The split and contradictory self is the one who can interrogate positionings and be accountable, the one who can construct and join rational conversations and fantastic imaginings that change history.

Donna Haraway,
Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature

University of Alberta

Reading Her Machine Flesh: Permutations of the Cyborg Body

by

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Abstract:

This thesis discusses the emergence of technomediated feminine agency in *Cordelia's Honor* by Lois McMaster Bujold and *Pattern Recognition* by William Gibson, seen through Donna Haraway's iterations of the cyborg and the modest witness, Bruno Latour's amodern hybrid and Lynn Margulis' work on symbiogenesis. Bujold's Cordelia engenders the beginnings of feminine agency through the uterine replicator, bypassing patriarchal defenses by making the reproductive body her agent of change, midwifing the reproductive body into a powerful subjectivity. In *Pattern Recognition*, Cayce troubles the borders between self, body and world through her fluid, persistent online presence. She chooses her physical body over her online avatar, yet remains unlocatable across digital boundaries, her ontological instabilities aligned with the maker's footage, her employer's transnational transgressions, and her father's persistent ghost. In both texts, the hybrid preserves her syncretic integrity through refusing dichotomy, choosing acquisition as her best strategy for negotiating a hostile world.

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0. Conjuncture: At the Nexus of Word and Witness.

Blasphemy is not always apostasy, I am told, and cyborgs do not remember either Eden or the cosmos – but they have histories, are themselves myth.

So let me begin with a story.

The scientific method is based around the idea of the reproducible result; that is, by following someone else's carefully documented materials and procedures, a scientist should be able to replicate her colleague's experiment, achieving similar data in order to support the initial researcher's existing conclusion. The method outlined supports no variation between researchers, requiring the exchange of one for the next without measurable effect on the experimental outcome. Thus, the individual researchers must become the Researcher, or better yet, vanish entirely into the research: judgement suspended, bodies utterly subsumed, only a dispassionate eye and steady hand remain to survey and record. As student researchers, we were never to claim that we had proved a hypothesis; to do so was to invite a failing grade and the instructor's most scathing critiques.[1] Of course, it was always possible to disprove a hypothesis, but by the tenets of the method one could never do more than provide a cautiously dispassionate report of a favourable outcome: *Thus, the appearance of phototaxis in the isopod Armadillidium vulgare*[2] *or the genotypic variation in the plants of genus Crepis*[3] *or the*

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[1] When I was later introduced to the ideas of fractal complexity and chaos theory as the governing models of ecological interaction, they anchored themselves into the fundamental unprovability of the initial hypothesis.

[2] *A. vulgare* is the small and lumbering isopod children call roly-polys, so named for their tendency to curl up and hide away from any perceived threat. Everyone but the entomologists calls them bugs, but these isopods are actually more closely related to shore crabs than to insects. *Phototaxis* refers to the organism's observed responses to light.

circular shape of mitochondrial DNA in the eukaryotic cell[4] *would seem to support the research*

group's initial hypothesis. Every click of the cursor strove to remove researcher from

research in the name of unbiased objectivity, the contamination of data by human

wistfulness our greatest experimental error. Just, in that bias would indeed unbalance

our results, yet insufficient, because in no way were we able to account for every

idiosyncratic quirk, every extant contextual variable. It was a skeptic's socialisation,

mediated through an almost dissociative lack of ground or place, a continual process of

dismantling both self and nonself into their component parts, all recorded in our most

carefully neutral passive voice. The ideas underlying the scientific method combined to

provide an apotheosis for research that obscured our lab benches and made bodies

vanish into passive voice and tabled results: "devoid of any trace of ownership,

construction, time and place," research and researcher faded into the accretion of

repeated and contextless assertions, a process Bruno Latour considers necessary to the

creation of fact (*Science in Action* 23).

Any practicing scientist knows this is not the way research works; my story is

much too simple to be real. But it is my creation myth, the heritage laid down in my

youth; I have left that ground, apostate, but cannot shake its dust from my feet. I begin

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[3] Jeannette Whitton's research group at the University of British Columbia is currently examining this question in the context of variants in chloroplast DNA and their phenotypic expression, with the goal of documenting speciation in action. See her site for more detailed analyses:
http://www.botany.ubc.ca/people/whitton.htm

[4] This circular ring of DNA, present in both the mitochondrion and its plant cell homologue the chloroplast, is a characteristic of the non-nucleated single-celled organisms (prokaryotes). The mitochondrial DNA's separation from the nuclear DNA, as well as its circular shape, are important support for the theory of endosymbiosis, which posits that the development of multicellular organisms began when one single-celled organism engulfed another without digesting it, allowing both organisms to coexist. In a move partly initiated in the work of biologist Lynn Margulis, an evolutionary model based on the endosymbiotic theory, called symbiogenesis, has also been propagated through the English-speaking scientific community.

with this small story in the interest of full disclosure, in recognition of the impossibility of my objectivity. Holding close Donna Haraway's radical refiguration of the "modest witness," the one qualified to observe and report a result in order to render it real within the community, I speak from "[t]he split and contradictory self" (Haraway, "Situated Knowledges" 193) through which I hope to articulate a contentious outline of the subject-agents in the texts under study. I also recall Latour's abjuration that "[s]i vouz voulez le Léviathan, il vous faut la pompe à l'air" (*Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* 146), by which somewhat convoluted reference he advocates for the acknowledgement of the *natureculture*, humanity's inextricable implication within the mechanisms it uses to constitute both self and nonself. My methodology is analytical, but not dissociated: I study my work, I examine it, but am neither passionless about nor separated from it.

The self constructed in the skeptic mode becomes invisible, what Elizabeth Grosz calls "perspectiveless" (28). In Grosz' view, objectivity, with its implied modifier *scientific*, should be questioned and eroded. The inclusion of the subject into the body of knowledge by definition renders that knowledge nonobjective by reorienting it around an ineradically present subject; therefore, a rejection of heterogeneity, rooted in the liberal humanist subject's desire to construct knowledge as ahistorical and immaterial (i.e., "objective"), results in the practitioner having no tools left for self-scrutiny. Knowledge constructed around this centralised absence cannot scrutinize itself; it "lack[s] the means to understand [its] own self-development" (Grosz 29). Instead, the body becomes vanishingly inconsequential while the mind (or, more specifically, that disembodied entity named "reason") comes to the fore. For Grosz, this relegation leads

to an ironic flaw, creating a potentially nonobjective result through the denial of the

subjective presence because the absent subject has limited its ability to evaluate the

present object.

In *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium*, Haraway also addresses the impossibility of

the witnessing subject's complete erasure, returning to the ground of situated

knowledges to call instead for a "non-innocent," personal and thus ethically responsible

positioning of the self in relation to the object under study. Haraway explores the seams

of the schism between the individual scientist's knowledge of his self-existence as a

subject privileged through agency and knowledge, and the method's demands for

erasure. She reaffirms that the erasure inherent in that methodological skepticism (itself

a constant state of denial) must be abandoned for a declarative situation: disclosure

instead of effacement, the "peculiar sort of modesty" she only half-ironically calls

"transparence" (*Modest_Witness* 26). Accordingly, the witness I bear toward my texts is

simultaneously more troubled and more active than the one I carried through my first

undergraduate degree; I affirm with Haraway and Latour that my own gaze is not

observational, but formative. This manner of witnessing is not a reversal of the scientific

method, which would counter Haraway's project of muddling dichotomies to

demonstrate their inefficacity. Instead, the modest witness as she has constructed him or

her functions as an eversion of the scientific method's half-stated requirements, a sort of

ideological entering into a contested zone of acknowledged or denied subjectivities,

alongside what Haraway would eventually call her war machine: the fluid, combative,

complicit and ever-complicating body of the cyborg.

The cyborg's illegitimate nonorigins mark its heterogenous position, multiple

entries, conflicting definitions and difficult reading, a convergence Haraway refers to as

non-innocent; situated at the boundaries "between tool and myth" ("Manifesto" 23), the

machine-flesh hybrid mediates human and animal (10), physical and non-physical (11),

and ultimately moves between the text and the world. Thus, "cyborg myth is about

transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (12) for current

stance and future action, gated through the affinities that cohere within the cyborg's

hybrid polyvalence and stemming from the agency granted by that hybrid vigour. Not

content to frame or hold, the cyborg allows re-forming, the deliberate construction of a

difficult plurality through the disavowal of centrality while holding to the hope of

affinities sited in the cyborg's nonunified ontology. Taken with Lynn Margulis'

reframing of the individual body as the evolutionary result of multiple acts of

collaboration, Anne Balsamo's refusal to posit the feminine subject as a passive site of

inscription, and Bruno Latour's insistence on the *réseau*,[5] the system or network (as

opposed to any point of origin), as the most important image for describing

relationships governing the intimate coupling of *natureculture*, these ideas form an

accurate description of my situation within the varying strictures and jointures of the

networks and systems under scrutiny.

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[5] The idea of the Latourian *réseau*, an important part of his actor-network model of interaction, could potentially have taken its shape from the joining of Teilhard de Chardin's firmly-rooted *fil d'Ariane*, which locks evolution to both a start and a finish, to Deleuze and Guattari's famous *rhizôme*. This joining removes the *réseau* from the rootedness inherent in Teilhard de Chardin's generative and chronological formulation of the *fil*, while keeping the ideas of hyperconnectivity implied in the images of the thread, the rhizome and the maze. Latour references Ariadne's thread in *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, naming it the primary connection or transport route between thing and hybrid (165), but leaves out Teilhard de Chardin.

The conjunction of human and machine is not a single join; instead, all fused but nowhere assimilated, the cyborg sutures herself together out of pieces of body and bits of time, assuming the seamed, syncretic mantle of a series of strange affinities. I cannot deny those formative presences, my own skein of patterns, nor do I take full credit for all the networked links spread through the systems under study. The power of what Haraway has labelled gravity wells, affinities, knots in string ("Cyborgs, Coyotes and Dogs" 338), links the texts in this project in parallels and entanglements of embodiment, subjectivity and agency. These affinities are "densities that can be loosened, that can be pulled out, that can be exploded, and they lead to whole worlds, to universes" ("Cyborgs, Coyotes and Dogs" 338), all focalising around the enigmatic presence/absence located within the machine flesh. These ideas curve around each other, whorls in the *fil d'Ariane*, knotted line leading to the *chimère* at the centre of the mirror-maze who waits to be named and fed. This cyborg is a site instead of a witness, but a site of both revolution and control, even as she locates the difficult multiple ontologies that grant her denizens agency. All the words to follow pass through her nexus.

1. Image-Bearer: Witnessing the Icon{oclast}ic Body in the Digital Age.

In her two-novel prequel to the Vorkosigan series, Lois McMaster Bujold's

relentless, systemic[6] infection of patriarchal ideologies with feminine agencies uses the

uterine replicator as a technological vector to carry out the dissolution of a stratified

system that places little value in feminine agency. Imported to the planet Barrayar by

ship captain Cordelia Naismith, the uterine replicator enables agency and control

through the eversion of identity and the manipulation of bodily boundaries across the

skin, encompassing the mechanical womb. Although the narrative eventually shunts

Cordelia into a (nonetheless significant) supporting role, she remains the major agent of

change for the remainder of the series, her subversive views inherited and promulgated

by both her son, series protagonist Miles, mutant, mercenary, and military commander,

and her foster-son, Emperor Gregor. The progress of both characters through various

societal obstacles remains an accurate barometer of the eventual extent of Cordelia's

reach in terms of social change.

In contrast to Bujold's body-based, technologically-mediated claiming of agency,

William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* addresses the same questions of eversion and

diffusion of identity through the same medium – technology, though this time in digital

form – and finds that the dissolution of identity through its online construct argues for

another version of agency. However, this agency has its source not within the

centralisation of an identity, but within its dissolution; as mediated through Cayce

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[6] I use the word *systemic* here in the medical sense, as indicative of a condition that has spread through the major systems – circulatory, digestive, nervous, reproductive – that make up the body, and thus cannot be easily eradicated through surgical means without incurring significant damage to the organism.

Pollard, identity is a fluid state, always moving, flickering and shifting across its own previously-set boundaries. The avatar (that online ghost) cannot fully incarnate, yet still partially contains its embodied creator. Nonetheless, *Pattern Recognition* professes to argue against the claims of textuality over bodily experience, pushing the reader toward a privileging of the body as agent over malleable and directionless avatar-text. This imperfect superimposition, the divergence of narrative arc and textual example, is itself an indicator of hybridity, realised and recognised as present in the pervasive absence of a longed-for singularity. Taken together, I posit that reading *Pattern Recognition* and *Cordelia's Honor* through the prismatic lenses of technological embodiment begins to document a schism between the somatic and the discursive, an unresolved and possibly irreconcilable – and thus extremely productive – tension between parts of the experience and pieces of the theory.

The cyborg has many points of ideational entry and chronological origin; the cyborg body is itself never located in the singular so much as it is found in the amalgamated or fused. The presence of familiar flesh only amplifies the uncertainty and instability the machine modification brings, linked across the cyborg nexus in an uneasy admixture of fascination and repugnance. This multiplicity of origins is still containable, sourced in the body of the humanmachine. However, the subject of study is itself a dual surface, etymologically and ontologically chimeric; its human components may well have been born, but the cyborg has no single point of origin. In this sense, it joins technology in having no matrix, in being a motherless child, unfaithful to its fathers. Its unsettling, decentralising power lies in this unsourced multiplicity, located in its very

being: the cyborg ontology recognises the uncomplicated singular, but recognises it as odd, unfamiliar and strange. Given the complications of a minimum duality as related to a point of origin, I have chosen instead to examine the cyborg from a position of affinities, of common connectors and ontological proximity, in order to produce something that can map the intersections that lie at its nexus.

In *Space, Time and Perversion*, Elizabeth Grosz discusses the importance of the body to epistemological systems in the West: "Western body forms are considered expressions of an interior, of a subjectivity" (34). It is this idea that forms the impetus to my own study of representational form as a method of tracking shifting ontological borders. Grosz posits that, in order to become "neutral [body-less] knowers" (38), men suborn the woman's body as the physical site and bodily function of the man's "conceptual supremacy," leading to Lacan's "castrated male" ideas for thinking about the feminine body:

> The masculinity or maleness of knowledges remains unrecognized as such because there is *no other knowledge* with which it can be contrasted. Men take on the roles of neutral knowers only because they have evacuated their own specific forms of corporeality and repressed all its traces from the knowledges they produce. In appropriating the realm of mind for themselves, men have nonetheless required a support and cover for their now-disavowed physicality. Women thus function as *the* body for men – correlative with the effacement of the sexual concreteness of their (womanly) bodies.[...] Women are thus conceptualized as castrated, lacking, and

incomplete, as if these were inherently qualities (or absences) of their

(natural) bodies rather than a function of men's self-representations.

(Grosz 38)

As they exists in Grosz's concept of Western philosophy, rational thought and especially

scientific concepts are functionally default-male; a corporeal agent through which to

carve out ontological breathing room becomes something of a requirement if women are

to emerge as anything but the "unspecified raw material of social inscription" (Grosz

33). In the earliest part of the theoretical structures of the 20th century, a semantically-

asserted space for the cyborg was already extant; according to Grosz, what needed to

happen was not just a monstrous replacement of gender, but a monstrous insertion of

the feminine into what had been a single-gendered space. Single, in this case, not being

the same thing as *ungendered;* the cyborg became Haraway's answer to that absence, the

woman's armoured elbow in the closing door. Thus gendered, the cyborg joins the

pantheon of oddities, objects that refuse to stay still and be signified: one of the "odd

boundary creatures – simians, cyborgs, and women – all of which have had a

destabilizing place in the great Western evolutionary, technological, and biological

narratives. These boundary creatures are, literally, monsters, a word that shares more

than its root with the word, to demonstrate. Monsters signify" (Haraway, Introduction

2). They take agency through their unparseability, their impossibility based in

recognitions of partial kinship.

Metaphors of nature and the natural world only implicate the literary into the

natural, exposing their reciprocal implications in the *natureculture* and further

reinforcing Bruno Latour's hypothesis that the modern man, separate from the past and decoupled from nature, does not exist: "nous ne parlons pas de la pensée instrumentale," he says, "mais de la matière même de nos sociétés" (*Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* 11).[7] Latour's line of reasoning argues for a refiguration of mankind's current ontology, confounding the heretofore-separate projects of translation (*réseaux, l'hybridation*) and purification (*critique, la séparation chose/soi*) (21) in order to produce an unstable subject, amodern in the sense of lacking stern separating boundaries, connected to the world through "le fil d'Ariane," his chosen metaphor, "qui permettrait de passer continûment du local au global, de l'humain au non-humain" (165).[8] But Latour's analysis stops short of considering how, exactly, those structures of time, space, culture and ideology actually form a constraining stricture around the Other, his philosophy disregarding the seat and direction of its Western male gaze even as he demonstrates that the patronising divide imposed between modern and primitive cultures is tools-based. Despite Latour's eventual arrival at something approaching a theory of situated knowledges,[9] recording and resisting the silencing and enclosure of the female body does not enter the focus of his seminal work.

Haraway deems this silence not so much a stopping short as a peculiar blindness, endemic not just to Latour but to the entire discipline of science studies. Without trivialising or reducing the complexity of their work, she points out that its representatives

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[7] "We do not speak of instrumental thought, but of the very matter of our societies" (translation mine).
[8] "Ariadne's thread [...] which would permit continual passing from local to global, from the human to the non-human" (translation mine).
[9] *See* Fig.12, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* 142.

took his [the modest witness'] masculine gender for granted without much comment. Like the stubbornly reproduced lacunae in the writing of many otherwise innovative science studies scholars, the gap in their analysis seems to depend on the unexamined assumption that gender is a preformed, functionalist category, merely a question of preconstituted 'generic' men and women, beings resulting from either biological or social sexual difference and playing out roles, but otherwise of no interest. (*Modest_Witness* 26)

It is difficult not to interpolate a reluctant critique of Latour, with whom Haraway otherwise shares several affinities, into this discussion of gaps and lacunae in the emergent study of "sciences, techniques, sociétés" (*Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* 10). Haraway affirms the witnessing subject-*chimère*'s syncretic polyvocality with Latour, but notes the pointed, painful absence of women's voices, the silence of those, she says, who "might watch a demonstration; they could not witness it" (*Modest_Witness* 31). Her response to this gendered silencing is an open disavowal of any desire to rely on natureculturally derived ontologies, rejecting them in favour of "a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities" ("Manifesto" 32), collecting and focusing this actively-chosen potency into the polyvalent, unsettling, partially-inorganic figure of the cyborg.

The "Manifesto for Cyborgs" can be read as an ecstatic surrender to the perverse possibilities of the humanmachine, identified less with gender than with an alienated awareness mediated through the otherness of technology. Haraway's foundational text does celebrate the cyborg's heterogenous physicality as representative of the power and

agency sited in the perverse and multiple, holding out an empowered and post-gendered hand to the future. However, the "Manifesto" also elides the immateriality and full-textuality of the cyborg hybrid with its projected physical agency, touching only lightly on physical iterations of the integrated circuit, as well as global and historical provenances, possibly binding the cyborg and its illegitimate power to the two-dimensional page. Nonetheless, its vision of physicality not based in easily comprehensible tropes within the context of the mid-1980s made the "Manifesto" a valuable tool, a theoretical site for its central construct. As Zoe Sofoulis puts it, "[j]ust when the (mainly white male) postmodernists were proclaiming the death of the subject and the end of metanarratives (Jameson 1984), the Cyborg Manifesto – offering its own myths along with the various utopian and US Third World Women's writings it drew upon – celebrated a different vision of a new kind of fractured subject, for whom partiality, hybridity, and lack of a single smooth identity of wholeness did not imply death" (92).

