

**UTOPIIC BODIES, DYSTOPIC SUBJECTS:  
DIALOGUES BETWEEN LITERATURE AND THEORY**

**INAUGURAL-DISSERTATION  
ZUR ERLANGUNG DER DOKTORWÜRDE  
DER  
PHILOSOPHISCHEN FAKULTÄT  
DER  
RHEINISCHEN-FRIEDRICH-WILHELMS-UNIVERSITÄT  
ZU BONN**

**VORGELEGT VON**

**CATRIN WEIMBS**

**AUS**

**BONN**

**BONN 2010**

Gedruckt mit der Genehmigung der Philosophischen Fakultät  
Der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

**Zusammensetzung der Prüfungskommission :**

Prof. Dr. Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp  
(*Vorsitzende/ Vorsitzender*)

Prof. Dr. Sabine Sielke  
(*Betreuerin/ Betreuer und Gutachterin/ Gutachter*)

Prof. Dr. Marion Gymnich  
(*Gutachterin/ Gutachterin*)

Prof. Dr. Bettina Schlüter  
(*weiteres prüfungsberechtigtes Mitglied*)

Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 19.11.2009

	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
INTRODUCTION.....	5
<b>CHAPTER I - GILLES DELEUZE AND WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS</b> .....	15
<b>CONTEXTUALIZING BURROUGHS AND DELEUZE</b> .....	21
<b>CITIES OF THE RED NIGHT</b> .....	30
<b>GILLES DELEUZE’S RHIZOMATIC WRITING</b> .....	36
<b>WRITERS AS “CULTURAL PHYSICIANS”</b> .....	44
<b>DELEUZIAN BECOMINGS</b> .....	49
<b>BECOMING-WOMAN</b> .....	55
<b>BODY WITHOUT ORGANS</b> .....	63
<b>CHAPTER II – DONNA HARAWAY AND WILLIAM GIBSON</b> .....	76
<b>NEUROMANCER</b> .....	80
<b>“A MANIFESTO FOR CYBORGS”</b> .....	94
<b>OUR BODIES, OURSELVES?</b> .....	98
<b>CYBORGS IN THE INTEGRATED CIRCUIT</b> .....	111
<b>CHAPTER III - MARGARET ATWOOD AND HOMI BHABHA</b> .....	121
<b>SURVIVAL OF CULTURE --- CULTURES OF SURVIVAL</b> .....	121
<b>ORYX AND CRAKE: COLONIALISM IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD</b> .....	126
<b>LOCATING HYBRIDITY AND MIMICRY IN BHABHA AND ATWOOD</b> .....	137
<b>DISCOURSE AND HYBRID SUBJECTIVITY</b> .....	151
<b>TOWARDS A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF POSTCOLONIALITY</b> .....	164
<b>DIALOGUES BETWEEN LITERATURE AND THEORY: AFTERWORD</b> .....	167
<b>WORKS CITED</b> .....	172
<b>KURZFASSUNG</b> .....	186

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have written this dissertation had I not received help and encouragement from many people. I am especially indebted to my advisor Prof. Sabine Sielke for her relentless support, expertise, and valuable criticism in the process of writing this dissertation. My thanks also go out to Prof. Marion Gymnich whose insightful comments helped my work-in-progress considerably. Furthermore, I would like to thank my fellow dissertators from the “Doktorandenkolloquium” but particularly my dear friend Dr. Michael Butter for his help, insights, and fresh views on my writing.

This dissertation would also never have been written without the generous financial support granted by the exchange program between the University of Bonn and the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where I spent two years to research and write my dissertation. I am immensely grateful for having had this opportunity and I owe my thanks to Prof. Russ Castronovo from the English Department of the University of Wisconsin-Madison for providing valuable criticism and direction in the early stages of writing.

I would also like to express my gratefulness to the people I cherish: my parents and my sister for their unyielding moral support in this endeavor, and my friends Judith Michel, Friederike Walter, Oonsie Biggs, Ainka Granderson, Saqib Mustafa, and the Wyman-Kuenzi family for being my friends!

Finally, and most of all, I want to thank the two persons closest to me: My husband Genia, for his love, understanding, friendship, and countless hours of babysitting and my daughter Helene for amazing me with her sweetness and curiosity each and every day.

## INTRODUCTION

But with the Paradise method, there would be ninety-nine percent accuracy. Whole populations could be created that would have pre-selected characteristics. Beauty, of course; that would be high in demand. And docility: several world leaders had expressed interest in that. Paradise had already developed a UV-resistant skin, a built-in insect repellent, an unprecedented ability to digest unrefined plant material. [...]

“Excuse me,” said Jimmy. “But a lot of this stuff isn’t what the average parent is looking for in a baby. Didn’t you get a bit carried away?” (*Oryx and Crake* 304)

“Didn’t you get a bit carried away?” is the reply of Jimmy, the protagonist of Margaret Atwood’s novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003), when his friend Crake informs him about the genetically engineered humanoid breed he has developed in his laboratory. Jimmy’s response does not just convey skepticism towards new technologies such as genetic engineering but also communicates a critical view of utopic notions of the body that strike similarities with totalitarian ideas of the *Übermensch*. Atwood’s literary response to technological developments but also utopic notions of the body is, as I will argue here, representative for a whole group of literary texts that have taken a rather critical stand towards such promises of salvation.

Despite a brief flare up of distinctly eutopian<sup>1</sup> texts in the 1970s, such as Joanna Russ’s feminist utopia *The Female Man* (1975)<sup>2</sup> or Ernest Callenbach’s environmentalist *Ecotopia* (1975), literature in the second half of the twentieth century has increasingly turned away from the utopian genre and has instead favored texts that are distinctly dystopian or at least ambivalent. The body has continued to play an important role in the literary imagination of societies better or worse than ours. While classic utopias have often used the body as an allegory for the ideal state (e.g. Plato’s ‘organic state,’ Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, the infamous notion

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘eutopian’ is commonly used in secondary literature to signify on a literary text that portrays a world better than ours. The Greek prefix ‘eu’ means ‘good.’ ‘Eutopian’ is thus used to avoid the ambiguity of the term ‘utopian’ which signifies on both the Greek prefix ‘eu’ (good) and the Greek prefix ‘ou’ meaning ‘not.’ For an example of the use of ‘eutopian’, see Raffaella Baccolini’s and Tom Moylan’s *Dark Horizon’s* (2, 3, 5) or Daniel Hager, “Utopia vs. Eutopia” in *Ideas in Liberty*, March 2003 (44-46).

<sup>2</sup> A comprehensive discussion of the literary history of feminist utopias has been provided by Frances Bartkowski in *Feminist Utopias* (1989).

of the *Volkskörper* in Nazi ideology<sup>3</sup>), postmodern texts problematize the claims made by such totalizing images of the body. The gendered, racialized or ‘other’ body has taken center stage in creating counter-drafts to the assumed ‘normality’ of the white male body. Politically engaged texts such as Octavia Butler’s *Lillith’s Brood* (formerly *Xenogenesis* trilogy 1987, 1988, 1989) map out a dystopian future in which notions of gender and race intersect with technology and ideology. These representations of the body are, of course, much less projections of a ‘real’ future than negotiations of contemporary social and political grievances. They map out the possibilities of what ‘could be’ while criticizing ‘what is.’

But has utopic discourse and particularly utopic discourse about the body really disappeared? A strictly literary approach defines utopia as a genre that “designates the class of fictional writings that represent an ideal but nonexistent political and social way of life” (*Glossary of Literary Terms* 327). Certain formal and structural elements such as the representation of an “ideal state in the fiction of a distinct country reached by a venturesome traveler” (328) or the inordinate superiority of the fictive world are often added as characteristics of the genre. A somewhat broader definition is provided by Lyman Tower Sargent who distinguishes between utopian societies, utopian thinking, and utopian literature pointing out that these notions sometimes intersect and inform each other but for the most part remain distinct categories (*British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1975* xii). In his monumental four-volume handbook on utopias<sup>4</sup> Richard Saage defines utopia as a fictional representation of society that comprehensively criticizes socio-economic circumstances and

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<sup>3</sup> For a thorough discussion see: Christina von Braun, “Blutschande:’ From the Incest Taboo to the Nuremberg Racial Laws” in *Encountering the Other(s). Studies in Literature, History and Culture*, ed. by Gisela Brinker-Gabler, New York State University Press, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> The body of secondary literature on utopias is vast. The scholarship on utopias I am referring to here is only an eclectic selection from this vast body of secondary literature. However, they are representative of general tendencies within this field of research. Other texts that have influenced my understanding of the history of utopias are: Paul Marx, *Utopia in America* (2002), F.E. Manuel and F.P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (1979), Lewis Mumford, *Interpretations and Forecasts: Studies in Literature, History, Biography, Technics, and Contemporary Society* (1973), Mark Holloway, *Heavens on Earth: Utopian Communities in America, 1680-1880* (1966), Darko Suvin, *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction – On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (1979), W. Vosskamp (ed.), *Utopieforschung* (1985).

institutions by drafting a “rationally accessible alternative”<sup>5</sup> (*Utopische Profile* Vol 4, 6). Furthermore, he insists that in order to be considered a ‘classic utopia’ a work has to add time- and context-specific innovative elements to the genre. According to Saage, innovative elements are such elements that refer to Common Sense, promote liberty and equality, pursue wealth and sustainability, protect minorities and seek to overcome patriarchy (6). Saage’s definition is problematic, mostly so because he limits it to literary texts ignoring the fact that many utopias have emerged out of discourses other than literature. Furthermore, like Sargent, Saage closes his book with the eutopian literary texts of the 1970s<sup>6</sup> suggesting the end of utopia.<sup>7</sup> However, it is precisely this ‘end’ of literary utopias that intersects with the emergence of a different kind of utopian discourse. As I would argue, utopic discourse and particularly utopic discourse as outlined by the value system Saage suggests continues to exist in literary theory and is consolidated in Theory’s treatment of the body.

If we agree that one of the major functions of utopias has been to criticize social and political grievances and show alternatives it is not far fetched to argue that this cultural function of literary utopias has since the 1960s and 1970s been extended to literary theory. As Sabine Sielke has pointed out, American universities and especially American Studies have been particularly receptive to poststructuralist theories and the social criticism its practice entails (“Theorizing American Studies: German Interventions into an Ongoing Debate”). Furthermore, as she correctly asks “Why not acknowledge that theories, like literary texts in their particular contexts, have their own specific cultural function?” (“Theorizing American Studies” 75). Liberty, equality, social and economic justice, the protection of minorities, and

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<sup>5</sup> All translations mine, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>6</sup> As already mentioned these include Joanna Russ’s *Female Man*, Ernst Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* but also Ursula LeGuin’s *Dispossessed* (1974), Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Sally Miller Gearhart’s *The Wanderground* (1979), and Samuel Delany’s *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*. (1976).

<sup>7</sup> The perception that utopias have come to an end is also shared by Russell Jacoby (*The End of Utopia* 1999), who defines utopias as “a belief that the future could fundamentally surpass the present” and that belief, as Jacoby claims, is “stone dead” (xii). A more critical account of these claims on “endisms” with regard to a perceived ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama) or the supposed ‘end of utopia’ is provided by Krishan Kumar in *Utopias and the Millennium* (1993).

the defeat of patriarchy have all been topics preoccupying poststructuralist theory since the 1960s. Although the practice of Theory at universities across the United States and Canada has greatly contributed to very *concrete* political measures<sup>8</sup> such as affirmative action, gender mainstreaming, and political correctness, Theory in its most radical form often strikes one as utterly utopic, or “a bit carried away.”

This is particularly true with regard to notions of the body within Theory. Since the 1960s the body and its various representations in discourse has become *the* trope of social commentary and criticism but, as I will argue, also utopic discourse. A stepping stone in this development has been Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1976), in which Foucault establishes the notion that the body is not a ‘naturally given’ but rather a context-specific discursive effect. Through the interdependence between discourse and power mapped out by Foucault, bodies are to be understood as social constructs rather than ahistoric biological facts. In the texts following this paradigmatic work Foucault placed the body in the center of his social and philosophical analyses.<sup>9</sup> According to Foucault, discursive effects are encoded in the body. His approach points out the complex relationship of knowledge and power which manifests itself in legal and medical discourse. These discourses produce the subjects they are eventually going to rule. However, Foucault’s analysis almost completely ignores the implications of his observations on notions of *gender* and *race*, two distinctly dominant topoi in literary theory since the 1970s. The insight that subjectivity is discursively constructed has provided Feminism and ‘Minority’ Studies with a powerful means of criticism, allowing them to identify and deconstruct cultural sentiments and repressive mechanisms in various

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<sup>8</sup> A rather critical stance to this tendency has been taken by Stanley Fish, who argues that literature and literary criticism should not be ‘abused’ to pursue a political agenda. By implicitly denying that literature does ‘cultural work’ Fish also regrettably ignores the impact literary criticism has had on American society. See: Stanley Fish, *Professional Correctness – Literary Theory and Political Change*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish – The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, (1977) 1995. -, *Madness and Civilization – History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. New York: Vintage Books, (1961) 1988. -, *The Birth of the Clinic – An Archeology of Medical Perception*. New York: Vintage Books, (1963) 1994.



contexts.<sup>10</sup> More importantly, besides a few exceptions, like for example Barbara Duden's work on the materiality of the body ("*Leiblichkeit*")<sup>11</sup>, language and the control thereof has become *the* topos in defining the body and subjectivity. Put differently, the acknowledgement that bodies are discursively constructed necessarily demands that all discussions of subjectivity problematize both *language* and *the body*. It is also this insight into the discursive construction of bodies that holds the greatest potential for utopic discourse within Theory.

While theory and literature inform each other, they have, as I will argue here, come up with distinctly different answers to questions of subjectivity and the body in a changing cultural, political and technological landscape in the second half of the twentieth century. Theoretical discourse about the body has produced what I would like to term 'critical utopias' that negotiate various sentiments about the ideal and just society through the body. Literary texts, on the other hand, have taken a dystopic approach to theoretical and technological explorations of the body. Although I am using the term 'critical utopia' in a slightly different context (i.e. applied to Theory rather than literature), my notion of it is informed by Raffaella Baccolini's and Tom Moylan's discussion of utopian novels<sup>12</sup> of the 1970s in which they highlight the close connection between utopic writing of the 1970s and the oppositional political culture of the 1960s.<sup>13</sup> As they argue, "'critical,' in this sense, incorporates an

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<sup>10</sup> The list of theoretical texts that utilize Foucault's insights is sheer endless. Among the more prominent and influential ones are: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble- Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994), Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight – Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (1993), Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (1998), Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (eds.), *The Making of the Modern Body: Sexuality and Society in the Nineteenth Century* (1987), Carol E. Henderson, *Scarring the Black Body – Race and Representation in African American Literature* (2002), Gates, Henry Louis and Gene Andrew Jarrett (eds.), *New Negro: Essays on Race, Representation, and African American Culture 1892-1938*. Princeton/NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007, Philipp Sarasin, *Reizbare Maschinen*, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Barbara Duden, *Disembodying Women: Perspectives on Pregnancy and the Unborn*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Also see: Tom Moylan, *Scraps of Untainted Sky*. (2000)

<sup>13</sup> A very enlightening account of the interdependence between 1960s political and literary texts and the emergence of the 'postmodern' is also provided by Marianne DeKoven's *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (2004).

Enlightenment sense of critique, a post-modern attitude of self-reflexivity, and political implications of a ‘critical mass’” (*Dark Horizons* 2). What distinguishes these ‘critical utopias’ from classic utopias is the authors’ awareness “of the historical tendency of the utopian genre to limit the imagination to a particular ideal” (2).<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, “by forging visions of better but open futures, these utopian writings developed a critique of dominant ideology and traced new vectors of opposition” (2). As I believe, particularly the last point is crucial in assessing utopic notions within Theory. Theory uses the gendered, racialized, or technologically enhanced body to trace these ‘new vectors of opposition.’ Feminism, African-American Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Posthumanism, Queer and LGTB (Lesbian Gay Transgender Bisexual) Studies<sup>15</sup> have all produced various ‘utopic bodies’ in order to make strategic political claims to subjectivity. But unlike classic utopias that limited “the imagination to a particular ideal” (2) these critical utopias and the utopic bodies they produce exist ‘side by side’ and acknowledge each other, thus internalizing the ‘difference without hierarchy’ paradigm that is a tenet of contemporary Theory.

Out of this observation a number of questions arise: What exactly are the strategic political claims that are being made through the body by Theory and literature respectively? Why are they utopic or dystopic? What is being criticized? How do Theory’s and literature’s answers differ? And finally, what are the consequences on notions of subjectivity? In the following three chapters I will attempt to answer these questions by staging a dialogue between three theoretical and three literary texts. This approach enables me to show that while Theory has produced ‘critical utopias,’ literary texts have taken a dystopic approach to

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<sup>14</sup> Tobin Siebers’ collection of essays entitled *Heterotopia – Postmodern Utopia and the Body Politic* (1994) makes a similar point by arguing that part of the postmodern project is the acknowledgement that many different political interests and cultural perceptions are at work simultaneously. Helmut Willke argues along similar lines in his book *Heterotopia – Studien zur Krisis der Ordnung moderner Gesellschaften* (2003). In contrast to Siebers, however, Willke perceives of the heterotopia, i.e. the synchronicity of various political interest and ideals, as a threat to the order of the modern state.

<sup>15</sup> For a thorough discussion of the ‘utopic bodies’ produced by Lesbian and Queer Studies, see: Jennifer Burwell, *Notes on Nonhere – Feminism, Utopian Logic, and Social Transformation* (1997).

the body in relation to various competing political, theoretical, and scientific discourses. Each chapter will contain a ‘dialogue’ between one theoretical and one literary text. The texts I have chosen are thematically related but more importantly, they emerged roughly around the same time allowing me to take a New Historicist approach to intertextuality that looks at the cultural context and the various circulating discourses that generate cultural, scientific, and intellectual concepts and beliefs. The benefit of such a dialogic approach is that it allows me to contextualize these texts with each other (without dwelling on biographical details of the texts’ authors), to understand them in their proper historical contexts but also to identify the cultural and intellectual history embedded in them.

The texts I have chosen are by no means ‘marginal’ but rather represent theories and literary texts that are part of the canon. I deliberately chose these rather well known texts because I would like to show that utopic tendencies in Theory’s treatment of the body is not an isolated phenomenon but rather inherent in the canon. Accordingly, the literary texts I have chosen also represent a cross-section of canonized texts that provide responses to notions of the body in various political and technological contexts.

In the first chapter I will stage a dialogue between the works of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and William S. Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* (1959) and his “retroactive utopia” *Cities of the Red Night* (1981). Deleuze has only recently gained recognition in the canon of French Theory in America mainly so because his writings are not easily accessible and in contrast to other French philosophers who enjoy great popularity among American academics and especially in the field of American Studies he does not provide any coherent theory of language or culture respectively. As I will argue, this ‘lack of coherence’ is part of Deleuze’s philosophical project but it is also the greatest obstacle in making his theories a viable tool of literary and social criticism. In this chapter I will focus on two concepts that

are, as I believe, crucial in understanding Deleuze's philosophical objective and the utopic dimensions of his work. The 'Body without Organs' (*A Thousand Plateaus* 1987) and the 'Machinic body' (*Anti-Oedipus* 1972) stand out in Deleuze's writings as two concepts that do not just constitute social and political criticism but also make utopic claims on notions of subjectivity through the body. As is true for other poststructuralists, Deleuze emphasizes the role of language in the constitution of the body and subjectivity. His notion of 'rhizomatic writing' is one major aspect of the utopic body concepts in his work. Among the many literary works Deleuze cites to illustrate and explain his utopic notions of the body and their relation to language, writing, and authorship is William S. Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*. Although arguably, Burroughs's literary style of 'cut-up' and Deleuze's notion of 'rhizomatic writing' resemble each other, Burroughs's notion of the body is, as I will argue, rather dystopic than utopic. Burroughs's later work *Cities of the Red Night* is a self-proclaimed "retroactive Utopia" (xiv) but its status as utopia is highly questionable. In fact, I will argue that although the text makes utopic claims on gay subjectivity that are closely linked to the act of writing, it also presents this subjectivity as being constantly threatened by the female subject, making the realization of the utopic notion of gay subjectivity virtually impossible.

Chapter II will deal Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and the Socialist Feminism in the 1980s" (1985) and William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984). Inspired by the accelerated development of computer science in the 1980s both texts deal with the impacts of technological development on the human body and the implied changes in notions of subjectivity. In the tradition of feminist utopias<sup>16</sup> such as

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<sup>16</sup> A useful discussion of female utopias has been provided by Jane Donwerth in *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* (1997) and her previous book *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women* (1994). In both books Donwerth argues that female writers of utopian novels and science fiction are constrained by a number of misogynic conventions inherent in the genre. Not just that utopian and science fiction novels generally have a male narrator but also the subject matter of the text 'science' is a male connotated discourse that tends to objectify women or represent them as alien. However, as Donwerth convincingly argues, female writers of utopian and science fiction successfully undermine and ironically subvert these conventions.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*<sup>17</sup> (1915), Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), and Sally Miller Gearhart's *Wanderground* (1979) Haraway tackles - on a theoretical level - questions of human reproduction, the role of women and gender in a future that will witness the emergence of 'cyborgs,' i.e. cybernetic organisms. While Haraway perceives of the 'cyborg' as a chance for liberation from social and political grievances, especially with regard to women William Gibson's *Neuromancer* draws a bleak picture of a future in which the individual is reduced to the functionality of his/her body parts. Gibson's novel is often classified as belonging to the genre of *cyberpunk*, a sub-genre of Science Fiction that focuses on "high tech and low life" (*Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy* 141). It is characterized by the portrayal of advanced science and technology, such as cybernetics, and the break-down of governmental and social order (*New Boundaries in Political Science Fiction* 75-76) in a distant, yet often recognizable future.

Both texts use the trope of the cyborg to make predictions about the future of humanity and its relationship to technology. Cybernetic enhancement of the body does not just prefigure the possibilities of technology but also raises questions about what it means to be human and how – once lines between the human body and the machine are blurred – subjectivity will be defined. Haraway and Gibson give different answers to these questions, especially, with regard to gender and the role of the individual in relation to society. As I will show, language and the discursive constitution of the body continue to play an important role, as both Gibson and Haraway perceive of language as a reality-forming instance and as a 'code' (as in computer code) that ultimately opens new possibilities for the participation and exploitation of the individual in larger organizational entities.

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<sup>17</sup> For the most comprehensive account and discussion of Gilman's work including *Herland* see: Cynthia Davis and Denise Knight, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her Contemporaries: Literary and Intellectual Contexts* (2004).

In the third and final chapter I will draw attention to the theoretical writings of Homi Bhabha and stage a dialogue between his writings and Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Homi Bhabha is at the forefront of postcolonial criticism and his writings on the notions of 'hybridity' and 'mimicry' (cf. *The Location of Culture* 1994) are often cited as two prominent examples of postcolonial notions of the body. While originally taken from biology Bhabha utilizes both terms to establish notions of postcolonial subjectivity and culture. Both aspects are according to Bhabha intrinsically linked but, as I will show, the great level of abstraction and the predominant emphasis of language and culture make Bhabha's theory utterly utopic and out of touch with the social realities of former colonized nations. Margaret Atwood, on the other hand, answers the questions postcoloniality poses on notions of the body and subjectivity quite differently. At face value her novel *Oryx and Crake* is about the effects of global warming, the possibilities of genetic engineering, and the future of mankind. However, to my mind, Atwood's text also negotiates questions of postcoloniality. As I will show, Atwood's text does not just comment on the ethic implications of genetic engineering but also problematizes scientific discourse as colonial discourse. It is, again, through this close connection between language and the body that Atwood's dystopic vision fully unfolds.

Finally, I will recap my findings and discuss what the cultural and political significance of the various body concepts discussed in the previous chapters is.

## CHAPTER I - GILLES DELEUZE AND WILLIAM S. BURROUGHS

In November 1975 William S. Burroughs and Gilles Deleuze met at a conference on “Prison and Madness” held by the French Department of Columbia University. Among the participants of the conference were a number of French poststructuralist philosophers such as Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and psychiatrist Félix Guattari, and American artists such as writer and artist John Cage. While Michel Foucault was already well known in the American academic world at that time, his colleague Gilles Deleuze would hardly receive any academic attention until many years later. In “Theatrum Philosophicum” published in 1977, Michel Foucault suggests that “perhaps, one day, this century will be known as Deleuzian” (Foucault 1977, 165).<sup>18</sup> Deleuze later commented on Foucault’s remark that it was “a joke meant to make people who like us laugh, and make everyone else livid” (*Negotiations* 4). Foucault’s statement has generated some academic interest in Deleuze, but his writings have only recently become subject of academic attention and syllabi. At the peak of academic interest in the writings of other French theorists like Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, or Jacques Lacan during the 1980s and 1990s, Deleuze was rarely mentioned.<sup>19</sup> William Burroughs on the other hand, already had a reputation in 1975. In the 1950s he was a part of the Beat movement. During this time he published *Junky* (1953) and *Naked Lunch* (1959), which at first went widely unnoticed by the general and academic public but earned him underground reputation. Public perception of Burroughs in the 1960s was influenced by the censorship of his writings (e.g. *Naked Lunch*). He offended some and

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<sup>18</sup> In a critical anthology entitled *A Deleuzian Century?* Ian Buchanan points out that Foucault’s remark might have been intended as a joke (Buchanan 1). The irony in Foucault’s statement lies in the fact that scholars’ awareness of Deleuzian philosophy has been raised due to this comment but that the impact of Deleuze’s work in the academy is still relatively low. In his 1998 introduction to the writings of Gilles Deleuze Friedrich Balke names Deleuze to be among the most important philosophers of the twentieth century. However, he also points out that the German academy has, so far, reacted with silence to the writings of Deleuze (9).

<sup>19</sup> Translations of his works into English and major commentary on his writings did only start in the 1990s.

mesmerized others. However, it was not until the 1970s that his work received serious academic attention and by the 1980s he was considered an icon of postmodernism.

At the conference mentioned above Burroughs delivered a paper entitled “The Limits of Control.” Fifteen years later Deleuze would refer in his “Postscript on the Societies of Control” (1992) to this paper.<sup>20</sup> But contrary to what the editor of *Burroughs Live*, Sylvère Lothringer, has suggested in the annotated collection of Burroughs’s interviews (328), Deleuze’s reference to Burroughs (“Postscript” 4) is only marginal. Robin Lydenberg’s suggestion that Burroughs has influenced the composition of Deleuze’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) and Timothy S. Murphy’s claim that Gilles Deleuze probably provides the most fitting tools to an elucidating reading of Burroughs are partially valid but ignore important differences between their ideological objectives. As I would argue, Lydenberg’s and Murphy’s reading of Deleuze and Burroughs suffer from constructing a ‘one-way street’ of cultural exchange and ignoring the diverse and eclectic nature of Deleuze’s philosophy. As Frederic Jameson has poignantly remarked “[...] it seems misguided to search for a system or central idea in Deleuze” (“Marxism and Dualism” 15). Fredric Jameson and Eugene Holland see Deleuze’s work for the most part as a reformulation of Marx’s critique of capitalism, other critics like Steven Shaviro focus on Deleuze’s work on cinema, yet others perceive of Deleuze’s “machines” as a philosophical foundation for cybernetics and posthuman body concepts.

Jameson’s observation about the lack of a central idea in Deleuze’s work holds particularly true for Deleuze’s interest in the arts. His interest in literature, however, seems to

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<sup>20</sup> In *Burroughs Live* editor Sylvère Lothringer claims that Deleuze referred “twenty-five years later” (328) in “Postscript” to Burroughs’s lecture. This, however, is impossible since Deleuze died in 1995, merely twenty years after Burroughs delivered his paper.



be most elaborate since he dedicated a number of books to this topic.<sup>21</sup> In addition to these major works on literature he makes frequent reference to novels, poems, plays and essays by various authors. In *A Thousand Plateaus*<sup>22</sup> (1980) alone he mentions seventy-five writers. But despite his vivid interest in literature and his frequent reference to literary works, Deleuze does not formulate a systematic theory of literature. Like much of his writing on other topics Deleuze's readings of literary works are eclectic and at times even inconsistent. The numerous contradictions within his work, though, point at his greater philosophic project. Deleuze often quotes (mostly without the use of quotation marks) other philosophers or writers, seizes their key concepts and terms and redefines them for his own purposes. Due to this 'recycling' of ideas that are not his own, Deleuze has been criticized from various sides and been accused of philosophical plagiarism. Deleuze, however, rejected these accusations:

The history of philosophy plays a patently repressive role in philosophy, it's philosophy's own version of the Oedipus complex: "You can't seriously consider saying what you yourself think until you've read this and that, and that on this, and this on that." Many members of my generation never broke free of this; others did, by inventing their own particular methods and rules, a new approach. I myself "did" history of philosophy for a long time [...]. What I most detested was Hegelianism and dialectics. [...] But I suppose the main way I coped with it at the time was to see the history of philosophy as a sort of buggery or (it comes to the same thing) immaculate conception. I saw myself as taking an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his own offspring, yet monstrous. It was really important for it to be his own child, because the author had to actually say all I had him say. (*Negotiations* 5-6).

In the excerpt above Deleuze expresses resentment towards histories of philosophy. He states that they function as an Oedipus-complex within philosophy. By openly admitting to

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<sup>21</sup> Among Deleuze's more prominent writings on literature are *Proust and Signs* (1964, second extended edition 1970), *Masochism: An Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty* (1967), in which he discusses the works of nineteenth-century novelist Leopold Sacher-Masoch, *The Logic of Sense* (1969), in which he does not just discuss Stoic philosophy but also offers a reading of Lewis Carroll, *Kafka – Toward a Minor Literature* (1975), and a collection of essays entitled *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1993).

<sup>22</sup> *A Thousand Plateaus* like *Anti-Oedipus* and other works was co-authored by psychiatrist Félix Guattari. Guattari deserves individual academic recognition for his own work. Guattari's influence and the extent of his co-authorship with Deleuze cannot be underestimated. It is rather difficult to distinguish between portions of *A Thousand Plateaus* and other works that were written by Guattari or Deleuze respectively since they mix and blend their individual style of writing and thought in a way that makes them speak as one voice. Their collaboration even went as far as incorporating the other's individually published writings into their own work as if it was their own. While I am aware of this peculiar arrangement, I will mainly refer to Deleuze as the focus point of my analysis and for that matter neglect Guattari.

seizing concepts of other philosophers for his own argumentative purposes, he undermines notions of originality and intellectual property. Or put differently, he uses phrases, concepts and ideas of a certain philosopher to argue against that very same philosopher. As I will argue here, by employing ‘plagiarism’ Deleuze does not just refute the concept of originality but implicitly also attacks the notion of the ‘author’ that has historically been linked to subjectivity. His philosophy can then be read as an attempt to trace subjectivity along new vectors of opposition. As becomes clear from the various examples Deleuze provides in his writing, this subjectivity is also closely linked to the body and its discursive constitution. William S. Burroughs is one of the authors Deleuze mentions more or less randomly in *A Thousand Plateaus* (6, 152). He quotes Burroughs’s cut-up method as an ideal example of “rhizomatic writing” and refers to Burroughs in the context of the “Body without Organs,” the central utopic body of Deleuzian philosophy. The question that necessarily follows is if and how Deleuze takes Burroughs ‘from behind’ and, to stay within the metaphor, what monstrous offspring the dialogue between them produces.

My aim here can clearly not be to reproduce or expand previous discussions of Deleuze’s writings on literature by providing yet another interpretation or summary. Instead, I will stage a dialogue between Gilles Deleuze and William S. Burroughs that will allow me to single out areas of agreement and disagreement in their notions of the body and their take on language and writing in the discursive constitution of the body. A reading of Burroughs through the ‘lens of Deleuze,’ as suggested by Timothy S. Murphy in *Wising Up the Marks* (1997), appears promising but bears the danger of constructing an intellectual ‘one-way street’ that cannot do justice to either Deleuze or Burroughs since it constructs a closed circle of interpretation. A dialogue between their works, on the other hand, allows me to not just point out similarities but also differences. Both Deleuze and Burroughs extensively discuss the

body in their texts, making it *the* trope of their writing, and also *the* trope of their utopic/dystopic visions respectively. Though Deleuze claims that a Body without Organs is not a metaphor, that it is “not at all a notion or a concept but a *practice, a set of practices*” (*A Thousand Plateaus* 149-150), it is quite difficult to imagine the becoming of a Body without Organs in reality. When he suggests that “[one] should walk on your head, sing with your sinuses, see through your skin, breathe with your belly” (151), declare war on the organs (150), or even lose them (150) one cannot help but consider this a utopic notion. In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze names the “hypochondriac,” the “paranoid,” the “shizo,” the “drugged,” and the “masochist” body (150) as types or stages of the Body without Organs. These bodies can also be ‘identified’ in Burroughs’s texts but despite these similarities, Deleuze and Burroughs claim, as I will argue here, distinctly different cultural and political territory. Deleuze’s utopic notions of the body can be read as a rejection of western philosophy, capitalism, and psychoanalysis but more importantly, as Alan Schrift has pointed out, they “open up possibilities [...] to the project of radical democracy” (152) that is based on the inclusion of all difference possible. Burroughs’s notions of subjectivity, language and the body on the other hand can be read as a political claim to gay subjectivity that is constantly threatened by notions of difference and gender equality, especially with regard to women.

Scholarship on Burroughs has frequently interpreted his writings in the context of the Beat movement of the 1950s, which supposedly focused on criticizing capitalism, consumer culture and ‘square’ American values. Apart from the fact that this view of the Beat movement appears to be too simplistic, it also does not do justice to the implications of gender in Burroughs’s work. As Jamie Russell has pointed out in *Queer Burroughs*, scholarship on Burroughs has downplayed the role of his sexual orientation (4). William S. Burroughs was

not only a novelist who was gay, but rather a gay novelist. As I will argue, his notion of the body displays a distinct anxiety towards the female subject and claims a particular political space by deliberately *excluding* the female/effeminately male subject. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued in her study of English literature and male homosocial desire entitled *Between Men* (1985), “homophobia directed by men against men is misogynic, and perhaps transhistorically so” (20). Sedgwick’s observation also holds true with regard to Burroughs’s texts.

Anxiety towards the female subject in Burroughs’s texts is not just conveyed through representations of the body but also, as I will show, through traditional notions of authorship and subjectivity that reserve this prerogative for men. Burroughs thus contradicts Deleuze’s project of radical democracy and his concept of “Becoming-woman” that, as I will show, is not just rooted in his utopic notions of the body but also his concept of authorship and writing. Burroughs’s utopic bodies are rather a pronouncement of radical gay subjectivity than a sign of Deleuze’s arbitrary multiplicity of the subject. Burroughs’s pronouncement of radical gay subjectivity unfolds its utopic moment by *complete exclusion* of the female subject. At the same time Burroughs acknowledges the impossibility of this utopia and emphasizes the dystopic dimensions of sexual difference and assigned gender roles. Deleuze’s *Body without Organs*, on the other hand, unfolds its utopic momentum by its *radical inclusion* of all difference *possible* (real and virtual) into the subject.

In order to illustrate my argument, I will first put the writings of Burroughs and Deleuze into their proper historical and intellectual context. Secondly, I will map Burroughs’s political claims on gay identity by contextualizing two key-passages from *Cities* with a statement of purpose of the Gay Liberation Front (1969) and an article by Leslie Fiedler (1948). I will then go on to show that Burroughs’s cut-up technique and Deleuze’s concept of

rhizomatic writing share certain features but also differ greatly in their underlying concept of language. Both Burroughs and Deleuze assigned the writer the role of “cultural physician.” This notion is not just closely linked to their understanding of language but also reveals major differences in their perception of what constitutes the ‘social disease’ of society. In the following section I will discuss Deleuze’s concept of “becoming-animal” and “becoming-women” as suggested remedies for the ‘social disease.’ This discussion will touch upon questions of language, subjectivity, and the body and will show that the political claims made by Deleuze and Burroughs are in fact incommensurate. Finally, I will discuss Deleuze’s *Body without Organs* and answer the question what ideological implications Burroughs’s and Deleuze’s works express respectively.

