with the successful enactment of a distributed consciousness which depends on the splice, as indeed we can see Eduardo is precisely imperilled by it. Again, however, it is not the splice but its potential consequences that threaten subjectivity. In Adams’s story, Eduardo’s

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umontreal.ca/recherche/vient-de-paraitre/20120227-la-cyberdependance-etat-des-connaissances-manifestations-et-pistes-dintervention.html> [accessed 29 June 2013]

<sup>41</sup> Sherry Turkle, ‘Connected, but alone?’, TED (2012) <[http://www.ted.com/talks/sherry\\_turkle\\_alone\\_together.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together.html)> [accessed 20/07/13]

<sup>42</sup> Monica Whitty, ‘Pushing the Wrong Buttons: Men’s and Women’s Attitudes toward Online and Offline Infidelity’, *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 6.6 (2003), 569-579 (p. 574).

<sup>43</sup> Elisabeth Adams, ‘Subversion’, *Escape Pod* (episode 398), 30 May 2013.

subversions have gone on to lead separate lives and gain new skills that do not agree with or refer back to Eduardo himself. In Marusek's novella, Anne's sims argue with her from the past, which affects the trajectory of her future, and in both stories the distance between the self and its selves – the severity of the splice – is irreconcilable. We can relate this back to our conduct in virtual environments by using Giddens's self-project to negotiate these existentially troublesome scenarios. In 'Subversion', Eduardo's selves take up their own strands of narrative as they split off from the original and branch off in various directions. While the subversions move on into a diverse collection of futures, Eduardo remains mired behind, powerless to exert control over where 'his' narrative will end up. In 'The Wedding Album', Marusek creates conflict not between present and future selves, but between present and past. By granting her sims agency Anne allows them, though they are consigned to her past, sway over her current self. While she has made every effort to maintain a good 'working relationship' with her sims, eventually the disparity they perceive between their senses of self (produced by the narratives they led) and the direction the original Anne's narrative is taking, is enough to bring the main biographical strand to a halt. This occurs quite literally, when Anne commits suicide. Thus, it is not so much the generation of spliced selves that troubles the picture, but the fact that the self-narratives do not resolve into a coherent biographical trajectory.

These very literal portrayals of spliced selves and incompatible narratives help to demonstrate what occurs when we engage in distributed cognitive practices online. Amber Case, a self-proclaimed cyborg anthropologist, spoke in 2010 about the lives of our online plurality of identity and the inherent problems of this new, multitudinous existence. Using Turkle's notion of the second self in relation to social media, Case warns that:

Whether you like it or not, you're starting to show up online, and people are interacting with your second self when you're not there. And so you have to be careful about leaving your front lawn open, which is basically your Facebook wall, so that people don't write on it in the middle of the night – because it's very much the equivalent.<sup>44</sup>

This implies that we leave part of ourselves within virtual environments, parts that we cannot easily take back and reconcile with the offline self, but also points further to a loss of control over our narratives, as these second (third, fourth) selves exist within a discursively constructed space in which we are not always present to maintain. Though the Facebook ideal is for every profile to refer neatly back to a single individual – expressed by the company's emphasis on authenticity, but presumably also to curb the chance of users' sense of identity spiralling out of their grasp – the reality is that over 80 million accounts are duplicates or fakes, and Facebook's stress on the importance of authenticity is not one shared unanimously across the virtual

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<sup>44</sup> Amber Case, 'We Are All Cyborgs Now', TED (2010) <[http://www.ted.com/talks/amber\\_case\\_we\\_are\\_all\\_cyborgs\\_now.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/amber_case_we_are_all_cyborgs_now.html)> [accessed 15 August 2013]

board.<sup>45</sup> The narratives of our discursively presented selves are dependent upon the types of sites we enter, and our reasons for doing so. Our writing practices vary to match our motives and the various milieus those motives propel us through: our levels of self-disclosure and the terms of our self-projections fluctuate from site to site. It is not an overstatement to say that some of our selves exist only online, and are left there, never to be reincorporated into our offline identities. Though Marusek uses image-capturing technologies to frame his version of virtuality, rather than the Internet, to express a postmodern configuration self in technoculture, he nonetheless implicitly directs us back to the virtuality we know. While Anne communicates a posthuman version of the Cowlitz soul stolen by cameras, her dissolution of self in the virtual realm suggests the ways in which we split off and mutate in online environments, and how our lives are lived every day on the splice.

In Chiang's novella, the splice is more subtly presented, and yet the crisis of self it engenders is more radical. In *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles uses the Turing test to elicit an altogether more powerful process of transfiguration than the one Turing originally proposed, when she argues that the virtual intervention on the self 'comes not when you try to determine which is the man, the woman, or the machine':

Rather, the important intervention comes much earlier, when the test puts you into a cybernetic circuit that splices your will, desire, and perception into a distributed cognitive system in which represented bodies are joined with enacted bodies through mutating and flexible machine interfaces. As you gaze down at the flickering signifiers scrolling down the computer screens, no matter what identifications you assign to the embodied entities that you cannot see, you have already become posthuman (p. xiv).

In 'Liking What You See', the intervention is bio(techno)logical: calliagnosia is induced in the neural pathways dealing with attractiveness. But this modification mimics existing augmented reality technologies that allow users to change the appearances of others at will, and which operate within and as a response to a culture 'saturated with this supernormal stimuli' (p. 382). Tamera, growing up seeing the world through calliagnosic eyes, has constructed both a self-project and a world picture based on a perspective which is irrevocably altered once she has the procedure reversed. Of course, she doesn't see the potential problems, any further than the ones she believes that her parents have created by keeping her from 'seeing' the 'real' world. Her thinly veiled motive for convincing Garrett to have his calli removed – 'so he could judge both sides' – amounts to a similar act of theft: while her parents robbed Tamera of a fully informed reality, Tamera's persuasion of Garrett ultimately denies him his self-narrative (p. 364). Garrett,

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<sup>45</sup> By September 2012 official company figures showed over 1 billion unique profiles on the site, of which 8.7% are estimated to be 'fake'; by March 2013 the number of unique profiles stands at 1.1 billion, making Facebook the most popular social networking site in Internet history. Cadie Thompson, 'Facebook: About 83 million accounts are fake', CNBC (2012) <<http://www.cnbc.com/id/48468956> > [accessed 5 June 2013] (para. 1 of 14)



less conventionally attractive than Tamera, has his confidence and sense of cohesion unseated by her plot to rekindle their relationship. Though Tamera professes to have realised these ramifications in time, and tries to distance herself from the corporate misuse of agnostic technologies that so mirrors her own actions, this realisation comes too late for Garrett. While she admits she 'shouldn't be trying to gain an advantage in the first place', she already has (p. 384). Garrett's suspicions that girls didn't find him attractive have only been confirmed after he had calli removed, and while he decides to revert to an agnostic state, he cannot ever unlearn what he now knows. In fact, he is now presented with his ex-girlfriend, newly beautiful, who sees him through the eyes of love. Though the status of their relationship is left ambiguous, the fact that Tamera is left with leverage (on the basis of her looks) does not go unnoticed.

Calliagnosia imagines a biological imitation of virtuality, the way we might perceive the world with retinal implants or brain modifications, which mimic the computer technologies that mediate and augment our realities. It also communicates a sense of the splice, where reality and virtuality meet. Choosing to adopt calli, or wear spex, or even look at a computer screen, necessitates a willingness to splice subjective perception over two (or more) worlds. At the critical juncture, the consciousness may or may not be able to handle the splice, as with Garrett, and thus the self-narratives that branch off into incompatible domains ultimately destabilise the coherence of the self-project. As much is clearly voiced by the interviewees in Chiang's 'documentary': for those students who feel robbed of their looks by calliagnosia, attractiveness is evidently a part of their holistic self-narrative, one they feel diminished without. For those who feel their looks (conventionally 'good' or otherwise) encumber their relationships and detract from connections made on less 'passive' foundations, calli clears a path obstructed by that particular strand of received cultural narrative (p. 341). All of this, however – the debates, the campaigning, the quasi-ethical discussions raised by whether beauty constitutes a necessary part of identity – fades into the background when compared to the role that love plays in their self-construction. The ideological debates are undercut by the experiential practicalities of negotiating relationships and constructing love on a calli or non-calli basis. It creates uneven ground, whichever way it goes, and the notion of jarring narratives is again pertinent here. Both Tamera and Garrett end up having their calliagnosia restored by the novella's close, though potentially problematic for their future is the way in which Tamera will always be denying a part of her biography that she felt enhanced her self-narrative, while Garrett now knows that he will be refusing to see a truth that exists whether he chooses to acknowledge it or not. How can the intersubjective love scene be reconciled, if the subjects cannot reconcile themselves? Chiang ends his novella with a brief discussion of several combative technologies that are beginning to appear in his depicted society. Some are biotechnological, more aggressive agnosias to filter out facial expressions, intonation and other paralinguistic cues. Others are virtual, such as

extensions to the spex for situational mediation of received stimulus. As the head of the calliagnosia campaign relates:

the next few years will be a very exciting time. A spex manufacturer just demonstrated some new technology that could change everything. They've figured out a way to fit somatic positioning beacons in a pair of spex, custom-calibrated for a single person. That means no more helmet, no more office visit needed to reprogram your neurostat; you can just put on your spex and do it yourself. That means you'll be able to turn your calli on or off, *any time you want* (p. 379).

This, in the eyes of the campaigner, provides a resistance to the image culture that poses such a threat to human relationships, while also treating the 'problem of people feeling that they have to give up beauty altogether' (pp. 379-380). Rather, she argues, 'we can promote the idea that beauty is appropriate in some situations and not in others. For example, people could keep calli enabled when they're working, but disable it when they're among friends' (p. 380). While ostensibly a reasonable and perhaps necessary measure against the social excesses of virtuality, the incessant one-upmanship of technologies in this picture suggests a battle fought at the expense of love. In Chiang's story, the Two scene is fated to become orchestrated and inorganic: to set down the terms of the gaze, to contract how one would like to be looked at – 'appreciating beauty would become a consensual interaction, something you do only when both parties, the beholder and the beheld, agree to it' (p. 380). Imposing such a contract on the lovers echoes the risk-free groundwork that characterises the online dating exchange. It annihilates the haphazard trajectory of chance that Badiou deems the primary encounter to be so reliant on, and institutionalises the last space we have in which to be free.

The encounter also loosely translates in practice to a sort of reconciliation process. Individuals in love, though they may gaze at the same world from their shared point of view, do avert their eyes in order to follow where their personal self-narratives are taking them. The redeployments of the encounter provide active instances of reflection that anchor the intersubjective scene to the self-narratives of the lovers. Each encounter, as it is replayed, forces the lovers to assess their various narrative strands and, if possible, incorporate their respective growth into their main 'story'. If the self-narratives have become incompatible, then the mutual narrative is unseated and love cannot continue. 'Liking What You See' ends on an unresolved note regarding this, hinting at the possibility of Tamera and Garrett's romance rekindling, but also that the couple have (unwittingly) found themselves in a state of power play. Prior to the calliagnosia removal episode, Tamera and Garrett had already enacted a fairly conventional love scene, which broke down as they moved away to different colleges and their mutual biography ceased to cohere with their personal narrative trajectories. Tamera explains that although she loved him and wanted them to stay together, 'he wanted to be free to date when he went to college' (p. 357). This clearly points to Garrett's level of agency over his self-construction and

the role he perceives his relationship plays in that project, an agency that Tamera then cruelly strips him of, which suggests that any future reconciliation between them would be doomed. In 'The Wedding Album', the simography provides quite a literal rendering of the encounter(s), but is shot through with the inherent threats of spliced subjectivity. I have talked about the redeployments of the encounter as 'savepoints', as anchored junctures wherein all prior information is preserved, and from which the couple then moves forward into their future. Marusek's sims, in the way Anne engages with them, invert the encounter in that their repeated exposure to the future they do not move into strengthens them and compromises the Anne-in-the-present through the demands for a deferred inclusion that they place upon her. Rather than briefly flagging up the relationship before proceeding to be reincorporated into it, the sims create a break in consciousness, a splice that cannot be unspliced and reconciled with the original, because it continues to exist in virtuality. The splicing of her self into sims, into virtual spaces where she cannot follow them, eventually spreads Anne so thinly that she cannot regroup, cannot recover. Moreover, rather than reminding him of their love, Benjamin's reviews of their many simographed encounters only serves to emphasise the distance between them, and eventually dissolves their relationship. Generations later, Anne and Benjamin's wedding sim is preserved in a museum of the future as an antique simulacrum annexed from reality, a curiosity visited by millions. This image parodies the wealth of romantic relationships preserved in photo archives all over sites such as Facebook – even if only in trace memory. 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', though the furthest away from the realisation of the virtual practices it points to – ten years before Haraway's cyborg and twenty before Hayles's posthuman – nonetheless manages to engage with the problematic of the encounter via its presciently spliced protagonist. Reading the revelatory ending, wherein Paul unmasks Delphi to reveal the monstrous P. Burke beneath, with hindsight we might align the scene Tiptree poses with the danger of the orchestrated online encounter. Of course, P. Burke cannot reincorporate her Delphi self; their narratives are diametrically opposed. Key to the undercurrent of virtuality running through Tiptree's novella is the shift from the world that is Delphi's – in which a relationship has begun to be constructed – and the world that P. Burke is chained to. As the relationship is nudged from hyperreality to stark reality, we can draw parallels between the dramatic encounter of Paul and P. Burke and the countless unveilings that have littered the media in recent years, as online relationships move into the real world.

This is the central dynamic at work here, not one explicitly made reference to in either Badiou or Haraway, but certainly addressed by Hayles as she works to relieve the Cartesian tension in her posthuman figure. In all three novellas, as in cyberpunk generally, the body haunts the narrative, the proverbial elephant in the room. Whether tackled directly or left hanging in the subtext, the body casts a shadow over cyberpunk and virtual discourses alike – even as its presence is denied – as the final site in which reconciliation of self takes place. To

conclude this chapter, I want to turn the focus to how Hayles's posthumanism furthers a particular line of criticism in contemporary theory, one which she attempts to readdress by a positivist, if not utopian, approach to virtual practices in current technoculture.

### 6.3. Existing as inscription

At first glance, a model of the posthuman that seeks to move a cyborgian engagement with high technology into the distributed cognisphere of virtuality seems to actively extend itself beyond the constraints of the body and realise the cyberpunk fantasy that continues to pervade the genre (and society) even today. As Hayles puts it in *How We Became Posthuman*:

physicality [can seem] a better state to be from than to inhabit. In a world despoiled by overdevelopment, overpopulation, and time-release environmental poisons, it is comforting to think that physical forms can recover their pristine purity by being reconstituted as informational patterns in a multidimensional computer space (p. 36).

Noting that 'embodiment has been systematically downplayed or erased in the cybernetic construction of the posthuman' (likely owing to its rich figurative history in science fiction), Hayles reintroduces the body through embodiment, effectively writing flesh back into the virtual picture (p. 4). Summarising her framework in 2002, she writes that 'the body [...] is an abstract concept that is always culturally constructed'.<sup>46</sup> This claim is neither original to Hayles nor one unique to discourses surrounding virtuality; the body had begun to recede from critical view decades earlier. I suggested earlier in this chapter that theories which pertain to the discursive construction of self find a fertile convergence in virtuality. Like Baudrillard's hyperreality and its inherent simulacra, these philosophies have come to be realised via our online culture. While the body was radically reconfigured by biotechnological practices and discourses in the post-Darwinian sciences, similar deconstructive frameworks concurrently buoyed continental philosophies of the embodied self from the mid-twentieth century onwards.

In a lecture given at UC Berkeley the year before his death, Michel Foucault traces the 'culture of the self' from antiquity, which led to his own treatment of the construction of subject and the body in modern discursive practices.<sup>47</sup> As Kevin McCarron saw the cyberpunk aesthetic turning on a 'Puritanical dismissal of the body', so Foucault sees a similar strain running through classical Greek and particularly early Christian philosophies of self. Using Plato's Socratic dialogues and the writings of Gregory of Nyssa (c. AD 335-395) to illustrate the roots of a framework that prefigured the Cartesian split by over a millennium, Foucault observes that 'the precept that one has to take care of one's self [...] was for the Greeks and the Romans one

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<sup>46</sup> 'Flesh and Metal', p. 297.

<sup>47</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Culture of the Self', Berkeley Language Centre, 12 April 1983 <[http://dpg.lib.berkeley.edu/webdb/mrc/search\\_vod.pl?avr=1](http://dpg.lib.berkeley.edu/webdb/mrc/search_vod.pl?avr=1)> [accessed 17 August 2013]

of the main principles of ethics, one of the main rules for their art of life, and this for almost a thousand years’:

In the *Apology*, written by Plato, we see Socrates presenting himself before his judges as the master of the concern of one’s self. He addresses passers-by and tells them: “You concern yourselves with your riches, with your reputation, with your honours, but you do not concern yourself with your virtue or with your soul” – and Socrates watches over his fellow citizens to make sure that they take care of themselves. He considers that this task has been [...] conferred on him by the god[s], and he will not abandon it except with his last breath. Eight centuries later, the same notion of concern with one’s self [...] appears with a role equally very important in Christian author Gregory of Nyssa [...] by this time, Gregory of Nyssa means the movement by which one renounces marriage, detaches one’s self from the flesh, and by which, thanks to a virginity of heart and body, one recovers the immortality of which one has been deprived.<sup>48</sup>

In Socrates, we see a literal disavowal of the body in favour of a commitment, in his bodily sacrifice, to the mind: ‘Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy’.<sup>49</sup> Fundamental to the Christian ‘technologies’ of the body, as Foucault elicits from Gregory of Nyssa, ‘renouncing one’s self was a way of taking care of oneself’.<sup>50</sup> The division of the body and the soul or mind, as we have seen, is framed by love in writings since Plato. Yet it is telling here, that by the earliest Christian elaborations on Greek thought, a renunciation of the body, and the bodily as expressed through marriage, is held as conducive to self-knowledge and self-preservation. Between Plato and Gregory, Foucault points to several developments in the Epicurean, Cynic and Stoic schools that saw a convergence of self and body around a philosophy that admitted the medical sciences – ‘the cultivation of the self as a curative and therapeutic function’ – which would later prove instrumental to his own theories on the discursively constructed subject.<sup>51</sup> This juncture between philosophy and science resurfaces in the early modern period in Descartes, whose *The Description of The Human Body* (1647) more firmly supplemented the Greco-Roman principle of knowing one’s self with the role of medical knowledges. Further consolidating this idea, in his earlier *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), was his view that:

the whole of philosophy is like a tree. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the branches emerging from the trunk are all the other sciences, which may be reduced to three principal ones, namely medicine, mechanics and morals. By ‘morals’ I understand the highest and most perfect moral system,

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<sup>48</sup> ‘The Culture of the Self’.

<sup>49</sup> Plato, ‘Apology’ (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2011), p 20. Kindle ebook.

<sup>50</sup> ‘The Culture of the Self’.

<sup>51</sup> ‘The Culture of the Self’.

which presupposes a complete knowledge of the other sciences and is the ultimate level of wisdom.<sup>52</sup>

After Descartes, as the secular study of science and the self ensued, discourses of knowledge became practices and around these were established the institutions that would become the abstract systems Giddens sees as constitutive of contemporary culture.

In Foucault's early works, the subject and its body are culturally refigured and produced at the intersection of institutional discourses and practices. In *Madness and Civilisation* (1961; 1964) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) he developed the role of psychiatric and clinical discourses as the producers of the body through their 'medical gaze'; while in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) his focus turned to the disciplined subject emerging from the power structures of prisons and schools; and in his three-volume *History of Sexuality* (1976; 1984) he traced changing sexual politics from the seventeenth century onwards that necessarily tied identity to the sexualised body.<sup>53</sup> He observes that 'the classical age discovered the body as object and target of power', and that bodies were consequently rendered 'docile' and acquiescent to the institutional interventions made upon them:

The great book of Man-the-Machine was written simultaneously on two registers: the anatomico-metaphysical register, of which Descartes wrote the first pages and which the physicians and the philosophers continued, and the technico-political register, which was constituted by a whole set of regulations and by empirical and calculated methods relating to the army, the school, and the hospital, for controlling or correcting the operations of the body. These two registers are quite distinct [...] and yet there are points of overlap from one to the other. La Mettrie's *L'Homme-machine* is both a materialist reduction of the soul and a general theory of *dressage*, at the centre of which reigns the notion of 'docility', which joins the analysable body to the manipulable body. A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed, and improved.<sup>54</sup>

Foucault's vision of modern society is one in which bodies are lashed down at every point by abstract systems imposed on them, systems that reconfigure them on their own terms before bringing them to the forefront of understanding. Brought forth through discourse, the subject sees his own body re-presented and revealed to him through systems of knowledge and relations of power, and thus his sense of self is one shown to be discursively constructed. Forced into docility by institutional regimes, as well as their encompassing political contexts, the self has been given an 'out' of sorts by theories and fantasies of the Cartesian split which circumvent the confines of bodily oppression by emphasising a way in which the mind can provide a site for resistance. Such a view of the body forges strong links with Haraway's cyborgian figure, which will be returned to in the final chapter, but for now I want to follow the line of enquiry initiated

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<sup>52</sup> René Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* (Berlin: Springer, 1984), p. xxiv.

<sup>53</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 136.

by Foucault that leads through subsequent theory to find quite a literal sense of realisation in the cyberpunk fantasy of bodily denial. For, as Foucault himself made clear: ‘we have to promote new kinds of subjectivity through refusal of this kind of [state-administered] individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries’.<sup>55</sup>

Following Foucault, the subject that arose from ‘discourses of life, labour and language [...] structured into disciplines’ continues to feature heavily throughout critical schools in the late twentieth century, and was most radically taken up in gender studies by Judith Butler.<sup>56</sup> Introducing the concept of performative gender to the regulative discourses governing the body and the self, Butler relieves what she perceives as a paradoxical anomaly that goes untreated in Foucault:

The body is a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves, a nodal point or nexus for relations of juridical and productive power. And, yet, to speak in this way invariably suggests that there is a body that is in some sense there, pre-given, existentially available to become the site of its own ostensible construction.<sup>57</sup>

In order to ease this tension, Butler employs performative language acts to qualify the construction of identity on the part of the subject whose agency is compromised (at best), or stripped away (at worst), in a scenario which determines its constitution through discursive formations externally given. Working from Foucault, but writing back to the existentialist processes of self-making, in particular those of Simone de Beauvoir – ‘one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one’ – Butler presents the case of agential self-construction through a discursivity which is wholly reliant on language as a performative practice.<sup>58</sup> That is, while external sources, abstract systems and social institutions interpenetrate our sense of self through providing normative discourses, we are able to adhere to or subvert these ‘givens’ by creating ourselves through our own subjective discourses. Butler draws the conclusion that though ‘the foundationalist reasoning of identity politics tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken’, performativity necessarily points to the notion that ‘there need not be a “doer behind the deed”, but that the “doer” is variably constructed in and through the deed’.<sup>59</sup> Giddens independently reaches similar conclusions in relation to his self-project when he rejects the ‘I’ as an ‘active, primitive will of the individual’ that precedes conscious engagement with identity

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<sup>55</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Subject and Power’, in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 216.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Rabinow, ‘Introduction’, in *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> Judith Butler, ‘Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscriptions’, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 86.11 (1989), 601-607 (p. 601).

<sup>58</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), p. 273.