The problematic of cyborg inheritance plays out in two different ways – the desire for the power of the hybrid (hybrid vigour) against the background of an imposed or simultaneously desired singularity, as in Latour's definition of the modern, and a movement toward theorising the body out of existence versus the experiential evidence of the body as a unit of perception. Thus, the borders of the self are not rendered but instead revealed as fluid, more fluid than the subject would like or appreciate; in the texts under study, this fluidity is mediated through eversion into machinic or digital apparatuses, which serve to extend the boundaries of the self, its

reach and capacity, outward from the sited body. Taking up this idea, Bruce Grenville characterises Haraway's cyborg goddess as a line of flight (29), an escape trajectory; however, it is no such thing. Rather than attempting to find or imagine a utopic place for her monstrous vision, Haraway situates the cyborg within the same world surrounding both theorist and machine-agent-insertion in order to give heterogeny and glossolalia an armoured site that embodies, and a multipartite identity which, being armoured, is able to enact. Far from being an escape, the cyborg ontology encysts within the body of the extant patriarchy; it seeds resistance along the liminalities of flesh and machine, the revolution taking shelter in its tech-mediated embrace.

What this image does not do is allow a clear picture of the complex interworkings of Haraway's theoretical exploration, which laces an acknowledgement of how technological advancement oppresses and marginalizes some women into its images of agency and connection. These are the women in the integrated circuit, who are excluded from or who are subjugated within the cycle of economic production associated with high technomancy, even as their location near that ideologically hybrid nexus should aid them to break out:

> If it was ever possible ideologically to characterize women's lives by the
> distinction of public and private domains – suggested by images of the
> division of working-class life into factory and home, of bourgeois life into
> market and home, and of gender existence into personal and political realms
> – it is now a totally misleading ideology, even to show how both terms of
> these dichotomies construct each other in practice and in theory. I prefer a

network ideological image, suggesting the profusion of spaces and identities

and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and in the body

politic. ("Manifesto" 29-30)

As Haraway discusses here, the cyborg's figuration is profoundly implicated in the economic politics of hybridity; despite a confounding of social and gendered concerns, the hybrid's power lies in part within its myriad simultaneous identities, as well as its confounding of categorical separations. This multiple ontology is itself a network, a useful mutability that eschews dichotomies in favour of "agency – or agencies – without defended subjects"(Haraway, Introduction 3). The only iteration of distinct separations that could possibly be used as access to power would include a liminality and a decentrality that together embed this agency into the surrounding landscape, instead of essentialising it into forms or figurations, a valorisation of the subject which Western systems of representation have traditionally assigned to the masculine.

This image of multiplicities within a nexus, the locus of agency held in decentralised power, comes from an extended discussion with new media scholar Katalin Lovasz. Lovasz's work concerns the uncontainable, always-escaping tendencies of online identities (or *avatars*), which initially define the self and then cross those borders, storming them without slowing down (as the spirit moves). Instead of a single dichotomous decision, the self must decide again and again against sets of moving parameters, articulating a kind of moving or fractured self-identification that allows, perhaps, for more accurate representation. As Haraway constructs this version of subjectivity, the flickering avatar becomes a place for meetings, a nexus or "map of

tensions and resonances between the fixed ends of a charged dichotomy [which] better represents the potent politics and epistemologies of embodied, therefore accountable, objectivity" ("Situated Knowledges" 194). By presenting the cyborg subject in this manner Haraway edges, albeit side-on, toward a vision of situated knowledges as feminist because rhizomatic, reconfiguring the Latourian *réseau* for a feminine agency situated precisely within the mutability enacted through the equating of *feminine* and *hybrid*, embodied within the cyborg's fractured ontologies and persistent liminality.

I do not use the word *rhizomatic* here in the Deleuzean sense, or at least, not only in the Deleuzean sense; the rhizome under discussion more closely resembles the description given by Lynn Margulis in her querulous interrogation of the zoocentricity of popular representations of biological research: "the rhizosphere [...] is an ecological zone of many different organisms that all grow and metabolize at the same time. Some rhizosphere inhabitants provide nutrients to what we see as the plant, generally the part above the ground. But, like, animals, plants are also confederacies of once-separate and different kinds of organisms" (21). Not only nonoriginary, this rhizome is also multiply and intricately connective, actively and permanently destabilising the concept of the individual by penetrating the boundaries between subjects until the designation becomes contentious – and then obsolete.

Margulis is a major proponent of multiple-origin stories. In *Acquiring Genomes*, Margulis' research offers two powerful alternative models to single-origin theories in the interactions of the *rhizosphere*, characterised by the primitive plant runners and hyphal mats of fungal mycorrhizae that so enraptured Deleuze and Guattari, and in the

promiscuously transgenic world of the prokaryotes, the kingdom of bacteria Margulis

terms "one single cosmopolitan species" (55), a species in constant genetic flux. Both

hold important demonstrations of Margulis' major contribution to the field of

evolutionary biology: *endosymbiosis,* a model of cellular evolution involving incomplete

engulfing, codependent behavioural modifications and eventual gene-sharing, a tangle

of interrelations between "intimate former strangers" (Margulis and Sagan 102).

The subtitle of Margulis' book is a simple and shocking declaration of this shift:

A Theory of the Origins of Species. I cannot overstate the deliberately transgressive nature

of the "s" at the end of *Origins,* which (despite her careful validation of Darwinian

models) reads as a stark attack on the fundamental unity of an individual from any

species, or indeed, the species designation itself. Margulis' groundbreaking theory turns

on this exact point: the idea of the individual, seemingly unarguable at the biological

levels which are Margulis' field of work, reveals itself to be far more complex beneath

her trained eyes. Throughout *Acquiring Genomes,* Margulis expands her theory of the

endosymbiotic origins of the energy-making chloroplast in plants, and the parallel

arrival of the mitochondrion in animal cells, to refigure the entire story of evolution

through a not-uncontested model called *symbiogenesis,* which positions each individual

multicellular organism as the product of countless enactments and embodiments of

hybridity, bearing future change in the shapes of its heterogenous provenance. Briefly,

symbiogenesis posits that the source of new genetic material comes not from mutation

within the existing genome, but from the acquisition of another genome, from

"outside," which leads to permanent physical and behavioural changes – the

"observable inherited variation" (11) that, so Margulis suggests, eventually leads to the rise of new species. Arguing for an ontology based in syncretic identities, the symbiogenetic model depends on, and indeed requires, shifting self-identifications, and indeed subject-identifications, away from uncomplicated singularity.

Margulis details the fundamental changes symbiogenesis brings to the definitions of long-stable biological terms by enacting a symbiogenetic transformation upon them. Her model lies in the "promiscuously fused and transgenic" (Haraway, "Manifesto" 4) worlds outside the animal kingdom, in the spreading filaments of efficient fungal mats and the blob-eat-blob world of the microbe. Through those kingdoms and their interrelations, Margulis redefines the traditional concept of a species as a "special case" within larger, less zoocentric and more rhizomatic concerns:

> Zoologists have long recognized the validity of Ernst Mayr's biological species concept: Two organisms belong to the same species if in nature they recognize each other, mate, and produce fertile offspring. This definition, which is apt for most animals and many plants, is one with which we concur. We see it as a special case of our definition. Only those animals that share the same complement of genomes can develop complementary genders that can indulge in fertile matings. (58-59)

She goes on to account for a radical definition of the specific term *species* in order to include or classify those organisms which reproduce by means other than those defined within the constraints of zoology. As with Haraway's cyborg and modest witness, Margulis' revision of Mayr's definition of the concept of *species* does not overturn it; she

deliberately eschews the dichotomous key, branching along lines named either/or. Instead of abiding by the restrictions of strict separation, Margulis enacts her own theory by first widening the scope of species-definition beyond the macroscopic, allowing for the transfer of genetic material along nonsexual lines as well as the fusion of *organisms* into *organism*. Without denying or expulsing Mayr's definition, Margulis transforms it: in a spectacular demonstration of symbiogenesis at an extrapolated textual-theoretical level, Margulis *acquires* it instead. Echoing her own provocative postulates,[10] she engulfs Mayr's definition into her own, declaring it "a special case" within a larger context, emphasising again the shift of origin stories into modes of plurality.

Mayr's notably ambivalent foreword to Margulis' text contains several instances of objection to Margulis' entire project, most visible through Mayr's pointed use of the *species* designation in its (in his) classically defined sense. Without denying the presence of acquired genomes in evolutionary models, and while demonstrating genuine interest in microbial models of speciation, Mayr still holds a shrinking part of Kingdom Animalia to the uncompromising statement that "[t]here is no indication that any of the 10,000 species of birds or the 4,500 species of mammals originated by symbiogenesis" (xiii). Contrast these careful boundaries, taxonomy in the service of conserving definition, to Margulis' deliberately confounded reading of human illness early on in her text: "We imagine that pathogenetic microbes attack us, but if such pathogens are

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[10] "The relationships that interest us most here are modulated coexistence between former predators, pathogens and their hosts, their shelter and food sources. As members of two species respond over time to each other's presence, exploitative relationships may eventually become convival to the point where neither organism exists without the other" (Margulis and Sagan 12).

part of the committee that makes up each one us to begin with, isn't health less a question of resistance of invasion from the outside and much more an issue of ecological relationships among committee members? Yes" (19). That one-word acceptance skews accepted body-borders not by redrawing them, note, but by questioning their purpose, a far more subversive project. That one word makes many others possible.

For Mayr, the other contentious point is, predictably, Margulis' partial, puckish, confrontational reclamation of the theories of early evolutionary theorist Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, a move which Mayr utterly rejects: "that [Lamarckian inheritance] is not true. The two processes are entirely different. Lamarckian inheritance is the inheritance of modified phenotypes, while symbiogenesis involves the inheritance of incorporated parts of genomes" (xiii). While not unjustified – Margulis' claim is a difficult one to substantiate – Mayr has, perhaps, chosen to leave aside how Margulis' theoretical movement here is, itself, symbiogenetic: she is enacting her theory into the text that surrounds it. Mayr's outrage is sourced in the developmental history of evolutionary biology: neo-Darwinian theories depend on overturning Lamarck's theory of acquired characteristics (inherited physical change or "modified phenotypes," the classic example being a giraffe which has learned to elongate its neck to reach leaves producing longer-necked progeny) that could be passed on from one organism to its descendants. Neo-Darwinian evolutionary theories rejected this model of inheritable change across one lifetime in favour of the multi-generational, genetically-based process of elimination by competition, more familiarly phrased as *the survival of the fittest*. Margulis claims that,

although incorrect in the specifics, Lamarck's ideas could fall within the realm of the

possible because

> [a]cquired traits can be inherited not as traits but as genomes. [...] The only
> 'character' or trait that can be passed down (vertical inheritance) or acquired
> (horizontal inheritance) and then propagated from generation to generation,
> is a 'character' encoded in genes. This means that 'characters' capable of
> propagation in the environment, of acquisition and inheritance from one
> generation to another, tend to be complete genes in genomes. (41)

Far from rejecting Mayr's definitions, which hold to a strong, apparent separation of

inheritance and expression, Margulis reconstructs the axes of species-specificity and

identification along transgenic-inclusive lines; Lamarck's ideas coexist with Darwin's if

(and only if) reformulated through endosymbiotic terms. This theoretical iteration of

symbiogenesis strikes at the conservative aspects of evolutionary theory in both content

and implication, embodying her chosen methodology: openly oppositional, deliberately

nondichotomous. As with Haraway and her revision of the subject and the object

through a reinvention of science's modest witness, Margulis' model widens extant

definitions of evolutionary change to include more than an entire kingdom's worth of

organisms, creatures which do not fit previously defined or accepted parameters –

monstrous others, bringing change into being. Margulis' theoretical manoeuvre

demonstrates how symbiogenesis allows for an unstable coding, definition and

comprehension of the object, or the subject, termed *individual*. This permanently partial

validation is, of course, entirely heretical in the field of evolutionary biology – and thus

only to be expected. I read Margulis' reclamation of Lamarck through the same kind of rhetoric of irony that Haraway claimed for her oppositional cyborg, and for much the same reasons.

As Margulis' theory demonstrates, the hybrid does not itself hold any intrinsic implications of a cyborg ontology; however, technology in all its digital and steel-alloy-encased incarnations seems to be the chosen bearer of the century's technocratic elite, not least because it increases the capitalist technocracy's perceived efficiency. In its digital forms, technology holds out promises of near-instantaneous communication and increasingly powerful influence, abridging distances and eliding nations. According to Margulis, the symbiote becomes symbiote by definition when the organism can no longer function optimally without it. By this definition, the machine has become the chosen symbiote for those privileged with access to it at the beginning of the 21st century. The "Manifesto for Cyborgs" annotates the networks between technological mediation, polyvalent ontologies and the resultant agency sourced in partial incomprehension: cyborg agency, the power of the war machine, starts not at heart or bone, but at the joining seams: the point of encounter between flesh and machine. What it also elides, however, is awareness of the gap between the woman in the integrated circuit who benefits from the symbiosis and the women located elsewhere in the circuit who must work within the structures of geopolitical identity and jurisdiction in order to create the technology the cyborg requires to exist. Both implicated in each other and embedded in their cultural matrices, these women resist any single model of

representation, even as they are identified with the partial differentiation inherent in the cyborg.

Instead of reading in search of an inner consistency its epistemological stance most emphatically rejects, realisation of the clashing undercurrents in something like Haraway's "Manifesto" should also foster recognition of structural components within texts which, like Margulis' project, reiterate their fundamental ideas through the shapes of their presentation. For example, the fractured borders of the "Manifesto" refuse to coalesce because, in documenting the cyborg's fundamental uncertainty and undecideability, Haraway has reproduced them within her document, achieving a kind of coherence without a stable singularity. In light of these unresolved pluralities, texts read through these visions of symbiogenesis and hybrid cyborgs become important locations along Latour's amodern *réseaux*, nexus texts that locate and name what already exists. The nexus text is that Latourian *patrie*, granting *patrimoine* to the hybrid body even as it problematises the assumptions of paternal generation inherent within the terms: "Impure and not even 'identical' to itself, the cyborg does not need to erase its differences from those to which it connects; a creature of parts, it can illustrate a widespread contemporary experience of having several partial and hybrid identities and axes of political and cultural affinity" (Sofoulis 90). The nexus texts under examination locate their agents within the mutinous object of the female body, that fractured subjective coalescent, yet evasive, encompassing agency through eversion into machine-mediated escape, holding power at the nexus of not-that and yet-now.

In Anne Balsamo's discussion of "panic bodies," the body vanishes into discourse like a deer through underbrush; for Balsamo the "compulsion to theorize" is a symptom of an underlying apocalyptic anticipation, the certainty that things have already begun to fall apart. In this eschatological time the female body functions as a "silenced conceptual placeholder in hysterical male discourse" (30): summoning misrule, her body is disruptive and destabilizing, constantly requiring and then exceeding medical and scientific control. As Balsamo notes, much like personal identity vanishing as postcolonial theorists arise, "the body disappears in postmodern theory just as women and feminists have emerged as an intellectual force within the human disciplines" (31). Although she does concede that bodies can be read as discourse in terms of modes of representation, Balsamo is wary of the loss of the physical experience; she does not accept the Gnostic privileging of spirit, even as she acknowledges the body's continued mediation along the lines of power/knowledge. Throughout her examination of Susan Suleiman's anthology *The Female Body in Western Culture*, Balsamo cautions against this fundamental reduction or relegation of the body to text, terming Suleiman's continued dependence on this idea a move to "correct the overreliance on an essentialist definition of the female body as a biological or 'natural' entity" (Balsamo 23) – in Haraway's terms, the body as text is a *war machine*, a steel-plated idea protecting troops under heavy fire. Balsamo refutes the idea that the (read-as-feminine) body is purely discursive, reaching instead for the material self as a living, breathing, experiential "vital site" for the working out of a chimeric agent-ontology in an erase-you world. In rejecting the female body as mere *tabula rasa*, a blank slate awaiting someone

else's panicked inscription or control, Balsamo underlines the importance of the body's experience in the subject's formulation.

In light of this melding of text and body, I initially took issue with Balsamo's conflation of the terms "cyborg" and "android" in the first few lines of *Technologies of the Gendered Body*, as the two terms are quite distinct: one etymologically signals a physiological hybrid of flesh and machine, and the other names a machine fashioned in the shape of – representing – the flesh. That is, one is a physical hybrid and the other is emphatically not. However, it is the pure-machine android who functions as a hybrid in the truest sense, conflating expectation and desire into a perceived humanity while holding a nonhuman self in a human shape. The physical cyborg is not – and perhaps, cannot be – coy about her hybridity; it is seamed into her heterogenous body, visible and tangible to all who perceive the difference between flesh and machine. In contrast, the android projects a destabilising ontological ambiguity while the informed viewer struggles to reconcile vision to knowledge, recognising the not/self split, yet eventually welding perceived flesh to machine being. In so doing, the witness names the android to a powerful, functional hybridity which enacts simultaneity and refuses dichotomy: a unit of chimeric, symbiotic relationship, a known cyborg after all. This kind of hybridity, ontological to its core, is the cyborg agency I claim in varying degrees for Cayce Pollard and Cordelia Naismith Vorkosigan.

Lois McMaster Bujold's Vorkosigan series has been the focus of much public and critical acclaim, but only minimal amounts of scholarly consideration; unlike the works of Octavia Butler, James Tiptree, Jr. (Alice Sheldon) and Ursula K. LeGuin, or even Anne

McCaffrey and Marion Zimmer Bradley, Bujold's books have been left profoundly alone by most theorists and critics. The Vorkosigan series explores the physical boundaries of humanity through its deployment of various versions of bodily abnormality, starting with the strong fear of deformity and mutation encoded deep within Barrayan culture that frail-boned, crook-backed, dwarfish series protagonist Miles must continually evade or surmount. The series covers relatively common space opera (i.e. comedic science fiction) tropes, albeit with more *Richard III* references than most, but peoples them with characters spanning the humanoid body-morph gamut from hermaphrodites and four-armed null-g musicians to dwarf-clones and gengineered lycanthropic mercenary-recruits.

I consider it likely that its very popularity has overshadowed the legitimate claim the Vorkosigan series has on a thorough reading of the intricate ambiguities riddling its plot twists and character designs. Sylvia Kelso's two articles on the series' positioning within literary and theoretical parameters are a welcome exception to the general silence, and a good indication of where the need for further consideration begins. They form an adequate introduction to the series' general themes, but by virtue of their nature as overviews, cannot address some of the quieter tensions and ambiguities present in Bujold's major novels. Kelso makes good points about Miles' clone-brother Mark's dysmorphia and its ties to control of self-image and self-iteration through Mark's re-presentation of their body, and provides a brief consideration of some of Miles' interlaced identity-based complexities; however, she replicates Bujold's own actions in relegating Miles and Mark's mother Cordelia to the edges of her

analyses. Although Cordelia's position within the novels is not central, her influence is pervasive; Cordelia's apparent marginalisation as mother and foster-mother is transformed through the agencies granted her through her alien provenance and the uterine replicator she claims as her own.

In *Cordelia's Honor*, first in the Vorkosigan series' chronology, the machine enables an agency-granting hybridity, augmenting and amplifying Cordelia's already-pervasive illegibility into combat-ready mode. In this case the body-mod enacts a reduction in girth and resource usage, a conservation of balance and speed that permits the mother to also be a warrior, to remain in control her own body. Cordelia frames all the maternal bodies as heroic, considering Kareen's "courage of endurance" and Alys' "brave and bloody birth-giving" as deserving of praise (*Cordelia's Honor* 569); however, Bujold presents Cordelia's body-based warrior-agency in stark contrast to Kareen's silence and Alys Vorpatril's waddling vulnerability, made most evident during the difficult warzone birthing of Alys' son Ivan. But in the novels' central paradigm, motherhood is vital to the granting of forward momentum; the renewal of embattled Princess Kareen's positioning as mother is the movement that grants her renewed agency – Cordelia calls it "her curse, live pain" (550) – and news of her son Gregor's survival transforms Kareen from power-access pathway into unleashed murder weapon. But her effort at reinscription falters – too angry to wait, too socialised to learn hand-to-hand combat, Kareen's enforced stillness and concomitant fury render her too fast on the draw. It is Cordelia who must complete the reinscription of Barrayan social

codes, for her own son and Kareen's as well, carrying both their hopes into the future when she adopts now-Emperor Gregor for her own.