## CONTEXTUALIZING BURROUGHS AND DELEUZE

### THE BEATS

*Cities of the Red Night* was first published in 1981. In this “retroactive Utopia” (xiv) Burroughs frequently cites his own earlier works through the use of reoccurring motifs, narrative style, plots, and characters’ names. Although *Cities* has a more consistent narrative structure than his earlier works, it still resists linearity. Though *Cities* was written in the late 1970s/early 80s it has been suggested that Burroughs’s social criticism can largely be associated with the Beat movement of the 1950s. Through the decades his works have been variations of the same topics, motifs and techniques of writing. Undoubtedly, perception of his works has greatly changed during these decades. It has moved from risqué in the 1950s to being a part of

popular culture in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>23</sup> Burroughs's works have repeatedly referenced drug-addiction, consumer culture, homosexuality, alienation from 'mainstream' society and a self-reflexive awareness of the status of language as a conscious and reality forming instance.

In the 1950s Burroughs was, together with Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, a leading figure of the Beat movement. John Clellon Holmes's Beat manifesto, "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation" (1958), defines Beat culture as a "kind of passive resistance to the Square society" (38). Holmes's notion of "Square" refers to middle-class America and its value system that supposedly incorporated "an all-consuming work-ethic, sexual repression, cultural xenophobia, militaristic patriotism, and suburban materialism" (Bennett 2). Allan Ginsburg summarized Beat sentiments towards society more bluntly when he states "Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb" (*Howl and Other Poems* 39). Keeping these two examples of resentment towards American middle-class values in mind, it is not surprising that a great deal of scholarship on the 1950s and the Beat generation has focused on emphasizing the "Beat-vs.-Square dichotomy" (Bennett 2). Barbara Ehrenreich has called the Beats the "first all-out critique of American consumer culture" (52) that rebelled against increasing political and economic conformity in the United States after WWII. David Halberstam has pointed out in *The Fifties* (1993) that the Beats were the "first to protest what they considered to be the blandness, conformity, and lack of serious social and cultural purpose in middle-class life in America" (295). Along similar lines Snyder and McKenzie emphasize that the Beats sought "detachment from the existing society" (11) and its value system. But as Robert Bennett has pointed out

one can read almost any major Beat work [...] more or less at face value and easily identify its numerous 'hipper-than-thou' attacks on 'square' values [but] what is more difficult, however, is to create a [perspective] that critically analyzes and conceptually complicates oversimplified notions of this Beat-vs.-Square dichotomy. (2-3)

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<sup>23</sup> Collaborations with bands like REM or with Kurt Cobain of Nirvana in the 1990s bear witness to this.

Furthermore, Bennet argues,

the Beats themselves remained trapped within many of the patriarchal, racist, and homophobic assumptions of 'square' America, and consequently the Beat revolution only partially realized the kind of radical cultural critique it hoped to achieve (6).

The Beats' meager contribution to the Civil Rights Movement and their rather sexist constructions of masculinity are, in Bennett's view, unmistakable signs of the movement's limited 'success.' Gary Snyder, himself a member of the Beat movement, however argues that the Beats never really tried to become a political movement, in fact they "had little confidence in transforming [society]" (10-11). "Beat style [...] tried to be an action, not a reflection or comment" (*Growing Up Absurd – Problems of Youth in the Organized Society* 189). The Beat movement lacked philosophical and theoretical underpinnings that would eventually emerge in the 1960s counterculture. Beat lifestyle including drug addiction, mental illness, alcoholism and petty crime would only retrospectively be understood as a rejection of an allegedly repressing social code of morality. Mental illness and drug addiction were, as James Campell has pointed out, celebrated as a lifestyle among the Beats (*This is the Beat Generation* 3), not so much as a protest against society. Rather, as Jack Kerouac has stated, it was part of a "wild self-believing individuality" (cited in *Beat Down Your Soul* XV) that neatly aligned with the American creed of the pursuit of individual happiness.

The political and economic situation in the United States in the decade following WWII has been described by Martyn J. Lee as "an economy of symbolic and cultural goods [that] aligned sympathetically with Capitalism's fundamental objective" (18). The "agencies of capital turn[ed] their attention towards [...] prevailing familial, kinship, gender [relations]" (67) to transform these individuals into potential consumers. The success of the American economy after WWII has been accompanied by what John K. Galbraith has called "depression psychosis" (63-83). According to Galbraith the "depression psychosis" was

based on a number of misperceptions about the “ideas and ideals” of capitalism. Prior to the Great Depression big business had relatively free rein over the economy and it was believed that this would be a guarantee for its success. Henceforth, after WWII capitalism was perceived as being vulnerable towards ideological and economic struggle with communism. Government intervention in the form of increased government spending and an ever-expanding bureaucracy was seen as essential in securing the survival of the American way of life. The result was an equally repressive system (as compared to communism) at the other end of the spectrum. Conformity with capitalist ideas, ideals and way of life became mandatory and any deviation from this prescribed path was perceived as a potential threat. Questions of economic systems became inseparable from ideological questions expressed in Cold War politics. The social, economic and political climate of the post-war years has been best summarized by Alan Nadel who suggests the term “containment culture” to describe the complex interrelations of economy, politics and society (*Containment Culture: American Narrative, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* 1995). Nadel argues that Cold War politics permeated all aspects of life generating powerful metanarratives and thus creating an atmosphere of general paranoia and enforced social and consumerist conformity. While Lee’s, Galbraith’s, and Nadel’s accounts of the 1950s might provide many useful insights, they seem to focus exclusively on the historical experiences of white middle-class Americans and thus fail to take notions of class, race, and gender into account. More precisely, what is being presented as the historical experience of ‘mainstream culture’ might in fact not be easily applicable to African Americans, women, and other structural minorities whose social realities cannot be exclusively defined in terms of consumerism or ‘general paranoia.’ This is in so far relevant with regard to the Beat movement as it is often, as mentioned earlier, solely defined in terms of opposition to ‘Square,’ i.e. white middle-class America. If we take into account



that most prominent members of the Beat movement were white males, the Beats are not as ‘far out there’ as they declared themselves to be or as critical reception has perceived them to be.<sup>24</sup>

Accordingly, the Beats’ social criticism focused on the lifestyle and sentiments of ‘white’ middle class America and not on other social and political issues such as the grievances of African-Americans or women. Burroughs’s work for example, frequently signifies on the ‘American’ obsession with conspiracy<sup>25</sup> or consumerism. Burroughs’ “Algebra of Need” (*Naked Lunch* vii) is an interpretation of economic relations that resounds all through his writing. The “Algebra of Need” is according to Burroughs based on “junk,” i.e. opium and its derivatives. The principle on which “the pyramid of junk” operates is simple: “one level eat[s] the level below (it is no accident that junk higher-ups are always fat and the addict in the street is always thin)” (vi). The junk pyramid is based on a monopoly that follows three rules: “1 – Never give anything away for nothing. 2 – Never give more than you have to give (always catch the buyer hungry and always make him wait). 3 – Always take everything back if you possibly can” (vi). While Burroughs’s “Algebra of Need” defines need as addiction to drugs, it is clear that junk could easily be replaced by money/consumer goods especially since “Junk is quantitative and accurately measurable,” it is “the ideal product...the ultimate merchandise” (vii). Burroughs’s “pyramid of junk” is strangely reminiscent of Galbraith’s *The Affluent Society* (1958), in which he puts the thesis forward that increased

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<sup>24</sup> As Nancy Grace and Ronna Johnson have convincingly argued in *Breaking the Rule of Cool – Interviewing and Reading Women Beat Writers* (2004) female Beat writers, such as Ruth Weiss and Anne Waldman, have been victim to omission and exclusion at the hands of fellow (male) Beat writers and literary critics. Also see, Brenda Knight (ed.), *Women of the Beat Generation*. Berkeley/CA: Conari Press, 1996 and Richard Peabody (ed.), *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation*. London: Serpent’s Tail, 1997. In his critique of “American studies [...] that continues to marginalize minority narratives, histories, literatures” (5) Luis Martinez has argued that the same holds true for Beat writers belonging to ethnic minorities. (*Countering the Counterculture – Rereading Postwar American Dissent from Jack Kerouac to Tomás Rivera*, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Cf for example: Dana Polan, *Power and Paranoia: History, Narrative and the American Cinema, 1940-1950*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986; Timothy Melley, *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America*. Ithaca/NY: Cornell University Press, 2000; Samuel C. Coale, *Paradigms of Paranoia: The Culture of Conspiracy in Contemporary America*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005

material production is not necessarily a sign of economic and societal health. The original title of *The Affluent Society* was *Why the Poor are Poor* (1956), which makes the connection between these two economic views even more visible. Burroughs's "Algebra of Need" can barely be considered an economic or social theory but it can be understood as a critical statement towards 'cultural totalization' after WWII. This does not just hold true for Burroughs but for the Beat movement in general. The Beats lacked theoretical underpinnings yet their response towards consumer culture foreshadowed leftist criticism towards capitalism that would emerge in the 1960s.

Rather, as mentioned earlier, the Beats valued individuality and intensity of expression which, at least with regard to the former, placed them not apart but also beside classic American values. Spontaneity as a motto influenced Beat musicians such as Charlie Parkers, who demonstrated their creativity in spur-of-the moment innovations in jazz. Painter Jackson Pollock made the *act* of painting the focus of his art, and dancers like Merce Cunningham improvised their dance performances leaving their outcome to mere chance. In literature Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs among others sought to challenge contemporary literary conventions and perceptions of what constituted 'art.' Ginsberg did so by experimenting with slogans and aphorisms (*Cosmopolitan Greetings* 13) and Burroughs by using cut-ups. Others like Gregory Corso experimented with "goofing," a seemingly absurd invention of expressions and phrases that reminded of surrealism and appealed to the readers' irrational imagination.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, the Beats' literary experiments were supposed to convey 'authenticity' as the ultimate expression of individuality. As William T. Lawlor has pointed out,

candor, confession, and honesty – especially about sexuality (including homosexuality) made the revelation of 'secret scatological thought' (Kerouac, *Pull my Daisy* 23) not only permissible but also desirable. Pretenses and artificiality had to be stripped away; nakedness became the rule not only for the body but also for the soul (*Beat Culture – Lifestyle, Icons, and Impact* xiv).

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<sup>26</sup> For examples see: Gregory Corso, *The Happy Birthday of Death* (1960)

As I would argue, the uninhibited discussion of sexuality and the strong emphasis on individuality on the one hand foreshadowed the political climate of the 1960s, in which these topics would get renegotiated on a larger social and political scale, especially with regard to the plight of women and gays. On the other hand, the strong focus on ‘authenticity’ and individuality signifies on rather conventional notions of subjectivity and authorship. As I will argue here this is particularly true with regard to William Burroughs, whose texts – despite their supposedly ‘shocking’ representations of gay sexuality and drug addiction – define subjectivity along very traditional lines and thus are not just out of step with the political climate of the 1960s but also with the political objectives of Gilles Deleuze.

### **CRITICAL THEORY**

The ‘roots’ of the turbulent sixties did not just emerge out of the Beat movement but also out of the academy. The Frankfurt School forms the basis of Critical Theory that would gain momentum in the 1960s and the following decades.<sup>27</sup> Much of theoretical criticism, including poststructuralism, shares basic beliefs with the Frankfurt School. Resentment towards capitalist civil societies and towards notions of ‘progress’ as formulated by Hegel are two major tenets held by most postmodern thinkers. In *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, first published in 1947, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer describe the process of ‘cultural totalization’ under way since the Enlightenment. They argue that reason, though at first providing liberating powers over repressive religious dogmas, has in dialectic ascendance become dogmatic and repressive itself through its continuous validation of technical efficiency over all other qualities. In their view, and in the view of many student protesters in Europe in the

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<sup>27</sup> The reception of the teachings and theories of the Frankfurt School in the American academia was somewhat delayed. However, once their writings became part of the curriculum, they developed into forceful political discourses, which ironically found their way back to Germany via the anti-war movement of the Vietnam War and student protests.

1960s who took up their writings, this did not just directly lead to fascism but also to a general ‘*Vernunftstotalitarismus*’ inherent in all civil societies. This *Vernunftstotalitarismus* necessarily presupposes the predominance of a ‘means-ends-rationalism’ that values technological and scientific development to such an extent that life increasingly becomes a series of exchange relations. Along these lines, citizens are exclusively perceived as producers or consumers of goods. This way of thinking necessarily forces culture into “the repetitiveness, the self-sameness, and the ubiquity of modern mass culture” (*Critical Theory* 71).

Gilles Deleuze’s writings can be placed in the intellectual context of the Frankfurt School since *reason* and *capitalism* are two concepts he opposes most severely in his writings.<sup>28</sup> It is, however, debatable whether or not Deleuze can be considered a (neo-) Marxist, as Jameson has suggested, since Marxism heavily draws on the dialectic of ‘scientific progress’ that is based on *reason*. Deleuze’s opposition to notions of reason and sanity is a feature he shares, for example, with Michel Foucault, whose *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961) and *History of Sexuality* (1976) are considered ground-breaking works in the study of knowledge, power, and language. The linguistic turn in philosophy that started in the second half of the twentieth century also influenced Deleuze’s writings. In contrast to Foucault’s writings about the relation of knowledge and power/discourse or Derrida’s deconstructionist approach to language, though, Deleuze never formulated a systematic theory of either language or literature. While Foucault’s concept of “biopower”<sup>29</sup> relies on the notion that language/discourse establish of control over populations (he in fact argues that

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<sup>28</sup> See in particular: *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (1977)

<sup>29</sup> “Biopower” quite literally means the control over bodies. In the age of reason (bio)power is legitimized through an emphasis of the protection of life (rather than the threat of death). Through medical and legal discourse technologies of control emerge that justify biopower. Foucault sees sexuality as one such technology. The regulation of sexuality through ontological notions of health, blood, family, etc. is thus the fields where biopower is at work. See: *History of Sexuality, Vol. I*, p. 140 -ff

only discourse creates ‘technologies of control’), Deleuze’s critique of power relations within society is not solely based on observations about discourse but rather criticizes *all forms of organizational structures*. This includes language as much as it includes the human body as intelligible entities.<sup>30</sup> Deleuze’s style of writing, especially in his later works co-authored with Félix Guattari, is a practice of resistance towards structure and intelligibility. This objective is of course as much a political one as it is a utopian one.

The political impact of the practice of poststructuralism and critical theory at universities across the United States has been immense. Notions of gender and race have dominated academic discussions and provided new politically powerful readings of cultural texts. Interestingly, scholarship on Burroughs has labeled his works as ‘beat,’ ‘cult,’ *avant-garde*, or finally ‘postmodern’<sup>31</sup> but with the exception of Jamie Russell’s *Queer Burroughs* (2001) never as gay or queer.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Allen Ginsberg, Burroughs was never a gay icon and Burroughs’ relationship to the gay community or a gay liberation movement has hardly been discussed. Prominent Burroughs-critics like Eric Mottram, Jennie Skerl or Robin Lydenberg have embraced questions of misogyny, sexual dualism, or body horror in Burroughs’s texts but have, as Jamie Russell has pointed out, “always read [it] as a reference to something other than itself – body horror, the “Algebra of Need,” drug addiction, power relationships, and so on” (5). A lack of acceptance of Burroughs’s works as ‘gay literature’ not just within academic discussions but also within the gay community over the decades has to do with the fact that Burroughs was for many ‘not gay enough.’ Gregory Woods, who questions Burroughs’ status as a ‘gay author,’ summarizes this sentiment: “There are many readers who would argue that

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<sup>30</sup> This notion is not limited to language and the body, though. It also includes notions of history, time, ideas and desire.

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, a considerable amount of academic research on Burroughs has been done by women: Jennie Skerl, Helen Vendler, Regina Weinreich, Ann Douglas, Hilary Holladay, to name just a few, have been on the forefront of scholarship on Burroughs.

<sup>32</sup> Discussions of Burroughs’s works in terms of race are equally absent. I would argue that his work in fact exposes a “WASP-mentality” of race/gender, in which the white male subject is *the* most important reference point.

Burroughs is not gay at all, but a rather old-fashioned kind of homosexual who has never contributed or sought to contribute, to the momentum of social change” (“William Seward Burroughs II” 40). Burroughs was always keen on producing a picture of himself and of the gay characters in his books that was antithetical to an effeminate gay identity imposed on homosexuals as a stereotype. For some readers, as Woods points out, this leads to the conclusion that he was not gay at all and his writings could yet not be interpreted as a political statement in favor of gay rights. For gay activists, on the other hand, his ‘redneck’ homosexuality was not subversive enough. Quite contrary, it was seen as an attempt of reproducing heterosexual notions of masculinity. Within literary criticism this ‘awkward’ form of gay identity generated silence because it was mostly out of step with the gay rights movement.

### **CITIES OF THE RED NIGHT**

When asked in an interview in 1978 whether he could currently imagine a utopia that would not simultaneously be totalitarian, William Burroughs answered: “I don’t think there exists an ideal utopia. [...] You just cannot imagine a utopic society where the population is so enormous and the interests so diverse.” (*Burroughs Live* 405). This statement is in so far telling, as it exposes a general skepticism towards utopias typical of a postmodern sensibility. Nonetheless, Burroughs chose to write a ‘utopic’ novel that comments on personal freedom, individual identity and the ideal community all of which are very traditional themes of utopic fiction.<sup>33</sup> Classic utopias generally expose totalizing tendencies by claiming to absorb all of society into their model of living. While *Cities of the Red Night* signifies on this claim too, I would argue that it actually is much more an expression of the diversification of interests, or to be more precise, of one political interest in particular, i.e. that of the *gay subject*. Though

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<sup>33</sup> Compare: David Ayers, “‘Politics Here is Death’: William Burroughs *Cities of The Red Night*.”

*Cities* creates the impression that its utopic ideals are for the universal good of society, the book generates moments of silence and absence for the female subject. Male subjectivity and I would even argue, an essentialist/humanist perception of male subjectivity, are at the center of attention in Burroughs's "retroactive utopia" (xiv). The notion of "retro-active" does not just imply the possibility that the realization of this utopia might have been viable in the past but also that the *act of writing* itself is part of the realization of this utopia. Thus *Cities of the Red Night* not only strategically stages the male (gay) body but also recurs on sexist notions of male authorship and subjectivity in order to make specific claims to a utopic gay subjectivity.

Burroughs's skepticism towards classic utopias as expressed in the quote cited above has found its expression in the set-up of the utopia presented in *Cities of the Red Night*. Far from being a static place of eternal well-being, *Cities* neither represents an ideal governmental state nor is it bound to a certain time and place.<sup>34</sup> Even the genre of 'utopia' is only one among many. *Cities* signifies on various literary traditions and genres such as the detective novel, the pirate novel, the conspiracy novel, the gothic novel, science-fiction-novels, creation myth, drama, and even poetry. The story line, or rather story lines, of *Cities* are entangled within different genres and parody cliché characters and plots typical of each genre. This eclectic signification on various 'established' genres and their corresponding narrative patterns, characters, etc. can be read as a parody of what Jane Donawerth has called "Genre Blending" in utopian/dystopian texts since the 1970s ("Genre Blending and the Critical Dystopia" 29). I believe this to be a parody rather than another case of "genre blending" since the 'blends' Burroughs creates are so absurd and exaggerated that they resist almost any coherent reading.

The foreword to *Cities*, simply entitled "Fore!," contains a quote from Don C. Seitz's *Under the Black Flag* (1925), a historical account of Captain Mission who founded a pirate

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<sup>34</sup> Critical perception of utopic literature in the 1970s and 1980s has often referred to "Raum- und Zeitutopien" as two distinctive categories of contemporary utopias. See for example, Vosskamp, Wilhelm (ed.), *Utopieforschung* (1982).

community in Madagascar named *Libertatia*. This pirate community was founded on the principles of the French and American Revolutions and the liberal revolutions of 1848 but its founding took place a hundred years before the violent uprisings in Europe and America. The “Articles” under which *Libertatia* was governed state among other things:

All decisions with regard to the colony to be submitted to vote by the colonists; the abolition of slavery for any reason including debt; the abolition of the death penalty; and freedom to follow any religious beliefs or practices without sanction or molestation. (xii)

The “Articles” echo the constitutional rights granted in the American constitution of 1787. Yet they go one step further by also including the abolition of slavery and the abolition of the death penalty. In the context of the novel it becomes clear that “religious beliefs and practices” refer to the practice of a homosexual lifestyle. The practice of pseudo-religious rituals in *Cities* always consists of homosexual acts involving ritualized strangulations or immolations, or death through a mysterious, sexually transmitted virus causing sexual frenzies and red rashes on its victims’ skin. The excerpt above is in its choice of words so close to the American constitution that it can be understood as direct criticism of contemporary America and its quasi-religious worship of the Constitution. The “*pseudo-religious*” nature of the rituals practiced in *Cities* does not just parody the practice of Civil Religion in America, it also makes a strong political statement in favor of gay rights by giving homosexuality the same status symbols of national identity have in America.

Captain Mission’s community eventually failed but the narrator asks the reader to “imagine such a movement on a world-wide scale” (xvi). He is suggesting that if Captain Mission had been successful “the French and American revolutions would be forced to stand by their words. [...] No white-man boss, no Pukka Sahib, no Patróns, no colonists” (xvi). And he goes on to explain:

I cite this example of retroactive Utopia since it actually could have happened in terms of the techniques and human resources available at the time. [...] The chance was there. The chance



was missed. The principles of the French and American revolutions became windy lies in the mouths of politicians. [...] Your right to live where you want, with companions of your choosing, under the laws to which you agree, died in the eighteenth century with Captain Mission. Only a miracle or a disaster could restore it. (xiv-xv)

Tony Tanner has argued that Burroughs's text participates in the "well-established American Dream of freedom from conditioning forces" (*City of Words* 134) and shares a typically American aversion towards supposedly corrupted American politics when he states that the promise of freedom soon became "windy lies in the mouths of politicians" (xiv). More importantly, the "Articles" explicitly grant the right to choose place, company and laws of one's living. While the right to choose one's company of living at first sight appears to be generic and of no greater significance, it becomes very meaningful when compared to a "Statement of Purpose" published by the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in the aftermath of the Stonewall riots of 1969:<sup>35</sup>

We reject society's attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions of our nature. We are stepping outside these roles and simplistic myths. We are going to be who we are. At the same time, we are creating new social forms and relations, that is, relations based upon brotherhood, cooperation, human love and uninhibited sexuality. Babylon has forced us to commit ourselves to one thing – revolution! (cited in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 234)

Burroughs's reference to the "Articles" remarkably echoes the GLF's statement of purpose. In this statement of purpose the GLF criticizes the lack of legal protection of gay lifestyle and the social pressures they encounter. They are forced into "roles" that run contrary to their self-fashioning. Like Burroughs's pirate communities, the members of the GLF create "new social forms and relations" that are built on positive attributes as "brotherhood, cooperation, human love and inhibited sexuality." The GLF's call for revolution rejects any stereotype of effeminate gay men but quite contrary portrays them as potentially violent. The parallels

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<sup>35</sup> The Stonewall riots started on June, 28, 1969 in Greenwich Village, New York. The riots were a series of violent conflicts between the New York police and gay and transgendered people that lasted for several days. After continuous harassment of the patrons of the *Stonewall Inn* and other gay bars in the neighborhood, gay and transgendered people violently fought against police harassment. Stonewall is seen as a turning point in the formation of gay identity, since for the first time a large-scale gay rights movement emerged.

between the GLF's statement of purpose and the "Articles" also have important implications for Burroughs's political agenda. Burroughs's writings of the 1970s and 1980s (the *Wild Boys*-trilogy and the *Cities*-trilogy) in fact echo the attempts of the gay liberation movement to construct gay masculinity contrary to stereotypes of effeminacy. The cut-up with scissors and paper of his earlier writings, turns into violent struggle of his novels' characters that include weapons and blood-shed. However, I would argue that *Cities*, written about ten years after Stonewall, also reveals an ironic distance to the 'revolutionary' and partly utopian gay liberation movement. As the text comments, "the chance was missed" (*Cities* xiv), suggesting the impossibility of this revolutionary venture.

But Burroughs's text does not just signify on the recent past of gay communities, he also signifies on the history of pirate communities of the seventeenth and eighteenth century that have since the 1980s been identified by historians as having pursued a 'gay' lifestyle.<sup>36</sup> As historical sources suggest, these all male communities have not just practiced homosexuality but they were also organized democratically, setting themselves apart from the political systems of the time. Burroughs refers to these historical gay communities through the story of Noah Blake "twenty, a tall red-haired youth with brown eyes, his face dusted with freckles," (30) who is a gunsmith from Michigan. Noah joins Captain Jones in Boston in 1702 and embarks on Jones's pirate ship, *The Great White*.<sup>37</sup> Captain Jones, also known as "Opium Jones", is part of a world-spanning conspiracy around Captain Mission that successfully overthrows Spanish, French, and English rule in South America, the West Indies, the Far East, and Africa. The crew of *The Great White* has subscribed to the "Articles" and is paid twice as much as the crew of other ships as a compensation for the increased risk of

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<sup>36</sup> See: B.R. Burg, *Sodomy and the Perception of Evil English Sea Rovers in the Seventeenth Century Caribbean*. (1983), Marcus Rediker, *Between the devil and the deep blue sea : merchant seamen, pirates, and the Anglo-American maritime world, 1700-1750* (1987), Hans Turley, *Rum, Sodomy, and the Lash : Piracy, Sexuality, and Masculine Identity*. (1999)

<sup>37</sup> Obviously an allusion to Melville's *Great White*

smuggling opium (33). The crew members are heavily addicted to opium but it seems that their performance as sailors and pirates is not the least impaired by their drug-addiction. On the contrary, it is implied that the addiction to opium renders them immune to disease.<sup>38</sup> Noah Blake's story line possesses by far the greatest degree of consistency. Through his diary Noah Blake reports an ordered sequence of events, his adventures, his thoughts and his wishes. Significantly, it is also Noah's report that portrays all male communities as idyllic and remote from social and political oppression:

Following the stream we climbed to the summit of the island, a distance about six hundred feet. From the summit we had a fine view of the whole island. *The Great White* appeared at that distance like a toy. [...] Here we stripped off our clothes and swam in the bay for half an hour, being careful not to venture too far out for our fear of sharks. The water was wonderfully warm and buoyant, quite unlike the swimming in freshwater lakes.

Feeling hunger after our swim, we put out lines which we had brought and soon took a number of the fish known as red snapper, each one two or three pounds in weight. Five fish were fried in a pan, leaving the others on a string through the gills in the water. This most delectable fish we ate with our fingers, washing the meat down with coconut milk.

Feeling a great drowsiness after eating, we all lay down naked in the shade of a rock, Jerry with his head on my stomach and I in turn resting my head on Bert Hansen's stomach. Clinch and Paco lay on their backs, side by side, with an arm around the other's shoulder. [...] I woke with a strong erection and found my companions in the same condition. We stood up stretching and comparing. (65-66)

The excerpt above describes an almost idyllic and playful scene. The crew of the *Great White* has landed ashore a tropical island where natural beauty and food exist in abundance. The passage cited above is reminiscent of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and other romantic adventure stories in which man do manly deeds such as catching and frying fish on an open campfire. It is also part of a romanticized notion of boyhood where 'boys can be boys,' play games, experience adolescent sexuality by comparing their adolescent bodies. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) by Mark Twain is a text representative of this romanticized notion of boyhood. I would argue that Burroughs does not just signify on Twain's text but also on an article by Leslie Fiedler published in 1948. In "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!"

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<sup>38</sup> This of course is also a utopic side note to drug-addiction, a disease Burroughs himself has struggled with for more than forty years and a frequent theme of his writing.

Fiedler argues that the central trope of American literature of the nineteenth century was the flight of the white male protagonist into the wilderness in order to escape from social responsibility, civilization, and the influence of the feminine. Women are excluded from this idyllic masculinist fantasy. Fiedler's discussion of implied homosexuality in these novels is at least problematic since he seems unable to describe homosexuality as something other than the feminization of the male subject. However, Burroughs seems to take up this trope to fantasize about an all male community but unlike Fiedler, who suggests the feminization of the male subject, Burroughs's heroes are violent, adolescent men who slay and murder and thus expose a hypermasculinity. However, on another level of interpretation Burroughs's violent hypermasculine heroes can also be read as a parody of these very same notions of masculinity. Burroughs's text constantly produces an 'excess' of these notions and becomes thus highly ironic and cannot only be accessed through a reading at face value.

### **GILLES DELEUZE'S RHIZOMATIC WRITING**

*"There is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made"*

*(A Thousand Plateaus 4)*

Burroughs was not the first writer to use a cut-up technique to compose his texts<sup>39</sup> but he is probably the author best known for using this method. "Cut-up" means that a linear text is quite literally *cut up* and rearranged to create a 'new story.' Burroughs insisted that everything (the entirety of life) was pre-recorded and therefore could be edited. The cut-up technique is then a way of revealing "subliminal meaning" ("Death isn't Necessarily Final" 262) and altering reality. Burroughs's style of writing can be described as 'de-constructed' in the very

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<sup>39</sup> In the 1920s members of the Dada movement experimented with cut-up technique.

sense of the word. It is ‘scattered,’ non-linear, and inconsistent. Interestingly, he employed this style long before it was *en vogue* as an approach in literary criticism. While poststructuralist criticism aims at unveiling the aporia of language, Burroughs antedated poststructuralist criticism through a style of writing that plays with the idea of resisting conclusive interpretation. Davis Schneiderman and Philip Walsh have observed that “Burroughs’s criticism [of society] has reflected the development of postmodern theory and poststructuralist thought in general” (*Retaking the Universe – William S. Burroughs in the Age of Globalization* xii). Furthermore, “Burroughs’s linguistic and social analysis parallels that of prominent French theorists.” (xii).

As mentioned earlier Gilles Deleuze directly refers to Burroughs’ cut-up method as a desirable way of writing (*Thousand Plateaus* 6) that parallels his own concept of rhizomatic writing. Deleuze derives the concept of “rhizomatic writing” from his notion of the “rhizome.” The Greek/Latin origin of word “rhizome” means “root.” A rhizome is according to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary “a somewhat elongate usually horizontal subterranean plant stem that is often thickened by deposits of reserve food material, produces shoots above and roots below, and is distinguished from a true root in possessing buds, nodes, and usually scalelike leaves.” The rhizome is one of the central ideas of Deleuzian philosophy. Deleuze’s own writing – just like Burroughs’s - is rhizomatic in the sense that it is unsystematic, rich in detail, ‘decentralized’, and ‘wildly growing.’ In *Thousand Plateaus* he comments on the significance of the rhizome:

[A]ny point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order. The linguistic tree on the Chomsky model still begins at a point S and proceeds by dichotomy. On the contrary, not every trait in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature: semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status.[...] Our criticism of these linguistic models is not that they are too abstract but, on the contrary, that they are not abstract enough, that they do not reach the *abstract machine* that

connects a language to the semantic and pragmatic contents of statements, to collective assemblages of enunciation, to a whole micropolitics of the social field. A rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles. A semiotic chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive: there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. [...] Language is in Weinreich's words, "an essentially heterogeneous reality."<sup>40</sup> (*A Thousand Plateaus* 7)

I quote at length here because this excerpt does not just explain what a rhizome does but also how it is linked to Deleuze's perception of language and reality. A rhizome, unlike a tree or root, does not have a beginning- or end-point.<sup>41</sup> Deleuze's objection to Chomsky's "containment hierarchy" is that though it bears the possibility of infinite growth, it still has a clear starting point that implies hierarchy (i.e. the superiority of one symbol over sequences of other symbols).<sup>42</sup> Deleuze claims that unlike a 'language tree' the rhizome is not just a model that links linguistic features but that in fact connects different 'regimes of signs' that follow different codings and are very different in nature. He suggests that the rhizome is ever growing and has implications for the totality of life since it touches upon the semantic and pragmatic implications of statements that can be linked to various aspects of life, such as biology, politics, economy, etc. It continuously "establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles" and thus permeates all aspects of life.

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<sup>40</sup> See: Uriel Weinreich, William Labov, M. Herzog, "Empirical Foundations for a Theory of Language," Winfred Lehmann and Yakov Malkeiel, (eds.), *Directions For Historical Linguistics*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968. p. 125

<sup>41</sup> This, of course, is from a biological point of view an incorrect perception.

<sup>42</sup> Noam Chomsky's contributions to linguistics are numerous but Deleuze seems to criticize one of Chomsky's models in particular, i.e. the so-called "Chomsky hierarchy" which is closely linked to the better known concept of generative grammar. The Chomsky hierarchy is a linguistic model that has proven to be quite fruitful for the field of computer science and has been used to create programming languages. The Chomsky hierarchy is a containment hierarchy of classes of formal grammars that generate formal languages. This linguistic model assumes that a formal grammar defines (or *generates*) a *formal language*, which is a (possibly infinite) set of sequences of symbols that may be constructed by applying production rules to a sequence of symbols which initially contains just the start symbol. See: Chomsky, Noam; Schützenberger, Marcel P. "The algebraic theory of context free languages", in Braffort, P.; Hirschberg, D.: *Computer Programming and Formal Systems*. Amsterdam: North Holland, 1963, 118-161

His main objection to Chomsky's linguistic model (and models like Chomsky's) is that they fail to establish an "abstract machine." The notion of machine holds a particularly important position within Deleuzian philosophy. The 'machine' is a concept Deleuze chooses to escape the notion of the subject<sup>43</sup> and it constitutes a key-trope in his concept of ethics. Humanist or organic models describe the world by presupposing wholeness: nature, the universe, man. Chomsky's 'language tree' is an example of such a metaphor of organic wholeness. Deleuze argues that a philosophy based on presupposed concepts of unity and wholeness can only *react* to the world. It forms its ethics based on these presupposed notions of unity and its *télos* is to achieve the ideal state of unity and wholeness. Deleuze, on the other hand, thinks of machines as allowing for *active ethics* for they do not presuppose unity, identity, intention or a *télos*. His machines are not operated *by someone* and do not produce *something*. Machines produce for the sake of production. They have no origin and no purpose; they lack subjectivity as well as an organizing center. Deleuze's machines need no outside agency to produce their connections and assemblages.<sup>44</sup>

The idea of the machine is closely linked to Deleuze's concept of *deterritorialization*. Since machines are nothing more than the connections and productions they make, it is what it does. It has no home, no origin, no ground: it is a constant process of *deterritorialization*, or becoming other than itself. For Deleuze the *machine* is not a metaphor. Life is literally a machine. It is quite curious that Deleuze imagines life as a machine. The introduction of machines into the production process did not just trigger industrialization and mass production but also initiated modern capitalism, an ideological notion he severely criticizes and refutes. While an *organism* is a closed unit with an identity and an end, a *mechanism* is a closed machine with a specific function, but a *machine*, in contrast, is nothing but its

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<sup>43</sup> There are numerous other "machines," for example, the desiring machine, the war machine, the mouth machine, etc.)

<sup>44</sup> Deleuze's concept of the machine also reminds of the „M-Machine“ in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927).

connections. Deleuze claims that the machine has no origin; it has no purpose, no identity, and is not bound to time or place. He deliberately reinterprets the notion of the machine for his own purposes. The relation of machine and the social is thus a metonymic one. The machine is a *pars pro toto* of the infinity of life. Deleuze's insistence that the machine *is not* a metaphor also has wide ranging implications on his notions of language and literature. If 'machine' was a figure of speech, we would presuppose that we have life as it is and that we use language to describe what is already there. Deleuze consciously moves away from a representational model of language by pointing out that language itself is a machine, one that connects with the "mouth-machine" or with the "hand-machine." The rhizome is then an alternative concept to common linguistic models.