<sup>59</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 194-195

construction, and instead designates as a 'condition for the emergence of self-awareness', one which operates within a discursive framework to bring forth the subject.<sup>60</sup> Butler's performativity constitutes a practice of resistance, in that it enables subjects to create themselves in spite of cultural hegemonic norms, or even the 'norms' self-imposed by, for instance, the sexed body they 'inhabit'. Performative identity allows the embodied self to fluctuate beyond its regulatory body-story, and implicit in Butler, and those theorists who have adopted her theory for their own ends, is a sense of the embodied self produced by and through socio-discursive practices and contingent on performative language acts, overstepping the body in terms of what constitutes contemporary identity. The self is able to detach from the body, if the body can even be said to exist.

Subversive, and evidently intended as a potent image of resistance to normative power discourses impacting on agential self-construction, Butler's performative subject finds a particular resonance with the virtual posthuman as prefigured by the cyberpunk. While, in 1990, her emphasis on the dynamic production of self through discursive performance hinged on a philosophical reconfiguration of the body as social construction, by the time virtual practices had overlaid our realities in the twenty-first century, such a conception of self, body and identity required much less of an intellectual stretch. Lise Nelson has criticised Butler for initiating the grounds for an overhaul of subjectivity – one which Foucault called for and Butler's performativity clearly leans towards – but failing to follow through:

while Butler's approach to identity provides critical insights into how discourses function to constitute 'the subject', she deconstructs agency without presenting a constructive alternative to humanist versions of this concept. Her focused drive to annihilate the Enlightenment's masterful, autonomous subject overrides any commitment to retheorising subjectivity and agency in post-Enlightenment, post-structural terms. Paradoxically, this omission allows the masterful subject to haunt her work.<sup>61</sup>

In Hayles's posthuman subject, we are finally presented with this 'constructive alternative' that Nelson deems the Butlerian framework to be so glaringly lacking. Cyberspace not only necessitates the discursive construction of self, as it is absolutely dependent on the individual's ability to self-present through narrative, but it also actively encourages an alternative mode of being which challenges liberal humanist conceptions of selfhood. Such traditional views of the autonomous subject, as we have seen, rely on a sense of a unified self clearly demarcated from its environment (one which, ideally, it can then exert control over) by its epidermal surfaces. In addition, the body is, as the seat of consciousness, a second site to be dominated. However, this mastery, as Foucault identifies, is for the majority more properly exerted by social and

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<sup>60</sup> Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>61</sup> Lise Nelson, 'Bodies (and Spaces) do Matter: The Limits of Performativity', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 6.4 (1999), 331-353 (p. 332).



institutional discourses of power. Butler presents a means of resistance in which the subject takes responsibility for its self-construction via the performativity of identity, but essentially writes the body out of the picture in the process. While the countercultural cyberpunk of science fiction might see opportunity in Butler's framework to finally escape the meat and instead construct the body when and if appropriate in virtuality, Hayles worries over the costs of living purely as inscription. Writing in *How We Became Posthuman* that 'the computational universe becomes dangerous when it goes from being a useful heuristic to an ideology that privileges information over everything else', yet refusing to settle for the tired duality of the mind-body split ('a social construction that obscures the holistic nature of human experience'), she instead uses embodiment to treat the tension (p. 244). Cybernetics observed the human, its environment, and its technologies as atomically interrelated. Working from these discourses and taking heed from Foucault and Butler, Hayles argues that such theories 'should be taken as evidence not that the body has disappeared but that a certain kind of subjectivity has emerged, one constituted by the crossing of the materiality of informatics with the immateriality of information' (p. 193). In order to avoid another binary arising here, Hayles inserts embodiment between the body and the mind which then functions, like Koestler's holon, as a two-way mirror through which the subjective self is channelled. At either end, it can pass out into reality and virtuality, circulate easily throughout both, and work reflexively with all aspects of its environment(s).



At first glance, Hayles's virtual posthuman, which issues from cybernetics and eases Cartesian, Foucauldian and Butlerian tensions alike, seems like the perfect model of subjectivity with which to move forward in postmodernity. How can we measure its success? By combining it with those narratives wherein emergent virtual subjects are represented: cyberpunk texts, and the actual online practices (themselves a new kind of textual discipline) that occur in our daily lives. And, as we have seen, an enormous part of those daily lives, of our subjective existence and our resistance to a dehumanising technoculture, is our loving relationships. Neither Butler nor Hayles turn their subjects upon the crucial scene of the Two. Butler's performativity, like Foucault's discursive bodies, is wholly bound up with power discourses. Hayles's posthuman, though a more than adequate solution to the omissions Nelson identifies in Butler's work, speaks more to self-construction and new modes of autonomy in an era where socio-discursive practices are largely characterised by technocultural engagement. Love is outside both of these, not concerned with power relationships and unable to be understood through them, as we have seen with the redefinition of a self/Other paradigm. The following chapter will analyse the final three texts of the thesis, stepping out of science fiction proper and into examples of realist cinema nonetheless indebted to the configurations of selves and space as communicated by cyberpunk, and examine how love in virtuality fares when subjectivities are spliced and existence is inscription.

## Chapter Seven

### Are You Still There?

People never touched each other; the custom had become obsolete, owing to the Machine.

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E. M. Forster, 'The Machine Stops' (1909)

Over one hundred years ago, E. M. Forster's chilling tale imagined a world gone underground, to a hive of interconnected rooms – 'hexagonal in shape, like the cell of a bee' – housing one person apiece, supported and maintained by the Machine:

There were buttons and switches everywhere – buttons to call for food, for music, for clothing. There was the hot-bath button, by pressure of which a basin of (imitation) marble rose out of the floor, filled to the brim with a warm deodorised liquid. There was the cold-bath button. There was the button that produced literature. And there were of course the buttons by which [Vashti] communicated with her friends. The room, though it contained nothing, was in touch with all that she cared for in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Like Tiptree's 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', Forster's story gains much from retrospect; it speaks louder today as we inevitably read into the ubiquitous Machine our modern technologies and our levels of engagement with them. A Modernist precursor to *The Matrix*, 'The Machine Stops' is full of prescient details that have found their place in the information society – instant messaging, video calling and virtual gatherings – but furthermore, the story anticipates the contemporary debate surrounding the tension between reality and virtuality and on- and offline practices, figured in the story as embodied and intuitive experience. In a society where face-to-face interaction and human contact have fallen out of fashion, travel is deemed pointless, and the machine is revered as a quasi-religious source of life. The body persists as an afterthought, static and tended to the bare minimum, while the mind roams through the machine and ideas reign – 'in each room there sat a human being, eating, or sleeping, or producing ideas'.<sup>2</sup> Working from their armchairs, in front of screens through which they pursue knowledge and connect, the humans Forster depicts are not merely the ancestors of Gibson's cowboys or Tiptree's plugged in girl – they are ours. 'The Machine Stops' foreshadows such interpretative visions of contemporary technoculture as those made by Paul Virilio, whose critique of cybersex echoes Forster's imagery:

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<sup>1</sup> E. M. Forster, 'The Machine Stops', in *The Machine Stops* (Paris: Feedbooks, 2012), pp. 3-6.

<sup>2</sup> Forster, p. 10.

what's on its way is the planet man, the self-sufficient man who, with the help of technology, no longer needs to reach out to others because others come to him. With cybersexuality, he doesn't need to make love at his partner's house, love comes to him instantly, like a fax or a message on the electronic highway. The future lies in cosmic solitude. I picture a weightless individual in a little ergonomic armchair, suspended outside a space capsule, with the earth below and the interstellar void above. A man with his own gravity, who no longer needs a relationship to society, to those around him, and least of all to a family.<sup>3</sup>

One cannot read 'The Machine Stops' in the present day and fail to insert the Internet in place of the Machine. Such responses are indebted to the global anticipation of the Y2K panic: the fear that a failure in informatic infrastructures could lead to the total meltdown of society. Though the millennium clocked over without inducing Armageddon, we did not come through the *fin de siècle* unscathed; the level of anxiety surrounding the Y2K bug only proved how delicate are the virtual foundations upon which our daily reality is built, and how deeply entrenched we are with communications technologies. The Y2K panic is symptomatic, on the most macro-level, of how we have been and continue to be disciplined not only as new subjects, but as new societies. More than ever before, we are living in the interstices between reality and virtuality, and our actions in both spaces speak equal volumes. The emergent phenomenon of cybersexuality can also be traced back to predictions in science fiction – once again credited to William Gibson – the rise of which threaten to effect critical shifts in our understanding and pursuit of romantic relationships.<sup>4</sup> While the vast majority of us may not yet be regularly engaging in cybersexual encounters, we are, on the other hand, already embracing the enveloping virtualities that will encourage and nurture enhanced experiences of cybersexuality. Our induction into the virtual world comes today, not from our interpolation into machinic systems at the coded level and via specific knowledges, but through the less specialised and more 'innocent' modern rituals inherent to social media and online networking.

Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia point to a false dichotomy inherent in theories analysing the distinctions and relations between on- and offline culture, observing from their own research that: 'the Net is only one of many ways in which the *same* people may interact. It is not a separate reality'.<sup>5</sup> There can be little doubt that the majority of Internet users today experience some level of this unification, whereby the virtual world is an extension of the real world, featuring many of the same people and maintaining and mirroring their shared social lives. Social media websites like Facebook work from the premise of offering users an online

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<sup>3</sup> Paul Virilio and Jérôme Sans, 'The Game of Love and Chance: A Discussion with Paul Virilio', *Watson Institute Dialogues* (1999) <<http://www.watsoninstitute.org/infopeace/vy2k/sans.cfm>> [accessed 19 August 2013] (para. 10 of 27)

<sup>4</sup> Jayne M. Blanchard, 'Sci-Fi Author Gibson is 'Cyber'-Crowd's Guru', *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, 12 September 1993 <<http://www.twincities.com/archives>> [accessed 29 July 2013] (para. 4 of 8)

<sup>5</sup> Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia, 'Net Surfers Don't Ride Alone: Virtual Communities as Communities', in *Communities and Cyberspace*, ed. by Peter Kollock and Marc Smith (New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 170.

presence, or representation of their offline selves. Facebook itself was originally marketed between relatively closed scholarly social circles, and so, in the site's early days, users were for the most part either maintaining real-world friendships in a digital space or reconnecting with formerly known contacts from their academic pasts. Since 2006, however, the site's accessibility was extended from academic networks to the global public. The 'face' in Facebook, a nod to the American yearbook tradition, points to the level of disclosure between users. Unlike other online communities, where anonymity has provided the draw, Facebook encourages users to identify themselves and others through the uploading of photographs and an in-programme 'tagging' feature. Other aspects of the site, such as events publicity and social calendars, perpetuate an idealised mode of conduct that mirrors, and arguably enhances, our social practices offline. In 2012, a spokesperson for the company upheld that 'authentic identity is important to the Facebook experience, and our goal is that every account on Facebook should represent a real person'.<sup>6</sup> Such evidence, backed by Facebook company ethos, would seem to be in support of Wellman and Gulia's argument that the perceived tensions between reality and virtuality are misleading. While I would agree with their statement that the Internet is not a separate reality, and is increasingly becoming less so as more users gain access, I think that the fact they frame this argument through a human need for community ignores some of the more serious interventions on self and selfhood that social media and virtuality enact. To understand the relationship between our on- and offline communities as seamless and co-extensive is wholly utopian in ways that simply do not bear out in practice. To suggest that we employ communications technologies as mere prostheses to reinforce our offline relationships – that 'telephone contact sustains ties as much as face-to-face get-togethers' – is to overlook the fact that these relationships are significantly altered through technological maintenance. Such a view also diverts attention away from the ways in which individuals are shaped when they employ these technologies to support their self-expression.<sup>7</sup> Even sites such as Facebook, which rely on the ideal that the projection of self in each profile neatly refers back accurately and authentically to the embodied user, nonetheless function within a space that is contingent on a consciously mediated presentation of self. While the creators of the site take great measures to lessen the distance between the referent and the reference, with today's level of techno-fluency there are still myriad opportunities on the site for misrepresentation, and Facebook suffers from over 80 million fake profiles. Also, while Facebook is the most popular site of its kind, there are still an overwhelming amount of anonymous, text-based chat rooms and message boards, multi-user domains (MUDs) and online role-playing games (MMORPGs), which points to the Internet as still very much a place for experimental self-construction and self-presentation, as well as an environment through which individuals gain a sense of community.

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<sup>6</sup> Thompson, (para. 2 of 14).

<sup>7</sup> Wellman and Gulia, p. 182.

One must take into account the fact that people often reach out to and participate in virtual communities for a range of reasons, some of which may not necessarily reflect offline needs and circumstances, or may correspond to them, but in terms of what is lacking in reality. Online communities can fill a void in participants' offline lives, linking users with likeminded groups they cannot find in their particular offline localities, or else are not ready to commit to in the real world. In addition, the fact that it takes a certain level of technological prowess and discursive ability to navigate these spaces may also produce a model of user more adept to the pursuit of virtual community than to offline social interaction, creating a further imbalance that troubles Wellman and Gulia's utopian view of the co-extensive community. As Kevin Robbins sees it, proponents of virtuality substitute a lack of mastery in the real world for mastery in online environments and the behaviours therein – 'mastery is achieved at the cost of losing the world'.<sup>8</sup> We therefore have to bear in mind the reasons which motivate users to come to virtual spaces and exercise their constructions of self within these spaces. Charles Cheung, in a study of personal homepages, observes the 'emancipatory potential' of the Internet which precisely addresses the plight of individuals in offline social situations. He writes:

The personal homepage is particularly valuable for those with difficulty presenting themselves in face-to-face interaction, such as introverts with weak self-presentational skills, and people with any kind of visible or invisible disability such as amputees, the visually impaired, or the hearing impaired.<sup>9</sup>

The pursuit of community in virtuality, then, sheds light on three interrelated strands of the same story of connection. The first is that of the desire to forge and maintain meaningful connections in a networked world, a desire that is facilitated by virtual communications technologies. The second communicates a sense of lack in reality that can be alleviated or treated by participation in virtual communities. Finally, the very nature of these online environments, their levels of disclosure and commitment, addresses the needs of the contemporary subject for opportunities to practice self-construction and self-presentation in relatively safe environments which minimises the impact of such practices on an actualised, 'final' sense of self or real-world identity. This last point serves as a reminder that, for all their imitation of real-world communities, virtual social practices can be non-committal and easily abandoned, and therefore speak to a prioritising of individual self-interest over the interests of the collective. Furthermore, the pursuit of community within both on- and offline environments is not synonymous with the pursuit of love. The dichotomy of reality versus virtuality resurfaces quite significantly within romantic relationships, a truth which is clearly represented in the way

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<sup>8</sup> Kevin Robbins, 'Against Virtual Community: For a Politics of Distance', in *The Cybercultures Reader*, p. 231.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Cheung, 'Identity Construction and Self-Presentation on Personal Homepages: Emancipatory Potentials and Reality Constraints', in *The Cybercultures Reader*, p. 276.

that lovers try to take the online preludes to their subsequently embodied relationships and either transpose them upon the primary encounter, or have them stand in for it completely.

To conclude the textual analysis thread of the thesis, this chapter will now turn its focus to three poignant examples of twenty-first-century filmmaking, none of which is inherently science-fictional, but all of which engage with and draw from familiar tropes and character constructs from the cyberpunk mode. These films, and particularly the sketches of selves they communicate, show how the virtual posthuman has evolved from the recesses of science fictional representation to walk alongside us in our real-world practices. In short, as Hayles has claimed, we have become posthuman. In recent film, mirroring the developments of contemporary critical theory, the binary opposition held so dear to cyberpunk – reality versus virtuality – has been treated and to an extent relieved, largely due to the new, co-extensive nature of these domains our domestication of virtual technologies has engendered. However, as these texts and the five relationships depicted in them will show, while reality is now more overlaid with virtuality, rather than working in opposition to it, further conflicts arise between the construction of self and the construction of love. In the age of information, the harder we work to augment our selves virtually, the more our intersubjective scenes are diminished as a result.

### **7.1. I'm not sixteen years old, I'm not from Arkansas, and I'm not a girl – *The Parlor* (2010)**

Geoffrey Haley's short film *The Parlor* (2001) issues from a decade of anxiety regarding online identity, and it outlines the possibilities and the dangers of virtual presences and the codes of conduct they create. His eleven-minute vignette depicts an imagined 'reality' of the synchronous text-based communication experienced in online chat rooms, with the conversation between logged-in users enacted and embodied by persons in actual space.<sup>10</sup> The film begins with the pretext of strangers making attempts at conversation in a blandly decorated waiting room. Wearing labels with their 'names' written on them, the characters try to instigate discussion or break into the conversation with probing questions ("So, where's everybody from?"), ironic non-sequiturs ("I'm hungry! Anyone got change for a twenty?!"), cultural provocations ("N\*SYNC rules!") and insults ("Anyone who likes N\*SYNC is a fag!").<sup>11</sup> As conversation moves around the room, the viewer begins to notice small discrepancies: a middle-aged man puts his age at fifteen, a barely adolescent child claims to be twenty, and another older

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<sup>10</sup> *The Parlor* is truly an example of a film's success lying in its audience. Unsurprisingly, its main mode of circulation has been Internet video sites such as YouTube. It won three awards in its field: The Audience Award at the AFI Fest 2002; the Audience Award at the San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival 2002; and a Short Filmmaking Award – Honourable Mention at the Sundance Film Festival 2002.

<sup>11</sup> *The Parlor*, dir. Geoffrey Haley (Bandshell Entertainment/Muse Productions, 2001).

man wears a name tag that reads 'Beth'. Other characters try to corner each other into more private, two-way communication that is invariably sexually-motivated, as with Jerry and Mandybear:

JERRY (*A professionally-dressed man of around forty*) So, what do you do for fun?  
MANDYBEAR (*A girl of around fourteen*) Umm. Shop. Movies. Friends. Hang out with my boyfriend.  
JERRY Rock on. (*Pause*) Your boyfriend pretty cool?  
MANDYBEAR He's ok.  
JERRY What's his name?  
MANDYBEAR Derek.  
JERRY Really? (*Trying to engage her*) My *uncle's* name is Derek!  
MANDYBEAR (*Unimpressed*) Kick ass.  
JERRY So. You guys have sex?  
MANDYBEAR (*With some derision*) Yeah –  
JERRY (*Pause*) You ever do it – (*Another pause*) Doggy-style?<sup>12</sup>

The uncomfortable viewing only intensifies as a young man enters the room, and is greeted by another of the same age, wearing a label which reads 'Slappy Sue' and is visibly pleased at his arrival – “Hey Skater! Where were you last night?” – to which Skater replies: “I'm sorry, my parents grounded me and made me do all these bogus chores!”<sup>13</sup> Given that Skater is definitely an adult, the sense of the surreal is furthered. The two men begin to engage in a descriptively sexual exchange, before Slappy Sue interrupts Skater to make a confession:

SLAPPY SUE Oh God, I have to stop for a second.  
SKATER Why?  
SLAPPY SUE Skater, how long have we known each other now?  
SKATER I don't know. Six months, maybe.  
SLAPPY SUE I think you're one of the most amazing people I've ever met. I feel so close to you, like I could tell you anything. Which is why I have to clear the air about something.  
SKATER What are you talking about?  
SLAPPY SUE I'm not sixteen years old. I'm twenty-nine.  
SKATER Well, actually that's a relief, because I'm not fifteen. I'm thirty.  
SLAPPY SUE I'm not from Arkansas...  
SKATER You're not...  
SLAPPY SUE And I'm not a girl.  
SKATER What?<sup>14</sup>

Skater is aghast, but Slappy Sue persists:

My real name is Floyd. I'm a software engineer in Spokane, Washington. I'm still in the closet [...] Skater, you don't understand my situation. I live with this big time homophobe roommate, and I've got very close-minded co-workers. It's not like I could just explore my sexuality out in the open. And frankly, I

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<sup>12</sup> *The Parlor.*

<sup>13</sup> *The Parlor.*

<sup>14</sup> *The Parlor.*

didn't think I wanted to. Until I met you. We've shared parts of ourselves so real, so beautiful. I mean, how often in this world do you make a real connection with someone? Well, that's what we have, Skater, you can't deny it. And that's why I think I might be in love with you.<sup>15</sup>

The scene cuts to Brandon ('Skater') sitting in front of his computer, where we see the entirety of the film's dialogue as a series of multi-coloured messages on his screen. Stunned, he stands, pulling up his trousers and ignoring the sound of incoming messages from Slappy Sue ("Hey? Are you still there?"), before walking slowly down the corridor to the door of his roommate.<sup>16</sup> Of course, the roommate is Floyd, and Brandon is the 'big time homophobe'. They stare at each other in horror as the reality of their situation hits, and the credits roll.

*The Parlor* is short, humorous, and hard-hitting, managing to capture the tension and the discrepancies between reality and virtuality succinctly but evocatively. Juxtaposing the depth of intimacy achieved through conversation with the sparseness of the text-based chat room, the film realises and reifies the processes of discursive self-construction in online environments and the risks such constructions face. As noted in the previous chapter, such recent theories as those of Foucault and Butler concerning the construction and presentation of self through discursive and performative practices, take on new weight and tangibility when read through the frame of virtuality. In the early days of widespread public access to the Internet, before the space was fleshed out with imaging and video technologies (such as Skype), communication was entirely text-based, either synchronous (instant messaging, real-time chat rooms) or asynchronous (email, forum boards). The rise of text-based communication has impacted on a wide range of social behaviours and practices, permeating even the written language itself, which has evolved to meet demands.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the popularity of text-based communication has hardly been affected by the introduction of more sophisticated technologies (such as video-chat, with which most modern computers and social media applications are now embedded by default); rather, the varying modes have more sharply defined themselves as particular means to particular ends. Whereas some social networking sites strive towards transparency, and several video conferencing mediums are employed to underpin and enhance offline personal and professional relations, text-based communication platforms nonetheless persist in their attraction for users.

Various scholars of cyberculture and online relationships have pointed to the levels of disclosure as key to this attraction: Aaron Ben Ze'ev in particular notes the seemingly contradictory features of online romantic relationships commonly identified by users:

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<sup>15</sup> *The Parlor*.

<sup>16</sup> *The Parlor*.

<sup>17</sup> Naomi S. Baron, 'Language of the Internet', in *The Stanford Handbook for Language Engineers* (Stanford: CSLI Publications 2003), 59-127; Guy Merchant, 'Teenagers in Cyberspace: An Investigation of Language Use and Language Change in Internet Chatrooms', *Journal of Research in Reading*, 24.3 (2001), 293-306.



distance/immediacy; lean/rich communication; anonymity/self-disclosure; sincerity/deception; continuity/discontinuity; marginal physical investment/considerable mental investment.<sup>18</sup> Linking all of these features is an implied sense of control: even in synchronous chat modes, users have time to consciously construct their responses, considerably more time than is available in face-to-face, embodied communication. Of course, what Viviane Serfaty refers to as ‘online embodied writing’ performs a further ironic intervention on the user, who, temporarily disembodied from his or her corporeal self and existing as mind within the machine, reconstructs a second identity – often inhabiting a second ‘body’ – in order to navigate the intimate spaces of anonymous chat rooms.<sup>19</sup> As conveyed by Haley in *The Parlor*, the ‘bodies’ (which clearly do not refer back to the identities of their owners) are constantly in play within conversation:

MANDYBEAR (to FREAKER) Do you have a big cock? [...]  
BAMBI (to JOEY) Don't cry, Joey. You wanna hug? [...]  
JERRY (to MANDYBEAR) You ever get all oily... and... slippery... and...  
just roll around? [...]  
SKATER (to SLAPPY SUE) I am rubbing my hands all over your body.<sup>20</sup>

If, as Colin Milburn observes, posthumanism is informed by the critical theories that ‘discover[ed] the so-called human subject to be nothing but the constructed product of sociodiscursive forces’, then we may see the virtual posthuman as that which has disappeared into the bowels of the Internet, only to resurface, re-embodied, in the online textual presentation of self.<sup>21</sup> In this sense, might we not consider online practices, with their emphasis on embodied writing, as simply a modern continuation of Giddens’s reflexive project of the self? Self-presentation online is, after all, a very literal exercise in character-building, as Monica Whitty and Adrian Carr have commended the Internet for enabling. Interrogating the potential for virtual environments to function as spaces ‘for psychological growth and liberation’, Whitty and Carr draw from their own studies of text-based romantic relationships a tentative conclusion that ‘cyberspace can be a psychologically healthy experience’.<sup>22</sup> Tempering their claim, however, is the same issue implicit in Ze’ev’s study: that these exercises in self-identity and self-narrative must be carried out with a measure of self-control. John Suler outlines the clinician’s approach to the rehabilitation of patients treated for Internet addiction, pathologically linked to the loss of self-control, writing that:

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<sup>18</sup> Ben Ze’ev, p. 27.