Bujold's own response to feminist interpretations of her texts has tended toward denial of conscious effort to write an openly subversive text, preferring to take the insider-approach of "covert feminism" instead (Kelso, "Loud Achievements"). Kelso's reading of Bujold's stance demonstrates both Bujold's concern with and reluctance toward an explicit feminist alignment, allowing for its interpolation, but separating Bujold from what has been termed feminist science fiction: "her need to stress the female aspects of her work suggests that male readers ignore these elements" ("Loud Achievements"). However, Bujold plants social change within the central moments of her text: Bujold's afterword to *Cordelia's Honor* states quite clearly that "[t]he demands of motherhood especially consume the old self, and replace it with something new [...] Cordelia undergoes such a fearsome transformation, at the climax of *Barrayar* [the second half of *Cordelia's Honor*] laying down everything about her old persona, even her cherished Betan principles, to bring her child to life" (596). Although the subversive content of her work requires a perverse reading of her texts and their reception, Bujold's later analysis shows her own awareness of the transformative, creative possibilities still latent in that climactic shattering of Cordelia's constructed self. Julia Kristeva's ideas of *abjection*, which deal in dual-orbiting artefacts of self-nonself, become a potentially productive response to the schisms between intent and actuality, while Haraway ably frames Cordelia's agencies within her partial self-eversion into the machine, supporting Cordelia's heteroglossic agency and my own interpolations into and against authorial

intent. Seen through these lenses, Bujold's subtle, near-invisible reclamation of the

embattled alterities of embodiment and culture, all feminised throughout the series, is

nothing less than a pervasive tech-mediated resistance to the embedded patriarchies her

characters struggle hard to resist, subvert and rewrite.

In contrast to Bujold's relatively obscure presence in academic circles, William

Gibson has been a subject of scholarly interest since *Neuromancer*'s publication in the

mid-1980s. Academic discussion of Gibson's work has been largely contextualized in

terms of his relentless reliance on an imaginative technobabel and a notable and

worrying reliance on an exoticised Japan-Orient-Other. I propose that in *Pattern

Recognition*, Gibson considers ideas of technologically mediated communication joined

to an ecstatic erasure of the body through machine into streaming code and the

smearing away of the unsatisfactory experience of meatspace through the eternal

absence of cyberspace, and finds them not only unsatisfactory but fundamentally

flawed. *Pattern Recognition*'s resident wounded genius serves to locate the grief of

absence within her own metallic separation and digitalised enigmas, "eyes only truly

present when focused on this screen" (*Pattern Recognition* 316). This somewhat clunky

metonymic device serves nonetheless to anchor the entire novel's turn toward a

corporeally-mediated ontology, a rejection of the uncomplicated technoecstatic in favour

of something far more irresolute and complex. Balsamo's diagnosis of this anxious

discourse points to an underlying dis-ease, matched to Gibson's movement from

augmented, jacked-in and erased bodies to the intimately visceral presence and absence

of the physical self, with the separation or absence functioning as a wounding or lack

instead of a desired alter-state/holiness. This turn toward the singularly embodied

extends from the individual to the nation, even as both ideas are eroded by the

disembodied online presence.

Instead of the perceived singularity of the geopolitical entity called the nation-

state, an online community has a constantly shifting membership, cacophonic in its

geopolitical status and theoretical orientations, but all in synchronous orbit around

shared ideological concerns, whether they be pop stars, political stances, or the latest

word in obscure clothing. Lines of affinity and affiliation are drawn across erstwhile

markers of difference, the disparities of age, race, gender and geographic location, yet

still the online interactions tend to conglomerate across access and awareness of online

culture and community rules. The footageheads of *Pattern Recognition* posting at

Fetish:Footage:Forum (F:F:F.net) bear comparisons to communities of religious scholars

arguing philosophy around the clock, what Pheng Cheah has termed an *ontotheology*,

and could be productively considered in that sense to be seeking meaning or purpose to

the Footage, and by extension the geographically-isolated posters, which futility Gibson

parodies several times by opposing "living concrete actuality to abstract ghostly form"

(Cheah, "Spectral Nationality" 227).

Balsamo's analysis of the interstices of meeting, turning away and replication (as

opposed to innovation) in *Neuromancer* provide a basis for considering *Pattern

Recognition* as a reworking of the themes of anxiety and separation from the body,

sourced in a disappearance that is again technologically mediated. This time, however,

Gibson indirectly addresses the ideas of screen-based mediation through a series of

documented excavations centred on absence disrupted by the sudden revelation of bodily presence, those "towers of gray bone" (*Pattern Recognition* 189) metonymic for the weary work of reclamation in the rubble of the World Trade Center in both its spiritual exhaustion and the ecstatic exaltation of identification with the relics the crew finds buried in the mud. The vanished body is an everted trauma, "the image still ungrieved" (133) sent out into the world in order to layer itself over everything until Cayce Pollard can no longer see anything without that pattern of grievous loss, until she can recognise little else:

> And then she hears the sound of a helicopter, from somewhere behind her and, turning, sees the long white beam of light sweeping the dead ground as it comes, like a lighthouse gone mad from loneliness, searching that barren ground as foolishly, as randomly, as any grieving heart ever has. (335)

While Balsamo's claim for the "limited agency" (123) of technologies themselves must remain her caveat to all theorists, Gibson mingles her affirmation that "the virtual reality industry actually disseminates a certain mythology and a set of metaphors and concepts that cannot help but reproduce the anxieties and preoccupations of contemporary culture" (Balsamo 122) with Cayce's sharp, soul-lagged awareness of the epistemological variants lying in wait behind the footage, waiting for the end of her pilgrimage to find out whether there is fate or destiny or not a single lodestone-desire guiding the direction of the footage, and by extension, the lives of all who watch the footage. Cayce's soul-lag is certainly readable as symptomatic of a complication of the technoecstatic, the body dissociating under protest from the self. But in this dissociation

there is, according to Lovasz and Margulis, a decentralised access to agency, even as the centralised subject-artefact is questioned and eroded through its symbiotic interpenetration by technological means and media.

No longer weaponless, the feminist goes to war accoutered as a cyborg; difficult demigoddess for the new millennium, she sees the possibility of dominance in the body-alteration of the technological ecstatic: Haraway's insistence on an eventually ironic reception of even this emancipatory image is a part of what she calls "an ironic political myth," an iconoclastic icon "more faithful as blasphemy is faithful" ("Manifesto" 7). This reiteration of blasphemy *as* act of faith (see "Manifesto" 7-8) indicates the point at which dichotomous relationships break into something else, ecstacy or damnation, both sublimes of a sort. However, to blaspheme necessarily requires the presence of the blasphemed, its actuality brought into sharper relief through the fury of the denial. In this, both Margulis and Haraway follow a long tradition of blasphemers contending against that which they must acknowledge but refuse to adore: "My modest witness cannot ever be simply oppositional. Rather, s/he is suspicious, implicated, knowing, ignorant, worried and hopeful" (Haraway, *Modest_Witness* 3). It is with full acknowledgement of my own implication in the divided spirit of this witness, in a difficult act of faith, that I begin my consideration of Cordelia Naismith Vorkosigan as an agent of technologically-based ontological change in the constrictive military patriarchy of her chosen planet, Barrayar.

2. a very small iconoclasty: 'le pouvoir minable du féminin' in Lois McMaster Bujold's *Cordelia's Honor.*

> Many of the entities that command my attention in this Reader were
> birthed through the reproductive apparatuses of war. Perhaps chief
> among them is the cyborg.
> Donna Haraway, "Introduction: A Kinship of Feminist Figurations"

The genre of writing loosely termed *science fiction* is, in many ways, fiction based in context, in situated narratives neither artificially freed of chronological concern or place, nor protected by preexisting concepts of history or geography. Instead, through the necessities of worldbuilding and retrieval, present concerns are veiled with an unfamiliar setting, although still coded through the prevailing tropes and metaphors available at the time of their creation. Through this externalisation, science fiction provides the potential for productive and fertile exploration of current naturecultures, exporting their values, signs and idioms to a future generally made either utopic or dystopic through engagement with various forms of technology (itself an erstwhile signifier for both utopic progress and dystopic loss). Thus, science fiction is the world recognisably present, but distorted; as such, it makes for an eminently useful space to work out potentially destabilising ideas within strictly established parameters – an appropriate experimental site, in some ways, for ontological war machines and ideological time bombs.

Lois McMaster Bujold's Vorkosigan series is often and justly praised among science fiction readers for the tensile strength of its characters and its highly entertaining style. Bujold's work places consistently high in *Locus* (a "semipro" industry magazine)

reader polls,[11] and she has achieved considerable critical acclaim, winning a record

number of Hugo and Nebula awards, and taking the prestigious Mythopoetic Award in

2002.[12] The Vorkosigan series deals in what looks at first glance to be a well-written

rehashing of established space opera plots: a young hero with dual identities and

beautiful and/or interesting companions battles various villains in space, for the glory of

his foster-brother the Emperor, increasingly dangerous new missions and munificent

cash rewards. What tends to go unremarked by the majority of her readers is Bujold's

constant, consistent re-formation of the tropes of familiar science fiction, primarily

through the medium of bodily dysmorphia as a result of genetic manipulation.

Bujold plays with altered embodiment throughout the Vorkosigan series,

gleefully metamorphosing the human body to examine how many ways it can shift,

torque or change. Her novels address how those somatic alterations transform, mirror or

distort the fabric of the worlds she builds: how these altered bodies play out in their

galaxies demonstrates a possibility of redefining the real through those bodies' alterities

as they move through time and space. The unresolved pluralities of embodiment signal

the body's importance in defining the movements and mutability of power in Bujold's

universe; by substituting body forms which do not fit popular perceptions of the

masculine heroic, Bujold subtly aligns the requirements for sci-fi heroism away from its

physical norms. As Miles puts it in *Komarr*, "Physical solutions have never come easily

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[11] See <http://www.dendarii.com/awards.html>

[12] Hugo Awards: "Mountains of Mourning" (best novella, 1990), *The Vor Game* (1991), *Barrayar* (1992), *Mirror Dance* (1995*), Paladin of Souls* (2004); Nebula Awards: *Falling Free* (1988), "Mountains of Mourning" (best novella, 1989*), Paladin of Souls* (2004); Mythopoetic Award: *The Curse of Chalion* (2002).

to me. I just . . . played with his mind, eased him out [...] maybe my tactics had the novelty of surprise" (264). These kinds of trans-formations of mastery move Bujold's texts toward what Marleen S. Barr has called feminist fabulations, "fiction that enlarges patriarchal myths in order to facilitate scrutinizing these myths" (4), stories centred on a character's difficult, often oppositional position within patriarchal norms. As Sylvia Kelso astutely points out, Bujold puts her major characters into bodies and situations that read as feminised, "females in disguise" – that is, something the dominant military patriarchy does not recognize as powerful (Kelso, "Feminism and 'The Gernsback Continuum'"). Bujold's narratives demonstrate how these supposedly impotent characters achieve their goals in the midst of the dominant patriarchy, through traits and strengths it finds alien or irrelevant. Although it is not clearly outlined, the project requires no blatant statements; instead, as with much of her ideological work, Bujold demonstrates her point by redesigning the text beneath her characters' feet, decentralising the default-masculine position and experience still prevalent within the genre. Her subtle adjustments to character design, arc and development read as slantwise, but deliberate, underminings of military-male patriarchy both on Barrayar and outside the pages of her books.

Of particular interest from this perspective is Bujold's two-novel prologue to the series, *Shards of Honor* (1986) and *Barrayar* (1991), reissued by Baen as *Cordelia's Honor* in 1999. Both novels deal primarily with Miles' mother, Captain Cordelia Naismith of the Betan Astronomical Survey, and the tumult surrounding her arrival and eventual establishment upon Barrayar, a planet only recently rejoined to the galactic system and

still in possession of a distinctive cultural code. *Shards of Honor* and *Barrayar* form a single narrative arc tracking Cordelia's movement from the coolly egalitarian Beta Colony to the systemic militarized intolerance of her husband Aral's home planet. On Barrayar, *woman* and *mutant* and *disabled* are near-interchangeable terms, coded as less-viable alternatives to the able-bodied masculine. In the two-novel arc, *Shards of Honor* sets up some of the conflicts and direct attacks on identity Cordelia will face, giving several instances of forcible reinscription and traumatic erasure; *Barrayar* details Cordelia's life on the inside, describing the violent collisions between the planetary authorities' patriarchal will to power and Cordelia's resistance and creative initiative. Bolstered through the mediation of hybrids, mothers and madmen, Cordelia gates a social revolution through her own unstable body-borders, re-forming Barrayar through her fluid self as she lives out the war machine ontogeny Haraway eventually claims for the oppositional cyborg.

the Othered woman

Like any good infectious agent, Cordelia evades her host system's extant defences; as her eventual husband Aral puts it, the state as it is "has a little trouble recognizing as such some forms of power which are not synonymous with force" (570). Barrayar's ruling class links power, with its political connotations of present agency and future influence, explicitly to military men. In this ideological climate, any kind of hybrid (bisexuals, powerful women, disabled soldiers) reads as impure and unnatural – that is, monstrous. Therefore, in order to be a successful infection, Cordelia and her

transformative tech-avatars must effect an invisible invasion, choose a channel unwatched by the guardians of social mores and be perceived as harmless or irrelevant, too small to bother attacking.

Seen in these terms, the woman's pregnant body becomes a logical worksite: an "odd boundary" between one and two (Haraway, Introduction 2), channelling doubled and difficult possibilities, the pregnant body remains totally ignored because it is also, as Kelso puts it, codedly feminine ("Loud Achievements"). Cordelia's agency combines with Barrayar's reactive, default-conservative political state to render her fundamentally multiple, which difficult status increasingly mutates her assigned roles of wife and mother. Although seemingly subsumed into those familiar Barrayan-made impotencies, in actuality Cordelia's ontology sidesteps genuine translation into pat tropes in favour of interpolating her own hybrid texts, changing the system from the inside. She effects her most transformative work not through head-on confrontation, but by slipping in through some unremarked and undefended back way. By relocating the mother as mother-warrior-tactician, Cordelia situates her conflicting identifiers in and through her technologically-enabled agency: bearing both child and weapon, she amalgamates the familiar and the most deeply feared, exploiting the dominant culture's inability to read her correctly when she takes her actively destructive stance against it. In the spirit of Cordelia's agent of change, I have chosen to examine the implications of her multiple ontologies through the image-bearer of the cyborg, using a simple model of infection overlain on symbiogenetic theory's underlying ideas of diversification through acquisition instead of dichotomy.

I focus on Cordelia because of her close association with the uterine replicator throughout the entire Vorkosigan series. She brings seventeen womb machines to the planet Barrayar, she incorporates one herself, and eventually becomes the strongest proponent of their widespread use. The replicator remains a consistent, almost subtextual locus of conflict, in that most of the change and rage it engenders is peripheral to the action in the series – except when Cordelia is speaking. By importing the womb machine through Cordelia, Bujold sets up a kind of cultural imperialist dialogue skewed through its use of the matriline as process of invasion and imposition. As gender theorist Judith Butler puts it, "[t]he task here is not to celebrate each and every new possibility qua possibility, but to redescribe those possibilities that already exist, but which exist within cultural domains designated as culturally unintelligible and impossible" (148-49). This partial unintelligibility, her impossibility, is the source of Cordelia's power on Barrayar, decoupling her from the rigid caste structures governing the mores of Vor-class nobility as her hybrid ontology drives her toward a doubled primal act: in the presence of the womb machine and through multiple mediations, Cordelia performs giving death as birth, beheading the pretender-emperor to bring her mutant, transmutative child into the world.

Cordelia's vector, her small entry into the codification of Barrayan sociopolitics, is the technoscience she brings to the planet's surface: the uterine replicator. Within it lies a cataclysm – the engendering of planet-wide feminine agency in the midst of a military patriarchy through reassignment of reproductive control; the machine womb births the revolution on Barrayar, and is itself called into being through Cordelia's alien,

hybrid voice. Through it/her/them, "[n]o longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos,* the household" (Haraway, "Manifesto" 67). The presence of the uterine replicator on-planet means this woman can be simultaneously warrior and mother, enabling her return from the clefts and caves of the Dendarii mountains, a retreat in silence, to instigate a rebellious, vengeful physical invasion of the capital city in order to retrieve her stolen son.

Outside of the new-tech womb machines the story arc seems a familiar one: peaceful explorer from a technologically advanced society comes to the barbaric planet and civilizes it, ending the dark ages with a grand symbolic rebellious gesture. But that familiarity allows the subversion: in this case, civilization is freedom from the dangers of childbirth, rebellion is peaceful transitions of power, the symbol is castration and our explorer is neither young nor male: that is, "[t]he subject is not determined by the rules through which it is generated because signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and reinforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects.... agency, then is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition" (Butler 145). This agency is sourced in Cordelia's alien mores, in how she cannot replicate what she is not and does not know; instead, her unintelligible impossibility forms the subterranean reservoir of power grounding her position, within the bounds of possibility but outside any which have previously existed. That tie between agency and what Butler terms "signification," the

process of imputing an image or sign onto a functionally blank Other, involves an ideological shift both Betan and Barrayan society are initially reluctant to make.

Cordelia's supposed psychotherapeutic treatment by the Betans after her initial incarceration and release is mediated through the extremely patronizing Betan view of Barrayan barbarism, which treats Cordelia's sympathy for Aral and Barrayar as a form of madness. Dr. Mehta's enforced perspective imputes a kind of insidious ideological re-formation of Cordelia's psyche and experience that borders on the utterly destructive, dismissing her subjective knowledge in the service of a more probable, far more politically beneficial scenario. Cordelia quickly sees the parallels to the despised Barrayans, and likens Mehta's attempted psychic reinscription to Cordelia's near-rape at the hands of the madman Vorrutyer, from which she was spared only by concentrated random action in the form of the psychotic Sergeant Bothari. Cordelia draws on her memories of Barrayar in order to escape, demonstrating her irremediably mixed ontologies through both words and actions:

> "You know, you remind me a bit of the late Admiral Vorrutyer. You both want to take me apart, see what makes me tick. Vorrutyer was more like a little kid, though. Had no intention of picking up his mess afterwards.
>
> "You, oh the other hand, will take me apart and not even get a giggle out of it. [...]"
>
> Mehta looked puzzled. "You've stopped stuttering," she noted.
>
> "Yes ... " Cordelia paused before her aquarium, considering it curiously.
>
> "So I have. How strange." (*CH* 199)

The stutter's disappearance is concomitant with Cordelia's returning agency, tying unimpeded speech to initiated action – and in this case, uninhibited destructive power. Cordelia's combined experiences of forcible physiological and mental damage upon her return to Beta Colony break her self-image to the point where she can consider murder an acceptable cost for reacquired agency. Cordelia's experience with Dr. Mehta marks a permanent shift in her array of possible self-images, both removing Betan colonist as an option and opening chaotic violence as a space she can now conceivably inhabit. These troubling realisations are channelled through Cordelia's brutal interrogation and restraint of Dr. Mehta during her escape. This fundamental shift in the scope of her possible actions, focalised through Cordelia's use of "the real Barrayan interrogation techniques" (199), is what expands Cordelia's abyssal psychic range to the point of being able to encompass the contradictions required to mother the revolution she ignites upon her arrival on Barrayar. That split recognition, echoed in Droushnakovi's well-trained violence, Aral Vorkosigan's bisexuality and especially in Bothari's psychotic personas, allows space for the "possibility of a variation" Butler requires for new iterations of the subject, for the emergence of genuine ontological change.