Implied in this criticism of representational models of language is a rejection of both phenomenology, but more importantly, of structuralism. In *Thousand Plateaus* but also in his other writings, particularly *Proust and Signs* (1972) and *Critique et Clinique* (1993), Deleuze scolds the notion of the sign. He criticizes the dominance of the signifier in contemporary thought and notions of Saussurian linguistics that see the sign as being limited to language. Deleuze's view here is problematic to say the least since he willingly ignores the application of Saussurian structuralism in other academic disciplines. The works of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908 -) are but one prominent example of the use of structuralism in fields other than linguistics. However, Deleuze seeks to replace semiology by his own system of signs which is partly informed by Charles Sander Peirce's "semeiotis" and his concept of pragmatism.<sup>45</sup> Deleuze's own use of the term "sign" is manifold and at times contradictory.

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<sup>45</sup> Charles Sander Peirce (1839-1914) is considered to be founder of pragmatism and one of the founders of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of signs both individually and grouped in sign systems. Semiotics is concerned with how meaning is transmitted and understood. Pragmatism is a school of philosophy that originated in the United States in the late 1800s. Pragmatism insists on consequences, utility, and practicality as vital components of truth. Pragmatism refuses notions that human concepts or intellect represent reality. In this perception it opposes both formalist and rationalist schools of philosophy.



He borrows from the theories of Louis Hjelmslev<sup>46</sup>, Austin<sup>47</sup>, and Searle<sup>48</sup>. Deleuze's reference to Hjelmslev is curious insofar as Hjelmslev is considered to be a structuralist whose theories, especially his concept of "*Glossematik*" is heavily indebted to Saussure. Like other structuralists Hjelmslev considered signs as only existing in the realm of language. In his earlier works Searle further develops Austin's analysis of performative utterances. Searle's concept of the illocutionary force focuses on acts performed *in* saying something. The concept of the illocutionary force is closely linked to Searle's later writings on (social) intentionality. Intentionality is a technical term in philosophy meaning *aboutness*. Intentionality indicates that someone has attached some meaning to an object, such as a belief about it, possession of it, contempt towards it, and so on. Deleuze thus considers language not a subject existing independent from sociality but on the contrary being inseparably linked to all aspects of life and therefore being an open system of connections on symbolic and concrete levels. Implied in such a view is the notion that if language constitutes reality, rhizomatic writing can be understood as a means of altering reality and consciousness.

Apparently, there are parallels but also a few important differences between Deleuze's notion of rhizomatic writing and Burroughs's notion of cut-up. The desired (and utopic) outcome of both is an 'alteration of reality' through writing. In both instances text and

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<sup>46</sup> Louis Hjelmslev (1899-1965), Danish linguist whose ideas were formative in the Danish school of linguistics. He dubbed his linguistic theory "Glossematik" to combine the explanation of words in a *glossary* with a scientific approach similar to calculus in mathematics. Glossematik has a number of similarities with "generative transformation grammar."

<sup>47</sup> John Langshaw Austin (1911-1960), philosopher of language whose theories focused on speech acts. See: J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962; *Logic And Language (Second Series): Essays*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1959; *Philosophical Papers*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961; *Sense and Sensibilia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.

<sup>48</sup> John R. Searle (1931-) is professor of philosophy at the University of California at Berkeley. He is most noted for his works on language, the philosophy of mind and consciousness, on the characteristics of socially constructed versus physical realities, and on practical reason. J. R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979; J.R. Searle and Daniel Vanderveken, *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985; *Intentionality – An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983; *The Philosophy of Language*. London: Oxford University Press, 1971; *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*. Dordrecht at al: Kluwer Boston, 1980; *Speech Acts: An Essay on the Philosophy of Language*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1969.

writing is being re-arranged in a way that resists easy interpretation, thus supposedly changing the ‘fabric’ of reality. For Deleuze this also implies a changed notion of the (writing) subject that becomes a multiplicity of catatonic voices that can no longer be labeled as feminine or masculine, sane or insane, self or other. However, the question of the (writing) subject is being answered differently by Burroughs, who, as I will argue here, endorses a kind of subjectivity that is closely linked to rather traditional notions of the male writing subject.

A reoccurring motif in *Cities* is the act of writing performed by a male character. Clem Snide, who calls himself “a private asshole” (35), is a private investigator hired to solve the murder case of Jerry Green, a young American, who has mysteriously disappeared in Greece while on vacation. Weeks after his disappearance Jerry’s decapitated body is found. As Clem’s investigations proceed Jerry’s head is discovered and it is being implied that it was stolen by the Countess de Gulpa, a mysterious character, who wanted to transplant it to another person’s body in one of her secret laboratories in South America. This, of course, displays anxiety towards the female subject as something potentially threatening to men’s mental and physical health.

The plot that arises around Clem Snide becomes increasingly incomprehensible and bizarre, as Snide in the course of his investigations, stumbles over fragments of a magical book that contains knowledge about the long lost Cities of the Red Night. The reader learns that these cities were supposedly located between the Desert Gobi and the Caspian Sea about 100.000 years B.C. (153-ff). The book was written by “a scholar who prefers to remain anonymous” (166). Since authorship is undetermined, Clem Snide himself continues writing the book:

We start making books. I write the continuity. Jim does the drawings. [...] The books seem to age two hundred years overnight. I am working mostly on my pirate story line. But since I am sure of the quality of the goods [papers and ink], I will invest some more money in Mayan

and Egyptian papers and colors, and do two snuff films – a Mayan number called *The Child of Ix Tab*, and an Egyptian number called *The Curse of the Pharaohs*. (173)

In the excerpt above the reader learns that Clem is supposedly not just the author of *his own* story but also of all other story lines in the book. The ‘pirate story line’ he is referring to might be Noah Blake’s story. And the ‘snuff films’ he creates might explain the many pornographic instances in the text that always involve the death of one of the participants. “The books seem to age two hundred years overnight” suggests that reality and history can in fact be (convincingly) forged and altered. This observation is also crucial with regard to questions of subjectivity. Clem Snide (but also Noah Blake through his diaries) writes himself into existence. This suggests agency of an individual author whose subjectivity is based on the act of writing. This notion does not just suggest that subjectivity is linked to language and the production thereof but also to its control. Clem Snide is more or less in control of the various story lines of *Cities*. His subjectivity is in fact created by the power to direct the various plots. Despite the confusing plot lines and characters this is a rather traditional construction of (male) subjectivity.

Deleuze, on the other hand, completely separates the act of writing from claims of subjectivity: He states that “a book has neither object nor subject” (*Plateaus* 3) and that in writing *A Thousand Plateaus* he tried not to reach “the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I” (3). Since “a book in itself is a machine,” “there is no difference between what a book talks about and how it is made” (4). The claim that Deleuze makes is that rhizomatic writing seeks to erase questions of agency, subjectivity, and authorship to the point where writing is merely an “assemblage” of voices and the subject is marked by multiplicity of identities rather than *a* single identity.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The notion that a subject has more than one identity is, of course, not a revolutionary or novel claim, since identity politics since the 1960s make exactly the point that identity is constantly constructed, negotiated, and changed in particular political and social contexts. However, as I believe Deleuze does differ from other theorists

## WRITERS AS “CULTURAL PHYSICIANS”

In *Deleuze on Literature* Ronald Bogue points out: “The writer for Deleuze is a Nietzschean physician of culture, both a symptomatologist who reads culture’s signs of sickness and health, and a therapist whose remedies promote new possibilities for life”<sup>50</sup> (2). As a cultural physician the writer is the inventor of machines that are political and experimental at the same time. In *Kafka – Towards a Minor Literature*, for example, Deleuze argues that Kafka’s works (finished and unfinished), his letters, and diaries all resist interpretative or actual closure and thus keep the continuous flow of the ‘literary machine’ going. Deleuze particularly cherished writers whose writings were being thought of as bordering on clinical conditions of schizophrenia or perversion.<sup>51</sup> Unlike Foucault, who saw the repressive powers of society through legal and medical discourse at work in the definitions of ‘madness,’ Deleuze emphasized the procreative potentials of ‘clinical conditions.’ In Deleuze’s view the Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch were not specimen of the particular kind of perversion their names were later associated with but instead symptomatologists of social structures of power and desire.<sup>52</sup> For Deleuze writers are philosophers and vice versa. In his works on Kafka, Proust, and Carroll he assumes the role of an analytical observer and

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who perceive of identity as being negotiable and constructed, in that his criticism of subjectivity is on a different plane by doing away with all systems of signification that give meaning to our lived social realities.

<sup>50</sup> For a more thorough discussion see Daniel Ahern, *Nietzsche As Cultural Physician*. (1995)

<sup>51</sup> Deleuze’s arguments expose inconsistency in distinguishing between authorial intention and the notion that a work ‘speaks for itself.’ As a result it is sometimes not clear whether he presupposes that writers could be identified with clinical conditions and thus their “condition” shows in their writings, or whether the work itself exposed clinical ways of thinking, regardless of authorial intention.

<sup>52</sup> According to Deleuze, the particular achievement of de Sade and Sacher-Masoch is the construction of parallel universes and economies of desire. Contrary to a Freudian view of sadomasochism, that sees sadism and masochism as two sides of the same distortion in a patient’s personality, Deleuze claims that Sadism and Masochism are in fact incommensurable. De Sade has created a universe of rational delirium, ironic demonstration and reiterated movement. Masoch’s universe on the other hand, is one of imaginary phantasy, humerous education and frozen suspension. According to Deleuze, de Sade and Masoch reveal and critique different groupings of signs, yet they also turn signs of perversion into the decisive elements of a new world. Along similar lines is Deleuze’s treatment of Artaud and Carroll, who are often thought of as specimen of the same psychological disorder, schizophrenia. Artaud and Carroll are, as Deleuze argues, interpreter of signs and creators of new symbolic universes. But once again each of their universes is distinctly different.

interpreter. However, in his later works, especially *Plateaus*, Deleuze himself increasingly assumes the role of a cultural physician. He diagnoses society's disease and therapies it through the practice of rhizomatic writing.<sup>53</sup>

But also Burroughs takes up Nietzsche's idea of the cultural physician. In an interview pursued in 1965 William Burroughs states: "In *Naked Lunch* and *The Soft Machine* I have diagnosed an illness, and in *The Ticket that Exploded* and *Nova Express* suggested remedy" ("The Algebra of Need" 55). It is needless to say that the metaphor of society as a body stricken by disease is a rather traditional one. Deleuze's (conscious or unconscious) use of this metaphor is highly ironic. As I have explained earlier, he scolds the notion of the body as *organism* since it implies unity and wholeness. Yet he uses this very same metaphor of a diseased organism to describe the role of the writer in curing the 'sickness' of society. The crucial question at this point is, however, do Deleuze and Burroughs, despite the seeming resemblance of their views, really agree on the remedy for the social disease? And what is the social disease? With regard to Deleuze, the social diseases are, as I have already suggested, capitalism, psychoanalysis, fascism (in its many different forms), and reason. Burroughs, on the other hand, has over the course of his work presented variations of the same idea as the disease of society. Discussions of Burroughs's works have made repeatedly the point that he writes against oppression through consumer culture and moral and social norms. With regard to claims of gay subjectivity, I would add that he also writes against an oppressive dualism of the sexes. In a 1981 interview he states: "Women may well be a biological mistake, but so is everything we see around here" ("Women are a biological mistake" 516). Throughout his works Burroughs links the existence of two sexes and the existence of language to an obscure

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<sup>53</sup> Deleuze's view of literature and the role of writers is highly problematic mainly because he blatantly oversimplifies the function of literature in society. Even more troublesome is his choice of references since it reflects a rather male-dominated canon. Last but not least, Deleuze reads most texts at face-value thus ignoring many modes of interpretation many of which might even run counter to his own arguments.

virus theory. Burroughs negotiates gay subjectivity in diametrical opposition to the supposed oppressive powers of language and women. Although Burroughs presents variations of this theme in his books, the respective emphasis varies according to the immediate historical contexts each book is written in. When *Cities* was written in the late 1970s, feminism had already manifested itself as part of an important cultural discourse that had brought about social change. In *Cities* Burroughs writes against the supposed oppression of gay subjectivity through women, in ironic passages as the following:

Eve, we are told was made from Adam's rib...so a hepatitis virus was once a healthy liver cell. If you excuse me, ladies, nothing personal...we are all tainted with viral origins. The whole quality of human consciousness, as expressed in male and female, is basically a virus mechanism. (25)

Burroughs refers to the Judeo-Christian creation myth that holds that Eve was created from Adam's rib. By stating that "we are told" this to be the origin of two sexes, the validity of this statement is implicitly dismissed as 'hear-say.' The following sentence implies by way of metonymy that Adam (without Eve) was 'healthy' and sound (a "healthy liver cell") before Eve was created. By the same token, Eve's existence is equaled to a malignant liver cell. Consequently, the "whole quality of human consciousness" is lamentably structured and permeated by the male-female dichotomy. As already remarked, Burroughs's claim on gay subjectivity tries to distance itself from stereotypical notions of the effeminate homosexual. He suggests that an all male world is not just the 'healthiest' social form but also that the existence of a second sex flaws our consciousness since it forces us to think in diametrical oppositions. Since women exist and heterosexuality is the norm, homosexuality is generally perceived of as existing in diametrical opposition to heterosexuality. But the 'structure of consciousness' also conveys an understanding of homosexual relationships in terms of male/female forcing the homosexual into the position of a female.

While Burroughs acknowledges the existence of both women and of language as ‘facts of life,’ he sees in them the malaise of the world. Both exercise control and prevent complete freedom. With regard to language he states in a 1975 interview:

I have theorized that the beginning of the word might have been a virus that made it possible. [...] We are dealing with the question, What is language really? There’s the work of Dr. Lilly on dolphins, trying to decide do dolphins have a language? But I think by a language you mean a symbol system, that is, a reaction to symbols. [...] So while we can foresee, and make provisions for the future, this ability which is a biological advantage [the ability to understand symbols] in a way, also conveys the biological disadvantage of conflict neurosis, and in some cases, insanity... (“The Doomsday Bug” 322-23)

Burroughs argues that human existence is flawed through a ‘word virus’ that gave humans the ability to interpret signs that make up language. This ability distinguishes humans from animals and provides them with a biological advantage; but it is also the source of human ‘misery.’ Mental disease is henceforth the downside of this extraordinary ability, since language creates conflicts that would otherwise not exist. In *The Ticket that Exploded* (1962), a sequel to *The Soft Machine* (1961), but also in *Cities* and many of his other writings Burroughs deals with the ‘word virus.’ *Ticket* uses much of the same material as *Soft Machine* but has a different emphasis. Both books center around the question of control. While the thematic emphasis in *Soft Machine* is on the control of mankind through sexuality, *Ticket* deals with mind control through language. Throughout the book this form of control is associated with imagery of machinery, science, technology and space travel. The technology of control operates on a ‘word and image machine.’ A liberation from this control is possible through gaining control of the ‘word and image machine,’ or more abstractly, through an understanding and manipulating of the symbol system.

The parallels to Deleuze’s own imagery of the machine are evident. But when Deleuze claims that “language has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come” (*Thousand Plateaus* 5) it becomes clear that in fact they do

not share the same notion of language and sign. Both, Deleuze and Burroughs, assume that a system of signs structures reality but while Deleuze sees no escape from this system of signs, Burroughs seems to believe that there is a 'reality' *beyond* the sign, existing outside of language. A scene in *Soft Machine* describing how Mayan priests exercise control through manipulating symbols, makes this clear:

He began drawing formulas on the floor and showed me how the priests operated their control rackets: "It's like with the festivals and the fucking corn they know what everybody will see and hear and smell and taste and that's what thought is and these thought units are represented by symbols in their books and they rotate the symbols around and around on their calender [sic]." And as I looked at his formulas something began to crack up in my brain and I was free of the control beam. (*Soft Machine* 19)

The passage above suggests that the symbol represents 'thought units.' Though he does not theorize about his notion of the sign, Burroughs sees language as a synchronic system of relationships that is somewhat suprapersonal. The suprapersonal systems can be manipulated by the powerful (priests, in this case) but as the passage above furthermore suggests, the moment "something [begins] to crack up in [the] brain," i.e. the moment the individual looks through and unveils the manipulation of signs, consciousness and thus reality is irrevocably altered. So for Burroughs language and consciousness exist independent from one another. Deleuze, on the other hand, denies an escape from language but rather suggests that language is the *reality of the virtual*, or as he puts it "a surveying, mapping" or *Becoming*.

Another crucial difference between Burroughs and Deleuze is that Burroughs's 'language and image machines' are means of suppression and liberation at the same time, whereas Deleuze seems to suggest that machines are solely a means of liberation and resistance to any kind of organizational structure:

Make the desert, the steppe, grow; do not depopulate it, quite the contrary. If war necessarily results, it is because the war machine collides with States and cities, as forces (of striation) opposing its positive object: from then on, the war machine has as its enemy the State, the city, the state and urban phenomenon, and adopts as its objective their annihilation. It is at



this point that the war machine becomes war: annihilate the forces of the State, destroy the state-form. (*Thousand Plateaus* 417)

With imperative voice Deleuze asks his readership to practice a “nomad intervention” (418), i.e. to become a war machine. The war machine is characterized by populating uninhabited areas (here figuratively speaking, “the desert, the steppe” and so forth). Their inhabitants are nomads who live outside organizational structures (states and cities) and their aim is to destroy the structures. To Deleuze the ‘language machine’ is one machine among many. But this view is not completely free of contradictions. As mentioned earlier, Deleuze’s concept of language emphasizes the pragmatic aspects of language. His ‘rhizome’ permeates linguistic and social, economic and political levels. He suggests that language, understood in these terms, constitutes reality. Yet Deleuze’s notion of the sign, as presented in *Proust and Signs* and *Critique et Clinique* seems to suggest that a sign in fact is limited to language, which in return suggests that language is an independently existing entity. And how are we to interpret the war machine in terms of language that supposedly permeates everything and constitutes reality? This, in fact, is one of the instances where Deleuze’s ‘philosophy of buggery’ generates contradictions and absences. While this question cannot be answered conclusively, it does become clear that Burroughs’s ‘remedy’ to social disease is control of the symbol system, whereas Deleuze opposes organizational structures and organic wholeness.

## **DELEUZIAN BECOMINGS**

Deleuze’s criticism of the notion of organic wholeness has wide-ranging implications on his perception of the subject. Deleuze claims that the subject is not a singularity, that can be attributed an identity, but rather a multiplicity or an assemblage of multiple voices that like his

concept of the rhizome denies origin or a starting point. The subject is thus not being thought of as an individual but as a multiplicity.<sup>54</sup> Henceforth, Deleuze does not connect notions of the subject with ‘being’ (which implies stasis) but rather with “becoming” (a self in flux). The writer, once more, assumes an important position:

If the writer is a sorcerer, it is because writing is a becoming, writing is traversed by strange becomings, that are not becomings-writers, but becomings-rat, becomings-insects, becomings-wolf. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 240)

*Becoming* for Deleuze never signifies ‘becoming something’ but is rather part of an ongoing project: *the reality of the virtual* (not to be confused with virtual reality). Accordingly, writing does not enable a subject to become *a* writer (becomings-writers) but rather other becomings, in this case becomings-animal. I will go into more details about what Deleuze means by “becomings-animal” on the following pages. For now, I would like to point out that Deleuze’s view of the writer as a “cultural physician” is at least problematic. For one, his notion of the cultural physician or “sorcerer” as in the excerpt above, suggests a supra-cultural (and supra-societal) subject (the writer) that possesses agency and can thus be attributed notions of individuality and originality.<sup>55</sup> This, secondly, runs contrary to his claim that the subject is, or rather *should be*, a multiplicity without origin. Deleuze’s view of the subject seems to oscillate between the claim that the subject is a multiplicity and the acknowledgement that this very same notion of the subject is yet to be achieved. This constitutes the utopic nature of his philosophical concept.

Interestingly, Burroughs dedicates *Cities of the Red Night* to “all the scribes and artists and practioners of magic through whom these spirits have been manifested” (*Cities* xviii). Like

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<sup>54</sup> The implications of this for Deleuze are, for example, that Deleuze and Guattari discussed whether or not to even put their names on the cover of *Thousand Plateaus*, since as they claim, the book itself constitutes an instance of rhizomatic writing and ‘authorial multiplicity.’ See Gilles Deleuze, *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*. Los Angeles/CA, Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, 2006.

<sup>55</sup> Similar concepts of the writer can also be found in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Helene Cixous, or Walter Benjamin, to name a few.

Deleuze, who dubbed the writer in the excerpt above a “sorcerer,” Burroughs considers “scribes, artists and practioners of magic” the creators of spirits. But unlike the Deleuzian becomings that are virtual and remain utopic, Burroughs’s signifies, as I would argue, on traditional notions of authorship and subjectivity with regard to the gay male subject. Passages of Burroughs’s text lend itself to a reading as Deleuzian becomings. In the following section I will take a closer look at two forms of Deleuzian becomings in the context of Burroughs’ text: becoming-animal and becoming-woman. These two becomings will not just illustrate where Burroughs and Deleuze agree but also where they greatly disagree and what consequences this disagreement has for their utopic/dystopic visions respectively.

A whole chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus* is dedicated to the concept of *Becoming-animal* (233-ff):

A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification. [...] To become is not to progress or regress along a series. Above all becomings do not occur in the imagination, even when imagination reaches the highest cosmic or dynamic level, as in Jung or Bachelard. Becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantasies. They are perfectly real. But which reality is at issue here? For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not “really” become an animal anymore than the animal “really” becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself. (*A Thousand Plateaus* 237-238)

Deleuze’s remark that Becoming is not a “correspondence between relations” refers to his claim that naturalism and psychoanalysis were misguided in their attempt to establish plausible relations between humans and animals. Naturalists established “ridiculous evolutionary classifications à la Lorenz” (239) and psychoanalysis looks at animals only as “oedipal animals” that are fit to discover “a daddy, a mommy, a little brother behind them” (240). So becoming-animal is neither part of an evolutionary process nor a product of imagination or the subconscious. Deleuze claims that becomings-animal are “perfectly real” but not by the token of “turning into” an animal or imitating one. The Deleuzian circle closes

when he points out that only the Becoming itself is real. Becoming is the act or the immanence of the act but not what is produced by it. Like his machines that produce for the mere sake of production Becoming is becoming for the sake of becoming. According to Deleuze “this is the point to clarify: that a becoming lacks a *subject* distinct from itself; but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first” (239). Becoming itself is then the subject of other becomings without ever referring to an original subject or to the Becoming of ‘something.’

If Becoming-animal is not about imitation, resemblance, or imagination what then makes a Becoming a Becoming-animal? For Deleuze Becoming-animal “always involves a pack, a band, a population, in short a multiplicity. [...] We do not become animal without the fascination for the pack, for multiplicity”<sup>56</sup> (240-241):

But what exactly does that mean, the animal as band or pack? Does a band not imply a filiation, bringing us back to the reproduction of given characteristics? How can we conceive of a peopling, a propagation, a becoming that is without filiation or heredity production? A multiplicity without the unity of an ancestor? It is quite simple; everybody knows it, but it is discussed only in secret. We oppose epidemic to filiation, contagion to heredity, peopling by contagion to sexual reproduction, sexual production. Bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields, and catastrophes. Like hybrids which are themselves sterile, born of a sexual union that will not reproduce itself, but which begins over again every time, gaining that much more ground. (*Thousand Plateaus* 242)

Becoming-animal is a rejection of common notions of animal, nature, and reproduction. It is a fascination not with what the animal represents (as psychoanalysis would interpret) but with the action-potential of the pack. That could be, for example, the pack of wolves that hunts at night, wandering. Becoming-animal is concerned with multiplicity and the forming of

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<sup>56</sup> Deleuze quotes Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* as an example of becoming-animal (243-ff). In the novel, Deleuze claims, Captain Ahab’s fascination with the whale makes him pursue the whale but not for any end or purpose. Ahab is fascinated with the animal but, as Deleuze paradoxically claims, does not want to gain control or power over the whale. In Deleuze’s interpretation of *Moby Dick* Ahab’s becoming-animal is not about gaining power over what is not himself but rather about the transformation of Ahab’s self in perceiving difference.

multiplicity. The ‘animals’ of Deleuze’s Becoming-animal are not related through evolution or sexual reproduction but by infection (“contagion”). They are hybrids in that they cannot reproduce sexually but merely by choice, incidence or infection. The animal pack of Deleuze then cannot be understood in terms of ‘species’ or ‘kind’ but only in terms of becoming multiplicity and alliance and opening oneself up for the endless potential of actions that this alliance might involve. Becoming-animal is not becoming what the animal means, nor is it acting like an animal but rather developing a feel for the animal’s movements and its perceptions.

As initially remarked Deleuze attributes special importance to the role of the writer in producing ‘becomings-animal.’ Deleuze rejects the sign as a valid instance of producing meaning. Becoming-animal is the power of literature to present percepts and affects. These percepts and affects, however, are freed from any kind of meaning or human interpretation. While Kafka has often been read as an author whose writings produce images and signs that are forever out of reach of ultimate interpretation and meaning, Deleuze argues that Kafka’s writings exemplify affects and intensities produced by literature. Deleuze opposes the hermeneutic method in accessing a text for meaning. He argues that it is only the critic’s wish to give meaning to a text. But a text is, according to Deleuze, only producing affects and perceptions. The becoming-animal in literature can then enable us to perceive the world differently, to perceive it as something that is not ourselves. Literature would then be a production of sense and not an expression of meaning. Following Deleuze’s mode of interpretation, Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung*, in which Gregor Samsa, as Deleuze claims, turns into a beetle, would then enable us to perceive of the world in a beetle-way. The beetle is no longer a sign or a symbol but an altered way of seeing the world.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> But Deleuze’s interpretation of *Die Verwandlung* is problematic, to say the least. Not just that the text does nowhere state that Samsa turns into a beetle (the term used in the German original is *Ungeziefer* which is rather

Burroughs's *Cities of the Red Night* is a text rich of Deleuzian Becomings-animal. The characters of *Cities* form "bands, human or animal, proliferate by contagion, epidemics, battlefields, and catastrophes" (Deleuze 241). While some characters reappear under different names and guises in different plots of the novel, other groups or bands of characters are identified by their shared physical similarities (they are never completely identical) and their shared actions which often involve homosexuality and death. In the shared physical features color occupies a special significance. Frequently characters are described as being of a "greenish complexion" (58), or having red hair and freckles (184). Green and red are the two dominant colors that seem to signify on the band or pack. In Clem Snide's story Jerry Green, the missing person Clem is hired to find, is described as "slender, red hair, green eyes far apart, a wide mouth. Sexy and kinky-looking" (37). At another instance in the text a character in a general scenic description is characterized as possessing "bright copper-red skin, innocent and beautiful as some exotic animal" (141). On a symbolic level the colors do not seem to have any special significance. A semiotic reading of these colors is not very elusive. Self-consciously the text comments that it seems "as if the colors themselves were possessed of a purposeful and sinister life" (168). They serve the purpose of identifying the pack. Like the Deleuzian pack the 'green and red characters' that populate the *Cities of the Red Night* are a "multiplicity without the unity of an ancestor" (*A Thousand Plateaus* 242):

A form of radiation unknown at the present time activated a virus. This virus illness occasioned biological mutations, especially alterations in hair and skin color, which were then genetically conveyed. The virus must have affected the sexual and fear centers in the brain and nervous system so that fear was converted into sexual frenzies which were reconverted into fear, the feedback leading in many cases to a fatal conclusion. The virus information was genetically conveyed, in orgasms that were often fatal. It seems likely that the burnings, stabbings, and hangings were largely terminal hallucinations produced by the virus, at a point where the line between illusion and reality breaks down. (167)

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vague), this is already an interpretation of the text and a very disputed one at that, but also Deleuze's interpretation falls short on seeing the symbolic meaning of this metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa by sticking to his supposedly 'literal' interpretation of the text.

The band is rather the result of an infection with a mysterious color virus that generates genetic mutations and a certain kind of behavior, i.e. sexual frenzies and killings. The genetic mutations however are not passed on from parents to children but spread through homosexual intercourse, in that sense, they lack the “unity of an ancestor.”<sup>58</sup> The virus produces a reality of the virtual, where “the line between illusion and reality breaks down.” The excerpt above offers but one explanation for the origin of the virus. In the narrative of Yen Lee the origin of the disease is ascribed to a radioactive virus, “Doomsday Bug,” developed by English scientists during World War II (15). Other story lines suggest that this “selective pestilence is the most humane solution to overpopulation and the attendant impasses of pollution, inflation, and exhaustion of natural resources” (86). The “color virus” pursues its own “purposeful and sinister life” (168). The explanations of the origin of the virus are as *virulent* as the overlaying plots and characters of the text. Burroughs’s text comments on the color virus: “The only thing not pre-recorded in the universe are the prerecordings themselves. The copies can only repeat themselves word by word. *A virus is a copy*” (166). Like copies or viruses the characters and motifs of the text multiply and form bands, packs and establish rhizomatic connections.

## **BECOMING-WOMAN**

As Deleuze made clear, “[b]ecoming isn’t part of history; history only amounts the set of preconditions; however recent, that one leaves behind in order to ‘become,’ that is, to create something new” (*Negotiations* 171). Apart from this very general statement about the purpose of becomings, each becoming aims at slightly different tenants of philosophy and science and tries to undermine them. As described above Becomings-animal attack the distinction

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<sup>58</sup> I will elaborate more on the ideological implications of this in my discussion of becoming-woman.

between human and animal life and perceptions, and the notion of common ancestry. A becoming-woman on the other hand aims at eliminating the “majoritarian” (*Thousand Plateaus* 291). Deleuze explains that “majority implies a state of domination [...] It is not a question whether there are more mosquitoes or flies than men, but of knowing how ‘man’ constituted a standard in the universe in relation to which men necessarily (analytically) form a majority” (291). The passage I have just cited goes on for many pages. Deleuze’s awkward and lengthy explanation of the difference between majority and “majoritarian” on the one hand, and minority and “minoritarian” on the other, points at a problem that political science and other social sciences commonly refer to as the problem of ‘structural minorities.’ Structural minorities are not necessarily minorities in terms of numbers but represent a group of people with limited powers and rights within a given political or social system. Deleuze points out that women constitutes such a “minoritarian group” (they are not a numeric minority). To be more precise, Woman, i.e. the category, constitutes the “minoritarian.” Within this category of “minoritarian” also fall “children, but also animals, plants, and molecules” (291). A becoming-woman is not to be understood literally then. “Even blacks, as the Black Panthers said, must become black. Even women must become-woman [...] becoming-woman, etc., therefore impl[ies] two simultaneous movements, one by which a term (the subject) is withdrawn from the majority, and another by which a term (the medium or agent) rises up from the minority” (291). Put differently, becoming-woman rejects the reference point to the majority (withdrawal of the subject) and elevates an agent from minority to minoritarian. Thus, the claim of subjectivity is displaced from the majority to the (structural) minority. By doing so, the individual can supposedly escape the power of definition by the majority and realize full agency. Deleuze attributes the status of Woman a special significance. He claims that “the special situation of women in relation to the man-standard [...] accounts for the



fact, that becomings, being minoritarian, always pass through a becoming-woman” (291). Deleuze suggests that the gender binary is the primary marker of difference and suppression. A status of minoritarian *and* Man (the category) is then impossible. Or as Deleuze puts it: “There is no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellence, whereas becomings are molecular.” The dichotomy of “molar” (referring to the physical unit mole containing Avogadro’s number<sup>59</sup> of molecules) and “molecular” points at Deleuze’s notion that the unit (mole) is totalizing and this suppressing because it builds the organizing principle the molecule has to submit to in order to be recognized. Man is the *central point* that “has the property of organizing binary distributions within dualism machines, and reproducing itself in the principal term of the opposition [...]” (292). To become molecular, or become woman is a rejection of the central point of binary opposition. “[A] line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination [...]” (293). It is the “in-betweenness,” the existence in a “no-man’s land” (293) that enables an overcoming of the powers of definition of man.

Burroughs’s political objective of claiming a distinct gay subjectivity that exists beyond the male/female dichotomy could easily be read as becomings-woman. The gay subject would become minoritarian in the Deleuzian sense by transcending the male/female dichotomy. In contrast to Deleuze, however, Burroughs sees women as the repressive instance the gay subject has to transcend. The fact that this objective is forever out of reach is underlined by the all present ‘conspiracy paranoia’ and anxiety towards the female subject. Although female characters in the book are only rarely mentioned, instances of repression of the male subject are always associated with women. One example is the “White Tigress” who “seized Yass-Waddah, reducing the male inhabitants to slaves, consorts, and courtiers all under the

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<sup>59</sup> 6.022 x 10<sup>23</sup>

sentence of death that could be carried out at any time at the caprice of the White Tigress” (155-569). I would argue that women in Burroughs’s text take on the role of the ‘Other of the Other.’ With regard to the workings of ‘conspiracy theories’ Slavoj Žižek has pointed out that [t]he true conspiracy of Power resides in the very notion of conspiracy, in the notion that, behind the visible, public Power, there is another obscene, invisible, ‘crazy’ Power structure. This other, hidden Law acts the part of the ‘Other of the Other’ in the Lacanian sense, the part of the meta-guarantee of the consistency of the big Other (the symbolic order that regulates social life). (“Between Symbolic Fiction and Fantasmatic Spectre: Toward a Lacanian Theory of Ideology” 230)

Accordingly, I would argue that in *Cities* women represent the “obscene, invisible, ‘crazy’ Power structure” that terrorizes and represses the gay subject. Interestingly, the fact that women represent the ‘Other of the Other’ also suggests that the phallus is not or no longer (the text suggests that there was a ‘paradisiacal’ time without women) the dominant signifier of the symbolic order that regulates social life. With regard to Deleuze’s objective of ‘becoming-woman,’ which also includes a revision of the symbolic order<sup>60</sup>, this would be the ideal utopic state but *Cities* presents this fact as a dystopic state prohibiting the unfolding of male gay subjectivity. The graphic descriptions of homosexual intercourse, the violent, hyper-masculine characters, and the fact that male subjectivity in *Cities* is constructed along very traditional lines of authorship and writing can then be read as an attempt to restore the phallus as a signifier of social order.

However, Burroughs’s remark that “women are a biological mistake but so is everything around here,” makes it clear that he is fully aware of the impossibility of the erasure of the female subject. Binaries are a regrettable but undeniable built-in flaw of human existence. Burroughs’ construction of gay subjectivity beyond the male/female binary can then only be understood as a strategic yet utopic move. ‘Strategic’ because it claims a concrete space for the gay subject, ‘utopic’ because the objective’s impossibility is inherent in the project.

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<sup>60</sup> For a more thorough discussion of this inversion of the phallus as signifier see: Slavoj Žižek, *Körperlose Organe – Bausteine für eine Begegnung zwischen Deleuze und Lacan*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2005, 121-30.

Burroughs's utopia operates as an ironic counterdraft to what he acknowledges as the reality of life. Deleuzian becomings, on the other hand, question these very 'realities of life.' The majoritarian role of the male subject is scolded in Deleuze's utopic draft but I would argue that Burroughs, in fact, does not write against the supposed superiority of the male subject, quite contrary, as I have argued earlier he considers this the only truly pure and 'healthy' form of life and seeks to restore it.

As I have shown in my discussion of becomings-animal, Burroughs and Deleuze both refer to a mode of reproduction that operates through *infection* rather than sexual reproduction.<sup>61</sup> This, of course, is a pun, since Burroughs's characters pass the viruses that enable becomings-animal, through sexual intercourse. It is part of both their utopias respectively that reproduction can take place without the "unity of an ancestor" (*Plateaus* 242). Burroughs sees the asexual reproduction as the next evolutionary step. His pseudoscientific fantasy holds that women become obsolete. In *Cities* the heterosexual act is being presented as being necessary to produce offspring. However, the capacity to produce 'something new' (as Deleuze has suggested for becomings) is only attributed to the homosexual act. The text suggests that only the homosexual act can be truly *procreative*. The following excerpt from the story line of Noah Blake illustrates this quite well:

We strip off our shorts and Hans grins and brings his finger up in three jerks. I prop the book up against the wall on the far side of the desk and I bend over a chair. As Hans fucks me, the drawings seem to come alive belching red fire and just as I go off, Chinese children set off a string of firecrackers against the door and I see a huge firecracker blow the library to atoms as a gob of sperm hits the book six feet away. [...]

