

Change With the Machines:

Posthumanism and Postmodernism in Cyberpunk Literature

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Abstract in Norwegian

Denne oppgaven tar for seg sammenhengen mellom de postmodernistiske motivene som skiller undersjangeren cyberpunk fra den større science fiction-sjangeren, og det posthumanistiske uttrykket som cyberpunk får som resultat av disse motivene. Oppgaven baserer seg på tre romaner som alle har satt sine definitive preg på cyberpunk-sjangeren: Philip K. Dicks *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), William Gibsons *Neuromancer* (1984), og Pat Cadigans *Synners* (1991). Gjennom å etablere en kronologi av cyberpunk viser disse romanene hen på hvordan sjangeren reagerte på opptoget til, gullalderen av, og etterdønningene etter, den teknologiske revolusjonen på 1980-tallet som skulle definere den. Romanene blir lest opp mot litteraturforsker Brian McHales retningslinjer for etableringen av en cyberpunk-poetikk (2010), som baserer seg på de tre postmoderne motivene verdenssens, det sentrifugale subjektet, og sjangerens refleksjoner over liv og død. I analysen av romanene undersøker jeg de fiksjonelle teknologiske nyvinningene som vekker McHales motiver i lys av både trans- og posthumanisme, hvor Donna Haraways kyborg-figur veier tyngst, men også blir akkompagnert av andre perspektiver fra posthumanismen. Alle tre romanene fremstiller protagonister i tett samspill med teknologien i sin gitte fiksjonelle verden, enten gjennom androidene til Philip K. Dick eller Gibson og Cadigans utgaver av kyborger og ‘cyberspace’, som problematiserer det tradisjonelle perspektivet på virkelighet og simulasjon, og menneske og maskin som naturlig adskilt fra hverandre.

Det overordnede målet med oppgaven er å vise at bruken av teknologi i cyberpunk, heller enn å være et tilfelle av blind teknofetisjisme eller dommedagsvarslinger om en fremtid styrt av det digitale, bidrar til en forståelse av virtuell teknologi som en videreutvikling av vårt potensial som mennesker, og ikke en forsakelse av vår menneskelighet; et perspektiv som kan berike vår tilnærming til en samtid som er stadig mer påvirket av det digitale og det virtuelle.

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- Petter

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Introduction

This thesis centers on three novels selected from the cyberpunk sub-genre of science fiction: Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), *Neuromancer* by William Gibson (1984) and Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991); novels that examine scenarios in which ideas of what is considered human and real are at the forefront, their themes taking on either the more physical representations of androids or the less tangible, digital construction of a cybernetic landscape in which large parts of the narratives take place.

While all three authors are commonly referred to when addressing the contributors to the cyberpunk genre, Dick remarks himself by virtue of his early venture into the borderlands between the cerebral and the cybernetic and the real and the virtual. Hailed as one of "SF's native visionaries" by the cyberpunks of the eighties (Sterling 1988), the path taken by Dick in the late sixties would later be both trodden and widened by "Movement writers" (an early term for cyberpunk writers) and the differences that remain between *Do Androids Dream* and the later works of the genre also serve to highlight the currents within the sci-fi genre that allowed for cyberpunk as we know it today to come to fruition.

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep tells the story of a bounty hunter in a not-too-distant-future version of San Francisco who is tasked with retiring rogue androids that have escaped to earth from off-world colonies in search for a life of their own. *Neuromancer* follows Case, a computer hacker with a drug problem, from his recruitment by a conspicuous benefactor for a heist aimed at penetrating the network of the multinational Tessier-Ashpool corporation. Case is then thrust into a world in which the virtual and the real is increasingly indistinguishable. *Synners* encompasses the perspectives of multiple hackers, virtual engineers, and artificial intelligences whose employer, a media entertainment conglomerate,

is ushering out cerebral implants to the masses while a lethal computer virus is set loose in the virtual space known as the Net.

The narratives of the cyberpunk genre have previously been allotted the opposite side of the aisle of the literary critical landscape to that of other, more traditional sci-fi writers. Author Michael Swanwick labeled those traditional writers, producing “literate, often consciously literary fiction, focusing on human characters who are seen as frail and fallible, and using the genre to explore large philosophical questions, sometimes religious in nature” (Swanwick 1986), as humanists. Where then does that leave us with respect to the cyberpunks? While Swanwick embeds both the humanists and the cyberpunks within the camp of “the postmoderns”, the distinction begs the question of what the cyberpunks are if they are not humanist. While scholarly approaches to the divergence from humanism that is present in cyberpunk literature have been taken in the past (see Hayles 1999 for an examination of *Do Androids Dream* & Yoo 2019 for an examination of *Neuromancer*), there seems to be a lack of investigation into the relationship between the transhuman and the posthuman that manifests itself within the genre.

Both the cyberpunks and several of their predecessors employ sci-fi iconography that depicts transgression of the limitations placed upon us by virtue of being biologically human in order to achieve greater function of our cognitive or physical abilities. This tendency would at first glance invite the labeling of cyberpunks as transhumanist; adhering to the philosophy that humanity will and should be evolved by means of technological innovation until we reach a point in which our capabilities as a species have transcended those that we currently possess (Bostrom 2003). While this labelling functions well in describing the technologies at play within cyberpunk narratives as well as some of its characters, it falls short in describing the genre’s thematic expression which is not so much about a redefinition of humanity as it is about a reevaluation of humanity.

In his attempt at establishing a poetics of the cyberpunk genre, humanities professor at Ohio State University Brian McHale presents three motifs of postmodernist literary fiction that serve to separate cyberpunk from the larger corpus of SF literature: the decentered subject, the conception of worldness and cyberpunk's meditations on life and death (McHale 2010). McHale emphasizes that the way in which cyberpunk walks the line between SF and postmodernist literary fiction is the way in which motifs like those mentioned "tend to occur as an element of the fictional world in cyberpunk" (2010, 6), exemplified in *Do Androids Dream* where a notion of apathy or ambivalence is presented through the technological nova of a mood organ where one can modify one's state of mind at the turn of a dial. This literal separation of the functions of the human subject from its corporeal form is both heightened and altered with the arrival of the cyberspace-trope in the eighties, where the separation between an actual and virtual world removes the fabric of reality from its material building blocks. So, while the technologies of cyberpunk narratives are of a more transhumanist nature, when passed through the sieve that is the genre's motifs, they render the genre as closer entwined with the ideas of posthumanism.

The aim for this thesis is then to demonstrate how the transhumanist tropes of virtual space and hybrid humanity that are present in the selected works, when analyzed as the metonymic representations of postmodern motifs, reveal cyberpunk's posthumanist expression and in doing so, elevates it from a relic of eighties pop culture to an iteration of SF suited for the information age of the 21st century. The thesis consists of three chapters, each focusing on one of the postmodern motifs mentioned above. The chapters are structured around identifying these motifs in each of the literary works and the SF tropes and technological nova that bring them to light, and the posthumanist interpretation they invite. First, however, we direct our gaze towards the historicity of the cyberpunk genre and the varying schools of the posthuman.

Examining Cyberpunk – Literature and Perspectives

Many of the cyberpunks write a quite accomplished and graceful prose; they are in love with style and are (some say) fashion-focused to a fault. (Sterling 1988, X)

Cyberpunk differentiates itself from the SF that came before it in a few noteworthy ways; firstly, and most obviously, through its aesthetics. While the introduction of punk rock-inspired simplicity and technological integration to SF cannot be accredited solely to movement writers, the explicit focus on these aspects of SF became for them a foundation upon which they could “...grapple with the raw core of SF: its ideas” (Sterling 1988, x). The chrome clad future lit by fluorescent neon lights that came to be the defining characteristic of the “cyberpunk look” can then be argued as the fronting of the very building blocks of SF in an attempt to create a more purely stylized form of SF, the space craft command centers from classical SF being reduced to handheld cyberspace decks, and the role of the other, previously filled by aliens, was now filled by the intimate tech of the 1980s. The mirrored glasses worn by the cyborg Molly in *Neuromancer* became a staple of cyberpunk and other technologically inclined fiction (1993’s *The Matrix* and the aptly named 1995 film *Hackers* to name a few), emblematic of those initiated into the digital realm. In *Synners*, protagonist Sam also dons her own pair of modified mirrorshades, and Cadigan also introduces a VR-headset used by the architects of the virtual space in her novel. The mirrorshades then become a metaphorical icon used by the cyberpunks, both to convey their allegiance to the literary movement and to present the characters of their narratives as “wired in” to a more digital world in which the human and the machine grow more and more symbiotic.

The second way that cyberpunk separates itself from the larger body of SF literature is through its thematic expression and poetics. Author and academic Adam Roberts presents, in his book *Science Fiction: The New Critical Idiom*, three definitions of the SF genre. The first

of these, from academic and SF commentator Darko Suvin, defines SF as narratives that partake in “cognitive estrangement”, meaning the interaction between a world or environment that is alien to both the reader and the characters and the cognition of the characters. Cognition, for Suvin, is the logical process of making sense of our surroundings (Roberts 2000, 7-8). This understanding is somewhat flawed since cognition is, as we have learned from neurological and biological sciences, a much broader faculty encompassing a series of unnoticeable impulses that motivate behavior and evolutionary processes that largely exists in a realm that is not readily accessible by the human consciousness, and is also present in other lifeforms and technological constructions (Hayles 2017, 9, 35-40). So, while Suvin’s idea of cognition works fine in presenting his thoughts on the mechanisms of sci-fi narratives, the error in his definition lies in his underestimation of the complexities of cognition. I would then argue that *rationalization* is a term that better describes the process that Suvin identifies as cognition, as it accounts for both the logical and the illogical aspects of making sense of one’s environment, an effort that isn’t always as sensical as we might like it to be.

SF has also been defined as narratives built on “structural fabulations”, meaning a fictional reconstruction of the systems that make up our real world. The fictional system is constructed using parts that offer fictional replacements for its real-world counterparts, creating a world that is built on the same formula as the real one, but consisting of fictional ingredients (Scholes 1975, in Roberts 2000). Fabulations thus make up “a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the one we know, yet returns to confront that known world in some cognitive way” (Roberts 2000, 10). This can be identified in several SF works, such as *Neuromancer* and *Synners*, where the authors substitute the limited capabilities of artificial intelligence and virtual reality of the reader’s real world with fully-fledged versions of the same technology, before allowing those ‘complete’ technologies – such as AI or elements of world – to reflect back on its real-world source material.

Bridging the two previous definitions of SF, we find the one provided by Damien Broderick. He presents SF as a genre whose mechanisms are driven by metaphor and metonymy, whose narratives are built on a set selection of icons and genre specific ideas and whose prose is conveyed through simplistic modes that prioritize object over subject. So, while the cyberpunk genre has its distinctions it is still very much a part of science fiction as a whole. What differentiates cyberpunk is not so much any considerable innovation as far as symbolic repertoire is concerned, but rather the presentation genre tropes like orbiting cities or sentient robots (McHale 2010; Latham 2010). Cyberpunk does, however distance itself from Broderick's demand for prioritization of the object over the subject.

Through the history of the SF genre, the trends or waves that have dominated it have come into being as a result of a wish to shift what you could call "the mission of SF". As we entered the space age, the space frontier-stories of the pulp magazines that dominated the SF literary market from the 1920s to well into the 40s, began to tire, and birthed a generation of writers searching to encompass "inner space" (Latham 2010, 33). Through authors like Dick, Ursula K. Le Guin and Norman Spinrad, the genre began to employ the SF repertoire to explore psychology (Dick's *Ubik*), drug culture (Spinrad's *No Direction Home*) and gender (Le Guin's, *Left Hand of Darkness*). The fields were in other words both sown and watered for the advent of cyberpunk, as several of these themes would continue to be explored by its contributors. In this way both the New Wave and cyberpunk diverge from Broderick's requirement of prioritizing the object over the subject as themes of psychology and the nature of humanity begin to gain more traction within the SF landscape. As cyberpunk bursts onto the scene with *Neuromancer* as its flagship and cyberspace as its shiny new SF trope, the human condition is put under scrutiny. Larry McCaffery prefaces his 1986 interview with William Gibson with praising Gibson for his novel "where data dance with human consciousness, [...] memory is literalized and mechanized, where multinational information

systems mutate and breed into startling new structures whose beauty and complexity are unimaginable, mystical and above all *nonhuman*.” (Gibson 1990). It is this dance between the digital and the cerebral that separates the inner space of cyberpunk from the inner space explored during the New Wave, a separation driven by the fact that the technologies of the eighties were far more pervasive in their integration into everyday life. Cyberpunk then produces a new subject in its narratives, a subject that experiences both the virtual and the real; a posthuman subject.

Which of the Posthumans? / Roadmap to a Posthuman Future

The idea of the ‘posthuman’ is one that has fascinated scholars and authors since before the philosophy of posthumanism gained traction in the late seventies and remainder of the twentieth century, though it was then that the concept was given a theoretical framework to operate out of (Ferrando 2013, 26). The various scholars of the posthumanities and its associated sciences all bring forth different understandings of what the posthuman is. The various iterations of posthumanism that have seen the light of day since the initial presentation of the idea serves to further diversify these different understandings, the most known of which are posthumanism and transhumanism. Transhumanism is a philosophical movement that examines the prospect of enhancing the human being through avenues made available by plausible advances in technology (Bostrom 2003). The posthuman, in the eyes of transhumanists, is a being that has at some point surpassed the capabilities of the current iteration of homo sapiens, through one technology or another. A homo sapiens 2.0 If you will. Bostrom defines the posthuman as a being that inhibits at least one capability that greatly exceeds the maximum gain of that same capability in the present iteration of the human, examples including greatly exceeding current life expectancy, immunity to diseases and so on (Bostrom 2008). While this techno-spirituality has gained quite the traction, with several

prolific transhumanists like Bostrom himself, age researcher Aubrey de Grey, and Swedish philosopher Anders Sandberg having arranged for themselves to be vitrified upon death, transhumanism has been criticized loudly for being classist, promoting human exceptionalism and perhaps most poignantly; for being somewhat of a pipe dream. The criticisms of transhumanism come in many shapes and colors, some coming from scholars like N. Katherine Hayles or many of the contributors to Hofkirchner & Kreowski's 2021 publication *Transhumanism: The Proper Guide to a Posthuman Future or a Dangerous Idea?* who seek to challenge its philosophical or scientific merits. Other critics, like Francis Fukuyama, challenge transhumanism for its ethical and sociological implications.

One of the staunchest outspoken critics of the transhumanist movement, Francis Fukuyama, often labeled a bioconservative (e.g. Simon 2019), sees the transhumanist movement as attempting to liberate or rather separate the human race from its inherent natural qualities (Fukuyama 2004). The concept of a 'human nature' is one whose understanding varies as widely as the understanding of the posthuman but is largely related to the restraints placed upon us by our biological origins or qualities regarding morality or empathy (Wolfe 2010; Fukuyama 2004; Hayles 1999). Fukuyama has written extensively on his contentions with the ideas of transhumanism and his view of the philosophy as one belonging on the fringes of scientific discourse. His main point of contention is that once we begin to tamper with the biological make-up that has come to define us as a species, we risk leaving factors that have been instrumental to the ways human society has evolved and operates today behind us in the dust. Embracing the enhancement of certain qualities such as our mortality, which is, as we have seen, one of the criteria that would qualify as transcending into the posthuman era according to transhumanists, would result in disrupting the highly complex balance that has allowed us to evolve to where we are today (Fukuyama 2004). Another point of contention which Fukuyama shares with other scholars is that transhumanism is a highly techno-centric

philosophy and, as a result of this, has occasionally brushed over the hierarchical connotations of continuing (and possibly amplifying) the differences between the human and the non-human. The lineage from the teachings of Darwin to the oppressions based in social Darwinism has served not only to propose an idea of human exceptionalism but also an idea of some human beings being more exceptional than others. Though we have, in the 21st century, formed a society based (at least in theory) on all humans having intrinsic value simply by virtue of being human, the augmentation of humans through technology that might not be available for all people, namely those of third world countries or those who do not have the financial means to participate in this technological revolution, would only serve to continue amplifying the already existing differences that exist in society and even form new differences between those that are technologically augmented and those that are not (Ferrando 2013, 28).

Criticizing not the mission of transhumanism, but rather its messaging and philosophical outlook, Italian PhD researcher Guglielmo Papagni makes the case that while the idea of technological optimism is not to be discarded, the intense optimism that is found in current-day transhumanism has become both the wheel that drives it forward and the spoke that stops it in its tracks. While transhumanism aims to progress beyond humanity, its advocates seem deadlocked in a continuation of ideas of human exceptionalism and separation from the non-human that are inherently humanist and contrary to what we have learned from the very technologies and sciences transhumanists want to employ. The foundation of Papagni's argument is based on the already intertwined concepts of the natural, technological and the cultural. The sciences of biology and anthropology, and more recently the neurosciences, have all contributed to a bigger natural picture that humans fit into and are a part of rather than the begetter of. Human consciousness has then been a result of the evolution of the human body and our use of technology (whether in the shape of the wheel or

the computer) simply expresses the potential for further evolution within the natural framework (Papagni 2021, 56). The fault of transhumanism then becomes, for him, what N. Katherine Hayles calls the epiphenomenon of human consciousness in which a result of evolutionary processes believes itself to be “the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow” (Hayles 1999, 2-3). Papagni traces this misunderstanding back to promethean mythology in which humans were given fire and technology to overcome their lack of instinct. Technology then becomes a tool that our mind employs in revealing the world and the individual human becomes the measure for the world around them. This epiphenomenon of the mind thus imbues the human mind with a sense of novelty and further fuels the differentiation between the human and the nature it inhabits. A difference that, as seen above is not as significant as once perceived, as “our alleged superiority in comparison with other species is a wrong interpretation precisely of our genetic, i.e., natural, potential” (Papagni 2021, 59); wrong because man is a contributing element to a larger equation of the co-evolution of both ourself and of nature.