<sup>19</sup> Viviane Serfaty, *The Mirror and the Veil: An Overview of American Online Diaries and Blogs* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> *The Parlor*.

<sup>21</sup> Colin Milburn, ‘Beyond Posthuman’, *Twentieth-Century Literature*, 55.4 (2009), 618-625 (p. 618).

<sup>22</sup> Monica Whitty and Adrian Carr, *Cyberspace Romance: The Psychology of Online Relationships* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 65, 122.

An important dimension of what I call the integration principle is the process of bringing together one's online lifestyle with one's in-person lifestyle. Encourage clients to discuss and translate their face-to-face behaviours within the text relationship. Encourage them to take whatever new, productive behaviours they are learning via text and apply them to their in-person lifestyle. Encourage them to talk to trusted friends and family members about their online text relationships, including their therapy.<sup>23</sup>

Here, Suler is essentially prescribing a move to bring the online behaviours in-line with those engaged in the 'real' world, to prevent confusion and crisis of self. As Giddens sees self-identity as a coherent narrative maintained through life's trajectory, so the majority of self-construction and self-expression online takes place through narratives, though these narratives may be infinitely plural and therefore not easily reintegrated with the offline self, effectively leading to identity crisis. In addition, returning to the romantic sphere, Dennis Waskul and Phillip Vannini surmise that the successful enacting of any intimate encounter in text-based communications environments necessitates a wilful engagement with the construction of narrative: 'text cybersex [...] a form of co-authored interactive erotica [...] hinges on extensive sexual and communicative literacy'.<sup>24</sup> Ze'ev's research develops along similar lines: he reports that participants often re-enacted aspects of their cyberrelationships in keeping with courtship demeanour offline, supporting his notion that 'the illusory nature of cyberspace does not diminish the need to resort to the same illusory methods used in offline circumstances'.<sup>25</sup> For the most part, however, as Waskul and Vannini conclude, 'text cybersex relationships are often cloaked, temporary, and opportunistic', and in this sense speak to individual self-interest and gratification, rather than to any serious attempt to construct a meaningful romantic relationship.<sup>26</sup>

Our contemporary psychological literature, our world media, and our entertainment sources abound with the tragi-comic anecdotes arising from misrepresentation online, but underpinning these stories is a definite current carrying our self-trajectories through the information age. Haley's film was one of the first to so succinctly communicate these anxieties; *The Parlor* is a product of a specific period of our Internet history, as it turns on the reality/virtuality dialectic that had not yet been relieved by the widening social engagement with online practices that has since come to characterise twenty-first-century technoculture. In its blunt depiction of the two men who have been so intimate and yet remain so far apart, *The*

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<sup>23</sup> John Suler, 'The Psychology of Text Relationships', in *Online Counselling: A Manual for Mental Health Professionals*, ed. by Ron Kraus, George Stricker and Cedric Speyer (London: Elsevier, 2011), p. 50.

<sup>24</sup> Dennis D. Waskul and Phillip Vannini, 'Ludic and Ludic(rous) Relationships: Sex, Play, and the Internet', in *Remote Relationships in a Small World*, ed. by Samantha Holland (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), p. 247.

<sup>25</sup> Ze'ev, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Waskul and Vannini, p. 247.

*Parlor* is one of the first pieces of cinema to capture the jarring nature of on- and offline selves, and the potential for crisis the collision of their narratives can produce.

## **7.2. Have you ever met one of your internet girlfriends? – *LOL* (2006)**

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the emergent ‘mumblecore’ movement provided independent filmmakers with the perfect frame to depict the pervasiveness of modern communications technologies and their impact on communication itself. As a new mode of realist cinema, mumblecore has allowed directors to dispense with the trappings of high-budget production values in order to bare the stark hearts of their subjects. The genre was dubbed mumblecore by Eric Masunaga, a sound engineer on several early projects in the movement, referring to the characteristic poor sound quality (and minimalist filmmaking techniques in general) combined with an emphasis on natural and often improvised dialogue. In an article in 2009, Lynn Hirschberg wrote that ‘although the characters in these films don’t actually mumble, they are, mostly, in a state of in-between-ness. Emotions are keenly felt but, as in life, not always clearly enunciated’.<sup>27</sup> To date, the movement has produced several incisive portrayals of relationships enacted and maintained within digitally mediated spaces – *Kissing on the Mouth* (dir. Joe Swanberg, 2004); *Four Eyed Monsters* (dir. Susan Buice and Arin Crumley, 2005); *Uncle Kent* (dir. Swanberg, 2011) – but even where technology is not the main focus, mumblecore remains, at heart, a social critique of the potential for and limits to communication in modern relationships. Hirschberg calls the social milieu depicted by mumblecore films ‘a limbo world’, littered with ‘stories of ill-timed love affairs, small misunderstandings between friends, missed cues and minor victories’, which sketch a holistic portrait of a socially and romantically dislocated youth.<sup>28</sup> Across examples of the genre, and particularly in Swanberg’s films, youth is portrayed as the social group with all the tools at hand to form resilient and well-connected communities, but nonetheless failing in their attempts to do so. Mumblecore directors seize an opportunity to juxtapose the themes their narratives treat with the aforementioned stylistic techniques they have very deliberately selected to further foreground the social tensions inherent not only in their plots, but also in the wider contemporary society they see their films as authentically representing. Aymar Jean Christian observes that Swanberg’s *LOL* (2006) ‘represents aesthetic hopes about realism, intimacy, and connection (or empathy) in an environment persistently hostile to such aspirations’; but more than this, the constant meta-textual reminders of this self-referential mode of storytelling perform a paradoxical

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<sup>27</sup> Lynn Hirschberg, ‘Core Values’, *New York Times Style Magazine*, 6 December 2009 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/06/t-magazine/culture/06talk-mumblecore.html?ref=lynnhirschberg>> [accessed 3 June 2013] (para. 4 of 9)

<sup>28</sup> Hirschberg, (para. 4 of 9)

impossibility.<sup>29</sup> Mumblecore films, with their insistence on locating the self and selves within the social sphere – and particularly selves articulated in love – consciously obstruct that articulation quite literally in terms of sound and dialogue, and in doing so uncover the thematic tension informing the narratives themselves.

*LOL* sketches the dwindling courses of three relationships suffering the impact of the technological. The first, that of Tim and Ada, is perhaps the most recognisable in its portrayal of two lovers growing gradually apart. Their conversation is stilted and forced; neither can seem to meet the other's gaze or wavelength, and they have a distinct lack of common interests. This is a standard formula for the doomed relationship, but while just about anything could constitute the driving wedge between them, in this case it is Tim's incessant use of technology. This fracture is returned to several times, and at one stage Tim even laughs it off in (telephone) conversation with a friend, as he watches his girlfriend flirting with another man: "Ada's like, thirty feet away talking to this dude [...] She's just doing it to piss me off. I guess if I keep pushing it she'll go home with him tonight".<sup>30</sup> Ada tries to address Tim's attitude toward her, as her own relationship with the technologies that surround her is far more relaxed and domestic; she has not, as David Hudson puts it 'allowed love and sex to tumble precariously low in [her] hierarchy of needs', as Tim has.<sup>31</sup> When challenged, Tim asks if there is anything he can do, and she replies: "you could just pay attention to me".<sup>32</sup> Their relationship flags up, on a more micro-level, Gibson's assertion that the future, already here, is unevenly distributed. Rather than interrogating inequalities of technological fluency, knowledge or rights to access between social groups, Swanberg instead analyses disparities within the groups themselves, especially between those individuals existing in close quarters. Problems arise from frustration with, and inability to see, the other person's perspective. Ada cannot comprehend why Tim would rather work or chat to friends online than spend time with her; Tim cannot understand why she takes issue with his behaviour. The awkwardness of their relationship becomes more pronounced as the film develops, and is further undermined by how forthcoming and talkative Tim becomes (in comparison to his near-silence with her) when on the phone or chatting on the computer. Swanberg takes pains to frame this communication breakdown stylistically: scenes between Ada and Tim are constructed through a series of lingering close-ups that parody similar usage in the traditional Hollywood romance sequence, but here evoke the sense of unease between them,

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<sup>29</sup> Aymar Jean Christian, 'Joe Swanberg, Intimacy, and the Digital Aesthetic', *Cinema Journal*, 50.4 (2011), 117-135 (p. 122).

<sup>30</sup> *LOL*, dir. Joe Swanberg (Benten Films, 2006). The use of the word 'lol' in Internet slang is an initialism for the phrase 'laugh out loud', which somewhat overstates the comedy of the film, being more, as David Hudson observes, a 'sadly comic' piece of cinema. The same acronym, however, has historically been used in letter-writing as a signing-off, standing for 'lots of love', which seems ironic in the case of this film, due to its protagonists' contempt for anything or anyone falling short of techno-fluency, coupled with their utter failure to negotiate the language of love.

<sup>31</sup> David Hudson, 'It's Not You, It's Myspace' (essay for *LOL* DVD liner notes).

<sup>32</sup> *LOL*.

emphasising the sparseness of their dialogue. Christian notes that where close-ups are usually ‘saved for climactic moments or moments of revelation [...] in *LOL* and other Swanberg films *most* scenes are shot in close-up. In mumblecore films, even the mundane is given close-up treatment’.<sup>33</sup> This play on technique amounts to the capturing, in the most intimate of ways, the absolute dissolution of the intimate scene. The incessant use of close-up (not only between lovers but between all characters as they interact with one another) crowds these people within one another’s personal space to create the illusion of closeness, but ensures that it is the illusion itself which is foregrounded. These characters occupy futile spaces and awkward silences, scrabbling for words or ways out while the camera zooms into completely action-less scenes.

Swanberg, in an interview for Indiana University in 2012, had the following to say of his methods:

A lot of the work that I make is born out of frustration of things that I’m not seeing in movies [...] conversations that I’m having in my life and not seeing in movies or certain kinds of people that I’m meeting or the certain kind of person that I am that I’m not seeing reflected. So I’m hoping that the audience for those movies is also not seeing those people, or coming to the movies hoping to relate or to see themselves on screen in some way.<sup>34</sup>

There is a definite effort on the part of the director to implicate his viewer in the viewing process, in films that ‘feel more like dialogues between filmmakers and their audiences and less like calling cards to the studios’.<sup>35</sup> This intimate, dialogical exchange is an aesthetic form that has come out of the transference of image-capturing technologies from traditional and privileged spaces of film and television to the hands of their audiences. Filtered through technocratic, user-generated practices, the resulting techniques have been picked up once more and refocused back onto film and television.<sup>36</sup> As Dennis Lim writes, ‘artists who mine life’s minutiae are by no means new, but mumblecore bespeaks a true twenty-first-century sensibility, reflective of MySpace-like social networks and the voyeurism and intimacy of YouTube’.<sup>37</sup> The opening sequence of *LOL* shows a video embedded within a website, in which a girl performs a striptease in front of a webcam. The footage is intercut with the title credits, as well as close-ups of a series of male faces positioned as viewers, watching the striptease alongside the audience.

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<sup>33</sup> Christian, p. 124.

<sup>34</sup> Joe Swanberg, ‘10 Questions for Joe Swanberg’, *Indiana University Cinema* (2012) <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KjardOXx1uw>> [accessed 19 August 2013]

<sup>35</sup> Scott Macaulay, quoted in Dennis Lim, ‘A Generation Finds Its Mumble’, *New York Times*, 19 August 2007 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/19/movies/19lim.html?pagewanted=all>> [accessed 3 June 2013]

<sup>36</sup> Faux realism, documentary and mockumentary, and video blogging have all played a role in reshaping visual entertainment. Some of these practices have helped further self-referential genres such as the mumblecore movement, others have helped create new platforms for storytelling (e.g. Miles Beckett’s *lonelygirl15*, 2006-2008; Tony Hipwell and Miles Watts’s *Zomblogatypse*, 2008-2010), while still others have found their way into the mainstream (e.g. Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant’s *The Office* and its US spin-off, 2001-2013; Chris Lilley’s *Summer Height High*, 2007). Underscoring these innovations, of course, has been the rise of reality television.

<sup>37</sup> Lim.

Thus, within the first three minutes, fact, fiction and virtuality are plaited together to introduce and anchor the tone of the narrative. In this sense, Christian notes, *LOL* is ‘a product of a specific cultural moment’, continuing:

its efforts to depict the real in a digital age potentially reimagine how the cinematic experience is received. Mumblecore interprets the real as the space of intimacy, asking how a movie can make concrete a specific relationship to its viewers and within itself that reflects a generation’s constant computer use, engagement with social networking, and consumption of bodies through digitally mediated surfaces. *LOL* holds a privileged relationship to this system of representation: it embodies both the aesthetics of this digitally produced intimacy and the relationship among audience, screen, and image these aesthetics support.<sup>38</sup>

*LOL* consciously constructs, confuses and confronts the concept of the ‘real’, highlighting a strange yet pervasive paradox in contemporary visual entertainment. For while we embrace traditional modes of film and television as escapist fictions, their success lies in how they convince us of their realities; that is, the strength of the narratives, acting, and production values creates a sense of authenticity, even though that authenticity is to be (consensually) received as a fiction, constrained to the viewing experience. *LOL* (and mumblecore in general) disposes with these constraints, instead constructing the real through unscripted speech, uncued movement and a deliberate lack of attention to lighting, sound, and setting. As audiences spoiled by lavish set design and cinematography, gratuitous special effects and Oscar-winning performance, one might expect that mumblecore’s DIY aesthetic would fall short of our expectations. Indeed, critics have complained about the genre’s narcissistic indulgence, lack of pace and structure, and improvised acting – Aren Bergstrom writes that mumblecore ‘reduces cinematic storytelling to infuriating banality’.<sup>39</sup> However, in its reach for emotional realism, its close juxtaposition of audience and spectacle, and its thinning of the screen, *LOL* in particular functions as portraiture for the digital generation of self. Swanberg has said of his body of work that the films are all ‘so artificial [...] made up of all these fake moments meant to look hyperrealist’; *LOL* corresponds, then, with Jean Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality, both aesthetically and metaphysically.<sup>40</sup> As stated earlier, Baudrillard’s theory has come into its own in the age of digital media, though it is no less testing for its now having an actual laboratory in which to conduct its thought-experiment. In sorting out the degrees of reality from the precession of simulacra, *LOL* has, as Christian sees it, ‘offer[ed] an intervention by refocusing the debate on the question of emotional tangibility’.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Christian, p. 121.

<sup>39</sup> Aren Bergstrom, ‘Thursday Rethink 6: Mumblecore is Not Good Filmmaking’, *Three Brothers Film*, 12 April 2012 <<http://3brothersfilm.com/2012/04/thursday-rethink-6-mumblecore-is-not-good-filmmaking/>> [accessed 3 June 2013] (para. 1 of 5)

<sup>40</sup> Swanberg, quoted in Christian, p. 135.

<sup>41</sup> Christian, p. 134.

If Tim and Ada are the domesticated, sad-but-familiar casualties of the information age, then the other two relationships in *LOL* are the more inventively entrenched in virtuality. The second narrative strand of the film follows Tim's friend Alex, to whom we are introduced as the final face in the series of men watching the online striptease. Alex is an electronic musician passing his evenings writing songs, trying to secure gigs, and watching amateur pornography on his laptop. He flicks between websites, lurid advertisements and hyperreal images of sexuality, but is distracted by the crossing-over of fact and fantasy as an email correspondence with a model featured on the website *Young American Bodies* raises an opportunity for a meeting in real life (IRL). Alex has no romantic interest outside his virtual indulgences, and little interest in life outside electronic music and web-based activity, but combining the two creates a potential circumstance in which he might be able to turn an online fiction into a reality. At a rehearsal for a gig he hopes to secure in St Louis, Alex inadvertently attracts the attention of Walter, a girl who offers to drive him south for the performance, thereby initiating a tentative love triangle between Alex, Walter (IRL), and the as-yet virtual girl embodied by Tessa, the model. In a study conducted by Monica Whitty and Jeff Gavin in 2001, their observations across 60 online-to-offline relationships concluded that the participants almost unanimously agreed that the movement from virtuality to IRL 'needed to move through increments of trust'.<sup>42</sup> Alex's relationship with Tessa – who, for all intents and purposes remains a virtual, unattainable image within the confines of a particular narrative – fits this category. However, their relationship predictably fails to translate into the embodied world, because of the lack of trust upon which it was initially founded. We are led to believe that up until Alex informs Tessa by email that he will be visiting her area, online communication between them has been reciprocal, but we observe his lack of transparency and the further fictions he fabricates around his virtual projection of self. Though he does not manage to procure a performance slot in St Louis, he nonetheless informs Tessa (and also Walter) that he is indeed performing and then embarking on a national tour.

Giddens writes that:

An anchoring discursive feature of self-identity is the linguistic differentiation of 'I/me/you' (or their equivalents) [...] The 'I' is, as it were, the active, primitive will of the individual, which seizes on the 'me' as the reflection of social ties [...] But the I/me (and the I/me/you) relation is one internal to language, not one connecting the unsocialised part of the individual (the I) to the 'social self'. 'I' is a linguistic shifter, which gets its meaning from the networks of terms whereby a discursive system of subjectivity is acquired.<sup>43</sup>

Giddens, like Foucault and Butler before him, is not writing about self-identity or self-narrative in relation to virtuality, but, through that frame, transposing their theories onto the generation of

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<sup>42</sup> Whitty and Carr, p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 52-53.

self in the digitally mediated space produces quite literal examples of the self-construction they purport to be taking place in postmodernity. Giddens's 'reflexive personhood', framed by 'the capacity to use "I" in shifting contexts', is distilled in the production of self through online discursive practices.<sup>44</sup> Alex, much like Floyd in *The Parlor* (though to a less radical degree), projects an ideal self through his written emails to Tessa. The viewer is admitted to this space: the one-sided email conversation is represented in the film *à la* title cards reminiscent of the silent film era, pointing again to a sense of a dialogue which is in some way lacking, present, but at the same time, very much not. We also learn from these email-intertitles that Alex is neither performing in St Louis nor going on tour, and through this information we witness the divergence of the self-narratives he consciously constructs and tries to maintain. His commitment to the fiction leads him to completely overlook the efforts of Walter to get close to him: in a scene where Walter seizes the opportunity to spend time with him by offering to drive him to St Louis, Alex is oblivious to her subtle attempts at flirting; he appears distracted, measuredly and deliberately ensuring that the details of his story add up. In prioritising the idealised version of his self-narrative in order to somehow follow that fiction to reach a fictional girl, an opportunity for the embodied, offline intimacy he so desperately craves is swiftly passing him by.

Working from Giddens, Charles Cheung notes that when situations arise that challenge our identities, 'the coherence of our self-narrative can be disrupted, and we may experience an unstable and confused sense of self. In order to re-establish a stable sense of identity, we have to reflexively reappraise and revise our "disrupted" self-narrative until its sense of coherence is restored'.<sup>45</sup> Linking the production of self-narrative to writing the self on personal homepages, Cheung shows how this discursive mode facilitates Giddens's reflexive project of the self; continuing:

people who use their homepages for self-presentation can lay out, arrange, retouch and manipulate their 'homepage selves' until the outcome reflects the self-identities they intend to present. But for people with uncertain identities, or with a more free and fluid sense of self, this flexible creative process has a totally different meaning – experimentation and exploration of different identities [...] the hypertextuality of the personal homepage enables those authors who are in search of their self-identities – or who are happy to 'play' with their identities – to construct different self-narratives [...] and mull over which narrative (or narratives) makes most sense to them.<sup>46</sup>

Though Cheung's study restricts itself to personalised homepages, its scope can be widened to include all forms of online self-narrative, for at root this is what the Internet is really about, what it supports and engenders. By way of Giddens and Cheung, we can start to see a

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<sup>44</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 53.

<sup>45</sup> Cheung, p. 278.

<sup>46</sup> Cheung, p. 278.



generation of self that is, in several significant ways, at odds with the pursuit of a co-extensive virtual community. Employing the Internet as a sounding board for self-narratives, shifting subjects rely not only on shifting contexts, but also on shifting audiences, so that they do not have to pin themselves down too early or to any one particular narrative. This kind of experimentation is hard to replicate in offline community, in that identification with a social group relies heavily on a stable construction of self, or one that evolves more slowly, over time, as part of the natural evolution of the collective. We expect our offline relationships to change, but to change together. Online, though community is sought, virtuality is carved out as a selfish space in which connection is pursued to serve self-interests, either to assist in the construction of self or to validate the projection of an established identity. In this sense, the Internet can be understood as an excellent tool with which to develop and configure autonomy, and yet it repeatedly runs into difficulty when faced with the love relationship. As Michele Willson has put it, the Internet is a ‘powerful form of individuation’, but one which ‘connects and disconnects individuals at the same time’.<sup>47</sup> Self-presentation online holds an audience at arm’s length even as it reaches out to them, and jars with the closeness and transparency that the intersubjective scene requires. As in *The Parlor*, where Brandon and Floyd’s exploratory, experimental self-narratives are diametrically opposed to their offline narratives, so Alex intuits that his various stories are threatening to collide. Alex lands in St Louis, and after he is turned away from the club where he knew he was not performing, he acknowledges this narrative collision-course. Attempting to save face in front of Walter, he calls Tim:

I don’t know how I’m going to get back now. What am I supposed to tell this girl? I told her that I was on tour, I told that I was touring. I can’t have her take me back to Chicago. She’s gonna have to go back to Chicago by herself. I’m gonna have to stay here, *tomorrow* [Tim’s voice on phone] I don’t know how I’m gonna get back! Will you come and get me? [Laughs]<sup>48</sup>

Alex, so faithful to the fiction he has spun about himself that he allows himself to be left stranded by Walter in downtown St Louis, holds on to the story until the very end – “You should go back to Chicago. They’ll be here pretty soon and we’ll get going”.<sup>49</sup> The viewer is left wondering if his commitment to the fiction, and to the girl who, for all intents and purposes, does not exist, reflects a deeper anxiety about moving his narrative offline and into the real world. In short, is he afraid of the embodied intimacy that is being offered to him by Walter? Does he prefer to chase the image of a girl, even though he knows that such a relationship – rooted in misrepresentation and maintained through a lack of trust – would be doomed from the start? Both Alex and Tim, with their real girls waiting for their attentions to be reciprocated,

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<sup>47</sup> Michele Willson, ‘Community in the Abstract: A Political and Ethical Dilemma?’, in *The Cybercultures Reader*, p. 215.

<sup>48</sup> LOL.

<sup>49</sup> LOL.

exhibit a clear and crippling inability to transpose their gregarious online selves onto their actual social relationships. Their experimental narratives do not align with their real-world trajectories, thus unseating their identities, which hang precariously in the balance.