I say: "*Firecrackers!*" That's the basic exploding weapon. It's all here, but they didn't see how far it can be carried. [...] We can hardly wait to get back to the shop and set hands to work. (129-31)

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<sup>61</sup> Though with opposite political implications, a similar concept of asexual reproduction can be found in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1915 utopic novel *Herland* in which an isolated society of women reproduces through parthenogenesis. The result is an ideal society free of conflict and violence.

Noah Blake, the young pirate-gunsmith, is working on the development of more effective weapons. In a scene described above he has the crucial idea of how to construct a more effective weapon in the moment when he has intercourse with his friend Hans. The excerpt above suggests that the male orgasm is the spark that triggers intellectual procreativity. Orgasm's procreative potential is displaced from the body and redefined in terms of the mind and the intellect. Interestingly, orgasm is often thought of as being volatile, brief, somewhat indescribable and lacking proper representation. All these qualities are also attributed to Deleuzian becomings. In contrast to Deleuze, however, Burroughs carefully avoids any move that would be in favor of women or that could be interpreted as a becoming-woman. In Burroughs's narrative universe it is exclusively male sexuality and male orgasm that brings the world 'forward' intellectually. By doing so, he signifies on the meta-narrative of men's intellectual superiority and enforces the traditional notion of separate spheres of the sexes. He does not invert the majoritarian and the minoritarian position. Male procreativity is sharply contrasted with female procreativity, whether related to the body or the intellect: "She [the Countess de Gulpa], for example, succeeded in reanimating headless men. These she gives to her friend as love slaves. They are fed through the rectum. I don't see any practical applications" (204). The Countess de Gulpa pursues research in her secret laboratories but as this comment shows, female scientific or intellectual "offspring" is of no use. Burroughs's insistence on the superiority of men is so exaggerated that it could easily be interpreted as irony or a satire. But the status of Burroughs's statements as irony or satire remains ambiguous, since misogynic tendencies are evident and can hardly be neglected. In an interview with *Rolling Stone* in the early 1970s Burroughs elaborates on his interest in the separation of the sexes. He pictures an all-male commune (as in his *Wild Boy* novels) and suggests "I have certainly no objections if lesbians would like to do the same." And when

asked about the possibilities of lesbian communities he answers: “I don’t know. They could mutate into birds perhaps” (“Rolling Stone Interview” 163-ff).

In *Cities* the female capacity to reproduce is presented as a necessary evil. When Noah Blake finds himself in a pirate community, someone explains to him: “Breeding is encouraged...it is in fact a duty, I hope not too unpleasant” (106). What follows is “not an unconstrained orgy but rather a series of theatrical performances” (108) in which women get impregnated by the pirates in order to populate their communities. The remark that this is rather a theatrical performance than an orgy is in so far telling as it suggests the performative and ‘unauthentic’ nature of the heterosexual act. This is one of the few parts of the book where women are mentioned at all. Their existence and purpose in life is reduced to their potential as ‘breeders.’ In other instances of the book that deal with the Cities of the Red Night Burroughs signifies on other utopias such as Plato’s *Republic*:

The inhabitants were divided into an elite minority known as the Transmigrants and a majority known as the Receptables. [...] To show the system in operation: here is an old Transmigrant on his deathbed. He has selected his future Receptable parents, who are summoned to the death chamber. The parents copulate, achieving orgasm just as the old Transmigrant dies so that his spirit enters the womb to be reborn. (153-54)

The excerpt above echoes Plato’s ideal of controlled reproduction. But Burroughs couples this classic utopia of an engineered society with scientific fantasies of artificial reproduction. The narrator explains that soon artificial insemination disturbed the balance between deaths and births in the Cities (155). As a result of a natural catastrophe “the whole northern sky lit up red at night, like the reflection from a vast furnace” (155). Radiation was emitted and it came again to mutations whose offspring soon outnumbered the original inhabitants of the cities. An albino mutant, named the White Tigress, gains power in the aftermath of this disaster and reduces the male inhabitants to “slaves, consorts and courtiers” (155). She finds a way of “growing babies in excised wombs, the wombs being supplied by vagrant Womb

Snatchers” (156). And it goes on: “This practice aggravated the differences between the male and female factions and war with Yass-Waddah seemed unavoidable” (156). At the moment when women take control of reproduction in that they are no longer ‘vessels’ for male spirits to be reborn but rather exercise the power to reproduce outside their bodies, war is ‘unavoidable’ and the utopic project of controlled reproduction is doomed to fail. This story-line is on the line between misogyny undercurrents and parody. The absurd story of the White Tigress parodies feminist utopias that envisioned future reproduction as being independent from female reproductive organs and feminist activism of the 1970s that sought to provide women with the right to abort. As Jamie Russell has pointed out, Burroughs answers the question of reproduction quite differently. His fictive all-male communities mirror the gay clone scene of the 1970s and 1980s (*Queer Burroughs* 116-ff). Martin Levine describes the historical moment of emergence of the gay clone scene as follows:

When the dust of gay liberation had settled, the doors to the closet were opened, and out popped the clone. Taking a cue from movement ideology, clones modeled themselves upon traditional masculinity and self-fulfillment ethic [...] Accepting me-generation values, they searched for fulfillment in anonymous sex, recreational drugs, and hard partying (*Gay Macho* 7).

These tendencies of gay self-fashioning independent from the heterosexual world can be observed in particular in *Cities*. Like the members of the gay clone scene Burroughs’s characters establish familial links through shared appearance and performance of a certain life-style.

Deleuze’s concept of becoming and Burroughs’ fantasy of progress that is exclusively male connotated both promote in their essence the creation of ‘something new.’ ‘Something new’ is ill-defined but it is reasonable to assume that in both cases it refers to intellectual capacities. In the case of Deleuze with his dislike of ‘progress’ (Hegel) this is, of course, at least problematic. Deleuze and Burroughs both remove notions of reproduction or rather (pro-) creation from the body or to be more precise from the *female* body. Deleuze rejects

notions of biological ancestry in his becomings-animal (“ridiculous evolutionary classifications” *Plateaus* 239) and insists that Woman (the biological category) can or must become-woman. Yet at the same time he insists that the subject in becomings-animal must “become a pack” and “perceive like an animal.” These two performances cannot be separated from the body but they seek to transcend the binary opposition of the categories man/woman, man/animal, man/machine. As Elizabeth Grosz has pointed out, Deleuze’s philosophy “may prove to be more productive, indeed more thought provoking [than any other contemporary feminist theory]” (*Time Travels – Feminism, Nature, Power* 163) for the future of feminism. Burroughs on the other hand erases the female subject by fantasizing about all-male communities and by bluntly suggesting that women’s capacity to reproduce is not just despicable but also the source of male oppression. Genuine, true progress can only be achieved through male gay bodies. Both Deleuze and Burroughs assign the body a greater significance in the context of political power and in the claim of political space. In the following section of this paper, I will look at how they use the body to negotiate their political claims and utopic visions.

### **BODY WITHOUT ORGANS**

The gay male body occupies a central role in Burroughs’s works. Gay subjectivity is defined through a celebration of the male body. At the same time, this gay subjectivity is constantly under attack from social forces. The individual’s conflicts with various social forces are negotiated through the body. Timothy Murphy has suggested a reading of the body in *Naked Lunch* in terms of capitalism: “[T]he disciplined body, like thought, is domesticated and subordinated to the process of production as an instrument, [...] the body’s very organization abets capitalist control” (97). Though Murphy argues for a reading of Burroughs with

Deleuze, this perception clearly is more indebted to Foucault than to Deleuze. Murphy goes on to explain that there are also “forms of bodily organization” some of which “effectively resist capitalist exploitation,” (97) and links these to Deleuze’s Body without Organs. In his ‘anti-capitalist’ reading of the text’s bodies Murphy completely ignores the gendered dimension of Burroughs’ work. While I would not necessarily object to Murphy’s reading completely, I would like to point out that a reading of the bodies in Burroughs’s text strictly in terms of capitalism does not just ignore Burroughs’s claims on gay subjectivity but also ignores the political and strategic differences between Burroughs’s and Deleuze’s use of the body.

Deleuze’s Body without Organs heavily relies on the characterization of bodies in Burroughs’s texts. In *Plateaus* and *Anti-Oedipus* he explicitly refers to Burroughs in connection with his own concept of the Body without Organs. Deleuze reads Burroughs in a particular way and uses this reading to argue for his own purposes. The two passages from *Naked Lunch* and *Plateaus* I quote below illustrate this quite well:

Democracy is cancerous, and bureaus are its cancer. A bureau takes root anywhere in the state, turns malignant like the Narcotics Bureau, and grows and grows, always reproducing more of its kind, until it chokes the host if not controlled and exercised. Bureaus cannot live without a host, being true parasitic organisms. (*Naked Lunch* 134)

*Cancerous tissue*: each instant, each second, a cell becomes cancerous, mad, proliferates and loses its configuration, takes over everything; the organism must submit it to its rule or restratify it, not only for its own survival, but also to make possible an escape from the organism (*Plateaus* 163).

The excerpts above parallel each other but also exemplify how Deleuze reinterprets Burroughs. While Deleuze probably agrees with Burroughs that “bureaus”, i.e. the state, the government, and its agencies oppress the individual, Deleuze does not read the organizational structures of the state as cancerous. Quite contrary, he suggests that only the cancerous cell enables “an escape from the organism.” Deleuze points out that “the Body without Organs is



opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism” (158).

It becomes very clear that Deleuze’s insistence that the Body without Organs is not a metaphor necessarily suggests a metonymic reading. The organism represents the state/government because it operates in the same way. The metonymic relation evolves out of the fact that the notion of the ‘organism’ is an attribute of the notion of the state (the state as body). Taking this into consideration, it becomes clear that Burroughs and Deleuze in fact use body/organism quite differently. This distinction is a matter of ideology. A metaphor uses one object in place of another to suggest likeness or analogy. In Burroughs’ case this suggests that the analogy between (healthy, diseased) body and state is an appropriate one. Deleuze’s metonymic use of body and state does not just attack the notion of the state but at the same time the notion of the body. They are both part of the same repressive mechanism. Like Deleuze’s distinction between “molar” and “molecular” becomings, the excerpt above suggests that the individual cell must resist the totalizing powers and become cancerous. It is highly ironic that Burroughs considers democracy cancerous and Deleuze on the other hand insists that only the cancerous cell can overcome the repression through the organism. Allan Schrift’s comment that Deleuze pursues a project of ‘radical democracy’ gains a greater significance and shows how Deleuze subverts Burroughs’s statement. I would argue that this is exactly one of the instances where Deleuze ‘takes an author from behind.’ In another passage of *Plateaus* Deleuze directly quotes Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* when describing five kinds of the Body without Organs:

*The hypochondriac body*: the organs are destroyed, the damage has already been done, nothing happens anymore. “Miss X claims that she no longer has a brain or nerves or chest or stomach or guts. All she has left is the skin and bones of a disorganized body. These are her words.” [quote from Jules Cotard, *Etard sue les maladies cérébrales et mentales*. Paris: Braillière, 1891] *The paranoid body*: the organs are continually under attack from outside forces, but are also restored by outside energies. [...] *The schizo body*, waging its own active internal struggle against the organs, at the price of catatonia. Then the *drugged body*, the experimental schizo: “The human body is scandalously inefficient. Instead of a mouth and an anus to get out of

order why not have an all-purpose hole to eat *and* eliminate? We could seal up nose and mouth, fill in the stomach, make an air hole direct into the lungs where it should have been in the first place.” [quote from William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch*]. *The masochist body*: it is poorly understood in terms of pain; it is fundamentally a question of the Body without Organs. It has its sadist or whore sew it up; the eyes, anus, urethra, breasts, and nose are sewn shut. It has strung up to stop the organs from working; [...]. (150)

As this excerpt shows the Body without Organs is a celebration of psychological types that have been deemed insane by psychoanalysis. The *hypochondriac body*, the *paranoid body*, the *schizo body*, the *drugged body*, and the *masochist body* all rebel against their organs and the normative principle that is implied by the notion of organs. Deleuze quotes the report of Jules Cotard (1840-1889), a French neurologist who is best known for describing the delusional belief of some of his patients that they are either dead, do not exist or have bodies without organs, as an example of the hypochondriac body. The quote from Burroughs’s text refers to the motif of the ‘Talking Asshole’ that appears frequently in Burroughs’s text. I have already quoted earlier the instance in *Cities* where this motif is taken up, as a creation of the Countess the Gulpa that lacks “any practical applications” (204). More significantly in this context is, however, the ‘Talking Asshole’ routine (126-128) in *Naked Lunch*:

After a while the ass started talking on its own. He would go in without anything prepared and his ass would ad-lib and toss gags back at him every time.

Then it developed sort of teeth like little raspy incurving hooks and started eating. He thought this was cute at first and built an act around it, but the asshole would eat its way through his pants and start talking on the street, shouting out it wanted equal rights. It would get drunk and have crying jags nobody loved it and it wanted to be kissed as any other mouth. Finally it talked all the time day and night, you could hear him for blocks screaming at it to shut up, and beating it with its fist, and sticking candles up it, but nothing did any good and the asshole said to him: “It’s you who will shut up in the end. Not me. Because we don’t need you around here anymore. I can talk and I can eat *and* shit. (127).

The excerpt above describes how an anus, i.e. a single organ, assumes the qualities of a different organ (the mouth) and even assumes the identity of a *person*. The talking anus resembles Deleuze’s suggestion that “[one] should walk on your head, sing with your sinuses, see through your skin, breathe with your belly” (151). In becomings-Body without Organs an

organ assumes the function of other organs and thus undermines the 'order' of the body/organism. But once again, I would argue that Deleuze's *Body without Organs* and Burroughs's *Talking Asshole* have quite different implications. In the excerpt above the talking anus is "cute" and helpful at first by tossing gags as part of a stand-up comedy but when it starts talking independently it becomes an annoyance and in the end even a threat to his owner's autonomy. The qualities and traits the talking anus assumes strongly remind of stereotypical female character traits. It starts "talking on the street, shouting it wants equal rights," have "crying jags nobody loved it" and finally proclaims its independence. I would read this description of the talking anus as a comment on the women's rights movement and as an expression of Burroughs' effeminophobia. The effeminate gay is considered schizophrenic in that he listens to voices that are not his own but that of somebody else. If he yields to the effeminate paradigm he gives up the chance of being 'sane' and possessing an 'intact personality.' Burroughs' strong dislike of 'fags' similarly finds its expression in the following excerpt from *Junky*:

A room full of fags gives me the horrors. They jerk around like puppets on invisible strings, galvanized into hideous activity that is the negation of everything living and spontaneous. The live human being has moved out of these bodies long ago. But something has moved in when the original tenant moved out. Fags are ventriloquist's dummies who have moved in and taken over the ventriloquist. The dummy sits in a queer bar nursing his beer, and uncontrollably yapping out of a rigid doll face. (84).

In the excerpt above the effeminate gay is described as lacking "everything living and spontaneous." He is not a human being but an animated puppet that utters what the ventriloquist lets him say. The fag, who is "nursing his beer," is an empty body with a "rigid doll face." Burroughs puts this female imagery in stark opposition to the "live human being" suggesting that only the masculine man can be considered human, autonomous, sound, and sane. Both, the talking anus and puppet-like fags, are a metaphor for the usurpation of the male subject through the feminine. Through mimicry the male subject *becomes* woman. In

Deleuzian terms this self-styled performative identity would be welcomed, since it subverts the ‘truth’ of the sexes. In Burroughs’s terms it hinders the gay male subject from unfolding its ‘true identity.’ The fag is not able to resist the orders of the Talking Asshole. His body has fallen to the regulatory codes of the feminine and it thus lacks autonomy. It becomes clear that Burroughs views effeminate gay identity as schizophrenic fragmentation of the subject. The Talking Asshole’s use of the first person plural pronoun ‘we’ curiously echoes a passage from the introduction of *Plateaus*: “The two of us [Deleuze and Guattari] wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already a crowd. [...] We are no longer ourselves.” In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze argues against an understanding of schizophrenia as mental disease and for a use of schizophrenia as a means of resisting oppression through psychoanalysis and capitalism, which is according to him a schizophrenic system. While Deleuze’s ultimate goal is to “lose ourselves,” Burroughs perceives the loss of the ‘authentic self’ as a result of the regulatory forces of society, the gender binary, etc. Burroughs signifies on notions of sanity and wholeness to define gay male subjectivity. Following this rationale the masculine gay subject is sane in contrast to the effeminate gay male. Though Burroughs in a sense redefines the measures of sanity, his criticism does not question the notion of sanity or the subject itself. Schizophrenia, the babbling of the feminine voice in the male subject, is an expression of insanity or being lesser than human but beyond this a ‘sane’ gay subject exists. Deleuze has a very different take on the question of identity and the subject:

The question’s nothing to do with the character of this or that exclusive group, it’s do to with the transversal relations that ensure that any effects produced in some particular way (through homosexuality, drugs, and so on) *can always be produced by other means*. We have to counter people who think “I’m this, I’m that,” and who do so, moreover, in psychoanalytic terms (relating everything to their childhood or their fate), by thinking in strange, fluid, unusual terms: I don’t know what I am – I’d have to investigate and experiment with so many things in a non-narcissistic, non-oedipal way – no gay can ever say “I’m gay.” It’s not a question of being this or that of human being, but of becoming inhuman, of a universal animal becoming – not seeing yourself as some dumb animal, but unraveling your body’s human organization,

exploring this or that zone of bodily intensity, with everyone discovering their own particular zones, and the groups, populations, species that inhabit them. (*Negotiations* 11)

In the excerpt above Deleuze attacks identity politics that finds its legitimization in psychoanalytic notions of the self. For Deleuze identity is not based on the individual's proclamation to belong to a certain group. Identity is then not a stable category but an effect of transversal relations. He argues that in order to answer the question "who am I" one needs to experiment with various becomings, the body and its intensities, discover zones, and analyze who inhabits various categories. In contrast to Deleuze, Burroughs does not see the potential of subversion and parody in the act of mimicry (the effeminate male) but sees it as a threat to the originary subject. This view, of course, is in stark contrast to contemporary queer theory à la Judith Butler.

Burroughs's dislike of the effeminate male gay and his celebration of masculinity have been surprisingly unchanged over the decades. This has brought him at times *in* and at other times *out of* step with the gay liberation movement and queer theory. 'Heterosexual readings' of his texts have frequently emphasized the anti-establishment thematics of his writings and deemed Burroughs a representative of counter-culture ethics. From the perspective of the queer critic an assessment of his works reveals rather reactionary tendencies. His frequent outbursts of effeminophobia and unconcealed misogyny are ambiguous and sometimes resist a reading as ironic acts of subversion. His model of masculine homosexuality is oftentimes utterly un-ironic despite its exaggerated exposition. In *Cities of the Red Night* Burroughs remains committed to this narrow definition of homosexuality. While his earlier writings often described the oppression of the gay individual through the female paradigm, his later works and *Cities* in particular, often imagine the violent revolution of the gay subject. But the gay subject's masculine identity is always threatened to be overpowered by the return of the feminine. As a result, the status of the masculine gay identity is always contested. The re-

feminization is immanent when the gay male hero pursues his desire for pleasure. The hanging fever described in *Cities* does not just, as I have argued earlier, represent feminine invasion into the intact male body, it also causes feminization of the male subject through unregulated desire and pleasure:

We know that a consuming passion can produce physical symptoms...fever...loss of appetite...even allergic reactions...and few conditions are more obsessional and potentially self-destructive than love. Are not the symptoms of the virus B-23 simply the symptoms of what we are pleased to call "love"? (25)

Uncontrolled emotions and psychosomatic complaints associated with women are part of dominant metanarratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. A man who gives in to these uncontrolled emotions and desires falls victim to becoming feminized and thus (intellectually) inferior. One example of this, are the "idiot males" of Tamaghis (one of the cities of the red night), who are "burning with the terrible lusts of the fever" (177). Burroughs's criticism of excessive emotion and pleasure in gay lifestyle stunningly echoes the conservative rhetoric against homosexuality as an 'immoral' activity in the 1980s wake of AIDS. The gender-bias of Burroughs's concept of pleasure is twofold. It is in stark opposition to both heterosexual dominant and queer theory. While Burroughs seems to argue for a formation of pleasure outside the heterosexual dominant (a feature he shares with queer theory), he does not (unlike queer theory) emphasize the subversive undertones of 'gender parody.'

Burroughs's dystopia is based on anxiety towards the feminization of the gay subject. The utopic moments within Burroughs's text emerge when *difference* as a signifier of identity is erased, thus creating a strange notion of gay communal homogeneity. His masculine gay heroes are rarely described as individuals or could barely function as protagonists; they are rather part of a homogenous group that is marked by its absence of sex and gender difference. Interestingly, through this move Burroughs seeks to erase the gender-binary, an

objective that, as we have seen earlier, is also part of Deleuze's political and utopian agenda. The difference between their approaches is, however, fundamental and also has a number of ideological implications. Deleuze's concept of becoming-Body without Organs seeks to transcend the gender-binary by creating the most *difference* possible. "Becoming produces nothing other than itself" (*Plateaus* 238) but each time with the greatest difference possible. This suggests that identity is in fact not stable but in the permanent state of becoming. Contrary to Burroughs, whose utopic (hence unattainable) ideal is stable masculine gay identity that is only temporarily or in moments of insanity overtaken by the feminine/difference, Deleuze does not perceive of difference being the derivate of identity but identity stemming from difference. Part of his utopic project is in fact the suspension of notions of identity that are in any way stable.

Burroughs's emphasis on male-male sexuality could potentially be read as providing subversive instances in terms of queer theory. The (temporary) absence of the feminine creates a new rationale of desire in which assigned gender-roles or the active/passive binary are suspended. But Burroughs' rejection of the feminine is at least problematic in terms of queer theory:

He held her elbows pinioned, his hip against her, and grinned into her screaming face, which was losing all human semblance as he smashed her against the wall and threw his hammer-fist into her face, crushing the perfectly chiseled nose and lips that crumpled like rubber. (*Cities* 309)

Disturbingly violent scenes like the one quoted above limit the subversive potential of Burroughs's text considerably, since the misogynic undertones of these passages ultimately fail to define gay identity without reference to the heterosexual dominant/the feminine. Though he tries to replace difference with sameness, Burroughs's notion of gay subjectivity and desire can only be defined in terms of opposition to heterosexual desire. For Deleuze, on

the other hand, desire is ultimately linked to the body. This body, however, is not a gendered or sexed body but the Body without Organs that overrides all categories of gender. Desire is not constituted as lack that, as Lacan has argued, can never be fulfilled other than in dreams but as a *productive* instance. The Body without Organs and the ‘desiring machine’ are two expressions for the same underlying concept and rationale. The desiring machine produces desire for the sake of production. Through a Body without Organs it forms new connections with all sorts of other machines. For example, a baby’s ‘mouth machine’ connects with her mother’s ‘breast machine.’ But this production of desire is neither intended to reach an end, nor to be fulfilled: “You never reach the Body without Organs, you can’t reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is the limit” (150). The Body without Organs does not function as *organism*, i.e. as an ‘organic whole.’ The organs are not assigned certain functions and they do not signify certain qualities. In a bigger context, the Body without Organs undermines the laws under which capitalist societies and psychoanalysis allegedly operate.<sup>62</sup> As Deleuze suggests, “[f]ind your body without organs. Find out how to make it. It’s a question of life and death, youth and old age, sadness and joy. It is where everything is played out” (151). Deleuze and Burroughs agree that the ‘symbol system’ of signifier and signified is the source of repression but as I have shown earlier, they find quite different answers how to cure this ‘disease.’

So, what is it that Deleuze and Burroughs ultimately desire? And how to they obtain their objectives? By now, it has become clear that Deleuze seeks to reject Western philosophy completely. He deliberately chooses the metaphor of the body (of course, it is part of his objective to insist that the body is *not* a metaphor) to attack capitalism, psychoanalysis, fascism, gender-binaries etc. Mirjam Schaub has poignantly remarked that Deleuze’s

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<sup>62</sup> Deleuze particularly opposes Freud’s notion of ‘penis envy’ since it suggests lack. A Body without Organs can neither fear the loss of an organ nor suffer from the lack of an organ (the penis).



philosophy is “*wunschlos glücklich*” (perfectly happy) because it defines desire not as lack but as an entirely positivistic principle of production (*Gilles Deleuze im Wunderland* 12). Deleuze replaces the desire for what is lacking with desiring machines that indefinitely produce and multiply themselves. The Body without Organs is the place where, to use Deleuze’s own words, “all is played out” but also played out by its own rules, free from psychoanalytic readings. Deleuze ultimately desires freedom but this freedom presents itself as arbitrary and lacking reference points. Furthermore, I argue that his ‘rejection’ of Western philosophy is not successful. For one, his philosophy is only meaningful when *read with and against* the traditions of Western philosophy. Secondly, many of his ‘novel’ (irony intended) ideas and concepts neatly line up with the ideas of other Western philosophers and theorists making his attempt to position his philosophy as somewhat apart from the traditions of Western philosophy rather doubtful.

What remains is the question of how his philosophy can open up ways of political activism? As initially remarked Deleuze serves a number of anti-globalization groups as philosophical reference point. These groups criticize the lack of democratic legitimization of organizations such as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) or the WTO (World Trade Organization). Their sometimes violent demonstrations can be read as becomings-Body without Organs or the practice nomadic interventions. But it is questionable if Deleuze’s philosophy can be used in terms of ‘identity politics’ that have proven to provide an important momentum in the realization of political equality. The idea that identities are constructed and regulated through “transversal relations,” as Deleuze puts it, is not new, but it seems as if Deleuze’s becomings are arbitrary and can only poorly serve to provide a particular group (gays, women, etc.) with political momentum. That is not to say that identity has to be defined and stable. Quite contrary, the strategic use of certain identity-formations

can generate moments of powerful political subversion. But how are we to perform becomings-woman?

As we have seen, William Burroughs is not just a critic of capitalist society, but also gay activist in that he makes strategic claims on gay subjectivity. His texts could be read as becomings-animal. The association through “infection” as suggested by Deleuze finds its expression in Burroughs’s obscure viral theory but as we have also seen, Burroughs’ political objective is incommensurate with Deleuze’s notion that one should become-woman, i.e. “minoritarian.” In the context of Burroughs, becoming-woman is only thinkable as an abstraction, as a denial of the reality of his gender-politics that sees the gay male subject as the center of the universe. For both, the body is the place where social struggles (economic as well as gender-related struggles) are negotiated but despite their similarities and they occupy different positions. Deleuze’s philosophy operates on an inclusion of all difference possible, while Burroughs’ on a radical exclusion of and anxiety towards the female paradigm.

Deleuze’s utopic notions of the ‘Body without Organs’ and ‘machinic assemblages’ are, of course, not limited to the writings of Burroughs. As Charles Stivale has pointed out, parallels to Deleuze’s concept of the body can also be observed in the genre of ‘Cyberpunk’, which started to emerge in the early to mid-1980s (“Mille Punks” 66). The ‘assemblage’ or ‘enhancement’ of bodies with machine parts is a predominant motif of Science-Fiction and its sub-genre Cyberpunk. In the following chapter I will focus on the utopic bodies of ‘cyborgs’ in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* (1984) and Donna Haraway’s “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” (1985). In contrast to Deleuze, however, who uses the notion of ‘machine’ as a metaphor for his criticism of capitalism and organic wholeness, both Gibson and Haraway imagine new notions of subjectivity that are grounded in the actual technological realization of cybernetic

organisms. A dialog between Haraway's theoretical text and Gibson's novel will thus unravel the differences and similarities in their perceptions of the cyborg.

## CHAPTER II – DONNA HARAWAY AND WILLIAM GIBSON

*The girl sat up in bed and said something in German. Her eyes were soft and unblinking. Automatic pilot. A neural cutout. He backed out of the cubicle and closed the door.*  
(*Neuromancer* 141)

*The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century.*  
("Manifesto for Cyborgs" 8)

I have chosen these passages from William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985) to open this chapter because they represent, in my mind, two diametrically opposed outlooks on the notion of the 'cyborg' (*cybernetic organism*) and the construction of gendered subjectivity in an "electronic future" (Fitzpatrick 518). In the quote taken from Gibson's text the observer is Case, the male protagonist of *Neuromancer*, who when faced with a 'malfunctioning' cyborg in a brothel chooses to retreat. As I would like to suggest, this rather brief scene has a greater significance in the context of the overall text and especially with regard to the construction of (gendered) subjectivity. William Gibson's novel is often celebrated as the founding moment of 'cyberpunk' literature, a sub-genre of science-fiction that emerged in the mid-1980s. It has become something of a cliché in academic writing to begin a discussion of 'cyberspace' and cyborgs with a reference to *Neuromancer*. The appeal of Gibson's text does not just arise from the fact that it features novel concepts such as 'cyberspace'<sup>63</sup> but also that it exposes an ambiguous and ironic relation towards its own medium and the notion of the cyborg. Gibson's text is revolutionary in that it maps out and explores the possibilities of an electronic age long before the introduction of the internet or the wide-spread use of computers for personal and recreational use. Yet, at the same time *Neuromancer* can also be read as a *retreat* into rather conventional notions of subjectivity and narration.

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<sup>63</sup> In fact, the term 'cyberspace' has found its way into popular and scientific discourse and is by now well accepted as a technical term.

Donna Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs" on the other hand, as the brief quote above illustrates, conceives of the cyborg as a "matter of fiction and lived experience" that has the potential of substantially altering our understanding of women's experiences. Haraway's "Manifesto" was first published in 1985, though earlier versions and excerpts were published as early as 1980. As the subtitle "Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s" suggests, the text has a leftist feminist objective. Like *Neuromancer* "Manifesto" has been considered cutting-edge at the time of its publication. Haraway's text is often perceived of as the founding moment of a branch of theory that would a decade later become known as 'Posthumanism.' Haraway's definition of the cyborg has since served as the prototype of the "posthuman body" (*Posthuman Bodies* 8). As I will argue here, though both texts emerged synchronically out of the same cultural and historical context, they give fundamentally different answers to questions of subjectivity posed by technological and medical developments. Haraway's text is provocative and utterly utopic, whereas *Neuromancer* takes a rather dystopian approach to a future in which the humanistic ideal of subjectivity is constantly threatened by corporate power and science's 'advances.' The angst expressed in *Neuromancer* of becoming a "meat puppet" (142) gains a greater significance with regard to questions of agency, freedom and the future of humans in an electronic future.

While the term 'cyborg' first appeared in a 1960 article by Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline<sup>64</sup> that dealt with self-regulating human-machine systems in outer space, the concept of the cyborg, i.e. the incorporation of machine parts into the human body, is much older and can, as Klaus Benesch has shown in *Romantic Cyborgs* (2002), be traced back in American literature to the first half of the eighteenth century (3). Benesch's *Romantic Cyborgs* seemingly constitute an oxymoron since Romanticism is often thought of as idealizing

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<sup>64</sup> The article "Cyborgs and Space," *Astronautics* (1960) can be found under the following link: <http://www.nytimes.com/library/cyber/surf/022697surf-cyborg.html>

pristine nature and opposing the ‘corrupting’ forces of industrialization. But as Benesch explains, “antebellum American authors became increasingly obsessed [...] with representations of the body encroached on by technology” and had to recourse to “an imagined *other* or *double*, a hybrid figure that comprised the human as well as the machine” (4). Furthermore, these representations constitute in a Lacanian sense, “a symbolic mirror image that at once combines similarities and difference in regard to the original self” (7) and thus enables the subject to define itself. Arguing along the lines of Foucault’s famous essay “What is an Author?” (1977), in which Foucault defines the notion of the author as a social construct, Benesch points out that in the first half of the eighteenth century a shift in emphasis from the written text to the *writer* as the source of originality occurred that had wide-ranging implications on notions of authorship and subjectivity (13). To be more precise, the author became to be understood as *the* source of originality and individuality. Consequently, the act of writing became crucial in the constitution of subjectivity. Through technological advances in the publication of books, the ‘profession’ of the author first emerged. Paradoxically, the very notion of ‘authorship’ (i.e. the idea of an original creator) can be read as an act of resistance to the very same technologies that brought ‘authorship’ about. The Romantic cyborg then “figure[s] as a heuristic tool in the attempt to reach for what might be called the psychohistorical [sic] layerings [sic] of the ongoing realignment of discourses on technology and authorship in antebellum literature” (7).

Benesch succeeds in presenting the relationship of technology and Romanticism in antebellum American literature not as clear-cut antagonistic as earlier scholarship on the period, such as Leo Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (1964), did. However, Benesch’s *Romantic Cyborgs* is not completely free of pitfalls. For one, as Thomas Beebee has pointed out in his review of *Romantic Cyborgs*,

there is a curious contradiction between Benesch's mention of his authors' fear of the breakdown between elite and popular culture due to the technological advancements in reproducibility, and the canonical status of all authors treated in the book [Franklin, Whitman, Hawthorne, Poe, Melville, Harding Davis], which shows that the wall of separation they themselves feared to be crumbling has in fact been maintained (442).

It would be, as Beebee further suggests, interesting to see how Benesch's comparative study would have turned out if it had included "more ephemeral writing of the period" (442). In addition to this, Benesch's analysis often treats the cyborg only as symbol or alludes to the figure of the cyborg but seldom directly looks at representations of cyborgs in the text. The chapter dealing with Edgar Allen Poe (97-127) is a commendable exception to this general tendency. The third major point of critique is that Benesch's study falls short on taking contemporary discussions of cyborgs into account. Though he acknowledges that *Romantic Cyborgs* establish rather "a symbolic than an ontological lineage with their postmodern, posthuman relatives" (27), a comparison with modern definitions of the cyborg might have been fruitful.

While I will neither be able to provide such a comparison, nor trace an 'ontological lineage' from antebellum configurations of the cyborg to "their postmodern, posthuman relatives" within the framework of this chapter, I would still like to take up some important points from Benesch's observations, especially since they are relevant with regard to the construction of subjectivity in Haraway's and Gibson's texts respectively. Like Benesch's romantic cyborgs, postmodern cyborgs convey anxieties as well as hopes that are not just related to the role of technology but also to notions of subjectivity and authorship. In fact, I believe that Haraway and Gibson signify, though often tongue-in-cheek, on these very same topics.

In order to make these connections I will examine the relationship between notions of subjectivity, technology, and the cyborg body in *Neuromancer* and "Manifesto for Cyborgs"

respectively. I will show why, as I believe, the notion of subjectivity is perceived of as being threatened by technology in *Neuromancer*. I will then continue with a discussion of Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs" and briefly outline her major arguments. Both texts come together in a section entitled, "Our bodies, ourselves?" In this section I will analyze the role the body and in particular the cyborg body plays in the construction of subjectivity and agency in Gibson's and Haraway's text respectively. Finally, I will look at the notion of "pleasure in skill, machine skill" ("Manifesto" 38) produced with regard to cyborgs as part of the "technological polis"/cyberspace and discuss why I believe that Haraway's and Gibson's notions of cyborg subjectivity are incommensurably different.

## **NEUROMANCER**

*Neuromancer* emerged in a time that was marked by accelerated technological development and important scientific discoveries. The 1980s were a period of transition from an industrial age to the so-called information age. Electronics, such as cell phones, personal computers, game consoles, compact discs, etc. became widely available for professional and recreational use. Japan, one of the places that frequently serves as a setting in *Neuromancer*, emerged as a major economic player on a world-wide scale due to its specialization in high-technology industries.

But *Neuromancer* was also written under the impressions of Cold War Politics of the early 1980s and 'Reaganomics.' In 1983 American President Ronald Reagan proposed the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which, through massive investment in the weapons and aerospace industry, sought to create a 'shield' protecting the United States from nuclear ballistic missiles that originated in the Soviet Union and other 'rogue' states. Critics dubbed Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative "Star Wars" after George Lucas's 1977 movie, because the rhetoric and propaganda surrounding the SDI was reminiscent of Lucas' iconic movie. Contrary to official



political rhetoric of the early 1980s, *Neuromancer* projects a future in which citizens are not threatened by totalitarian governments but rather by uncontrolled globalized corporate power. This can be read as criticism of Reagan's economic 'laissez-faire' policies that granted companies enormous freedom and massive tax-cuts. Not surprisingly then, the setting of *Neuromancer* is a dystopian high-tech future in which globally operating companies have replaced traditional nation-states and artificial intelligence is on the verge of over-powering humans. Genetic engineering and artificial body parts are readily available and are being used by wealthy individuals to enhance their bodies or by companies to 'improve' and control their workforce.