Bujold describes Barrayar as "a militaristic, patriarchal culture that prizes physical perfection and has a historically driven horror of mutation" (Bujold, "Interview"). Aral Vorkosigan validates a disruptive interpretation of Cordelia's polyvalence by initially coding her as a warrior, and therefore default military-male. Cordelia eventually explains the psychosocial dynamics relatively late in the series, speaking to her second son, Miles' clone-brother Mark:

Well, in truth... I judge him [Aral] to be bisexual, but subconsciously more

attracted to men than to women. Or rather – to soldiers. Not to men

generally, I don't think. I am, by Barrayan standards, a rather extreme, er,

tomboy, and thus became the solution to his dilemmas. The first time he met

me I was in uniform, in the middle of a nasty armed encounter. He thought it

was love at first sight. I've never bothered explaining to him that it was his

compulsions leaping up. (*Mirror Dance* 286)

Since Aral's primary pursuits relate to power and control it makes sense his primary

attraction would be toward the soldier, representative of the major power structure on-

planet. Aral's immediate attraction to her inscribes Cordelia as an explicitly dual-

gendered hybrid cipher within Barrayan mores, while affirming the powerful nature of

her half-hidden affect; an only partly legible text, Cordelia cannot be completely

comprehended within Barrayar's narrow codes of femininity. Her agency lies at least

initially in this perceived androgyny, sourced in her leadership role, her combat

experience, and the egalitarian ideologies she imports from her homeworld, Beta

Colony. Within her polyvalent gender and stranger-status, on Barrayar Cordelia holds a

"cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from fusions of outsider identities"

(Haraway, "Manifesto" 93). It is this opacity she uses to gain access to her primary

conduit of power in the desperate mission to save her son: that conduit is not pretender-

Vordarian or even young Emperor Gregor, neither Aral nor Piotr, but Gregor's mother,

the disregarded Princess Kareen. Led by her female bodyguard through the tunnels of

the capital to emerge and deploy her attack in the heart of the imperial residence,

Cordelia's tactics echo Bujold's through the text, deliberately confounding til-now

separate categories of power in the services of unsilencing and enacting feminine agency

through the strength of discounted individuals, through the quixotic power held by

liminal figures.

Barrayar's military-patriarchal rule has established its societal norms, and

deviance from them is strongly discouraged; as Aral euphemistically puts it, "[i]t's our

society. It tends to be . . . rather hard on anyone who can't keep up" (*Cordelia's Honor*

281). The military and the patriarchy form the largest locus of power; therefore, the

strongest members of Barrayan society exist at the top of both categories – men like

those angling for the title of Emperor through the historically-validated method of

killing four-year-old Gregor Vorbarra, next in line for the throne, and marrying his

mother Kareen, guaranteeing imperial legitimacy through her name. The current

Emperor, the politically astute and critically ill Ezar, has no faith in Kareen's ability to

protect herself or her son after his death; reflecting her position as political object,

Kareen is not even present at this crucially important meeting. Kareen's positioning

within the straitened confines of *mother* trumps any other identifiers she might have

chosen to claim. He eventually convinces Aral to take on the Regency in Kareen's place

through the same argument, leaning on Kareen's projected helplessness and

vulnerability in the political arena:

> "Well, it won't be my problem. It will be Prince Gregor's, and his mother's.
>
> And that of – whatever individual can be persuaded to stand by them, in

their hour of need. How long do you think they can last, without help? One

year? Two?"

"Six months," muttered Vortala. (234)

It is worth noting that even Aral does not question Ezar's version of political reality,

focusing instead on exactly which Ministers and Lords he would automatically alienate

as Regent. Kareen demonstrates that she is well aware of her own vulnerability, and has

already noted the necessity of Ezar's protection – as well as its precise timing: "Ezar

protected me from Serg, after I became pregnant. I had not even seen my husband for

over a year, when he was killed at Escobar" (270-71). All the people in this particular

network accept that Kareen, with her status as mother to the Prince and noblewoman in

her own right, remains incapable of wielding the kind of political clout that could

protect Gregor over the next sixteen years. Cordelia's actions will bend, then explode

those confines, transforming the mother from object to active subject through the

mediation of that ontological time-bomb, the womb machine.

the womb machine

Cordelia's hybrid Other-gender is something she uses as a weapon, but her

sword is a scalpel: the medical technology Cordelia authorizes onto Barrayar through

her own fiat. Identified with the uterine replicator, yet embedded within the

Vorkosigans and their patriarchal societal structure, Cordelia lives in the nexus of two

mutually incompatible paradigms (a quite monstrous habitation). She is able to

externalise both into the machine womb when, due to a politically motivated attack that

mutates her developing embryo, Cordelia's own womb is transplanted to the uterine replicator. While in this everted state her cyborg nature is most concretely manifest; Cordelia's roles as galactic explorer and planet-mapper shift arenas from new planets and spaceships into a political resistance located in the sewers conducting her rescue effort, the deep crevasses of Vorkosigan land where she flees with the child-Emperor, and the hidden machine gestating her unborn child. Conflict gathers around Cordelia as she enters explicitly into that third place, holding both a masculine-coded agency and the feminine ability to birth change into being through the multiple ontologies enabled by her cyborg womb.

The coming of advanced weapons technology transformed Barrayar in a generation, ensuring that its military becomes even more powerful than it already was during the pre-galactic Time of Isolation. This weapons-based technological revolution only solidified class stratifications, reinforcing the Vor nobility's position as top predators on the planet, enabling them to employ guerrilla tactics (techtics?) to fight off interplanetary incursions onto their territory, but locking the social strata into their rigorous caste structures, now further imbalanced by the technological divide assigned to existing gender privilege. Since the previous technological advances benefited only the already-prosperous, there was no reason to suppose this tech-advance would do anything but widen that gender-privilege gap. Although the next technological innovation introduced to Barrayar had no intrinsic associations with warfare, their provenance as disputed adherents with no mouthpiece or spokesperson – silent refugees, in effect – makes these seventeen uterine replicators a product of war as well.

The confusion surrounding this initial shipment shows their powerlessness through their objectification, which perception gates them through military constraints:

> The medtech smiled sourly. "We're returning these to the senders."
>
> Vorkosigan walked around the pallet. "Yes, but what are they?"
>
> "All your bastards," said the medtech.
>
> Cordelia, catching the genuine puzzlement in Vorkosigan's voice, added, "They're uterine replicators, um, Admiral. Self-contained, independently-powered – they need servicing, though – "
>
> "Every week," agreed the medtech, viciously cordial. He held up a data disk. "They sent you instructions with them."
>
> Vorkosigan looked appalled. "What the hell am I supposed to do with them?" (*CH* 166)

As previously discussed, Barrayar's military patriarchy responds best when onslaughts occur along established lines of attack. Neither the mother nor the reproductive body are even recognisable as sites of unrest, situated as they are within the lines of socialised passivity and control. But when the mother's identity is partially held in the machine womb, she returns to a worrisomely potent physical agency while retaining her identity as mother. No longer stayed by the metabolic exigencies of the pregnant body, the pregnant woman adds the machine womb *to* her body, widening her ontological reach to include it; although her physical markers shift, everted into the uterine replicator, the pregnant woman's subjective identification does not.

The uterine replicator removes the dangers of childbirth from the mother and is also able to clean out genetic mutation, long a source of trouble on isolated, inbred Barrayar. By removing the danger of deleterious mutations and making clear the parents' equal roles during conception, the uterine replicator removes the strain of blame for mutation, culturally placed in the woman's body, as well as the full brunt of the physical dangers of childbearing. By changing the limits of the woman's self, the replicator externalises a previously well-hidden process and the ideologies that went with it, making process and product luridly visible through a literal estrangement of the creative womb from the woman's body. Woman-introduced and quickly woman-accepted, the replicator mediates more and more of the aspects of reproduction; embryonic matrix, the machine womb births Barrayar into its future. However, *Cordelia's Honor* retains a curious silence about the potential dangers of this externalization, choosing instead to give the replicator a single shade of meaning:

> Captain Vaagen and Dr. Henri stood sterile-garbed and waiting, beyond the operating table. Next to them sat the portable uterine replicator, a metal and plastic canister half a meter tall, studded with control panels and access ports. The lights on its sides glowed green and amber. Cleaned, sterilized, its nutrient and oxygen tanks re-charged and ready... Cordelia eyed it with profound relief. (396)

Bujold clearly positions the uterine replicator as home and health, the advent of a technological salvation. By doing so, she gives Cordelia the ability to change history. But

she also denies the machine womb the myriad possibilities and polyvalences opened by Cordelia's own dissonant advent in-system.

In *Lost in Space*, feminist science fiction scholar Marleen Barr discusses in detail the dangers of letting the womb out of the body: for Barr, the womb machine signals "a future stage of modern technology's cooption of women's reproductive power" (82), patriarchal control "blurring womb and word" into a mechanically-stifled silence (91). In *Cordelia's Honor* these issues go almost unremarked by both protagonist and writer; for Cordelia the replicators are a part of her cultural heritage, and Bujold, normally quite willing to put ambiguities into her work, leaves this artefact no possible inflection but good. It is possible to tie Cordelia's unconcern over the replicators' history to her exemplification of Beta Colony's gender-neutral professional distribution, considering that her own Captaincy is unexceptional (and especially when said genders include hermaphrodites), but "[a]ssignment by aptitude test" (*CH* 272) is Cordelia's only reference to said distribution. Bujold's own silence is rather more revelatory; the uterine replicator's continued validation is an unusual singularity in an otherwise polyphonic text, and one of the strongest indicators of its importance to the novels' project of subversion through reproductive technology as vector for feminine agency. Bujold's authorial agency passes almost unnoticed, manifesting itself in silence and evasion instead of transparently violent assertions of position. This delocalised structuring of the replicators as always and only beneficial vectors allows access into their importance to the project of the text – indeed, signals the presence of a project through the very absence of heteroglossia. Far from being neutral, the uterine replicator locates the

reading of Cordelia's subsequent empire-destroying action, channelling its interpretation along axes of destruction for the sake of birthing new life, and violence for the sake of positive, transformative change.

The central question for Barr and Bujold returns to agency: who controls the mechanically-mediated processes of reproduction on Barrayar? Who owns the womb machine? Barr insists that mechanical means and models of reproduction dehumanize the woman, making her a body with parts and nothing else: "she is victimized by the institutionalized power to deny her the control of her own body" (84), decoupling body from agency through state-sponsored control of a mechanised reproductive process. This commodification, the reduction of woman to tool, slate or receptacle rented out to the highest bidder, is something Barr sources in patriarchal control of reproductive technologies. Deprived of what little agency her personhood lent her, the woman descends even further, disintegrating into stifled inhumanity until destruction is her only possible language, death her only possible position: she sees "murder as an appropriate offensive weapon against those who wish to separate motherhood from female control" (Barr 88). Bujold certainly validates the alignment of mother and murder, but addresses its power-reft obverse only through near-silent parallelism, aligning Alys and Cordelia during their time in the capital, naming both heroic for their courage under fire, but assigning agency and power only to Cordelia. Bujold's dissolution of that tight knot of affinities, the silencing of the replicator's polyvocality, translates to a straitened singleness instead of the ontological instabilities present within

a resonating locus of uncertain meanings; although stringently undeclared, the uterine replicator's representation signals a deliberate turn toward its liberating possibilities.

Significantly, Bujold repeatedly notes that the replicators arrive on-planet under Cordelia's aegis. Initially, the uterine replicators are a bewildering embarrassment: Aral has no idea what to do with them, and his military cohorts are not interested in their contents; even the chief surgeon immediately asks, "But why not just flush them?" (*CH* 168). It is Cordelia who requires the reception of the hybrid wombs as they are, refusing to silence the mothers' rapes or destroy their genetically-validated evidence. It is Cordelia who takes the replicators in. Bujold shifts the woman-machine conflation into another register by putting a woman's hands at the replicators' controls from the moment of their arrival in the narrative and on-planet. Thereafter, the replicator's importance spreads in parallel with Cordelia's increasing influence on Barrayan policy; both birth each other into a paradigm-altering authority protected in its infancy by being feminine – hidden, because liminal. This tech-mediated ascendancy marks the embryonic presence of Barr's "feminist utopian dream" (83) instead of a "patriarchal biological tyranny" (88) or the "man's machine" (87); on Barrayar, it is the woman who controls reproductive technology, and attempts to remove her reproductive control result in death. For Bujold, and for her readers, it becomes difficult to see the replicators any other way. Barr's imagined agency comes at the end of the woman's reduction from body into nothingness, functionalities all removed and silenced by patriarchal control. Bujold posits the agency without the reduction, through the wartime mediation of the womb machine. Without that singularity of value, the goodness of the uterine replicator,

Bujold's reinscriptive project falters; however, without myriad possibilities, the destabilising power of the cyborg drains away. In the climactic scene of *Cordelia's Honor*, Cordelia and Sergeant Bothari will locate but not resolve this significant instability, ontologies and identities flickering across already-questioned boundaries, widening the nexus of the cyborg's irresolute multiplicity to include the formerly impossible.

Seen from the ground, the uterine replicators' arrival on-planet acts as more of a mutagen than a simple lever; the replicators do not reinforce so much as they transmute. Despite their overt associations with war and bastardry, no one recognizes the replicators as an infection, an infiltration of the next wave of military-development-induced technological change that will transform the planet. The uterine replicators have no one to speak for them until Cordelia claims them, using the cover of Aral's Vor military-bred name. The replicators' disregarded, noncombatant status renders the devices functionally invisible to the vast part of the Barrayan military complex; only a few of the medical personnel demonstrate any professional interest in what is seen as primarily a women's matter, and therefore nothing to do with the current contingent of politicos and policymakers within the increasingly unsettled capital city. This functional invisibility is the replicators' way in, their way past the vigilance and surveillance guarding the state as it stands from any sort of paradigm shift. Within their armoured matrices lie the quiet beginnings of a machine-mediated agency: a "feminist biological self-determination" (Barr 88) in silent *utero* within the machine womb, poised for the imminent disruption of its birth.

mother-murder

"Cyborg gender," says Haraway, "is a local possibility taking a global vengeance" ("Manifesto" 100). Upon hearing that the child will be deformed, Aral's father Count Piotr, bastion of the conservatives, pleads with Cordelia to abort; when she chooses the uterine replicator instead he utterly rejects both her and it. When the uterine replicator holding Cordelia's unborn son is taken hostage by would-be dictator Vordarian, it precipitates a union of all three socially rejected things – womb, woman, and womb-machine – into a weapon. Cordelia's eventual victory is made explicit through the symbolic castration of Vordarian's execution, accomplished through the liminalities of woman-unperson and the free-floating dissociation of incipient psychosis, and attempted because of the abjected womb and its unfathomable contents. Cordelia's greatest moment of power is a direct result of her maternal instinct; in this moment she unites and distorts the idea of mother, "act[ing] in opposition to the image of woman as mother and nurturer" (Barr 88) even as her primary motive is to save her unborn son.

By freeing the physical body of the woman from the dangers of childbirth, the uterine replicator already restores through its very existence a measure of agency to the mother on Barrayar which she did not previously possess. It makes her simultaneously able to bear a child and a sword. Cordelia's pregnancy will result in a mutated son, the next pivot of societal change, which possibility is held within the multiply transgressive nature of Vordarian's beheading as she retrieves her unborn child and ends the Pretendership with one well-placed swordcut. Vordarian's removal of the uterine replicator carrying her son Miles can be equated to removal of Cordelia's agency and

power, and it mediates a specific transformation in her: she is at her angriest, her most vengeful and her most powerful in pursuit of her son. For Cordelia in this moment, as for Barr in her own text, "the proper definition of mother becomes synonymous with death and destruction" (Barr 88). Although she describes herself as psychotically disconnected in that moment, Cordelia is the acting agent throughout, extending her reach through the replicator and Bothari to effect what looks like a symbolic castration of patriarchy through Vordarian's beheading.

The link to Bothari is quiet but crucial, its importance understated but eminently demonstrable. Bothari's psychoses move him from the contemplation of murder to its accomplishment with joy; when he tells Cordelia that he has no way of knowing when it's right to kill, it has only a partial foundation in the military memory-wipe he has been forced to undergo. Cordelia uses all those disruptions, reinventing him as her "right arm" (*CH* 564) even as his memory loss incorporates the incomplete reinscription Cordelia barely escaped on Beta Colony into his own already-damaged psyche. She recognises his scapegoat function, and goes into battle knowing he channels her potential for psychotic violence alongside his own monstrous killing rage. But Cordelia explicitly links herself to Bothari well before he follows her into the capital: "She and Bothari were twins, right enough, two personalities separately but equally crippled by an overdose of Barrayar" (*CH* 497). Even during his state-imposed amnesia Bothari is aware enough of his own distress to comment on it, articulating a lacunae-filled, inchoate self: "There's a great deal of my life I can't remember very well. It's like I'm all... *patchy*" (*CH* 528). Cordelia coopts his monstrous identity, not by erasing it but by

interpolating her own will into his. During their three-person invasion of the capital

city, it becomes a laying on of hands that encompasses his killer instinct within her own.

Cordelia effects her transformation through destruction, several times over, in

the central confrontation of the double-novel arc. When she and her invasion force

(herself, Sergeant Bothari, and her female bodyguard Droushnakovi) are captured by

Vordarian's forces, Bujold makes clear during their confrontation that Vordarian is the

personification of all Cordelia wishes to overcome:

> "What have you done with my son, Vordarian?"
>
> Vordarian said through his teeth, "An outworlder frill will never gain
>
> power on Barrayar by scheming to give a mutant the Imperium. That, I
>
> guarantee." (*CH* 549)

In one sentence Vordarian unites all the fears of the Barrayan patriarchy in Cordelia's

captured presence, equating mutant, alien and woman ("frill," with all its echoes of

ornamental inconsequentiality) with the idea of chaotic disruption. He gloats about his

ability to destroy all of this while Kareen, Emperor Gregor's mother, watches in silence.

But it is Kareen who sites the beginnings of the revolution, and not in spite of but

because of her identities as impotent, captive mother. Cordelia's goal is to get through to

Kareen, not Vordarian, precisely because news of her son will be what galvanises

Kareen into action: "When I see Kareen, you are a dead man, Vordarian" (*CH* 548).

The rejection of passivity, previously demonstrated through Alys' experience of

pregnancy, is demonstrably also a desire for agency. Kareen's response to Cordelia's

presence shows that Kareen's access to agency comes through her identity as mother, as

Cordelia hands her Gregor's shoe, proof that he is alive:

> "We have not failed," Cordelia whispered, meeting Kareen's eyes. *Now.*
>
> She lifted the shoe from the table, and stretched out her arm with it; Kareen's
>
> eyes widened. She darted forward and grabbed it. Cordelia's hand spasmed
>
> like a dying runner's giving up the baton in some moral relay race. Fierce
>
> certainty bloomed like fire in her soul. *I have you now, Vordarian.* Kareen
>
> examined the shoe with passionate intensity, turning it in her hands.
>
> Vordarian's brows rose in bafflement, then he dismissed Kareen from his
>
> attention and turned to his liveried guard commander. (*CH* 549)

Cordelia's certainty is grounded in the text's epistemological outworkings of its central

possibility, acting within but incomprehensible to the extant locus of authority: at the

centre of her abnegation Cordelia is utterly certain of her victory, not in spite but

because of Kareen's restored motherhood. The length of this descriptive passage, one of

the few in a dialogue-heavy action sequence, only underscores its importance. Bujold

presents Kareen's restoration to independent action as easily read by Cordelia, but

totally and completely opaque to Vordarian, clear demonstration of the

incomprehensibility of both Cordelia's strategy and Kareen's response in the eyes of the

patriarchal elite. That Vordarian turns aside to consult a military leader only drives

home the finality of his fatal incomprehension: he seeks command and clarity from

recognisable lines of power and authority, and ignores the mother-murderer being

birthed behind him. Kareen's final action is a declaration of utter loathing for forcible

reinscription, directed at the existence and continuity of all that Vordarian represents:

> Cordelia read the murderous undertones ringing like a bell; Vordarian,
>
> apparently, only heard the breathiness of some girlish grief. He glanced at
>
> the shoe, not grasping its message, and shook his head as if to clear it of
>
> static. "You'll bear another son someday," he promised her [Kareen] kindly.
>
> "Our son."
>
> *Wait, wait, wait,* Cordelia screamed inside.
>
> "Never," whispered Kareen. She stepped back beside the guard in the
>
> doorway, snatched his nerve disruptor from his open holster, aimed it point-
>
> blank at Vordarian, and fired. (*CH* 550)

As she shoots, Kareen is rejecting both him and his son, declaring her body active and

off-limits; Vordarian's incomprehension of feminine agency as coded through

motherhood is reemphasised through his treatment of motherhood as casual, forcible

reinscription. Where Cordelia hears a death knell, Vordarian hears only static; Kareen's

renewed agency remains unintelligible to him. Brilliant but mistimed, Kareen's actions

still fall short of her goal: the guard skews her aim, another kills her. But in that moment

Cordelia seizes the opportunity to pull Vordarian from Pretender to hostage, headed for

the uterine replicator containing her own son. Kareen's agency, encoded in the illegible

script of Gregor's shoe and gated through Cordelia, opens the way for Vordarian's

downfall through the agencies coded through both mother and machine.