The third and final relationship in *LOL*, between Chris and Greta, can only be articulated through a familiarity with, and a degree of fluency in, virtual practices. Chris has moved back home to Chicago from New York, and his relationship has gone from offline and embodied to online and virtual, mediated by phone calls and the exchange of photographs. Maintaining a long distance relationship is taking its toll on Greta: Chris's mobile phone is an extension of himself, his life and his functionality, and he tries in vain to apply these same means to his romantic conduct. His (and also the viewer's) only interaction with Greta throughout the film takes place through telephone calls, SMS and MMS exchanges, and the leaving and listening to of answerphone recordings – most of which are tearful, one-sided arguments. His method of addressing the distance he has put between them is to pressurise her into sending him sexually suggestive photographs of herself, and then complain that her attempts are too suggestive: “when I asked for them I thought you were gonna send stuff that would be like, sexy. [*Greta's voice on phone.*] I know you're naked but they're just not that like, sexy. [...] I think they could be more explicit”.<sup>50</sup> Chris and Greta's virtual relationship perversely mirrors that of Alex and Tessa: while Alex works hard to coax his virtual girl offline, to separate her from the rest of the pornographic images that frame her in his virtuality, Chris adopts a reverse tactic, pushing Greta to blend with the world of images by revisualising herself with his gaze:

Yeah, but I'd rather look at it than look at porn, because, yes, you are my girlfriend and it's *you* and I want it to be something that I can like, look at and think about you and think about us and have it be like, sexual and explicit. [*Sighs.*] I'm not being a jerk! I didn't do anything! [*Greta's voice on phone.*] It's not 'never good enough', I'm saying it *can* be good enough, I don't know – if you just try a little harder with it.<sup>51</sup>

As well as refiguring his lover as an image – for both himself and the audience (our only visual interaction with Greta onscreen is through the series of ‘too suggestive’ photographs she sends to his phone) – Chris also imposes an asynchronous communications mode on their verbal relationship. After exerting power by rejecting her phone call as he flirts with another girl at a party, their dialogues become disjointed, expressed and played out through the one-upmanship of enforced voicemail leaving and retrieval. Though the least focused upon, Chris and Greta's relationship is perhaps the most telling with regard to the jarring of the autonomous self and the intersubjective scene, and as such serves to thematically underpin the others. Chris's treatment

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<sup>50</sup> *LOL*.

<sup>51</sup> *LOL*.

of Greta, his effective demotion of her to a virtual lover, shows a reverse movement from the positive construction of the love relationship that is really only possible in technoculture. While the love scene, as we have seen, requires an intersubjective, conscious co-creational partnership on the parts of the lovers, Chris performs a deconstruction of his relationship instead. Separating Greta into the aspects of virtuality – image, text, and sound – and further isolating these so that she never appears substantially, Chris relegates his lover to a safer and more manageable distance. Rather than nurturing the Two scene that we presume he initially had with Greta, Chris uses their distance to his advantage, manipulating their temporalities to create a space in which he furthers his self-narrative instead of concentrating on the one that they share.

*LOL* points to the disconnection of the connected, the dislocation of the virtual subject adrift in a cyberscape of subjectivities, and, furthermore, the use of virtual technologies themselves as cruxes for the pursuit of self-determining goals. These three technophiles represent the pinnacle of the human-network interface, the height of technological understanding, and yet they cannot or will not translate virtual connection to embodied intimacy. Alex misses out on Walter IRL, who leaves him waiting in St Louis for a Tessa who does not ‘exist’, and the film closes with Chris and Tim, arguing with Greta and Ada (on their respective phones), who have both broken up with them. Giddens’s concept of self-identity in postmodernity as constructed through narrative(s), as well as the sociodiscursively constructed or performatively interpellated subject, are realised quite literally when these theories are applied to the virtual environments that so heavily rely on the generation of self and selves through discursive practices. The Internet is shown to be a selfish space in which experimentation and exploration can be engaged with freely and in depth, and though undoubtedly an excellent creative resource for the search for and exertion of autonomous self-narratives, these narratives can prove to be the undoing of self when that self withdraws to the real world.

### **7.3. I keep changing your smile because you keep changing your smile – *Catfish* (2010)**

In 2010, Facebook made it into the movies twice, in two very different kinds of narrative. The most commercially successful of these portrayals, David Fincher’s Oscar-winning *The Social Network*, relates the tale of the founding of the company by then-Harvard student Mark Zuckerberg. Though the bulk of the film is adapted from Ben Mezrich’s 2009 book *The Accidental Billionaires*, screenwriter Aaron Sorkin chose to bookend his narrative with a failed romance (between Zuckerberg and college girlfriend Erica Albright), which many have since argued is the most fabricated element of the story.<sup>52</sup> At the beginning of the film, after a messy

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<sup>52</sup> Zadie Smith, ‘Generation Why?’, *The New York Review of Books*, 25 November 2010 <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2010/nov/25/generation-why/?pagination=false>> [accessed 19 August 2013] (para. 16 of 47)

public breakup, Zuckerberg returns to his dorm room and drinks into the night, denouncing Erica on his blog as a 'bitch', before angrily coding a cruel website allowing students on the Harvard intranet to rate side-by-side photographs of their female peers. By the film's close, we have seen the rise to power of Zuckerberg and Facebook, interspersed with scenes from his much-publicised lawsuit, and yet Sorkin chooses to end his retelling with a shot of Zuckerberg mooning over Erica's Facebook page. Having had no contact with her since they broke up, he now sends her a friend request and, waiting for her response, refreshes the page every few seconds. Sorkin's version of events has been much-criticised by those represented in the film, including Zuckerberg himself, and the implication that Facebook was born out of romantic frustration has been cited as the most blatant example of sensationalism. And yet such a choice, in framing the narrative with a speculative tale of lost love, is significant. Producer Scott Rudin, at his Golden Globe acceptance speech, thanked the company and Zuckerberg in particular 'for his willingness to allow us to use his life and work as a metaphor through which to tell a story about communication and the way we relate to each other'.<sup>53</sup> One has to wonder, then, exactly what metaphorical role the imagined relationship powering the genesis of Facebook plays. In Fincher's film, Zuckerberg is (mis)represented as a technophilic outcast akin to the male characters of *LOL*, unarguably brilliant in his virtual mastery (and a sly, manipulative businessman), but socially awkward and romantically inept. The film's tagline – 'You don't get to 500 million friends without making a few enemies' – reflects at once the enormity of Zuckerberg's professional achievements (only slightly marred by the legal settlements he has had to make) and also the phenomenal social position of the networking platform he created. That Zuckerberg, in reality, had almost singlehandedly connected 500 million people – this figure had doubled in a further two years – in virtuality it suggests an inherent superficiality in social media and in the digitally facilitated spaces in which that 'friendship' now takes place. Sorkin ends his narrative on a very humanised portrayal of Zuckerberg: the film's final titles, rolling as Zuckerberg waits for Erica to accept his friend request, inform us that the 'world's youngest billionaire', even with the world's largest network at his fingertips, is rendered as powerless as the average user in the face of love.<sup>54</sup>

The other film to examine the impact of Facebook on our modern intimacies, in a much more explicit fashion, was Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman's *Catfish*, premiering at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2010. This 'strange and unusual love story' fleshes out the tentative issues raised almost a decade earlier by Haley's work, as three young filmmakers communicate the complexities of Internet users' imaginative faculties and the ramifications of

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<sup>53</sup> Allie Townsend, 'The Social Network Filmmakers Thank Zuckerberg During Golden Globes', *Time Magazine*, 17 January 2011 <<http://techland.time.com/2011/01/17/the-social-network-filmmakers-thank-zuckerberg-during-golden-globes/>> [accessed 3 June 2013] (para. 2 of 4)

<sup>54</sup> *The Social Network*, dir. by David Fincher (Columbia Pictures, 2010).

self-fictionalisation.<sup>55</sup> Joost and Schulman document the course of an eight-month relationship between Schulman's brother Nev and 'the Facebook family'.<sup>56</sup> The film begins with an explanatory sequence that chronicles the online meeting of New York-based dance photographer Nev and an eight-year-old girl named Abby, whose mother Angela sends a painting done by Abby, copied from a photograph of Nev's printed in a national newspaper. Nev believes himself to be on to a child prodigy, due to the quality of the work, and begins to post more photos to Abby in Michigan for her to paint. After several months of exchanging photos and paintings (which in the beginning are mostly Nev's dancers but grow to include paintings of Abby's family) the two artists connect on Facebook. Nev's communication with Abby is for the most part mediated by Angela, but he also develops relationships with Abby's older siblings, Alex and Megan, and occasional online conversation with cousins and family friends.

Gradually, the film's focus is expanded to include the blossoming romance between Nev and Megan. Analysing the state of their long-distance infatuation, Nev tells his brother: "I'm going to have to be really careful. Because, even if there is a lot of chemistry, she still does live in Michigan".<sup>57</sup> His concerns, at this point, are limited to the problems their physical distance from one another might pose to a potential relationship, rather than to do with his lover's authenticity. As their relationship intensifies, inconsistencies begin to arise in Megan's stories. The three men realise that the music tracks being posted by Megan and Angela online and attributed to themselves are actually songs by other musicians – down to the piano piece Megan supposedly composed for Nev. Searching via Google, YouTube, and other user-generated content, they find the same songs Megan claims to be singing herself under the names of other people. Realisation begins to dawn, with Internet research revealing further discrepancies: properties they supposedly own are available on real estate listings; no record can be found of the child artist's exhibitions. "Oh my God," says Nev, "they are complete psychopaths!"<sup>58</sup> Armed with this knowledge, the men decide to turn up unannounced at the addresses they have been sending correspondence to for nine months. On arriving at the family home, they finally come face-to-face with a very different Angela from the one they recognise from Facebook and Abby's paintings. This Angela is older and much less attractive than her online persona (as the audience has perhaps anticipated from the start), married to an equally older and less attractive version of the husband she posted photographs of online. She is a full-time carer to her husband's severely disabled twins, and mother of an eight-year-old Abby who doesn't paint at all. More crushingly, there is no Megan. Gradually, Nev extracts a full

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<sup>55</sup> Allison Willmore, 'Breaking into Sundance', *IFC*, 25 January 2010 <<http://www.ifc.com/fix/2010/01/sundance>> [accessed 3 June 2013]

<sup>56</sup> *Catfish*, dir. by Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman (Universal Pictures, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> *Catfish*.

<sup>58</sup> *Catfish*.

confession from her, and the active social group surrounding Angela on Facebook is eventually reduced to prove their hypothesis: “they all could be her”.<sup>59</sup> Angela is a lonely housewife searching for a love story online, fabricating an entire ensemble of characters to support her imagination, embellishing the lives of herself, her daughter and husband to ensnare the interest of Nev, then employing the younger, sexually available persona of Megan to enact the romantic narrative she so craves (kept fully secret from her husband IRL), whilst also maintaining a regular supporting cast to authenticate the virtual activities of herself, Abby, and especially Megan.

At first glance, *Catfish* would appear to be about the interrogation of transparency in online environments, and indeed it does contribute a great deal to the current debate around and demarcations of reality and virtuality and the ways we engage with both. To begin with, virtuality is seen as a supportive means for reality, which benefits both parties (Nev and Abby) by enabling a long-distance professional relationship that could not have taken place to the same degree in a pre-Internet society. Virtuality is thus presented as a means to ultimately embodied, offline ends – the exchange of concrete objects (the paintings, photographs and other small tokens) via the postal service underscores the embodied nature of their relationship. In fact, references to bodies abound in *Catfish*, as if to anchor the text in its claim to authenticity – from the explicitly sexual text messages sent back and forth between Nev and Megan/Angela, to the revelation that Abby/Angela paints strands of her hair and her saliva into her artworks (“because she wants to be able to prove that it’s hers by DNA, down the line”), to the host of physical interests and hobbies Angela attributes to her ‘children’ (art, dance, music, animal care).<sup>60</sup> Had Angela’s story been genuine, and remained the focus of the documentary, then virtuality would have realised Wellman and Gulia’s co-extensive community and functioned safely and manageably as the utopian ideal that communications technologies can support and enhance. The issue of the real itself becomes a slippery concept due to the fact that, much like *LOL*, the documentary format is rendered an essentially recursive mode of presentation. *Catfish*’s subject matter eventually becomes a question of (as Nev puts it): “who’s real here?”, not only assessing the authenticity of the characters and in the process resurrecting the reality/virtuality dialectic, but also choosing to frame their quest for an underlying truth within a mode that further complicates the confrontation of the real.<sup>61</sup> Lisa Gye and Jeremy Weinstein, comparing the film to Casey Affleck’s mockumentary *I’m Still Here* of the same year, write that ‘what the reception of both these films articulates is an ongoing uncertainty, in the public

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<sup>59</sup> *Catfish*.

<sup>60</sup> *Catfish*.

<sup>61</sup> *Catfish*.

imagination at least, about the delineation between fiction films and documentaries'.<sup>62</sup> They continue:

We now fetishize the question of the real to such an extent that the realness of a representation is of as much concern to us as viewers, as the thing represented [...] The impact of changes in the modes of production, dissemination and consumption of documentaries made possible by networked, digital technologies do more than alter the form of documentaries – they impact on how we understand ourselves in relation to regimes of truth.<sup>63</sup>

Supposedly filmed as events unfolded chronologically, but edited and re-presented after the fact, Joost and Schulman make several interesting choices in their framing of the narrative. The viewer is led to believe that the subject of the film was intended to be the prodigious talents of Abby, before the romantic involvement of Nev with Megan, and finally the arousal of suspicions over the Facebook Family took over as the narrative focus. The original premise, then, is one of factual documentary filmmaking, with Nev and his colleagues based in New York (reality), Angela and her family in Michigan (reality) and Facebook providing a virtual channel of communication between the two.

Initially, the family is the primary focus, not Facebook itself, and the problematic dichotomy of reality versus virtuality goes untreated. After what reviewers have referred to as the 'Colorado incident', in which the first serious doubts regarding Megan/Angela's claim to authenticity arise, the real and the virtual begin their collision course. However, this overlap is written into the film from the beginning, a retroactive move which serves to thematically unify the divergence between initial premise and resulting content. A second viewing of *Catfish* foregrounds Joost and Schulman's post-production additions that then pre-empt the 'real' issues at the heart of their story, permeating their shots with self-referential frames lifted from the communications devices themselves. The film's spatial engagement, for example – its representation of the long-distance between the lovers, and also geographical movement during the journey across country – is depicted through the usage of Google Earth's mapping programme, and in places in-car satellite navigational technologies overlay the cinematography. The interactions between characters are consistently presented via screenshots of Facebook, email correspondence, and SMS conversations. This enframing conveys a certain type of communications-savvy culture, one completely enmeshed with informatics, and our perception of cyberspace as a means by which both temporal and spatial distances (not to mention other, social distances) are flattened, is at the forefront of the film's concerns. By way of the Internet, of social networking and synchronous text-based mediums, the rural backwoods of Michigan

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<sup>62</sup> Lisa Nye and Jeremy Weinstein, 'Documunity and the Disruptive Potential of Collaborative Documentary Filmmaking', *Expanding Documentary: Conference Proceedings*, 1.2 (2011), 49-56 (p. 49).

<sup>63</sup> 'Documunity and the Disruptive Potential of Collaborative Documentary Filmmaking', p. 50.

and the urban sprawl of NYC are aligned in a very real way. Peter Bradshaw, reviewing the film for *The Guardian*, writes that ‘communication technology assists and obstructs the movies in different ways’, continuing:

*Catfish* is full of design touches taken from the web: Google Maps and Google Earth show the leading figures’ respective locations in New York and Michigan. We zoom down on to the streets and see what things look like with Google Street View. The Internet is theoretically making Abby and her family vividly and instantly real even though they’re hundreds of miles away, but it’s precisely because an elaborate, visually detailed reality can so easily be conjured up via the web that it is so treacherous.<sup>64</sup>

Joost and Schulman’s re-presentation of their emergent story engages with a heavily relied-upon blurring of the virtual and the real, which they depict quite literally using augmented and computer-mediated realities, highlighting the utter indivisibility of the real from the virtual in contemporary society. The treacherousness of reality Bradshaw claims the film reveals is one brought forth by its relationship with virtuality and which hinges on the mutability of the technologies that supposedly demarcate and maintain clear boundaries between the two. In the age of information, our virtual communications and visual imaging technologies ought to be lessening the degrees of distance between us and demystifying our worldviews, but, as *Catfish* so incisively shows, these tools can be manipulated to the opposite effects. Furthermore, the film also, in tongue-in-cheek mode, speaks metatextually to the process of the documentation of reality via similar means. Mike Rot had the following to say of Joost and Schulman’s technique:

As a construct, documentaries lie, however our actual experience of documentaries occur not as whole commodities but in moment-by-moment interactions with what is onscreen. Despite the construct, outside narrative and the pull of an edited choice, there are truths, incidental and undeclared, that exist like bubbles rising to the surface. Such micro-effects cross-referenced with your own lived-in cache of experiences are not bound by narrative but by recognition of behaviour. Narrative, in this case, presumes continuity like a nicely paved road over the images that exist, so that you cannot respond to them without this blockade intruding. The fallacy is in this notion of continuity, as if there is a fixed narrative in a split second of film that can be forever linked to authorial intent. Each moment contains its own possibilities for recognition, if there is pavement, it’s cracked, and no more cracked than in the last forty minutes of *Catfish* which blossoms with these small moments, which, depending on your proclivity, becomes a choose your own adventure for how the film resolves itself.<sup>65</sup>

This last forty minutes Rot insightfully points to is what sets *Catfish* apart from *The Parlor*, for example, or other films of its ilk, or even the countless number of stories the media

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<sup>64</sup> Peter Bradshaw, ‘*Catfish* – review’, *The Guardian*, 16 December 2010 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2010/dec/16/catfish-review>> [accessed 3 June 2013] (para. 5 of 6)

<sup>65</sup> Mike Rot, ‘*Catfish*: Why the ‘Hoax’ is Probably Fake’, *Row Three*, 22 October 2010 <<http://www.rowthree.com/2010/10/22/catfish-why-the-hoax-is-probably-fake/>> [accessed 3 June 2013] (para. 16 of 17)



has seen in recent years that issue from similar grounds of online misrepresentation. Like these other examples, *Catfish* turns on the same dramatic energy as it unmask the 'Facebook family' as Angela and Angela alone. Where it goes further is working through that sensationalist shock factor and going on to name the phenomenon of 'catfishing', thereby marking an important milestone in cybercultural history. Joost and the Schulman brothers then attempt to unpick that phenomenon as Nev spends time with Angela to understand her motivations.<sup>66</sup> Unlike *The Parlor* and *LOL*, but in keeping with the documentary ethos, *Catfish* aims for a degree of closure. In the final scenes between Nev and Angela, the two sit together in Angela's studio as she explains how her imagination created her virtual life, the mechanics of keeping up the pretence, and the psychologies behind the selves. She explains how she had been touched by Nev's photographs of dancers, as she had danced herself in her youth, and they reminded her that she had given up her own dreams to marry Vince and take on the burden of his children. "You were able to show me things that I don't have access to", she tells him, which again points to the alignment of worlds that virtual media can offer.<sup>67</sup> Angela comes to her own conclusion that "a lot of the personalities were just fragments of myself, fragments of things I used to be, wanted to be, never could be", confirming the pull of the virtual space and its allowances for the 'trying on' of identities.<sup>68</sup> The most developed of her personas is Megan, and through her Angela is able to fully express the fragments of herself she most wished were true. It could be argued that such self-expression is healthy for the human being, that repression of the same would be more dangerously detrimental to our psychological state. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged, as Sherry Turkle and Monica Whitty have independently claimed, that such self-experimentation is a natural part of our formative development, and if the 'trying-on' of identity cannot take place in the real world, then the Internet can provide another outlet for this action. For individuals in later stages of their lives, living through a second, quasi-adolescent stage for whatever reason – loneliness, marginalisation, infirmity, depression, isolation – it could be taken as a social practice harmless to the person engaging with virtuality in this way, relieving or fulfilling a need. The practice becomes problematic when extended to include others who are not intimated into the fiction, when disclosure is absent and the practice is continued via deceptive means. Of course, this comes to a head in *Catfish*, when Angela's fantasies overlap with Nev's reality; he has fallen for the fictional Megan, and Angela's self-construction

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<sup>66</sup> The term 'catfish', which has since entered Internet parlance to describe people who impersonate others online, is lifted from a folksy tale that Angela's husband unwittingly relates to the filmmakers – "They used to tank cod from Alaska all the way to China. They'd keep them in vats in the ship. By the time the codfish reached China, the flesh was mush and tasteless. So this guy came up with the idea that if you put these cods in these big vats, put some catfish in with them and the catfish will keep the cod agile. And there are those people who are catfish in life. And they keep you on your toes. They keep you guessing, they keep you thinking, they keep you fresh. And I thank God for the catfish because we would be droll, boring and dull if we didn't have somebody nipping at our fin" (*Catfish*).

<sup>67</sup> *Catfish*.

<sup>68</sup> *Catfish*.

eventually performs a destruction of the other. As Angela begins to realise this, she sees the full impact of her actions, and voices her regret at hurting Nev: “I feel so bad for you, for what I’ve done to you”.<sup>69</sup> No matter what truth she was aiming at in her self-construction, what sense of reality she maintained or found validation in – just like Floyd’s sharing of ‘parts of ourselves so real’ in *The Parlor* – the fact remains that the other parties (Nev and Brandon) were deceived by the means Angela and Floyd used to achieve their ends. Angela created a Megan-image, with whom Nev began to fall in love, and so it ceases to matter whether the character of Megan were truly more the reality of Angela than the IRL personality she maintained. If Angela felt she were more the online identity than she could ever enact offline, that ‘truth’ still reverts to a lie when re-embodied outside the virtual facility.

The jarring of narratives, which supplies *Catfish* (and also *The Parlor* and *LOL*) with its key dramatic element, is the primary and most obvious hindrance to the creation of a successful romantic relationship. Transparency, honesty and trust are repeatedly cited in the literature as the basic foundational factors of relationships.<sup>70</sup> It is unsurprising, therefore, that when potential romantic partners call their lovers on their imaginative self-narratives, which then fail to be reconciled with their offline realities, that love rarely survives the collision. Nev Schulman and Max Joseph took the *Catfish* concept to MTV in 2012, adapting it for an episodic reality television format, in which they responded to requests for help from Americans in suspected similar situations.<sup>71</sup> Twelve couples who had met online were investigated, having been in relationships maintained completely online from anything from three months up to ten years, and the degrees of misrepresentation were equally as varied. Out of the twelve, only one couple is reported to be still together, and, tellingly, theirs was the relationship in which the fewest details had been embellished or invented. To return to Cheung, who adapts Giddens’s project of the self for the generation of online writing, the ‘self-exploration process is akin to conducting internal dialogues within one’s mind’, but can be ‘completely retrieved for further self-contemplation whenever the author wants to’.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, when Nev asks Angela to explain the logistics of maintaining a web of simulacra – which she orchestrates via three phones and twenty-one separate email addresses and Facebook accounts – she acknowledges the platform offered by online writing as a revisable, creative space:

NEV How many people were there?

ANGELA A lot. (*Laughs.*)

JOOST (*Off-camera.*) Angela, see if you can list them.

ANGELA Oh, golly. (*Counting on fingers.*) Megan. Ryan. Then Ryan had two sisters, Amy, and uh, Sarah-Ann, who is a girl here in town also, one of Joelle’s

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<sup>69</sup> *Catfish*.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Perlman and Beverly Fehr, *Intimate Relationships: Development, Dynamics, and Deterioration* (California: Sage Publications, 1987).

<sup>71</sup> *Catfish: The TV Show*, MTV, 12 November 2012 – 25 February 2013.

<sup>72</sup> Cheung, pp. 278-279

friends, that's how I get pictures of them together. Um. Josh, that's Joelle's brother, and uh –

NEV In real life, you're talking about now?