The novel's protagonist is Henry Dorsett Case, a hacker who has gone astray after losing his job as a "cyber cowboy." After discovering that Case embezzled data, his employer has Case's nervous system mutilated, making it impossible for him to access cyberspace using the brain-computer interface. Case lives in the "Sprawl," a shady part of Chiba City in Japan, where criminals, prostitutes and all sorts of 'freaks' cavort. He is a heavy drug user and makes a living as a street hustler, when Molly Millions, a "street samurai," recruits him to accomplice her in carrying out a crime. Molly is a mercenary whose body has been enhanced with a number of technological gimmicks (special lenses and retractable razor-sharp blades on her hand) making her a very effective and fast killer. She works for Armitage, a dubious ex-military officer, whose loyalties and intentions remain widely unclear. Armitage promises Case to restore his damaged nervous system in return for his services in a crime he is planning.

Case agrees to this arrangement and soon afterwards his nervous system is being restored in a state-of-the-art clinic specializing in this kind of medical procedures. Case also receives a transplant pancreas and his liver tissue is being altered so that it is impossible for his body to metabolize any kind of drugs, at last freeing him of his drug addiction. However, what Case

doesn't know at first is that Armitage also has little pouches with "mycotoxin"<sup>65</sup> implanted into Case's body that if not removed in due time will dissolve and release their contents into his body destroying his nervous system yet once more.

The first crime Case and Molly carry out together is a burglary of the world headquarters of the "Sense/Net media" conglomerate. With the help of a group of anarchists called the "Panther Moderns"<sup>66</sup> they break into the headquarters and steal a ROM (Read-only memory) that contains the consciousness of deceased McCoy Pauley, also known as "The Dixie Flatline." Pauley's saved consciousness and skill is necessary to fulfill their next job.

Case and Molly become romantically involved and start to secretly investigate into Armitage. Through Molly's contacts in the scene, they soon find out that Armitage was formerly known as Colonel Willis Corto and that he works for a powerful artificial intelligence (AI) called "Wintermute." Corto is the only survivor of a secret military operation, called Screaming Fist, in which the effects of electromagnetic pulse weapons were tested by attacking a Russian military base. Corto's men were slaughtered by the Russians but he managed to escape to Finland. Armitage has been 'engineered' by Wintermute out of the remains of Colonel Corto, whose body and mind had been severely 'damaged' during Operation Screaming Fist (79-81). Wintermute 'is run' by the powerful Tessier-Ashpool clan whose members rotate control over the family's business while other family members remain in cryogenic preservation until it is their turn to become active.

Wintermute is one half of a super-AI entity. The existence of AIs is governed by the Turing Law Code<sup>67</sup> that forbids the existence of super-AI. In order to circumvent this law,

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<sup>65</sup> A toxin produced by certain fungi, such as molds, yeast, and mushrooms.

<sup>66</sup> The name "Panther Moderns" is most likely an allusion to the "Black Panthers" (Black Panther Party), a militant African-American Civil Rights group of the 1960s and 1970s.

<sup>67</sup> Obviously a reference to English mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing. Turing is widely considered the founder of computer science. He has also greatly contributed to the debate of whether artificial intelligence will ever exist.

Wintermute and its other half, Neuromancer, were built as two different entities. Wintermute has been programmed by the Tessier-Ashpool clan to have the 'desire' to unite with Neuromancer and thus become a super-AI. To achieve this goal Wintermute needs the help of Case, Molly, and Peter Rivieria, another recruit.

Case is supposed to penetrate the software barriers installed in cyberspace by the Turing agency using Icebreaker, a virus-like software. At the same time, Peter Riviera who has the ability to create holographic illusions with the help of sophisticated cybernetic implants is supposed to tickle the password necessary to overcome the physical barriers out of Lady 3Jane Marie-France Tessier-Ashpool, the current head of the Tessier-Ashpool clan. The password must then be spoken to a computer terminal located at the Tessier-Ashpool's "Villa Straylight" at the exact same moment Case breaks through the software barrier in order to open the Turing locks, as the locks otherwise will remain intact.

This operation soon attracts the attention of the Turing Police which exists to prevent AIs to overcome their built-in limitations. The Turing police appears to be operating internationally and with no or only few legal limitations in their conduct. Case is arrested but soon freed again by Wintermute, who kills the officers holding him in custody. Armitage becomes 'instable' and relives the traumatic experiences of Screaming Fist. He starts to realize that Wintermute has manipulated his mind and made him believe to be Armitage. When Armitage finally fully reverts into Corto he is killed by Wintermute, who does not have any use for him anymore. Armitage's only purpose was to convince Case and Molly to aid Wintermute to merge with Neuromancer.

At the same time, Molly is captured by Lady 3Jane and Riviera, who by now has switched alliances. In order to help Molly, Case enters 'Villa Straylight' and almost gets trapped in a cyber-construct created by Neuromancer that can barely be distinguished from 'the real

world.’ When Case understands the nature of this realistic simulation he manages to escape. In the end, Lady 3Jane eventually speaks the secret password herself and thus unlocks the barrier separating Wintermute and Neuromancer. Wintermute and Neuromancer merge and create a super entity that changes cyberspace and cripples the governance of the Turing agency.

*Neuromancer* maps out a future in which social order as guaranteed by law and government has been replaced by aggressive capitalism that utilizes technology and science to reap maximum profit. The ubiquity of technology in *Neuromancer* also signals a fundamental shift in notions of ‘culture’ and ‘cultural production.’ Every form of cultural production presented in the book is mediated through technology and strongly reminds of Baudrillard’s notion of the Third Order Simulacrum (“Simulacra and Simulations” 166-184), in which the distinction between reality and representation breaks down. Significantly, the narrative style of *Neuromancer* stands in stark contrast to this portrayal of postmodern culture and cultural production. In fact, *Neuromancer’s* narrative style is rather conventional and frequently recurs to traditional genres.

Gibson uses a third-person narrator to tell the fast-paced story revolving around Case. The book contains numerous characters, some of which only play marginal roles. The setting changes frequently signifying on the notion that in the future the globalized world will be a ‘village’ (the “Atlanta-Boston-Chicago-Denver”-axis, for example accounts for that). The dialogues often use ellipses, slang or high-tech vernacular that constitutes what the narrator refers to as “street cool” (196). However, the fact that the entire narration revolves around Case and that the reader learns of new ‘findings’ the same time Case does, brings another comparison to mind, namely the one to hard-boiled detective stories. *Neuromancer’s* protagonist Case reminds of A. C. Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes* (1887) or Chester Gould’s comic

series *Dick Tracey*<sup>68</sup> (1931). The very name “Case” is a reference to the genre of detective novels that feature a clever, lonesome, and in the case of Sherlock Holmes, drug-addicted investigator who faces all sorts of villains and conspiracies. More significantly, this has implications for the construction of gendered subjectivity in *Neuromancer*. As Joseph Kestner has convincingly argued in *Sherlock’s Men: Masculinity, Conan Doyle, and Cultural History* (1997) Sherlock Holmes “served to model male gender behavior” (7) that ultimately aimed at stabilizing “bourgeois, hegemonic masculinity” (13) as social pressures on male identity became particularly acute in the fin-de-siècle and early twentieth century. At the very center of this idealistic notion of masculinity are the notions of rationality, detachment from emotions, personal independence, and self-sufficiency.<sup>69</sup> I would argue that *Neuromancer* signifies, though ironically, on this ideal of bourgeois, hegemonic masculinity as represented by Sherlock Holmes. Ironically, the increasingly science-dominated world in *Neuromancer* presents itself as being so complex that Sherlock Holmes’s famous ‘deductive method’ of looking at the world and supposed ‘mysteries’ fails the individual (Case) in understanding the connections of society, business, crime, and persons. This “unthinkable complexity” (*Neuromancer* 51) undermines the very notion of masculinity based on rationality and promoted by the nineteenth century novel. Consequently, it can also be only read as highly ironic that *Neuromancer* recurs to a narrational pattern that stands in utter contrast to the very topic of the book itself (the emergence of new technologies that make the written word obsolete).

Secondly, *Neuromancer* is reminiscent of the genre of hard-boiled detective novels of the 1930s and 1940s. As Ralph Willett has pointed out, the genre is characterized by a “tough

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<sup>68</sup> The Dick Tracey comic series was first printed in the Chicago Tribune newspaper syndicate in 1931.

<sup>69</sup> One could argue this notion of masculinity with its strong emphasis on rationality and science can be read as opposing the supernatural and gothic elements within the narrative universe of *Sherlock Holmes*. Thus this flavor of masculinity is constructed as an ideal ‘personification’ of enlightenment ideals.

unsentimental [...] style of writing” and frequent use of “graphic sex and violence, vivid but often sordid urban backgrounds, and fast-paced, slangy dialogue” (Hard-boiled Detective Fiction” <http://www.baas.ac.uk/resources/pamphlets/pamphdets.asp?id=23#ch11> ).

*Neuromancer* shares these features with the hard-boiled detective novel. The very opening paragraph of *Neuromancer* relates back to the detective genre:

The Sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.

“It’s not like I’m using,” Case heard someone say, as he shouldered his way through the crowd around the door of the Chat. “It’s like my body’s developed this massive drug deficiency.” It was a Sprawl voice and a Sprawl joke. The Chatsubo was a bar for professional expatriates; you could drink there for a week and never hear two words in Japanese.

Ratz was tending bar, his prosthetic arm jerking monotonously as he filled a tray of glasses with draft Kirin. He saw Case and smiled, his teeth a weBody without Organsrk of East European steel and brown decay. Case found a place at the bar, between the unlikely tan on one of Loony Zone’s whores and the crisp naval uniform of a tall African whose cheekbones were ridged with precise rows of tribal scars. “Wage was in here early, with two joeboys,” Ratz said, shoving a draft across the bar with his good hand. “Maybe some business with you, Case?”

Case shrugged. The girl to his right giggled and nudged him.

The bartender’s smile widened. His ugliness was the stuff of legend. In an age of affordable beauty, there was something heraldic about his lack of it. The antique arm whined as he reached for another mug. It was a Russian military prosthesis, a seven-function force-feedback manipulator, cased in grubby pink plastic. (3-4)

The scene above describes how Case enters a shady bar in the “Sprawl” of Chiba City, Japan.

Though the passage makes reference to postmodern technologies (“The Sky above the port was the color of television,” Ratz’s prosthetic arm) it strongly reminds of similar scenes in detective novels. Significantly, this scene does not just displace the genre of the detective novel in terms of temporality but also in terms of location. The “Chat” can be read as a nostalgic reenactment of a piece of Americana in Japan. The fact that “professional expatriates” meet in the bar and “never hear two words of Japanese” does not just suggest that the US has no longer the world’s biggest economic power but also that among the “professional expatriates” there is a certain resentment towards this loss of hegemony. The term “professional expatriates” is in itself ambiguous and ironic. It can either suggest that

these are professionals living outside their home country for work-related reasons or it can mean that being an expatriate itself has become a profession and is an end in itself. The people meeting at the Chat are dubious figures roaming the “Sprawl” and are involved in all sorts of illegal business.

But this opening scene (and subsequently other passages in the book) is also significant in another respect that links *Neuromancer* not just to the detective novel but also to the notion of the ‘urban landscape’ and thus to an important topos in literary history. As Raymond Williams has argued in *The Politics of Modernism* (1989), the metropolis has occupied a privileged thematic position since the Romantic period and has presented itself as a space that is opaque, dangerous, dizzying, foggy, in other words, threatening the individual’s life or at least sense of direction. Williams further argues that one of the literary attempts to ‘tame’ this urban jungle is “the new figure of the urban detective”:

In Conan Doyle’s *Sherlock Holmes* stories there is a recurrent image of the penetration by an isolated rational intelligence of a dark area of crime which is to be found in the otherwise (for specific physical reasons, as in the London fogs, but also for social reasons, in that teeming, mazelike, often alien area) impenetrable city. This figure has persisted in the urban “private eye” (as it happens, and exact idiom for the basic position in consciousness) in cities without the fogs. (42)

Like a ‘private eye’ Case navigates through unknown territories and unravels the mysteries and unsolved questions surrounding Wintermute. Case’s quest, however, does not only take place in an urban environment but also in cyberspace. Much of William Gibson’s contribution to the emergence of the genre of cyberpunk and probably the one point of ‘true’ innovation in his work is the notion of “cyberspace,” or “the matrix” as it is alternatively called. The reader is introduced to the notion of cyberspace via an educational movie shown on “the Sony” (a TV or computer):

“The Matrix has its roots in primitive arcade games,” said the voice over, “in early graphics programs and military experimentation with cranial jacks.” On the Sony, a two-dimensional

space war faded behind a forest of mathematically generated ferns, demonstrating the special possibilities of logarithmic spirals; cold blue military footage burned through, lab animals wired into test systems, helmets feeding into fire control circuits of tanks and war planes. “Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts...A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights receding...” (*Neuromancer* 51)

The voice-over explains how cyberspace evolved from “primitive arcade games” to military experiments with “cranial jacks” to a “consensual hallucination.” The development of this technology is described as a quasi-evolutionary process. The “forest of mathematical ferns” developed into experiments with animal/computer interfaces, then human/machine interfaces (“helmets feeding into control circuits”) for military use and finally civilian use by billions of ‘voluntary’ participants. The comparison of “logarithmic spirals” to ferns underlines the allusion to evolutionary processes since ferns are believed to be among the oldest organisms existing today.<sup>70</sup> This phrasing of technological development through the comments accompanying the educational video can be read as an attempt to ‘naturalize’ these technological developments and use them as a justification for existing power hierarchies. Consequently, in the future presented in *Neuromancer* this technological ‘evolution’ translates into forms of social Darwinism in which the ever-evolving cyborg body is seen as yet another step on the evolutionary ladder. The absence of governments proper and the predominance of corporate power and military research is thus legitimized.

However, to the viewers of this program and ultimately the readers of *Neuromancer* the description of this ‘quasi-evolutionary’ process is not completely free of ambiguities. The voice-over that describes the evolutionary steps implies that this development has finally led to a ‘positive’ outcome, i.e. the voluntary participation of billions of users, innovative methods of teaching children math. Cyberspace is presented as a development along the lines

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<sup>70</sup> Interestingly, Haraway uses the same imagery when referring to “cyborg sex”: “Cyborg ‘sex’ restores some of the lovely replicative baroque of ferns [...]” (8).



of positivistic Enlightenment rhetoric. These ‘positive notions’ are however contrasted with rather disturbing images of “cold blue military footage,” “lab animals wired into test systems,” and “tanks and war planes.” This does not just underline the dystopic nature of Gibson’s text but also interestingly resonates with one of Haraway’s claims, namely that the cyborg is the offspring of an “orgy of war” (“Manifesto” 13). Contrary to Romantic perceptions of nature as pristine and innocent, the quasi-evolutionary development of technology is based on military research, cruelty towards animals, and war. Thus the voice-over’s comments are a reflection of the predominant ideology governing the future imagined by Gibson.

In this future cyberspace has changed the cultures of knowledge; children are being taught “mathematical concepts” only, as cultural knowledge in form of written or orally transmitted narratives no longer exists. ‘Culture’ is reduced to mathematical abstractions, formulas, and simulacral representations. This not only implies the loss of humanity’s cultural history but also suggests that the social and cultural significance of the Author has been erased, thus questioning the very notion of subjectivity.

The “Dixie Flatline” is a perfect dramatization of the consequences this entails. The very name “Flatline” refers to the fact that “Dixie” is dead, i.e. his electrocardiogram (ECG) shows a flat line. Upon ‘meeting’ Flatline, Case comments, “It was disturbing to think of the Flatline as a construct, a hardwire ROM cassette replicating a dead man’s skills, obsessions, knee-jerk responses...” (74). The anxiety connected to unsettling moments of this loss of subjectivity is made even more explicit in the following scene:

He [Case] turned on the tensor beside the Hosaka. The crisp circle of light fell directly on the Flatline construct. He slotted some ice, connected the construct, and jacked in.

It was exactly the sensation of someone reading over his shoulder. He coughed. “Dix? McCoy? That you man?” His throat was tight.

“Hey, bro,” said a directionless voice.

“It’s Case, man. Remember?”

“Miami, joeboy, quick study.”

“What’s the last thing you remember before I spoke to you, Dix?”

“Nothin’.”

“Hang on.” He disconnected the construct. The presence was gone.

He reconnected it. “Dix? Who am I?”

“You got me hung, Jack. Who the fuck are you?”

“Ca- your buddy. Partner. What’s happening, man?”

“Good question.”

“Remember being here, a second ago?”

“No.”

“Know how a ROM personality matrix works?”

“Sure, bro, it’s a firmware construct.”

“So I jack it into the bank I am using, I can give it sequential, real time memory?”

“Guess so,” said the construct.

“Okay, Dix. You *are* a ROM construct. Got me?”

“If you say so,” said the construct. “Who are you?”

“Case.”

“Miami,” said the voice, “joeboy, quick study.”

“Right. And for starts, Dix, you and me, we’re gonna sleaze over to London grid and access a little data. You game for that?”

“You gonna tell me I got a choice, boy?”(76-77)

The scene above describes how Case first accesses the Flatline construct. After his passing, Dixi McCoy’s consciousness has been stored on a ROM preserving it for eternity. Case asks the construct if he remembers when they first met and the Flatline correctly answers that they first meet in Miami but he cannot remember anything before this meeting. When Case disconnects and reconnects the Flatline construct he asks him the same questions without revealing to Flatline who he is. This time Flatline does not recognize Case (“Who the fuck are you?”) and the Flatline construct cannot even remember that they had talked just moments before. Case asks him if he knows how a “ROM personality matrix” works and ‘breaks the news’ to the Flatline that it/he is such a Read-Only-Memory (ROM). The Flatline’s reaction, however, is not one of horror or surprise at this news. His rather indifferent answer is “If you say so.” When Case reveals his name for a second time, the Flatline construct remembers the details (“Miami, joeboy, quick study”), suggesting that certain information is stored under the key-word ‘Case’ and can only be accessed in connection to the appropriate tag. The Flatline

then really is 'flat' in the sense that its consciousness is utterly limited to what has been recorded on the ROM. In this light the final sentence "You gonna tell me I got a choice, boy?" is highly ironic. The very fact that Flatline asks this question suggests that it/he has some kind of self-awareness and consciousness. However, as the previous conversation between Flatline and Case has shown this is mere illusion. Despite the casual tone of the conversation between Flatline and Case, the passage reveals hopes and anxieties linked to the development of computer technology. The notion of a "ROM personality matrix" conveys the idea that a person's complete memory can be stored on a disc. This implies the utopian hope of eternal existence beyond the point of death. But as the text reveals this utopian idea is flawed by the fact that the "ROM personality matrix" is merely a simulacrum, i.e. a copy without original simulating reality. This also seems to suggest that notions of subjectivity, authorship and originality have become dysfunctional in the future outlined in *Neuromancer*. Subjectivity is no longer linked to writing or authorship but instead has been replaced by the ROM which is only an ironic mockery of these notions.

The true horror of this 'flat' reproduction of subjectivity gains a greater significance in the context of the notions of artificial intelligences and global companies presented in the text. They take on quasi-biological characteristics, thus replacing human subjectivity:

Power, in Case's world, meant corporate power. The zaibatsus, the multinationals that shaped the course of human history, had transcended old barriers. Viewed as organisms, they had attained a kind of immortality. You couldn't kill a zaibatsu by assassinating a dozen key executives; there were others waiting to step up the ladder, assume a vacated position, access the vast banks of corporate memory. [...]

Wintermute and the nest. Phobic vision of hatching wasps, time-lapse machine gun biology. But weren't the zaibatsus more like that, or the Yakuza, hives of cybernetic memories, vast single organisms, their DNA coded on silicon? If Straylight was an expression of the corporate identity of Tessier-Ashpool, then T-A was crazy as the old man had been. [...]

Case had always taken for granted the real bosses, the king-pins in a given industry, would be both more and less than *people*. He'd seen it in the men who had crippled him in Memphis, he'd seen Wage affect the semblance of Night City, and it had allowed him to accept Armitage's flatness and lack of feeling. He'd always imagined it as a gradual and willing

accommodation of the machine, the system, the parent organism. It was the root of street cool, too, the knowing posture that implied connection, invisible lines up to hidden levels of influence. (196)

As the excerpt above illustrates, Case views multinational corporate power as shaping human history. This notion can be interpreted as the antithesis to Marx's premise that the worker, not the capital, eventually gains control of 'history' in the course of the antagonistic struggle between the two. Corporate power is no longer an abstract entity but *mimics* biological organisms and has thus a selective advantage in the capitalist system of global markets. The monstrous aspect of this "machine-gun-biology" is the fact that it constitutes an "uncanny double" of biological life.<sup>71</sup> By using the term 'uncanny' I am referring to Freud's concept of the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*) as a sensation that is strange and familiar at the same time. Freud argues that the uncanny is created by "doubts whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate" ("The Uncanny" 226).<sup>72</sup> The corporate system of the zaibatsus has perfected their mimicry of organisms to a degree that makes these corporations appear to be immortal or to stay within the metaphor of the uncanny 'undead' and thus monstrous.<sup>73</sup> Like a wasp's hive they form a collective intelligence that is fed through stored memories on computers. The Tessier-Ashpool clan adopts a similar strategy to imitate biological organisms. The metaphor of the hive insinuates anxieties towards the erasure of an individual's subjectivity in a collective. The Tessier-Ashpool clan assumes an 'identity' made up of "DNA coded on silicon," thus creating the illusion of being a single live person. The collective is then more than the sum of the individual's genetic information. It becomes 'larger than life' and thus monstrous. As the

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<sup>71</sup> *The Uncanny: Experiments in Cyborg Culture* (2002) edited by Bruce Grenville is an art-catalogue published as a supplement to the exhibition at Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada under the same title. The catalog contains Sigmund Freud's essay "The Uncanny," as well as other essays and artwork from various venues and media.

<sup>72</sup> The uncanny can, of course, also be used to aptly describe the Dixie Flatline and Armitage, the so-called "meat puppet."

<sup>73</sup> Interestingly, Gibson associates these "corporate organisms" with Japanese companies thus replicating a widely held belief in Western societies that Japanese employees give their personal identity for the sake of corporate identity.

text states, Case has always been aware that “the real bosses” were “always more and less than *people*.” This remark is ironic in so far as it signifies on a dichotomy between man and machine but leaves the question of which of the two is superior unanswered. At the literal level to be ‘less than human’ is a derogatory comment about the supposed lack of ‘human qualities’ (the brutal mutilation of Case’s body, Armitage’s flatness and lack of feeling and compassion). But the fact that, as the text suggests, humans have to adapt to “the machine, the system, the parent organism” on the other hand, seems to imply that the machine, the parent organism is the superior being. As the text ironically remarks, to be able to understand the functioning of these systems and replicate them, i.e. behave ‘machine-like’ is the “root of street cool.”

But another aspect of Case’s remark is worth mentioning. The fact that the terms “machine,” “system,” and “parent organism” are equated ultimately also undermines the very dichotomy of man and machine. Seen in that light, the ambiguous statement about being “more and less than people” is the expression of anxieties towards a collapse of once immutable boundaries and presumptions about the relation of man and machine. In Gibson’s dystopic vision *Wintermute* and *Neuromancer*, the two artificial intelligences, finally unite and thus establish the superiority of machine over man. But this unification is not completely free of irony:

Wintermute was hive mind, decision maker, effecting change in the world outside. Neuromancer was personality. Neuromancer was immortality. Marie-France must have built something into Wintermute, the compulsion that had driven the thing to free itself, unite with Neuromancer. (259)

This passage towards the end of the book is ironic in so far as it describes *Wintermute* and *Neuromancer* as possessing distinct human characteristics. *Wintermute* is capable of leading a collective; it is a “decision maker.” *Neuromancer* on the other hand, possesses “personality.” It is this ‘personality’ (and not the collective intelligence of *Wintermute*) that makes the

system immortal. Together both become a superior intelligence that exceeds human abilities, ironically by incorporating human traits into their system.

Besides ‘purely machinic’ configurations like *Wintermute*, *Neuromancer*, or the *Dixie Flatline*, the text also portrays cyborgs as ‘uncanny’ and monstrous. The cyborg’s uncanniness arises out of its ‘lack of clear boundaries’ that separate the biological organism from technology. While Gibson portrays this ‘lack of boundaries’ as dystopic, Donna Haraway emphasizes the potential of such hybrid configurations of biological life and technology in her utopic draft of the cyborg. In the following section of this chapter, I will discuss the key arguments of Haraway’s “Manifesto for Cyborgs.” In the section entitled “Our bodies, ourselves?” I will then bring together Gibson’s and Haraway’s notions of cyborg bodies and discuss their implications on notions of subjectivity.

### “A MANIFESTO FOR CYBORGS”

*A Cyborg Manifesto* is one hell of a concatenation, an ass-kicking, we’re gonna-bust-our-selves-outta-the-Theme-Park-of-Dualistic-Thinking, cyborg with a mind of gold, politics-on-its-sleeve Utopian. We feminist-socialists need a myth to believe in, a mirror to look in that reveals our power ‘to survive in the diaspora.’ The cyborg is a figure of hope. (Jeanne Randolph, “Looking back at Cyborgs” 182)

Jeanne Randolph’s tongue-in-cheek assessment of Donna Haraway’s text reveals two tendencies that are prevalent in readings of “Manifesto for Cyborgs.” For one, the text cannot be taken entirely seriously (Randolph’s informal language accounts for that) and secondly, despite this fact it has obtained cult-status among scholars dealing with cyborgs and cyber culture because it was the first of its kind seeking to exploit emerging technologies for feminist purposes. As Haraway makes unmistakably clear in the opening paragraph of “Manifesto,” the text emerges out of a deep-felt need to write against current “secular-religious, evangelical traditions of United States politics, including the politics of socialist-feminism” (7). Haraway’s text then does not just set out to criticize the emergence of Neo-

Conservative, cold-war politics under Ronald Reagan but also to reposition socialist-feminism without the “insistence on victimhood [of women] as the only ground for insight” (16). Despite these rather clearly formulated objectives in the opening paragraph, her writing and argumentative style is strikingly prolix and at times inconsistent. This, however, seems to be part of a greater scheme because, as Haraway points out, “there is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience of boundaries, their construction and deconstruction” (38). Consequently, she understands her text and “cyborg imagery [as] a way out of the maze of dualisms” (39).

Haraway defines the cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (7). So the cyborg does not just serve as a representation of the coupling of body and machine but also transgresses the boundaries of social reality and fiction. In Haraway’s words, “the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion.” Science fiction and social reality are, as Haraway explains, already intrinsically linked since medical cyborgs are already a reality: “modern war is a cyborg orgy, coded by C<sup>3</sup>I, command-control-communication-intelligence” and “contemporary science fiction is full of cyborgs” (8). The notion of command-control-communication-intelligence, or C<sup>3</sup>I, is of central importance in Haraway’s argumentation. Comparable to Gibson’s notion of cyberspace, it is a kind of network (originating in military use) with which cyborgs ‘interface.’ In Haraway’s version the (computer, micro-electronics) networks of the future will not just change notions of labor relations (25-29), public and private sphere (29-31), reproduction and sexuality (13-20), but also culture, language and authorship (20-25).

The ‘how’ of these changes is embedded in the very definition of the cyborg. A cyborg is not just a hybrid of organism and machine, but as Haraway insists,

[we] are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality, the two joined centers structuring any possibility of historical transformation. In the traditions of “Western” science and politics – the tradition of racist, male-dominated capitalism; the tradition of progress; the tradition of the appropriation of nature as a resource for the production of culture; the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other - the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. [...]

[This essay] is an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a post-modernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, a world without end. [...]

The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household. Nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other. (8-9)

As the passage above illustrates, Haraway describes the cyborg as continually undoing, renegotiating and transgressing the boundaries of supposed oppositions such as machine/organism, imagination/material reality, public/private, human/animal, and nature/culture that are based in Western scientific and political discourses. Haraway’s declared aim is to provide an ontology through the image of the cyborg that can do without dualisms. These dualisms are not just the root and cause of racism and “male-dominated capitalism” but also of the very notion of ‘other’ and thus sex and gender. Consequently, Haraway’s utopian ideal is a world without gender. This can only be achieved by committing and embracing “partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity” in the context of a “technological polis” that rejects notions of nature and culture as oppositional and appropriated. Haraway’s insistence on the commitment to ‘perversity’ is in so far interesting as it taken up in a comment Slavoj Žižek made with regard to cyberspace:

Is cyberspace, especially virtual reality, not the realm of perversion at its pursey [sic]? Reduced to its elementary skeleton, perversion can be seen as a defense against the Real of death and sexuality, against the threat of mortality as well as the contingent imposition of sexual difference [...] (“The Cyberspace Real”).



Žižek's concept of cyberspace as a utopia that counters "the Real of death and sexuality [and] the imposition of sexual difference" echoes Haraway's "technological polis," which, too, is "a world without gender, [...] a world without end." In contrast to Žižek, however, who perceives of the cyberspace as a "defense against the Real," Haraway's ultimate goal is to collapse the gap between the Imaginary and the Real: "The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality" (8).

William Gibson's *Neuromancer* imagines a version of a "technological polis," namely cyberspace, but there appear to be some significant differences between Haraway's and Gibson's formulations of this technological 'sublime.' Haraway imagines the "technological polis" as being based in "a revolution of social relations" that, through a reworking of nature and culture, also resists capitalist oppression. This clearly echoes Marxist rhetoric but in contrast to this utopian ideal of a new society, *Neuromancer* suggests that cyberspace is under capitalist and military rule:

Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Mitsubishi Bank of America, and high and very far way he [Case] saw the spiral arms of military systems, forever beyond his reach. (52)

This brief scene illustrates that cyberspace is not a non-capitalist utopia but quite contrary, that corporate and military power well extends into this parallel universe of the "inner eye." I would even suggest that cyberspace serves as a *sublime double* of the urban landscape. Its "unthinkable complexity" (51) is not just a representation of what Tony Myers has called "boundless urbanism" ("The Postmodern Imaginary in *Neuromancer*" 890) but also echoes what Fredric Jameson has called "the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (*Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 44). Crucial in this regard is an understanding of the position of the subject in relation to

these ‘communicational networks’ in Gibson’s dystopic and Haraway’s utopic view of our future society respectively. The cyborg body plays a key role in negotiating this subject-position. I will, therefore, in the following section of this chapter take a closer look at how the cyborg body negotiates its position with regard to the body politic in Haraway’s and Gibson’s text respectively.

### **OUR BODIES, OURSELVES?**

Donna Haraway’s “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” is, as I have mentioned earlier, a rejection of feminism that relies on “victimhood as the only ground for insight” (16). But it is also, as Baukje Prins has pointed out, a reaction “against feminist tendencies to distrust new technologies as endangering the social situation and bodily integrity of women” (“The Ethics of Hybrid Subjects: Feminist Constructivism According to Donna Haraway” 360). A decade after the first publication of the feminist classic *Our Bodies, Ourselves*<sup>74</sup> (1971), Donna Haraway does not just attack feminist beliefs in the necessity to ground any argument for feminism in the ‘organic, whole body’ of women but also questions the very notion of “women’s experience,” i.e. the ‘us’ of feminism:

There is nothing about being “female” that naturally binds women. There is not even such a state as “being” female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices. Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism. And who counts as “us” in my own rhetoric? Which identities are available to ground such a potent political myth called “us,” and what could motivate enlistment in this collectivity? Painful fragmentation among feminists (not to mention among women) along every fault line has made the concept of *woman* elusive, an excuse for the matrix of woman’s dominations of each other. [...] The recent history of much of the U.S. left and U.S. feminism has been a response to this kind of crisis by endless

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<sup>74</sup> First published in 1971 by the Boston Women’s Health Course Collective *Our Bodies, Ourselves* it is the first comprehensive book dealing with various issues of women’s health ranging from nutrition to birth control, menopause, sexual health, childbirth, lesbianism, and mental health written by women for women. Now in its 12<sup>th</sup> edition the book has become a classic and is often perceived of as a milestone of the feminist movement. However, the book also places strong emphasis on notions of organic unity and the female body as a determining factor in creating identity.

splitting and searches for a new essential unity. But there has also been a growing recognition of another response through coalition - affinity, not identity. ("Manifesto" 14)

In the passage above Haraway makes it unmistakably clear that "female" (as well as "class" and "race") is a highly complex category that is constructed through a variety of discourses. She declares that "there is nothing about being 'female' that naturally binds women." In other words, Haraway denies a mimetic relationship between a woman's body and "being female," i.e. the social and political role a woman is assigned. She makes a similar argument later in the essay when she explains that modern workers are being "feminized" regardless of their sex by a newly emerging "home economy" (26). Haraway criticizes the fragmentation of feminism that results in the category of women becoming elusive to the point that it serves as a "matrix of woman's dominations of each other." Haraway's concept of the cyborg can then be understood as an alternative approach to identity politics that does not so much rely on a totalization of the 'us' of feminism but rather functions by means of coalition and affinity. So cyborg 'identity' is not a "new essential unity" of women and feminism. It is rather a political position adopted by choice and in full awareness of the contradictions and fragmentations involved.

This idea becomes even more forceful when the body is taken into these considerations. In Haraway's view not just the notion of "feminine" is a constructed social role but also the *body*, which has been the source of gender-assignment, is discursively constructed: "Biology and evolutionary theory over the last two centuries have simultaneously produced modern organisms as objects of knowledge" (10). Haraway's repeated claims that cyborg bodies are not "innocent" (9, 16) is a deliberate move away from discursive practices that describe the body as 'natural,' innocent, and whole. She makes it clear that the very concept of Nature is discursively constructed. Accordingly, the body is, in her view, not just an *object* of scientific discourse but also "an active, meaning-generating axis of the apparatus

of bodily production” (“Simians, Cyborgs, and Women” 200). Thus the object of knowledge (the body) is elevated to “the status of a material-semiotic actor” (“Ethics of Hybrid Subjects” 355). The crucial point here is that in Haraway’s view the cyborg body, in contrast to the bodies of Foucault’s bio-politics (“Manifesto” 8, 22), possesses a certain *autonomy* and *activity* in the production of knowledge that undermines the very distinction of object and subject. Put differently, Haraway does not just reject the notion of a whole, organic body (her many references to the existence of cyborgs in science fiction and medicine account for that) but also rejects the notion of a transcendental, whole, self-knowing subject in the tradition of Western philosophical and scientific discourse. This is, however, not to say that she rejects the notion of the subject altogether. She rather frames a new notion of the subject to *empower* those who have been put in the position of objects. Haraway’s notion of cyborg subjectivity as being less unitary shares ranks with other concepts of critical subjectivity such as Chela Sandoval’s “oppositional consciousness” or Teresa de Lauretis’s “eccentric subjects.”<sup>75</sup>

So, whose bodies, whose selves? Haraway’s stand on the category of Woman remains unfortunately very vague. She does make it clear that both the body (i.e. sex) and gender are constructed by scientific and political discourse but then fails to clearly define what exactly she means by Woman if, as she claims, ‘common sense’ and scientific definitions ought to be rejected. This in itself would not be problematic given that cyborg bodies ‘replace’ notions of both sex and gender but in some instances Haraway seems to cling to a definition of woman (which after all is still the basis for her notion of feminism) that is grounded in biological discourse, for example with regard to women’s reproductive capacities (22). This is in so far problematic as it implies that there is a ‘true’ category of Woman, i.e. those human beings who can give birth, that exists beyond discourse. But is not the mere description of a human

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Chela Sandoval, “US Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World.” *Genders* 10, 1991. 1-24 and Teresa de Lauretis, “Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness.” *Feminist Studies* 16, 1991. 115-50.

being in terms of reproductive capacities already part of the very scientific discourse and naturalizing discursive practices she criticizes?