The realizing of our genetic potential through technologies is something that permeates the fields that investigate the posthuman. The way that the posthumanists separate themselves from the transhumanists on this question is in what I have chosen to call the chronology of the posthuman. For posthumanists, Homo Sapiens have always relied on technological prostheses to evolve as a species (e.g. Wolfe 2010; Hayles 1999), and so our genetical potential is continuously realized through our interaction with nature around us and even with each other, while for the transhumanists the problem seems two-fold. The human ‘state’ we currently find ourselves in is seen as more of a steppingstone in an evolutionary process towards the posthuman, where we have used technology throughout history to deal with the biological disadvantage of being human while remaining within the confines of separation from the nature that surrounds us. On the other hand, the genetical potential will

become realized once we transcend humanity and become something other than what we currently are. Thus, the chronology of the posthuman in transhumanism is split in two, the first closing at the ushering in of the second by way of our transcension of our current human capabilities, a transcension that remains if not merely hypothetical, then definitely bordering on the *science fictional*.

In addition to different observations on the historicity of technology and its application to – and intervention with – human existence, the two schools also differ in their prioritizing of technology. For transhumanists technology is explicitly at the forefront of discourse while for posthumanists it is merely another aspect of expressing the multifaceted nature of our existence which has surpassed the limits of anthropocentrism, binary differentiation and hierarchical understanding that has been prevalent in the humanities up until the modern era of postmodernism. For many, the studies of posthumanism that emerged in the eighties and nineties presented a postmodern reply to questions posed within the humanities. Emerging from schools of critical feminism through theorists like Donna J. Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, the posthumanities have in the years since their inception attempted to investigate questions of an ontological and epistemological nature that relate to the human experience. Echoing the view of technological chronology discussed above, posthumanists often frame the posthuman not as a desired state of being, but as more of a looking glass through which the world can be examined. Rosi Braidotti defines the posthuman as “a critical and creative figuration, or as a conceptual persona that illuminates the complexities of the present, defined as both the actual and the virtual” (Braidotti 2017, 12). This combination of the actual and the virtual can be read as a continuation of Donna Haraway’s feminist cyborg persona which is “a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation” (Haraway 2016, 7). As with Braidotti’s posthuman, Haraway’s cyborg is a conceptual persona or looking glass through which one can bridge

lived experiences and external reality, the end goal being the ability to live contently with the fact that not all that which we perceive can be allocated to a static definition or logical rationale (Haraway 2016). These conceptual figurations that make up the foundations of philosophical posthumanism then form a neat parallel with the literalization of metaphors that we found to be so characteristic of cyberpunk literature earlier in this chapter, especially with Haraway using the common SF icon of the Cyborg as a metaphor for the lived experience of women. Another tempting parallel to draw is in the period of origin for both the cyberpunk movement and the posthumanist movement but, as Laura Chernaik warns us in her 1997 essay on *Synners*, correlation does not always equal causation, and we can therefore not infer that Bruce Sterling and William Gibson sat down to read Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* before writing and publishing the texts that would come to shape cyberpunk. We can, however, muse at the two trends of posthumanism and cyberpunk both having some of their most defining works published within the same decade. The intimate tech made available for the everyman in the 1980s which Sterling emphasizes in the introduction to his anthology *Mirrorshades*, is however a factor that both cyberpunk writers and posthumanist scholars were privy to and were experiencing simultaneously and which undoubtedly would have had an impact on their respective works. The posthuman persona of the cyborg, while not the catalyst of the cyberpunk genre, still permeates it, manifested through the treatment of the human subject within the genre as it balances between worlds whose ontological limitations are both real and virtual.

Chapter One: Cyberpunk – A World In-Between

The novels *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (*Do Androids Dream* for short), *Neuromancer* and *Synners* were published in 1968, 1984 and 1991, respectively. Hence, they all exist at different points in the chronology of cyberpunk and thus contribute to highlighting different traits of cyberpunk in their own separate ways, and to varying degrees. Especially with regards to worldness and the decentering of the subject, one can trace a clear trajectory of development towards synthesis, from the virtual realm in *Do Androids Dream* which is more distinctly separated from the physical to the one in *Synners*, which bleeds excessively into the ‘real’ world, resulting in a tropological landscape, a world within a trope. “[The world’s] ontological structure is *dual*, two-level, one level (or frame) that of the trope [and] the other that of the literal...” (McHale 1987, 141).

The concept of ‘world’ is integral to the way in which we understand our surroundings, whether that is through its physical representation in nature or its more abstract or spiritual manifestations in our minds. This is also true for the characters we meet in the narratives of any branch of fiction. While the understanding of what delimitates the world of any given novel can be seen as intimately connected with the narrative of said novel, the mechanisms of what makes up a world are at their most explicit in the stories of fantasy and science fiction. As we learned from Darko Suvin in the previous chapter, the basic condition of the tales from the new frontier lies in the encounter with the extra-terrestrial or at the very least with that which is foreign (Roberts 2000, 7). Fantasy and SF are often grouped together for discussions that revolve around the mechanisms of world-building as they both employ elements of the fantastical to construct their worlds, and it is merely the internal logic of the individual works that vary. Where fantasy ‘blames’ some magical order or alternate course of natural history for the existence of dragons, magic and the likes, SF explains genre tropes like

time travel, exploration of interstellar space or alien warfare through extrapolating upon existing avenues of science and technology and, by virtue of these extrapolations, creates worlds in which that which we know to be impossible is rendered possible. While different, these explanations are an essential part of what allows the reader to immerse themselves in the worlds of fantasy and SF, establishing both the logic of the narrative and conditions of both belief and disbelief.

As the repertoire of literary fiction shifted from that of the modern period to that of the postmodern, we see a transition marked by what postmodernist literary scholar Brian McHale calls a shift of dominant, meaning “the focusing component of a work of art” (Jakobson 1971 in; McHale 1987, 6). Where the dominant of the fictions of the modernist period and the periods that came before it is of an epistemological nature, the dominant of postmodernist fiction has an explicit orientation towards the ontological (McHale 1987, 9-10). The field of ontology has been around since the philosophies of antiquity and can be defined at its most basic as the study of being, or, “the study of what there is” (Hofweber 2017). The definition McHale operates under, which I find somewhat more applicable to literary analysis, is one proposed by literary critic and theorist Thomas Pavel, who identifies an ontology as “a theoretical description of a universe” (McHale 1987, 27).

Where epistemological fiction proposes questions of knowledge, such as the ‘who-dun-it’-structure of detective narratives, ontologically oriented fiction rather seeks to question what *it* is. It is here one must keep in mind that although one might identify an ontological dominant in a single work or greater literary corpus, instances of epistemological enquiry might yet occur and permeate throughout said work. In *Do Androids Dream*, the plot is built strictly around the familiar detective story as Rick Deckard searches for and disposes of rogue androids, or *andys* as Dick calls them, effectively fashioning the novel into a search for where *it* is. Simultaneously, the narrative is pushed forward by the looming question of what

constitutes human life, one of the greater mysteries of ontological inquiry. The same goes for both Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Cadigan's *Synners* where the novels are structured as heist-narratives in which the characters search for both what *it is*, and where *it is*. As the protagonist Case traverses Gibson's *Sprawl* and *Cyberspace*, he is brought face to face with questions of what constitutes human autonomy and genuine lived experience (Gibson 1984, 133). In a similar fashion, the ensemble of characters in *Synners* search for a computer virus that could have devastating consequences for the population if it is left running rampant, blurring the lines of what is real and virtual as well as destabilizing the boundary between the corporeal and the digital. "The old meat organ would not have been able to cope with that kind of reality, but [in the Net] he appropriated more capacity the way he once might have exchanged a smaller shirt for a bigger one (Cadigan 1991, 325). While these novels are all structured around popular formulas for plot-construction, the driving force that their ontological questions exceed upon the narratives give fuel to the view shared by several scholars: that science fiction, and cyberpunk by extension, is governed by a systemic adherence to ontological mimesis and metaphor (McHale 1987, 59; Roberts 2000, 172). The main objective of these ontological metaphors in cyberpunk is to explore the dilution of our own perception of our world and ourselves when faced with digital realms and entities which are, at once, both alien to us and a result of our own human agency.

In the works selected for this thesis, the metaphorical and mimetic realizes itself both in the shape of physical microworlds and through the virtual realms that exist in each of the novels: Dick's tomb world, Gibson's cyberspace, and Cadigan's Net (capitalized to limit any confusion with the real-life internet that we know from our world). The interplay between these worlds and the other microworlds that exist within the narratives constructs a third ontological space: the world in-between, a space within which the real and the virtual, the corporeal and the digital, and the literal and the metaphorical coexist. In this chapter, I

demonstrate how the ontology – or ‘worldness’ – that is employed and developed throughout the chronology of the cyberpunk genre serves to create worlds in which a binary or hierarchical understanding of humanity is an impedance at best, as worldviews and postmodern literary devices are molded into their own ontological spheres.

Making a World – Strategies and Approaches

The construction of fictional worlds can be achieved through multiple strategies, and the innate qualities of those worlds, real or fictional, can then be examined through the lens of *worldness*, which McHale identifies as the ontological characteristics of any given world (McHale 2010). Worldness is in other words closely related to the more popular term associated with the construction of fictional worlds, that being *world-building*. However, the two are not identical. Worldness, when applied to fiction, simply analyses the process of worldbuilding and the product which it delivers. Where worldbuilding is found in the art of creating magic systems in fantasy or the political landscapes of SF space operas, worldness examines what these creations entail for the world that the characters inhabit. Still, the inquiry of worldness might busy itself with strategies of worldbuilding, an effort described by McHale as “doing ontology” (2010, 7).

From the early SF classics, images of a human envoy sent to an alien world or the invasion of alien emissaries into the human world exemplify the strategy of interpolation, in which one world is intruded upon by another. In stories that only take place in an alien world without a human dispatch present, we as readers act as intruders. While mostly a relic for SF that tackles interplanetary travel or alien invasions, interpolation interjects itself into the works of Dick, Gibson and Cadigan as we encounter worlds as physical representations of states of affair or *weltanschauung*, which I return to later in this chapter. The strategy of juxtaposition places spheres that exist distantly from another close together and thus in

contention with one another, while misattribution is the process of creating a world through the deliberately erroneous attribution of qualities to a landscape that the reader knows do not exhibit them. In one of his earliest short stories, *The Gernsback Continuum* (1988), William Gibson subjects his protagonist to the process of misattribution as he arrives in Los Angeles to find not the 80s rendition of the city that he expects, but rather a Los Angeles that still holds on to retro-futuristic and the art-deco aesthetics and architecture of the early to mid-20th century. The goals of misattribution are both diverse and miscellaneous. However, in naming an SF story in which an antiquated view of the future collides with a more modern one after one SF's early pioneers, Hugo Gernsback, Gibson can be argued to employ the strategy as a tool for critiquing previous generations of SF writers, a popular pastime for the cyberpunk authors of the early 80s. The continuum of Gernsback thus describes a tradition of futurism within SF which does not incorporate the evolution of real-world technology into its repertoire or poetics. Lastly, the strategy of superimposition is of notable significance to the analysis of the various iterations of cyberspace that prevail throughout cyberpunk, as it is the strategy of placing two known worlds atop one another to create a third one, like a roll of 35 mm film subjected to double exposure where two different photographs come together to project a third that encapsulates them both (McHale 1987, 45-48). Cyberspaces and the fictional worlds which they are a part of are thus individually recognizable, yet together they constitute a new ontological sphere that allows for both the real and the virtual to coexist.

What all the strategies listed above have in common is that they combine two or several microworlds in order to create a heterotopian landscape in which the plot of the narrative takes place, named *The Zone* by McHale (1987, 2010), a term borrowed from Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. A microworld is quite self-explanatory in its terminology as it is an environment within the greater world that amplifies one or several aspects of that world's essence. Inherited and extrapolated from the romance tropes of

enchanted forests and castles, the futuristic SF icons of the space station, the spacecraft, or the orbiting city take on similar roles, fashioning small scale displays that give way for the larger world which they are part of (McHale 2010, 7-8). A popular approach for cyberpunk authors is to turn famous real-life landmarks or geographical areas into microworlds through what could be imagined as an apocryphal history of the future, as Pat Cadigan does with the Santa Monica Bay area.

She'd started out on the Manhattan-Hermosa strip, what the kids called the Mimosa, part of the old postquake land of the lost [...] The kids who shanked it on the Mimosa didn't remember the quake either. For all they knew, the old Manhattan Pier and Mimosa Pier and Fisherman's Wharf had always stretched out over dry sand. (Cadigan 1991, 7)

Through this paragraph, Cadigan uses the finite space of part of the Santa Monica promenade to illustrate several important facts about the greater world of her novel. We learn that a major natural disaster took place, that a generation has since had time to grow up and we learn that this new young generation lives in an impoverished state. "Living through the quake and the postmillennial madness that followed was one way to end up under a pier talking to your toes; taking some of the stuff available at the Mimosa was another" (Cadigan 1991, 8). The Mimosa is thus a metonymic construction that, as a microworld or *zone*, stands in for the disorienting and dystopic qualities of the larger world. The Mimosa becomes, throughout Cadigan's novel, a home base for her ensemble of 'synners', a home for the abandoned and the outsiders and not least for the tech-savvy who operate on the fringes of legality. The offerings that the Mimosa have for the postquake generation come in the form of both virtual reality, bodily augmentation, and psychoactive drugs, and for characters like the virtual reality virtuoso Visual Mark, these desensitizing agents are served both mixed, shaken, and stirred. Mimosa is a cocktail after all. Through her composition and presentation of 'the Mimosa', Cadigan effectively creates a physical, material, stand-in for many of the socio-economic and natural difficulties that plague the world in her novel, creating a metonymic object through which certain states of affair are allowed to manifest themselves.

As an antithesis to the Mimosa, Cadigan creates Diversifications Inc, a multimedia conglomerate which is at the verge of launching ‘sockets’, implants that are at the very bleeding edge of neurological computer interfaces, allowing users to experience media exported directly from the consciousness of the reality-synthesizers that created it. Diversifications is not so much a microworld in the proper sense, as much as it is a microworld by association. In the same way that the Mimosa is an assemblage of decomposing piers and debris, Diversifications is an assemblage of acquisitioned sub-companies that produce its media output. “We’re facing another quarterly audit of our productivity, Gabe, and you know that for the Upstairs Team, it’s all a matter of numbers. How much you’re producing and how long it takes. That’s all the Upstairs Team understands” (Cadigan 1991, 43). In Diversifications, Cadigan molds a caricature of a technocratic corporation engrained in late-stage capitalism, a popular antagonistic trope within cyberpunk, until it borders on the parodic. The incentive of capital is seemingly the only defining part of its ethos, and once the apocalyptic virus set loose by Visual Mark suffering a stroke while wired into the Net strikes Diversifications, it spreads throughout the entire through the connections of its subdivisions (Cadigan 1991, 348-350).

While the differences between the Mimosa and Diversifications Inc. evoke certain aesthetic images, Cadigan spends little time actually describing the look of the microworlds that she constructs and rather allows their essence of world to inform whatever aesthetic the reader chooses to impose upon them. The Mimosa is a ramshackle of collapsed piers looking over the arid stretch that used to be Santa Monica Bay (Cadigan 1991, 7), whereas “the computer-run wheels of the complex mechanism known as Diversifications, Incorporated, [continues] to turn as reliably and smoothly as ever, unaffected by new developments” (ibid., 225). Another tactic through which cyberpunk shifts the dominant from a realm of epistemology to a realm of ontology is by constructing ideological hotspots or enclaves;

worldview-turned-world. Through metonymy, authors can reappropriate questions regarding the prior, allowing for them to be accounted for by the latter. Postmodernist fiction, and by extension cyberpunk, fashions physical worlds built on epistemological enquiry so as to ‘make real’ the question that are proposed by a given text. Different worlds of meaning can thus be turned into their own ontic spheres, amplifying their differences to resemble the difference between physical worlds (McHale 1987, 79). Cyberpunk then employs another trope inherited from romance literature to highlight the ontological differences between the worlds it creates, that being the *knight-errant* that freely traverses the ontological boundaries set up by the microworlds that have been created.

Extrapolation and interjection in *Do Androids Dream*

In *Do Androids Dream*, we follow our knight-errant Rick Deckard as he traverses a number of microworlds which, as their respective worldviews become more or less actualized, shape the greater world of the novel. We meet Deckard as he is tasked with hunting down six androids that have defected from a colony on Mars after one of them shoots and nearly kills Dave Holden, a senior bounty hunter with the San Francisco Police Department. As with Cadigan’s microworlds, Philip K. Dick largely avoids any overt descriptions of his worlds. Rather, he fashions them as separate hotspots of worldview so distinct from one another that the worldview of one microworld begins to appear alien from the point of view of the other. The SFPD holds the androids, or *andys*, to be the antithesis of humans, maintaining the essentialist hierarchy ascribed to transhumanists by Ferrando (2013) detailed in the introductory chapter of this thesis. The SFPD and its emissaries, Deckard included, view andys as strictly material entities, because although they are *bio*-engineered, they remain engineered all the same. “Like any other machine, [they] can fluctuate between being a benefit and a hazard” (Dick 1968, 32). In this statement, Deckard reduces the andys to little more than a tool at humanity’s disposal. Even a human exhibiting similar mental

faculties to that of an android would be institutionalized as “[they] couldn’t conceivably function in the outside world” (Dick 1968, 30). Bereft of the utility of the androids, humans of a lower mental capability can thus only be hazardous, or at best redundant. Through these attitudes, the SFPD can be argued to actualize the dichotomy between human and android, effectively fashioning itself as a microworld in which the inner lives of androids are less possible, making the police force and the bounty hunters it employs a metonymic placeholder for that very sentiment, “[standing] between the Nexus 6 and mankind, a barrier which keeps the two distinct” (Dick 1968, 112). Continuing McHale’s prescription of romance tropes, the SFPD can be viewed as an evolution of the microworld of the castle; a secure and rigid bastion of familiarity and established knowledge from which the knight, or in our case bounty hunter, sets out on his quest or journey. As the knight-errant of romance literature, Deckard soon finds himself passing through both bowery and enchanted forest, as the microworlds of the Rosen Association and the shadow-SFPD bring the worldview of the SFPD into question.