ANGELA Yeah, in real life also. And, um, Alex, and Tim, and Sophia, and I think that's it. I think. No! Ben and Kyle, and those guys had to have some cousins, just to keep life interesting.

JOOST (*Off-camera.*) How do you keep track of what everyone was doing, and –

ANGELA Luckily it was on Facebook and I could go back and re-read [...] I could never hardly ever delete anything, and I guess in the back of my mind I knew that this would happen.<sup>73</sup>

This notion of revisability is revisited in an episode of *Catfish: The TV Series*, in which Max Joseph tries to communicate to one of the subjects a better use for her addiction to self-fictionalisation, telling her: “‘You really put a lot of time and effort into creating this world [...] if you put that same intensity [...] into a world in which people weren't necessarily getting hurt or being manipulated, you could be, like, the next amazing American writer’”.<sup>74</sup>



These films help to identify three interrelated strands of the narrative of virtuality, and the kinds of subjects that are producing and being produced by virtual environments. The first traces the dovetailing course of the generation of selves and self-narratives in online writing: on the one hand these spaces can be understood as social environments in which users pursue community, intimacy and in some cases love; while on the other there are those employing the tools as a space for experimentation and entertainment. Both groups, in order to exist online, need to generate self-narratives that support the projected identity they wish to transmit in virtuality. These selves may or may not refer accurately back to an embodied presence. Where love complicates the picture is in its demands for a certain degree of transparency and honesty; for many different reasons, users in some cases do not respect or adhere to offline conventions. Secondly, while technofluency is a prerequisite for greater depth of engagement in virtuality, that can also lead to the relinquishing of meaningful social interactions offline; one world is sacrificed for the other, as with the male characters in *LOL*. There is a temptation to prioritise virtuality over reality. Finally, and especially in the case of *Catfish*, excessive virtual activity and over-generation of divergent, conflicting self-narratives threatens a dissolution of self into parts which cannot be restored into one coherent agency. This underpins the addiction to catfishing that Nev Schulman and his team have flagged up as symptomatic of our obsessive engagement with virtual communications technologies. In highlighting these risks and by actively raising awareness about them, his film may yet prove to be a significant contribution to issues of psychology and social health regarding virtuality.

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<sup>73</sup> *Catfish*.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Joe and Kari Ann’ (season 1, episode 7), *Catfish: The TV Show*, dir. by Kelly Ostreicher (MTV, 2013).

Hayles's conclusion to *How We Became Posthuman* calls for a view of the self as 'metaphor', claiming that once we accept this conceptualisation of ourselves in postmodernity, 'the better we can fashion images of ourselves that accurately reflect the complex interplays that ultimately make the entire world one system' (p. 290). All parts of this statement can be seen in practice in these films. Floyd, Alex, Tim, Chris and Angela willingly engage with cyberspace as a metaphorical environment, as material-semiotic actors. They make use of the 'complex interplays', enacting their own contribution to an overall network that represents the wider world – both on- and offline – as one complete, interconnected system. Their behaviours show their adaption to the increasingly virtual nature of the modern world; their engagement is symptomatic of our technocultural evolution – certainly, if we are to exist and thrive in such a world, we need to excel in these skills, we need to be able to move within the confines of virtuality and be willing to transition between personae far more fluidly than we do IRL. In terms of its potential for our self-development, these characters are exercising their posthuman nature in exceptional ways. However, all of them experience conflict when their constructions of self come up against others, framed by the love relationship. These relationships are not easily translatable to offline, real-world scenarios. To return to Charlotte Ross's point, the use of online environments often involves 'the wilful shrugging off of gender, sex, and sexual orientation'; with users in many cases replacing those sloughed-off identities with quite different aspects of self to be 'tried on'.<sup>75</sup> As these three films clearly communicate, such experimental practices of self are exemplary of contemporary online conduct and virtual fluency, benefitting a range of users in diverse ways. However, the films have in common a sense of warning, as they raise the issue of conflict between divergent self-narratives and plurality of selves. Moreover, all three narratives highlight the tension between practices of self and their relationship to the embodied lifeworld, and foreground the body itself as a problematizing site to which not all signifiers can comfortably be restored.

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<sup>75</sup> Ross, p. 223.

## Chapter Eight

### Nothing but Solitudes

Loosely coupled fractals – that’s what we are. We split and divide, hoping that the near-random walk of our fragmentation will bring us close enough to interact. To procreate. To love.

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Tom Crosshill, ‘Fragmentation, or Ten Thousand Goodbyes’ (2012)

In occupying such a prominent position as the figurehead of cybercultural psychology, Sherry Turkle’s holistic studies of the impact of computing and virtuality on self, selves and communities have undergone cyclical shifts in tone and scope, as they track the progress of both the technologies and the users. Mirroring such rapid developments, from the genesis of the personal computer in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to the ubiquity of smartphones today, the course of her research unfolds in such a way that it makes sense to speak of it in terms of ‘eras’ – a word which itself has been redefined by the speed of technological progress. Turkle’s second book-length study, *Life on the Screen* (1996), celebrated the ‘nascent culture of simulation’ that she saw at that time as already intervening radically on ‘our ideas of mind, body, self, and machine’, some ten years before the founding of Facebook and the proliferation of mobile computing devices rendered virtuality a constant and immediate presence.<sup>1</sup> An overwhelming amount of this middle period of her scholarship deals with participation in Multi-User Domains (MUDs): online communities firmly grounded in narrative, the virtual successors of the Dungeons and Dragons form of role-playing games (RPGs). Regarding MUDs, Turkle observes that participants actively engage in what Hayles, four years later, would term the splice. Calling them ‘a new kind of parlour game and a new form of community’, Turkle writes that:

As players participate, they become authors not only of text but of themselves, constructing new selves through social interaction [...] MUDs make possible the creation of an identity so fluid and multiple that it strains the limits of the notion. Identity, after all, refers to the sameness between two qualities, in this case between a person and his or her persona (pp. 11-12).

We might argue that online practices of self merely extend, into a new cultural domain, the roleplaying we have partaken of for centuries, newly retrofitted for the virtual age. After all, every day the vast majority of us balance our personae across social settings, as we adopt different registers of behaviour, language, and even fashion to accommodate our working,

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<sup>1</sup> *Life on the Screen*, p. 10.

familial and leisure duties. But we have never practiced self quite like this. Turkle insists that, in virtuality, the self is 'no longer simply playing different roles in different settings at different times, something that a person experiences when, for example, she wakes up as a lover, makes breakfast as a mother, and drives to work as a lawyer' (p. 14). Underscoring the roles we play in offline life, no matter how implicitly, is the fact of embodiment. The body, though it may have been reduced to a postmodernist footnote, is still the common denominator uniting all of the roles we may take on throughout the course of a varied social existence. In virtuality, the body ceases to play such an important part: is left, in fact, at the other side of the screen. Turkle's subjects, quite unwittingly, align themselves with their cyberpunk predecessors when they report that they actively divide their minds and their time across selves they would never otherwise get the chance to be in the embodied world. One explains that: "I split my mind. I'm getting better at it. I can see myself as being two or three or more" (p. 13). Another distils the crux of the problem, offhandedly remarking: "Part of me, a very important part of me, only exists inside the MUD" (p. 12). Such user accounts simultaneously realise, on a significantly instrumental level, the cyberpunk aesthetic of the eluded meatspace and the incidental body-construct of postmodernism.

In a recent story for *Clarkesworld Magazine*, Tom Crosshill pushes our online engagement beyond spex and cybersex to a world in which virtual spaces have been re-demarcated, colonised, and put to specific social ends. His protagonist, Rico Dieter, a virtual architect, designs 'habitats': cyberspatial alternatives to the crematorium. Rico's first habitat, a joint endeavour with his wife, Lisa, was an effort to preserve his father after death in a simulated paradise of his choosing. George Dieter picked a secluded beach of his native Cuba, furnished with the accompanying presence of a young woman: 'a simulacrum of Mom as she once was. The thing can't even hold a conversation, but Dad doesn't seem to mind'.<sup>2</sup> In the real world, Rico's mother Alina is slowly succumbing to a neurodegenerative disease; Lisa is pushing him to create her a habitat before it is too late. Alina's reluctance to undergo the same virtual embalming as her late husband, coupled with Lisa's increasingly ambitious visions of a future they could shape with such technologies, causes Rico to seriously rethink his ethics with such power at his hands. He and Lisa repeatedly come up against one another regarding the direction of their work:

Lisa zips her suitcase and comes to me. She slides between me and the viewport, wraps her arms around me. "Come with me to LA. Emily and I, we've got miracles to show you. There are breakthroughs coming down the pipe that –"

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<sup>2</sup> Tom Crosshill, 'Fragmentation, or Ten Thousand Goodbyes', *Clarkesworld Magazine* (2012) <[http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/crosshill\\_04\\_12/](http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/crosshill_04_12/)> [accessed 21 August 2013] (para. 47 of 218)

“Breakthroughs?” I pull back without meaning to. “Every month, heck, every week we get some breakthrough. We all rush to try it and blog it and show it off. Aren’t you scared we’re losing our humanity?”

“Oh, but we’re not human anymore! We’ve fragmented into a thousand different species. With every new technology we choose to adopt – or not – there are more of us.”<sup>3</sup>

With his mother’s illness and interests conflictingly at heart, as well as a newfound sense of duty over the power he wields, Rico berates Lisa for wanting to use their VR technologies to change the world even further: “I never wanted to change the world. I wanted to preserve it”, he tells her.<sup>4</sup> Crosshill’s interpretation of the potential uses of virtuality seems initially at odds with the recent critical readings of our current online practices. Indeed, if we are to take Hayles’s virtual posthuman as one actively seeking to undercut the unified self of liberal humanism, then it is to understand a perspective of reality as limited by attempts to preserve the (illusory) unitary self, and virtuality as a means to engage with our potential as part of a distributed cognitive system, as a fluid collection of reflexive processes able to splice across the nodes of our rapidly evolving environments. Crosshill inverts this perspective to emphasise the ways in which the self might be preserved in virtuality to an extent that such preservation interferes with an embodied reality. Alina displays contempt for her late husband in his choice to return to a memory of her, inferring from this that his love must have peaked somewhere along the route of their shared romantic path. Like Anne and Benjamin in Marusek’s story, Alina and George are driven apart, not by death or lack of love, but by frozen encounters that, instead of rising and then receding to be incorporated into the natural succession of encounters, remain artificially fixed and loom over the rest of their history as unattainable and immovable standards of perfection. Alina is of the opinion, which Rico comes to share, that life is always already fragmentary, and while her degenerative mind comes to express this as losing a person every time they disappear from immediate view – her ‘ten thousand goodbyes’ – she sees this as an extension of her lifelong belief that people fragment constantly. Rico eventually reiterates this argument to Lisa:

“What if every goodbye is really the last one we get?”

“I don’t know what you mean.”

“You talk about fragmentation. Every time you stuff a new gadget into your brain, you fragment away from the human race, right?”

Lisa shrugs. “Sure.”

“I don’t think you need a gadget. Every time you leave the room, you come back a different person. Ten times a day you fragment away from me. A hundred times. Every time you walk out the door, I’ll never see you again.”

A thousand times I should have said goodbye to you. A thousand times, as I lost the woman that I loved.

“That’s great, Rico.” Lisa chuckles. “We’re human fractals, huh?”

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Fragmentation’, (para. 40-42 of 218)

<sup>4</sup> ‘Fragmentation’, (para. 49 of 218)

“Yes.”<sup>5</sup>

Two powerful images break the surface of Crosshill’s poignant story: fragmentation and preservation, which in turn add a further tension to the relationship between embodied and virtual practices. In advance of Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson expresses the ‘waning of affect’ in postmodern culture, going on to figure this in a decentralised conception of subjectivity:

We must add that the problem of expression is itself closely linked to some conception of the subject as a monad-like container, within which things are felt which are then expressed by projection outwards [...] expression requires the category of the individual monad, but it also shows us the heavy price to be paid for that precondition, dramatizing the unhappy paradox that when you constitute your individual subjectivity as a self-sufficient field and a closed realm in its own right, you thereby also shut yourself off from everything else and condemn yourself to the windless solitude of the monad, buried alive and condemned to a prison-cell without egress.<sup>6</sup>

Noting that it is postmodernism which ‘presumably signals the end of this dilemma’, Jameson goes on to caution that its reconstitution of subjectivity necessarily leaves another in its wake.<sup>7</sup> Ominously, he warns that the replacement of the unified self with the decentralised, fragmentary postmodern subject will mean the end of the ‘unique and the personal’, and that a liberation from ‘the older *anomie* of the centred subject may also mean, not merely a liberation from anxiety, but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling’.<sup>8</sup> Turkle, whose figurative terminology transmutes to match her theoretical shifts, moves swiftly from the image of the computer as a mirror in *The Second Self* to that of its screen as a window in *Life on the Screen* – one still semi-reflective, but able to be looked through and passed into – ‘one enters the screen world as Alice stepped through the looking glass’ (p. 31). As well as playing on the scope for new ways of seeing – both ourselves and others in networked worlds – ‘windows’ points back to familiar operating techniques in which we consciously apportion our time, tasks and focus across the virtual medium, and as such ‘have become a powerful metaphor for thinking about the self as a multiple, distributed system’ (p. 14). In this sense, Turkle argues, postmodernist thought has been grounded by computers and computing practices, and if the fragmentation of self in contemporary culture leads to new anxiety as it splits off from the unified subject of liberal humanism, then computers ‘give people a way to think concretely about identity crisis’ (p. 49). Such a hopeful view of the computer’s potential is perhaps precisely what Hayles had in mind when she wrote that the virtual posthuman depends on the splice, rather than allowing itself to become imperilled by it.

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Fragmentation’, (para. 165-172 of 218)

<sup>6</sup> *Postmodernism*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Postmodernism*, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> *Postmodernism*, p. 15.



### 8.1. A neo-Romantic media

In the last few years of the twentieth century, Turkle and Hayles were in brief accordance in their theoretical stances, though, somewhat surprisingly, cross-dialogues between the two have remained minimal. Nonetheless, the arc of Turkle's research uncovered many concurrent ideas which bolstered the psychological environment through which Hayles's posthuman subject came to move. Turkle progresses swiftly from talking about the computer as an evocative object (1984) to the computer as a 'romantic machine' (1995), writing that the 'reaction against the [pre-1960s] formalism and rationality of the machine was romantic [...] the cultural presence of these romantic machines encouraged a new discourse; both persons and objects were reconfigured, machines as psychological objects, people as living machines' (p. 24). Though Turkle does not explicitly cite the sources supporting her view, we can trace it back to the emergence of cybernetics, of which Hayles gives a more exhaustive account in *How We Became Posthuman*, and upon which she confers a more directly influential shaping of her virtual subject. The reflexive relationship between subject and environment, linking flesh, metal and ideas, that cybernetics so keenly elicits, is one Hayles returns to in 2005 in her second book on virtual selfhood. By this point, however, she has dropped the term 'posthuman' in favour of the less sensationalist 'digital subject'.

Featuring heavily throughout Turkle's first two studies are a high proportion of what she terms 'programmer-virtuosos': people who have, or actively seek, deep understanding of their computing devices and processes at the coded level. In *My Mother Was a Computer*, Hayles seizes upon these incipient figures as a new generation of digital subjects, a term she lifts from Mark Poster. In Poster's definition, he asks whether cyberspace can be best understood as 'an occasion of strengthening, restructuring or abandonment of authorship':

Foucault [in 'What is an Author?'] has presented the most complex and convincing conceptual articulation of the modern author. What is remarkable in his analysis is not only its rigour and comprehensiveness but its anticipation of digital authorship [...] I introduce then the term *analogue author* in place of Foucault's *author function* and *digital author* in place of Foucault's *postauthor utopia*. The terms *analogue* and *digital* are taken from the world of technology and I use them to suggest the centrality of machinic meditation.<sup>9</sup>

In presenting his evolution of the author-function, Foucault underpins, at the subjective level, the breakdown of grand narratives that postmodernism employs to characterise its current fragmentary worldview. Observing that a conception of the regulatory author – one linked to 'individualism and property' – is rooted in Romanticism, Foucault proposes that, as a consequence of societal change, the author-function will gradually disappear, 'in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode [...]

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<sup>9</sup> Mark Poster, *What's the Matter with the Internet?* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), pp. 63, 65- 69.

one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced'.<sup>10</sup> He comes to this conclusion by way of four incarnations of the author since the rise of the novel: the first 'linked to the juridical and institutional systems that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses' (the Romantic/liberal humanist Author); the second, which 'does not affect all discourses in the same way at the same time and in all types of civilizations' (more clearly expressed in 1968 by Roland Barthes's 'The Death of the Author', in which the text takes precedence over authorial intention as a powerful semiotic artefact); a third, 'not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer, but rather by a series of specific and complex operations' (which Poster sees as supporting Foucault's own theory, as a figure upon whom authorial power is conferred but also regulated by institutional discourses); and finally, one which 'does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise to several selves, several subjects'.<sup>11</sup> In the increasingly uncertain figure of the author, we can read the metamorphosis of the systems maintaining liberal humanism, while underpinning it we can see the emergence of the subject as a mode of resistance. Poster reads into Foucault's fourth author-function a utopian proposal, the tools for which were not at the immediate disposal of early postmodernist thinkers. As Turkle in *Life on the Screen* observes *fin de siècle* postmodernism as having 'found its objects', so Poster sees these objects – computers, and the virtual discursivity they engender – as the foundations on which an environment is finally constructed in order to support the new kinds of subjectivities that Foucault had previously called for (p. 45). In his sketch of the postauthor utopia, Foucault envisions 'a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state', continuing:

All discourse, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever the treatment to which they will be subjected, would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur. We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse? Instead, there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?<sup>12</sup>

Such an account could have easily been describing the Internet and the discursive practices constituting it, putting paid to the claims made, by Turkle and Poster, that virtuality functions to reify postmodernist thought. Creating a direct route from Foucault through Butler to Hayles,

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', *The Foucault Reader*, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p. 119.

<sup>11</sup> Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p. 113; Poster, p. 66.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, 'What is an Author?', pp. 119-120.

Poster writes that participants in virtuality ‘are interpellated by each other, suturing identity in performatives, but the construction of the subject occurs entirely on the screen, determined [...] by the words entered on the keyboard. Participants are authors of themselves’.<sup>13</sup>

Foucault’s quadrantal evolution of authorial function brings us to a neo-Romantic perspective of narrative practice in virtuality, one in which privilege is deferred to the subject. I use the term quadrantal quite deliberately, to express the sense in which this evolution essentially comes full circle to complete what the Romantics had originally set out to do, what liberal humanism promised but did not deliver. Through Badiou, Haraway and Hayles, by way of postmodernist contributions to this ongoing discussion, the Romantic/liberal humanist paradigm has been shown to be illusory and exclusive. The Romantic subject emerged against a background of social change: industrialisation, democracy, and increasing secularism. It also constituted the self as a site of resistance, which has since carried over into contemporary society: the cult of sensibility in the face of Enlightenment rationalism; the rise of narratives of the self; and the roots of early religious dissidence (or a redistribution of spirituality in accordance with the natural world, in the Romantics’ leaning towards pantheism).<sup>14</sup> As Bertrand Russell observed, the ‘revolt of solitary instincts against social bonds is the key to the philosophy, the politics, and the sentiments, not only of what is commonly called the romantic movement, but of its progeny down the present day’.<sup>15</sup> Drawing meaningful parallels between self, love and narrative, we can see how aspects of Romanticism have been recycled in contemporary society. Giddens’s confluent love far more accurately realises the aims of Romanticism, before the movement was subsumed beneath liberal humanism. The Romantic ideal of love, though going a great way to democratise romance across social divides, nonetheless operated within a wider liberal humanist framework that placed limitations on how far that democratisation could be taken up by those outside and across the boundaries of a white, heterosexual European stratum. The pure relationship of confluent love is therefore much closer to the Romantic ideal than the relationships taking place during Romanticism – outside novels and poetry – ever truly were.

Several cybercultural theorists have picked up on the pure relationship, arguing that its absolute realisation lies in the romances pursued in cyberspace, that the wider social contexts Giddens sees the pure relationship as being removed from can be extended to include the constraints of reality. Shanyang Zhao writes that pure relationships ‘thrive’ in cyberspace, due to the way subjects are stripped down by virtuality, while Lynn Schofield Clark interprets them

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<sup>13</sup> Poster, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Dabundo, ‘Panorama’, in *Encyclopedia of Romanticism: Culture in Britain, 1780s-1830s*, ed. by Laura Dabundo (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 455.

<sup>15</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 620.

as the logical consequence of the emancipatory nature of online dating.<sup>16</sup> The sense of pureness in relationships taking place in virtual spaces might also be attributed to the understanding of these spaces themselves as pure, in that those coming to the Internet to find love are met with a wealth of sites and environments dedicated to precisely that project. If Giddens's pure relationship is one that exists in and for itself, then many online spaces mirror those intents and purposes, removing romance from its imbricated social position and refining it within a truly independent context. Such views may well support, then, the belief that the Internet is, as Kai Dröge and Olivier Voirol designate it, a neoromantic media, in that it fosters the new kinds of romantic relationships under construction in our contemporary society and gives credence to the proposal of the pure relationship. Without interrogating Dröge and Voirol's view at this point, I want to stretch their neologism to argue that the Internet can also be understood as a *neo-Romantic* media, due to its support of both a liberated self, and also the self as brought forth by narrative. As Foucault observed, the shapes of these narratives are certainly changed, but from them are produced the historically specific figure of the 'author-subject', in whom we can see and read a contemporary delineation of the Romantic self who quickly collapsed beneath the weight of his own ideals.

The author-subject undergoes a swift lexical transmogrification from Foucault's initial character sketch, to its adoption by Poster as the digital author, before settling into Hayles's terminology as the digital subject. Giddens has suggested that contemporary society is conditioned by a 'collage effect' pertaining to media, and that the various forms of media are 'modalities of reorganising time and space'.<sup>17</sup> Such a view of the narrative *bricolage* that has come to replace our cultural metanarratives is fortified when extended beyond traditional print media to the myriad modes of story-telling in virtuality. Our information online comes from sources as diverse as state-sanctioned news channels, peer-reviewed journals and verifiable encyclopaedias to guerrilla journalism, social media platforms, and weblogs conveying the opinion of every conceivable demographic with access to an Internet connection. Hayles's digital subject emerges as the producer and product of these collaged media, suggesting new ways to think about and move through distributed cognitive systems. Like the virtual posthuman from her earlier work, the digital subject continues to resist liberal humanism, remaking itself in relation to an environment constructed through an oppositional ethos to capitalist society. Returning to Poster's analogue subject and Foucault's primary author-function, she writes in *My*

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<sup>16</sup> Shanyang Zhao, 'Consociated Contemporaries as an Emergent Realm of the Lifeworld: Extending Schutz's Phenomenological Analysis to Cyberspace', *Human Studies*, 27 (2004), 91-105 (pp. 100-101); Lynn Schofield Clark, 'Dating on the Net: Teens and the Rise of "Pure" Relationships', in *Cybersociety 2.0: Revisiting Computer-Mediated Community and Technology*, ed. by Steve Jones (California: SAGE, 1998), p. 165.

<sup>17</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 26.