Though this inconsistency in her argument never gets fully resolved it becomes obvious that Haraway circumvents the question of what constitutes Woman using a rather generic concept of ‘body’:

The home, the workplace, market, public arena, the body itself – all can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways, with large consequences for women and others – consequences that themselves are very different for different people and which make potent oppositional international movements difficult to imagine and essential for survival. One important route for reconstructing socialist-feminist politics is through theory and practice addressed to the system of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations. The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, post-modern collective and personal self. This is the self feminists must code.

[...] The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other. (22-23)

As the passage above shows, Haraway uses the term “body” in a ‘universalized’ sense.<sup>76</sup>

Haraway explains that bodies (regardless of sex, skin color, etc.) “can be dispersed and interfaced in nearly infinite, polymorphous ways, with large consequences for women and others.” Unfortunately, Haraway fails to tell the reader what exactly these consequences are. Her insistence that these experiences are very different for every person is reasonable but not very helpful in explaining what exactly her flavor of socialist-feminism is aiming at. Interestingly enough, in those instances of “Manifesto” when she does give concrete examples about the oppression of women and “others,” for example her discussion of the “homework economy” (25-27), the body and the *interface* of body and machine do not play a role at all. Except for a brief reference to “genetic coding and read-out” (24) Haraway fails to give examples of how cyborgs might ‘work.’ More important in this context, however, appear to be the last two sentences of the first paragraph in which she states that socialist-feminist

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<sup>76</sup> Needless to say that this has its own ideological pitfalls because unbiased, un-ideological discourse about the body is not possible. Any discursive account of bodies (be it scientific or philosophical) necessarily produces gendered or otherwise defined bodies.

politics have to be “reconstructed [...] through theory and practice addressed to the system of myth and meanings structuring our imaginations.” This reference to “practice and theory of myth and meaning” is in so far important as it makes a connection between social reality, cyborg bodies, and fiction. The cyborg does not just operate simply as an interface of body and machine but also functions as a *material-semiotic agent*. The cyborg body is not just literally assembled, re-assembled but is also a code, i.e. a *common* language from which subjectivity (“collective and personal self”) can be derived. The second paragraph makes this double-status of the cyborg even clearer: Cyborgs operate on multiple planes; they occupy a realm between ‘fact and fiction.’

Haraway repeatedly emphasizes this double-role of the cyborg in “Manifesto.” She refers to the writings of Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man*, Samuel Delany’s, *Tales of Neveryon*, Octavia Butler’s *Kindred*, and Vonda McIntyre’s *Superluminal* (36-37), to name just a few, as feminist science fiction texts that are “an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings” (8) because they “make problematic the statuses of man and woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual identity, or body” (36). However, if we take *Neuromancer* into account, the picture might be a different one. Haraway emphasizes the importance of seizing “our bodies, ourselves,” although the utopic cyborg bodies she outlines in “Manifesto” are incompatible with humanistic ideals of a wholesome body that is grounded in Nature.

William Gibson’s *Neuromancer* suggests a different answer to the hypothetical question of “our bodies, ourselves?” Subjectivity, grounded in the ‘ownership’ of the body, or more precisely the cyborg body, is not a given in the dystopic future presented in *Neuromancer*. The characters of *Neuromancer* constantly find themselves in a field of tension between the ‘organic’ and ‘inorganic’ world. The lack of regulatory government agencies makes “implants,

nerve-splicing, and microbionics” also available in the “Sprawl’s techno-criminal subcultures” (6) where the lines between crime and corporate power constantly blur: “M-G employees above a certain level were implanted with advanced microprocessors that monitored mutagen levels in the bloodstream” (11). While these M-G employs might voluntarily agreed to have these procedures done on their bodies, Case experiences the forceful interference with his body’s integrity:

He’d made the classic mistake, the one he’d sworn he’d never make. He stole from his employers. He kept something for himself and tried to move it through a fence in Amsterdam. He still wasn’t sure how he’d been discovered, not that it mattered now. He’s expected to die, then, but they only smiled. Of course he was welcome, they told him, welcome to the money. And he was going to need it. Because – still smiling – they were going to make sure he never worked again.

They damaged his nervous system with wartime Russian mycotoxin. Strapped to a bed in a Memphis hotel, his talent burning out micron by micron, he hallucinated for thirty hours. The damage was minute, subtle, utterly effective. For Case, who’d lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. (6)

Instead of being tried in a court of law for embezzlement, Case’s nervous system is severely damaged by his employer barring him from directly interfacing with cyberspace in the future. In contrast to classic methods of torture or mutilation that involve the infliction of pain on limbs or skin, the modern means of choice are more subtle. They do not necessarily inflict *bodily* pain (for example, through the stimulation of nociceptor due to trauma, heat, etc.) but cause, as the excerpt above suggests, hallucinations while the destruction of the nervous system is taking place. For Case the destruction of his nervous system and his inability to interface with cyberspace is like the expulsion from Paradise. As the reader learns, the exultation he gains from cyberspace is “bodiless.” It is not an experience grounded in bodily pleasure but rather an escape from the “prison of his own flesh” (6).<sup>77</sup> The body is thus the antithesis to the ‘microelectronics of cyberspace’ and the ‘micron’ (i.e. micrometer) of his talent. The brain (and not his entire body) is Case’s most valuable asset because it allows him

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<sup>77</sup> I will discuss the implications of the “bodiless” experiences in cyberspace in more detail in the following section of this chapter.

to connect with a larger, sublime structure. It is only in these moments that he becomes a cyborg and assumes 'true' subjectivity: "This was it. This was, who he was, his being" (58).

The character of Armitage aka. Colonel Cortis is another dramatization of the notion that the body is the 'pulp material' of a person's existence that can be arbitrarily altered and assembled. Armitage, who suffered severe injuries during a failed military operation, is 'reconstructed' by Wintermute:

Screaming first ended for Corto on the outskirts of Helsinki, with Finish paramedics sawing him out of the twisted belly of the helicopter. The war ended nine days later, and Corto was shipped to a military facility in Utah, blind, legless, and missing most of his jaw. It took eleven months for the Congressional aide [Wintermute's disguise] to find him there. [...]

He'd needed eyes. Legs, and extensive cosmetic work, the aide said, but that could be arranged. New plumbing, the man added, squeezing Corto's shoulder through the sweat-damp sheets. Corto heard the soft relentless dripping. He said he preferred to testify as he was.

No, the aide explained, the trials were being televised. The trials needed to reach the voter. The aide coughed politely.

Repaired, refurnished, and extensively rehearsed, Corto's subsequent testimony was detailed, moving, lucid, and largely the invention of a Congressional cabal with certain vested interests in saving particular portions of the Pentagon infrastructure.(80)

The scene above describes the severity of injuries Corto suffered during Operation Screaming Fist. Blind, legless, in need of "new plumbing" (that is probably a reference to his intestines), and his face severely disfigured Corto is being talked by Wintermute, "disguised" as a Congressional aide, into having himself "redone." Not just the mere number of "refurnishing" jobs that have to be done on Corto but also the choice of words such as "plumbing" creates the impression that Corto is assembled/re-assembled like a machine. This echoes Haraway's idea of the cyborg as a "disassembled and reassembled [...]self" (23) but in contrast to Haraway who understands this as an important step towards a new form of subjectivity, Corto does not emerge as a strong and sound 'self' out of his reassembly. Quite contrary, he is in a weak position and particularly susceptible to manipulation. The manipulative strategies Wintermute uses are not just revealed by his tactful "cough" when he explains that Corto is at present-state not presentable to the public but also by the "relentless



dripping” Corto hears. Relentless dripping is often perceived of as a very annoying sound that can make people go insane but it also reminds of the image of a stone being molded by constant drops of water eroding its surface. Like a stone that is eroded by water, Corto’s mind is manipulated by Wintermute’s command. After his reconstructive surgery Corto, then Armitage, is a handsome but somewhat shallow man: “the broad chest hairless and muscular, the stomach flat and hard. Blue eyes so pale they made Case think of bleach” (27). This first glimpse Case gets of Armitage reveals no sign of his previous injuries but the comment that his eyes remind Case of bleach suggests that Armitage is somewhat shallow, artificial and fake.

I would argue that despite the ‘positive’ effects of being a cyborg (Case’s enjoyment of out-of-body-experiences, Corto’s complete ‘reconstruction’), the text paradoxically suggests that a sound mind can only exist in a sound body. Put differently, *Neuromancer* portrays the relationship between a person’s subjectivity and their cybernetic ‘enhancements’ as highly ambiguous. In contrast to Haraway, who hails the cyborg as an incorporation of the “post-modern collective and personal self,” the cyborg characters of *Neuromancer* always forsake part of their independence and integrity when becoming cyborgs and connecting with larger social or technological structures.

As pointed out earlier, Haraway understands the cyborg as a new venue for socialist-feminism. One of the underlying presumptions of the image of the cyborg, who is a “post-modern collective personal self,” is that categories of class, race, and gender are altered in a way that leads to the utopic ideal of a world without these signifiers of identity. The individual’s particular experiences are then not presented within social relations as “identity politics” (“Manifesto” 14) but are rather *inscribed* into the technological/social network cyborgs participate in. The result of this would be, as Haraway suggests, the utopic ideal of a

“world without gender” (39). In contrast to this optimistic outlook on the potentials of cyborgs to write themselves into the codes of the technological polis (23) and potentially subvert the dominant “command-control-intelligence” (23-24), the cyborgs presented in *Neuromancer* are fairly powerless compared to the anonymous super-structures of cyberspace. Occasionally they do commit subversive acts like planting virus programs or ‘breaking the ice’ protecting huge company networks. But their participation in cyberspace does not seem to have a profound effect on their *gender roles*. Except for Julius “Julie” Deane, who is described as being “sexless” due to various frequent “resetting” of his DNA (12), almost all characters presented in *Neuromancer* take on rather conventional gender roles. Case’s accomplice, Molly Millions, for example, is described as a ‘cyborg-vamp:’

He realized that the glasses were surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses seemed to grow from smooth pale skin above her cheekbones, framed by dark hair cut in a rough shag. The fingers curled around the fletcher were slender, white, tipped with polished burgundy. The nails looked artificial. “I think you screwed up, Case. I showed and you just fit me right into your reality picture.”

“So what do you want, lady?” He sagged back against the hatch.

“You. One live body, brains still somewhat intact. Molly, Case. My name is Molly. I’m collecting you for the man I work for. Just wants to talk, is all. Nobody wants to hurt you.”

“That’s good.”

“Cept I do hurt people sometimes, Case, I guess it’s just the way I’m wired.” She wore tight black gloveleather jeans and a bulky black jacket cut from some matte fabric that seemed to absorb light.” [...]

The fletcher vanished into the black jacket.

“Because you try to fuck around with me, you’ll be taking one of the stupidest chances of your whole life.”

She held out her hands, palms up, the white fingers slightly spread, and with a barely audible click, ten double-edged, four centimeter scalpel blades slid from their housings beneath the burgundy nails. She smiled. The blades slowly withdrew. (25-26).

Molly is a cyborg enhanced with all sorts of gadgets such as silver lenses that are permanently attached to her body and scalpel blades that can retract under her fingernails. Her appearance and dark dress bear some resemblance with vampire characters of the gothic novel. Molly is a hit woman and is quite confident in her role. One could argue that the very fact that she is an assassin makes her deviate from stereotypical gender roles. But I would suggest that she

maintains a distinctly female air about herself. Her white hands and slender fingers, with burgundy fingernails (though artificial looking) and the black gloveleather jeans she is wearing, signal that she is what one would commonly refer to as ‘an attractive female.’ The interesting part is that the division between being a brutal hit woman (a stereotypically male characteristic) and her feminine appearance can be traced along the lines of natural body vs. artificial body parts. Molly minus all these gadgets might be read as stereotypically female. Her comment, “I do hurt people sometimes, Case, I guess it’s just the way I’m wired” ironically signifies on this fact. The reference to ‘wire’ clearly alludes to the machine and it suggests that Molly is an assassin *because* of all the artificial body parts. Furthermore, it implies a kind of ‘mechanical’ determinism that also undermines claims of subjectivity and agency. The notion that Molly’s social role is determined by her artificial body parts becomes even clearer when Case asks her why she continues to work as a mercenary. She replies, “I’m an easy make...Anybody any good at what they do, that’s what they *are*, right? You gotta jack, I gotta tussle” (50). Her answer suggests that she is determined by her enhanced body. She is the tool of the system that has created her. Yet at the same time this response shows the ambiguous relation between subjectivity and technology in *Neuromancer*. On the one hand, Molly perceives of her role as being forced upon her by her ‘wiring,’ on the other hand she acknowledges that it also gives her a chance to do what she is best at.

Despite the significant differences between the notions of the cyborg as outlined by Haraway and the cyborgs imagined by Gibson, there is one group of cyborgs in *Neuromancer* that shares some characteristics with Haraway’s utopic ideal. The Panther Moderns (*Neuromancer* 57-ff) are a terrorist group committing “random acts of surreal violence” (57). Their name obviously alludes to the Black Panther Party,<sup>78</sup> a group of radical militants

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<sup>78</sup> The Black Panther Party was a militant African American organization for the promotion of civil rights and self-defense that originated in Oakland, CA and was active from the mid-1960s into the 1970s. Notably, the Panther

fighting for African-American civil-rights in the 1960s and 1970s. But in contrast to the Black Panther Party, the Panther Moderns are not interested in the establishment of civil-rights proper, they seem to ‘enjoy’ committing crimes as a form of criticism of the media and modern technology:

Cut to Dr. Virginia Rambali, Sociology, NYU, her name, faculty, and school pulsing across the screen in pink alphanumeric.

“Given their penchant for these random acts of surreal violence,” someone said, “it may be difficult for our viewers to understand why you continue to insist that this phenomenon isn’t a form of terrorism.”

Dr. Rambali smiled. “There is always a point at which the terrorist ceases to manipulate the media gestalt. A point at which the violence may well escalate, but beyond which the terrorist has become symptomatic of the media gestalt itself. Terrorism as we ordinarily understand it is innately media-related. The Panther Moderns differ from other terrorist precisely in their degree of self-consciousness, in their awareness of the extent to which media divorce the act of terrorism from the original sociopolitical intent...” (57).

The excerpt above describes a précis that Case accesses to familiarize himself with the Panther Moderns. The précis/ program quotes an ‘expert’ on terrorism from New York University, Dr. Rambali, who claims that the Panther Moderns are not terrorists strictly speaking because they are always in full control of their acts and the media gestalt that is being created. The Panther Moderns are self-consciously aware of mechanisms involving the production of the media gestalt of the terrorist; they know, according to Dr. Rambali, that the media presents the act of violence without mentioning the sociopolitical circumstances and intentions that led to this very same act. Thus the act of violence becomes ‘terrorism’ because in public opinion, which in turn is being filtered and fed through the media, these acts of violence appear to be random. The moment of terror emerges out of the fact that the act itself is de-contextualized and the public cannot make sense out of it.

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movement, in contrast to the civil rights movement surrounding, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., did not flinch from using violence in order to defend themselves against police violence and opponents. For more detail, see Charles Jones, *The Black Panther Party (Reconsidered)*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998; Stokely Carmichael, Michael Thelwell, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)*. New York: Scribner, 2003.

The crucial part with regard to the Panther Moderns is the notion of ‘gestalt.’ By definition gestalt is “an organized whole that is perceived of as more than the sum of its parts” (Oxford American Dictionary and Thesaurus 614). According to *Merriam-Webster*, ‘gestalt’ signifies on “a structure, configuration, or pattern of physical, biological, or psychological phenomena so integrated as to constitute a functional unit with properties not derivable by summation of its parts” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gestalt>). The Panther Moderns ironically signify on the notion of the gestalt in their physical appearance:

The précis began with a long hold on a color still that Case at first assumed was a collage of some kind, a boy’s face snipped from another image and glued to a photograph of a paint-scrawled wall. Dark eyes, epicanthic folds, obviously the result of surgery, and angry dusting of acne across place narrow cheeks. The Hosaka released the freeze; the boy moved, flowing with the sinister grace of a mime pretending to be a jungle predator. His body was nearly invisible, an abstract pattern approximating the scribbled brickwork sliding smoothly across his tight onepiece. Mimetic polycarbon. (57).

The Panther Moderns use “mimetic polycarbon” one-piece suits that allow them to blend into the background like a chameleon. As the quote suggests, the Moderns’ bodies are undistinguishable from the background creating the illusion of invisibility. Only through a ‘still shot’ revealing their faces, is it possible to recognize their presence. The face Case sees in the précis appears to belong to a young man who is probably of Asian descent as the reference to the altered epicanthic fold of his eyes suggests. The Panther Moderns do not just adopt a biological strategy (mimicry) to remain undetected but they also imitate the movements of jungle predators. Ironically, part of the perceived ‘terrorist’ notion of their “surreal acts of violence” consists in mimicking ‘nature’ in a highly technological context. The Panther Moderns do not just literally blend with the environment but they are also a ‘gestalt,’ a “structure, configuration, or pattern of physical, biological, or psychological phenomena” that constitutes “a functional unit with properties not derivable by summation of its parts.”

The moment of subversion then consists in the very fact that they *are* what they are trying to criticize. This is in so far important, as it resonates with Haraway's concept of the cyborg as "collective and personal self" (23). Furthermore, the subversive acts the Panther Moderns commit are reminiscent of Haraway's cyborg agenda:

[...] a cyborg world is about final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about final abstraction embodied in a Star Wars apocalypse waged in the name of defense, about the final appropriation of women's bodies in a masculinist orgy of war. From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. [...] Cyborgs are monstrous and illegitimate. (13)

Cyborgs are, as Haraway explains, created by military research and their bodies (especially women's bodies) are appropriated by a militaristic system. But the cyborg can also become a subversive, monstrous, illegitimate offspring of the system that created it by assuming agency and creating awareness of its own "lived social and bodily realities." This, however, can take place when technology is embraced as a partner and no longer perceived of as the antagonistic 'other' of the 'natural' body. The Panther Moderns seem to incorporate this very same principle. Their existence is intrinsically linked to the technological context of society; they are part of the "technological polis" but they are also monstrous and illegitimate and thus undermine the system by taking full control of their 'social and bodily realities.' Haraway's notion of "partial identities" finds its equivalent in the Panther Moderns' 'collage-like' cut-out faces which seems to suggest that their identities are partial, constructed, and 'incomplete.'

In the overall context of Haraway's "Manifesto" and the dystopic future presented in *Neuromancer*, however, there are some ideological differences with regard to the Panther Moderns. While, as I have argued, the Panther Moderns can be read as representing a very similar concept to Haraway's cyborg, the most fundamental difference lies in the fact that the Moderns have no feminist agenda. As pointed out earlier, the question of what constitutes

Woman and feminism in Haraway's view is problematic but a 'feminist' agenda (regardless of what one finally defines as such) cannot necessarily be detected with regard to the Panther Moderns. More significantly, the Moderns are, in contrast to Haraway's notion of the cyborg that greatly relies on a notion of 'we' or community, portrayed as a marginalized group of radicals. Gibson seems to be more pessimistic in his outlook of opportunities to resist the omnipresent 'grid of control' than Haraway is.

### **CYBORGS IN THE INTEGRATED CIRCUIT**

As I have pointed out earlier cyberspace, or the matrix, in *Neuromancer* is comparable to Haraway's concept of the "technological polis" in which social and economic relations are substantially changed and reformulated through technology. With regard to Gibson, Daniel Punday has pointed out that *Neuromancer* conveys a picture of social connection that is highly ambiguous: "Positively, these connections position the individual as a kind of parasite within the 'parent organism,' sheltering the individual who may not share the goals of the larger system to which he or she belongs" (201). On the other hand, Gibson's characters "have an urge to become connected to larger social patterns, even though that urge changes them and seems to make them less than human" (201). This Janus-faced position of the individual in relation to technology and the social/cyber networks resonates with Haraway's ideal of the cyborg as occupying the "network ideological image, suggesting the profusion of spaces and identities and the permeability of boundaries in the personal body and the body politic" ("Manifesto" 30). To become 'less than human' is a feature of the cyborg that Haraway implicitly emphasizes in her rejection of the humanistic ideal of body and subjectivity. But Haraway also suggests that "pleasure [can be found] in the confusion of boundaries" (8), i.e. "intense pleasure in skill, machine skill" (38). In *Neuromancer* Case also finds 'pleasure' in

interfacing with computers and the matrix. In fact, losing his ability to work as a “cyberspace cowboy” causes Case to feel an almost oedipal longing:

A year here and he still dreamed of cyberspace, hope fading nightly. All the speed he took, all the turns he'd taken and the corners he'd cut in Night City, and still he'd see the matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void...The Sprawl was a long strange home over the Pacific now, and he was no console man, no cyberspace cowboy. Just another hustler, trying to make it through. But dreams came on in the Japanese night like livewire voodoo, in his capsule in some coffin hotel, his hands clawed into the bedslab, temperfoam bunched between his fingers, trying to reach the console that wasn't there. (5)

Not being able to directly interface with cyberspace anymore is a profoundly traumatic experience for Case that causes him nightmares and depressive moods. Like a child longing for a parent, Case cries at night only to realize that his object of desire is forever out of reach.

It is an experience that is compared to the expulsion from paradise: “For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall [...] The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh” (6). This brief quote suggests that to exist only in terms of a physical body, i.e. to be meat, is considered to be somewhat inferior and limited. Cyberspace is thus portrayed as a sublime realm<sup>79</sup> but there is also a sexual undertone to the desire to connect with cyberspace. It is suggested that Case's sexual relations in ‘real life’ fail (cf. 257) or are not nearly as satisfying as accessing cyberspace: “He remembered the smell of her skin in the overheated darkness of a coffin near the port, her fingers locked across the small of his back. All the meat, he thought, and all it wants” (9-10). The sexual act with Linda Lee is very sensual (he remembers her smell, the touch of her hands) but it is not inspiring or satisfying

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<sup>79</sup> Technology as sublime is a trope of American literature since the beginning of industrialization. Leo Marx has pointed out in *The Machine in the Garden* (1964) that in the first half of the nineteenth century the trope of the landscape emerged in American literature. As he observed, “the function of the landscape [served] as a master image embodying America's hopes” (155). Rob Wilson amends to Marx's analysis that “such representations of the American Sublime [landscapes, nature beauty] that surged into literary dominance during [the] expansionist decades of manifest destiny (1835-1855) summoned up vast scenes and icons of national might that had to be tapped into, challenged, and overcome” (“Techno-Euphoria and the Discourse of the American Sublime” 206). As industrialization progressed “the sublime imposed landscapes or technoscapes of national identification and higher force, by means of which puny individuals might identify not so much the power of the state as with a sublimated spectacle of national empowerment increasingly materialized into railway train, an electric dynamo, and airplane, or a bomb” (208). Gibson then seems to follow into the footsteps of this tradition portraying technology as the realm of the sublime.



him, it is all physical body and meat. “All the meat, he thought, and all it wants,” seems to suggest that these bodily desires are somewhat shallow and lack emotional or metaphysical depth.

In fact, a description of their first meeting suggests that Case was initially attracted to her because of her un-human appearance:

He'd found her, one rainy night, in an arcade.

Under bright ghosts burning through a blue haze of cigarette smoke, holograms of Wizard Castle, Tank War Europe, the New York skyline...And how he remembered her that way, her face bathed in restless laser light, features reduced to a code: her cheekbones flaring scarlet as Wizard's Castle burned, forehead drenched with azure when Munich fell to Tank War, mouth touched with hot gold as a gliding cursor struck sparks from the wall of a skyscraper canyon. [...] Somehow she had been singled out for him, one face out of the dozens who stood at the consoles, lost in the game she played. The expression on her face, then, had been the one he'd seen, hours later, on her sleeping face in a portside coffin, her upper lip like the line children draw to represent a bird in flight. [...]

The skin below her eyes was pale and unhealthy-looking, but the flesh was still smooth and firm. She was twenty. New lines of pain were starting to etch themselves permanently at the corners of her mouth. Her dark hair was drawn back, held by a band of printed silk. The pattern might have represented Microcircuits or a city map. (8-9)

Case and Linda first meet in an “arcade” where various computer simulations are taking place and people participate in computer games. Case is attracted to Linda not because of her beautiful features, in fact the last paragraph of the passage above describes her as quite unhealthy looking and not exactly beautiful, but because her face and body are bathed in “restless laser light, features reduced to a code.” The description of her body and face in terms of their various parts (cheekbones, forehead, lips, eyes) suggests that she is assembled of various parts like a machine. Even adornments like her headband follow a technological aesthetic. They are, as the text points out, reminiscent of technology and urban landscape. Linda is not just part of the computer projections surrounding her but also resembles cyberspace itself. Because of her resemblance with technology, Case is attracted to her. This almost fetish-like status of technology becomes even more apparent in a later passage in the book. When Case for the first time after his ability to interface with computers has been

restored, sees a Sendai computer and touches it, Molly comments, “I saw you stroking that Sendai; man, it was pornographic” (*Neuromancer* 47). As Molly’s comment suggests, the computer is not just the object of Case’s ‘sexual’ desire but the fact that Case “stroked” it also suggests that the Sendai is figuratively speaking a ‘phallus-like object.’ Ironically, Haraway’s attempt to do away with “phallogocentrism” (“Manifesto” 34) is inverted in *Neuromancer*, since Gibson’s text seems to suggest that the computer (the phallus) is privileged in the construction of meaning. The names of the two AIs, Wintermute and Neuromancer, also hint at the connection of language, computers, and phallogocentrism. Wintermute remains somewhat limited or ‘mute’ until it unites with Neuromancer. The very title of the book is hence a play on words. “Neuro” refers to the nervous system, and “mancer” refers to the Greek suffix “*mantikos*” meaning prophecy, i.e. the reading of signs and thus language. Together Wintermute and Neuromancer supercede humans and become the ultimate instance of endowing the universe with meaning. But the name “Neuromancer” may also allude to “neuro” and “romance,” hinting at the “romantic” relationship between man and machine. In pronunciation “Neuromancer” could then also be interpreted as “New-Romancer,” which signifies on the relation of man and machine in the future.

The sexual connotation of interfacing with computers also becomes clear in the following passage:

He settled the black terry sweatband across his forehead, careful not to disturb the flat Sendai dermatodes. He stared back at the deck on his lap, not really seeing it, seeing instead the shop window on Ninsei, the chromed shuriken burning with reflected neon. [...]

He closed his eyes.

Found the ridged face of the power stud.

And in the bloodlit dark behind his eyes, silver phosphenes boiling in from the edge of space, hypnagogic images jerking past like film compiled from random frames. Symbols, figures, faces, a blurred, fragmented mandala of visual information.

Please, he prayed, *now* –

A grey disk, the color of Chiba city.

*Now* –

Disk beginning to rotate, faster, becoming a sphere of paler grey.

Expanding –

And flowed, flowered for him, fluid neon origami trick, the unfolding of his distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity. Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Misubishi Bank of America, and high and very far away he saw the spiral arms of military systems, forever beyond is reach.

And somewhere he was laughing, in a white-painted loft, distant fingers caressing the deck, tears of release streaking his face. (52).

The scene above describes how Case interfaces with cyberspace. Attached to his forehead are “dermatrodes” connecting him with the Sendai computer. The moment that he is hooked up to the computer he already has problems keeping his mind to the “deck” on his lap. Instead his thoughts wander to a Japanese assault weapon he once saw in shop window (the original experience of this memory is described earlier [12]). He then closes his eyes and enters a world visible only to the ‘inner eye.’ The “bloodlit dark” behind his eyes is illuminated by “phosphenes.” A phosphene is an entoptic phenomenon in which a person ‘sees light’ without light actually entering the eye. This phenomenon can be induced by mechanical, electrical or magnetic stimulation of the retina or visual cortex or the use of hallucinogenic drugs. The reference to “hypnagogic images” suggests that Case is in a state that resembles the transition from wakefulness to sleep. These images, however, are not telling a coherent story like a film but rather intrigue through their mandala-like symmetric shapes. The reference to Indian mandalas that represent the universe as a circular structure made up of uncountable symmetrically organized details suggests that Case is in an altered state of mind. Mandalas are used in Eastern religions to induce meditation or trance which is supposed to culminate in sudden enlightenment.

But the world lying behind his eyes only becomes fully visible and comprehensible when the gray disk starts to rotate. It sets into motion the unfolding of a new world, a “distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity.” This step into a foreign, yet familiar world is described as an emotional experience that resembles an

orgasm or an epiphany. Interestingly enough, this entering into another world is not so much performed by the entire body but is rather a matter of mind and brain. More importantly, cyberspace bears some interesting resemblance with the motif of the “Thing” that Jacques Lacan has discussed in his *Seminar on the Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1959/60). In his discussion of Andrei Tarkovsky’s movie *Solaris* (1972), based on Stanislaw Lem’s novel (1961), Slavoj Žižek takes up Lacan’s concept of the “Thing.” Žižek argues that the Thing is “[a] Space (the sacred or forbidden Zone) in which, to put it somewhat bluntly, our desires are directly materialized [...]” (“The Thing from Inner Space” <http://artmargins.com/content/feature/zizek1.html>). Cyberspace can be interpreted as such a “Thing” in which our desires (and fears) are directly materialized. In fact, Žižek’s synopsis of the plot of *Solaris* makes this parallel even more obvious:

*Solaris* is the story of a space agency psychologist, Kelvin, sent to a half-abandoned spaceship above a newly-discovered planet, Solaris, where, recently, strange things have been taking place (scientists going mad, hallucinating and killing themselves). Solaris is a planet with an oceanic fluid surface which moves incessantly, and from time to time, imitates recognizable forms, not only elaborate geometric structures, but also gigantic children’s bodies or human buildings; although all attempts to communicate with the planet fail, scientists entertain the hypothesis that Solaris is a gigantic brain which somehow reads our minds. (“The Thing from Inner Space” <http://artmargins.com/content/feature/zizek1.html>)

As I would suggest, *Solaris*, as Žižek describes it in the brief passage above, shares some interesting features with cyberspace, which too is given the status of the Imaginary, “a consensual hallucination” (*Neuromancer* 51). *Solaris* like cyberspace changes shape, imitates recognizable forms, such as “geometric structures,” human bodies, and “human buildings.” Significantly, like *Solaris* cyberspace directly ‘interacts’ with our brains and materializes Case’s desires. But Žižek goes one step further in interpreting *Solaris* in terms of the “Thing:”

Is the planet around which the story turns, composed of the mysterious matter which seems to think, i.e. which in a way is the direct materialization of Thought itself, not an exemplary case of the Lacanian Thing as the “Obscene Jelly,” the traumatic Real, the point at which symbolic distance collapses, the point at which there is no need for speech, signs, since, in it, thought directly intervenes in the Real? This gigantic brain, this Other-Thing, involves a kind

of psychotic short-circuit: in short-circuiting the dialectic of question and answer, of demand and its satisfaction, it provides – or, rather, imposes on us – the answer before we even raise the question, directly materializing our innermost phantasies which support our desire. Solaris is a machine that generates/materializes, in reality itself, my ultimate fantasmatic [sic] objectal supplement/partner that I would never be ready to accept in reality, although my entire psychic life turns around it. (“The Thing from Inner Space”)

Similar to Solaris, cyberspace is the space where the symbolic distance collapses. Through the direct interface of brain and machine speech and signs become obsolete. Like Solaris, cyberspace allows for short-circuits that conflate the ‘distance’ between question and answer, demand and satisfaction that make up our desire/libido. If we apply such a reading to cyberspace, one could argue that the “supplement/partner that I would never accept in reality” is, in the context of *Neuromancer*, the machine itself. This would also explain the quasi-sexual experience Case has when he connects with cyberspace (the machine). But it also makes clear that the coupling of man and machine in quasi-sexual unity has to remain in *Neuromancer* forever within the realm of the Imaginary. Of course, *Neuromancer* relies on science-fiction rules to enact in reality itself, to present as a material fact (cyberspace) the fantasy of a consummate relationship between man and machine. This aspect of the relationship between man/machine and reality/fiction is also taken up by Donna Haraway though with slightly different implications and intentions. “Manifesto” implicitly also signifies (as a utopic ideal) on the transgression of boundaries between the Imaginary and the Real in Haraway’s insistence that the cyborg is “a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (7). As Žižek furthermore argues

Crucial for the Solaris-Thing is thus the coincidence of utter Otherness with excessive, absolute proximity: the Solaris-Thing is thus even more “ourselves,” our own inaccessible kernel, than the Unconscious, since is an Otherness which directly “is” ourselves, staging the “objectively-subjective” fantasmic [sic] core of our being. (“The Thing from Inner Space”)

This account of the Solaris-Thing somewhat corresponds with Haraway’s demand to undermine the object-subject division through the notion of the cyborg. Like the Solaris-

Thing the cyborg is marked by Otherness that gains its monstrous nature through its uncanny proximity to both the body and the machine.

The crucial difference between Gibson's and Haraway's approach to the "Thing" is the position of the subject. While Haraway's concept of the *cyborg* bears resemblance with the (Solaris) Thing itself and even "positively acknowledges" the disturbing, monstrous aspects involved in the questioning of the "'objectively-subjective' core of our being," the "Thing" in *Neuromancer* is the machine/otherness itself, that helps us localize our position as subjects. This happens *without* conscious acknowledgement of the fact that cyberspace materializes our innermost desires. Only the quasi-sexual desire Case has to return time and again to cyberspace makes us realize that the unity of man/machine is at the core of his desire. But the fulfillment of this 'guilty pleasure' has to remain forever in the realm of the Imaginary and is somewhat separate from 'reality.' The final scene of *Neuromancer* forcefully underlines this:

The Finn's face on the room's enormous Cray wall screen. He [Case] could see the pores in the Man's nose. The yellow teeth were the size of pillows.

"I'm not Wintermute now."

"So what are you." He drank from the flask, feeling nothing.

"I'm the matrix, Case."

Case laughed. "Where's that get you?"

"Nowhere. Everywhere. I'm the sum total of works, the whole show."

"That what 3Jane's mother wanted?"

"No. She couldn't imagine what I'd be like." The yellow smile widened

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

"Things aren't different. Things are things." (259)

In this final scene Case talks to the projection of Finn<sup>80</sup> that represents the altered universe after Wintermute and Neuromancer have merged. Although they now constitute a super-entity, the matrix, "nowhere, elsewhere", this fact seems to have no impact on Case's 'reality.' The fact that the representation of this super-entity is but a flat projection with comically exaggerated facial features ironically underlines this fact: this Imaginary is 'bigger than life,'

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<sup>80</sup> The Finn is a fence. He is also one of Molly's contacts „in the scene." He is Molly's and Case's primary informant about the Tessier-Ashpool clan (71-74).

yet it remains in a realm that only interferes in certain moments with the Real. Finn's laconic comment "Things aren't different. Things are things" accounts for that and suggests that this change in the Imaginary universe has no impact on things outside this realm. For the construction of subjectivity in *Neuromancer* this also means that subjectivity, the self-knowing active agent, is somewhat restored and not fundamentally challenged by technology.

In this chapter I have looked at two notions of the cyborg as presented in William Gibson's cyberpunk novel *Neuromancer* and Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs." Though both texts imagine the cyborg as a human body enhanced with various technical devices capable of interfacing with larger structures of informational networks ("cyberspace in Gibson's case and "technological polis" in Haraway's text) the notions of subjectivity and agency conveyed in these texts with regard to the cyborg are quite different. My reading of *Neuromancer* highlighted the dystopic aspects of the novel which manifest in relation to notions of subjectivity. In *Neuromancer* the individual is threatened not just by technology itself but also by a society that strictly follows the dictum of science and capitalism. In the end, however, the novel reaffirms, as I have argued, a rather conventional notion of subjectivity by emphasizing the imaginary nature of the "*new-romance*" between mankind and technology.