Cordelia's multiple attacks on Barrayan patriarchy include Vordarian's execution, but extend beyond his immediate demise. The execution fits the narrative-fulfilling, science fiction plot-arc approved, climactic world-changing event: violent, abrupt, aggressively transgressive, Cordelia's hands take that instant to begin a new age in blood and fire. She steps into the hero's role, taking it on with Bothari in their most symbiotic moment, prefigured in his earlier dispatching of Vorrutyer under the influence of her words. Inhabiting the male body and figure through her literal embodiment in Sergeant Bothari, the sword an extension of her reach, Cordelia becomes the iconic hero the story requires.

This is the public front.

The second attack is the one that alters not only Barrayan history but its future, like a seed planted in the small space between concrete squares – or a very small amount of genetic material, transposed into the end of a sequence of DNA, that nonetheless permanently expands the gene pool (Margulis' acquisition of possibilities) by changing cellular behaviour. The uterine replicator, present at Cordelia's other hand throughout Vordarian's execution, is a steel shell around a possibility, an unviewed space in which altered versions of genealogy can take root, form and eventually be birthed into that equally altered world. Itself marginalia in the official histories of the ruling Vor, a historical footnote not worthy of promotion into the main body of the text, the uterine replicator becomes the ultimate infiltrator, a virus without peer. Humble and ignored, it slowly extends its influence throughout the system without its host's conscious knowledge until the host body itself is altered through and through, each cell

holding and birthing new generations across all its systems. Out of the mechanical

womb comes a society unrecognizable to its current inhabitants; this agent of change

mutates as it invades, flourishing beneath and between the official histories until it alters

the grounds and subjects those histories sought to control. "This is not just literary

deconstruction," says Haraway, "but liminal transformation" ("Manifesto" 34).

By trading in a singular certainty for free-falling subjective dislocation, Cordelia

is able to mediate a staggering change into being: from a few possibilities the woman's

role on Barrayar expands into a web of difficult dependencies and contingencies. Not

freed, but no longer sessile, mother becomes agent within her confounded example. But

in the same moment self dissolves into strangeness; Cordelia's mission succeeds as she

transgresses the limits of who and what she was, losing coherence even as she sheds

constraint.

iv. the ambiguity of abjection

The biologically-embodied, machine-mediated nexus of social revolution that

Cordelia uses to displace Barrayar away from patriarchy has its origins not within

widely accepted innovation or massive regime change, but within the small and

disregarded, within the openly reviled – "un de ces violentes et obscures révoltes" that

Julia Kristeva named *abjection* (9).[13] The bodily violation of Miles' forced removal from

Cordelia's womb combines with Vordarian's will to power to place Cordelia within a

paradox: to save her son she must accept the military mode she has so far resisted,

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[13] "one of those violent and obscure revolts" (translation mine)

become mother-murder. Moved outside the accepted borders of her constructed self, she must either act or implode.

The way Cordelia chooses to return to the capital exemplifies the pattern of growth of the feminine voice within the world of Barrayar as well as the text itself: on the advice of her fellow female warrior, she chooses the disregarded sewer line that opens into the palace where Vordarian holds her son hostage, contingent on her husband's good behaviour. Vordarian expects a rescue attempt; he is not expecting Cordelia. Through her refusal to act in accordance with its rules Cordelia codes herself as unbounded by both societal and narrative convention; "[f]rontière sans doute, l'abjection est surtout l'ambiguïté" (Kristeva 17).[14] Cordelia functions in the liminalities of both her cultures in this venture, rendering herself illegible to Vordarian while remaining partly hidden from others – like herself. In the caves and sewers, the inaccessible mountain passes, in the covert operations and sequestered rooms she carries her plans to fruition, birthing the rebellion through her refusal to accept the limits placed on her possible actions. She uses both crevasses and drainpipes, the humble byways and impenetrable caves, to get her to the capital, where her sword and voice can and will speak most loudly. In this powerful decentering of the hurt secret body-places, in what Kristeva has termed "le pouvoir minable du féminin" (198),[15] Cordelia's patterns of resistance source themselves in the dissociating abject, whether geographical, biological or ontological. Kristeva's statement positions this *pouvoir*

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[14] "without doubt a frontier, abjection is above all ambiguity" (translation mine).
[15] "the miserable power of the feminine" (translation mine). The adjective *minable* has no direct translation in English, but can be approximated as an amalgam of *miserable*, *mean* (in the sense of *negligible*) and *pitiful.*

minable directly in the centre of *abjection,* sourced in the same place of rejection from the *soi-disant* self, and taking its power in the same way – not through forcing a definition upon the subject, but in forcing the subject to attempt a definition of the self located away from or outside the abjected thing. Of course, rejecting something positions the self in relationship to it, which is where the approach to the abject begins; disgusted, yet unable to completely dissociate from the rejected abject, the subject must recognise the artificiality of her own borders.

Kristeva's confounding of the abject with the subjugated object becomes increasingly evident within Cordelia's mission to retrieve the uterine replicator containing her son, overlain on the Freudian implications of castration implicit in Vordarian's beheading. Through Piotr, Vordarian and even Aral, who forbids her to act when they hear news of Miles' capture, Barrayar sees her as merely a gestator, a tool, a humble and tender bomb carrying the seeds of a vitally important family tree. The mutagenic attack on Miles and her subsequent refusal to abort turns Cordelia into an active threat to Barrayar's genetic supremacy and untarnished military excellence, which leads to Piotr (and tacitly Aral) denying her any agency or function beyond the biological one of mother. Cordelia's decapitation of Vordarian is her answer to these biologically-based reductions of her powerful polyvalent alterity, but in this climactic moment her own ontology shifts, blurring into something she also considers alien. Right after Kareen's murder Cordelia enters a state she calls "floating" (*CH* 552), torching the entire hall behind her as she heads for Miles. Her scorched-earth strategy emerges concomitant with a near-complete dissociation, sourced in rage and explicitly linked to

revenge against the injustices carried out against the women in the novel: *"Burn, you. Burn for Kareen. Pile a death-offering to match her courage and agony, blazing higher and higher.* […] She felt as though her body were floating, light as air. *Is this how Bothari feels, when he kills?"* (*CH* 552). Already everted through the uterine replicator she has come to reclaim, already linked to Bothari through their paralleled damage and servitude, Cordelia extends her reach further by appropriating Bothari's hand on the sword:

> "Bothari." He was at her side instantly. "Pick up that sword." He did so. She set the replicator on the floor and laid her hand briefly atop his, wrapped around the hilt. "Bothari, execute this man for me, please," Her tone sounded weirdly serene in her own ears, as if she'd just asked Bothari to pass the butter. Murder didn't really require hysterics.
>
> "Yes, Milady," Bothari intoned, and lifted the blade. His eyes gleamed with joy.
>
> "What?" yelped Vordarian in astonishment. "You're a Betan! You can't do –"
>
> The flashing stroke cut off his words, his head, and his life. (*CH* 554)

In her Afterword, Bujold shapes this climactic moment in terms of ultimate sacrifice for the sake of the unborn child, calling her novel "a book about the price of becoming a parent, particularly but not exclusively a mother" (595). Kristeva might refer to it as the moment where the repugnant, inseparable abject, in this case the violence leading to the deliberate taking of a human life, definitively ceases to be outside the grounds of the self. In this abjected moment the non-object or rejected thing becoming not only possible

but integral: "Dans le symptôme, l'abject m'envahit, je le deviens. Par la sublimation, je le tiens. L'abject est bordé du sublime" (19).[16] Kristeva's reversal and juxtaposition of *sublimation* and *sublime* point out abjection's major dynamic, a familiar move in light of Haraway and Margulis: the taking in of the contradictory, the unthinkable, and the formerly hostile, recuperating them in the recreation of the self. From the giving up of her precious ethical considerations to a literal incorporation of learned savagery, Cordelia must rewrite her identities, continually redrawing the borders of selfhood against erosion without and within. She finally finds herself incapable of doing so.

According to Kristeva, Cordelia's psychotic break is the surest sign that she is approaching the rupture and invasion of the boundaries of the known self-object. Cordelia achieves her ultimate victory through rendering the dominant power into "le comble de l'abjection"[17] (Kristeva 11), leaving Vordarian, and the ideology he represented, a decapitated corpse instead of crowned emperor. In doing so, Cordelia derails the primary system of the passing of the crown – murder, itself of long historical basis on Barrayar – even as she employs it, gating the transfer of power through her own alien and hybrid self. But those former borders have become suspect: in the moment of her laying of hands over Bothari's, as they swing the blade ending male-dominant mode of rule on Barrayar, Cordelia achieves mastery and victory through ultimate transgression at the cost of her self-knowledge. She no longer recognizes the

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[16] "In the symptom, the abject invades me, I become it. By that sublimation, I hold it. The abject is bordered by the sublime" (translation mine).

[17] "the apex [height] of abjection" (translation mine). The tension between the ultimate achievement inherent in the word "comble" against the abasement always present in the word "abjection" is a deliberate juxtaposition on Kristeva's part.

hand or the person of Vordarian's executioner, yet is multiply present in all the abject objects which answer to that description: she feels dissociated but is present, her agency ascendant in the uterine replicator, in the madness, in the female bodies, in the hand on the blade. All of these carry her rage, become her *who* and her *why*. She again becomes illegible, indecipherable even to herself, "une renaissance contre et avec l'abjection"[18] (Kristeva 39), by allowing expression of her violent, murderous desire and breaking the final barrier between herself and Barrayar even as she wrests the entire planet into a new ideological system bound into the womb machine. Cordelia's rebellion is small but potent, unleashed from a hard-won space within the political chaos of the burning city, midwifing babies and corpses and murderers into being within the same day. Her revolution sites itself in interstices, along the cracks and gutters of the social power structures: extant in the liminal space shared by both outlaws and pioneers.

The use of the uterine replicators is in one sense a maintenance of the chronologically-organised system of inheritance and progeny – these children are not clones, but true children of their parents, born out of machine-mediated relation between two separate genomes. But the arrival and dispersal of the replicators themselves follows not just a rhizomatic but a genuinely transgenic pattern of spread: they arrive unregarded, so lowly they are ignored, under the guarded passage provided by another alien unknown. And then they proliferate, wildly, womb machines as ideological war machines: the children born of these replicators will themselves birth a new Barrayar into being. The replicators' influence makes itself felt through the

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[18] "a rebirth against and with abjection" (translation mine).

subterranean, disregarded channels of "women's business," the woman's game Cordelia

references with grim respect in *Mirror Dance*. Within less than two generations, the

abjected mechanical womb has gained planetwide prominence, not through the

lingeringly patriarchal channels of state, but through the uterine replicators' widespread

acceptance into Barrayan cultures, at the levels of feminine daily life and long-term,

genetically-based social engineering. Three decades after the events of *Cordelia's Honor*,

Cordelia discusses the central importance of the womb machines on Barrayar with her

second son Mark, in one of Bujold's clearest statements on the replicators' enduring

political importance:

> "The whole Vor system is founded on the women's game, underneath. The
>
> old men in government councils spend their lives arguing against or
>
> scheming to find this or that bit of off-planet military hardware. Meanwhile,
>
> the uterine replicator is creeping in past their guard, and they aren't even
>
> conscious that the debate that will fundamentally alter Barrayar's future is
>
> being carried on right now among their wives and daughters… The Vor
>
> system is about to change on its blindest side, the side that looks to – or fails
>
> to look to – its foundation. Another half generation from now, it's not going
>
> to know what hit it."
>
> Mark almost swore her calm academic voice concealed a savagely
>
> vengeful satisfaction. But her expression was as detached as ever. (*Mirror*
>
> *Dance* 296-97)

Bujold's consistent concern with modes of embodiment as a) representative of alternate modes of being (ontologies) and b) as explorations of how far norms can push in her worlds before they shift demonstrates the power of an available alterity through the working out of story, with a notable lack of polemic or exposition. Her employment of familiar science fiction tropes actually skews them past repair by way of her subversive casting; using characters considered weak – that is, not abled-bodied and male – within the Barrayan caste system, Bujold demonstrates how these embodied alterities are not only able to survive but to prosper in their roles, not despite their marginalised characteristics, but because of them. The replicator's introduction permanently transforms the methodologies and ideologies underlying the birthing process, beginning (like any useful tool) to dismantle the entrenched disparities between the two genders on-planet. The survival and widespread preponderance of these cyberparents, and specifically the cybernetic matrilines, argue strongly for a viable and highly competitive idea whose time and place have come. That Bujold's slyly subversive space operas have set records for both awards and sales would argue something remarkably similar for her work in her time and place.

v. ontogenesis

"Transformations are effected by virus vectors carrying a new developmental code," says Haraway ("Manifesto" 37). A vector is a carrier, a method of propagating a message into some potentially hostile new host. It is a way in. Cordelia Vorkosigan is such an agent of mecha-mediated, ontological change, moving from the silenced edges

of the page into the very heart of the action, taking the male-coded warrior's place and creating room for Othered women through her very presence in-system. The revolution she brings seems small at first: seventeen uterine replicators carrying the bastard children of rape and war. But these machine wombs will write the planet's future, reassigning agency through their technological mediation and birthing a new paradigm of woman-beingness into the patriarchy's primal foundation. Cordelia's centrality within the narrative ruptures the border of misogyny, eliding monovocal machismo with the braveries found in traditionally female-coded spaces and bodies. "Cyborg writing is about the power to survive, not on the basis of original innocence, but on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other," says Haraway ("Manifesto" 95). In this feminist fabulation Cordelia is a record of wrong and a rewriting of extant codes; encoded in the alien presence of the uterine replicator, she is author and mother and instigator, the revolution incarnate within her machine flesh.

3. Internexionality: Hybrid Agency and Eternal Absence in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition.*

> "I, insofar as I have an 'I' – this gets rather metaphysical, you see –"
> William Gibson, *Neuromancer*

After the warily murderous, partially dissociated iterations of cyborg agency in Bujold's text, William Gibson's two homophonic protagonists both evince a far stronger conscious melding with the digital world. Already cyborg-identified through physical association with their productive machines, *Neuromancer's* Case and *Pattern Recognition's* Cayce Pollard are also digitally enhanced, communicating with their fellow netizens primarily through codes in translation between human and machine, establishing identities only to escape them, eliding geographic boundaries even as they establish them. However, both remain intensely aware of their embodiment even as the body's borders fade out of the text. *Neuromancer* posits that cyberspace contains a possibility of hope perpetually located elsewhere, while *Pattern Recognition* presents the reunion of soul and body as a reclamation, privileging the body as the site of a longed-for singularity of identity. But the strain of working with irretrievably hybridised protagonists crosses with this desire for singularity to produce an ironically polyphonous text; far from glorying in N-ghost Case's technoecstatic escape, *Pattern Recognition* marks cyberspace's eternal absence as the end result of violent harm and grievous loss, inscribing the rift between self and body as something to be mourned even as it affirms the systemic presence of the networked machine in, around and

through iteration of the self. Caught halfway between embodiment and erasure, it is Cayce Pollard's intermediary position that most clearly situates the dynamic equilibria between thing and self, the human and the nonhuman. More than Case, it is Cayce who locates the intersection of ideologies and monsters, her diffuse borders indicative of the physically-located subject's hesitancy to valorise its own objectification and disappearance, even as it recognises that both are well underway.

THE SHAPE OF THE ENTHUSIAST [19]

William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) defined the literary interpretation of an emergent digital age, giving it both name and habitation: *cyberspace*, as opposed to meatspace or facetime; the repeated examples of body modification subsumed into the far larger modification that enabled protagonist Case to jack in, direct connection to cyberspace and the kickstart for the cyberpunk vision of the early 1980s. Case's realities are defined by the neon-lit glow of some version of Japan, and the absence-otherwhere ghostworld Gibson first termed *cyberspace*. Within the loose alliances and affiliations mapped out between local mafia, cyberspace jockeys and body-modified warriors, Case works to neutralise the agency of the AI named Wintermute; something else ends up happening instead. In this constantly-desiring-elsewhere, *Neuromancer's* bodies become passive sites for modification, sigils and trademarks running across flesh, flesh itself vanishing into code. While the novel privileges the jacked-in body as the one with agency, *Neuromancer* does not present cyberspace as a place of desire or a place *to* desire;

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[19] All subtitles are taken from *Pattern Recognition*. I have, however, specified which *TRANS*— I have chosen to address.

at best, by novel's end Case achieves a kind of migitated success in the knowledge that somewhere beyond his physical reach, in the endless iterations of reality configured within cyberspace, he has both son and lover. The image flashes by as he "punch[es] past the scarlet tiers of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Association" (*Neuromancer* 270), a moment's revelation lost forever in the streaming images that fill his field of vision. Case chases after a dream of reconciliation, even as he knows he will never attain that nonplace: it does not exist outside of cyberspace, which comes to paradoxically signify both nothingness and a lost perfection where body and soul are not just able, but willing to share the same ontological space. The hope held in cyberspace becomes, simultaneously, the promise and the perpetual absence of a perfection Case will never reach.

In *Deconstructing the Starships*, writer and critic Gwyneth Jones defines science fiction as "news from nowhere, not a report from the future but a parable for our times: a vision and a daydream and a warning" (15). In her figuration science fiction is at once a mirror and a window, a projection from what is into what we would like to believe. This impulse toward utopic – or dystopic – representation is an important one within the genre, allowing the writer to work out the ramifications of technologies within a society s/he can structure along the lines of projected or desired outcomes. Certainly this dynamic is evident in Bujold's Vorkosigan series, which is able to track increasing use of the uterine replicator on Barrayar as the spread of a quiet, planet-wide revolution. The idea of the parable is also a key to Gibson's handling of Case's final dissolution: there is no explicit judgement of his choices, and viable alternatives are not presented; however,

Gibson's final statement destroys any semblance of wholeness or resolution in that accomplishment, showing only destabilising and continued absences resulting in constant loss. Although I see no direct link between the actual plots of the two novels, I do think that *Pattern Recognition* picks up *Neuromancer*'s themes in an attempt to translate them into a readily identifiable context. In uniting genre conceits like computer-based metaphors to digital topics in a refiltered, but recognisable context, Gibson attempts to re-read his own work into a developing frontier – not only cyberspace, or even the projection of the self into cyberspace, but the situation of the body with regard to cyberspace. *Pattern Recognition* preserves science fiction's teleological concerns while falling outside the bounds of the genre, using real-world constructs to create its "mirror-world" reflections. While the online presence CayceP eventually tries to become Cayce Pollard again, to return to the world she once fled, Case does not jack out; he chooses instead to leave the linearity of time and the physical body, abandoning both in favour of the endless absence of cyberspace. Gibson's conclusion to *Pattern Recognition* points to a dyadic concept of positioning – this or that, 0 or 1 – but the tensions at the end of his narrative point to a continuing blur between online and offline selves.