*Mother Was a Computer* that ‘analogue subjectivity is bound up deeply with the dominance of print culture’ (p. 202). She continues:

reinforcing the sense that print texts are “voiced” by an individualistic creator is the uniformity, stability, and durability of print’ [...] [I]t has long been recognised in literary studies that the novel reinforced the depth model of interiority and the stability and individuality of the analogue subject [...] [T]he legal fight to insure copyright, the cult of the author, print technology, and print culture worked hand in glove to create a depth model of subjectivity in which analogue resemblances guaranteed that the surface of the page was matched by an imagined interior within the author, which evoked and was also produced by a similarly imagined interior in the reader [...] Unlike analogue subjectivity [...] the digital subject allows for and indeed demands more drastic fragmentation. This difference can be seen easily in the greater fragmentation of digital technologies compared to print [...] In fact, emergence depends on such fragmentation, for it is only when the programs are broken into small pieces and recombined that unexpected adaptive behaviours can arise. Instead of a depth model of meaningful interiority, the digital subject manifests global behaviours that cannot be predicted by looking at the most basic levels of code with which the program starts (pp. 202-203).

Coding is of primary focus in Hayles’s study, which she uses to bolster a performative model of subjectivity in virtual practices: ‘performative code makes machines do things, and we should be in control of our machines. But figurative language makes people do things’ (p. 127). In the digital subject, Hayles prescribes that these two forms of language ought to be meaningfully synthesised; in short, that users ought to know how their virtual practices play out from the base level up. The ideal approach, for Hayles, requires ‘three different modes of interrogation: what it is (the material); what it does (the operational); and what it means (the symbolic)’ (p. 194). By her logic, intimate knowledge of machines and a bottom-up approach to their operations and the environments they subsequently produce, will work to allay panic in the face of the cyberspatial abyss.

To understand the Internet as a neo-Romantic media is to draw several parallels between the Romantic self and the digital subject, and the environments they helped to constitute even as they were being constituted by them. Both models of selfhood foreground an inherently reflexive relationship with their external environments, which, as a result, cease to be understood as external by way of such thinking. Of course, their respective environments and subsequent alliances with them were significantly different. The Romantics were a reactionary movement against industrial capitalism, favouring an organic view of the human harmonised with the natural world. As early as this period, due to its overwhelming presence throughout Romantic literary production, love can be read as set in tentative opposition to the dehumanising tendencies of early technocultural capital. Framed by pathetic fallacy and pioneering the cult of sensibility, emotive language and natural imagery interpenetrate one another in Romantic writing, cross-fertilising spaces wherein self-narratives between lovers converge, merge and

find their validation; where the individual hero of the romance is reaffirmed and resists the industrial fragmentation of the populace into so many faceless units of production. The Romantics' resistance to the colonisation of nature by capital, and thus of themselves as part of that ecocentric worldview, is championed throughout their poetry and prose. As Russell surmises, Romanticism is 'a temper best studied in fiction', but, as we have seen, the rise of the novel during the late eighteenth century synergistically conditioned that temper.<sup>18</sup> With the hindsight of readings provided by the likes of Poster and Hayles, we see how, despite their temperament of resistance, their choice of mode of expression proved to be their undoing. In contributing so significantly to furthering the reach of print culture – itself by that point already an institutionalised mode of discourse – the capital worth of the novel as an immediately and widely popular narrative form played directly into the hands of liberal humanism, and as such undercut the Romantic aesthetic to bolster the myth of the unified self that powered the juggernaut of Victorian modernisation over the next century.

At the other side of modernism, we see a re-enactment of the Romantic paradigm, but with several important 'improvements'. Giddens's pure relationship covers the ground that the Romantics aspired to but fell short of, opening up a confluent love which promotes equality between subjects. Subjective experience – love included – faces the effects of an engrained capital on every front, and subjects are themselves refigured by a postmodern worldview. Deconstructed by discourses, reconstituted on terms other than their own, the contemporary subject blends with its environment with the kind of seamlessness that the poets of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries romanticised, but this environment is now only partly biological. Scientific developments in the twentieth century have rendered our natural world knowable through technological means, thus our current relationship to our environment is bio(techno)logical, and furthermore extends to the technologies themselves by way of reflexively constitutive analogical relation. While the roots of this understanding are to be found in cybernetics, and its ramifications most pragmatically formalised by Hayles, between its inception and its critical application various scientists have reiterated similar sentiments. The most famous of these is perhaps Carl Sagan, who in 1980 expressed humanity in terms of the cosmos:

The cosmos is full beyond measure of elegant truths; of exquisite interrelationships; of the awesome machinery of nature. The surface of the earth is the shore of the cosmic ocean. On this shore we've learned most of what we know. Recently we've waded a little way out, maybe ankle-deep, and the water seems inviting. Some part of our being knows this is where we came from. We long to return. And we can. Because the cosmos is also within us. We're made of star-stuff. We are a way for the cosmos to know itself.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 620.

<sup>19</sup> 'The Shores of the Cosmic Ocean', *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, PBS, 28 September 1980.

Following Sagan, Neil deGrasse Tyson gives a more succinct version of this account when he asserts that ‘we are all connected: to each other, biologically; to the Earth, chemically; and to the rest of the universe, atomically’.<sup>20</sup> While poetic in their own way, these scientists do not speak allegorically, and so the moves in recent theory to dissolve the ‘monad-like container’ of liberal humanism can be seen as prefigured by scientific discourses which continue to fortify postmodernism by effectively bookending it with the physical sciences – cosmology at one end, the mapping of genomes at the other.

Hayles urges us to see a sort of residual power in this way of thinking, rather than the anxiety that has come to characterise it in postmodern theory. In *How We Became Posthuman* Hayles had already advocated a measure of scientific literacy, advising that ‘the more we understand the flexible, adaptive structures that coordinate our environments and the metaphors that we ourselves are, the better we can fashion images of ourselves that accurately reflect the complex interplays that ultimately make the entire world one system’ (p. 290). In *My Mother Was a Computer*, she persists along this same line of inquiry, which takes code to be the ‘lingua franca of nature’ from which all complexities are produced and to which everything can be traced back (p.55). Potentially, everything becomes knowable, because everything becomes reducible to code. Our virtual practices, Hayles argues, take place within the parameters of a hierarchical structuring of coded information. As complex organisms, behaviours and phenomena emerge in nature from layer upon layer of increasingly convoluted informational patterns, so, Hayles maintains, the symbolic domain of virtuality can be deconstructed to strings of binary. As mentioned earlier, Hayles prescribes a bottom-up approach to virtuality, from the simplest level of coding forming the material technologies themselves, to the command clusters which permit their operation, to the highest level of layered code from which emerges complexity – the symbolic datascapes of virtual environments. Noting that ‘anxieties arise when the operations of the computer are mystified to the extent that users lose sight of (or never know) how the software actually works’, and acknowledging that in virtuality we are disciplined by technologies, Hayles advises that knowledge of our machines at a deeper, coded level of utility helps us to gain a measure of control over our higher-level practices in these spaces (p. 60). Consequently, the digital subject as figured in Hayles’s later writings is akin to Turkle’s programmer-virtuoso and even to the Gibsonian cyberpunk, as these users actively and consciously produce their consensual hallucinations, as authors of themselves and their trajectories through the symbolic realm of virtuality. Code is also language, as well as information, and true technofluency requires that subjects ‘speak’ (and write) at varying levels of complexity. In relation to digital media, Hayles illustrates the way in which narrative richness

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<sup>20</sup> Neil deGrasse Tyson, ‘We Are All Connected’ (2010) < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtWB90bVUO8> > [accessed 25 September 2013]

at a high level ‘depend[s] on rigidity and precision at a low level. The lower the level, the closer the language comes to the reductive simplicity of ones and zeros, and yet it is precisely the ability to build up from this reductive base that enables high-level literariness to be achieved’ (pp. 53-54). In this sense, the digital subject is a neo-Romantic figure, enabled by new modes of narrative practice by which it is able to author and thus produce itself. In Western culture particularly, where virtuality is supported by a relative state of freedom of speech and of press, the digital subject manages to sidestep the capitalist institutionalisation of mainstream discourses and tradition print culture, able at last to constitute itself freely on terms other than those dictated by liberal humanism and its myth of the unified self. With a new environment within which to operate, one predicated upon a consensual engagement with a wilfully distributed cognitive system in which participants author not only themselves but the very spaces in which they move, as well as the terms of that space, Hayles’s digital subject manages to extricate from the fragmentation of postmodernity a model of self that turns this paradigm on its head. The digital subject, no longer needing to be perceived or to perceive itself as a unified monad, instead converts a passive submission to fragmentation into an active commitment to the splice. Having established, via the cyberculturists’ stemming of the unravelling self of postmodernism, a seemingly robust model of subjectivity with which to proceed into virtuality (via Foucault, Poster and Hayles), as well as a case for the Internet to function as a form of neo-Romanticism, we may now refocus upon the six texts from this section in the light of these arguments, to assess the extent to which they support these new practices of self.

## 8.2. The generation of selves

Thomas Streeter sites the cyberpunk within a literary-historical context, writing that:

I suspect one might be able to trace a fairly direct line from some of the earliest masculine heroes of romantic literature – Goethe’s young Werther, say – onward to the protagonists of cyberpunk novels, who are typically ‘geeks’ who have spent a large part of their lives sitting at computer consoles engaged in narrow, technical tasks, but then in the course of the story have dramatic adventures.<sup>21</sup>

While the Romantics’ resistance to society was expressed through an avid rejection of emerging industrialism – in senses material, aesthetic, and political – the cyberpunk, already embroiled in high technoculture, seeks a mode of resistance that works from within. Prefiguring the cyberpunk in culture is the hacker, whom Steven Levy in *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* charts from the 1950s as hard on the heels of the rapidly developing computer sciences. Highly fluent in virtual technologies and often in the employment of professional

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Streeter, ‘The Romantic Self and the Politics of Internet Commercialization’, *Cultural Studies*, 17.5 (2003), 648-668 (p. 652).



computing companies, early hackers subverted discursive systems from their integrated position of privilege, in such a way that their counterculture was fully imbricated with and reliant upon mainstream institutions, rather than marginalising itself by rejecting them outright. The term ‘cyberpunk’ was coined by Bruce Bethke for a story in 1980 to describe ‘the stereotype of the punk hacker with a mohawk’; a neologism which he came to ‘through synthesis’.<sup>22</sup> He writes: ‘I took a handful of roots – cyber, techno, et al – mixed them up with a bunch of terms for socially misdirected youth, and tried out the various combinations until one just plain sounded right’.<sup>23</sup> Through its connotative link to the subcultural hijacking of mainstream technologies by individuals who saw themselves as apart from that mainstream, the ‘high tech and low life’ that coalesces in the cyberpunk is firmly rooted in the hacking communities that preceded its explosion into the fictional imaginary.<sup>24</sup> Bruce Sterling sees the cyberpunks of the 1980s as coming to prominence through their association – recrafted at the hands of Gibson and his peers – with youth culture, writing that ‘the hacker and the rocker are this decade’s pop culture idols, and cyberpunk is very much a pop culture phenomenon: spontaneous, energetic, close to its roots [...] Cyberpunk comes from the realm where the computer hacker and the rocker overlap’.<sup>25</sup>

While the ‘high tech’ aspect is fairly self-explanatory, the ‘low life’ Sterling and others have seen as historically contingent, brought forth by the countercultural undercurrents of the 1980s. As Levy’s history uncovers, however, the immediate predecessors of the cyberpunks – the far less glitzy but equally interstitial hackers of MIT and Xerox PARC – spoke to a notion of ‘low life’ as low quality of life. The quintessential hackers were removed from their wider academic milieus and shunned social lives and relationships that were outside the hacking community in favour of spending long, junk-food-fuelled stretches of time (‘hackathons’) in the computer labs, and took little pride or care over their physical appearances. This image of the hacker has not only prevailed in cultural conceptions of modern computer ‘geeks’ but clings to the underside of even the savviest cyberpunk. While protagonists like Gibson’s Case, the Wachowskis’ Neo, or Iain Softley’s Kate Libby/Acid Burn reinvent the reclusive computer genius as a slick Byronic hero, other writers take care to remind us of the body those avatars are momentarily overstepping. The embodied ‘reality’ of the hacker has been evocatively depicted by Ellen Ullman, who recalls her time spent at close quarters with colleagues during long programming stints:

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<sup>22</sup> Bruce Bethke, ‘Foreword’ (2001) <<http://www.infinityplus.co.uk/stories/cpunk.htm>> [accessed 1 January 2013] (para. 5 of 9)

<sup>23</sup> Bethke, (para. 8 of 9)

<sup>24</sup> Richard Kadrey and Larry McCaffery, ‘Cyberpunk 101: A Schematic Guide’, in *Storming the Reality Studio*, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> *Mirrorshades*, p. xi.

Here, in *that place*, we have no shame. [Joel] has seen me sleeping on the floor, drooling. We have both seen Danny's puffy white midsection [...] when he stripped to his underwear in the heat of the machine room. I have seen Joel's dandruff, light coating of cat fur on his clothes, noticed things about his body I should not [...] Still, none of this matters anymore. Our bodies were abandoned long ago, reduced to hunger and sleeplessness and the ravages of sitting at a keyboard and a mouse. Our physical selves have been battered away.<sup>26</sup>

These 'battered away' bodies – plugged in and rendered monstrous like so many real-world P. Burkes – belie a sense of quasi-religious experience in the programmer-virtuoso's commitment to virtuality. To reiterate Foucault, who saw in early Christian denials of the body a way of 'taking care of one's self', and to link that with the many scholars who have since read into cyberpunk a sort of 'revived Puritanism', we are reminded of the ways in which, historically, the body is flagellated in order to cleanse or to free the mind.<sup>27</sup>

Richard Coyne, in his 1999 study of 'technoromanticism', shows how the body has been bypassed throughout the history of Western philosophies of self, and argues that 'digital narratives represent the latest transformation of the theme of unity as initiated by Plato and the Neoplatonists and appropriated by the romantics'.<sup>28</sup> He continues:

Romanticism was also idealist in orientation, and the romantics read Plotinus. They readily equated the soul with individual genius, and they attributed to the unity of the real the source of creativity and beauty. Certain digital narrative is idealist and has taken to heart the Neoplatonist concept of ecstasis – release of the soul from the body – though here the soul is replaced with the mind, the means of ecstasis is immersion in an electronic data stream, and the realm of unity is cyberspace. Cyberculture invokes a romantic apocalyptic vision of a cybernetic rapture, a new electronically induced return to the unity, an age in which the material world will be transcended by information.<sup>29</sup>

Coyne's reading of virtuality as a pure, rapturous space in which unity can finally occur, though it manages to touch base with most of the major philosophical shifts since antiquity, is fundamentally utopian, not to mention at serious odds with an argument – such as my own – which sees virtuality as an essentially postmodern, fragmentary social sphere. Coyne's interpretation, however, retraces the idealistic path of the cyberpunks, and furthermore is only possible if the body is circumvented. Though he raises many valid points regarding the indebtedness of the virtual aesthetic to prior philosophical frameworks, Coyne's commitment to locating the Romantic self in digital narrative causes him to produce a 400-page treatise on his

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<sup>26</sup> Ellen Ullman, *Close to the Machine: Technophilia and Its Discontents* (London: Macmillan, 2012), pp. 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> María Goicoechea, 'The Posthuman Ethos in Cyberpunk Science Fiction', *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 10.4 (2008) <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol10/iss4/9>> [accessed 2 September 2013] (p. 3)

<sup>28</sup> Richard Coyne, *Technoromanticism: Digital Narrative, Holism, and the Romance of the Real* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999), p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Technoromanticism*, p 11.

technologically oriented form of neo-Romanticism without once mentioning the role of romance. As Giddens so succinctly puts it: ‘intersubjectivity does not derive from subjectivity, but the other way around’.<sup>30</sup> Our need for self-narrative, encouraged by Romanticism, is also encouraged in large part by love. The intersubjective scene is crucial to understanding the subject; virtuality mirrors this to an extent, in its rendition of community. Prior to Gibson’s consensual hallucination, Web 2.0 and the pervasive presence of interactive social media, hackers were the first to hold one another up in virtual communities; to author themselves, their comrades, and the structural integrity of cyberspace itself. As Ullman recounts, embodied space and proximity ceased to matter between her and her colleagues, because ‘now we knew each other in one way and one way only: the code’.<sup>31</sup>

In *The Matrix*, proficiency in code, in the unpicking of the seams of cyberspace, is vital to the central characters’ survival. Midway through the film, after Neo’s initiation into the world of the freedom fighters, comes a conversation between two hackers. Cypher, the film’s eventual Judas, is monitoring the Matrix on the ship’s computer screens, and Neo tries awkwardly to bond with him over their shared skills. Unused to the complexity of the Matrix, however, Neo sees what the viewer sees: the scrolling strings of effervescent green characters that have been the Wachowski’s iconic gift to the cyberpunk aesthetic. He asks Cypher: “‘Is that [the Matrix]? [...] do you always look at it encoded?’”, and Cypher gestures to the images he can see beyond these alphabetic building-blocks by way of reply: “‘Well you have to. The image translators work for the construct program. But there’s way too much information to decode the Matrix. You get used to it. I.. I don’t even see the code. All I see is blonde, brunette, redhead’”.<sup>32</sup> Until the very end of the film, Neo’s experience of the Matrix is stuck at the symbolic level, and though his eventual revelation (and salvation) permits him to see the simulation for what it really is, he works towards this epiphany from the top down. Cypher, on the other hand, has assisted with the hacked entry points from the bottom up – as his name suggests, his mastery of virtual discursivity allows him to read, see and know the Matrix at all levels of complexity. The two characters’ outcomes, however, are polarised: Neo chooses to pioneer the rebels’ cause, while Cypher tires of the burden of knowledge and defects back to a state of blissful ignorance. Among a rich array of questions surrounding issues of authenticity and subjectivity in virtuality that *The Matrix* prompts, the divergence of the two freedom fighters’ trajectories quite simply points to disparities between digital subjects.

The six texts under analysis in this section perform similarly, highlighting inconsistencies between understanding, objectives and practices which trouble a conception of the digital subject as one armed with enough expertise and holistic knowledge of virtuality to

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<sup>30</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> *Close to the Machine*, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> *The Matrix*.

render it seamlessly coextensive with reality. In Hayles, her informed virtual subject, who turns on a sense of liberation gleaned from the splicing of selves, is able to navigate online environments seemingly without experiencing crisis at such multiplicity. Coyne goes even further to declare that ‘virtual reality presents a world where you can be yourself, against a duplicitous world in which you have to conform to the expectations of others: a fake and fragmented world of similarly disconnected individuals’.<sup>33</sup> The disconnection of postmodern life might encourage us to move into virtual environments, which by their very nature are founded upon the promise of communication and connection, but this substitution of online connection for offline intimacy is no real substitution at all. The ghost of the embodied relationship continues to haunt attempts to forge community across the virtual medium, and even where it is not directly invoked, can arise suddenly to trouble our practices of self.

These narratives draw their dramatic energy from the disparities between individuals as they connect with others via virtual technologies, but also emphasise the disparities within the individuals themselves, and show how virtuality not only encourages the splice but creates scenarios in which the characters are permanently disabled by it. In each case, it is love that frames this disablement, as it curtails what could otherwise be understood as successful practices of digital self. *The Parlor*, in its brevity, presents an austere cross-section of turn-of-the-millennium Internet users. Haley pares virtual practices down to their absolute minimum: conveyed through the starkness of the waiting room setting, the crude simplicity of the user’s name-tags, and reflected in the sparseness of the synchronous message board on Brandon’s computer screen. The film also communicates a minimum amount of selves in play. In the central drama which unfolds between Brandon/Skater and Floyd/Slappy Sue, this amounts to four people: the two men sitting at their computer screens, and the much younger (and in Floyd’s case, alternatively sexed) characters they each project in their role-play. We infer that for six months their relationship has been as straightforward as logging on to enact their sexual fantasies and logging out when that desire has been sated, with no attempt to reach further than the confines of the chat room, and no interest displayed in the relationship between the online and offline identities. Thus, the chat room, and cybersex practices in general, are initially depicted as safe, utilitarian spaces wherein anonymity works both ways to protect the experimentation and expression of self – even if in several depicted cases this experimentation borders on the deviant – and also the conflict of interests between on- and offline personae.

To understand virtual spaces as relatively safe is to contrast their logistical set-up with their offline counterparts. Giddens maintains that, in day-to-day life, we construct protective cocoons to preserve a viable *Umwelt*. These ‘mantles of trust’ are upheld to varying degrees by the inputs of those around us, and in return we perform equally supportive roles in order to

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<sup>33</sup> *Technoromanticism*, p. 4.

uphold the *Umwelts* of others.<sup>34</sup> Placing trust in our own and others' ability to co-create stable *Umwelts*, which in turn act as vessels through which our self-narratives are channelled, is an inherent feature of our contemporary social intercourse. Yet, to place trust in others is to engage with potential risk, to leave oneself permanently open to the actions of others. This view of our current social makeup furthers Badiou's perception of online conduct as a move towards risk minimisation. Giving the pursuit of romance as his central example in *In Praise of Love*, Badiou maintains that the transference of this pursuit to the virtual domain is evidence of how we are presently trying to force love to operate on the terms of a culture characterised by risk, through measures with which to evade it. This 'safety-first concept of love', he argues, is symptomatic of contemporary Western culture's preoccupation with risk and insurance, and thus also of strategically economic approaches to hazardous social and personal scenarios (p. 6). Giddens also highlights risk, and chance, as the 'inevitable concomitants of a system geared to the domination of nature and the reflexive making of history'.<sup>35</sup> Here again, the technological interventions on culture, the dissolution of grand narratives and of fixed social trajectories, are implicitly invoked as the backdrop of a contemporary society wherein coherent self-projects are at stake. Why, then, might we see in virtuality the potential to circumvent risk? After all, the co-constitutive nature of the Internet and online discursivity is in some senses a magnified version of community in offline life. In entering virtual environments – built by us, maintained by us – the digital subject necessarily becomes a consenting cog in a multiplicitous, collaborative wheel. Part of this consent involves giving over control to others, allowing them to constitute oneself and one's experience of virtuality even as one consciously contributes to the experiences of others. As Hayles reminds us:

Since distributed cognitive systems coevolve, the functioning of any one actor can be understood fully only in relation to that actor's interactions with all the other actors [...] Spliced into a distributed cognitive system, we create these narratives not by ourselves, but as part of a dynamic evolutionary process in which we are coadapting to other actors in the system (p. 197).

The consensual and hallucinatory synergism of Gibsonian cyberspace might be better sketched as a digitisation of the *Umwelt*. Like the hackers, whose close-knit pooling of resources helped to embed the sense of virtuality as community, we are complicit in one another's experiences online. Intersubjectivity is almost concretised by the Internet, but it interprets its central dynamic of trust in a new, paradoxical way. In embodied social relationships that preserve the *Umwelt*, we construct a working identity within cocoons to which are intimated perhaps a handful of supporting characters, for whom we in return perform the

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<sup>34</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 129. Examples of the widening nets of those involved in maintaining the *Umwelt* might proceed from those closest to us (lovers) through families, social and working communities, to civic groups.

<sup>35</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 109.

same supporting roles. In sociological terms, the notion of the *Umwelt* as a prerequisite for the negotiation of contemporary society, and as a substrate carrying the self-project, is a historically contingent phenomenon. The *Umwelt*, which turns on an intersubjective trust, functions to preserve our trajectories of self from the harmful effects of a confused, fragmented, and collaged worldview that is expanding incessantly in accordance with the global village as powered by the information society. In virtuality, where the digital subject is encouraged to splice itself, the environment it moves through is constructed as a vast *Umwelt*. The hallucination is not only consensual but communal, as it is reinforced and validated by others in whom we necessarily place a measure of trust. If Badiou sees online practices as a move towards risk minimisation, it is because in virtuality we give less of ourselves to others, and receive less in return. Interaction with people online often takes place at a very superficial level of intimacy – what Turkle terms the ‘interface level’ – but with many more people than we would usually meet in the real world – most of whom remain faceless, nameless. So even though we give less, we give to many more, spreading ourselves thinly across the virtual medium. Anonymity supplements the digital *Umwelt*, as it protects our freedom of speech, expression, and experimentation with identity in online practices. However, whilst relying on a heightened degree of trust, anonymity also threatens that trust proportionately.