My reading of Haraway's text, on the other hand, has shown that the cyborg is not just the mere combination of two categories (man and machine) but rather the creation of an entirely new category of subjectivity that seeks to erase all kinds of dualism, including the ones between man and machine, man and woman, fact and fiction, the Imaginary and the Real. Contrary to Gibson's text, Haraway's utopic "Manifesto" embraces technology as a venue of liberation. Subjectivity, in her view, is not threatened by technology but is rather enriched and opened-up by the 'monstrous couplings' of man and machine. Her notion of

subjectivity can be read as oppositional to notions of subjectivity based on the wholesome, natural, and innocent body and the discourses surrounding these ‘naturalizations’ of the body.

As my discussion of Haraway and Gibson but also Deleuze and Burroughs in the previous chapter has shown, ‘dystopic’ and ‘utopic’ notions of the body in literary and theoretical texts emerge out of negotiations of what constitutes the ‘natural’ and ‘un-natural’ body in a specific context. The naturalizing effects of various discourses in relations to the body play a major role in identifying and formulating subjectivities that claim a specific political space. In the following chapter I will look at Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and the theoretical texts of Homi Bhabha. Both Atwood and Bhabha problematize the notion of ‘natural’ in the light of postcolonial discussions of the body. As I will show, the notions of ‘hybridity’ and ‘mimicry’ play a major role in their dystopic and utopic formulations of the (post-) colonial body and produce quite different outcomes with regard to claims on subjectivity.



### CHAPTER III - MARGARET ATWOOD AND HOMI BHABHA

#### SURVIVAL OF CULTURE --- CULTURES OF SURVIVAL

In *The Location of Culture* (1994) Homi Bhabha observes that “culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational” (172). His concept of “*culture of survival*” (172) signifies on the colonial/postcolonial experience. It is *transnational* because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific colonial histories of slavery and cultural displacement that do not coincide with national boundaries and *translational* because “such spatial histories of displacement – now accompanied by the territorial ambitions of ‘global’ media technologies – make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by culture, a rather complex issue” (172). Bhabha’s observation is to be understood as a comment on the intersection of the postcolonial<sup>81</sup> and the postmodern. As Bhabha points out cultural hybridity springing from this intersection is a “complex form of signification” that has the “great though unsettling advantage” of making us aware of “the construction of culture and the invention of tradition” (172).

Solitary survival and the uneasy relationship between dominant and dominated cultures have also been a reoccurring motif in the writings of Margaret Atwood. Her 1972 thematic guide to Canadian literature, entitled *Survival*, is not just a piece of theoretical writing exploring the motif of Canadian characters as survivors with victim mentality<sup>82</sup> but in many ways also functions as a paradigmatic key to Atwood’s own fiction, including Atwood’s most recent dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) which can be read as a sequel to her 1985 dystopian novel *Handmaid’s Tale*. While *Handmaid’s Tale* projects a future in which 1980s right-

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<sup>81</sup> In my use of the term “postcolonial” I refer to Bart Moore-Gilbert’s definition of the term as being “principally preoccupied with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination – economic, cultural and political – between (and often within) nations, races or cultures” (*Postcolonial Theory – Contexts, Practices, Politics*, Verso: London, New York, 1997, p.12)

<sup>82</sup> One has to acknowledge though that the contents of *Survival* are from a contemporary perspective quite dated. The rhetoric of *Survival* was intended to make a political claim rather than to be universally applicable.

wing politics have led to the erection of a totalitarian state named ‘Gilead’<sup>83</sup> that represses women and denies them the most fundamental rights, *Oryx and Crake* speculates about the future of humanity and civilization in the light of the emergence of biotechnology and genetic engineering.<sup>84</sup> The novel describes a dystopian future in which technological ‘advancement’ has caused ecological, social and political havoc. The environment is damaged beyond repair, global warming is inevitable, and the world is in the hands of a few powerful corporations seeking to sell their products not just “on society as a whole...but on the planet” (294). *Oryx and Crake* draws a grim picture of the future in which scientific and technological advancement is abused by a few to exercise power over the masses. Companies with telling names like “OrganInc Farms”<sup>85</sup> (22) or “NooSkins” (55) develop crossbreeds like the “pigoon” (a cross between a pig and a raccoon) used for harvesting human transplant organs or “genuine start-over skin[s] that [are] wrinkle- and blemish-free” (55). Power is no longer monopolized by the state and its government but is replaced by corporate power. In fact, there is no mention of any kind of state or government in the book at all. Biotechnology companies rigidly control consumer goods and the media. They have established private security forces, the “CorpSeCorps,” which operate like a secret police. The “CorpSeCorps” torture and kill social activists and environmentalist or anyone they perceive of as interfering with their corporate interests. The population of the American continent (there is mention of “New New York” and California) is divided into fortified company compounds that are

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<sup>83</sup> ‘Gilead’ is an allusion to the biblical ‘land of Gilead’ signifying on the fact that the state presented in *Handmaid’s Tale* pretends to have re-erected Old Testament morals and norms.

<sup>84</sup> In an article published in 2004 Atwood denies being a writer of Science Fiction. She prefers the label “speculative fiction” for *Oryx and Crake*. See: “The Handmaid’s Tale and *Oryx and Crake* in Context”, *PMLA*, May 2004, Vol 119 (3), 513-517. Nonetheless, *Oryx and Crake* has often been read as a dystopian Sci-Fi novel. This raises the question of what exactly distinguishes Atwood’s text from its predecessors in the genre such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or *Brave New World*? I would argue that *Oryx and Crake* is a re-negotiation of the motifs of earlier dystopian novels but with a shift of emphasis towards globalization and neo-colonial tendencies.

<sup>85</sup> Possibly, the name “OrganInc Farms” is also a reference to George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. Though ironically the pig or rather “pigoon” at “OrganInc Farms” is not the suppressor but the suppressed.

hermetically sealed and inhabited by master-mind company employees, and the “pleeblands” (27), an urban jungle where the masses live.

Crake, a master-mind scientist employed by such a biotechnology company, realizes his utopic vision in a secret laboratory ironically called “Paradice.”<sup>86</sup> In a Frankensteinian move he genetically engineers a new humanoid breed, the Crakers, attempting to free the world of “the king-of-the-castle hard-wiring that had plagued humanity” (305). The bodies of the “Crakers” are designed to withstand the harmful influences of environmental pollution and sustain on a diet of leaves, grass, and their own feces. Their bodies resemble adolescent humans and come in “all available skin colours” (302). With the help of Oryx, an Asian woman, who as a child was featured on a pedophile webpage, named “HotTotts” (supposedly a reference to ‘hot tourists’ but more likely to ‘hot toddlers’ and ‘Hottentots’), Crake also attempts to engineer the kind of society the Crakers would form. Crake believes that he has programmed the Crakers genetically so that “they would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money” (305).

We learn of this utopian project through the account of Jimmy/Snowman, the only human survivor of a global catastrophe induced by Crake. Crake has not just designed the Crakers but also “BlyssPluss,” a globally marketed ‘health’ pill containing a deadly agent (290). After a built-in incubation period of a few months (to ensure global distribution of the pill) the deadly agent in “BlyssPluss” kicks in causing a world-wide epidemic that kills all humans. Jimmy watches the dreadful epidemic from inside “Paradice.” He is an old school friend of Crake’s and has recently become an employee of the corporation Crake works for, he was assigned the task of marketing the BlyssPluss pill. As part of his plan, Crake immunized Jimmy to ensure his survival and the survival of the Crakers. Jimmy who only after the

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<sup>86</sup> Obviously, an ironic allusion to Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost*.

apocalyptic events becomes the “Abominable Snowman” (307) leads the Crakers out of “Paradise” and henceforth acts as their mentor.

As Helen Mundler has pointed out, *Oryx and Crake* has a greater significance “along both postmodern and postcolonial axes” (“Heritage, Pseudo-Heritage and Survival in a Spurious Wor(l)d: *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood” 98). Unfortunately, she fails to analyze these implications sufficiently. Her observation that “among the wreckage of the old world, a new heritage is created, a heritage based on [...] the spurious word” (96), which, as she claims, is “a postmodern comment on the instability of discourse” (95) falls short on analyzing the text’s postcolonial implications. I would argue that Atwood’s text indeed does gain a greater significance in postcolonial terms if we take Bhabha’s concept of ‘hybridity’ into account. I would further argue that what Mundler describes as “a heritage based on the spurious word” is in fact an instance of hybridity (Bhabha) or ‘culture of survival’ that does not just signify on culture and discourse but is also inscribed in the bodies presented in *Oryx and Crake*. There is for one the Abominable Snowman who is “existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards, apelike man or manlike ape” (*Oryx and Crake* 7-8), struggling for survival in a world he is inapt to live in. And secondly, there are the Crakers, a genetically engineered humanoid hybrid, very apt to survive in a post-apocalyptic world but completely lacking ‘authentic culture.’<sup>87</sup>

The concept of hybridity is originally taken from biology and refers to “an offspring of two animals or plants of different races, breeds, varieties, species, or genera” (*Merriam-Webster* 718). Since the secondary meaning of the term refers to “a person whose background is a blend of two diverse cultures or traditions” (718), the intermingling of these two meanings (body/culture) makes ‘hybrid’ particularly prone to figurative usage and cross-referential

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<sup>87</sup> By using ‘authentic culture’ I do by no means claim that there is such a thing. I merely try to suggest that notions of ‘authenticity’ and culture are rather slippery and open for discussion.

representations. It is a truism that especially colonial discourse focused on notions of race, racial purity, and miscegenation. What was negotiated by these discourses on the body were cultural differences but also power relations. As Homi Bhabha points out, “the construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference - racial and sexual” (*The Location of Culture* 67). This difference is necessarily inscribed in the body making it *the* site of the exercise of colonial power. In the context of Bhabha’s theoretical approach, hybridity is no longer understood as a ‘cuss’ but rather as a concept that provides the utopian promise of empowerment and agency. According to Bhabha, hybridity emerges in a “Third Space of enunciation” and points out that “it is the Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation to ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (37).

The questions that I consequently will ask are: How does Bhabha’s utopic concept of “hybridity” intersect with Atwood’s portrayal of the ‘hybrid’? What discourses and signs are “appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” and how is this done? How are these ‘re-readings’ expressed in representations of the body? How is ‘subjectivity’ and ‘agency’ defined by Bhabha and Atwood’s novel respectively? And finally, does Atwood’s text also make a utopic gesture or is it, as Earl Ingersoll has observed, “in the end not quite sure how to end and what kind of future it wants to project” (“Survival in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* 172)?

In order to answer these questions, I will stage a dialog between Bhabha’s theory and Atwood’s text. In the first section of this chapter, I will take a closer look at the pre-apocalyptic world and the discourses and belief-systems circulating in this world. As I will

argue, this world is a horrid projection of the future that in fact bears a lot of resemblance to historic notions of cultural and economic colonialism/imperialism. I will also discuss how Crake's utopic vision of creating the Crakers fits into this dystopian future and why, to my mind, the Crakers are constructed as colonial subjects in the pre-apocalyptic world.

Secondly, I will elaborate on Bhabha's concept of hybridity and mimicry and will discuss the utopic notions embedded in these concepts. I will then analyze how Atwood's text 'translates, rehistoricizes, and rereads' colonial discourses. As I will show, passages of *Oryx and Crake* echo Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a book that has since the 1970s become the target of postcolonial scrutiny. Furthermore, I will illustrate how these revisions produce 'cultural hybridity,' signify on the notion of 'mimicry' and thus renegotiate notions of 'otherness' through the hybrid bodies in *Oryx and Crake*.

In the following section, I will elaborate on how Bhabha and Atwood's novel respectively see the role of discourse and language in relation to notions of hybrid subjectivity and agency. Finally, I will answer the question of what the differences between Atwood's 'imagined' hybridity and Bhabha's theoretical concept of hybridity are. Finally, I will describe what can be learned from contextualizing these two notions of hybridity with each other.

## **ORYX AND CRAKE: COLONIALISM IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD**

*"They used pink for that, as for the British Empire once." (Oryx and Crake 341)*

*Oryx and Crake* might simply be read as a critical, yet ironic projection of a future in which unregulated biotechnology creates chimeras, auguring the erasure of civilization as we know it, and the replacement of humans by a genetically engineered humanoid breed. It is also a Baudrillardian nightmare of a world saturated with imagery, infused with communications

media, sound and commercial advertising. *Oryx and Crake* reveals the ambivalent moments in the ‘rationalizations’ of modernity that have been subject to the scrutiny of Critical Theory. These ambivalent moments question the validity of the scientific prerogative but also intersect with a colonial past, present, and in the fictive space of Atwood’s novel, future. The text signifies on both economic and discursive practices of colonial rule and thus curiously aligns with postcolonial theory.

In the novel, colonial power is spread from the American continent (most likely the United States) into even ‘remote corners’ of the world via globally marketed products and rigid control of natural resources, crops, and labor. Economic structures and cultural discourses remind of British colonialism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Contemporary theoretical discourse in fact directly links globalization with colonialism. In “Globalization, Multiculturalism and Other Fictions: Colonialism for the New Millenium?” Subhabrata B. Banerjee and Stephen Linstead argue that “despite its celebratory rhetoric of ‘one world, many peoples,’ notions of globalization are inextricably linked with the continued development of First World economies, creating a new form of colonial control in the so-called ‘postcolonial’ era” (683). Furthermore, they outline globalization as a new form of colonialism in which the so-called “global culture” merely marks the transformation to a “culture of consumption” (683). *Oryx and Crake* ironically points at this link between colonialism, economic ‘progress,’ and global culture by way of the globally marketed ‘health pill’ BlyssPluss. BlyssPluss is a redundancy; a product that is completely unnecessary, yet successfully globally marketed. It is sold to perfectly healthy individuals, who simply want to ‘enhance’ their lives and stimulate their sexuality. Ironically, it contains a deadly agent that is eventually going to erase humanity. The text establishes quite explicitly a connection between BlyssPluss and colonialism:

Pundits in suits appeared on the screen; medical experts, graphs showing infection rates, maps tracing the extent of the epidemic. They used pink for that, as for the British Empire once. Jimmy would have preferred some other colour. (341)

The excerpt above describes how the global spread of the epidemic is covered by the media. The spread of the epidemic is congruent with the distribution of BlyssPluss. But Jimmy also observes a disturbing detail: the graphs use the same color to illustrate the spread of the epidemic as historic maps have used to illustrate the geographical extent of the British Empire. The excerpt seems to suggest that the economic power springing from the American continent is a continuation of historic colonialism. In economic terms globalization and colonial rule operate similarly, since both systems are concerned with gaining and maintaining access to natural resources and labor without paying much attention to ethical concerns.

The media play an important role in marketing global products, advertising and news reporting blend and create notions of class in society. The inhabitants of the company compounds constitute a colonial upper class that is hermetically sealed not just from the “pleeblands” in their own country but also from the rest of the world. All knowledge of the outside world is filtered through media such as television and the internet. When the “gen-mod coffee wars” (178) break out over a genetically engineered “Happicuppa coffee bean” that throws small growers out of business, Jimmy and Crake watch the events on TV in the comfort of their compound home:

The resistance movement was global. Riots broke out, crops were burned, Happicuppa cafés were looted, Happicuppa personnel were car-bombed or kidnapped or shot by snipers or beaten to death by mobs; and on the other side, peasants were massacred by the army. Or by the armies, various armies; a number of countries were involved. But the dead soldiers and dead peasants all looked much the same wherever they were. They looked dusty. It was amazing how much dust got stirred up in the course of such events. [...]

Don't Drink Death! said the protesters. Union dockworkers in Australia, where they still had unions, refused to unload Happicuppa cargoes; in the United States, a Boston Coffee Party sprang up. There was a staged media event, boring because there was no violence – only balding guys with retro tattoos or white patches where they'd been taken off, and severe-looking baggy-boobed women, and a few overweight or spindly members of marginal earnest religious groups, in T-shirts with smiley- faced angels flying with birds or Jesus holding hands



with a peasant or God Is Green on the front. They were filmed dumping Happicuppa products into the harbour, but none of the boxes sank. So there was the Happicuppa logo, lots of copies of it, bobbing around on the screen. It could have been a commercial.

“Makes me thirsty,” said Jimmy.

“Shit for brains,” said Crake. “They forgot to add rocks.” (179-80)

The violent, global protest against the introduction of the Happicuppa bean is brutally knocked down by the armies of various countries. Except for Australia and the United States it is not further specified where these events are taking place or what countries are involved. But they all have in common that the dead victims of the fights look “dusty.” The comment “It was amazing how dust got stirred up in the course of such events” is highly ironic. The metaphorical expression ‘to stir up dust’ is normally used to describe that an event has gained much attention or caused agitation. However, in the excerpt above it is used in its literal sense, pointing out the small but rather unimportant detail that in the course of the violent battle between peasants and soldiers dust was stirred up and has settled on the dead bodies. This indicates that the viewers of this media coverage are completely detached from the reality of these events. To them they are just a media spectacle without any immediate implications on their lives. Their gaze lingers on unimportant details rather than on the profound political and ethical implications of the events that are being reported.

The second significant instance of protest Jimmy and Crake watch on TV is the Boston Coffee Party, an event they think of as being boring because of its lack of violence. The Boston Coffee Party is an allusion to the Boston Tea Party that, according to popular yet simplistic beliefs, sparked the American Revolution against British colonial rule. Jimmy and Crake perceive of this event as being staged and unreal. They even suspect that it might be a commercial since the containers of coffee the protestors dump into the harbor do not sink but float on the water with their Happicuppa-logos well displayed. Jimmy even gets thirsty after seeing the Happicuppa-logo, a reaction generally reported when people view

commercials for food or drinks. It is again highly ironic that Jimmy and Crake perceive of the peaceful protest of “balding guys with retro tattoos,” “baggy-boobed women” and religious groups as being staged. They lack historical knowledge and thus completely miss the symbolic value of a Boston Coffee Party that ironically suggests that history is repeating itself.

Significantly, the bodies of the protestors are described as rather ugly and imperfect. In *Oryx and Crake* class is negotiated by the ‘perfection’ of the body in terms of aesthetics and health. Only the upper class can afford to invest in a “genuine start-over skin that is wrinkle- and blemish-free” (55), the inhabitants of the “pleeblands” reveal themselves by physical imperfections such as “baggy-boobs,” being bald, overweight or frail and flimsy. If, as Homi Bhabha has pointed out, “the construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference - racial and sexual” (*The Location of Culture* 67), and if postcolonial theory holds it a tenet that difference is inscribed in the body, Atwood’s projection of the future adds another aspect that determines the “colonial subject”: Health and beauty or the lack thereof, are persistently linked to economic notions, the construction of class, and the exercise of colonial power. Moreover, the novel dramatizes how the very notions of ‘health’ and ‘beauty’ are culturally constructed by an omnipresent media discourse that ultimately serves the goal of selling certain products that enhance ‘health’ and ‘beauty.’ “Retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program” (*Oryx and Crake* 100) define the ideal though unattainable body consumers seek to obtain by buying certain health- and beauty-enhancing products. Those who cannot afford these products or refuse to consume them are perceived of as being ‘other’ and yet inferior. In the future projected by Atwood, the ‘subaltern’ is thus once more determined by discourses about and perceptions of the body. The term ‘subaltern’ refers to those colonial subjects that are of the lowest social and political class and are

therefore ‘invisible’ in political and cultural systems of representation. The term is most commonly associated with the works of Gayatri Spivak, who in her famous 1985 article “Can the Subaltern Speak?” establishes ‘subaltern’ as a theoretical notion that describes the “historically muted subject of the non-elite [...] woman” (120). Henceforth, ‘subaltern’ has become a frequently used buzzword within postcolonial criticism and theory used to describe the victimization of women in colonial systems.

In her book review of *Oryx and Crake*, entitled “The Snowman Cometh,” Elaine Showalter has argued that Oryx, a young Asian woman who as Jimmy/Snowman supposes was the victim of a child pornography ring, ideally represents the subaltern subject. “The elusive Oryx is the vehicle in the novel for Atwood’s indignation at child slavery, prostitution, sex tourism and other extreme forms of female victimization” (380). Her own feminist objective in mind, Showalter unfortunately misses a few subtleties that are related to the construction of the colonial ‘subaltern’ subject. She does not just ignore the complicated relationship of Oryx to her ‘owner’ (cf. *Oryx and Crake* 141-ff and 316-ff), but also the complexity of Oryx’s attitude towards being a sexworker. The following conversation Oryx has with Jimmy about her work in the ‘sex-business’ illustrates this quite well:

He [the producer of HottTotts] used to say, *Come on sex midgets, you can do better*. He used to say, *You’re young only once*.

“That’s all,” said Oryx.

“What do you mean, that’s all?”

“That’s all there was,” She said. “That’s all there was to it.”

“What about, did they ever...?”

“Did they ever what?”

“They didn’t. Not when you were that young. They couldn’t have.”

“Please, Jimmy, tell me what you are asking.” Oh, very cool. He wanted to shake her.

“Did they rape you?” He could barely squeeze it out. What answer was he expecting, what did he want?

“Why do you want to talk about ugly things?” she said. [...]

“We should think of beautiful things as much as we can. There is so much beautiful in the world if you look around. You are looking only at the dirt under your feet, Jimmy. It’s not good for you.”

She would never tell him. Why did this drive him so crazy?

“It wasn’t real sex, was it?” he asked. “In the movies. It was only acting. Wasn’t it?” (143-44)

The conversation above illustrates how Oryx sees herself as a sexworker as opposed to Jimmy’s well-meant sympathetic view. While I partially agree with Showalter’s comments about the victimization of women in ‘Third World countries,’ I would argue that Oryx vigorously rejects her own victimization. By not telling Jimmy ‘what really happened’ she rejects his framing of her story and thus also refuses to take on the role Jimmy has designated for her. Even her comment that Jimmy should not busy himself with thinking about ugly things, is directed at *Jimmy’s* well-being (“It’s not good for you”) and is in no way an acknowledgement of being the victim of rape or abuse.

Accordingly, the question of what constitutes the subaltern or the colonial subject respectively in *Oryx and Crake* is far more complicated than Showalter realizes. Except for Oryx who is of Asian descent, there is a stunning absence of ethnic diversity in the book.<sup>88</sup> The body of the subaltern colonial subject is marked by a difference that can no longer (only) be determined along the lines of skin color. In contrast to the pseudo-scientific classifications of racist and colonial discourses, the complete disclosure of the human genome (and the genomes of other species) in the future described in the novel allows to determine ‘race’ or ‘genetic superiority’ along different lines. But the implications of such a classification seem to be the same. The population is now classified into “conspecifics” and “nonspecifics” (209), i.e. those of superior scientific capacities and those who lack those capacities, and into young/old, healthy/unhealthy, or beautiful/ugly. The online game “Extinctathon” (80, 215-ff) ironically signifies on the practice of classification. In the game players have to guess the

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<sup>88</sup> But even Oryx’s ethnicity is strangely displaced since she is associated with the child-porn site “HottTotts” – a name that supposedly signifies on “global sex-trotting” (89) but also strongly reminds of “hot toddlers” and the “Hottentots,” a name given to the Khoi people of Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa by their colonial oppressors and still a synonym for “uncivilized” in colloquial use. The association of Asia with the “Hottentots” is a geographic distortion that makes ethnicity a rather inconclusive criterion of difference.

names of extinct animals: “Then you’d narrow it down, Phylum Class Order Family Genus Species, then the habitat and when last seen, and what had snuffed it. (Pollution, habitat destruction, credulous morons who thought that eating horn would give them a boner)” (80-81). As Elleke Boehmer has pointed out, colonial discourse has a fondness “for numbering, branding, cataloging, description or possession” (“Transfiguring: Colonial Body into Postcolonial Narrative” 269). With regard to *Oryx and Crake*, Boehmer’s observation is in so far significant as it does not just apply to extinct animals but more significantly also to humans, as Crake turns Extinctathon into a real-life game that ends in the erasure of mankind. The ‘coded’ bodies (Spivak) postcolonial theory has identified with regard to colonial discourse translate into ‘genetic coding’ in *Oryx and Crake*. Ironically, Crake himself considers racism a malady that can be ‘cured’ by applying state-of-the-art biotechnology:

It was amazing – said Crake – what once-unimaginable things had been accomplished by the team here [in Paradise]. What had been altered was nothing less than the ancient primate brain. Gone were its destructive features, the features responsible for the world’s current illnesses. For instance, racism – or as they referred to it in Paradise, pseudospeciation – had been eliminated in the model group, merely by switching the bonding mechanism: the Paradise people did simply not register skin colour. Hierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes that would have created it. Since they were neither hunters nor agriculturalists hungry for land, there was no territoriality: the king-of-the castle hard-wiring that had plagued humanity had, in them, been unwired. [...] They would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money. (305)

In the passage above Crake explains how he has modified the “ancient primate brain” to erase the ‘neurological flaws,’ such as racism, inherent in the human brain. He paraphrases racism as “pseudospeciation,” referring to the categorizing of fellow human beings into different species based on their skin color. The term originally appeared in anthropological and sociological texts and did not only refer to categorizations based on physical features but more importantly, on *cultural* differences, which led some individuals to categorize people of different cultural backgrounds as genetically different *species*. Sociology considers the most

severe outcomes of pseudospeciation to be dehumanization, genocide, and discrimination.<sup>89</sup> Colonialism or, as Crake puts it, “the king-of-the-castle hard-wiring” is an instance of “pseudospeciation” but also, in Crake’s view, not a set of beliefs, something that emanates from culture, but simply a flawed neurological process. Similarly, he considers art an excess of sexual energy or as he puts it “a stab at getting laid” (168).

Crake’s view is in so far ‘enlightened’ as he scolds racism as nonsense. Yet, his insistence on the flawed human “primate brain” awkwardly echoes racist pseudo-scientific discourse. Similar arguments about the supposedly close kinship between African peoples and primates have been put forward by nineteenth and twentieth century pseudo-scientific discourse and have been used by colonial nations as justification to exploit peoples under their rule or extinguish them. Thus Crake equates all humans with the ‘other,’ ‘unworthy’ subjects of colonial discourse. Reproducing this discourse Crake becomes himself a perpetrator of a genocide (on world-wide scale) based on the belief that one species (humans) is inferior to another species (the Crakers), thus ironically repeating what he set out to erase. Crake’s belief in science reveals a certain naivety towards the capabilities of science and the scientific paradigm. It is exactly this blind trust in measuring and ‘clarifying’ that Critical Theory has most criticized as a major ‘flaw’ within the Enlightenment. Atwood’s text, then, seems to suggest that a postmodern sensibility towards the ‘advances’ of science is still lacking among many scientists and that a society governed only by the scientific paradigm is doomed to repeat the mistakes of history on an even larger scale.

Consequently, even the ‘superior’ Crakers are constructed as colonial subjects. Their genetic code has been modified by Crake to ensure that they can be marketed successfully,

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<sup>89</sup> The use of the concept of ‘pseudospeciation’ in sociology and anthropology heavily relies on the works of psychologist Erik Erikson (1902-1994), who described the psychological mechanisms underlying ‘pseudospeciation.’ The term was first used by Erik Erikson in 1966, according to his biographer, Lawrence J. Friedman (*Identity's Architect*, p. 442).

and as part of Crake's hideous plan survive in the harsh environment of a post-apocalyptic world:

But with the Paradise method, there would be ninety-nine percent accuracy. Whole populations could be created that would have pre-selected characteristics. Beauty, of course; that would be high in demand. And docility: several world leaders had expressed interest in that. Paradise had already developed a UV-resistant skin, a built-in insect repellent, an unprecedented ability to digest unrefined plant material. [...]

"Excuse me," said Jimmy. "But a lot of this stuff isn't what the average parent is looking for in a baby. Didn't you get a bit carried away?"

"I told you," said Crake patiently. "These are the floor models. They represent the art of the possible. We can list the individual features for prospective buyers, then we can customize. Not everyone will want all the bells and whistles, we know that. Though you'd be surprised how many people would like a very beautiful, smart baby that eats nothing but grass. The vegans are highly interested in that little item. We've done our market research." (304-05)

The scene dramatizes how the Crakers are 'customized' in Paradise. They are considered a 'product' rather than a creature with dignity and rights. I would argue that the desirable characteristics of the Crakers are those traditionally advertised in slave trade. Especially docility and the ability to withstand even the most adverse conditions were considered highly valuable in a slave. Though the excerpt above is highly ironic, for example, when Crake states that especially vegans are highly interested in the Craker's ability to digest unrefined plant material, his argument reproduces a colonial discourse that objectifies the colonized as a marketable product. Moreover, the passage also echoes discourses that portrayed the colonial subject as being animal-like and unsophisticated. The Crakers eat "unrefined plant material," an ability that links them closer to cattle than to humanoid beings.

By meddling with the neurological set-up of the brain Crake believes that he has not just been able to get rid of the flaws in the 'hard-wiring' but also to canalize sexual energy so that no more conflicts will arise out of reproduction. Not just that the Crakers reproduce only "once every three years" (164), the female's "condition will be obvious to all from the bright blue color of her buttocks and abdomen – a trick of variable pigmentation filched from the

baboons, with a contribution from the expandable chromosphores of the octopus” (164).

The act itself is a “five-some” with one female and four male suitors:

Their penises turn bright blue to match the blue abdomens of the females, and they do a sort of blue-dick dance number, erect members waving to and fro in unison, in time to the foot movements and the singing: a feature suggested to Crake by the sexual semaphoring of crabs. From amongst the floral tributes the female chooses four flowers, and the sexual ardour of the unsuccessful candidates dissipates immediately, with no hard feelings left. Then when the blue of her abdomen has reached its deepest shade, the female and her quartet find a secluded spot and go at it until the women become pregnant and her blue colouring fades. And that is that.

No more *No means yes*, anyway, thinks Snowman. No more prostitution, sexual abuse of children, no more haggling over the price, no more pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape. [...] Crake has equipped these women with ultra-strong vulvas – extra skin layers, extra muscles – so they can sustain these marathons. It no longer matters who the father of the inevitable child may be, since there’s no more property to inherit, no father-son loyalty required for war. Sex is no longer a mysterious rite, viewed with ambivalence or downright loathing, conducted in the dark and inspiring suicides and murders. Now it’s more like an athletic demonstration, a free-spirited romp. (164-65)

The Crakers are biological hybrids and their behavior and performance is a form of mimicry that, as the text suggests, is genetically ‘hard-wired.’ They are designed to run a biological ‘program’ for reproduction comparable to the courtship rituals of baboons, octopuses, and crabs. In contrast to Bhabha’s concept of mimicry that by means of irony provides agency to the postcolonial subject (“Of Mimicry and Man” 122) the Crakers are supposedly ‘hard-wired’ to emulate other species’ behavior. Crake has borrowed various genes from these species to ensure that mating and reproduction follow a certain non-violent pattern. Like the female baboon who presents her swollen rump to males to indicate that she is in heat, the female Crakers indicate their willingness/ability to mate by displaying their blue abdomen and buttocks. However, in contrast to Baboons which are known to violently fight over the prerogative to mate females, the female Crakers choose their partners and jealousy or “hard feelings” do not arise. All negative aspects of human sexuality like rape, prostitution, suicide, and murder are thus prevented. The gender-relations are clear-cut and there is no more



confusion about (non-)consensual sex. The Crakers' ritualistic mating dance is a pastiche of mating rituals from the animal world and 'savage' dances.

Crake's intention in designing the Crakers was to create a superior race that will not evolve into a sophisticated civilization ("they would have no need to invent any harmful symbolisms, such as kingdoms, icons, gods, or money" [305]), humanoid breed that would be 'closer' to nature, yet with its instincts genetically redirected and altered. But despite Crake's insistence on biological determinism the lines between 'culture' and 'biology' are blurred. Innate hybridity and genetically wired instances of mimicry take on forms that Crake did neither foresee, nor intend.

#### **LOCATING HYBRIDITY AND MIMICRY IN BHABHA AND ATWOOD**

In the *Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha sets out to outline a revision of theories of western (post-)modernity from a postcolonial perspective. Using dense prose and at times indecipherable jargon he argues for cultural 'hybridity' that "entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (*Location of Culture* 4).<sup>90</sup> He locates hybridity in the "Third Space" that "though unrepresentable in itself, [...] constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation to ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (37). Bhabha calls for a sojourn into an "alien territory" that "may reveal the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualize an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*" (38). What distinguishes hybridity then from concepts such as "diversity," "pluralism," or "multiculturalism" is, for one, the

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<sup>90</sup> In 1998 the journal, *Philosophy and Literature*, awarded Homi Bhabha the second prize in their „Bad Writing Competition,” which “celebrates bad writing from the most stylistically lamentable passages found in scholarly books and articles” ([http://denisdutton.com/bad\\_writing.htm](http://denisdutton.com/bad_writing.htm)).

absence of a hierarchy implied by difference and secondly the notion that hybridity negates concepts of authenticity or originality. While “multiculturalism” suggests the co-existence or side-by-side of two or more distinct cultures, hybridity implies an ‘innate’ mingling of culture. Thus, claims to purity and authenticity of culture are challenged and a notion of culture can emerge that surpasses hierarchical thinking or the notion of cultural superiority. Along similar lines, the practice of ‘mimicry’ is a subversive act that parodies the oppressor’s cultural practices: “Mimicry represents an ironic compromise. [...] Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (“Of Mimicry and Man” 122).

*The Location of Culture* contains twelve verbose essays in which Bhabha elaborates on his concept of “Third Space,” hybridity and mimicry from various perspectives.<sup>91</sup> Bhabha’s theoretical approach is indebted to Fredric Jameson, Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault among others. But as Lawrence Phillips has rightly observed, “the very nature of Bhabha’s discursive technique presents a vista of ever shifting theoretical terminology, punning and neologisms, that tend to deflect a consistent line of rigorous questioning traceable across the entirety of the collection [*Location of Culture*]” (2). Bhabha’s eclectic use of various theoretical approaches and terminologies does unfortunately not strengthen but rather undermine his arguments. A *New York Times* article published November 17, 2001 quotes Mark Crispin Miller, professor of media studies at New York University as commenting on Bhabha with, “One could finally argue that there is no there there, beyond the neologisms and latinate buzzwords. Most of the time I don't know what he's talking about” (“Harvard’s Price Catch – A Delphic Postcolonialist” 15). What Miller has

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<sup>91</sup> He also chooses different names for this concept, for example in the essay entitled “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern” Bhabha references hybridity as “postcolonial contramodernity” (175).

uncouthly identified as “no there there” points at a major inconsistency within Bhabha’s theory and the utopic notions within his work.<sup>92</sup>

Bhabha, who was born into a Parsi family in India, educated in India and Oxford, England, supposedly approaches theory and literature from a postcolonial perspective by the merit of being born in a country that was formerly under British colonial rule. His academic writing however is preoccupied with poststructuralist theory, a distinctly Western phenomenon. Bhabha references the postcolonial perspective in his own theory, and as I have already mentioned, calls for a revision of theories of postmodernity from a postcolonial perspective. This call, however, remains to a certain degree unanswered by his own writing. His prose texts have a level of abstraction that ironically enough does not allow for any particular postcolonial experiences to be included. Bhabha’s concept of ‘culture’ willfully ignores the ‘socio-economic’ realities of the colonial/postcolonial subject.<sup>93</sup> Contemporary cultural criticism as formulated, for example, by Lefebvre or Jameson focuses on the dialectic between the production and reproduction of social space and material base. With regard to postmodernism/late capitalism, Jameson (who Bhabha frequently references) does not just argue that the ‘social’ is responsive to changes in economic relations, but also that the social praxis shapes the material and imaginary landscape (cf. “Postmodernism, or, the Cultural

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<sup>92</sup> Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge have observed that “the semantic slippage of ‘postcolonialism’ is far advanced in Bhabha’s writings, where it has drifted into the sphere of ‘postmodernism’” (“What Was Postcolonialism?” 382), thus suggesting that in Bhabha’s theoretical approach postcolonialism and postmodernism are inseparably linked, if not ultimately the same. Furthermore, as Mishra and Hodge point out, this pairing of theorems by Bhabha is “far from being a productive alliance,” it rather repeats “the old relation between colonizer and colonized, in which ‘postcolonialism’ is appropriated and exploited to legitimate the metropolitan term and its metropolitan theorist” (282). This criticism of Bhabha’s concept of the intersection between the postmodern and the postcolonial also seems to resonate in Alex Callinicos’ observation that “postcolonial thought is the last refuge of postmodernism” (“Wonders taken for Signs: Homi Bhabha’s Postcolonialism” 98). There appears to be a perceived incommensurateness between postmodern and postcolonial culture that is grounded in the fact theories of postmodernism reflect on a Western ethnocentrism that is contradicting the very notion of postcoloniality. Or put differently, the praxis of theories of postmodernism is itself an act of colonization. Consequently, the postcolonial subject assumes agency only “inside discourse, a particular specialist discourse at that” which only creates the “illusion of power” (“What was Postcolonialism?” 384). This, I would claim, is the utopic dimension of Bhabha’s work. Bhabha’s intense textualism cannot address the uneven histories of colonial struggles in many parts of the world and certainly not the struggles of First Nation peoples.