 Pattern Recognition (2003) tracks the efforts of logo-sensitive advertising "cool-hunter" Cayce Pollard to find the maker, source of random pieces of a possibly-complete (or possibly in-progress) film, released exclusively in obscure online drop points and known only as the footage. The footage's devotees congregate faithfully together at their online forums, alternately building up a mytharc linking all its pieces

into a whole or else rendering each segment down for parts, looking for clues about when and where and who. Cayce is backed in her search for the maker by a loose series of alliances comprising transnational media entrepreneurs, fellow footageheads, and former dot-com geniuses, all with differing motivations, all either aiding her pilgrimage or hoping to capitalise on her faith in the maker's intrinsic meaningfulness in order to either enter the mystery or exploit the "most brilliant marketing ploy of this very young century" (*Pattern Recognition* 67). Unlike *Neuromancer*'s, *Pattern Recognition*'s own location lies within a readily identifiable moment, comprising industrialised or industrialising nations in the early twenty-first century, and centred primarily (though not exclusively) in the Western hemisphere. Cayce's story has a firm grounding in a recognisable reality, referencing brand names and historical moments with pinpoint accuracy even as it nails the pervasive sense of dread surrounding the possibility of sudden, violent death in the early part of the twenty-first century. Gibson's genre switch seems aimed at addressing the widening splits along the seams of the cyborg ontology, not coded into a future dystopia but broadcast instead through a cascade of signs familiar to his projected readership. Tearing along lines of previously established difference, the physicality of the technohybrid unravels and reknits itself throughout *Pattern Recognition*, restless within a locatable incarnation inextricably tied to the body's experience of the *avatar*, the body's flickering online presence.

The narrative proposes but does not support the hopeful idea that the maker, the footage, the footageheads and Cayce herself might be dreaming something different into being, ending discussion of the footage on an ambiguously capitalist note. In part, this

stance has a solid base in current economic realities, well illustrated by the nationless

imperialists – primarily incarnated in Hubertus Bigend "post-geographic" advertising

firm Blue Ant – which complicate Cayce's ethical position throughout her search. But

there seems to be no provision for nonbinary choices; Cayce must choose which of her

symbiotes to give up, ignoring how all of them are ineradicably intermingled. Gibson's

elision of the problematic complications of reassuming singularity into the dream of

Cayce and Parkaboy's romantic relationship does not erase them from the narrative; if

anything, he highlights the questions by leaving them unaddressed, unasked.

I do not suppose *Pattern Recognition* to be any sort of continuation from

Neuromancer; as stated elsewhere, this project on the whole understands its illegitimacy,

and has little to do with tracing lineages. Instead, I consider the novels as sites along a

congruent system of affinities, with similar trajectories that land in orthogonal places.

Neuromancer is arguably a rhizomatic text – it floats, disconnected from extant reality but

tenebrously linked to an extant cyberpunk dystopia the reader cannot see, coming from

an elsewhen-otherwhere formed by increasing social estrangement. *Pattern Recognition*

documents the rhizome's spread but presents it in the context of dystopia-now: sourced

in the remembered fall of the twin towers, the novel is inextricably linked to the

nightmare of the new millennium – that is, held within a specific time and place, even as

it references grievous bodily harm across decades and continents. However, these ties

which seem like roots change, chimera-like, shifting allegiances and origins upon closer

inspection. The bodily disappearance of a biological father, sourced in these ashes, is not

only mimicked at every turn, but that central absence is itself constantly challenged

through the mediating presence of memory: film footage, online messages, or EVP –

messages from the dead across blank tape, the voices of ghosts across time. Within these

areas of uncertain ontology (fictions of memory, history, online narrative recreations)

the body's boundaries fog and diffuse; occluded by hardware and feed, arm's length

comes to mean – for those with access to it – digital connection across geopolitical

landscapes through the eversion of reach from arm to jack, one hand encompassing the

directive and directional click of a mouse or touchpad. Cayce and the empires she

represents deal primarily in the possibilities of networks, rhizomes without origins still

crossing paths or seemingly linked in parallel, yet never seem comfortable with their

outworking. Although his characters explore the ramifications of dual citizenship across

digital and physical borders, Gibson's narrative discourages validation of the

geographically emancipated body, and questions its avatar more thoroughly yet, even

as this hybrid entity makes itself at home in cyberspace, going out to inhabit and

become.

SIGINT

In *Pattern Recognition* identity takes on puretext forms in the digital otherwhere

known as cyberspace. Cayce's favoured nexus-spot is a forum called

Fetish:Footage:Forum.net, which is primarily dedicated to discussion of the footage.

Unlike clothing, words string themselves into sentences, simultaneously more

prescriptive and less demanding on Cayce's physical ontological space; they define but

do not (yet) encroach, and therefore evade her autonomic avoidance-response to

semiotic contamination. The interactions documented in the forum demonstrate kinship

and identity sublimating from national into ideological federations, transposed from the

geographic onto the metaphysical; within this elsewhen otherwhere anyone who

follows the Footage is granted immediate citizenship. Individuals arrive from nowhere

in particular, array themselves in a panoply of words, and group themselves in

federations formed more along philosophical lines than geographic situation. Each

thread documents the often-combative production of a line of thought, while each

successive post delineates the poster's salient psychic features, even as the flesh recedes

into insignificance; primary communications entail email, bypassing both face and voice

in favour of the written word, accessible anywhere there's a signal to pick up. Unlike a

physical first impression, the development of an online identity is firmly under the

control of the dominant personality; the first posts by the online avatars CayceP,

Parkaboy and Mama Anarchia at F:F:F.net demonstrate a high congruence to their

offline interaction within the novel. Mama Anarchia's words in particular set up an

immediately antagonistic, high-theory-jargon laden attack on interpretations of the

footage, which corresponds so precisely to her offline characterisation that her identity

is evident several hundred pages away from its revelation. These forum posts intertwine

with, echo and often overshadow what happens on the other side of the monitor as their

generators squabble over interpolations of meaning into the footage, a text without

landmarks or sequence, a canon which does not just allow but invites the

knowledgeable community's endless speculation, interpretation and reinscription.

Cayce calls F:F:F.net "a way now, approximately, of being at home. The forum has become one of the most consistent places of her life, like a familiar café that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones" (5). Logging on to the forum is almost the first action the reader sees Cayce perform; the second, her ubiquitous pilates workout, locates her strongly within the bounds of the physical even as she twists herself into the machine known as the reformer, "a very long, very low, vaguely ominous and Weimar-looking piece of spring-loaded furniture" (*PR* 6). Taken sequentially, the two actions suggest Cayce's order of priority in securing her own ontological perimeters; taken together, the pilates seems to relocate her machine-mediated interactions into a somewhat alienating, very threatening piece of metal, which twists her into a series of set poses and positions her abruptly back into her body. The two activities present an imperfect juxtaposition, proffering Cayce Pollard and CayceP set channels of interaction within machine settings that ground Cayce in completely different ways, but return her to the body as a method of locating her subjective experience within an easily defined physical object. This reversal of Cayce's established sequence reads as a distrust of online mediation, a centralising action that comes from outside of her will: a preemptive privileging of embodied experience, even as Cayce reports a serious and increasing separation between body and subjectivity, a disconnect she labels "soul-lag." That disconnect is the distance between singularity and polyphony, character and narrative ensconced in the struggle of moving between zero and one.

The novel draws strong parallels between the establishment of online identities and the function of a primary offline semiotic tool: fashion. Although cultural perception of clothing tends to classify such concerns as varying shades of frivolous – as one commentator put it, "Who needs to worry about the Sudan when we've got John Galliano?" (O'Brien 37) – fashion does (in these fast times) require a remarkable eye for trend. However, the current speed of trend development can be taken as an indicator of supersaturation; in an interview regarding online blogging, independent designer Stanley Carroll stated his belief that "90-95% of trends are now artificially generated [...] the cultural environment we live in now doesn't really understand or allow self-expression," choosing the closed semiotics of branding instead. Interpersonal evaluation becomes an exercise in decoding signifiers encapsulated in cut, colour, pattern and especially visible tags; cross-cultural incomprehension becomes more severe the farther apart these aesthetic signifiers lie. The online discourse of the novel comes to mirror the subject's offline reshaping by transnational market forces; thus, Cayce's hypersensitivity to trademarks and logos translates as extreme ambivalence about their imposed, genericizing influence. Her minimalist aesthetic comes from her logo-based allergies, which enable her to do her job: the Michelin Man horrifies her, Tommy Hilfiger makes her recoil – not because of any inherent flaw in design, but because she finds the work either terrifying or nauseating, menacing or derivative, meaning translated into threat or nonsense.

Cayce's unmarked clothes are her reaction to this kind of psychic trauma, her response to the supersaturation of encoded meanings being forcibly reinscribed over her

identity, a denial and rejection of the prefabricated messages obscuring any statement

she cares to make. At no time throughout the text is fashion mere diversion or semiotic

blank; Cayce's own de-labelled clothing is fetishised throughout the novel, their ritual

denuding and nonetheless-noted provenances duly recorded through the text. Far from

being meaningless, within the first 25 pages of *Pattern Recognition* Cayce's clothes are

presented in terms of computer components (CPUs, or Cayce Pollard Units), as a

sporadically cultish "one-woman school of anti" (*PR* 9), and in her initial confrontation

with the antagonistic Dorotea, as evidence of Cayce's comprehensive mastery of the

semiotics of their field. Cayce's one statement – her only brand name – is the Rickard's

MA-1, the minutely-detailed reproduction flight jacket, a facsimile of decades of

American warfare; she calls the simulacrum "an act of worship."[20] Cayce wears the MA-

1 for reasons that match its provenance: "Cayce's MA-1 trumps any attempt at

minimalism, the Rickson's having been created by Japanese obsessives driven by

passions having nothing at all to do with anything remotely like fashion" (*PR* 11). Like

the footage – and, in a gradual disclosure that is one of the novel's strengths – like Cayce

herself, it is a record of damage, and Dorotea's sabotage of the MA-1 is a remarkably

well-placed psychic blow. Cayce's hypersensitivity to trademarks and logos translates to

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[20] In a fascinating demonstration of Cayce and Magda's conversation about artificially-established trends (see *PR* 88), Cayce's MA-1 has become available outside the pages of the novel. Although the Buzz Rickson's company exists, and does indeed manufacture fanatically precise reproductions of military jackets, the black MA-1 was not a part of their catalogue until after the publication of *Pattern Recognition*. The jacket is available for order at Buzz Rickson's official site, here: http://www.buzzricksons.jp/product/william_gibson-0001.html. There is also a brief English translation detailing its link to Gibson's novel: http://www.buzzricksons.jp/top.html. Gibson discusses his version of events in further detail on his blog: http://www.williamgibsonbooks.com/blog/2005_12_01_archive.asp.

a profound ambivalence about the power latent in their invocation and the transnational corporations responsible for their propagation, even as she is responsible for gating their identifying logos. Her partnership with the advertising firm Blue Ant brings these "tame pathologies" (*PR* 67) to the fore, wedding them to the attempt to find the maker even as Blue Ant attempts to incorporate her online persona into its vast and rapacious virtual presence.

The last important identity-production site also takes its meaning from its paradoxical lack of physically-static identifiers. Like Blue Ant president Bigend's accent, Cayce's aesthetic sense and F:F:F.net's online presence, the footage has no set basis in one reality. The footage becomes a sigil for the possibility of a nongeopolitical axis of emergence or ontological status for all those who hold access to the world wide web, allowing the circumvention of the nation-state as identifying logo, what Pheng Cheah calls "one of the few phenomena we associate most closely with death" ("Spectral Nationality" 226). The footage is tied to calamity, its emergence sourced within the violent removal of parents, health and normality melded to a modification of the physical body which effectively cuts the mind and body apart. The footage speaks to the netizens of F:F:F.net across every possible affiliation, carrying every disaster, every piece of rubble, the ruin and upset of passing from knowledge and presence into blank absence.

The footage is Cayce's sigil, a text without landmarks, without provenance and holding no immediately obvious message except "the perfectly revealed extent of her present loneliness" (*PR* 25). As CayceP, Cayce becomes a fervent participant in the

footagehead cult; her insights and interactions with the other footageheads at F:F:F.net

demonstrate a purity of longing sourced in her own experiences with absence,

disappearance and evanescent vanished bodies. As Bruno Latour puts it in *Nous n'avons*

jamais été modernes, "...en parcourant ces réseaux, nous ne reposons dans rien de

particulièrement homogène. Nous demeurons plutôt dans une infra-physique. Sommes-

nous immanents alors, force parmi d'autres, textes parmi d'autres, societé parmi

d'autres, étant parmi les étants?" (175).[21] The footage focuses Cayce's search for

meaning through its speechless, unlocated immanence, allowing Cayce's complex

relationships with her sensitivities, her employment and especially her vanished father

(that generative principle) to emerge, slowly, throughout the course of the narrative.

I read the footage as irresolute, and overtly chimeric: even as Bigend hails its

advent as an incredibly powerful marketing device, the footage also recites the

possibility of a nongeopolitical axis of emergence or ontological status for all those who

hold access to the world wide web, allowing the circumvention of nation-state as

identifying logo in favour of the previously mentioned ideological federations. The

markers usually used to pinpoint historical period – shoes, hair, the cut of the clothes,

the passing events – are absent, deliberately disappeared; all indicators for location –

landscapes, buildings, landmarks – have been elided or removed by the maker's hand.

Thus denuded of specificities, they become imbued with possible significance, the

footage and its two denizens representing at once all times and none, carrying all places

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[21] "in navigating through these networks, we do not rest in anything particularly homogenous. Rather, we remain in an infra-physical [state]. Are we then immanent, a force among others, texts among others, society among others, being among beings?" (translation mine).

and none, even as the maker holds one unknowable pair, place and moment locked

behind steel and bone. Like Cayce's mastery of the semiotics of fashion, the footage's

power lies in what it does not say, allowing others to read what they like, but never

confirming or denying their insight. This means the footage is paradoxically able to

speak to people across extant affiliations, its semantic field wide enough to carry the

ruin and reversal of every disaster, the rubble of passing from centred presence into

absence and chaos.

TRANS—{NATIONALITY}

The online discourse mirrors the body's reshaping by transnational market

forces, troubling the lines between brand-named bodies and manipulative online

identities. The company named Blue Ant (a possible reference to *Neuromancer*'s insect

colony dream-sequence) is the foremost embodiment of this second-order predatorial

stance.[22] No longer considering online interactions in terms of identity production and

proliferations of identities, Blue Ant is the creation of one Hubertus Bigend, whose

ridiculous name also underscores his enormous influence throughout the text; in terms

of gravity wells within the novel, he is one of the strongest, his pull only equalled,

perhaps, by the footage itself. Their affinity for each other is not suprising in light of

Bigend's constant representation as "accentless" (*PR* 58), replicating the footage's

ontology in being from nowhere in particular but relevant to everything. Through the

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[22] In his dream, Case experiences the wasp's nest as the epitome of visceral terror: he calls it "[h]orror" and "alien" (*Neuromancer* 126), right before he tries to burn it to ash. Just before he wakes up, Case sees the logo of the powerful Tessier-Ashpool group, economically located somewhere between corporation and mafia, imprinted on the ruins of the nest.

engineering of seemingly viral ad campaigns to predicating his entire professional

philosophy on the pervasive loneliness of disembodied interaction, Bigend is out to take

control of that rhizosphere of linked entities called the internet, and his firm's entire

ontology reflects this; Cayce describes Blue Ant as being

> [r]elatively tiny in terms of permanent staff, globally distributed, more
>
> post-geographic than multinational, the agency has from the beginning
>
> billed itself as a high-speed, low-drag life-form in an advertising ecology of
>
> lumbering herbivores. Or perhaps as some non-carbon-based life-form,
>
> entirely sprung from the smooth and ironic brow of its founder, Hubertus
>
> Bigend, a nominal Belgian who looks like Tom Cruise on a diet of virgins'
>
> blood and truffled chocolates. (*PR* 7)

Blue Ant's "post-geographic" organisation gains it a strong stake in the imperialist

expansion coded through the logo-plastering self-eversion techniques characteristic of

corporate capitalism. It functions in the novel as a stand-in for the emerging second

wave of action upon the inital, forcibly democratic movement of partial identities and

clashing ideological stances within online fora. F:F:F.net, where Cayce does part of her

research, is a place of open contention, what Pheng Cheah calls a "forum where public

interests can engage with and confront transnational corporations"(*Inhuman Conditions*

33). However, Cayce's experience of economic imperialism, channelled through

TRANS's Magda and Blue Ant's invasive, pervasive presence, does not support a

hopeful view of the "eBay imaginary" (Jameson 108). Instead, her own realisations of

her profound complicity within Blue Ant's performative exploitation provide implicit

refutation to any suggestion of *détente* in the cultural ramifications of cybercolonialism. Cayce's presence in the forum becomes more and more clearly hypocritical – that is, multiply significant – the further she goes in her associations with Blue Ant. In its drive to pin the footage down from all meanings into one, Blue Ant embodies the hard split between multiplicity and the production of harnessed significance – namely, that any agency present in the first is forcibly removed by the second. Control of the freeform flow of online traffic, self-representation and information becomes a major signifier of wealth and (in this narrative) a pre-eminently masculine-coded control over the production and value of meaning and identity – that is, the ontology of the digital human. Cayce spends much of the novel looking for ways to escape these transactions, even as she carries them with her into F:F:F.net.

In an action paralleling its attempted cooption of the maker's work, the Blue Ant affiliate called *TRANS* attempts to recreate the Footage's pattern of spread offline, using previously established networks and affiliations for a new purpose:

> "So," Magda says, "I am being used to establish a pattern? To fake that?
>
> To bypass a part of the process."
>
> "Yes," Cayce says. (*PR* 88)

Through Magda's embodied vector, high-traffic gatherings become not just opportunities for meeting or connection, but sites of transmission, interpolating a piece of information into casual meetings in a way designed to make them markers of an elusive desirability. When asked, *TRANS*'s representative interface explains the process as follows: "Look sorted, go to clubs and wine bars and chat people up. While I'm at it, I

mention a client's product, of course favorably. I try to attract attention while I'm doing it, but attention of a favorable sort. I haven't being doing it long, and I don't think I like it" (*PR* 86). Without mentioning it outright, her dislike centres on her exploitation of what the company chairman calls "that older, deeper mind, beyond language and logic" (*PR* 71), the aspiration toward some coherent meaning, what Cayce calls her heart and her faith: pattern recognition.

Blue Ant's worldview reinscribes Magda's bleeding-edge bars and Cayce's F:F:F.net function not as ontological creators but as experimental sites, stand-ins for the emerging second wave of action upon an inital, forcibly democratic moment comprised of partial identities and clashing ideological stances. These sites becomes representative of "forum[s] where public interests can engage with and confront transnational corporations" (Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions* 33), but the presence of pattern-mediators like Cayce and Magda becomes increasingly difficult the further they go in their associations with Blue Ant – not just for their community interactions, but in terms of the disintegrating integrity of their own identity-constructs, whether online or off. Blue Ant's documentary approach to figuring out what makes their fora click, in the form of (say) tracing posting histories and making searchable copies of the forum threads, seems benign until the ramifications of surveillance and control over what should be free-form identity-constructing interactions become clear: Magda says she feels "cheapened," that she can no longer trust anyone's opinion on anything. Cayce's profoundly divided response to Bigend's desire to find the Maker iterates this half-acknowledged implication, her own doubled complicity in the system compromising her ability to

interact on the F:F:F.net forum as anything but a reluctant viral marketer, even as she

becomes their representative hierophant into the mysteries of the maker. In an ironic

perversion of internet promises and aspirations, person to person connection is severed

through recognition of these identity-constructs' "non-integral," impure or non-identity-

forming motivations, and a profound alienation results. And then, as Blue Ant's

rapacious boss predicts, people buy things.