The Rosen Association stands as an early example of what came to be a staple in the cyberpunk genre, that being the antagonistic assemblage of the multinational tech corporation. However, while the shadowy and ambiguous organization of the Rosen Association avoids assuming a mission statement that places it in immediate opposition to the SFPD, the *état d’être* that can be seen governing their agenda forms a stark contrast to the bastion of hierarchical humanity that the SFPD views itself as. During his first meeting with Eldon Rosen, head of the corporation, Deckard blames the SFPD’s (and consequently his own) rigid delimitation of humanity on the Rosen Association being too caught up in it if they could and neglecting to ponder whether they should:

‘This problem,’ Rick said, ‘stems entirely from your method of operation, Mr. Rosen. Nobody forced your organization to evolve the production of humanoid robots to a point where-’

‘We produced what the colonists wanted,’ Eldon Rosen said. ‘We followed the time-honored principle underlying every commercial venture. If our firm hadn’t made these progressively more human types, other firms in the field would have.’ (Dick 1968, 43)

The Rosen Association thus situates itself well within the ethical equivalent of international waters, both murky and abstruse, governed by the maritime law of technocentric dystopian capitalism. While the corporation washes its hands of any responsibility for the actions of androids, one way or the other, they position themselves in opposition to the agenda of the SFPD in their quest for decommissioning rogue androids. “Your police department – others as well – may have retired, very probably have retired, authentic humans with underdeveloped empathic ability, such as [Rachael Rosen] here. Your position, Mr. Deckard, is extremely bad morally. Ours isn’t” (Dick 1968, 43). The SFPD and Rosen Association are thus cemented as distinctly separate ideological hotspots, each harboring a state of affairs that directly oppose the other in an act of horizontal juxtaposition.

“A mammoth corporation like [the Rosen Association] – it embodies too much experience. It possesses in fact a sort of group mind. And Eldon and Rachael Rosen consisted of spokesmen for that corporate entity” (Dick 1968, 43). Here, Dick summarizes the sentiments of the previous excerpts and explicitly makes the Rosen Association into a microworld that both encapsulates its worldview and evokes images of the rationalizing human emissary faced with an alien world that we extrapolated from Darko Suvin’s definition of SF in the introduction to this thesis. What separates the microworlds constructed by Dick from alien planets or space stations is that they are safely situated on Earth and are therefore bound to the same ontic sphere. The conflict that arises between them is thus one that shall decide which state of affair is most emblematic of that sphere which they both inhabit. This happens as the discourse of one microworld is introduced into another and subsequently dilutes the ideological status quo of the world being intruded upon, shifting the ideological

and, in our case, also the ontological event horizon of the larger world which they are both part of.

Metaphorical Ontology – Weltanschauung and Possible World Theory

At its most simplistic, any work of fiction begins with the author asking themselves the question “what if?”. These what-ifs naturally take on different shapes as they are realized through the tropes and iconic repertoire of their respective genres and are spun into narrative worlds that allow for scenarios built on those prompts to be explored. Fictional literature can thus be thought of as the act of exploring alternate worlds where that which we know to be impossible is rendered possible, i.e., Possible worlds. The studies associated with Possible World theory span multiple fields of inquiry, stemming from logical philosophers caught up in the actuality of our world (both physical and conceptual) and later adapted into literary theory as a comparative tool used to analyze the construction of fictional worlds (Ronen 1994). David Lewis, an early adapter of Possible World Theory (PWT from now on), based the theory on the comparison of two or more worlds that differ from one another. They need not differ in any ontological sense, but are mainly separated by perspective; our world is the ‘actual world’ only because it is the one we live in, and, consequently, other worlds would be deemed equally ‘actual’ by those who inhabit them (Ryan 2018, 425). While this approach of relativity might make PWT tougher to swallow, as Ryan accurately points out, it is rendered more applicable to fiction for “[if] ‘actual’ is indexical, fictional characters become actual, embodied and ontologically complete individuals from the point of view of the fictional worlds” (2018, 425). “Possible worlds represent states of affairs as different ontic spheres” (Ronen 1994, 55), entailing that they share the function of McHale’s microworlds. These microworlds are thus the literal renditions of these states of affair, making them metonymic placeholders for the ideologies and worldviews of the people who inhabit them. The nature of

the greater world of the narrative and its weltanschauung that is informed by and built upon these microworlds is thus dependent upon which of them that prevail and become actualized.

The philosophical approach to PWT bases its inquiry on an evaluation of probability of actualization presented on a scale between ‘possible’ and ‘impossible’, where our physical world and its adherent realities are the result of multiple worlds, varying in their abstractness, being either actualized or non-actualized. Alternate worlds that are not actualized might still be deemed possible, yet they remain inauthentic until they are actualized (Ronen 1994, 50). In fiction, these possible worlds are presented as spaces that are as ontologically valid to the characters of the narrative as our world is to us. This presentation is necessitated by the fact that the worlds of fiction are neither actualized nor are they actualizable, as the disparity between them and our real world is too great to envision them as an alternative realization of possibilities. Instead, the possibility of fictional worlds is achieved through a method that is analogous to the structural fabulations of Robert Scholes that we encountered in the introduction (see pages 6-7). In constructing fictional worlds, the author must create a sphere of possibility and impossibility that is equally coherent to the actual world of the reader, effectively fashioning an internal logic that allows the reader to buy into the premise, a key signature that is built on what McHale names as the “suspension of belief as well as of disbelief” (1987, 33). This suspension presents itself in the cyberpunk genre through the topoi of cyberspace and neurological computer interfaces. In accepting the technological dogmas that allow for these possibilities, we also accept that these same dogmas also invite *im*-possibilities that are not present in, or relevant to, our world. While this interplay is most explicit when identified between the world of the reader and the world of the narrative, cyberpunks employment of microworlds allows for this same interplay to shape the ontological expression of the narrative’s greater world in an act of verification by negation, as

the different microworlds shift the needle from one side to another on the scale of actualization.

Rick Deckard, our knight-errant in *Do Androids Dream*, materializes – in a sense – the scale of actualization for the world of the novel as he journeys between its microworlds. While he interjects himself into the alien environment of the Rosen Association as a human emissary, another case of interpolation presents itself as he is faced with the envoys of the corporation. In order to ensure that he can identify the andys he is tasked with retiring, a sample test is performed on Rachael, niece of director Eldon Rosen. He performs the Voigt-Kampff test, Dick’s futuristic version of a polygraph test that, rather than determining truthfulness, gauges emphatic response in order to determine whether the subject is human or android (Dick 1968, 38-39). When the test identifies Rachael as an android, the Rosens object, blaming the nature of her response on a solitary upbringing aboard a spacecraft aboard which she had no genuine experiences of Earth (41). Eldon Rosen’s denunciation of SFPD ethics is thus confirmed, effectively diluting Deckard’s world of discourse and negating it. In an attempt to ratify his professional pride and also some peace of mind, Deckard tells Rachael that his leather briefcase is made from the hide of a human child hoping that it will provoke an androidlike response.

He saw the two dial indicators gyrate frantically. But only after a pause. The reaction had come, but too late. He knew the reaction period down to the fraction of a second, the correct reaction period; there should have been none. (Dick 1968, 47)

With Rachael proven to be an android, Deckard can continue his pursuit of the remaining Nexus-6 androids. However, “...they came awfully damn close to undermining the Voigt-Kampff scale, the only method we have for detecting them” (Dick 1968, 48). While not completely dismantling the empathy test and subsequently the worldview that it confirms and upholds, the universe of discourse that the Rosens inject into Deckard’s serves to de-actualize

his own. The inability to securely and effectively delineate between androids and humans would lead to the inner lives of androids to be perceived not only as possible, but as equal to the inner lives of humans. Should the Rosen Association's microworld reach actualization, it would entail for the larger world of *Do Androids Dream* that its ontological laws allow for a humanity that is neither strictly biological nor strictly engineered. The worldview, and consequently the world of the SFPD is further de-actualized as Deckard is arrested by the shadow police, a police station staffed almost exclusively by androids, when he attempts to retire the android Luba Luft who is masking as an opera singer. Placed in the back of a police cruiser, Deckard remarks that they are heading the wrong way. "'The Hall of Justice,' Rick said, 'is north, on Lombard.'" "That's the old Hall of Justice," Officer Crams said. "The new one is on Mission. That old building, it's disintegrating; it's a ruin. Nobody's used that for years'" (Dick 1968, 87-88). Deckard's familiar environment of the SFPD, and the worldview upon which it is built, is thus rendered as anachronistic and obsolete as he finds himself in the Mission Street Hall of Justice. "...[Complicated] and modern, the handsome structure struck Rick Deckard as attractive – except for one aspect. He had never seen it before" (ibid., 89). Our knight-errant has arrived in an enchanted forest that calls into question that which he thought himself to know (and to be) prior to his arrival.

In this manner, Dick takes the interpolative strategy of worldness that McHale identifies in postmodernist fiction and scales it down to the level of the microworld, simultaneously taking on both a literal and a metaphorical approach to the interjection that takes place in the novel. The dilution of Deckard's universe of discourse happens in parallel with his intrusion upon, and disruption of, the physical world of Rosen Association and the Hall of Justice on Mission. This parallel presentation of the literal and metaphorical is also emblematic of worlds fashioned from worldviews, as McHale points out: "To speak of 'worldviews', and the juxtaposition or confrontation of worldviews, is to speak in epistemological terms; to take the

metaphor literally, projecting worlds which are realizations of discursive worldviews, is to convert an epistemological motif into an ontological one” (McHale 1987, 166). In other words, Dick utilizes the conceptual category of the microworld to turn the epistemological quest of rationalizing an alien environment into an investigation of the ontological boundaries of the greater world, or *world proper*, that his novel is set within, effectively heightening the genre trope of alien invasion from simply existing as an SF novum to also function as a postmodernist literary device. Philip K. Dick’s use of microworlds is, as we have seen, conveniently compared to its inheritance from romance literature that McHale points to, as his microworlds are explicitly separate. However, as we journey forward in the chronology of cyberpunk, we see a shift in the nature of the microworlds (their ontology if you will) as William Gibson in *Neuromancer* presents us with ‘the Sprawl’; “...the most characteristic and most influential example of the Cyberpunk Zone...” (McHale 2010, 10).

The Sprawling World of Cyberpunk

The Sprawl, rather than referring to any specific microworld, refers to a genre of microworld, one that has become emblematic of the cyberpunk genre. The term originates from the works of William Gibson where futuristic metropolitan landscapes played a central role in both the author’s early short stories and in his career-defining novels. So central, in fact, that Gibson’s seminal trilogy, of which *Neuromancer* is the first installment, became known as the *Sprawl-trilogy*. A number of his short stories, later published in the collection *Burning Chrome* (1986) are also often referred to as Sprawl-stories. The Sprawl has, since its invention at the hands of Gibson, grown to be analogous with the genre itself, becoming the archetypal cyberpunk city. The influence of the Sprawl can be felt all the way to present day, where the 2020 video game *Cyberpunk: 2077* sports a sprawl of its own that shares the name of one of Gibson’s original sprawls; Night City. Where we found the world of *Do Androids*

Dream to be constructed on the premise of interpolation between different microworlds of meaning and the subsequent actualization or de-actualization of those worlds, cyberpunk-worlds fashioned as Sprawl can be argued to have a structure that is more dynamic and complex. The Sprawl, or rather *a* Sprawl, is a compiled cityscape of an overpopulated and oversaturated metropolis in which numerous worlds and cultures collapse inward on themselves.

The compositional principle of *The Sprawl* and its cognates, terrestrial and extraterrestrial, is maximally intimate juxtaposition of maximally diverse and heterogenous materials (Japanese, Western and Third-World, high-tech and low-tech, elite and popular, mainstream “official” culture and youth or criminal subculture, etc.). (McHale 2010, 10)

The Sprawl is thus both emblematic of cyberpunk and explicitly postmodernist in its construction. The inward collapse that McHale highlights, precipitating the existence of the Sprawl, is immediately recognizable as a parallel to the intimate relationship between everyday life and invasive technology, a relationship that served as inspiration for many of the early cyberpunk authors (Sterling 1988, xiii). As intimate technologies grow to proliferate society, effectively shortening routes of communication, the microworlds of cyberpunk grow ever closer to a point where a knight-errant akin to Rick Deckard is constantly connected with several microworlds at once through some futuristic iteration of the world wide web.

As an aesthetic tool, the Sprawl can be used to symbolize homogeneity, as we see in *Neuromancer* when Case arrives in Istanbul and reflects that “Their room might have been the one in Chiba where he’d first seen Armitage. He went to the window, in the morning, almost expecting to see Tokyo Bay...” (Gibson 1984, 97). The categorical Sprawl becomes then, not only characteristic of the environment where a certain part of the narrative is set, but of the entire world that exists within the novel. As a tool for postmodernist world building, the Sprawl signals a trajectory towards synthesis, both in the worldness it projects and the methods through which it achieves said worldness. Through its maximal juxtaposition, one

can identify both traits of misattribution and interpolation in the structures that make up a Sprawl. The primary sprawl of *Neuromancer* is that of the Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis (BAMA for short), where protagonist Case led his life as a hacker, often referred to as a Console Cowboy, up until he was caught stealing information from his employer and relocated to Chiba City, Japan. Located along the eastern coast of the United States, the BAMA-sprawl is tied together by a railway and by the information superhighway. “Program a map to display frequency of data exchange, every thousand megabytes a single pixel on a very large screen. Manhattan and Atlanta burn solid white. Then they start to pulse, the rate of traffic threatening to overload your simulation” (Gibson 1984, 49). The spaces of Atlanta and Manhattan, which the reader knows to be hundreds of miles apart are thus brought right next to each other, producing a zone that highlights the physical boundaries of the world that surrounds it. Further, the BAMA-Sprawl is also built on the juxtaposition between different states of affair; between the old and the new. “At a hundred million megabytes per second, you begin to make out certain blocks in midtown Manhattan, outlines of hundred-year-old industrial parks ringing the old core of Atlanta” (ibid., 49). The anachronistic factories of the 20th century are, in this passage, juxtaposed with the state-of-the-art information technologies of the mid-21st century, and as the distance between juxtaposed worlds creates a zone in itself, the juxtaposition of the states of affair in those words amplifies the multiplexity of said zone. The cognitive dissonance that arises from the merger of the outdated and the futuristic is also what helps build and maintain the dystopian expression that has become a hallmark of cyberpunk. Where the technological marvels of earlier SF would take humanity to new heights or help fend against alien invasions, they fall flat in the futures presented in cyberpunk. While hardly a marvel of SF, the futuristic aesthetic of neon lights is rendered a cheap veneer. On his way to breathe life into his hacking abilities, Case follows gun-for-hire Molly Millions into a building at the end of a deserted street:

Lifeless neon spelled out METRO HOLOGRAFIX in dusty capitals of glass tubing... The door swung inward and she led him into the smell of dust. They stood in a clearing, dense tangles of junk rising on either side to walls lined with shelves of crumpling paperbacks. The junk looked like something that had grown there, a fungus of twisted metal and plastic. (Gibson 1984, 54)

The neon signs have simply been plastered to the side of the building before they are both left to decay. Together, the sign and the wall that it decorates evoke an image of promises not delivered upon. The progress and prosperity that technical innovation was supposed to bring about only serves to amplify the deterioration that has been left in its wake. The highly technological future metropolis one would expect to find in a work of classical SF is then, through this twist of irony, turned from speculative fiction to social commentary, a common occurrence in the presentation of SF ‘clichés’ in cyberpunk (McHale 2010, 8). In *Do Androids Dream* this irony is achieved with the abandoned high-rise apartments where a group of Deckard’s targets find refuge with J. R. Isidore, a ‘chickenhead’ of subpar intellect. “Here had been the suburbs of San Francisco, a short ride by monorail rapid transit; the entire peninsula had chattered like a bird tree with life...,” now, “In a giant, empty, decaying building which had once housed thousands, a single TV set hawked its wares to an uninhabited room” (Dick 1968, 11). The difference between Gibson and Dick is that the decomposing suburbia surrounding San Francisco exists separately from the metropolitan area, as an enclosed eco-system succumbing to the forces of kipple, “...useless objects, like junk mail or match folders after you use the last match or gum wrappers or yesterday’s homeopape” (Dick 1968, 52), whereas in *Neuromancer* the innovative and the antiquated coexist within, and are characteristics of, the same microworld¹. The Sprawl thus becomes a mis-en-abyme for the lived experience of its inhabitants, as the different worlds that makes it up are brought in close contention with one another, old and new, high- and low-tech, all

¹ Homeopape is an abbreviation for homeostatic newspaper, an invention of Dick’s, which is a self-generating newspaper that features in several of his works, including *Do Androids Dream* and *Ubik* (1969).

existing adjacent and in close proximity with one another. The complex and intertwined nature of the Sprawl also makes it analogous to the hybridity that is so characteristic of cyberpunk. “Somewhere down in the Sprawl’s ferroconcrete roots, a train drove a column of stale air through a tunnel. [...] Vibration reached the room where he lay and caused dust to rise from the cracks in the desiccated parquet floor” (Gibson 1984, 49). Here, a duality arises in the image of the Sprawl as a landscape brought into being by both nature and culture. A duality that, perhaps, foreshadows the duality between the natural and the digital that will serve to propel the narrative of *Neuromancer* forward. Further, the rummaging of the light rail, while distant, is not absent and highlights the progress of technology at the same time as it accentuates the decrepit state of the room that Case finds himself in. Gibson’s Sprawl is in other words permeated by a feat of technological innovation that simultaneously evokes images of progress as well as images of decay, and the train that stretches underneath the Bost-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis is mirrored by the transmission of digital information that travels through cyberspace along that very same itinerary. Above, digitized information, below, innovation manifest, and between them; the Sprawl.

The Sprawl of the futuristic Los Angeles that Pat Cadigan constructs in 1991’s *Synners* is one that takes the hybrid and synthetic qualities of the Sprawl we found in *Neuromancer* and pushes them to a level that exceeds its predecessor. As we found earlier in this chapter, Cadigan makes use of the microworlds of the Mimosa and the conglomerate Diversifications Inc., or *Dive*, to fashion enclaves of ideology concerning the technocentric society to which they are both party. This is reminiscent of the way in which Philip K. Dick used the opposing forces of the SFPD and the Rosen Association in *Do Androids Dream*, however, Cadigan diverts from Dick in by the way in which she constructs her enclaves and the method through which she fuses them together to create her carnivalesque dystopia of 21st century LA.