*The Parlor* manages to convey the repercussions of anonymity’s double-edged sword by introducing love to trouble the virtual scene. Brandon sees a clear-cut divide between his offline identity and his online practice of self: he enters the chat room to address a specific desire that is enacted through a fictional character that only exists in the virtual world. The relationship between Floyd and Slappy Sue is less clear: though his projection of a ninth-grade Catholic schoolgirl quite obviously does not refer back to his twenty-nine-year-old male self, the projection allows him to explore his sexuality within the parameters of a more accepting heteronormativity. Slappy Sue’s declaration of love (coupled with the revelation that Slappy Sue is in fact Floyd) shatters the cover of anonymity, confuses the divide and forces the signifiers to retract awkwardly into the signified. That Skater and Slappy Sue are roommates is farcically unlucky, but in including this element Haley concretises the repercussions of anonymity in cyberspace, and points to the fact that virtual practices initiate a new form of risk-taking. Unmasking the splice in this brutally confrontational way alerts the viewer to issues of self-disclosure and transparency online, which in the end come down to trust and the wilful or inadvertent manipulation of relationships that depend upon it. Both characters are horrified at their unmasked situation, but unseated in different ways. Brandon trusted that his online relationship was one of convenience, respecting the anonymity promised by the chat room and feeling both empowered and protected by it. Floyd develops trust over the course of their relationship, coming to believe that his connection with Skater could survive the unmasking and eventually be incorporated into their offline lives. While Floyd trusts in love, Brandon trusts in

virtuality; the two do not align, due to the lack of self-disclosure, and both characters ultimately end up betrayed. Somewhat ironically, in the light of Hayles's model of virtual subjectivity, it is Floyd who stands to lose more by misjudging the nature of his and Brandon's relationship. Haley makes sure to foreground in his confession the fact that Floyd is a software engineer, and as such, we might expect him to have a better understanding of the risks of pursuing love in virtual spaces, not merely because of his familiarity with online conduct, but, following Hayles's rubric, that his coded knowledge would bolster his handling of the symbolic level.

*Catfish*, a decade later, speaks volumes to the extent to which users have become technofluent, but operate on the symbolic level only. Angela is portrayed as little more knowledgeable regarding the inner workings of her devices than we would expect the average user in the connected world to be. Nevertheless, she manages to spin a complex web of simulacra about her through mastery of virtuality at the top level, using email, social media, and three telephone lines. Hayles might argue that Angela's hold on her own identity – a point of intense focus towards the end of the film – is destabilised by prolonged engagement with her various technologies while lacking a deeper material understanding, and an awareness of how she is being disciplined by them. While I would agree with the latter part of this view, that Angela is certainly disciplined into becoming the sort of subject that Nev and his friends finally reveal her to be, I think there is more that is troubling her subjective scene, something Hayles evades in her two studies of virtual selfhood. Like Anne in 'The Wedding Album' sharing her consciousness among her 'sisters', or even P. Burke, whose joyful lease of life as Delphi sees her throw herself willingly across the splice, Angela admits that her divergent practices of self allow her to fully express incompatible fragments of her identity. This may have brought her respite from her offline life over the many months she spent 'in' these selves, but there remains the issue of reincorporation, which she had quite obviously been avoiding and which Nev eventually forces her to undergo. In the cases of *Catfish*, *The Parlor*, and also 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In', we are offered clear warnings of the perils of the splice. In each depiction, however, those imperilled are not just those engaging with the splice to its fullest potential, but also the lovers who call them on it. As a result, we do not react to the lovers' interventions as acts of disempowerment, as we might otherwise see a character intruding on another's rights to use virtuality to their own personal ends. Nev, Brandon and Paul are presented as wholly sympathetic characters, as cuckolded lovers left reeling by their relationships' failures to materialise. We do not question Brandon's jolt of horror at Slappy Sue's unveiling, or Paul's reaction to the monstrous P. Burke, or even Nev's extraction (and subsequent broadcasting) of Angela's confession. This suggests that despite an undisputed awarding of individuals' rights to autonomy in contemporary society, that love retains some sway over the subjects' trajectories, if they have made some sort of disclosed prior commitment.

Where Badiou sees the move of the pursuit of love to virtuality as a means to evade risk, by minimising self-exposure and perhaps in laying some measure of groundwork to absorb the effects of that riskiness, we see in these texts how delaying the inevitable primary encounter actually invites further risk and graver consequences. In addition, knowledge of virtuality cannot predict any given outcome or cushion the individual from reality. Floyd and Angela are both eloquent and masterful in their virtual practices – albeit it at different operational levels – but lose sight of how their actions impact on (others in) the real world; they have traded mastery of one realm for a hold on the other. Hayles’s digital subject works to alleviate anxiety through a holistic understanding of virtuality and all its constitutive devices, but fails to account for the disparities between types of subject, other than those who know and those who do not. Like Neo and Cypher, who work from opposite ends of the spectrum towards fluency in the Matrix, subjects’ levels of knowledge and methods of knowing vary across the board. As Steven Levy observes, in his updated epilogue to his history of the hacker, due to the pace of technological development contemporary hacking communities are so changed that what translates as operative knowledge has been transformed accordingly. He uses Mark Zuckerberg as a central example of the contemporary software hacker, contrasting him with his predecessors:

Unlike the original hackers, Zuckerberg’s generation didn’t have to start from scratch or use assembly language to get control of their machines. “I never wanted to take apart my computer,” he says. As a budding hacker in the late 90s, Zuckerberg tinkered with the higher-level languages, allowing him to create systems, rather than machines.<sup>36</sup>

That hackers at the turn of the millennium were beginning to operate from the mid-level up to the symbolic is telling, especially as the major players of this period have contributed enormously to the creation of Web 2.0 as a community space which, grounded in social media, does not equate a material knowledge of computing devices with proficiency in virtual environments. Thus, Hayles’s 2005 subject, who reads digital from the material level upwards, is not an accurate reflection of either the majority of users currently engaged with virtuality, or, increasingly, an informed base of those in control of it. Neither does her model subject account for the cultural and fictional renderings of the hacker/cyberpunk as having lost themselves within the recesses of their machines.

*LOL* is concerned with precisely this phenomenon, as it refigures the reclusive hackers of pre-1990s computer culture as the recreational users of today. Alex in particular is depicted as having a deep understanding of the inner workings of his machines, yet this understanding does not help him negotiate between his on- and offline lives, no less exploit his fluency in communications technologies to better communicate with the potential romantic partners around him. Zygmunt Bauman writes that ‘failure of a relationship is more often than not a

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<sup>36</sup> Levy, p. 476.



failure of communication', which is exactly what we are seeing in play in *LOL*.<sup>37</sup> These three young men are presented as children of the information age, virtually posthuman by Hayles's definition, but so embedded in their cyberspaces that a number of comic scenes interspersed throughout each narrative depict their inability to perform more traditionally 'analogue' tasks (such as DIY, driving a car, juggling – Tim even has Velcro shoes). Their forte lies in the technologies of communication: in the Internet, social media and devices meant to enhance human interaction. Yet their gross mishandling of these artefacts leads to communication problems in each of their lives: Tim and his girlfriend cannot communicate in person, and their arguments are centred on the distractions of the device; Chris is unable to make his IRL relationship translate to an image/text/voice medium, and his girlfriend does not want to become just another pornographic image; Alex has become detached from the realities of social interaction, and tries in vain to coax an IRL experience from a virtual environment with such determination that he fails to notice communication made to him from the outside as Walter attempts to extricate him from his virtual world. These men ought to be masters of communication, but in losing their organic sides to their virtual selves, they are deaf to the very mediums they work within. As Bauman explains, 'technical concerns square ill with emotions. Concentration on performance leaves no time or room for ecstasy. Physics is not the road to metaphysics'.<sup>38</sup> *LOL* plays on our very current fears regarding over-exposure to media, of fear of desensitisation, and of the intrusion of our devices into our embodied, emotional lives.

Martin Heidegger writes in 'The Question Concerning Technology', paraphrasing Rousseau, that '[e]verywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it'.<sup>39</sup> The dangers of enframing our subjectivities through virtual and communications technologies are made blatantly obvious in *LOL*, as the subjectivities of the male characters – so imperative to the offline relationships they are trying to conduct, and so required by their respective others – are threatened by their unhealthy reliance on the technologies themselves. Alex, Chris and Tim are chained, unfree and subsumed by their virtuality; their technologies cannot rescue their humanity. This would appear to contradict Hayles's argument, as here, human survival (or at least, social survival) is certainly imperilled, rather than enhanced. Heidegger proposes that:

we should like to prepare a *free relationship* [to technology]. The relationship will be free if it opens our human existence to the essence of technology. When we can respond to this essence, we shall be able to experience the technological within its own bounds.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love: On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2003), p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> Bauman, p. 47.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. by David Farrell Krell (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 311.

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

In order to maintain such a relationship with the technological, the online/offline activity must be balanced and accounted for. As discussed earlier, communications technologies offer much potential for self-projection, self-preservation, and the construction and experimentation of identity. In terms of the love relationship, however, an embodied experience of the other lover IRL must be cultivated – the Two require constant mediation and, as Ada puts it, attention.<sup>41</sup>

While the male characters of Swanberg's film, like Angela and Floyd, disappear willingly into the bowels of their machines, the protagonists of the three cyberpunk novellas illustrate the anxious and unconsciously disciplined subjects of Hayles's study. The stories, though all prefigure the boom in social media, predict a form of subjectivity inadvertently or unwillingly entered into in such practices. Tamera and her peers in particular exist in a social sphere where to be spliced by virtuality is not a choice. Chiang and Tiptree show how the choices made by their characters which reflect a seizure of the subjective scene – Tamera's decision to do away with calli, P. Burke's pact with GTX – may ultimately prove irreconcilable with future choices that occur in the intersubjective domain. In each story, the protagonists' decision to exert control over their respective autonomies eventually clashes with a need to move off the splice in order to connect with their lovers. These configurations of digital subjectivity, however, are far cry from the wilful engagements with virtuality in order to exploit others, as seen in *The Parlor* and *Catfish*, or the ways in which the characters turn away from reality in favour of the perceived safety of online environments, as seen with Floyd and also the men in *LOL*. 'The Girl Who Was Plugged In' and 'Liking What You See' communicate, to different degrees, other inherent dangers in the constitution of autonomy through virtual means. In 'Liking What You See', Tamera and her peers may choose to adopt calliagnosia (or to mediate reality through spex and software), but their 'choice' is no real choice at all. Like Hayles's reading of the subjects who participate in the Turing test, the citizens of Chiang's novella have already been spliced by a media-saturated culture that overlays the embodied world with a range of enticing, hyperreal alternatives. Whether the inhabitants of this society choose to engage with the technologies or not, they are already spliced by the decisions of those around them, namely the advertising companies which perpetuate these environments. Tamera attends a college where the adoption of calliagnosia is optional, and as such creates an initial divide between the 'realities' that students 'see', but these students recreationally use a range of further technologies to modify their world pictures both with and without the disclosure of those in their immediate social circles. Furthermore, the emerging technologies the interviewee towards the end of the novella gestures to suggest even more of these interventions. The impression Chiang leaves us with is that not only are a range of digital subjects utilising virtuality to different ends, but that the variety of technologies, software, and biological

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<sup>41</sup> *LOL*.

interventions are creating divides further than the relatively simple ‘on/off’ choice of reality versus virtuality. With so many mediations on modes of ‘seeing’, individuals are likely to become dislocated from one another, and unable to uphold one another’s *Umwelts* as a result. Though they move in the same physical spaces, the versions of those spaces that they see will be unevenly perceived; so many overlapping, but potentially infinitely variable realities will push them further apart.

In her own experience and in anticipation of these issues, Tamera tries to navigate her path through virtuality by relying on a level of disclosure she feels is appropriate for the relationships she tries to maintain, despite the intrusions of virtual technologies upon them. But the splice has already effected its damage, for her and Garrett at least: their newly unequal grounding, rather than being levelled by virtuality, is painfully illuminated by it. Unlike Rico and Lisa, the protagonists of Tom Crosshill’s story, Tamera and Garrett are not in any sense in control of their technologies or the directions in which they are being swept by them. They, like the vast majority of the users in today’s information society, are being propelled through the symbolic realm largely without knowing how or why. For Hayles, their superficial engagement would be perhaps reason enough to explain such anxiety, but really it is the dissolution of identity which is foregrounded in these three novellas – the incessant splicing and fragmenting which virtuality encourages without a counteractive move towards preservation. ‘The Girl Who Was Plugged In’ sketches an even more pathetic picture of the subject as browbeaten into submission by image culture. P. Burke’s choice to splice is even less of a choice than Tamera’s, but it is a choice of sorts, GTX’s hollow promise that plucks her from the absolutely real and choiceless world she previously inhabited. The story predicts how even virtual spaces cannot escape completely the effects of institutionalisation, a notion raised also in ‘Liking What You See’ where the ‘choices’ to engage with virtual technologies are framed by capitalist control of society as the instigator of such needs for evasion or participation. It also diametrically opposes the pursuit of self in virtual spaces with the pursuit of love, which, in light of the subsequent texts under analysis here points to a lack of meaningful connection between the masterfully connected.

Kim Thorne and Alexander Kouzmin perceive the Internet as having moved from an egotistic space to a narcissistic space, in its shift from the hacker-defined Web 1.0 to the socially networked Web 2.0 in current use. Aligning the hacker, the cyberpunk, and a neo-Romantic configuration of self, their study shows how cyberspace was initially ‘heralded by technological pundits and free market advocates as a place for immediate, democratic communication that obliterated all forms of pre-existing “difference” and presumed a brave new world’.<sup>42</sup> This

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<sup>42</sup> Kim Thorne and Alexander Kouzmin, ‘Cyberpunk-Web 1.0 ‘Egoism’ Greets Group-Web 2.0 ‘Narcissism’: Convergence, Consumption, and Surveillance in the Digital Divide’, *Administrative Theory and Praxis*, 30.3 (2008), 299-323 (p. 301).

perceived freedom, coupled with the aforementioned opportunity to engage in newly meaningful authorial practices, provides the seductive draw of cyberspace and helps to explain its success as it moved from a relatively closed circle based on hacker communities and their privileged knowledges to the pervasive social and consumerist tool it is today. The hacker counterculture, adapted by cyberpunk writers who have canonised it as an influential part of the Internet's mythology, was the first real form of what Thorne and Kouzmin designate as 'communal cyber-activity [...] formulated on the triumph of certain technocratic, enabled forms of self-reliant, yet networked individualism'.<sup>43</sup> Already we see an intrinsic tension in the concept of individuality as newly networked, due to the environment through which these individuals now move, and as such the digital subject enacts a paradox – driven by self-interest, but nonetheless reliant on virtual community to bolster experience and knowledge in cyberspace. One side of this dichotomy must, therefore, give way to the other, and as I suggested in the previous chapter in terms of social media, the pursuit of community in virtuality could always be read as self-serving, because of its lack of concrete commitment, its capacity to be quickly constructed and even more quickly abandoned. This serves as a reminder that the original forms of virtual community were incredibly opportunistic, based on knowledge exchanges in which participation was – and continues to be – guided by self-interest. As the virtual domain opened up to non-specialised users, those who now constitute the social dimension of Web 2.0, we see how the hacker ethics are not dissipated, but are recycled. Community in the 'group-web' has gone from being openly selfish to quietly narcissistic, because of its promise of a subjective freedom, an opportunity which is taken up at the expense of others. Such narcissism, of course, impacts both on selves and on the possibility of constructing successful relationships, and implies a U-turn from Turkle's computer screen – from mirror to window and back to mirror once more.

Though not all digital subjects are hackers, and not all forms of virtual community are hacker knowledge bases, we can read a sort of magnification of the former counterculture as it spreads into a more mainstream model of virtuality. There are many striking similarities between Romantic narrative culture and the ideals of selfhood it produced and the digital subjectivities authoring themselves in virtuality, but one important disparity stands out – the Romantic hero has generally been figured as the great lover of literary history. This is not just so in the cyberpunk (or the hacker, or the digital subject), whose narcissistic, opportunistic and self-serving nature is completely at odds with the love paradigm. To return to Russell's sketch of the Romantic hero, whom he saw as revolting against social bonds, we see an even more concentrated realisation of this in the neo-Romantic digital subject. Russell meant the bonds of the social contract, but the virtual posthuman revolts even against the bonds of love, and so this

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<sup>43</sup> Thorne and Kouzmin, p. 304.

statement becomes even more relevant when considering how toxic the narcissistic pursuit of self in virtuality becomes for the love relationship. Leaving the ramifications for the self aside momentarily, we can see how a model of individuality nurtured by the narcissism of virtual practices may greatly trouble the love paradigm. These six texts converge around this idea, approaching it from a number of angles ranging from relationships pursued solely in online spaces (*The Parlor*) to the way virtuality pulls the lover away from the Two scene (*LOL*). Most worrying is the fact that these trends are no longer confined to the realm of post-cyberpunk science fiction, but, as the realist films under analysis here convey and much recent scholarship supports, they have become commonplace in our daily engagement with virtual worlds. Tiptree and Marusek's novellas also point insightfully to the tension between traditional, modernist conceptions of selfhood – in Paul and Benjamin – and the postmodernist or posthumanist reconfigurations of subjectivity that seek to undercut liberal humanism – in their lovers, P. Burke/Delphi and Anne. Both texts also invoke the myth of Narcissus: Tiptree quite explicitly makes reference to this in her eerily prophetic vision of a spliced virtual subject becoming obsessed with herself, and thus reduced to an echo of her former person. Marusek does not make as precise a point of figuring Anne as a contemporary Narcissus, and yet, in her mental breakdown brought on by the disintegration of her personality, we are reminded of the insular narcissism of the psychological disorders named for the Greek myth. While P. Burke finds herself a reverberating series of echoes, the repeatedly simographed Anne is reduced to so many reflections, copies that clamour for autonomy and threaten the integrity of the original. In both stories, the inability to construct love around these pursuits of self prevents the kinds of subjectivities proposed by the authors from being considered successful or particularly desirable, and forces us to reassess the critical stances of those such as Hayles and Coyne, whose models of virtual subjectivity – in leaving out such important social bonds as love – are rendered utopian, at best, and worryingly egocentric, at worst.

Though several proponents of cybercultural theory want to see reality and virtuality as coextensive, and, like Hayles, prescribe measures we can take to enact successful practices of self in both realms, their views fall short of the reality of the situation. As these texts show, online selfhood and offline relationships are all but irreconcilable, because the former is pursued at the expense of the latter. Even those with deep knowledge of machines – like the technofluent characters in the three films – are not guaranteed success in the symbolic realm, and even less in the real world. Retreading the history of the hackers, it could be argued that commitment to the virtual world, to learning their machines, means that these individuals turn away from the real world. And for those operating at the symbolic level only, the fact that social relationships across virtual communities have been reconfigured by this new environment means that offline social practices do not translate fluidly into online spaces – the terms of these spaces are very different. Virtuality, then, cannot be seen as a true mirror of reality; our virtual selves are not

neat reflections of our embodied selves, no matter how much Facebook officials may strive for that to be true. Where virtuality does mirror reality, however, is in its echo of postmodernity's fractured, fragmented composition. But instead of cushioning us from its effects, it rather encourages the splice to endless, potentially infinite and infinitely unmanageable degrees. We not only spin away from one another in virtuality, but we also internally 'split and divide' over and over, 'straining the limits' of identification between aspects of our own sense of self. In offline life, depending on the *Umwelt*, we are regularly given opportunity to recall our personae and resettle the parameters of our self-narratives; what strands we abandon we cast off fully – sometimes in lengthy, painful processes – but we do it to achieve closure. The opportunistic, non-committal generation of selves in virtuality means we can abandon any given self at any given moment, without a second's hesitation. We never need to sit back and regroup these myriad selves into one coherent identity, which would of course be impossible.

In these six texts, and in many cyberpunk texts, love is not found. Yet the narratives draw their energy from exactly that absence, and direct our attention to the kinds of selves being generated in virtuality, to pose the question: why is it that these selves cannot love? Such thematically rich and socially reflexive sketches of subjectivity in the virtual age point to several reasons for this: digital subjects are variously presented as further fragmented than their non-virtual postmodern counterparts; as ruthlessly individualistic, narcissistic, and driven by self-interest and the self-determining pull of the experimental virtual environments. To retrace a course already laid by the Byronic heroes of Romanticism, we might see in these neo-Romantic figures their own attempts at preservation in virtuality, the preservation of self. This argument, I feel, could easily be made, as I do see a degree of accuracy in understanding virtual practices as a move towards the preservation of self at the expense of the preservation of the love relationship which these subjects may see as a threat to their carefully enacted self-constructions. However, as I have said, the story of love is also the story of self, and I think that these new selves, these digital subjects, are acting under the illusion of virtuality as preservative. To conclude this chapter and the section I want to balance the most recent findings of Turkle with Hayles's vision of virtual subjectivity, to suggest that it is a further crisis in contemporary constructions of the self that not only prevents intimacy and hinders the romantic paradigm, but signals grave repercussions for the non-romantically presented self also. Those actually enacting a successful model of digital subjectivity are in the minority, so it is to the majority to whom we should attend. These texts push us out of fiction to consider the relation of the narratives and their characters to situations and people in the real world. They show that even among those with extensive specialist knowledge and the skill to permeate virtuality at all levels, this does not keep them safe from themselves, and does not guarantee translation into social, romantic, offline practice.

### 8.3. Adrift, 'alone', and dis/connecting

In her most recent book, *Alone Together*, Turkle's tone is significantly changed from the hopefulness of her first study from almost three decades earlier. She writes that 'in the psychoanalytic tradition, one speaks about narcissism not to indicate people who love themselves, but a personality so fragile that it needs constant support'.<sup>44</sup> As her rich ethnography of Western Internet users – from children and their parents, to university students, professionals, and hackers – conveys, this narcissism is not necessarily wilfully entered into, but rather is symptomatic of the state of our current engagement with virtuality and its impact on the relationships we pursue and maintain there.

So far this chapter, inspired by the various representations in cyberpunk and post-cyberpunk cinema of the digital subject, has considered those that throw themselves willingly across the splice. These subjects engage with virtuality at varying levels of Hayles's operational model, from the deep level of material knowledge – the hackers – to the sophisticated symbolic realm – like Angela in *Catfish*. We have seen that users come to virtuality, and consequently turn away from their embodied lifeworlds, for a number of reasons. Dissatisfaction with their offline lives (Angela), a need for self-expression and experimentation with identity (Floyd), and the pursuit of a more simplified, utilitarian desire (Brandon) – these reasons prompting the choice to consciously move away from the real world in favour of virtuality are many, likely as many as there are users. Sometimes, however, the choice does not seem like much of a choice at all, strongly suggesting that virtuality as a domain and a tool is lately something that is forced upon users largely without their consent. In contemporary society, even the choice not to go online, to stake out virtual presence, is still a choice dictated by virtuality itself. Tamera and P. Burke both communicate the pains of being disciplined into being by image-culture, which to an enormous extent is reinforced by virtual media.