Cayce's profoundly ambivalent response to the ramifications of her entanglement

with Blue Ant reveals itself in an early moment of potential rebellion, a rejection of

outcome even as she recognises her own implication as an advance scout in a logo-

based, globe-spanning semiotic colonisation attempt. What could be read as Cayce

sourcing the semiotic, inscribing a new sign onto the web of extant global

communications through her gated permission, also demonstrates Cayce's own

oppressive functions within the wider technologies of economic imperialism. As a

repeat contract hire, she participates directly in Blue Ant's mission, even as she registers

her personal unease through her refusal to procure a salary. Her ambivalent positioning

reflects her equally ambivalent reaction to the amount of power she wields:

> Briefly, though, she imagines the countless Asian workers who might,
>
> should she say yes, spend years of their lives applying versions of this
>
> symbol to an endless and unyielding flood of footwear. What would it mean
>
> to them, this bouncing sperm? Would it work its way into their dreams,
>
> eventually? Would their children chalk it in doorways before they knew its
>
> meaning as a trademark? (*PR* 13)

Cayce's rebellion hangs in that moment of possibility, in recognition of her own implication as partial architect in a globalising logo-based semiotic. Her ambiguous positioning – central to the company's plans but peripherally attached through economic liaison – approaches that of the early explorers, sent out to conquer, subjugating and making comprehensible the unknown: she is sent to survey the lay of the trends and report back for debriefing. Seeing that she cannot absent herself from these social implications, being too deeply implicated in their causational economic mechanisms, Cayce chooses to subvert her signals from within, her controlled absence of meaning finally collapsing into a message the further she travels: "the fundamental opposition is always between popular spontaneity and its ideological manipulation" (Cheah, "Spectral Nationality" 233). Taking this comment even a little outside of its political context, Pheng Cheah's remark implies that Blue Ant's manipulation of the Footage into an advertising technique parlays new art forms into another signifier of capitalist subservience, inscribed onto the quasireligious quest of the F:F:F.net community, and by implication, upon each seeking individual as well. It posits the advertisement as the solution to the scattered world-state, an empire ruled by the capitalist advertiser, mediated through the fugitive nature of identity in the internexional space called the internet. In this internalising, transfigurative instant, the footage represents what the online nexus could be, what cyberspace had once been for *Neuromancer's* Case, what it will never be again for *Pattern Recognition's* Cayce: a utopic, never-realised, ever-fugitive dream of commonality.

This basic irreconcilability of meaning – identity as only unsourced projection, cyberspace as simultaneously disembodied and profoundly interrelational – supports Latour's version of the amodern hybrid even as it casts further doubt on his insistence that the amodern presence is achieved through relentless hybridity. Early on in *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* Latour brings up the difficulty of legislating or legitimising the hybrid into being; by extension, the hybrid loses its liminal status upon assuming the mantle of centrality and state-sanctioned hyperproduction. If the hybrid's power is located at its borders then this centralising cooption threatens to defuse its reactivity, and the revolution is dead. Anne Balsamo's comments on the complex interweaving of the "countercultural belief in the possibility of resistance within a corporate culture" into "the process whereby technologies are transformed into technological commodities" (122) only demonstrate that the uncommodified ontology exists best within the marginalised and subcultural. As Blue Ant and *TRANS* illustrate, thus centralised and made stable, the regulated hybrid "actually disseminates a certain mythology and a set of metaphors and concepts that cannot help but reproduce the anxieties and preoccupations of contemporary culture" (Balsamo 122). Latour's amodern present reveals itself in Blue Ant's attempts to "régler la prolifération des monstres en représentant officiellement leur existence" (22).[23] Delineated and contained within and through its involuntary centrality, the regulated hybrid risks losing the agency conferred by its partial incomprehensibility; breathing space removed, the

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[23] "regulate the proliferation of monsters [the monstrous hybrid] by officially regulating their existence" (translation mine).

cyborg rejoins the workforce, catalysing the mass production of *what is* instead of *what might be*. It is this betrayal that Cayce Pollard must confront when she is asked to take on Blue Ant's search for the maker, blaspheming what she most adores by ascribing identity and location to the footage, destroying the power held in its delocality as she channels the innovation of its dispersal into Blue Ant's bank accounts.

Neuromancer's dream-sequence provides what I consider a clear parallel to Blue Ant's aggressive, systemic infection of cyberspace. Far more clearly opposed to the terrifying power of the corporate conglomerate than the highly complicit Cayce Pollard, Case's reaction to an equally alien invasion of his ontological space is telling:

> Horror. The spiral birth factory, stepped terraces of the hatching cells, blind jaws of the unborn moving ceaselessly, the staged progress from egg to larva, near-wasp, wasp. In his mind's eye, a kind of time-lapse photography took place, revealing the thing as the biological equivalent of a machine gun, hideous in its perfection. Alien. He pulled the trigger, forgetting to press the ignition, and fuel hissed over the bulging, writhing life at his feet. (*N* 126)

Case torching the wasp's nest registers a half-conscious rejection of the communal hive, raddled with varying stages and forms of near-clone life, signalling progression while denying the individual any self-will. The hive exists in a cohesive whole, acting as a primary, multiply-constructed unit, generating the new even as the new are integrated into the hive, an organic representation of the projected endpoint of both Case's and Cayce's realities. Case burns the hive to ash, violently rejecting its multiplicity, its alienness and its perfection. His reaction complicates itself through the conflation of

these three into something that that defines all his realities – and is therefore to be despised. Unlike Cayce Pollard, Case's participation in globally-based economies does not rest on an uneasy truce between freelance and ownership through salary; his deals happen in an almost-legitimised, parallel buffer zone between big companies and mafia conglomerates. The logo stamped onto the hive's side in Case's dream prefigures Cayce's vision of the commercialised global web, which would again render technoecstatic sublimation no triumph: instead, with corporate identities eliding through their commodified selves, all these entities (Case, Cayce, their online avatars) would remain under the ineradicable control of commercial signification.

In *Mille plateaux*, Deleuze and Guattari's efforts to represent the state as centrality and stability finish by acknowledging that even the all-encompassing *État* is riddled with interpenetrated nondichotomies, polyvocal at their bases, in which the state's smallest elements evince "toute une insécurité moléculaire permanente... une macro-politique de la société pour et par une micro-politique de l'insécurité" (Deleuze and Guattari 263).[24] In order to effectively protect the maker and the footage from their impending desecration Cayce must work through these multiply signified channels, using her shifting ontologies to her own ends. She makes a good start, noting her own explicitly dual-agent status several times, most notably when she coopts her father's knowledge and recreates them into metaphors for her own journey: "Somewhere, deep within her, surfaces a tiny clockwork submarine" (*PR* 121). Haraway's and Margulis' ideas of "powerful infidel heteroglossia" (Haraway, "Manifesto" 39), the incorporation

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[24] "a permanent molecular insecurity... a societal macro-politic [structure] for and by a micro-politic of insecurity" (translation mine).

of multiplicities, become ascendant through the multiple attempts at signification laid

and overlain on Cayce's body by the confluence of created meanings. But, unlike

Bujold's Cordelia or even Gibson's own Case, Cayce Pollard finds herself at the end of

the novel with a quiescent footage, a maker affiliated with Blue Ant and a single, soul-

socketed self. It is a kind of resolution, but remains imperfect and imperfectly satisfying,

troubling its own conclusions through the continuing presence of that partially-located

entity, that stubborn possible agency: the fluid digital avatar whose presence continues

to blur between Cayce Pollard and CayceP. This troubled border does not necessarily

signal full agency – Cayce is, after all, socketed – but provides for the possibility of

agency, staking out a space for its own projected reemergence.

PUPPENKOPF

Cayce's cyborg ontology frames her curious lack of self-will; despite the

demands of the conventional narrative setup and resolution, Cayce's amalgam-sourced

power cannot be entirely removed. At each pivotal moment Cayce returns to the body,

but does so through the medium of cyberspace, her cyborg ontology marking her out for

agency over puppetry. Cayce's final defence, the one she uses to destroy Dorotea,

demonstrates the power of Haraway's cyborg ontology even as Cayce's own

consciousness disintegrates under the flow of drugs and exhaustion: "when things go

black, she's just curling her fingers around something smooth and cold" (326),

something as decontextualised as she is: a piece of robot girl, brought from a drawer in

London to this table in Moscow. From both inside and outside the synthetic persona

named Mama Anarchia, Dorotea is not easily disarmed, but Cayce manages it; armed with her father's voice and her robotgirl knuckleduster, Cayce embodies *cyborg*, appropriating the war machine (and possibly the author-function) to strike out at the closest representative of circular reasoning and mind-fogging webs. I doubt that many readers have missed how the eye rearranges Dorotea's acquired screenname to Mama *Arachnia*. But while Gibson the writer may have meant for this malevolent superimposition – horrible monster-mother, the maw of chaos – to signal more regulation of the female body even in cyberspace, what results from these interactions is less unequivocal.

Fredric Jameson's analysis of the novel is strongest when he considers the primary decoupling between the footage and Cayce's own narrative situation:

> there is a striking and dramatic contradiction between the style, as we have described it, and the footage itself . . . . Indeed, it is rather this very contradiction which is the deeper subject of *Pattern Recognition*, which projects the Utopian anticipation of a new art premised on 'semiotic neutrality', and on the systematic effacement of names, dates, fashions and history itself, within a context irremediably corrupted by all those things. (111-112)

This contradiction between footage and text is also made manifest in Jameson's own phantom presence in the novel. The dialectical "we" Jameson employs belongs to the very critics Gibson parodies relentlessly throughout his portrayal of the online presence named Mama Anarchia, whose near-incoherent theoretical pastiches propose to situate

the footage within the corrupted context Jameson simultaneously validates and decries. Mama Anarchia's most vitriolic hatred is aimed at Parkaboy's assertions that the footage is progressive, still being created, still moveable and mutable, and thus still powerful; she considers the text closed, cut off from change, proceeding from some unifying centrality which she, as a relentless theorist and critic, has already entirely encompassed and comprehended. Jamie Bianco has cogently suggested that La Anarchia's spiteful portrayal and eventual, violent destruction is the clearest possible indication that both the footage and *Pattern Recognition* are not necessarily in praise of either the multiply-branded or the brandless. Instead, both artefacts exist as composite structures and sites of constructed meaning, composed under and intended to promote only one brand name: William Gibson.

What Jameson refers to as a shift of register, "from active to passive for example (from male hacker to female future-shopper)" (114), actually constitutes one of the major ways in which Cayce functions as a possible agent of disruption or multiplicity: while Jameson sees the shift between male Case and female Cayce as active to passive, that shift can be read quite differently. Katalin Lovasz's considerations of the multiplicity and complexity resulting from the decentralisation of the subject (her metaphors for presence include both water and skin, which come together to form intriguingly mutable possibilities) certainly do not read passivity into her gendered online subjects. Instead, in a move reminiscent of Margulis' insistence on multiples, Lovasz considers the subject's mutability, its tendency to overstep its own previously-iterated bounds, to be the online identity-construct's great strength, allowing it to escape unwanted

reinscription even as its ties to other online constructs allow multiplicity, complicity and

strengthening affinity – not in spite of the avatar's fluidity, but because of it.

John Marx states that the "network of women in which Cayce participates

appears almost by accident" (16), an idea whose expression matches Cayce's experience,

but whose truth is debatable at best. This network of women is not a side effect or an

apparition, nor does it "appear" out of the ether, or the text; saying so would be like

insisting Cayce had looked outside one morning and discovered Siberia. Or the sun.

Cayce's interrogations of Magda, as well as her negotations with Parkaboy, uncover an

extant network based on objectifying women into commodifiable and thereby profitable

images. Judy Tsuzuki's Parkaboy-mediated digital transformation into an anime

dreamgirl, "genderbait for the nerds" (*PR* 78), precipitates one of the central economic

exchanges in the novel: Cayce trades Judy's altered image to procure a critically

important piece of code from a Japanese footagehead, the watermark that determines

the presence of the Claymore mine schematic. Cayce's unease is attributed to her

reactions to the duped *otaku*,[25] but her later relief at Judy's indignant response signals a

deeper awareness of Cayce's own role in a series of exploitations: "she's glad someone

else dislikes what they've done to Taki" (*PR* 206). Magda's later objectification as

"henna and pop-out tops, good fun" (*PR* 366) is only one more demonstration of

rendering women down for parts, even as Magda's own discomfort with the

transactional nature of human interaction necessitated by her work for *TRANS* is echoed

through both Judy and Cayce. Haraway's multiple sitings place Judy, Magda and

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[25] A Japanese term whose English approximation is something like "obsessive geek-nerd fan." *Otaku* is not a compliment, although reclamation efforts on both sides of the Pacific are well underway.

especially Cayce within both the privileged cyborg and the integrated circuit of exploitative labour, located and dislocated within stringently capitalist systems of representation and exploitation; thus, Cayce's apparent passivity stands within a dangerously unstable ontological break, even as her character is rendered down to parts within the spring-loaded mechanisms of Gibson's deliberately conservative narrative. Gibson's conclusion locks Cayce solidly into her body, but reading Cayce's relocation into her body, her lack of soul-lag, as complete or permanent is to ignore the continuing multiplicity signalled by her online presence.

This disjointure of the feminine self from its awareness, and its eventual resolution in Cayce's relationship with Parkaboy, could be taken as a statement of Cayce's continued fragility, or of Gibson's eventual failure to plot an autonomous female lead. However, that disconnection holds Cayce to her cyborg agency, and its attempted removal through a collapse from multiples into some semblance of a whole veers from Haraway's potent cyborg subjectivity and Latour's amodern self through to both innocence (Haraway) and unquestioning separation (Latour), with a side trip through Balsamo's reestablished cultural anxieties, rewritten on the now-quiescent object named *female body*. But the conditions of this imposed ontological purity are sustainable only through Cayce's continuing absence from the online nexus. Cayce's brief online silence breaks into the resumption of digital communication throughout the bulk of *Pattern Recognition*'s final chapter. Although currently in abeyance, CayceP's return always hovers at the brink of possibility, her ghostly presence encoded outward

into email, her primary method of communication by the end of the novel, as well as within the archives of F:F:F.net.

HIS MISSINGNESS

Absence in *Neuromancer* is not triumph or achievement; instead, absence is an escape, a smearing away and eventual erasure of the body in chasing after what is not permissible or possible within the compass of meatspace: in *Pattern Recognition* absence is evidence of grief, the soul out seeking a resolution denied to the physical self. Linked with or metonymic for the fall of the Two Towers on September 11, 2001, Win Pollard's disappearance is tied to the catastrophe of absence and the impossibility of physical reclamation. Win is its primary human measure, the size of his absence the measure of distance spanning Cayce's grief – the distance between Nora's body and wandering soul. Cayce's own body vanishes from her sight because she cannot and may never reclaim Win's, his absence jammed like a metal plate between self and self-awareness, fueling Cayce's retreat away from his memory, into a denial of any further claims on her body or identity through the visible marks of trademark logos or the economic ties of a salary and company position. Her missingness is maintained by his, and Win's vanished body and absent voice are her guide throughout the action of the novel. His gift to her lies in that span of absence: rather than grounding or centering her, Win's disputed present absence allows Cayce to interpolate herself into his fugitive and untraceable ontological space. Instead of securing her perimeters, he troubles and transgresses them,

giving density and shape to dreams and intuitions, holding open her access to

possibilities of a nondichotomous ontology through his own diffuse embodiment.

Bodily presence is her antidote to soul-lag; although performing Cayce's final

resolution through the body of her lover is problematic in terms of characterisation

alone, within the novel this final image represents both rest (Cayce finally falls asleep

without being exhausted or drugged) and reward for having passed through her

difficult pilgrimage, which extends from her father's disappearance to meeting her long-

sought maker. But this awareness of presence as valuable is only possible through loss,

that absence marking much-vaunted cyberspace as deathly, ghostly, this final

opposition itself in opposition with Cayce's indeterminate status throughout the novel.

By contrast, in *Neuromancer*, Case's determined bodily absence can be read as a kind of

migitated success for those who long for perfect ghosts; his neon-lit dystopia is a bleak

reflection of the only quest he has left. The world his nightmare, Case jacks in to find

some nirvanic nothingness: not heaven but the possibility of its existence, or at least a

less-blank version of hell. But where Case's involvement with cyberspace is an unsteady

mix of addictive need and disintegration, technodystopic somatic erasure, Cayce's

journey in *Pattern Recognition* takes her somewhere extant: a location coded into the

shape of a bomb, a .ru address and a web of family bonds mirroring the map of her own

relationships – travelling across cyberspace, but connected up on either side of the

digital network.

However, in *Pattern Recognition* the body gone missing is not only Cayce herself

but that of the generative principle, her father Win Pollard. In that sense, Win Pollard's

missingness marks the aporic escape of meaning, signifying both nothing and some elsewhere otherwhen into which Cayce cannot follow. Her actions at the end of the novel, digging through the archaeological site, tears streaming and fists full of mud and bone, acknowledge her new status as present and embodied, but profoundly troubled; perplexed, but neither passive nor absent, Cayce actively pursues other resolutions, realising that this one will never come to pass. Her cyborg ontology is shadowed through her constant communication by email, itself shadowed and traced through her mother's similar dependence on EVP readings: both deal in the voice of the absent loved. A deeper excavation of cyborg text uncovers Win's instructions regarding the robot girl knuckleduster, the circumstances surrounding Cayce's email to *stellanor*, her dependence on F:F:F.net for psychic stability, and her persistent soul-lag: all are signs that Cayce's body and her identity are not all contained in a single location, but are spilled across partly-physical, partly-digital terrain. She must recognise her own hybridity, which remains as much a dissolution between self and other as it is a joining between body and machine. Haraway shapes this recognition along similar networks, also joined around fluid boundaries:

> I began to get it that discourse is practice, and participation in the materialized world, including one's own naturalcultural (one word) body, is not a choice. Practitioners of immunology, genetics, social theory, insurance analysis, cognitive science, military discourse, and behavioural and evolutionary sciences all invoked the same eminently material, theoretically potent stories to do real work in the world, epistemologically and

ontologically. That is, I learned that I was a cyborg, in cultural-natural fact.

Like other beings that both scientists and laypeople were coming to know, I

too, in the fabric of my flesh and soul, was a hybrid of information-based

organic and machinic systems. ("Morphing" 204)

Longing for wholeness or singleness of heart, Cayce pursues both throughout the novel

but must at last relinquish this dream into unknowingness, accepting its (his)

"missingness" instead. It is in this kind of ontological half-absence, tangible through the

mourning and memories it leaves behind, that Cayce retains a kind of fluid multiplicity,

everted into her own missingness, which points toward something else left wholly

unrevealed.

INTO THE MYSTIC

When Cayce meets the maker the entire novel stops. Time distorts, movement

ceases; after the outlines of her initial encounter with god there is utter stillness: Cayce

watches meaning being pulled up out of repeated iteration and compression, pattern

reduced to a single, digitally-compressed gesture or expression. Each piece is endlessly

interpretable, and although the footage explicitly creates meaning, the pattern Cayce

carries away with her is one of illegibility and absence. Despite Nora's twin sister

Stella's eventual alliance through her powerful uncle with Bigend and Blue Ant, locating

the maker (the "headwaters of the digital Nile" (*PR* 316)) only further destabilises

singularity of meaning. Cayce watches Nora create, asks Stella her questions on the

origin myth, the acquired possibilities, but that oracle (speaker for the god) can only

deny the strict imposition of a single generative myth:

> "Are they your parents, Stella? The couple?"
>
> "Perhaps, when they are young. They resemble them, yes. But if what she
>
> is doing tells a story it is not our parents' story. Not their world. It is another
>
> world. It is always another world." (317)

Stella's answer performs a remarkable transformation upon the origin myth, taking

away any possibility of its existence even as she acknowledges that said myth may now

belong only to Nora, actively involved in taking up the machine-mediated bodies and

incorporating them into what she once was, in her doubled singularity with Stella, in

order to simultaneously shatter and recreate the cosmos. With each click of her mouse,

Nora demonstrates how the cyborg may not remember Eden, but might narrate one into

being instead.