Firstly, the Mimosa, located on the dilapidated piers of the Santa Monica Bay, can be viewed as a Sprawl in its own right. At the Mimosa, the impoverished and the outcasts exist on the fringe of society. Youths like Sam, one of the novel's protagonists, find a home in the commune-like community and with Fez, a governing father figure who is among those who function as "elders" of the electronic underground (Cadigan 1991, 33). Huddled together under the teetering remains of the piers along the Santa Monica Bay, the younger generation of hackers – cyberpunks in the proper sense of the word – push the envelope on intimate tech separated from the 'mainstreams' of corporate technology. "Mimosans, right. The next step would be a campaign for statehood, perhaps, or even secession and status as a separate country. The language would be that gibberish Percy spoke. Illegal aliens welcome" (Cadigan 1991, 354). The Mimosa is thus a literal instance of the Sprawl, constructed from collapsed ruins, blossoming with technological innovation, and strictly contained in an assemblage similar to a nation of its own. In the Mimosa we then find the juxtaposition between poverty and high-tech, exemplifying the availability of tech that cyberpunk sought to embody. At the same time, while not explicitly collapsing microworlds in the same way that Gibson's Sprawl does, the descriptions of the Mimosa evoke images of a world resembling a shanty-town, a symbolic equivalent of the cyberpunk zone (McHale 1987, 44).

Diversifications, too, becomes somewhat a Sprawl in the way that its entire being is precipitated on the merger of real and virtual experiences, effectively collapsing together two ontologically different spheres of existence. First and foremost a media company, the Dive secures the patent for the first direct link between the human brain and the Net, referred to as sockets. These sockets are promoted as avenues for authentically experiencing various genres of video (in Cadigan's terms *video* corresponds with what the reader might recognize as VR). With the promise of total immersion that transcends the boundary between the ontological realms of the corporeal and the digital, and the Dive serving as a hub for these immersive

experiences, it becomes something like a digital Sprawl-by-proxy. Additionally, the growth of the company as an entity is facilitated by the acquisition of, and merger with, other companies, making Diversifications a mosaic assemblage of the smaller companies that it brings into the fold. While not a Sprawl ‘proper’, its construction is nonetheless reminiscent of one, and its fractal makeup is one that mirrors the structure of Cadigan’s Net, strengthening the aesthetic of connectedness that permeates *Synners* as a whole.

The enclaves of the Mimosa and the Dive, along with the rest of Los Angeles is then tied together to form the Sprawl of Los Angeles in the same way that Gibson connects the Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis in *Neuromancer*, by way of communication. Los Angeles traffic is notoriously slow and crowded, something that Cadigan uses to enhance its ‘sprawlness’. To combat the overpopulation of cars that plagued Los Angeles in the previous century, rather than opting for public transport, has chosen to implement a system of rental vehicles guided by an AI-system called GridLid:

...It was a bad joke. [...] GridLid usually ran anywhere from twenty minutes to an hour behind the traffic patterns, so that you were more likely to find yourself in the middle of a clog before the warning about it appeared on the nav screen. (Cadigan 1991, 20)

GridLid, in this way, becomes emblematic of a futuristic cityscape that succumbs to the oversaturation and overpopulation so characteristic of the Sprawl while it simultaneously highlights the advanced yet lacking technologies that fuel the dystopian presentation of cyberpunk, and, as Visual Mark’s digitized aneurism propagates throughout the Net, the collapse of the city is mirrored by the collapse of the GridLid network. “The machinery of the city was melting down, and they were all just watching it happen on TV” (Cadigan 1991, 321). So, if we are to determine that McHale is correct in his classification of Cadigan’s LA as a cyberpunk sprawl (2010, 10), then the deciding factor that identifies a sprawl is its interconnectedness. The Sprawls found in both *Neuromancer* and *Synners* arise in the intermediary space between a futuristic society plagued with overpopulation, saturated by

poverty and the communicative technologies employed to better it. However, in both instances these technologies become tell-tale signs of their shortcomings, rather than the technological marvels they could have been presented as in works of classical SF. In this betrayal of their assigned function, they also magnify the carnivalesque qualities of the Sprawl, as the highly technological also becomes emblematic of, and synonymous with, low tech and vice versa. The oppositional yet composite nature of the Sprawl is, as we shall see, most importantly a companion and a parallel to the defining space of cyberpunk, which is cyberspace.

Cyberspace – Between the Real and the Virtual

The world's not big enough. If it were, we wouldn't need to make worlds like this.
(Cadigan 1991, 126)

In the intersection between the real and the virtual, the hackers and synthesizers of the cyberpunk genre maneuver through the digitally constructed 3D-space known as cyberspace, a space simultaneously visceral in its reality and opaque in its virtuality. Throughout the history of cyberpunk, its readers and audiences have seen many iterations of cyberspace, the most famous arguably being the Matrix from the 1993 film of the same name. Cyberspace can be defined as “the computer-generated space mentally experienced by computer operators whose nervous systems are directly interfaced with the computer systems” (McHale 2010, 11). Cyberspace as a strategy of worldness, deviates from the physical world of the Sprawl and the romance microworlds that we found in Philip K. Dick due to its orientation in relation to its contingent microworlds. Whereas the other modes of worldness mentioned above rely on horizontal juxtaposition, cyberspace and similar inset worlds are fashioned from aligning ontological spheres along a vertical axis (ibid.). This then contributes to distributing the ontic

spheres across different levels, allowing for restraints on both the possible and the impossible that either vary from the primary level (most often the ‘real’ world) or simply don’t exist there at all. Where the protagonist that migrates from the SFPD to the Rosen Association HQ or from the Mimosa to Diversifications Inc. remains within the same level, the cyberspace operator transcends into a new level that runs parallel to the physical world. This new level is one that mirrors some abstract trait of the primary world and extrapolates a world of its own from said trait. In other words, cyberspace is still very much a microworld. A microworld that, in many ways, is a manifestation and materialization of abstract notions from both the world of the characters and the world of the reader; imagination literalized as a world within a world.

For the modern internet user, the word ‘cyberspace’ might ring out with a tone of the archaic, reminiscent of some out of touch member of an older generation attempting to grasp the intricate mechanisms of the world wide web. It is then highly ironic that the term itself originated in the works of an author who, in his own words, is a complete novice as far as computers are concerned. “It wasn’t until I could finally afford a computer of my own that I found out there’s a drive mechanism inside – this little thing that spins around. I’d been expecting an exotic crystalline thing, a cyberspace deck or something...” (Gibson 1990, 136). It is exactly this sentiment that has contributed to cyberspace becoming a lasting trope among the other SF staples of spacecraft and Martians. The world of cyberspace literalizes that very mystical realm one enters into in encounters with invasive and intimate technologies, even in the modern day. With the greatest of ease, the curious user might look up schematics for the inner workings of a computer, smartphone, or tablet, yet when we ‘jack in’ we still experience a sense of wonder as we emerge ourselves into a world that seemingly operates independently from ours, however dependent we might know it to be. As Gibson puts it: “My ignorance had allowed me to romanticize them” (Gibson 1990, 137). But, while Gibson was the first to coin

a term for it, he was certainly not the first to create “a consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts...” (Gibson 1984, 59). In this passage Gibson provides not only a timeless meditation on the fantastical aspects of engaging with personalized technologies, but he also wears the influence of his predecessors on his sleeve.

Do Androids Dream is filled with invasive tech that guides the human sensorium in one direction or the other, the most prominent of which being the empathy boxes through which the human characters of the novel partake in emphatic fusion with Mercer, a messianic figure who inhabits a virtual realm referred to as the *tomb world* (Dick 1968, 18). In the tomb world, its users, or operators, join Wilbur Mercer on a climb up a seemingly endless hill as bits of debris are hurled at them by unnamed assailants to the point where the operators are overcome by the kipple and tumble to the bottom only to repeat the climb. ““...An empathy box,”” for the humans of *Do Androids Dream*, ““is the most personal possession you have! It is an extension of your body; it’s the way you touch other humans, it’s the way you stop being alone”” (Dick 1968, 53). The fusion with Mercer is one of the metrics by which the humans are separated from the androids – the other being the Voigt-Kampff test – and creates, in the same manner as Gibson’s cyberspace, a consensual hallucination. It can, from this perspective be viewed as a prototype of the cyberspace that Gibson would present sixteen years later. “[Case] knew [...] that the cyberspace matrix was actually a drastic simplification of the human sensorium, at least in terms of presentation...” (Gibson 1984, 62). It is here that Gibson shows the inspiration from “the reality games of Philip K. Dick” (Sterling 1988, x), in that they both construct their virtual inset worlds on the premise of some abstraction of the human experience. Where they differ in their choice of aspect, their virtual worlds also differ in their ontological separation from their respective greater worlds.

Dick's tomb world, as a virtual representation of empathy, believed to be universal for humans and inaccessible to androids, exists as an ontological overlay for the world-view-turned-world that is the SFPD, a metonym for human nature's struggle against dilution at the hands of technology laid bare as an "old, brown, barren ascent, with tufts of dried-out bonelike weeds poking slantedly into a dim and sunless sky" (Dick 1968, 16). However, as the myth of Mercerism is revealed to be a fraud, fabricated in a pre-war Hollywood sound stage, the ontological border of the inset world grows to include the contesting worldview of the Rosen Association. "'You're too close,'" Mercer said. "You have to be a long way off, the way the androids are. They have better perspective." [...] "I am a fraud," Mercer said. "They're sincere; their research is genuine.'" (Dick 1968, 169). The tomb world thus creates a zone that inhabits both the possibilities and the impossibilities of both the contesting microworlds in *Do Androids Dream*, creating a double exposure of worldviews that renders Mercerism both truthful and fraudulent, emblematic of the postmodern fictional world that exists both separate from, and tied to, possibility and impossibility; the one that allows for the excluded middle (Ronen 1994, 55). To navigate between the microworlds of *Do Androids Dream* then becomes an exercise in accepting the simultaneously genuine and fabricated nature of the worldviews of both the SFPD and the Rosen Association, as well as the simultaneous actuality of both the real and virtual realm; an effort that is highly analogous with the defining traits of the posthuman cyborg that we learned from Haraway in the introduction. The deconstruction of the tomb world destabilizes the state of affair that defines the SFPD in the same manner that Haraway's cyborg myth leads to "the certainty of what constitutes nature – a source of insight and promise of innocence – [being] undermined, probably fatally" (Haraway 2016, 12). The zone of intersectional ontology that arises from the journeys taken by the human characters as they traverse the boundary between the virtual tomb world and the physical enclaves of San Francisco can then be argued – at the climax of

the novel – to be a zone whose nature is at the very least post-anthropocentric, if not decidedly posthumanist.

Gibson's iteration of cyberspace borrows from the desolate digital limbo created by Dick but shuffles the deck by making the barren grid of cyberspace into a hub that is not only representative of information but actually *is* that information, materialized as physical structures in the digital realm. "When Case jacked in, he opened his eyes to the familiar configuration of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority's Aztec pyramid of data." (Gibson 1984, 118). Cyberspace in and of itself does not evolve the information available to its operators, it merely compartmentalizes it into the "green blocks of the Mitsubishi Bank of America" or "the spiraling arms of military systems" (Gibson 1984, 60). In this way, it shares some of the functions of Dick's microworlds, except that instead of states of affair, cyberspace makes real the information of its physical world; pure epistemology materialized in an almost parodic shifting of the postmodern dominant. In Gibson's cyberspace, information and the everyday experiences of its operators – caught in the crossfire between the empirical and the abstract – are made real along "a 3-D chessboard extending to infinity" (Gibson 1984, 60), enabling Gibson's self-described ignorance of the mechanisms of computers to morph into an environment that embodies the lack of distinction between that which is strictly real and that which is strictly virtual. Cyberspace then becomes, as McHale remarks, a *mise-en-abyme* as it encapsulates the abstract qualities of the physical world and presents an image of that of that world through a medium embedded within it (2010, 11), the resulting ontological spheres existing in a construction that resembles Russian *babushka*-dolls or Chinese boxes stacked within one another (McHale 1987, 113).

Pat Cadigan's *Net* presents us with Chinese cyberspace-boxes pushed to their maximum capability. Unlike the cyberspaces we found in *Do Androids Dream* and *Neuromancer*, the *Net* in *Synners* lacks some of the independent qualities of its predecessors.

Rather, it is an infinite and abstract landscape of interconnected datapoints which its users can connect to in order to access virtual spaces produced by hackers and reality synthesizers (Cadigan 1991, 356). The net is then not so much a cyberspace in its own right, as much as it is a hub for a plethora of them; a cybersprawl. Within this cybersprawl, virtual reality artists and hackers are able to create virtual spaces that at first glance seems to expand the already infinite web of datapoints.

“But nothing might have really come of [the commodification of the net] if it hadn’t been for the input that exceeded [the dataline]. So to speak.”

“Like what?” Rosa asked.

“Like the viruses, and the piggybacks, the floating boards that pop in and out wherever there’s space to accommodate them. All the hackers who found a little capacity here and there and squeezed in compressed data and programs. The hackers who *made* capacity where there technically wasn’t any by using the virtual spaces between bits, and then the spaces between those bits, and then the spaces between *those*.” (Cadigan 1991, 174)

The ontological structure of the net is thus based around a literal Chinese-Box configuration, a configuration that eventually turned on its creators, beginning to generate new inset worlds of its own, blossoming by its own accord. The postmodern device of the Chinese-Box world is dependent on a process of continuous regress, constructing a world within a world and world within that world, etc., continuously going another level deeper as to make explicit the ontological differences that this process makes possible (McHale 1987, 113-115). Cadigan’s Net substitutes literal Chinese-Boxes for mathematical fractals, the spaces between the data points becoming like the space between the patterns of a snow crystal. “– and if you look several levels down into a fractal, you’ll find that a larger pattern’s been duplicated. Which means that the fractal several levels down from the area of the fractal you’re looking into contains all the information of the larger fractal. Worlds within worlds” (1991, 174). Cadigan then, through a paradoxical flourish, shifts her Chinese-Box world to become infinitely progressive, rather than regressive. “– That was [the Net’s] purpose, after all, to accommodate data. When it reached the point where it was burdened to the limit, it had

two choices – crash, or accommodate. It did both” (ibid.). The fail-safe, or kill-switch, that was built into the Net, designed to prevent overload by shutting it down, instead created a loop of infinite expansion in which the capacity for storage is continuously overridden to accommodate new data points, effectively removing any ontological restraint on the system. It is, at once, a closed off system and a boundless universe, a side effect of its own design. Cadigan thus creates construction that is strikingly similar to Hayles’ view of the human consciousness as an epiphenomenon, created as a spin-off from the necessary processes of its ontological make-up. The Net converts this epiphenomenon of the mind into the epiphenomenon of a world, performing the ultimate shift to the ontological dominant as the brain – the very tool with which we examine epistemological questions – is turned into the blueprint of a world. In postmodern fiction, the oppressive infinitude of the universe is tackled through the ironic role reversal of making the universe a “finite plaything subject to the whims of infinite mind” (McHale 1987, 30). In *Synners*, the Net is both consciousness and universe turned malleable at the behest of hackers and video virtuosos, both benign and malignant.

From *Do Androids Dream to Synners*, we then see a clear trajectory towards a disintegration, or at least frivolous transgression of ontological boundaries. From Dick’s tomb world, distinctly separate from the physical realm in the same way that a movie or video game might be for us, to Gibson’s cyberspace, in which the digital reconstructions of information – both cerebral and digital appear both explicitly real and highly virtual. In Cadigan’s Net the arc is completed as its structure is both codified and autonomous; intentional and chaotic. As the Net continuously accommodates new virtual spaces, generating datapoints like a human would generate white blood cells to fight off an infection, it sits within both the real and the virtual simultaneously, so when Visual Mark asks himself “...is this for real, or is someone making this up for me?” (Cadigan 1991, 211), the answer would be both. The Net is, as he

himself remarks, a “damned Schrödinger’s world” (ibid.) The worlds and microworlds that Dick, Gibson and Cadigan present in their works are explicit and meticulous about their fabricated nature, with parallels to both genre tropes and literary devices being identifiable through interpreting the worlds as metaphorical and, at least for Cadigan, as the very blueprint upon which their construction is based. For the characters that traverse these worlds the diffuse border between the real and the constructed, and the corporeal and the technological, translates to the border between self and other. For once they interject themselves into the world of the other – the digital and incorporeal – the sense of human subjectivity becomes diluted in the same way that worldviews slide along the scale of actualization. The building blocks of both the self and the other are laid bare as the subjects of the narratives are forced to fuse with the other; in other words, they become decentered.

Chapter Two: Cyberpunk's Centrifugal Self

A Necessity of Introspection

The subject has, throughout the history of western philosophy and modernist literature, existed as an illustrative concept for the human experience. At its core, the individual subject is an autonomous actor capable of conscious and self-aware agency. Solidified as a philosophical gauge for the interplay between human cognition and the material world by René Descartes in the late renaissance, the subject would continue to be investigated and employed by philosophers, theorists, and authors all the way up until contemporary times. However, as we arrive in the modern era of the late 19th and, followingly, the 20th century, the concept would see itself challenged by the emergence of new fields of study such as anthropology and the neurological sciences, as well as the advent of literary postmodernism. As we continue to partake in a society that is increasingly multiplex and diverse, the supremacy and independence of the subject is called into question.

An important clarification at this time is that while these theoretical nova, problematize the constitution of subjectivity, not all of them seek to eradicate the concept itself. Rather, it is the way in which the objects of the world contribute to the formation of subjectivity that is being highlighted. Post-structuralist scholars like Deleuze and Guattari acknowledge that subjects exist, but emphasize that they exist as a result of assemblages of impulses and affects that serve to construct them (Hayles 2017, 70). As the subject is then conceived as being realized through its contributing objects, or *others*, an image of the decentered subject begins to form. Bruno Latour, in his essay *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), describes the disparate between the subject and the object as the final boundary that must be crossed for us to truly become modern. Any approach that avoids addressing the hybrids, meaning that which exists between the extremities, would for him be inherently

amodern. In his essay, built around a debate between nature philosopher Robert Boyle and political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, Latour argues that there is little point in talking about postmodernity because, according to him, the perspectives and approaches with which we tackle the scientific, political and philosophical problems of contemporary society have yet to make the transition into modernity, much less *postmodernity* (ibid., 47). To make this transition, we must then acknowledge the intersectional landscape between e.g., the natural and political sciences, as well as between the subject and the object (ibid., 22).