In *Alone Together*, Turkle repurposes several metaphors from computer language to express our current condition in online environments. The first is lifted directly from one of her interviewees, who describes his online activity and interaction with others as going no deeper than the 'interface' level (p. 28). This potent descriptor not only suggests the action of engagement online – stretched from the initial tool use of the human/computer interface to stand for all forms of contact and connection with others in virtual spaces – but goes further to reconfigure those connections as superficial and lacking depth of emotional involvement. In fact, Turkle argues that our social relationships are in danger precisely because the insertion of technology – email, text messaging, social media websites – as a mediator between us creates a remove which holds feelings at arm's length, people at a more manageable distance, and dulls

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<sup>44</sup> Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), p. 162. [Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.]

the emotional richness of familial, social, and romantic encounters (p. 187). This keys into Badiou's disparaging vision of dating sites as measures to reduce or eliminate risk, but sheds further light on new parameters of risk that have arisen from virtual practices that not only trouble the love relationship – or any relationship – but intervene into the self so radically that connection of any kind becomes almost impossible. Furthermore, Turkle makes clear that at highest risk in virtuality are not those, like the hackers, who consciously shun society in favour of spending time with their machines, or those, like the catfishes, who actively manipulate themselves and others in online spaces. Rather, her study suggests that it is the majority of recreational users who are being disciplined daily by life on the splice. Turkle claims that we are most affected by an 'always on' culture, one which simultaneously fosters, supports and exacerbates an inadvertent, accidental form of narcissism. Speaking of the many hundreds of teenagers she interviewed regarding their use of social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Myspace, Turkle explains:

These young people are the first to grow up with an expectation of continuous connection: always on, and always on them. And they are among the first to grow up not necessarily thinking of simulation as second best. All of this makes them fluent with technology but brings a new set of insecurities. They nurture friendships on social-networking sites and then wonder if they are among friends. They are connected all day but are not sure if they have communicated. They become confused about companionship. Can they find it in their lives on the screen? (pp. 26-27).

Thinking back to Brian Massumi, who saw in the simulacrum its own inherent power, we can see that, with regard to virtuality, this means the power to reconfigure human experience and even emotions in unprecedented new ways. Intimacy becomes something to be achieved anonymously, with strangers. Friendship becomes thinned out, superficial, conducted at the interface level. The private becomes the public. And, most importantly for Turkle, the notion of connection is completely overhauled.

In the early days of real-world virtual practices, our conduct mirrored to some extent that which we have read in – and perhaps learned from – the cyberpunks. The image of the plugged or jacked-in user, the body motionless before a computer terminal while the mind roams free in cyberspace, is not too far an imaginative leap from the ways in which we have, until quite recently, always initiated ourselves into virtual worlds. If nothing else, the body remaining static while the mind or self 'escapes', has always pointed to a fairly clear-cut, slightly ritualistic mode of engagement. When stationary at the screen, virtuality was 'on'; when away from the screen, 'back in' the mobile body, the real world returned. In a talk for TED in 2012, to publicise this most recent book, Turkle voiced her worries about the current state of the self and its inability to forge meaningful connections in the connected world. She compares her



current outlook to the 'heady days' of her earlier studies, and demonstrates that the 'always on' computer culture of today has intruded radically upon the spaces we need for self-construction:

In 1996 [...] I had just written a book that celebrated our life on the Internet and I was about to be on the cover of Wired magazine. In those heady days, we were experimenting with chat rooms and online virtual communities. We were exploring different aspects of ourselves. And then we unplugged. I was excited. And, as a psychologist, what excited me the most was the idea that we would use what we learned in the virtual world about ourselves, about our identity, to live better lives in the real world.<sup>45</sup>

What Turkle had originally hoped for in the interplay of on- and offline life practices, was akin to the co-extensivity that Barry Wellman and Milena Gulia argue that the Internet already fosters, whereby the two worlds reflexively bolster one another in ways that are complementary and mutually beneficial to the user and his or her relationships. However, the 'and then we unplugged' is crucial to understanding how this scenario might be workable. The point Turkle insists on is that in our current culture, thanks to the ubiquity of computing devices and Internet access, we now almost never truly unplug. Across a range of social groups, Turkle observes how 'people can't get enough of each other, if and only if they can have each other as a distance, in amounts they can control'.<sup>46</sup> The mobile devices, PDAs, and incessant computer use facilitate this control, inserting a manageable distance between users while also perpetuating the illusion of closeness. And it is an illusion, for as Turkle notes, 'we spend an evening on the social network instead of going to the pub with friends'.<sup>47</sup> What these behaviours, underpinned by the technologies that support and encourage them, produce in our experience is a dual paradox: we are alone, but never really alone, because we are connected, but we are not truly connecting. In *Alone Together* Turkle expands on this contradictory state by explaining how our virtual practices have refigured our social adeptness in worrying new ways: 'when technology engineers intimacy, relationships can be reduced to mere connections. And then, easy connection becomes redefined as intimacy. Put otherwise, cyberintimacies slide into cybersolitudes' (p. 26).

This last statement is redolent of Paul Virilio's observation that cybersexuality, or the environments enframing it, create a sense of cosmic solitude. Virilio's phrasing in turn calls to mind the ways that Neil deGrasse Tyson and Carl Sagan saw us all as cosmically connected. Badiou sees the love relationship as being particularly marked out by its opposite state of being, that is, when we are not in a relationship. Each state is analogised by its relationship to the other; in Badiou's words, before love 'there was nothing but solitudes'.<sup>48</sup> The scene of Two is

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<sup>45</sup> Sherry Turkle, 'Connected, but alone?', TED (2012) <[http://www.ted.com/talks/sherry\\_turkle\\_alone\\_together.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/sherry_turkle_alone_together.html)> [accessed 20/07/13]

<sup>46</sup> 'Connected, but alone?'

<sup>47</sup> 'Connected, but alone?'

<sup>48</sup> 'L'écriture du générique', p. 357.

elevated, made special and necessary, precisely defined, by the state of subjective solitude that preceded it. In order to appreciate the love relationship, it follows that we must also appreciate, and certainly know, the solitude to which it stands in opposition. Turkle identifies the need for solitude as a prerequisite for self-construction, an imperative and instrumentally formative state to which we continually need to return over the course of our lives, in order to take stock of ourselves as individuals. Moreover, she argues, virtuality's intrusion into our lives robs us of this solitude. We ought to be cultivating ourselves and our identities through moments of self-reflection; Giddens's self-project correlates with this view, in that the self-narrative needs continual assessment in order to bring aspects of the self in line with the main trajectory of identity. If we are never alone, but never connected, then we are adrift, unable to construct either a coherent self or a meaningful relationship. Turkle makes a light-hearted point about the new skills technology brings us, relating an interviewee's account of texting while making eye contact. The anecdote is met with laughter from her audience, but I want to deconstruct this image as a very concrete example of the ways in which our selves have been spread too thinly across the virtual divide.

If a person needs to send communication to another via text message, the likelihood is that that other person is not in the immediate vicinity. Already the connection between them is strained: they are both at a remove. If the person texting is also making eye contact in order to maintain or give the semblance of maintaining a conversation in real time with a third person, then the connection between them is inhibited. The one texting spreads his or her attention thinly, across multiple sources: partly attentive to the person in real time conversation, partly to the side of the conversation they conduct on the phone, and partly to the absent person on the receiving end of the text message – fully connecting with none. Equivalent of this behaviour have been known in the past as multitasking; now, they are evidence of splicing. This image draws us back to the scene in *LOL* where Tim and a friend 'chat' on their computers from opposite sides of the room, while Tim's girlfriend Ada watches a film, alone but not alone. Tim ought to be spending time with Ada – and arguably is – but his attention is partly with her, partly with his friend, and wholly tethered to his computer.

Of the six texts in this section, *LOL* is the most realistic in its portrayal of people being 'alone together'. In a highly connected world, the majority of us are guilty of spreading our attention across conflicting sources, of multitasking or splicing or disappearing behind our technologies. But because our technologies, and our virtual selves, are always on, there is no real disappearing act. We have forgotten how to cultivate ourselves in our alone time, and the inability to be alone paradoxically does not equate in an ability to be together. This is why I believe that digital subjectivity is not only dangerous for the self, but for the love relationship, as these texts and Turkle's research ask us to seriously consider. Where Turkle had once seen the computer as a mirror through which we could monitor and construct our self-image, what

reflects now, darkly, in our semi-permeable looking-glass screens, is not the matching outline to our embodied self, or even its proportionate shadow. What reflects, or refracts, is a host of echoes, some louder and deeper than others; a hall of mirrored images all sharing one, tenuously variegated root source. As Tom Crosshill so eloquently figures our virtual selfhood, we are fractals, constantly evolving more edges and faces than can ever be truly mapped or accounted for. And the more we fracture, the harder it becomes for the shapes we become to tessellate with the shape of others. Love demands that we constantly reappraise ourselves and our partners and create savepoints and remake encounters – in short, even as it evolves it recursively speaks to history in order to preserve itself. The project of the self, the viable self-narrative passing through the *Umwelt*, functions similarly, asking us to probe for conflicting knowledges, unravelling strands or untenable aspects that may lead to identity crisis. Love, I feel, can help us navigate postmodernity by tempering fragmentation with preservation. But in virtuality, preservation is discouraged, relegated and often dispensed with outright, and as such the practices of self engendered by online spaces cannot support a successful construction or sustainment of the Two scene. If subjectivity proceeds from intersubjectivity, and a depth model of identity can be validated against equally deep, meaningful constructions of love, then accordingly, the superficiality of virtual intersubjectivity points to the constructions of selves also occurring at the surface level.



Solitude is where the self-narrative, the *Umwelt* and the body all converge, to provide a space of reflection in which the self can be regrouped, the strands retied. One striking disparity stands out between the neo-Romantic digital subjects and their Romantic predecessors: the Romantics knew how to be alone. Consider Heathcliff, tramping the desolate Yorkshire moorlands, or Wordsworth's 'bliss of solitude' when wandering lonely as a cloud.<sup>49</sup> Consider Byron's Don Juan, or even Frankenstein's creature, who knew the greatest solitude of all, and accordingly craved the lover to treat it. In his time alone, the creature says of reading Goethe that the novel provoked him to ask questions of himself: "What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my destination?"<sup>50</sup> These questions are replayed in Giddens's existential queries – 'What to do? How to act? Who to be?' – that he sees as guiding the self-narrative in postmodernity.<sup>51</sup> The body figures largely throughout Romanticism, united for the first time in the history of the philosophy of love with the loving mind or soul. The body becomes a powerful site of expression, both of individuality and of sexuality, and furthermore is the point from which everything is put out into the world, and to where it must return. The body,

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<sup>49</sup> William Wordsworth, 'I wandered lonely as a Cloud', in *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 303.

<sup>50</sup> Shelley, *Frankenstein*, p. 153.

<sup>51</sup> *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 70.

which we carry everywhere with us and that carries us everywhere – except into virtual spaces – is our own unique, microcosmic material *Umwelt*. Though postmodernist theory has sought to phase out the body by reducing it to a mere footnote, an incidental construct from which our selves proceed, I think that we can make better use of our bodies by refiguring that footnote as that which underpins our identity. In the spliced subjectivities of these texts, the self is destabilised by its many divergent narratives; these practices of self trouble one another because they cannot be regrouped in the coherent whole. The body, which is always denied entry into virtual worlds, becomes yet another strand of incompatible narrative for these characters.

Hayles's digital subject is an impressive model of selfhood that seeks to undercut the liberal humanist model. She succeeds where other postmodernists have failed by recognising the fragmentary nature of our contemporary culture and, rather than allowing the subject to be passively debilitated by it, she prescribes a seizing of this fragmentation and a conversion of it into wilful splicing. Certainly, the notion of the unified self has come under attack from all fronts, and is generally held in present thought to be misleading and unworkable. However, a unified self we may be able to do away with, but a coherent identity we surely cannot. The two, as the cyborg has shown us, are not the same thing. Splicing oneself over the nodes of one's environment may feel like a seamless existence, a cosmic connection – especially with new virtual domains that appear to support it – but as the various cyberpunk writers and contemporary filmmakers ensure to convey, splicing has its serious repercussions for identity. Without coherence, the self experiences crisis; with so many divergent narratives being enacted by any one self online, the self is bound to suffer from incoherence. While not all projections of self in virtuality will be meaningful, they still require time and energy and attention, and what is more, these seemingly meaningless selves may become meaningful to someone else. With so many variables in play, and no longer any unplugging, no retreats by which the subject can take stock and regroup, Hayles's digital subject traversing virtuality unscathed by the splice comes to seem utopian. The digital subject is an idealised form of virtual selfhood, practiced by scant few, if any, and furthermore is completely overshadowed by Turkle's sketch of the 'tethered' self. Her image of the contemporary self which is tethered to its technological devices, and further tethered through those devices to other tethered selves, expresses with full force the new, postmodern dilemma facing love and all of our social intercourse – if we are always on, we are never truly alone. And if we are never truly alone, we may never feel the need to be truly together.

In the various selves put forward in these texts, from a novella that predicted virtuality to a documentary that reports from the front, and in the light of Hayles's virtual posthuman/digital subject as tempered by Turkle's vision of these subjects as existing, alone, together, I want to conclude that if we are to see virtuality and reality as increasingly coextensive, then virtuality does not provide respite from a fake and fragmented postmodern

world, but mirrors it and further exacerbates it by removing the solitary scene and obstructing the Two scene. Moreover, the myriad disparities between individual users, and within the users themselves as they generate self after spliced self, create gaps in community. The connected become disconnected; the augmented, diminished.

## Conclusion

Love must be reinvented, but also quite simply defended.

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Alain Badiou, *The Meaning of Sarkozy* (2008)

Ten years ago, Francis Fukuyama sketched two future scenarios that he saw as most likely to push us into the next, posthuman stage of history. Abandoning the communications prong of his hypothesis fairly early on, Fukuyama instead chose to worry about the kind of world picture, the peoples and ethics, that a biotechnological future might create. In his concluding paragraphs, he writes:

much of our political world rests on the existence of a stable human ‘essence’ with which we are endowed by nature [...] We may be about to enter into a posthuman future, in which technology will give us the capacity to alter that essence over time. Many assume that the posthuman world will look pretty much like our own – free, equal, prosperous, caring, compassionate – only with better health care, longer lives, and perhaps more intelligence than today. But the posthuman world could be one that is far more hierarchical and competitive than the one that currently exists, and full of social conflict as a result. It could be one in which any notion of ‘shared humanity’ is lost, because we have mixed human genes with those of so many other species that we no longer have a clear idea of what a human being is.<sup>1</sup>

A conservative politician, Fukuyama regurgitates the pitch of the liberal humanist paradigm, and his comparison of our current world with an imagined posthuman society is not only paranoid but also compromised by his tunnel vision. Fukuyama works from the assumption that our contemporary world is not already full of conflict, that it respects this human ‘essence’ across the board, that all men everywhere are born, seen and treated free and equal. Going on to embellish his nightmare sketch of the future, he returns to Huxley’s novel, writing that: ‘it could be the kind of soft tyranny envisioned in *Brave New World*, in which everyone is healthy and happy but has forgotten the meaning of hope, fear, or struggle’.<sup>2</sup> His analysis of Huxley’s society is fairly superficial, but it says much about the premise of liberal humanism, in that it requires that human society somehow needs fear, strife, presumably wars and starvation, in order for those in power to better enjoy their positions of privilege.

I agree with Fukuyama that the posthuman future is likely to resemble our own, but this is because our own is already one forged by ruthless politics and technocultural capital. We already live in this future. In Huxley’s novel, love does not exist because the people have no need for it. Margaret Atwood has called this the beauty of the novel, in that it can be read as

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<sup>1</sup> *Our Posthuman Future*, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Our Posthuman Future*, p. 218.

either a perfect utopia or a stark dystopia, depending on the reader's outlook. Indeed, in plenty of utopias, love tends to be given a backseat compared to emotions concerned with friendship, family, and communal altruism. As this thesis has argued, love has come to play an active role within high capitalist society, as a buffer against the dehumanising effects of such a world. As long as the world is characterised by a flattening capital, love will persist to temper its effects on the subjective level. If Fukuyama worries that we will lose our 'essence' in the posthuman era, it can only be that he worries that the utopia might come true, which would likely usurp capital and love simultaneously.

While Fukuyama looks to the future, he misses the fact that we have already become ontologically posthuman, even if our bionic limbs and cloned children are still some way off becoming a reality. Donna Haraway and N. Katherine Hayles each propose a model of subjectivity that can appropriately be called posthuman – critically or philosophically – because they mark the transition from the liberal humanist period and offer constructive solutions to the postmodern crisis of self. The postmodernists' abstract concerns over the fragmentary self are quite literally realised in virtuality, and at first glance Hayles's virtual posthuman/digital subject seems like the perfect model of selfhood to which we can aspire. However, on closer inspection, there are many issues the digital subject faces. While Hayles claims that ontological security in the virtual world will be preserved by informed practices and coded knowledges of the machines that discipline us, this thesis has shown in various cases – from the hacker to the catfish, all highly proficient in their respective ways – that this claim simply does not bear out. Hayles's digital subject also cannot account for the majority of users in virtuality, those who have fleshed out Sherry Turkle's extensive ethnographic studies. What becomes startlingly clear is that while we all necessarily become digital subjects through engaging with virtual technologies and practices, a higher proportion of us are irregularly being disciplined by them, rather than balancing that process with informed discipline exerted over ourselves. We are constantly being interpellated into narratives without our full consent or awareness, and we have to leave parts of ourselves online, never to be recuperated with other branches of our self-narrative. The digital subject invites too many conflicting terms into play: too many selves that cannot be reincorporated, too many narratives that do not cohere, the sum of which is a potentially infinitely fragmented identity, supported and encouraged by virtuality – and the others encountered there. The virtual posthuman is at odds with preservation, its practices obscure trust and create new parameters of risk for the self and social relationships. The more that individuals leave parts of themselves online, the less there is the chance of successful recombination of selves, narratives, and practices into a stable and meaningful self-project. And without a self-project, there is little chance of being able to construct a successful Two scene, which relies on the reflexivity of the joint narrative with the narratives of the lovers.

The more successful model of subjectivity is to be found in Haraway's ontological cyborg. We might be most obviously posthuman in the way we engage in widespread virtual practices, but we are all latently cyborgian. Hayles called for the cyborg to be updated to reflect the state of technoculture today – meaning the pervasiveness of virtuality, which has overtaken biotechnology in its bid to configure a posthuman future – but her digital subject never really fulfilled this project. Scholars have since confused the two: even Turkle speaks of her virtual subjects as cyborgs because of their symbiotic relationships with computing devices. Still other scholars have risen to Hayles's challenge, and used Haraway's cyborg metaphor to speak about virtuality, but few go much further than employing it to express a blurring of boundaries between the organic and inorganic. I think that the synonymising of the two – of the cyborg and the cyberpunk – is essentially problematic. Trying to find a point at which constructions of the self can be compared in Haraway and Hayles can be boiled down to a simple use of terminology. The cyborg as woven, the virtual posthuman as spliced, though Stevenson erroneously synonymised the two in her reading of Tiptree, may be the defining features on which each theorist's construction of posthuman selfhood turns. The virtual subject, as we have seen, is a diminished figure that always begins with a denial – that of the body. The cyborg, on the other hand, augments. Augmentation is synonymous with improvement, enhancement. While it can signal our position on the threshold of an upcoming volitional period of history, it will be decades before these classically cyborgian figures appear. Cyborgian ontology goes much further than its mere iconography. More immediately, it shows us how to improve the human, how to ease ourselves into a post(liberal)humanist era of selfhood. In this era, aspects of the old system will be recycled and incorporated, as 'transgressive gestures re-enclose us', while others will be discarded. One can never truly 'make it new', and neither can we reinvent ourselves from the ground up. We partially enhance, but never fully eradicate. Features of the liberal humanist subject will persist in the cyborgian subject – such as the sense of a unified self, expressed instead as the coherent identity gleaned from a woven self-narrative. The cyborg insists on the body, reminding us that we will always have bodies, even if we know those bodies are atomically vulnerable or bleeding into our surrounding environments, even if they have all but been written out of the postmodernist picture.

Haraway writes that 'to be One is an illusion', but I think that the concept of illusion is something that we can turn to our advantage in postmodernity. When Hayles uses cybernetics to blend the human with its environments both natural and technological, she invokes the observations of those like Sagan who remind us that we are all atomically connected. While a beautiful sentiment evidently meant to evoke a meaningful sense of connection, to conduct one's life with that always in mind would prove impossible. As Giddens asserts, in order to engage in daily life we require the illusion of the *Umwelt* to protect our fragile self-projects. A need for a coherent sense of identity quite clearly suggests that we need to continue to think of



ourselves as individuals, even in an era where the unified self of liberal humanism is no longer useful. Similarly, the cyborg's weaving together of partial identities into a reconstituted whole, suggests that there is still a requirement in postmodernity to claim a subjective autonomy. This subject position is refigured, however, by rejecting the final or finished self ideal of liberal humanism, and instead remaining a work-in-progress, a constant construction and reconstruction which remains open to new knowledges, revisionary discourses and life's experiences.

For these reasons, the confluent love that has taken hold of the romantic paradigm in our contemporary period can be read as an ontologically cyborgian practice. The current model of love, as proposed by Badiou, Nancy and Giddens, supports the kinds of selves that cyborgs encourage us to be. Charlotte Ross, writing about the difference between cyborg sex and cybersex, held the virtual subject above its cyborgian counterpart because she saw in it a radical reconfiguration of the sexual self that could, in its 'wilful shrugging off' of aspects of its embodied identity, subvert gender norms and the hegemonies of sexual politics.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, she saw the cyborg as merely 'reinforcing or replicating more normative human practices'.<sup>4</sup> As I have argued, sex and love play entirely different roles in constituting our subjectivities. The cyborg in fiction has often been sexualised, objectified, and generally used as a conduit for male desire. But in love, as the writers in Part One of my thesis clearly show, that subject/object relation has to be done away with. We could still quite happily agree that cyborg love reinforces normative practices, but 'normative', in terms of the romantic metanarrative, is quite different from the normative values of any other.

I have pointed to the four paradigmatic shifts that can be observed in the evolution of love since Plato's writing. But I do not wish to suggest that each time love remakes itself completely. Badiou writes that love must be something that reinvents, that innovates, but I do not think he believes that this reinvention necessarily forgets itself and its own history. I have already outlined, with the aid of Badiou, Nancy, Sartre and others, how love manages to hold conflicting aspects quite comfortably, how it operates beneath laws of its own, at the point of paradox. To add to this, as much as love can be understood to remake and reinvent itself, it is also essentially a movement towards preservation. This is easily read on the subjective level, as lovers enact the succession of encounters that build upon one another, whilst communing with the first, but superseding it to extend towards their future. Love progresses recursively, making use of history and memory and preserving the couple even as it allows them to grow. This process is exactly mirrored at the universal level, which incidentally is why I believe that, in spite of the convincing claims of the postmodernists that our current time sees culture as devoid of superstructural mythologies, love persists and will continue to persist as the last of our

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<sup>3</sup> Ross, p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> Ross, p. 223.

metanarratives. Metanarrative hinges on a sense of normative values, values which are reinforced and re-imposed generation after generation. There is every reason to be mistrustful. But what of love? Why has it survived? Because love is essentially the only human condition, that is without negativity. It is wholly positive, and so what is normative in love can only be determined on a positive basis. The metanarrative of love speaks recursively to its entire history, even as it improves upon it, even as it reinvents itself. Badiou points out that love in the universal sense only exists as such because it supports the infinite number of unique experience on the subjective level; it is a story made up of stories. In this sense, love as metanarrative is unique among other metanarratives because it does not prescribe one story, one set of rules or values for all, but rather encourages subjective engagement and persists precisely because of it. Thus, love's metanarrative is up to us all to perpetuate, to defend and reinvent. And if Badiou requests that love be defended, then there can be no more powerful combatants than confluent lovers and ontological cyborgs.

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