Nora is bodily located within the prison-safehouse of her own mind, whatever

consciousness she has totally taken up within the series of rhizomatic images she

isolates and mutates onscreen, and then releases to the rootless (everywhere-rooted?)

internet. The footage's dispersal through its chosen medium is thus ultimate dislocation

given local habitation and a name, or two: the online presence *stellanor* is a hybrid, after

all, Stella the conduit connecting her sister's voice to the world, Nora conducted only

through the manipulation of pixels on the screen, any presence she once had utterly

subsumed within the closed systems of image and damage. This dispersal functions as a

meditation on the rhizomatic nature of viral dispersion, of wirelessness: how apt a

representation of the restless world, its rootless nature reflected Cayce's endless global

circumnavigations, and most sharply, in her constant, consistent "soul-lag."

Consideration of the genius behind the footage meshes with intimations of devastation,

tied into the mourning of the final break between body and soul seen as the result of

disastrous surprise, of world-spanning grief, of catastrophic change.

Gibson's iterations of relationships between mind, body and soul have shifted in

the decades between Case and Cayce: whereas Case's physicality surges entirely toward

dropping out of meatspace into the "bodiless exultation of cyberspace" (*Neuromancer* 6),

Nora's biomachinic interface presents itself as permanent disorder, an alienated self

only connected to humanity through the most tenuous of links: the evanescence of light

tracing movement on a screen. Here, the cybernetic escape is something to be marvelled

at: never aspired to, it remains embodied nonetheless on either side of the screen. Nora's

permanent absence pours a flood of meaning through itself, a record of pain and loss

made tangible in her bomb-damaged mind and intangible through the footage she

creates, an absence carried out through Win's vanishing and re-embodied in Damien's

bone-shattered Russian dig site with its mountains of reclamation, rubble and bone, its

Nazi pilot perfectly preserved within the wreckage of his aircraft. The nexus emerges –

an instant only, but that instant repeated – within these juxtapositions: declarative

inscriptions, delineations of the boundaries of self within the larger bounds of an

ideological federation that might approach nationhood, reproducing the familiar

boundaries of self and country – or approaching nothing at all, asymptotic only to

eternity.

Here, at the book's climactic moment, Cayce returns to the almost-idle

awareness of global reaction that characterised her initial meditations on trademarks

and logos, but enlarged now to include the ramifications of earlier economic production

for war:

> [Nora's] consciousness, Cayce understands, somehow bounded by or
>
> bound to the T-shaped fragment in her brain: part of the arming mechanism
>
> of the Claymore mine that killed her parents, balanced too deeply, too
>
> precariously within her skull, to ever be removed. Something stamped out,
>
> once, in its thousands, by an automated press in some armory in America.
>
> Perhaps the workers who'd made that part, if they'd thought at all in terms
>
> of end-use, had imagined it being used to kill Russians. (*PR* 315)

Cayce finds Nora's literal mind-body separation in direct alignment with the application

of unthinking global economics, both centred around the T-shaped fragment from the

Claymore bomb "flung into the very center of Nora's brain" (*PR* 316). Far from Case's

"bodiless exultation" (*Neuromancer* 6), Nora's permanent jacking-in comes to Stella only

as absence and loss, the footage her only remaining link to her sister. Even their twin-

talk, "the language of Stella and Nora" (*PR* 298), vanishes under the weight of the

footage, Nora's chosen idiolect; Stella is her mouthpiece, interpreting for the enigma, but

the oracle knows that Nora is not and will never be found anywhere but the footage.

Thus, Nora's cybernetic implant traces the same shape of loss through the footage and

through the fallout of 9/11, mapping permanent devastation at the centre of the body,

the full weight of its inscriptions hidden even from its mirror-self. Like Case's jack,

Nora's implant reaves flesh from soul, but brings no concomitant transcendental moment of communion with an impossible perfection; Nora remains entirely behind her metal shield, spirited away from anything but the creation of meaning out of pixels and light. Cayce emerges from her audience with the aporia silenced, in tears; there are no answers. "Only the wound, speaking wordlessly in the dark" (*PR* 316).

In her discussion of *Pattern Recognition* Katherine Hayles asserts that Cayce's action in sending the message to stellanor links her own absence-based traumas to the forum's various wounds and the "healing possibilities of the footage" (146); I would argue that what Cayce does instead is link all their traumas up in circuit. "The Footage, then, is both antidote and witness to the trauma Nora has suffered," says Hayles (144). But the inscription of trauma into image and watermark, the intensified shapes amid the shapelessness associated with the footage, mediated through the digital-image modification programs Nora uses to screen her world, demonstrate only the wound, with no resolution in sight. Arcing away from healing toward witness, the footage deals entirely with "the cycle of obsessive repetition" (Hayles 142) – as Stella describes to Cayce, every single image of the footage has been altered, modified and most of all, intensified through the technomantic repetition mediated through Nora's imaging program, her film-eye. Instead of healing the trauma the footage outlines its shape, the wound mapped over itself again and again: "Three months, she recut. Five operations in that time, and still she worked. I watched it grow shorter, her film. In the end, she had reduced it to a single frame" (*PR* 298). Those who see the footage and mourn along with its multiple records of loss, artificially amplifying the T-shaped physical evidence of

permanent soul-loss, are witnesses (in Haraway's use of the word, in the sense of implicated participants) to the "modality pertaining to cyborgs" lodged at the centre of Nora's brain: fractures between self and world elided into the footage, where both are juxtaposed in "condensation, fusion, and implosion" (Haraway, *Modest_Witness* 12).

In my reading of Nora's syncretic, difficult present absence, the footage is not antidote. The footage is symptom. Far from any textual analysis of the absence of the embodied real, Cayce experiences Nora's ghostly technomediated presence as an ecstatic moment of wordless lament: closer to Case's eternal absence than anything else in the novel. Hayles says this herself, averring that "[i]n this complex entanglement of signifiers, the hidden message points in two directions at once: inward to the physical object that is the immediate cause of Nora's injury and outward to a representation that promises to link the footage with the world" (145), but which instead routs the world through the footage, shows the world itself transformed into the footage – polyvalence its hallmark, cyberspace its only known location.

APOPHENIA

In *Neuromancer* and *Pattern Recognition*, Latourian ideas of sanctioned hybrids take on dubious flesh, dubious because these architectural constructs distrust their carbon bases, altering them in order to one day leave them behind. The unmodified body is a hindrance, insufficiently accessorised and thus unable to hack a living out of the spaces on either side of the jack. Case's own modifications – organs, drugs, jack – all point toward this final goal, and while many of the other bodymods he meets have their

basis in the need for survival in the socioeconomics of the physical world, Case's major concern with his physical body is its ability to gate him back into the net. All throughout the novel Case pursues his return to cyberspace with relentless focus, burning along the straightedge of addiction to fall back into a place where human physicality vanishes and the ghost-self becomes preeminent. That absence frames Case's final realisation, a recognition of irreplaceable somatic connection. Case ghosts through cyberspace as another component of its ultimate emptiness.

I think Cayce Pollard chooses otherwise, and not just because Gibson forces her hand; although the shape of the plot arc imposes a slight artificiality from the moment she meets Parkaboy in the flesh, Cayce's longing for a return to a bodily presence, extant from the early chapters and present through her father's voice, presupposes a sort of lost unity she had when her inheritance and genealogy were intact. But all she can do in the wake of her father's final disappearance is recognise the loss of any claims to unity she might have held, her father's absence signifying a lack of knowledge and understanding at the very place where past and future join. By the end of the novel Cayce has accepted her hybrid nature, her grievous oversensitivities either dulled or removed, and thus no longer prompting her withdrawal from the world. She settles into that slightly plasticky happy ending with her cyberspace compatriot, online sympathy having turned into facetime compatibility – as unlikely an image as spooling her soul back like fishing line, "reeled entirely in on its silver thread and warmly socketed" (*PR* 367). But Cayce's final moments in the narrative demonstrate her decision to privilege embodied presence even as she maintains her avatar online; thus, her restored bodily presence brings her only

halfway back into the world. Soul-socketed, she continues to hold out the possibility of ontological change: her cyborg agency remains only in abeyance, stilled through embodied circumstances, and contentedly so, but neither resolved nor removed.

In Gibson's texts the immateriality of the textually-represented cyborg runs into the body's stubborn physical persistence, producing neither a *here* nor a *there* in favour of a resonating presence flickering between the spectral textual forum and the geopolitically situated body. Even as Gibson's narrative arc pushes one reading of Cayce's final embodied resolution, her own allegiances remain firmly and multiply embedded within both the body and the globalising digital interface. Despite a desire to read her as firmly within her body, Cayce remains within the integrated circuit from the absent to the physical, between grief and presence, yet still alive to her implication, her embedding within the larger systems of transnational economics. By the end of the novel Cayce makes a temporary decision in favour of her situated flesh, but cannot relinquish the neogeographic statement even in digital communication, exhibiting her intermixed and intermediary position through her @hotmail.co.uk address. Though CayceP seeks after the solid flesh, she cannot yet surrender the digital ghost.

Seen through the idea of ideological maps and sites, immaterial cyberspace becomes a paradoxical bearer of mitigated connection, digital interaction encoding a culture's fears of complicity, its last hopes of continuity; of immortality, radiant along direct lines of light or sound or low-level electromagnetic waves. Each message, reply or post is a small signal, the desire for connection encoded into photons, wave forms and words, sent out to find another from the dying but still-present flesh. Its denizens live in

these modern times, in half-hardened webs of conflicting ontologies and desires, their words coalescing from flesh to signal to noise and back: an irregular, regulated circuit of connection and immortality located at the join between text and texture, body and code fearfully rendered no heavier than light.

4. Coda: The Internext

"grâce au prodigieux événement biologique représenté par la découverte
des ondes électro-magnétiques, chaque individu se trouve désormais
(activement ou passivement) simultanément présent à la totalité de la mer
et des continents, – coextensif à la Terre."[26]

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le phénomène humaine*

The image of the cyborg, the mechanised self/other, pervades speculative fiction,
enacting its dreams and highest morals, haunting its crevices and nightmares. But that
hybrid body moves genres, shifting contexts to arrive in a recognisable space, eliding
across the borders of fiction to call out and name my own heteroglossic, technomediated
hybrid ontology. The simultaneous movement toward and away from the at-once alien
and viscerally known figure of the cyborg participates in fear and partial rejection, yet
without accomplishing disengagement: an act of profound schismatic multiplicity in the
attempt to integrate disparate sets of observations into some sort of meaningful,
singular whole. The basic incompatibility between the two words *cybernetic* and
organism comes at their opposition of materials, which is centred in turn on the
definitions of what constitutes life, consciousness and self-awareness – humanity, in
short. It is this concept that the cyborg puts into continuous question by its very
ontology: not just as technohybrid but as hybrid, revisioning the individual body as an
unexpectedly precarious and difficult proposition. With Haraway, this revisioner, the
modest witness to the cyborg self, must ask: "How can our 'natural' bodies be

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[26] "thanks to the prodigious biological event represented by the discovery of electromagnetic waves, each
individual finds himself henceforth (actively and passively) simultaneously present, over land and sea, in
every corner of the earth" (trans. Bernard Wall 240, qtd. in Theall 142).

reimagined – and relived – in ways that transform the relations of same and different, self and other, inner and outer, recognition and misrecognition into guiding maps for inappropriate/d others? And inescapably, these refigurings must acknowledge the permanent condition of our fragility, morality, and finitude" (Haraway, Introduction 4). The cyborg embodies a part of that monstrous and misrecognised pantheon, seeking to encompass the human unknown in order to make space for possibilities through the comprehension of the previously feared, unknown or reviled. S/he remains the most intimate, and therefore the most perverse, complication of the technocracy, creating plurals as s/he goes, siting the most dangerous questions along a series of seams: where and what and, most of all, whom.

While the cyborgs I have presented are hardly post-gendered, they do represent meldings and fusions between traditionally gendered ontologies, amalgams of agent and substrate, hunter—gatherer and mother—murderer, myriad possibilities mediated through the expansion of the mind's compass and the body's reach through their chosen technologies. Cordelia's eversion of bodily boundaries through the uterine replicator parallel her loss of an imputed galactic 'innocence,' but her dissociative episode clearly demonstrates the existence of a fractured subject acting with a composite, yet cohesive will – not for preservation of the nation-state, but for a characteristically polyvalent alterity, admixtured being and purpose. Likewise, Cayce Pollard's move from cyber- to embodied puppet, complicated by her technomantic avatar-agency, seems to signal an authorially-mandated, reader-based refutation of her claims of hybrid agency, but calls this very move into question through the aporic presence of the Maker as well as the

still-inscriptive agency required for the move: transcendent meaning is by definition unintelligible, the code-illiterate were once called *barbarians*, and puppets do not ask questions. Cyborgs live out the asking.

The shifts and lacunae in Haraway's "Manifesto" hint at a far more nuanced reading of the cyborg body than an uncomplicated celebration of technoecstatic gender-abnegation. The "Manifesto for Cyborgs" is not (or perhaps not simply, not only) a technobunny fembot celebration, but a multiple lashing out against the constructed ideologies and ontologies extant in Haraway's environment at the time of writing, "a somewhat desperate effort... to hold together impossible things that all seemed true and necessary simultaneously" ("Introduction: A Kinship" 3). Far from being an uncritical embrace of the technomediated sublime, the "Manifesto" pointedly critiques the entrenched ideologies surrounding the development of a technocracy based on the labour and subjugation of entire genders, classes and races. At the time of Haraway's writing her embattled subject needed a variant that would help her survive, an outward expression of an ontological possibility not yet extant in the world – a performer, a shield, a suit of armour. A shell. Haraway chose the cyborg because its uncanniness was part of its armour-alloy: a weapon, a powerful part of its blasphemous array. The jointure of two such supposedly inimical, dichotomised substances points to the subject's fracturing vision and substance, a rendering of subjectivity that relies not on centrality but dispersion.

To code something or to encode it into an extant system is not the same thing as introducing a form of liberation; *encoding* results in the embedding of one more level of

disruption between impulse and outcome, an increased reification sourced in the very

nature of code. If code adapts to situations, it is then not following a strictly classical

evolutionary model, choosing instead a negotiation between subjectivities, environment

and behaviour that allows the fractured individual to survive in an increasingly

destabilising online ecology, itself dissociating between lines of creation and

exploitation. The idea of evolutionary progress mediated through code situates itself

firmly within that genetic reductionism, a textually-dominated paradigm of radiant

adaptation; however, the (im)possibilities inherent in Margulis' *in*-hybrid-*vitae* model of

symbiogenesis present a viable alternative to that singularity-dependent story.

In a limited and somewhat recursive sense, the cyborg can be seen as a splice,

one code fused to another, permutations of code shifting abruptly away from carbon-

based life to steel, silicon and plastics, from nucleic acids to binary flow: the

technological finds a host for replication, the human finds a potential symbiont with

which to create a viable life, even as the subject's seeming singularity shatters into

incoherence. True presence may lie within this schism, at the nexus of transfer between

one thing and the other – *dans le réseau*, as it were – but Gibson's and Bujold's texts,

while exploring the potentials of cyborg agency, also demonstrate the limitations of this

limitless view of the technoecstatic. The basic syncreticity at the limits of jointure, the

splicing into the gene-level control – the most intimate and profound measure of

endosymbiosis possible, according to Margulis – happens not when the flesh fuses to

the machine, but when the code that produces the flesh becomes inextricable from the

machine-symbiont:

No greater intimacy is known than the permanent harboring of your

partner's genes. By the time this level of intimacy occurs, the chance is great

that behavioral, metabolic, and gene-product integrations are already in

place. When partnerships persist, they are intimate and share long histories,

and many factors preclude their dissolution. Often, they can never return to

the status quo ante. (Margulis and Sagan 101)

The emphasis on both organismal and genetic hybridities in symbiogenesis allows the

presence of a body or bodies, objects holding emergent agencies that, while not separate

from code, are not themselves embodied within code alone. Also, "spacer" code

complicates the subsuming of the body through its own codes; spacer code consists of

long strings of DNA that have no apparent purpose, but whose removal causes

unpredictable upsets to the developmental progress of the organism under experiment.

Genetic code has no origin we can inquire of; unlike computer code in that respect there

is no accompanying documentation, or at least, not one that everyone agrees on. The

direct interaction perceived to exist between code and expression is disrupted by the

presence of the spacer code; the enigmatic sigils embedded within legible genetic

material remains unintelligible to the barbarians at its gates.

Contrary to both technophilic future-hopes and eager utopian desires, Gibson's

Case falls short too often of his goals for any vision of utopia to unproblematically map

itself over his travels. And although Bujold's Cordelia demonstrates the anarchic power

harnessed into the technohybrid flesh, the shattered subject lies at the heart of her

unstable construct: lacking the nexus of compass Cordelia's mind is unable to hold all

her identities at once; instead, shifting through the borders between innocence and murder, she inhabits both man and machine to effect her worldchanging revolution. In this climactic scene Cordelia's physical body recedes to the sidelines even as her agency comes to the fore, a recognition of schism she experiences as psychotic dissociation. Despite any protestation of lack of intent, Cordelia demonstrates nonetheless the problematic power extant in her technohybridity, a power ironically accorded her through the straitened nature of the patriarchal bonds she eventually dismembers. According to Haraway, the body of the cyborg celebrates "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and …responsibility in their construction" ("Manifesto" 8). The armoured body cutting a swath through softer organic material provides a potent dream of technologically-based invincibility – not just immortality, but aggressive capabilities long denied to the disenfranchised or voiceless. While Bujold's mitigated victory for Cordelia bears part of this promise out, Cordelia's satisfaction still waits, pending and contingent upon female bodies still at least putatively under patriarchal control. Thus warned, Cayce Pollard makes a temporary decision in favour of her physically situated flesh, but cannot relinquish the parageopolitical statement made by her digital communication networks. She exhibits her intermixed and mediary position through her digital communication, continuing to create the amalgamated self, working as a coherent unit while still remaining recognisably heterogenous. Cayce not only inhabits but locates a constantly shifting ground, and her ontological fluctuations and instabilities spill over the straitened requirements of her narrative, demonstrating her simultaneous longing for simplicity while enacting multiplicity, embodying a node of

complexities in "a world in which metamorphoses are accompanied by a fluidity of signifiers" (Theall 148). She remains unstable, her presence a spectral flicker across flesh and screen and continents, without location or break or separation: CayceP remains with Cayce, simultaneous "vision and daydream and warning," the promise of continuing possibility.

In this technomantically-mediated not-yet my own document spins theories, is surrounded by and permeated with cyborgs, recording my own hybridity, my embodiment of the "suggestive flaws and fissures, the chimerical assemblage of elements" that Zoe Sofoulis sees in Haraway's "Manifesto" (Sofoulis 91). Ontologically heterogenous, permeable, polyvalent and multivocal, this cyborg continues to question a singularity situated entirely in the flesh even as she enters the body-limitlessness of cyberspace with increasingly sharp-eyed trepidation. To widen the way to a reconsideration of cyborg ontologies, positioning their potential jointure outside of the body but within the projected self, alters the borders of the self to encompass the devices needed to connect within the world wide web, threatening all the shapes and lines drawn between self and Othered, between subject and subjected, between site and witness. Agent and object fuse but do not wholly integrate; not choosing the dichotomous split, they remain instead within the small hybrid cleft at its centre. This nexus momentarily, repeatedly holds the promise of monsters and chimeras, of androids and cyborgs: their inextricably confounded codes revealing the continuing origin stories of a technologically-hybridised ontology, a way of being in a world that does not want them strong.

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