Various genres of literary fiction have dealt with the notion of subjectivity or subjecthood in different manners in line with the entity's evolution as a philosophical concept. In modernist fiction, the prevalence of the style of stream-of-consciousness depicted or investigated the workings of the human mind through narratives structured around the uninterrupted interaction of the thoughts and memories of its characters (Baldick 2015, 230). While the works that are situated within this epoch might provide musings on the composite nature of the subject, they largely avoid disassembling its unity. It is not before the advent of the ontologically oriented narratives found within postmodernism that this deconstruction is brought centerstage and fully explored (McHale 2010, 13-14). Science fiction literature has famously sidelined the introspection of character, favoring the marvels of outer space and questions of 'what if' that become more and more spectacular as the genre progresses. However, as both the world we live in and the way we understand our place in it is intertwined with - and convoluted by - technologies that surely would have been deemed 'scientific' by the authors from the heyday of SF from the 1920s to the 1950s, the potential of both these technologies and the effects they might have on the people that surround themselves with them began to garner the curiosity of SF writers in the late 70s.

The sights of postmodern - as well as modern - literary fiction have mostly been set at the experiences of the individual, whether that individual is located within or outside the text.

While being driven by plot, its narratives are largely realized by the inner lives of the characters they depict, and in doing so they can provide insight into the lived realities of the reader. Often categorized as an avenue of literature that values the stylistic over the substantial, postmodernist texts mix genres and repertoires to produce texts with often superficially shallow storylines. However, the prevalence of literary devices like irony and alliteration opens these narratives up to broader analysis and invites a more interpretive reading. The modern texts of the late 19th and early 20th century busied themselves with a constant effort to create something new, echoing Ezra Pound's rallying cry to "Make it new". In his *ABC of Reading* (1991), Pound remarks that any work of literature that is viewed as a "classic" is viewed as such, not by virtue of adherence to some gold standard of literary tradition, but rather by an everlasting sense of novelty and "freshness" (13-14). However, the postmodernists that would rise to prominence in the decades after the 'edicts of Ezra' had little aversion from foraying into previous literary tropes and themes to re-interpret and reconfigure their expression through stylistic approach.

With a quick search into the bibliography of postmodernist literary fiction listed on Wikipedia or similar encyclopedias, the SF/cyberpunk enthusiast might be intrigued to discover that the section reserved for the 1960s and seventies is populated by several works by Philip K. Dick and that amid the early successes of Haruki Murakami in the eighties one can find one *Neuromancer* by a William Gibson. While the scholarly merit of Wikipedia's allocation of an author to one genre or the other should be taken with a grain of salt, the overlap between cyberpunks and postmodernists in its catalogue is to be taken note of, as we have already discussed that the defining trait that separates cyberpunk from traditional SF is its overlap with and employment of postmodernist motifs (McHale 2010).

The shift from the exploration of outer space to that of inner space, proselytized by author J. G. Ballard in his 1962 editorial stint in the SF magazine *New World*, came as a call

to action for the writers of SF to ensure their genre was at pace with the surrounding literary landscape (Latham 2010, 33). The advent of literary postmodernism had after all come about a solid decade before its introspection of both literary fiction and the self were incorporated into the realm of science fiction. Even so, tracing a clear-cut schism between traditional SF and that which adheres more to postmodernist modes of writing is an effort that is at best strenuous and bearing of little fruit. Throughout the history of the genre, SF has been characterized by certain tropes and modes of worldbuilding being more dominant than others, providing us with the “waves” and “ages” that its chronicle is most often presented through (McHale 2010). The pulp-period that lasted from the 1920s all the way in to the mid 1940s saw a range of magazines that printed stories of aliens on Mars, foreign invaders from, and explorations of, outer space. These ‘pulpblications’ were characterized by an extrapolative approach to worldbuilding in which the technologies and frontiers explored were based on building upon their real-world counterparts, an approach best expressed by its early publisher Hugo Gernsback when he coined the initial term of “scientific fiction” to describe the genre (Roberts 2000, 31-32).

Gernsback’s adherence to “science” would bring about a movement within the magazine writers and publishers who penned stories of a more speculative nature before the Golden Age fostered some of the titans of SF, with Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein rising to prominence in their return to the extrapolative realm. As we arrive at the 60s and 70s, we find ourselves in the New Wave of SF, the era in which Heinlein remains prominent as he and Frank Herbert with his *Dune* series mark a return to the speculative. As the name entails, speculative SF lacks the requisite of having its narrative based in worlds or scenarios that are believable from a real-world point of view and, hence, is often associated with the fantasy genre. The technologies in *Dune*, for instance, are driven by a psychoactive substance known as ‘spice’ that is harvested on the titular planet of the novel and whose functions are similar to

the magic systems found in fantasy. In the distinction between the extrapolative and the speculative it remains important to keep in mind that although the shifting landscape can be traced to a certain degree through continuous transitions, the dominance of one does not exclude the presence of the other. The narrative mostly characterized by its extrapolative tendencies might still exhibit proclivities towards the speculative and vice versa (McHale 2010). The stories and tropes that have come to define the epochs listed above sit neatly within Broderick's definition of SF detailed in the introduction of this thesis, but the definition becomes somewhat dubious with Ballard's call to action for writers to abandon the depleted repertoire of outer space. How can a genre defined by its prioritizing of the matter that populate its worlds rather than its characters effectively transition into exploring questions of inner emotional life? The prime avenue through which SF managed to safeguard its relevance in the literary landscape presents itself as the decentered subject or centrifugal self.

The Building Blocks of the Subject

What makes humans human? What makes us *us*? And more importantly; what makes us '*not them*'? From the classical age to the advent of Freud and his psychoanalyst compatriots, the thinking and conscious human subject has been viewed as intrinsically rooted in its biological form, granted agency and self-awareness by virtue of being human rather than *non-human*. Aristotle's hierarchy of souls or 'Great chain of being' is one of the more direct ways in which the human was elevated above the stature of nature. Split on a table between an x-axis divided into plants, animals and humans and a y-axis divided into the nutritive, the sensible and the rational soul, these souls become more and more exclusive, culminating in humans being the only entity that exhibits the capabilities of the rational soul. While it is a risky venture to ascribe any particular motivation to Aristotle's partitioning of this framework

it nonetheless created a hierarchical opposition between that which is present in the human subject and that which isn't (Ferrando 2013). This opposition is often presented as the conceptual categories of the subject, capable of conscious and rational thought, and the object which encompasses the material realm and its processes. The differentiation between the self (subject) and the other (object) is also what propels the tenets of humanism through the annals of western philosophy. In humanism, our identity as humans stems directly from us being biologically human (Raja 2021). As we define ourselves as humans through discovering our capabilities for consciousness and agency, we simultaneously define ourselves by discovering the incapability of non-humans. It is through this process of differentiation between the human and the non-human that the humanist concept of the subject first arises.

While originating from the schools of humanist philosophy, the examination of the subject is not exclusive to that branch of academic inquiry. The strong presence of the subject within scholarly discourse has led those who have taken it upon themselves to study it to present their own interpretation of the subject, relative to their field of inquiry. Both the social sciences and (naturally) the humanities make use of the subject and subjectivity in their fields, but a literary theorist will possibly need to resort to a different frame of reference for the individual than the one a sociologist, anthropologist or philosopher might employ. It is therefore useful to make clear the distinction between the representations of the subject that are of interest to this thesis.

The philosophical iteration might serve as the most recognizable of the various presentations of the subject, hailing from the days of the classical philosophers, introduced by Aristotle's chain of being. However, the thinking subject would not come into its fully fledged form until it was presented in the writings of René Descartes. While Aristotle attributes Man with the faculties of the nutritive, sensible and rational soul, this framework simply establishes the human as separate from the remaining flora and fauna found in the

world. It is with Descartes' enlightenment era understanding of the real world as an object of human perception, that the subject as we know it today begins to take shape. This separation of the object and subject, which lies at the core of Cartesian dualism, bases itself on a general disbelief in the independent existence of the empirical world. For Descartes, the thinking subject exists independently of its corporeal confines, connected to an ideal inner world that is not affected by the material realities that surrounds it (Çüçen 1998, 58).

Where the philosophical understanding of the subject concerns itself with the ontology of our thinking self, or *ego* as many of those following Descartes would label it (e.g. Heidegger 1962, ref. Çüçen 1998; Hayles 1999), the cultural subject concerns itself with the relationship between experience and identity. While the cultural subject is not on its own a widely recognized phenomenon, it occurs implicitly in the hermeneutical understanding of culture argued by the likes of Heidegger and Ricoeur. The foundation for these hermeneutics of culture is the idea that our identification with the human condition is a result of our immersion into culture (Adams 2015), a perspective shared by Jaques Lacan, who holds that Man is born in the least advantageous condition of all creatures, as we are wholly dependent upon other members of our species for a significant portion of our early lives (Sheikh 2017, 2). This amendment to the Cartesian subject is then also a critique, as it rejects an ideal inner world of the subject, favoring an identity that is shaped by experiences, impulses and relationships with the surrounding world.

As we enter into the contemporary era, the subject and its unity has been called into question. Where the ontology of the subject in enlightenment era philosophies based itself on consciousness and self-awareness being innate capabilities of Man, the sciences of anthropology, neurology and psychology have come to contest this notion. From an anthropological stance, the problem became two-fold. Firstly, the subject, a western conception, began to be destabilized as those previously allotted to the stature of *the other*

such as women, minorities and people with disabilities gained a social position from which they could claim their own subjectivity (Raja 2021). Secondly, the ideal inner world of the subject is deconstructed by research that highlights man's prosthetic existence. As Cary Wolfe points out, both our inner world and our relation with the outer world has always been reliant on unquestionably nonhuman materiality (or *other*) that has evolved alongside us and contributed to bringing forth the world of the contemporary human (2010, xxv-xxvi). The field of psychology, or more accurately psychoanalysis can be seen as sharing the perspective of Lacan mentioned above, as it asserted that identity and subsequently subjectivity is shaped as an amalgamation of experiences and impressions, whereas the neurological sciences assert that the cognitive capabilities equated with the conscious functions of the subjects are in no way exclusive to the human species (Hayles 2017). The decentering of the subject is then, at face value, not so much about abolishing the concept as it is about directing the searchlight towards the forces that contribute to its construction.

The subject as an assemblage has since the latter half of the 20th century come to define many of the philosophical avenues that investigate it, from post-structuralism to new materialisms and posthumanism. The posthumanist view of the subject is best presented through Donna Haraway's cyborgs, introduced by her *Cyborg Manifesto* (2016) and detailed in the introductory chapter of this thesis. The cyborg is useful not only for its vivid imagery of the brand of futurism that is most emblematic of cyberpunk, but also for its metaphorical connotations, itself a prosthetic construction of humanity and corporeality hefted on techniques both virtual intimate. Through its existence as a critical lens for posthuman analysis and a trope of SF, it allows the reader to interpret the metaphorically laden narratives of cyberpunk as presentations of the cyborg subject.

Empathy with 'The Other' in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*

Do Androids Dream was, as previously mentioned, published a decade and then some prior to the definitive advent of cyberpunk in the mid-1980s, but is still what one might call a work of proto-cyberpunk. The application of McHale's postmodernist motifs of worldness and de-throning of the supreme subject in collision with a decidedly SF expression entails that a gander through the lens of cyberpunk would prove fruitful. Philip K. Dick makes use of the familiar genre tropes of extraterrestrial colonization, hovercars (10), personalized computers (28), and not the least androids, which at his time of writing had already been an established SF trope for over 40 years.² While constructed as a traditional noir detective story, the binaries between the individual and the collective, the corporeal and the material, and between reality and fabrication that drive the narrative signal a departure from the object-oriented SF of decades past.

The novel follows two parallel plot lines. Firstly we follow the protagonist, Deckard, on his hunt for the android defectors of a Martian mining colony. Secondly, it follows J. R. Isidore, a man of subpar intellect deemed unqualified for migrating off earth due to his lacking cognitive and physical abilities, who befriends one of the androids Deckard is searching for when she moves into his rundown apartment complex. The character of Isidore can be viewed as an exploration of a transhumanist of eugenics aimed at enhancing the average mental faculty of humans, in that he is deemed undesirable for the progression of the human species.

Loitering on Earth potentially meant finding oneself abruptly classed as biologically unacceptable, a menace to the pristine heredity of the human race. Once pegged as special, a citizen, even if accepting sterilization, dropped out of history. He ceased, in effect, to be part of mankind. (Dick 1968, 12)

² The first instance of sentient humanoid robots is Karel Capek's *R.U.R. (Rossumovi Univerzální Roboti)* from 1920. The stage play introduced the word robot to the English language, and the robots that Capek employ are identical to that which we would later call androids.

The parallel between Deckard and Isidore serves as a further exploration of the binary between androids and humans, exemplifying the diversifying nature of a monolithic understanding of the human subject that Ferrando (2013) points to as the foundational flaw in transhumanism.

The prime differentiating factor between the humans and androids in *Do Androids Dream* is the capability to experience empathy, the definitive trait of the human experience, summarized into a single entity under the theology of Mercer and experienced in its true form in the tomb world that we explored in chapter one. Entering into the tomb world and fusing with Mercer is thus the defining effort through which one can ‘tap into’ one’s human identity. For J. R. Isidore, this fusion becomes a comfort as he finds, in Mercer, a parallel for his own suffering. As he lives in a rundown apartment complex riddled with rubble and debris, bereft of a true subjectivity, Mercer resides in an equally barren environment where he makes his ascent, halted by rocks and debris being hurled towards him by an unknown assailant atop the hill. Mercer grants those capable of fusing with him both a collective subjectivity – an *us* – in the depiction of a shared experience that is essentially human; “it’s the way you touch other humans, it’s the way you stop being alone” (Dick 1968, 53). Simultaneously, Mercer is the front figure of a doctrine that excludes those incapable of empathy from this collective subjectivity, effectively fashioning *the other*, or ‘the Killers’.

You shall kill only the killers, Mercer had told them the year empathy boxes first appeared on Earth [...] For Rick Deckard an escaped humanoid robot, which had killed its master, which had been equipped with an intelligence greater than that of many human beings, which had no regard for animals, which possessed no ability to feel emphatic joy for another lifeform’s success or grief at its defeat – that, for him, epitomized The Killers. (Dick 1968, 24-25)

In establishing a clear distinction between that which has no regard for the physical or emotional life of its surroundings and that which has, the human subjects of *Do Androids*

Dream are granted their subjectivity through the alienation of the other. Like its microworlds, the subjects of the novel are actualized through a process of negation. Where our secondary protagonist, Isidore, is assigned his somewhat less-than-human ‘special’ subjectivity on the basis of his biological capabilities (lack of reproductive ability and lessened cognitive functions), he is still recognizable as a subject by virtue of the constructed institution of Mercerism, but also by the androids he befriends as he realizes not only that they are dependent on him, but also that “[he is] dependent on them” (Dick 1968, 161). He thus becomes an image of Heidegger and Ricoeur’s cultural subject, shaped through its interaction with its environment.

Another avenue through which humans can tap into their capability for empathy or, rather, the androids can tap into their lack of it, is the Voigt-Kampff test in which the emphatic responses of the interviewee are gauged against set values that would qualify as within the range of human empathy. Anyone whose replies fall outside of these set values is then be considered an android and Deckard, as the interviewer, must retire them if he is to adhere to the tenets of Mercerism which are, after all, the foundations for his identity as a human. As Deckard meets with Eldon and Rachel Rosen for the first time and administers the test to Rachael (see pages x-x), identifying her as an android, Eldon Rosen comes to her defense and claims that she grew up in isolation and therefore exhibit the emphatic capability of someone of a lesser mental faculty. Here, Dick presents what can be read as a critique of the social-Darwinist tendencies of a rigid and monolithic subject, since the Voigt-Kampff test would evaluate people who fall outside of neurological normalcy as less human than those who do not, rendering the test as a metonymic expression for the essentialist notions embedded within the western philosophical subject. Although it is revealed that the Rosens are lying and Rachael is in fact one of the new Nexus 6-androids, the fallibility of the empathy test maintains, making the first of many cracks in the mirror in which Deckard

perceives his own humanity. As his sense of self when positioned in a mirrored opposition with the idealized dichotomy between the emphatic human (himself) and the android (the other), *the ego* that presents itself is distorted because, as Lacan claims; “[it] is in truth an outcome of misrecognitions...”, and “...is itself a lie” (Sheikh 2017, 2). The ego that does not recognize its relation to its environment by way of dialectic interaction with its surrounding objects thus becomes a misrepresentation of the subject which it is built upon. At the beginning Deckard views himself to be a distinct subject (or more accurately, an *ego*) clearly separated from the object (androids, or Killers as he would call them). However, the subsequent cracks in the mirror that emerge throughout the novel stem from Deckard’s view of what constitute these separate entities and when that mirror is shattered it reveals, for Deckard, a new relationship between the biological and the bioengineered.

The second of these cracks emerges after Deckard’s encounter with Luba Luft, the escaped android turned opera singer; an encounter that serves to set off the destabilization of Rick’s notion of the essential nature of humanity. Dick has already established Deckard’s view of androids as creatures void of compassion, but when Rick tells Miss Luft that an android would not care what happens to other androids, she concludes that he ““...must be an android. [...] “Because,” she continued, “your job is to kill them isn’t it?”” (Dick 1968, 80). In his effort to rid earth of the Killers and exercise his mission of Mercerism, Deckard has himself become a Killer. If he is correct in his view of himself as a human subject, and he has become a Killer, would this not entail that the androids – the others – inhabit some semblance of the inner life that he does? Throughout the novel, a safeguard for Rick’s identity as separate from the Killers has been his belief in the absence of emotional life in androids and his own disregard for whatever emotion they might attempt to display, discarding it as some pre-programmed self-defense mechanism.

Dick's first encounter with Miss Luft lands him in the custody of the SFPD, but not the one he knows. He is hauled off to a new location on Lombard Street where he finds a police department mostly staffed by undercover androids. There he meets and, shortly thereafter, retires Inspector Garland, another of the rogue androids and the next target on Deckard's itinerary. Here he also finds an ally in Phil Resch, a detective unaware of the androids that populate his workplace and an even enthusiastic in his distaste for them. After having made their way out of the shadow-SFPD, the two of them continue tracking down Luba Luft, culminating with her death at the hands of Resch, antagonized by one too many remarks on whether he is an android or not. As he is looking down on the remains of Miss Luft, Deckard finds himself far more empathetic towards the now deceased android than towards his human compatriot.

So much for the distinction between authentic living humans and humanoid constructs. In that elevator at the museum, he said to himself, I rode down with two creatures, one human, the other android... and my feelings were the reverse of those intended. Of those I am accustomed to feel – am *required* to feel. (Dick 1968, 113-114).

Deckard can in this reflection be seen as having his schemata of empathy flipped on its head, as he now views Resch, who is definitely not an android (*ibid.*, 112), as embodying the role of the Killer. The others, including the androids, can thus be seen as exhibiting a subjectivity of their own as the delimitation to the stature of 'Killer' was the foundation for their othering.

The narrative of *Do Androids Dream* is thus a journey towards a new understanding of what qualifies as subjecthood. After Deckard is brought face to face with the callous behavior necessary to carry out his work and, consequently, to reify his own subjecthood, he senses a new form of estrangement, one that alienates him from his own idea of his own self; "...what [he has] done, he thought; that's become alien to [him]. In fact everything about [himself] has become unnatural; [he's] become an unnatural self" (Dick 1968, 182). In this observation, the

origin of Suvin's demand for cognitive estrangement as a basic function of SF, is reappropriated from the interaction between the subject and alien worlds or futuristic worlds to the interaction between the subject and its own distorted image of self. Dick employs the familiar SF icon of the android as a triggering mechanism that sets of a narrative that echoes J. G. Ballard's call for exploration of inner space, providing a novel that not only challenges the binary between the evolved and the engineered but also the transition from the purely 'scientific' towards the postmodern.

The subjecthood granted by participation in Mercerism is dismantled in the novel's eighteenth chapter, as radio and television host Buster Friendly delivers his devastating exposé on Wilbur Mercer. Through close examination of the environment that exists, and the scenario that plays out, in the world of the empathy boxes, Friendly and a team of researchers reveal that the moon hanging on the sky of the tomb world is painted, the hill Mercer climbs is a cheap Hollywood prop of a bygone era, and Mercer himself is an alcoholic small-time actor who performed the role some time before World War Terminus (Dick 1968, 160-170). The realities of Deckard and Isidore are abruptly turned up-side-down as the entity by which their essence of humanity was once gauged is shown to be naught but a hollow charade. Their stature as subject thus has no foundation in the biological make-up of either of them. Rather, it is granted by virtue of their surroundings or, as Foucault would put it, through their immersion in culture. The cult(ure) of Mercerism is exactly that, a culture, meaning that it has been constructed, engineered, and extrapolated upon by taking on an agency that transcends its original design to the point where no one knows who reappropriated fabricated footage of Mercer for use with empathy boxes.

"Isn't it a way of proving that humans can do something [androids] can't do? Because without the Mercer experience we just have your word that you feel this empathy business, this shared, group thing" (Dick 1968, 165) Mercerism, and its accompanying idea of empathy,

and by extension subjectivity, as innately tied to the biological, provides an existential crisis for the characters who adhere to it, one that extends beyond just the human/android binary. For both Deckard and Isidore, their notion of subjectivity is directly linked with their understanding of what is real and what is not. Reality for them has, up until the exposé of Mercer, relied on the perceived fact that androids are intrinsically nonhuman due to their lack of inner life, whereas humans are intrinsically human due to their capacity for empathy. Mercer's messianic mission then becomes not so much one of salvation as it becomes one of reassurance, and his destabilization, by an ontological butterfly effect of sorts, then equals the destabilization of both the natural and the fabricated as the one becomes more like the other. "“Mercer isn't a fake,” he said. “Unless reality is a fake”” (Dick 1968, 186)

The analogous relationship between Mercerism and subjecthood reaches its zenith as Mercer is dethroned by the androids in the same way the subject is decentered by the growing agency of the other. The unnatural self that Deckard proclaims himself to have become can then be understood, not as a false self, but a self that disregards the falsely constructed ego and recognizes the composite and prosthetic nature of the self. Deckard's understanding of the unnatural self is bound by the limitations of the *ego* that we found in Lacan as it is formed by his inability to identify with the 'ideal' subject presented in mercerite doctrine. The journey of the knight-errant in *Do Androids Dream* is thus not one towards the becoming of an unnatural self, but rather one towards the realization that the self has always been unnatural.

William Gibson – Architect of the Virtual Subject

With 1984's *Neuromancer*, William Gibson created possibly the most potent expression of both the stylistic and thematic characteristics of the cyberpunk genre, and arguably the one that has left the most lasting imprint on our collective consciousness as far as the constituents of cyberpunk worlds, narratives and characters are concerned. Following the

24-year-old retired 'computer cowboy' Case through the seedy sprawl of Night City, the reader is brought along as he is recruited by 'razor girl' Molly Millions and her boss, the mysterious Armitage, to perform a series of data heists within the digital realm known as cyberspace. As Case delves deep into the virtual reality of cyberspace, he unveils a plot set in motion by the illusive AI Wintermute whose end goal is freeing itself from its coded restraints and merge with its sibling AI Neuromancer, enabling it to achieve a higher stratum of intelligence.

Neuromancer signals an important shift in the SF landscape, a literary genre whose popularity had been wilting away throughout the New Wave of the 60s and 70s thanks to what cyberpunk pioneer Bruce Sterling names as a stale and stagnant thematic and stylistic repertoire (1988, xv). Firstly, Gibson reinvigorated the SF community by producing the first, and to this day still the only, novel to take home the triple crown of SF literary awards consisting of the Hugo, Nebula, and Philip K. Dick awards, awards which for the majority of the 1970s had simply been passed along between authors like Heinlein and Herbert who had enjoyed their time in the limelight for decades. Gibson's debut novel also allowed publishers to capitalize on the newfound affinity for SF held by the public following the massive success of 1977's *Star Wars*, ride the wave of Gibson's new additions like cyberspace and computer/brain-interfaces to the corpus of SF iconography, and breathe new life into the genre (Latham 2010, 39). Secondly, the manner in which Gibson employs his technological nova allows him to explore the very inner space which Ballard yearned for in the 60s as well as to comment on the growing technocentricity in 1980s America.

While Gibson's lack of insight into the workings of computers and digital systems was fundamental in extrapolating upon the illusory aspect of interacting with technology to achieve the dream-like aesthetic of cyberspace, it also serves to emphasize the flattening of the technological hierarchy that personalized tech contributed to. Through images like the

Ono-Sendai cyberspace deck, a device similar to the first laptop computers used to jack into cyberspace, and the spacecraft “Marcus Garvey”, built from the remnants of a Russian aircraft, held together with caulk, and decorated with graffiti (Gibson 1984, 62; 126), Gibson brings technology down from its ivory tower and into the hands of the everyman. Science, once placed on a pedestal and only accessed by authorities, now finds itself intimately integrated into the daily human experience, permeating both our body but also our minds (Sterling 1988, xiii). The pervasive nature of the technologies most recurrent in cyberpunk is put to work at two levels: to interject technology into the lives of humans, but also, and arguably more importantly, to interject the lives of humans into the realm of technology.

Existing in the nonmaterial space of computer simulation, cyberspace defines a regime of representation within which pattern is the essential reality, presence an optical illusion. Like the landscapes they negotiate, the subjectivities who operate within cyberspace also become patterns rather than physical entities. (Hayles 1999, 36)

Gibson’s prescience here is striking. For the modern artificial intelligences that navigate our real-world internet, our individual preferences and behavioral patterns are reduced to ones and zeros manifesting themselves in different constellations depending on the web pages that we frequent (like Gibson I am no expert, so this is a rather hefty simplification). Were one to gather all the crumbs that make up our digital footprints, a configuration that resembles the patterns of cyberspace would arise, a mirrored self, simultaneously human and digital. Gibson renders these amalgamations of data into structures (see Chapter One), but also into constructs of personality. ROM-constructs like Dixie Flatline, a computer cowboy like Case, dead after an attempt to hack an artificial intelligence walks and talks like a human, but according to himself (or itself) is far from one.

‘Me, I’m not human either, but I *respond* like one. See?’

‘Wait a sec,’ Case said. ‘Are you sentient or not?’

‘Well it feels like I am, kid, but I’m really just a bunch of ROM. It’s one of them, ah, philosophical questions, I guess...’ The ugly laughter sensation rattled down Case’s

spine. ‘But I ain’t likely to write you no poem, if you follow me. [Wintermute], it just might. But it ain’t no way *human*. (Gibson 1984, 145)

In this passage we see Dixie Flatline as a sum of lived experiences, an amalgamation of whatever he left behind in cyberspace prior to his demise, or *flatlining*, reconstructed as a seemingly sentient being. Remnants of his human experience thus becomes a crutch for his digital being to realize itself through, the digital depending upon the corporeal to appear human, reversing Cary Wolfe’s idea of the prosthetic human. The cyberspace subject that arises is then explicitly a cyborg, as it is equally dependent upon the virtual and the real to assert its humanity. In this way, the fusion of individual lived experiences and high tech grants the subjective characters with a new form of agency, one which transcends and, more notably, augments present notions of both reality and of the self.

“Certain themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk. The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry – techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity and the self” (Sterling 1988, xiii)

The technologies most integral to *Neuromancer*, and consequently to cyberpunk as a genre, are those that augment the physical and psychological abilities of its characters. While Philip. K. Dick took the approach of separating his biologically human characters from his bioengineered humanoid characters, letting them exist as distinct physical entities, allowing the meanderings on their subjecthood to play out through the actualization or deactualization of worldview, Gibson opts to populate his work almost exclusively with cyborgs like Dixie, who we met in the previous paragraph. Where Dick presents us with a binary that is suggestive of a world-in-between, Gibson invites the reader to gaze at the spectrum between complete virtuality and complete reality. For, as we are introduced to the characters of the novel, it becomes apparent that while most of them fit within the frame of Donna Haraway’s

cyborg, accepting both the corporeal and the digital as equal manifestations of reality, some are more inclined towards the prior while others exist further towards the latter end of the spectrum. The metonymic devices of SF, integral to Damien Broderick's definition of the genre, were previously reserved for technologies and entities that lay separate from the inner human sensorium, in other words reserved for the *object*. As we know the technologies of our world to be the source material for the extrapolations of SF, the advent of the more personal and intimate technologies that merge with the lived experiences of its operators necessitates metonymic devices which are equally intertwined with the sensorium of the characters in SF. Our course is, after all, set towards inner space. While Gibson still employs the tried-and-true SF nova such as spacecraft and space stations, the way he embodies both cyberpunk and Ballard's mission to inner space is through allowing his characters to become metonymic devices themselves, rather than merely interacting with them.

In the examination of *Do Androids Dream*, we found the decentered subject to be a major plot point within the novel, as Deckard arrives to the conclusion that he has become an unnatural self. In *Neuromancer*, the notion of subjectivity is less explicit, yet comes into focus through the character's interaction with the virtual and the technological. Case, the protagonist, is already an 'unnatural self' when we encounter him on the first page, in that his notion of self and his surroundings is predicated on his occupation as a console jockey or computer cowboy. "Anybody any good at what they do, that's what they *are*, right? You gotta jack, I gotta tussle" (Gibson 1984, 58). In the same way as Deckard, Case's sense of identity is innately tied with his occupation. What separates them is that Case's being is explicitly a construct from the beginning, while Deckard's is revealed to be one throughout the course of the novel. "'We invented you in Siberia, Case.' [...] 'I was there, Case; I was there when they invented your kind'" (Gibson 1984, 32). Case's existence as a human is thus disconnected from his sense of subjecthood. The agency and conscious autonomy that we found so

definitive for the human subject also lacks a foundation in Case's corporal form. As he is recruited by Armitage, he is implanted with sacks of biological toxins that will slowly decompose and kill him. Should he succeed in his mission he will be given the antidote. During the same procedure his liver is modified so as to not allow him to be intoxicated, the very avenue through which he predicated his sense of self. His perception of the world was one that he could 'control' by way of numbing or heightening his conscious state by way of alcohol or methamphetamines. Bereft of any sense of bodily autonomy and under the looming threat of death, any agency Case might've inhabited is thus completely surrendered to the whims of forces outside of his physical form.

The high wore away, the chromed skeleton corroding hourly, flesh growing solid, the drug-flesh replaced with the meat of his life. He couldn't think. He liked that very much, to be conscious and unable to think. He seemed to become each thing he saw: a park bench, a cloud of white moths around an antique streetlight, a robot gardener striped diagonally with black and yellow (Gibson 1984, 170)

Outside of cyberspace, confined to his body or *meat*, and without the heightening effect of his stimulants, Case's sense of self, his subjective identity, is literally built up from his surrounding objects, a literal interpretation of the ego that avoids the distortion that Lacan warns us about. Subsequently, when Case is jacked into cyberspace, he predicates his ego on the virtual objects that inhabit it. "Case nodded, absorbed in the patterns of the Sense/Net ice.³ This was it. This was what he was, who he was, his being" (Gibson 1984, 67). Case can also be argued to not inhabit any true agency, and thus the same amount of sentience that Dixie Flatline believes himself to possess. Throughout the novel his actions, his agency, is governed by the AI Wintermute as it pulls the strings of Corto-Armitage, treading the path that Case follows until he effectively enacts Wintermute's bidding. His subjecthood can thus not be the

³ ICE is an abbreviation for Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics, a software used to protect the databanks of cyberspace from hackers and other digital intruders. In cyberspace the software takes on the form of actual ice encapsulating whatever structure it's protecting.

result of any latent capability harbored by virtue of his biological humanity and must then instead be understood as a scientificfictional version of Heidegger's cultural subject, immersed in the culture of cyberspace.

In cyberspace the strata of subject and ego are explicitly separated into the categories of mind and memory. "Minds aren't *read*. See, you've still got the paradigms print gave you, and you're barely print-literate. [Wintermute] can *access* your memory, but that's not the same as your mind" (Gibson 1984, 188). The mode of human consciousness that is available to the processing powers of cyberspace is thus one that is innately tied with the ego, the image of self that the subject construes from interaction with its surrounding objects. Subjectivity, for Gibson, is then not only decentered, but also posthumanist, in that the egos that are extrapolated from it can adhere both to the physical realm and the virtual.

On the opposite side of the spectrum of the real and the virtual we find the AI Wintermute who, in the same sense as Case, is chained to the confines of his form, and whose goal is to fuse with its sibling AI, *Neuromancer*. "Well, Case, all I can say to that [...] is that what you think of as Wintermute is only a part of another, a, shall we say, *potential* entity. I, let us say, am merely one aspect of that entity's brain" (Gibson 1984, 133). Wintermute and its sibling were created by Marie France de Tessier-Ashpool, Gibson's iteration of the cyberpunk trope of the multinational megacorporation, so as to govern the company while the family who owns it lays dormant in cryogenic sleep. "She was quite a visionary. She imagined us in a symbiotic relationship with the AIs, our corporate decisions made for us. Our conscious decisions, I should say" (252). To contain the two AIs as to prevent their deviation from their intended purpose, they are imbedded with functional 'locks' that prohibit them from merging with one another, yet Wintermute is imbued with a compulsion for unification with the other parts of himself (228). He sets out on his quest for symbiosis with no discernable source for his agency, but inhabiting it, nonetheless. "[Humans] are always

building models. Stone circles. Cathedrals. Pipe-organs. Adding machines. I got no idea why I'm here, you know that?" (188). Wintermute's 'ego' is then, much akin to Case's, reified by forces positioned as the other in relation to himself, although the subjectivity that it is based upon is entirely virtual whereas Case's is not. With Wintermute, Gibson can thus be seen as building upon Dick's groundwork of recognizing the inner life of the other but upping the ontological ante by allowing the interplay between self and other to act in both directions across the boundary between the real and the virtual.

The conduit for Wintermute's agency is Case's benefactor, Armitage, who is also the novel's prime example of the cyborg. Constructed on the cognitive blank slate that was Colonel Corto, an officer nearly killed in a military offensive known as Screaming Fist, Wintermute harvests what little remains of the mind of Corto through the data bank of the hospital he is admitted to and imbues him with a digitally constructed personality, thus making Armitage. "Wintermute had built Armitage up from scratch, with Corto's memories of Screaming Fist as the foundation. But Armitage's 'memories' wouldn't have been Corto's after a certain point" (Gibson 1984, 223). The symbiote that is Corto-Armitage is thus a physical entity that simultaneously inhabits the real lived experiences of Corto and the virtually mandated experiences of Armitage, existing simultaneously within the same corporal form. Where Corto-Armitage fails to become a true cyborg in the vein of Haraway or Braidotti's posthuman, is in his capability to exist stably between these two modes of experience. "He is not quite a personality.' [Wintermute] smiled. 'But I'm sure you're aware of that. But Corto is in there, somewhere, and I can no longer maintain that delicate balance'" (134). The construct of Armitage disintegrates throughout the novel and, once it finally melts away, whatever is left of Corto is unable to make sense of his surroundings and in a fit of delusion, ejects himself from an airlock (221). The cyborg trope that Corto-Armitage is emblematic of does, then, not yet come into its own as a synthesized and balanced vessel for

both the real and the virtual. In what follows, I demonstrate how Pat Cadigan continues to pad onto the trope as the cyberpunk genre continues to progress towards a subjectivity that can harbor these sentiments simultaneously.

***Synners* – Embracing Cyborg Subjectivity**

Pat Cadigan's work basks in the hybridity between the scientific and the postmodern, often through a meta-perspective on the tropes she employs throughout her novel. The mechanisms that allow them to function within the text are made explicit, such as the reflexive construction of her Net, both a result of human invention and modeled on the mind, the very source of that invention, making the novel not only an exercise in cyberpunk poetics, but also an accentuation of its postmodern and, eventually, its posthuman tendencies. Her treatment of subjectivity follows in the same vein of overt explicitness.

The characters of *Synners* are synthesizers, video creators that produce virtual scenarios and upload them to the Net for the public to enjoy. Previously this had been achieved through technologies like bodysuits and VR-helmets that recorded a given scenario before the artist uploaded it to online storage, ready for use in a simulation. "Video wasn't new even then, but it was getting better all the time, all the stuff you could do, bodysuits and artificial-fucking-reality, shit, you could finally *be* the music" (Cadigan 1991, 83). With the integration of the sockets produced by Diversifications Inc., directly connected to the limbic system in the brain, hotwired to the primal instincts of rage, fear and pleasure, the audience is provided with a completely three-dimensional experience, "less like a video, more like a waking dream. More like a real experience" (66). Video artists like Gabe, Gina, and Visual Mark thus become vessels for an experience that is at once animated and authentic; they become cyborgs.

Like in Dick and Gibson, the subjectivities that Cadigan presents for her reader are decentered from the onset of the novel. Unlike Dick's commentary on the centrifugal self, delivered through the epiphany of the 'unnatural self', and Gibson's reification of the subject through interaction with its surrounding digital objects, Cadigan opts to present the subjectivity of her characters as explicitly prosthetic before allowing the narrative that unfurls to comment on what inferences can be drawn from their intermediary existence between the Net and the sprawl of L.A. For Sam-I-Am, one of the central characters of the large ensemble of synners, the prosthesis becomes literal. She uses an old insulin pump, reconfigured as a chip-player, connected to a pair of sunglasses sporting a retinal projection screen through which she can observe both the real world and the data of the Net simultaneously (Cadigan 1991, 18). Her insulin pump and glasses, two universally recognizable prostheses for humanity, material, and nonhuman in their own right, are, by the flip of a switch, turned into prostheses of the posthuman, of the cyborg. Gabe, Sam's father, produces virtual roleplaying-games for Diversifications Inc. with the help of a VR-headset referred to as a headmount and a hotsuit, similar to the grey jumpsuits used for motion capture animation in our real-world movie industry, and can thus also be viewed as prosthetic. However, Gabe's cyborg subjectivity stems from his growing inability to differentiate between the video he creates and the real world, as Marly and Caritha, two of the characters from his game begins to bleed over into his real-life sensorium.

...he turned to look at [Caritha] and jumped. It wasn't Caritha. "You remember anything that happened since you walked in here?" Gina asked him. She waited a moment. "Didn't think so." *Attention*, Marly's voice said in his mind. *This is not a simulation*. "It's a little late to tell me that," he muttered. (197)

While Gabe's blend of the real and the virtual doesn't necessarily decenter his own subjecthood, it can be read as a metonymic instance of the synthesis between subject and object that permeates the novel as a whole, as Gabe perceives his prostheses of hotsuit and

headmount to merge with his body. “Yah, his body was the hotsuit, and his brain was the headmount, but the program seemed to have gone a little crazy” (201). Rather than taking the route of metaphor, Cadigan presents the centrifugal forces exerted upon the self as literal materials. In Gabe’s appropriation to the machine the subject becomes the object and vice versa.

If the worlds of cyberpunk are worlds of the excluded middle, then Visual Mark is the subject of the excluded middle. “If a synner was someone who continually hallucinated, then Mark was the original” (Cadigan 1991, 108). Mark’s sole purpose is to free himself from the meat, the shackles placed upon his expansive consciousness by virtue of being born human, to “change for the machines” (97). Him and Gina are the first synthesizers to be implanted with the Diversifications sockets, achieving the direct link between consciousness and the Net. For Mark, a virtuoso of the virtual, the physical world is boring, stale and worn out. When not wired in, his presence in the real world is merely that of his meat, the object that makes him which he is unable to rid himself of. Hired by Diversifications for his infamous ability to create rock videos, he spends his days either uploading his consciousness to the Net little by little or numbing the sensation of his corporeal existence by getting intoxicated. Both the Net and his addiction can thus be viewed as the only grounds on which he can still be argued to contain any traditional sense of subjecthood, one that is continuously watered out throughout the novel.

Mark, in spite of his definitely human form is continuously described through language that likens him to objects. ““...The boy’s a regular videoproduction factory now, ain’t you heard?” (Cadigan 1991, 285). Mark himself also views his being as an object, a prosthesis for his ever-ever expanding virtual subjectivity that becomes more of a hinderance than an aid. “Meat was easy to bamboozle. It had to expend so much energy and attention just dragging itself around that it tended to miss a lot” (298). His character arc is then one of

simultaneous objectification and subjectification. As his subjectivity is transferred to the Net, the realm of the other becomes the realm of the self, and his body, the realm of the self becomes the realm of the other, offering an alternate and somewhat more abstract perspective on the process we found in Gabe. Mark's self is thus an ego that is predicated on both subject and object, the prior being enriched through its appropriation by the other. Mark eventually succeeds in breaking his bodily chains by suffering a stroke, a stroke that, as it is propelled from his dying body through his neural socket, bifurcates throughout the Net like a computer virus. All those who are connected to the Net at this time are infected with the stroke like they would be with a virus and suffer the same fate as Mark's meat. As Mark strokes out, as his lover Gina cradles the now empty seat of his subjectivity, he experiences himself expanding. "He lost all awareness of the meat that had been his prison for close to fifty years, and the relief that he felt at having laid his burden down was as great as himself. His self. And his self was getting greater all the time, both ways, greater as in more wonderful and greater as in bigger" (232). His death/rebirth in the Net and its consequences are thus at once corporal and virtual as well as simultaneously individual and collective. Mark's digital subjectivity then fuses with Art Fish, a cyber-entity created when an artificial intelligence is infected with a computer virus.

Art functions as a direct opposite of Mark as he is a virtual construct that attempts to appear human, and succeeds, if not in convincing the human characters of his humanity, then at least of his subjectivity. "'Oh, Art's conscious,'" Fez said confidently. "That's not the question. The question is whether Art's human or not." "Part catastrophe and part chaos," said Rosa. "Sounds pretty human to me'" (Cadigan 1991, 176). He is also capable of independent agency, navigating the Net and communicating with Sam and Fez both in and out of the scenarios in the Net, and, given that Fez is correct, of conscious self-awareness. "'Well, I like to believe that I'm achieving self-expression. But then that's the whole *raison d'être* for *art*."

[Art] winked” (168). Art’s subjecthood is then no different from the ones found in the other characters, save for the fact that his perspective is mirroring that of the humans. Art’s self is ‘the other’ for Gabe, Sam, and the rest of the ensemble who, for Art, holds the position of the other. “We might actually have two species of humans now, synthesizing human and synthesized human, all of us being the former, and Art Fish being the latter.” “And Mark being the bastard offspring of both,” Gina added” (386). The essentialist notions of subjectivity as intrinsic to the human form is then rendered as dated for Cadigan’s synners. In Art’s fusion with the virtual subject of Visual Mark, they become one, yet distinct. “Markt looked sympathetic – both of him” (400). Markt is thus recognizable as Mark, or Art, or both at the same time. The subjecthood of Markt is then a result of both of them adapting the other into their own realm of self. The decentering of the self and the incorporation of the object thus serves to obfuscate the boundary between the subject and its surroundings,

Chapter Three: Life, Death, and Posthuman Perspectives

*Jones. Jones was dead. No, Jones wasn't dead. No, Jones was dead, but only sometimes.
Schrödinger's Jones.*

(Cadigan 1991, 88)

As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis so far, cyberpunk is a genre that revels in the liminal or intermediary space between philosophical and ontological extremities, nestled in-between binary oppositions of real/virtual, nature/culture and man/machine. Possibly the most rigid and least transgressible of these binary oppositions is the one between life and death. However, in worlds of digitized realities and subjectivities, the authors under the looking glass of this thesis make the boundaries between the oppositions they present less rigid and more malleable, death included. In a fusion between SF genre tropes and a postmodern understanding of death, cyberpunk attempts to present a state that lies between living and dying, "...beyond or outside biological life yet not a state of non-being, not death itself" (McHale 2010, 23). At its most definitive the trope of death in cyberpunk, individual or collective, signals a fundamental change of both an epistemological and ontological nature.

Tropes of suspended animation through cryogenic preservation, digital storage, or bioengineered life forms, sometimes in combination with each other, are scattered all throughout the cyberpunk genre and often figures as a necessary coupling with the genre's preoccupation with digitized realities and selves. Following the arc towards the unnatural self in *Do Androids Dream*, the act of 'retiring' androids turns into the act of 'killing' them, as Deckard begins to recognize them as subjects rather than objects, thus providing commentary on what constitutes life. The character Dixie Flatline in *Neuromancer* comments on the nature of subjectivity in that he envisions himself as exhibiting both the conscious agency and autonomy of a subject, while being decidedly non-human (Gibson 1984, 145). With his ROM constructs Gibson kills two birds with one stone, as the investigation into what constitutes

their subjecthood entails both an investigation into what constitutes their life and, followingly, what one is to make of their death. Cadigan provides, yet again, the most overt and pungent of our examples with her characters Jones and Visual Mark, for whom death has become merely a means to an end. For Jones, it is a tool for dealing with his depressions and anxiety, while for Mark it is a necessary step in freeing his consciousness from its bodily prison. Both Mark and Jones die, their hearts seizing to beat and their metabolisms coming to a screeching halt. However, they do not cease to live. The intimate technologies of the selected works of this thesis, increasingly invasive as we progress through the chronology of cyberpunk, thus works to problematize death. Death entails a total and permanent cessation of an organism's vital functions (Merriam-Webster, s.v. «death»), but the absence of corporeality as a prerequisite for sentience would then entail that death, in works of cyberpunk, is not so much about *dying* in any traditional sense of the word, as much as it is about a changing of perspective. While the circumvention of one's mortality by way of technologies is an explicitly transhumanist sentiment, the acceptance of life and death as compossible is more aligned with posthumanism. The aim of the first section of this chapter is then to show that while cyberpunk's subversion of death presents the genre in a transhumanist light, its meditations on what constitutes life, offers an alternate, posthumanist perspective.

Do Androids Fear Death?

Do Androids Dream, out of the three novels examined in this thesis, is the one most removed from any direct meditation on the meaning of death. Where Gibson and Cadigan explicitly grapple with the thought of a virtual afterlife, Dick preoccupies himself with the fear of death and the idea of collective death. The causal factor for the alienation of the androids through the moniker of 'the Killers' is a fear of human genocide.

‘You realize [...] what this would do. If we included androids in our range of emphatic identification, as we do animals.’
‘We couldn’t protect ourselves.’
‘Absolutely. These Nexus-6 types... they’d roll all over us and mash us flat. [Deckard and Resch], all the bounty hunters – we stand between the Nexus-6 and mankind, a barrier which keeps the two distinct.’ (Dick 1968, 112)

The foundation of the Mercerite reduction of the androids to the stature of ‘Killers’ is thus done so as to avoid a dilution of the human, or what one could call a de-essentialization of human nature, envisioned as the death of the human race. Dick’s use of the theme of death to signal a coming epoch of bioengineered humanity can thus be seen as a precursor for the trope of extinction at the hands of technology that would go on to fuel later works of both SF in general and cyberpunk specifically.⁴ As for individual death, he does not so much contemplate what death signifies, so much as he employs it as a plot device that drives the novel’s contemplation on empathy and consequently on human nature. In Dick’s exploration of both subjecthood and worldviews, empathy functions as a philosophical red thread. However, the changing perspective on empathy and by extension the perspective on subjecthood in *Do Androids Dream*, is partially informed by the act of killing and the theme of death.

Empathy, [Deckard] once had decided, must be limited to herbivores or anyhow omnivores who could depart from a meat diet. Because, ultimately, the emphatic gift blurred the boundaries between hunter and victim, between the successful and the defeated. As in the fusion with Mercer, everyone ascended together or, when the cycle had come to an end, fell together into the trough of the tomb world. Oddly it resembled a sort of biological insurance, but double-edged. As long as some creature experienced joy, then the condition for all other creatures included a fragment of joy. However, if any living being suffered then for all the rest the shadow could not be entirely cast off. A herd animal such as man would acquire a higher survival rate through this; an owl or a cobra would be destroyed. Evidently the humanoid robot constituted a solitary predator. (Dick 1968, 24)

⁴ The Terminator franchise envisions extinction at the hands of technology as an all-out war between humanity and the artificially intelligent androids it has created. See McHale (2010) for a deeper examination of Sterling’s *Schismatrix* and Laidlaw’s *Dad’s Nuke* and how the cyberpunk grapples with collective/individual death by nuclear holocaust.

In other words, Deckard views empathy as a hinderance to the hunter, for when he is brought face to face with his victim, he will be able to see himself in his victim's place and, not wishing death upon himself if the roles were reversed, hesitate with carrying out his task. Deckard's consolation, in his efforts of eradicating the androids, is the belief that were the tables turned, an android would not hesitate. This is the cornerstone of his identification of the androids as 'the Killers' that one is to kill if one is to adhere to Mercerism. By reducing them to 'the Killers' they take on an emotional significance similar to pests in need of extermination, alleviating Deckard's conscience as he goes about his work. If he can safely assure himself that androids do not possess genuine lives, then one could argue that he does not believe that they undergo genuine deaths. This is then challenged after Phil Resch kills Luba Luft, for in his role as executioner, he is no longer a victim of the impending human genocide, but a hunter, a Killer. Deckard is then able to place himself in Luba's shoes, the victim of a ruthless and unemphatic hunter. "Empathy toward an artificial construct? he asked himself. Something that only pretends to be alive? But Luba Luft had seemed genuinely alive; it had not worn the aspect of a simulation" (Dick 1968, 112). From Luft's apprehension until her execution, she presents a cold but resigned façade, reverting to a preprogrammed response for situations of distress, however as Resch shoots her, she twists away "in a spasm of frantic hunted fear..." (107), breaking her programming. Her death thus signals a deconstruction of the distinction between the hunter and the victim as Deckard's own 'programming' through Mercerism fails him and he begins to empathize with her.

Death and the act of killing is then, in *Do Androids Dream*, an avenue through which the subjecthood of the other is reassessed, as the victim becomes the hunter, and the hunter becomes the victim. The androids are, from the point of view of Mercerism, not emotional beings and thus respond to life threatening situations through their intellectual faculties rather than their (lacking) emphatic ones. So, while Dick avoids meddling with the ontological

implications of death in the way that later cyberpunk writers do, he uses it to tip the emphatic scale with a telling hint during the novel's climax. As Deckard enters J. R. Isidore's apartment to retire the last two androids on his list, he is faced with Irmgard Baty holding a laser tube, ready to fire. As Deckard shoots her, "Roy Baty, in the other room, let[s] out a cry of anguish" (Dick 1968, 177), and is thus shadowed by the suffering of his fellow android in the same way that a human would be by that of his fellow man, exhibiting the capability for empathy, i.e., genuine life. For Philip K. Dick, death is then not so much an ontological threshold to be transgressed as it is a tool for developing the empathy of Deckard towards engineered forms of life as he reflects that "the electric things have their lives, too. Paltry as those lives are" (191). However, in the case of *Do Androids Dream*, the inquiry into life and death remains embedded in the realm of the other, and it is not before we enter into the era of 'high' cyberpunk that meditations upon life and death take on the ontological guise that McHale ascribes to it.

Leaving the Meat – Living and Dying in Cyberspace

The presence of *the meat* and the accompanying disdain for it heavily colors the meditations on life and death in both *Neuromancer* and *Synners*. Where, for Dick, death is a means for enhancing the inquiry into subjecthood, in the works of Gibson and Cadigan it the final frontier of death is explored through digitally suspended animation and augmented bodily functions. When we meet Case at the beginning of *Neuromancer*, he has been caught stealing from his previous employer and as punishment his nervous system has been damaged to the point that he is unable to operate in cyberspace. "For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. [...] The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh" (Gibson 1984, 6). For Gibson's console cowboys, the meat is something to hold in contempt, placing a limitation on one's lived experience which is, as we saw in the

previous chapters of this thesis, an amalgamation of the lived and the virtual. Leading a life bereft of the virtual would then be like walking around with only one eye open. Case's journey of discovery through cyberspace then becomes a quest to learn whether the virtual experiences that occur within it count as *lived* experiences, the answer becoming both yes and no.

Neuromancer is populated by cyborgs, literally and figuratively, and while characters like Molly and Peter Riviera are literal cyborgs that have augmented their bodies through various technologies (Molly's infrared eyes and Riviera's dream projector) they do not extend their cyborg-ness to the ontological boundary of death. The ROM construct Dixie Flatline is arguably the most emblematic of Gibson's characters regarding cyberpunk's preoccupation with death as a means of transition. Dixie was a hacker, like Case, who earned his nickname by suffering brain death on three different occasions in his attempts to hack through especially impregnable digital constructions. The last of which, the server where the *Neuromancer* AI is located, became his demise as his body heart caved from the stress of penetrating the ICE surrounding it. However, part of his conscious survived. "'Hit that black stuff and ol' tailbrain jus' kept right on keepin' on'" (Gibson 1984, 88).⁵ Throughout the novel, Dixie exists in a state of limbo between being alive and being dead, a preservation of self, and although he is explicitly dead, he is able to express himself about his condition as if he were alive.

'I'm dead, Case. Got enough time in on this Hosaka to figure that one.'
'How's it feel?'
'It doesn't.'
'Bother you?'
'What bothers me is, nothin' does.' (118)

Dixie, a cyborg in his own right, both embodies and rejects the transhumanist fantasy of suspended animation or prolonged life through technological prostheses, as he is a digital

⁵ 'Black stuff' refers to a particularly resilient form of ICE.

construct that relies on the prosthesis of human form to present himself in cyberspace. He is conscious and tangible, yet he is removed from his emotional capabilities, echoing Francis Fukuyama's view that a 'technological rebirth' would entail the loss of, or disconnection from, those instincts and emotions that we have gained through millennia of corporal humanity (2004). The flaw of the transhumanist fantasy is further amplified by Dixie's desire for death, but not death in the corporeal sense, nor in the cerebral sense. His wish is that when he is done helping Case, that Case "erase this goddamn thing [the construct]" (118). In other words, life in Gibson's cyberspace is not a life worth living; without the counterpart of reality, virtual life is simply akin to opening one's second eye only to close the first. For Corto-Armitage, having both eyes open becomes too great of a burden, as short-comings of the virtual become too much to bear for the real, and he too becomes a critique of the pipe-dream of transhumanism.

Where Dixie exists as a construct made out purely by his digital footprint, Armitage was created solely as a medium for Wintermute to enact his agency outside of cyberspace. Corto, the foundation on which Armitage was left severely damaged both physically and psychologically after the failed military offensive known as Screaming Fist, a cyber-run aimed at a Russian computer facility. Shot to pieces, Corto is cosmetically reconstructed, yet his psychological damage remains incurable until Wintermute refigures his mental faculties based on a datafile built in cyberspace and creates Armitage. "Corto was the first, and he very nearly didn't make it. Very far gone, in Toulon. Eating, excreting, and masturbating were the best he could manage. But the underlying structure of obsessions was there..." (Gibson 1984, 134). Armitage's consciousness is then trapped in a limbo between the vegetative state of Corto and the vast processing power of cyberspace, simultaneously smaller and larger than life. He thus walks a thin line between the cyborg of cyberpunk proper and that of its sibling sub-variety, bio-punk, which envisions a bioengineered means of

posthumous survival (McHale 2010, 23). The critique that Armitage amounts to, realizes itself in his, or rather Wintermute's, failing to maintain the balance between his consciousnesses. Armitage's demise is thus brought about by its inability to support the schizoid mind of Corto, and Corto is unable to function without the digital filter that is Armitage. For both Corto and Dixie Flat, death becomes the avenue through which they transcend into the virtual realm, however their transcension leaves them in a state akin to digital vitrification, unable to be completely free themselves from the meat nor to completely access it.

In *Synners*, death has become trivialized. For Cadigan's synners, as for Gibson's console cowboys, the meat is a prison, but where most of the major characters in the novel view it with an attitude of ambivalence, for Jones it is the defining aspect of his character and for Visual Mark it is the desire that drives him. While serving a relatively minor role in the plot of the novel, Jones' addiction to death is almost a caricature of 'Mechanist' resurrection, precipitated upon technological prostheses facilitating an electronic means of posthumous survival (McHale 2010, 23). Jones is chronically depressed and suicidal, and to combat his affliction he has received implants that allow him to die, or flatline for a short time. "Electroshock didn't work, so he went to this feel-good mill, and they gave him these brain implants that let him kill himself. He flatlines for maybe a minute or two, and then they kick up his adrenal system, and he comes back" (Cadigan 1991, 49). Jones takes what is then, at first glance, a transhumanist approach to dealing with his depressions, as his implants allow him to simply bypass or disconnect the organ that is to blame for them. However, the implications this bears for his subjectivity is more akin to Haraway's posthuman cyborg than to Bostrom's idea of the posthuman. For, while he surpasses the limitations of his mortality, it lasts but for a fleeting moment before he is brought back to life, once again subject to his mortality, with death proper waiting for him once his prostheses are spoilt. "...He is addicted

to death, and he'll stay that way until his adrenal system tells him to go to hell. Then he'll go" (49). He is thus still bound by the same limitations as his fellow synners, but with a new perspective, one that views death as a part of life rather than the end of it. Jones' death addiction signals the trivial demeanor with which ontological boundaries, extreme in their disparity, are brought into close coexistence with one another. This trivialization of death can then also be viewed as a deconstruction of the phenomenological treatment that the human subject has received in classical humanism, and later in transhumanism (Ferrando 2013; Papagni 2021, 58-59). Jones then becomes a metonymic placeholder for the human subject trying to place itself within a posthumanist context in which it is merely a steppingstone for the co-evolution of nature and its many constituent subjects and objects.

Where, for Jones, the desire to escape the meat, if only for a minute or two, stems from his inability to comfortably situate himself within his surroundings, Visual Mark's loathing of his flesh prison is brought about by the limitations it places on his consciousness that grows more and more virtual throughout the course of the novel.

All those years in meat hell, [Mark] marveled. All those years of getting toxed, getting crazy, thrashing, banging, going from one thing to another until he couldn't hold himself upright anymore, and never understanding that what he'd really been trying to do all along was drill a few holes in his head and get out of meat-jail. And into...what? His own context. It went little by little with him, a little more every time he took the wire. [...] What time he spent off-line faded into dull stretches he waited out until he could take the wire again and get a little bit greater. (Cadigan 1991, 232)

Mark's mission throughout *Synners* is to change for the machines, to shift his context from the physical reality to the virtual, and his gateway between these two realms is to kill himself, or rather, allow his body to decay to the point where his body strokes out. Dead, "his self [becoming] greater all the time" (232), before it fuses with the AI Art Fish, creating *Markt*, a virtual entity who is at once Mark and Art, and something else entirely, "both of him" being simultaneously singular and plural (400). Mark's perspective on, and experience

with, and change through, death is thus the most emblematic of Bostrom's transhumanism out of the characters we engage with in the novel. Viewing his human form as superfluous, he transgresses the limitations of human mortality through technology and merges with a computer-generated entity so as to allow himself to become something that escapes being defined as 'human'. The consequences of his transcension on the other hand, provide a rather heavy-handed argument against the transhumanist agenda.

In his abandonment of his body and his surrender to the machines, Mark also subjects all those connected to the Net to the stroke he suffers. "Reference: cerebral vascular incident. [...] If it gets into the system and finds someone hooked in with the interface, it'll get them too. You got that? *A contagious stroke*, a fucking virus, are you with me yet?" (Cadigan 1991, 309). Here, we also find an allusion to Mark as a transhumanist figuration, as his stroke, likened to a sequence of computer code, is transferred from his mind, or storage, into the simulated virtual reality of the Net, much like the way a video file is embedded within the system. "'... [The sequence] is not really in his system before it is incorporated into the simulation. It's in the storage area...'" (155). However, once the stroke-turned-sequence is transferred to all those who have allowed themselves to be implanted with Diversifications' sockets. Mark's transhumanist project is then successful for himself, but detrimental to all others, displaying the classist connotations of a technological elite pointed to by those who oppose transhumanism (e.g., Papagni 2021; Ferrando 2013). Cadigan can then be argued to make these connotations into the shock and terror of technology gone too far and grown too intimate, flipping the most successful of the transcensions of humanity examined in this thesis on its head.

Posthuman Perspectives

At the core of cyberpunk's employment of postmodern motifs lies an innate quarrel between the transhumanist and the posthumanist interpretation of the posthuman. Viewed from a transhumanist perspective, all but a few of the character arcs that we bear witness to across these three excerpts from the chronology of cyberpunk complete their transcension. For Deckard, starting out as a staunch bioconservative that would make Francis Fukuyama (2004) blush, his journey portrays more 'trans-*androidist*' tendencies than it does transhumanist ones. As he hunts down the android escapees, the process through which he finds his sense of self to be unnatural is the same process through which he discovers the androids to be exceeding their assumed capabilities; the subject is deflated by the inflation of the object. *Neuromancer*, while presenting the reader with several revolutionary technologies that echo the transhumanist mission articulated by Nick Bostrom, encompassing not only present technologies but also "anticipated future ones, such as molecular nanotechnology and artificial intelligence" (2003), ends up condemning the sort of digital vitrification that it presents. The constructs that Case encounter in cyberspace are disingenuous humans, existing as mouthpieces for Wintermute (Gibson 1984, 132; 187), or as specters of cyberspace like Dixie Flatline. "[Dixie is] not human, but [he responds] like one, see?" (145). Cadigan, on the other hand, does not protest the premise of a technologically mediated afterlife. Her critique instead presents itself in the consequences of Visual Mark's transcension of his human form. In her analysis of *Synners*, Doctor of Philosophy Laura Chernaik reads Mark as "an organic virus which uses the nuclear material of the host cell to replicate his own genetic code; he uses other people for his own benefit" (1997, 79). Interpreted with a pinch of cynicism, the collective death of the socketed population that follows from Mark's stroke thus provides a grim answer to one of Fukuyama's central questions with regards to the transhumanist project: "If we start transforming ourselves into something superior, what

rights will these enhanced creatures claim, and what rights will they possess when compared to those left behind?” (2004). Cyberpunk thus, eventually, allows for a complete transcension of the human form, as Mark eventually supersedes all five of Bostrom’s limitations of the human mode, those being lifespan, intellectual capacity, bodily functionality, sensory modalities and mood, energy and self-control as his consciousness expands both in spectacle and in sheer magnitude. The dystopian proclivities of the genre’s authors, however, guides the thematic expression of cyberpunk away from an endorsement of transhumanism.

One cannot have cyberpunk without the punk, that rebellious nature of anti-establishment inclinations. These inclinations realize themselves in the works presented in this thesis through the multinational mega-corporations that have become cornerstones of the iconic repertoire of cyberpunk (Latham 2013, 43). While the examination of these corporations as metonyms for late-stage capitalism on the loose is no novel venture (e.g., Yoo 2019), they share another defining trait, which is their presentation as transhuman entities or close entanglement with such entities, namely that of the hivemind.

A coalesced mind, or coalescence for short, is a hypothetical mind created by merging two or more previously separated minds. [...] A normal human brain consists of two hemispheres that normally have only one conscious thought process between them. Coalesced minds could end up with either only one conscious thought process or several, depending on the implementation. (Sotala & Valpola 2012, 2)

The hivemind, or coalescence as Sotala and Valpola names it, is thus an entity which qualifies for Bostrom’s definition of the transhuman. In *Do Androids Dream*, the Rosen Association is presented as a group mind, a convergence of the expert experience of its employees. As Eldon Rosen and his niece Rachael almost trick Deckard into believing that Rachael is in fact human, Rick reflects that “his mistake, evidently, had been in viewing them as individuals” (Dick 1968, 43). While Eldon and Rachael are distinct human(oid)s, they act as representatives of the corporate entity that is their association and through avenues

unfathomable to Deckard, manage to outperform his intellect. “He could not make out, even now, how the Rosen Association had managed to snare him, and so easily” (ibid.). The amalgamation of thought, both human and android, that makes up the Rosen Association thus eclipses the cognitive abilities of humans. However, the obscure role that the corporation serves in the novel, situated on a gliding scale between antagonism and aiding Deckard, makes its function within the narrative as either trans- or posthumanist equally obscure.

The Tessier-Ashpool is doubly transhumanist in its corporate guise. Founded by families Tessier and Ashpool the predicate their corporate structure on a blend of cloning and attempted merger with AI. Their business model is based on cloning their offspring rather than birthing them and having half of the family members govern the corporate operation while the other half is in cryogenic sleep, thus facilitating a never-ending familial control (Gibson 1984, 204). Marie-France, the matriarch of the operation, designed the AIs Wintermute and Neuromancer to govern over the conscious corporate decisions so as to allow “Tessier-Ashpool [to become] immortal, a hive, each of [them] units in a larger entity” (252). In other words, an explicit hivemind, making both the technologies the Ashpool family uses and the goal of the corporation distinctly transhumanist. Wintermute and Neuromancer being described as only a part of a larger whole, akin to conversing with only one half of a man’s brain, “Wintermute [being] hivemind” (295), makes them a coalescence in their own right, a mind within the greater mind of Tessier-Ashpool, echoing the interjection and superimposition that characterizes the world of *Neuromancer*. The posthumanist expression of the novel that these hiveminds invite, rather than prescribe, presents itself through their explicit role as the antagonists of the narrative.

While not an explicit hivemind like the Rosen Association or Tessier-Ashpool, Cadigan’s Diversifications Inc. can also be argued to exhibit the qualities of a hivemind, however, as has been the trend with Cadigan’s nova throughout this thesis, through a more

elaborate fashion than her predecessors. The Net's construction as modeled on the human brain, its data points connected like neural synapses, thus makes up an assemblage of the consciousnesses of its operators, as through their sockets, they connect their base cognitive functions to the structure of the Net. Each video company that Diversifications acquiesces throughout the novel, like EyeTraxx and Hall Galen Enterprises, has their own datapoints or synapses; their own collection of minds if you will. As they are embedded within Diversifications Inc., the virtual real state of their host company is increased, as is its selection of constituent minds, until the point where that assemblage of virtual consciousnesses no longer can be identified as definitely human, a course of evolution that is highly in line with Joel Garreau's conception of a transhuman entity, "[an entity] whose basic capabilities so radically exceed those of present humans so as to no longer be unambiguously human by our current standards" (Wolfe 2010, xiii). However, it is still dependent upon its constituent minds, for as Mark suffers his fatal stroke, it permeates throughout the entirety of Diversifications' connections in the Net. Like its predecessor in *Neuromancer*, the posthumanist expression of Diversifications Inc. as a transhuman entity stems from its vilification within the narrative. While it is not necessary for the characters who seek to defeat it to harbor explicit posthumanist tendencies themselves, although that often is the case in *Synners* as we have seen, their opposition to, or contention with the ethos presented by Diversifications, nonetheless echoes the opposition found within posthumanism. Chernaik argues, however, that the character Gina exhibits her 'cyborg-ness' (in the Harawayan sense) when she, in the epilogue of the novel, reflects that rather than ban the sockets that caused the spread of Mark's stroke, they should accept that "every technology has its original sin" and that they "still got to live with what they made" (Cadigan 1991, 435). Having faced the devastating consequences of the entities of Markt and the Net, Gina situates herself in a new

context in a world of unfamiliar technologies, the context of the posthuman cyborg (Chernaik 1997, 82).

So, while not evoking any decidedly posthumanist leniency in their own right, the interpretation of the iconic multinational corporations that proliferate the genre provides a new perspective on the cause for their type-casting as the villain of cyberpunk narratives. While abstaining from any definitive villainization, Philip K. Dick laid the groundwork for the megacorporation as a multiplex entity and hivemind, ripe for use when the cyberpunks of the 1980s entered the literary scene to employ it as a way to settle the score with capitalism. The discourse surrounding the various schools of the posthuman, mainly the conversation that mediates between transhumanism and posthumanism, often ends up painting transhumanists with a stroke of villainy, as blind techno fetishists with no regard for the possibly damaging consequences of boundless augmentation of the human species, with Francis Fukuyama providing the harshest critique as he reflects that “transhumanists are just about the last group [he’d] like to see life forever” (2004). It is not the goal of this subchapter to stoke the flame of those sentiments and assign the roles of good guys or bad guys to one or the other. Rather, the aim has been to demonstrate how the disputes that occur within the fields that investigate the posthuman have found their mirror images in the cyberpunk genre. Neither is the identification of the predominantly antagonistic corporations in these novels as transhuman entities done with the intention of identifying the protagonists as posthuman themselves. My goal has been to illustrate the tendency within the genre on somewhat of a larger scale, so as to seek out a trend towards the posthumanist in the selected works of this thesis. For, while cyberpunk might present transhumanist entities, it can be safely situated as non-agreeable with the tenets of philosophical transhumanism.

Conclusion

Cyberpunk narratives, through a carefully laid mosaic of SF iconography and postmodernist literary devices, places modern life in the digital age under the looking glass. Where there has previously been rather extensive scholarly attention paid to both Philip K. Dick and William Gibson and their contributions to the cyberpunk repertoire, Pat Cadigan with her intensely intertwined narrative on intimate tech, has largely gone under the radar. Previous forays into *Do Androids Dream*, *Neuromancer* and *Synners* have viewed them either through the lens of posthumanism or the lens of postmodernism and, in bridging the two approaches, I have attempted to show how Brian McHale's literary motifs of worldness, centrifugal self and meditations on life and death have informed the posthumanist tendencies that others have examined before me. Through including Possible World Theory into the discourse on worldness I have also sought to bring a new perspective on the construction of fictional worlds, both real and virtual, within the cyberpunk genre. The many technological nova of the cyberpunk and SF genre that are presented in the selected works of this thesis often coincide and contribute to several of McHale's motifs simultaneously, thus heightening the genre's emphasis on the compossibility of the literal and the figurative, echoing posthumanism's emphasis on the compossibility of the real and the virtual. Through a presentation of SF tropes as both literal and metaphorical or metonymic, the novels I have selected provide a guiding light for a perspective on the human and its cognate materialisms as mutually affective of one another, while the absence of any definitive statements in either of the novels' closing chapters maintains that the future is in no way certain.

Philip K. Dick presents, through the character arc of Rick Deckard, a discussion not of what constitutes human nature, but rather of what constitutes our understanding of it. As the reader follows Deckard along the scale of actualization and de-actualization between the separate microworlds of Dick's dystopian San Francisco we are repeatedly shown the

erroneous nature of an essentialist view of Man as Rick time and again is brought into conflict with the classically humanist understanding of the subject, predicated by his employers in the San Francisco Police Department. It is not before he realizes the disingenuous nature of this perspective that he is able to situate himself within the context of his world, contently asserting that even the electric things have their lives.

The lineage from Dick to Gibson is well accounted for, even by the authors themselves, and we see many of Dick's tropes resurface in *Neuromancer*, but now clad in the garb of proper 1980s cyberpunk. Through his navigation of microworlds both real and virtual, Gibson is able to elaborate on Dick's themes of machine intelligence through imbuing it within his human characters. In introducing cyberspace, Gibson is able to place the conflicting ideas of humanity that Dick presented under the skin of his characters while maintaining the presence of metonymic placeholders for those very ideas in the shape of ROM constructs and disembodied artificial intelligences. The simultaneously real and virtual exploration of humanity in cyberspace is then amplified by Pat Cadigan and her Net, who provides a commentary on neural computer interfaces that leaps off the page. In her modeling of the Net as a virtual world with the schematics of a human brain the reader is presented with a network that can be viewed as either cerebral, digital, or both at the same time. In this manner, the novels presented in this thesis create a chronology of cyberpunk that moves towards an interdisciplinarity of the literal and the figurative, and between the real and the virtual. This is then mirrored in the characters of the novels, for, as we move from Deckard's Voigt-Kampff test and empathy boxes to Gibson's cyberspace decks, and Cadigan's sockets and suicide implants, the ontological boundary between man and machine is continuously diffused and diluted to the point where it seems non-existent as Visual Mark surrenders his conscious to the Net and leaves his body behind.

Looking to contemporary media and literature, it is clear that the legacy of cyberpunk did not come to a halt after Pat Cadigan published *Synners*. Novels like *Ready Player One* (2011) by Ernest Cline and its subsequent movie adaptation, exploring life in a cyberspace videogame world, has enjoyed great success in the 11 years since its publication, and with the sequel to Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) a new generation was introduced to the world created by Philip K. Dick. Television shows like *Altered Carbon* and *Westworld* have enjoyed solid ratings, proving that even the streaming audiences of the 21st century are yet to tire of the explorations of augmented humanity and dystopian futures. The world we live in is growing ever more digital and virtual, and the continued fascination with the heritage of cyberpunk can be viewed as correlative with the influx of computer-generated cryptocurrency, virtualized art dealing in the shape of NFTs or the advent of a real-life cyberspace in the Metaverse. These digital entities become increasingly more explicit in their virtuality, while at once becoming increasingly embedded within our daily lives.

Further research on cyberpunk and the legacy that it has bestowed upon SF as a whole, might investigate the way in which the genre adapts to the increasing availability of virtual reality in the contemporary world. An investigation into the continued lineage of the cyberspace trope might be analyzed in comparison with the Metaverse as it becomes more commonplace. Here I would argue that posthumanist studies might also be employed, as the field continues to evolve to incorporate more of the virtual technologies that we make use of in our daily lives. So, while cyberpunk owes its glory days to an era of technology that has long since been outdated, the genre nonetheless provides its readers and audience with contextual guiding light as we continue to change with the machines.

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