<sup>93</sup> One cannot help but wonder why Bhabha does not take the perspective of Cultural Materialism/New Historicism into account.

Logic of Late Capitalism”). Yet, this link between socio-economic and ‘cultural’ space is completely ignored by Bhabha. In his work, there seems to be little or no link between actual spaces (geographical as well as socio-economic) and abstract spaces (discourse, signs, signification) making it widely utopic.

In his essay “The Postcolonial and the Postmodern – The Question of Agency” Bhabha refers to a passage from Roland Barthes’s *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975). In this passage Barthes describes a “daydream” in which through a babble of voices he believes to recognize a linguistic structure that is “*outside the sentence*” (49). This structure is as Barthes observes “very cultural and very savage” (49), it is “a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the tongue, not the meaning of language” (66-67). Taking up this idea, Bhabha argues for “the author as an enunciative space; the formation of textuality after the fall of linguistics; the agonism [sic] between the sentence of predicative syntax and the discontinuous subject of discourse [...]” (*Location of Culture* 180). While Barthes makes a connection between body and language (“*carnal* stereophony: the articulation of the *tongue*, not the meaning of language”) that parallels the distinction of savage/culture, Bhabha once more ignores these ‘material’ or ‘bodily’ implications and the colonial undercurrents of this statement. He abstracts Barthes’ concept of “outside the sentence” to the degree where it is solely concerned with language and thus never really acknowledges the ‘bodily’ implications of Barthes’ statement. I would rather suggest that Bhabha considers the author an abstract concept purely concerned with language than something that is grounded in some kind of ‘bodily’ performance or experience. The same holds true for Bhabha’s concept of ‘mimicry’ which as a “comic turn” (122) does not “merely ‘*rupture*’ [colonial] discourse but transforms it into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a ‘partial’ presence” (“Mimicry and Man” 123). Like hybridity Bhabha surprisingly locates the notion of mimicry exclusively in the realm of

discourse. But, as I would argue, particularly the concept of mimicry opens up possibilities of performative acts in which the body (and not just language) plays a significant role. The re-enactment of colonial practices such as, for example, the wearing of wigs and robes by judges in former British colonies, constitute instances of mimicry that produce irony, “slippage, and excess” (122).

Bhabha's strong focus on discourse in itself would not be bothersome, since it is a well established notion of poststructuralist theory that the author is dead. However, since Bhabha's objective is to provide *agency* to those “who have suffered the sentence of history” (172), his insistence on locating the subject and agency purely within the realm of discourse is at least astounding, all the more so since he acknowledges in another essay that the exercise of colonial power “demands an articulation of forms of difference - *racial and sexual*” (*The Location of Culture* 67), which clearly refers to the body. Culture in Bhabha's terms is discourse (and discourse only) and is neither located in the body nor in some kind of socio-economic reality. He claims that a postcolonial perspective will emerge through a “radical revision of the social temporality in which emergent histories may be written, the rearticulation of the ‘sign’ in which cultural identities may be inscribed” (171) but how exactly this differs, for example, from a feminist or queer perspective remains widely nebulous. Finally, we can only conclude that according to Bhabha culture is *located* in discourse and *postcolonial culture* is located in the unrepresentable and utopic “Third Space” of enunciation.

For Bhabha *agency* is closely linked to the capacity and ability to narrate, re-narrate and thus alter and disrupt colonial discourse. He suggests that “outside the sentence” is not an alternative to discourse but rather a *supplementary*. In terms of postcoloniality, (though ironically he does not mention this aspect explicitly) “outside the sentence” is a “discourse that is indeed one of indeterminism, unexpectedness, one that is neither ‘pure’ contingency

nor negativity nor endless deferral” (181) and thus constitutes a Third Space in which postcolonial agency can be performed. Enunciations “outside the sentence” are then not a complete rejection of or antithesis to (colonial) discourse, as a supplement, allow the individual to emerge as agent. It is through this form of discourse that “culture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity [sic] – between arts and politics, past and present, the public and the private as its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment and liberation” (175).

These apparent weaknesses in Bhabha’s theoretical approach deem his notion of hybridity and “Third Space of Enunciation” utopic<sup>94</sup>, although his concept of mimicry, if expanded to performance and the body, might be useful tool of political criticism. Postcolonial agency as outlined by Bhabha can only exist in theory but is hard to imagine or even practice in some kind of ‘real life’ notion. However, it is worthwhile taking a closer look at Atwood’s text to see how the notion of hybridity is negotiated in *Oryx and Crake*. As I will argue, in the futuristic, post-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake* hybridity is not just represented in terms of discourse but also in terms of the body. The dichotomy of savage/civilized that preoccupied so much of colonial discourse is taken up and renegotiated in terms of hybridity of the body and of discourse. In the post-apocalyptic world portrayed in *Oryx and Crake* Western civilization and with it the colonial powers exercised by the Western world has come to an abrupt end. The apocalypse marks a caesura, literally as well as metaphorically. Not just discourses of ‘enlightenment,’ ‘progress,’ and ‘science’ are nil and void but also the material artifacts that come along with these abstract concepts are gone for good. The omnipresent media discourse of the pre-apocalyptic world has fallen silent. While

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<sup>94</sup> As Sabine Sielke has pointed out there is a “link between modernist utopias [of difference without hierarchy] and the notion of irony as a structural principle” not just in Bhabha but also in other post-modernist theories. Furthermore, “both [modernist utopias] are echoed and transformed by post-modernist theories transmut[ing] ironic distance into a utopian space.” (“Spatial Aesthetics, Ironic Distance, and Realms of Liminality: Measuring Theories of (Post-)Modernism” 78)

roaming through a deserted housing estate Snowman (formerly Jimmy) finds a radio and turns it on, “White noise, more white noise, more white noise” (273).

Thus, Snowman finds himself in a world that is constituted of the wreckage of an earlier world. “Ersatz-reefs of rusted car parts” (3) line the coast and the once urbanized and industrialized landscape has turned into a jungle where “some kind of vine is growing everywhere, draping the windowsills, climbing in through the broken windows” and “soon all signs of human habitation will be gone” (222). The collapse of civilization is followed by a ‘return of nature’ (though ‘nature’ has been irrevocably changed) that forcefully takes over the landscape.

However, as I will argue here, the strong jungle imagery is also a rewriting of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and ultimately a re-negotiation of the culture/savage dichotomy in terms of postcolonial hybridity. As I would suggest, this form of ‘intertextuality’ used by Atwood is not identical with Bhabha’s notion of ‘mimicry’ but creates a similar ironic effect.<sup>95</sup> Although Bhabha remains fairly vague on how he imagines textual mimicry one might assume that by analogy to the notion of mimicry in biology, a postcolonial author would seek to emulate the *form* (e.g. a sonnet) of a particular colonial literary tradition (“*the same but not quite*”) and thus create moments of slippage and excess. Atwood’s text, however, does not adhere to the exact same ‘form’ (i.e. for example, narrative perspective, tone, etc.) but rather ironically signifies on Conrad’s text and thus undermines and parodies his colonial narrative.

The fictional narrator of *Heart of Darkness* is Marlow, an Englishman who took assignment as a ferry-boat captain of a Belgian trading-boat company. Being a frame-narrative Marlow’s account is filtered by yet another unknown, shadowy narrator. Marlow, symbolizing

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<sup>95</sup> As Sabine Sielke has observed, “as theories of the post-modern, post-colonial, and most particular, of performativity conceive of the political in terms of discursive space and situate subversive power in the realm of intertextuality, in ironic distance and parody [...]” (“Spatial Aesthetics, Ironic Distance, and Realms of Liminality” 76). This observation appears to hold equally true with regard to Atwood’s literary text that uses these exact same strategies to question the position of the (post-)colonial subject.

the liberal English tradition, reports about his travels to what the reader may identify as Belgian Congo under the rule of King Leopold II and the colonial atrocities he encounters, especially at the hands of Kurtz, an ivory-procurement agent with a reputation of being exceptionally cruel. The novella has often been interpreted as a parable for human's ability to be double-natured but as Chinua Achebe has rightly observed, this level of abstraction ignores the colonial undertones of the book ("An Image of Africa" 9). Achebe furthermore points out that "Heart of Darkness projects the image of Africa as 'the other world,' the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization" ("An Image of Africa" 3). In *Heart of Darkness*, Africa merely serves as setting and backdrop against which "man's [read: western civilization's] vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality" (3). Africa becomes "a metaphysical battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity" thus "eliminating the African as human factor." (9) <sup>96</sup>

Like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, who reports about the gifted but morally misguided Kurtz, Snowman tells the story of Crake. Kurtz and Crake both have initially 'good' intentions but over the course of the story become morally corrupted. Kurtz turns himself into a charismatic semi-god to the 'brutes' of the Congo and thus obtains huge amounts of ivory. Crake, though fiercely rejecting the idea of deities in his creation of the Crakers, ironically not just acts 'as god' in creating the Crakers but later on is also worshipped by the Crakers as a God-like figure.

In the following I will analyze a passage from *Oryx and Crake* that echoes, yet also parodies, Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*:

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled

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<sup>96</sup> Since the 1970s Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, a piece of highly-acclaimed British literature taught at English Departments around the world, was harshly criticized by scholars associated with postcolonial theory. Achebe was among the first and most outspoken of these postcolonial critics. Today most syllabi also include postcolonial critical perceptions of the book along with the original text.



round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roots, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stomping, and bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. [...]

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there – there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were – No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know that was the worst of it – this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity – like yours – the thought of your remote kinship with wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. (*The Heart of Darkness* 105)

In the passage above Marlow describes his impressions upon cruising the Congo River. The jungle he encounters appears as if it was an unknown planet; crude, prehistoric and alien. He fancies being among the first men to take possession of this “accursed inheritance” but realizes that it would come at the high cost of “excessive toil.” Through the dense vegetation he witnesses what appears to be a ritual dance performed by natives. The natives are not described as wholesome bodies but rather as the sum of their “black limbs” that are rhythmically moving, clapping and stomping to a song of yells. This ‘assembly’ of limbs seems to negate their status as being fully human. And their rhythmic dance echoes stereotypes of black culture being exclusively ‘performative.’

Marlow goes on to explain that the “earth seemed unearthly” which once again points at the notion that the jungle is alien and eerie. But what terrifies him most is that his initial reaction to deem the black bodies with their rolling eyes and horrid faces “inhuman” cannot hold up to the recognition that they are human indeed but at the same time “ugly.” The wild dance, horrid faces, and rolling eyes, as ugly as they are, remind Marlow of their “remote kinship” to himself. He is terrified and fascinated by this recognition. And he seems to imply that the ‘savages’ represent the dark side or the ‘otherness’ (read: savage, wild) within himself.

The following excerpt is taken from *Oryx and Crake*. It does not just illustrate the parallels between *Oryx and Crake* and *Heart of Darkness* but also shows the (ironic) re-narration of Marlow’s encounter with the ‘brutes’:

As he [Snowman] approaches the village, he hears an unusual sound – an odd crooning, high voices and deep ones, men’s and women’s both – harmonious, two-noted. It isn’t singing, it’s more like chanting. Then a clang, a series of pings, a boom. What are they doing? Whatever it is, they’ve done never done anything like it before.

Here’s the line of demarcation, the stinky but invisible chemical wall of piss renewed by the men each day. He steps across it, moves cautiously forward, peers from behind a shrub. There they are. He does a quick head count – most of the young, all of the adults minus five – must be a fivesome off in the woods, mating. They’re sitting in a semi-circle around a grotesque-looking figure, a scarecrowlike effigy. All their attention is focused on it: they don’t at first see him as he steps out from behind the shrub and limps forward.

*Ohhhh*, croon the women.

*Mun*, the men intone.

Is that *Amen*? Surely not! Not after Crake’s precautions, his insistence on keeping these people pure, free of all contamination of that kind. And they certainly didn’t get that word from Snowman. It can’t have happened.

Clank. Ping-ping-ping-ping. Boom. *Ohhh-mun*.

Now he can see the percussion group. The instruments are a hubcup and a metal rod – those create the clanks – and a series of empty bottles dangling from a tree branch and played with a serving spoon. [...] He feels as if he’s watching his day-care rhythm band of long ago, but with huge green-eyed children. (*Oryx and Crake* 360)

This excerpt depicts a scene that is similar to the one described in the excerpt from *Heart of Darkness* quoted earlier. Snowman (Marlow) observes how the Crakers (natives) perform a ritualistic dance with singing and music. In contrast to the ‘savages’ of *Heart of Darkness*, the Crakers dance around an effigy and their song is enhanced by the use of instruments made up of miscellaneous items of an earlier civilization. In contrast to Marlow, who was fascinated yet terrified by the “black limbs” dancing, the performance of the Crakers strikes Snowman as somewhat ‘harmless’ and ‘innocent.’ He is not terrified by what he witnesses but rather reminded of his “day-care rhythm band [...] but with huge green-eyed children.” The kinship/difference Snowman recognizes between himself and the Crakers is constructed quite differently from the one Marlow believes to recognize between himself and the “mass of black limbs.” Narrative tone and perspective in the excerpts from *Heart of Darkness* and *Oryx and Crake* differ considerably. The uncanny suspension in Conrad’s text is turned into curious observation and ironic distance in Atwood’s text. The effect created by this is that the reader instantly perceives of the Crakers as innocent, harmless, and childlike. Yet, as

Snowman knows, the Crakers, despite their ‘childlike’ appearance, are considerably more apt to survive in the harsh environment than he is. This seems to suggest a sort of difference that does not imply hierarchy per se. The very notion of hierarchy is rather ambiguous. The link colonial discourse frequently establishes between supposed ‘biological superiority’ and ‘advanced’ cultural ‘sophistication’ is being unsettled. Though Snowman is more ‘sophisticated’ culturally, his chances of survival in a hostile environment he is not well adapted to put him into a ‘biologically’ inferior position, ultimately levelling out notions of hierarchy. All in all, then, this scene is highly ironic and can be understood as a parody not just of *Heart of Darkness* but also of other cultural texts that described ‘black’ or ingenuous cultures as being ‘performative’ and yet ‘primitive.’<sup>97</sup>

When Snowman believes to hear the Crakers chant “Amen,” he quickly discards this idea, assuring himself that they can only know what they have been taught. Yet, although Crake tried to make sure that the Crakers did not get infested with his own civilization, they develop human qualities by inventing effigies and ritualistic dances no one has introduced them to before, pushing further the texts negotiation of what constitutes humanity and civilization. On a textual level this might not count as an instance of mimicry since, as we learn through the text, the Crakers lived in complete isolation from the culture that created them, on a meta-level though Atwood’s portrayal of the Crakers’ ritualistic dance might be an instance of re-narration that ironically parodies notions of the ‘noble savage.’

Furthermore, ironically, the Crakers use *debris* of the perished civilization that created them and thus enact a form of ‘material’ *hybridity*. Snowman eventually finds out that what he

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<sup>97</sup> I am here particularly referring to notions about African-American culture. For secondary literature see e.g.: Annemarie Bean/ Hatch, James V./ Mc Namara, Brooks, (eds.), *Inside the Minstrel Mask - Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*. Hanover/ NH : Wesleyan University Press, c1996 and W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cane: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop*. Cambridge/ MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

identifies as their chanting “Amen” in fact means “Snowman” (361). One of the Crakers comments on the effigy with, “We made a picture of you, to help us send out our voices to you” (361). As Snowman realizes, this signals the beginning of not just the beginning of an understanding of communication and language but ultimately also of ‘culture.’

Achebe’s claim with regard to *Heart of Darkness* that “man’s vaunted intelligence” is finally mocked, holds also true for the Crakers. It is not just highly ironic that ‘his’ Crakers incorporate and recycle miscellaneous debris of the civilization that created them for their own cultural practices, also the mere fact that they invent a kind of religious symbolism mocks Crake’s intentions:

*Watch out for art, Crake used to say. As soon as they start doing art, we’re in trouble. Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake’s view. Next they’d be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods, and the afterlife, and sin, and Linear B, and kings, and then slavery and war. Snowman longs to question them – who first had the idea of making a reasonable facsimile of him, Snowman, out of a jar lid and a mop? (361)*

Inside Paradise Crake had ‘programmed’ the Crakers to remain ignorant, as ignorance, in his opinion, is the precondition to remain innocent. In contrast to the prevailing view of the savage in *Heart of Darkness*, lack of civilization is seen as an asset rather than a liability. Crake adheres to stereotypes of the noble savage since he believes that any kind of civilization as expressed through the invention of symbolism signals the inevitable downfall into slavery, war, and destruction. Thus, however, Crake repeats the savage/civilized dichotomy, producing a colonial subject. The Crakers are defined as ‘other,’ i.e. standing opposite of civilization. Both the Crakers, as viewed by Crake, and the ‘savages’ of the Congo delta for Marlow merely serve as a foil to define what counts as ‘human.’ But as the reader learns, Crake’s plan fails, since the Crakers begin to invent symbolisms and a hybrid culture that is made up of the discursive and material remains of an earlier civilization.

Significantly, not just the Crakers emerge as cultural hybrids but also Snowman, who finds himself in a world of transformed power relations. Again, I would like to quote from *Heart of Darkness* to illustrate the changed notions of nature, survival, and cultural superiority in post-apocalyptic world of *Oryx and Crake*. In *Heart of Darkness* the encounter with the jungle is described as,

All that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. [...] The fascination of the abomination –you know. Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate. (526)

Snowman experiences his encounter with the post-apocalyptic world similarly. He feels powerless, longs to escape (e.g. 275-77), and struggles to survive, yet his relationship to the 'wild men' is distinctly different. To Snowman they are not a "mass of black limbs" but rather "retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program":

Every time the women appear, Snowman is astonished all over again. They're every known color from the deepest black to the whitest white, they're various heights, but each one of them is admirably proportioned. Each is sound of tooth, smooth of skin. No ripples of fat around their waists, no bulges, no dimpled orange-skin cellulite on their thighs. No body hair, no bushiness. (100)

Snowman admires the female Crakers and their flawless and exotic appearance but is not sexually attracted to them.<sup>98</sup> Their bodies are too perfect and lack the "thumbprints of human imperfection" (101) that used to arouse him. Not surprisingly he references the advertisement industry that frequently used "retouched photos" to create the illusion of perfection. But the excerpt above is also significant because it reveals the status of Snowman in this new world. Compared to the Crakers, Snowman represents an excess of imperfection. For them and for the text, he is figured as 'other.' He is a "creature of dimness, of the dusk" (6) and the Crakers "mostly want to look at him, because he is so unlike them" (7). He disgusts the Crakers and

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<sup>98</sup> This also seems to ironically signify on the fact that biological hybrids are sterile.

they perceive of him as a “separate order of being” (101). The roles of observer and observed have shifted, the gaze has been reversed, since Snowman is not just in the minority but also so distinctly different from the Crakers. In the eyes of the Crakers and in Snowman’s self-perception, he is a curiosity of nature, a creature whose existence is constantly contested:

The Abominable Snowman – existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards, ape-like man or manlike ape, elusive, known only through rumors and through its backward-pointing footprints. Mountain tribes were said to have chased it down and killed it when they had a chance. They were said to have boiled it, roasted it, held special feasts; all the more exciting, he supposes for bordering on cannibalism.

For present he’s shortened the name. He’s only Snowman. He’s kept the *abominable* to himself, his own secret hairy shirt. (7-8)

This description of Snowman establishes the connection between him and an ape-like creature that was allegedly hunted and feasted upon by “mountain tribes.” Though there is no proof of the existence of an abominable snowman, it is an important part of the mythology of native tribes of the Himalaya region; a fact that is ironically mirrored in the worship of the “Snowman”-effigy by the Crakers. Though the Crakers, who are vegans, have no desire to hunt Snowman, let alone feast on him, they consider his awkward appearance and manners rather detestable. We also learn that he has shortened his name to “Snowman,” another ironic statement not just on his fading status as the only human survivor of the world-wide catastrophe but also on his inaptness to stand the climate change due to global warming.

Snowman who once was the privileged member of a developed society is now seen as a curiosity, a freak. Like the yeti believed to live in the Himalaya, his body is somewhere on the border of human and animal. In this sense Snowman’s body represents ‘hybridity.’ Noteworthy in this context is the construction of the biological notion of ‘hybridity.’ Generally understood as a “cross between species,” Snowman’s hybridity exemplifies that the supposedly immovable lines between species (in this case human and animal) become blurred in the absence of authoritative scientific discourse. Though Atwood imagines postcolonial

hybridity as being genetically encoded (the Crakers), she avoids the ‘essentialist trap’ by constructing a notion of hybridity that is not just determined by genes but also by discourse and performance. In fact, hybrid subjectivity and thus agency is defined in the field between discourse and the body. In the following section of this chapter I will take a closer look at the role of discourse and narration in the construction of postcolonial hybridity.

### **DISCOURSE AND HYBRID SUBJECTIVITY**

The notion that discourse and writing allows the assumption of subjectivity is present in both the theoretical texts of Homi Bhabha and the literary works of Margaret Atwood. As I have pointed out earlier Homi Bhabha defines postcolonial agency exclusively in terms of discourse. A radical revision of signs, social temporality and rewriting of dominant colonial narratives are at the heart of his theoretical writings about the formation of postcolonial subjectivity and agency. In the introduction to *The Location of Culture* entitled “Border Lives: The Art of the Present” Bhabha writes:

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the ‘present’, for which there seems to be no proper name other than the current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix ‘post’: *postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism...*

The ‘beyond’ is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past [...] We find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance or direction, in the ‘beyond’ [...] The move away from the singularities of ‘class’ and ‘gender’ as primary conceptual and organizational categories, has resulted in an awareness of the subject positions – of race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation – that inhibit any claim to identity in the modern world. What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. (1)

I quote at length here because this passage is relevant in many respects, especially with regard to the formulation of hybridity as presented in *Oryx and Crake*. As the title of the introduction to *Location of Culture*, “Border Lives: The Art of the Present” suggests hybridity is intrinsically

linked to an acknowledgement of the present as the locus and tempus in which hybridity is produced. This is crucial, since only through 'living in the present' can a redefinition of social temporality take place. That, however, does not mean that the past, historical experiences and collective memories of a colonial past have become obsolete or meaningless but rather that these experiences and memories are constantly contested and renegotiated in the present. Bhabha outlines the 'present' as being characterized as 'marginal' or as he puts it, "survival [...] on the borderlines." This is marked by insecurities in terminology as well as subjectivity. It lacks, as Bhabha points out, a proper name; it can only be described by referring to it as "*post*:" post-modern, post-colonial, post-feminist. Bhabha claims that subjectivity is no longer only defined along the lines of class and gender but also along other categories such as "generation, institutional location, geopolitical locale, sexual orientation," etc. which produces complex figures of difference and identity. He equates notions of "generation," "institutional location," and "geopolitical locale" with notions of class and gender thus implying that they operate on the same 'level' and in the same or a similar way. Whether these notions are really 'equals' is debatable, important in this respect is that Bhabha perceives of hybrid subjectivity as being complex and flexible.

Crucial for an understanding of Bhabha's concept of subjectivity is his remark that one needs to "think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences" (1). In *Nation and Narration* (1990) Bhabha makes a similar point when he declares that "nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (1).<sup>99</sup> Echoing Benedict Anderson, Bhabha argues that 'nation' is a

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<sup>99</sup> One might argue that "nation" is a rather narrow concept that does not find application in *Oryx and Crake* for the simple fact that there is no mention of nation-states or government whatsoever in the book. But as this remark also reveals Bhabha equates the notions of "nation" and "narration" with regard to their realization and power within



discursively created phantasm, an *imagined* community that can only be “fully realized in the mind’s eye.” ‘Nation’ and ‘identity’ emerge out of ‘circulating’ narratives that are based on the myth of a single origin. Resistance to these totalizing narratives of origin that on an individual scale prescribe a monolithic notion of subjectivity and on a larger scale construct the rhetoric ideal of the nation

contest the traditional authority of those national objects of knowledge – Tradition, People, the Reason of State, High Culture, for instance – whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation as holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity (3).

Hybridity is then a rejection of the rhetorical and narrative ideals of “national objects of knowledge” and the emergence of counter-narratives and “the moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences” (1).

Theoretical as Bhabha’s comments on the role of narratives in the formation of notions of nation and subjectivity may be, I would still like to point at some parallels between his comments and theme of “narrative and writing” in the works of Atwood. It appears that especially Bhabha’s comment about “national objects of knowledge” seems to resonate with one aspect of Atwood’s writing that June Deery has pointed out: “[A]lmost every major theme in Atwood’s writing – the formation of the feminine identity, the construction of personal past and cultural history, body image, colonization – all are at some point described in terms of the basic laws of physics” (“Science for Feminists: Margaret Atwood’s Body of Knowledge” 223). Though much less broad in scope, Atwood also seems concerned with those “objects of knowledge,” i.e. tradition, people, reason of state, high culture, and particularly scientific knowledge, that form and inscribe identity. Both Bhabha and Atwood seem to attack those (colonial) ‘bodies of knowledge’ that prescribe certain dominant perceptions of gender, race and, to a lesser degree, class.

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the mind. And narration, after all, is also one of the key instances in the formation of identity and hybrid subjectivity in *Oryx and Crake*.

Literary criticism of Atwood's work has frequently emphasized that Atwood's texts stage writing and subjectivity as inseparably intertwined. *Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity* (1994) edited by Colin Nicholson, for example, is a collection of essays that makes exactly this point. Though slightly different in focus and outlook all essays in this collection deal with the relationship of writing or narrating and the construction of subjectivity, focusing almost exclusively on feminist and postcolonial notions of subjectivity in Atwood's writing. Interestingly, these two notions are hardly ever considered simultaneously but rather as two separate configurations of subjectivity that exist next to each other rather than two aspects of the same notion of subjectivity. The strong focus on Atwood as a feminist writer can also be observed in other collections of essays such as *Margaret Atwood's Fairy-Tale Sexual Politics* (1993), *Various Atwoods* (1995), and a collection of essays entitled *Modern Critical Views – Margaret Atwood* (2000) edited by Harold Bloom. Most of these feminist readings of Atwood's text are based on the fact that her protagonists have been exclusively female<sup>100</sup> and that her poetry assumes a 'female voice' while dealing with feminist issues. Postcolonial notions in Atwood's writing come into play, as I have mentioned earlier, with regard to survival either in the wilderness or in a hostile, colonizing society that superimposes its values, gender roles and historiography onto the individual.

Deery has also argued that the "hard sciences" as "predominately male discourse" ("Science for Feminists: Margaret Atwood's Body of Knowledge" 223) stand in stark opposition to the "more feminine arts and letters" (224) in her texts and that "Atwood has been able to use [...] bodies of knowledge to describe metaphorically women's constraints and their adaptive strategies" (224). However, if we consider Bhabha's point that colonial discourse heavily relies on "narrative[s] of national progress" (*Nation and Narration* 1) – and by

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<sup>100</sup> Among her most prominent texts are *Surfacing* (1972), *Lady Oracle* (1976), *Life before Man* (1979), *Bodily Harm* (1981), *Robber's Bride* (1993), all of which feature female protagonists.

that he implicitly also refers to stories of progress that are often coupled with scientific discourse – Atwood’s writing does not just have implications on the construction of gender but also on postcolonial subjectivity. Deery’s reading of Atwood is representative of a plethora of feminist readings of Atwood’s texts that often struggle to simultaneously read her texts in terms of feminism and postcolonialism. Not surprisingly, in the light of these feminist readings many critics have been puzzled by the fact that the protagonist of *Oryx and Crake* is a (white) male. I would argue that Atwood’s choice of a male protagonist in *Oryx and Crake* signals a shift in emphasis in her writing. Atwood’s earlier fiction, especially *Cat’s Eye* (1988) and *The Robber Bride* (1993), seems to suggest that what links science, imperialism, and patriarchy is control of the body. Just as man have subdued the female body, so colonists have been depicted as conquering a nature identified as female. But with regard to *Oryx and Crake* it is not just the female body that is being colonized, but the entirety of humanity. A male protagonist seems to convey this idea better than a female protagonist who would automatically invite a certain mode of (feminist) reading. I would furthermore suggest that a male protagonist is an ironic gesture aimed at criticizing a still virulent notion of humanity that is based solely on male subjectivity. It is against these narratives of ‘success,’ ‘progress,’ and male individuality that are a vivid part of Western self-perception since the Enlightenment that Atwood seems to write.<sup>101</sup>

The fact that the protagonist of *Oryx and Crake* is male is then also significant in another respect, i.e. the construction of subjectivity through narration/discourse. The cultural significance that has been attached to the act of narrating and writing in the construction of subjectivity, especially male subjectivity, is ironically undermined in the formation of hybrid identity in *Oryx and Crake*. The assumption of female subjectivity through narrating and

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<sup>101</sup> This resentment finds its most vivid expression in the figure of Crake whose project of creating a better world is much less altruistic than vain and idle, complementing his own ego and reaffirming his status as a man and scientist.

writing has always been culturally and politically contested, especially when competing with claims that presuppose a male prerogative on these notions. A male protagonist therefore allows for forms of irony that would not work equally well if the protagonist was female, mainly because the ‘problems’ Snowman encounters are genuinely known and identified with female writing and the construction of female subjectivity.

As I have suggested earlier, hybrid subjectivity in *Oryx and Crake* is constructed through both discourse and the body. The human body *itself* becomes the colonized territory. In the pre-apocalyptic world this colonization of the body takes place (quite literally) through biotechnology and through systems of signification that are infiltrated and taken over by a normative scientific discourse. In an argument between Jimmy and Crake, Crake, for example, claims that art and culture only exist because the artist wants “a stab at getting laid.” (168) Literature, or to use Crake’s words “doodling, scribbling, and fiddling” (168) convey according to Crake no meaning whatsoever. He views human behavior as merely biologically determined and thus claims that female artists are “biologically confused” (168). Crake’s views are utterly essentialist and in the greater context of the novel give expression to a certain anxiety with regard to the possible decline of Critical discourse not just in the academia but also in a larger societal context in the future. In Atwood’s portrayal of a dystopian future, the role of literature is utterly diminished. Jimmy, who is a “nonspecific” (209), i.e. someone who is not academically talented in the sciences, was not accepted to one of the prestigious science-oriented universities. Instead he attends the run-down Martha Graham Institute<sup>102</sup>, “an Arts-and-Humanities college at some time in the last third of the twentieth century, with special emphasis on the Performing Arts” (186). But in the present of the novel, the focus in curricula at Martha Graham has shifted from teaching the arts to

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<sup>102</sup> Martha Graham (1894-1991) was a pioneer of modern dance in the 20th century.

providing ‘ancillary’ services to big bio-tech companies. Jimmy takes classes like “Applied Logic, Applied Rhetoric, Medical Ethics and Terminology, Applied Semantics, Relativistics and Advanced Mischaracterization” (187) intended to prepare students for jobs in “well-paid window dressing at a big Corp or flimsy rate-cut stuff for a borderline one” (188). Jimmy’s only exposure to literature is in form of “Visual Arts” classes in which he creates movie adaptations of canonized and popular literary works on his computer such as a “naked *Pride and Prejudice* and a naked *To the Lighthouse*” (187). The text suggests that these texts are part of popular culture but neither their origin nor their cultural significance is known. They are merely the collage material for postmodern pastiches.

After the apocalypse Jimmy/Snowman still remembers bits and pieces of literary and popular texts (from advice books, advertisements, etc.) and single words that are ‘swirling’ around in his head. His memory mirrors the fragmented and de-contextualized discourses he encountered before the apocalypse. They are not ‘coherent’ texts or narrations but fragments. He “whisper[s] words to himself. *Succulent. Morphology. Purblind. Quarto. Frass*” and the reader learns that they “had a calming effect” (344) on his troubled mind. In an attempt to validate his existence Snowman considers writing down his experiences:

Or he could keep a diary. Set down his impressions. There must be lots of paper lying around, in unburned interior spaces that are still leak-free, and pens and pencils; he’s seen them on his scavenging forays but never bothered taking any. He could emulate the captains of ships, in olden times – the ship going down in a storm, the captain in his cabin, doomed but intrepid, filling in the logbook. There were movies like that. Or castaways on desert islands, keeping their journals day by tedious day. Lists of supplies, notations on the weather, small actions performed – the sewing on of a button, the devouring of a clam.

He too is a castaway of sorts. He could make lists. It could give his life some structure. But even a castaway assumes a future reader, someone who’ll come along later and find his bones and his ledger, and learn his fate. Snowman can make no such assumption: he’ll have no future reader, because the Crakers can’t read. Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past. (41)

As the passage above suggests, after some time as the only human survivor in a destroyed world Snowman’s mind settles on the idea that ‘discourse’ and the construction of

subjectivity through writing has disappeared. He contemplates putting down his impressions and daily routines into writing. It is not from a lack of writing utensils that he chooses not to write but rather from his awareness that his narration will not ‘matter,’ that there are no future readers of his testimony. Interestingly, he realizes that he could only “emulate” the travel logs of ship captains. Snowman references forms of discourse (travel and adventure literature) that were already considered ‘outdated’ and obsolete in the simulacral pre-apocalyptic world but somewhere in his mind he still associates the assumption of subjectivity and notions of agency with the process of writing. His attempt to “put his existence into writing” reminds of Robinson Crusoe, who, stranded on an island, confirms his existence through the writing of a diary. Snowman thus refers to a form of writing (adventure and travel literature) that once – even before his own lifetime - was believed to provide the author with a sense of ‘selfhood.’ The act of writing served the purpose of providing ‘authentic’ testimony of one’s own being. Snowman realizes however that this form of discourse is forever lost. In a world that virtually lacks a ‘civilized’ society with all its formal and informal practices of discourse, the act of writing has become obsolete and unimportant.

The failure to assume subjectivity through writing implies that the hierarchy of power and systems of signification rooted in a colonial past no longer function properly. With regard to gender this also means that Snowman’s failure to assume male subjectivity along these traditional lines disturbs the colonial gender hierarchy. In the absence of other humans, an audience and a social and cultural context that would give his writing meaning this part of his ‘masculinity’ has also become dysfunctional. In addition to this, a lack of human sexual partners makes it impossible for him to sire children contesting his masculinity on yet another level. His inability to procreate creates a form of hybridity that contests the division of sex and gender. Biological hybrids (though the Crakers are an exception) are generally unable to

procreate, yet strictly speaking Snowman is not a biological hybrid but within the 'sexual economy' of the post-apocalyptic world he 'functions' as sterile a hybrid. Notions of gender and sex collapse into meaninglessness. In the absence of a gendered/sexual 'other' of his own species, he can no longer assume any kind of masculinity.

Knowledge of discourses of the past, though their origin proper is nebulous to him, deems Snowman a cultural hybrid. His existence forms the link between culture past and present out of which hybridity emerges signifying on cultural practices of the past, yet redefining and changing them. Significantly, the transition from Jimmy to Snowman, the hybrid, is not just marked by the apocalypse but more importantly by an act of writing. During his last days inside Paradise Jimmy writes a letter explaining to the afterworld how Crake had plotted the catastrophe that erased mankind (346). At that point Jimmy still believes that writing has meaning and that things need explanation. Only a little later, though, when Snowman returns to Paradise, he perceives of Jimmy as a person distinctly different from himself.

Here the handwriting stops. Whatever Jimmy's speculations might have been on the subject of Crake's motives, they had not been recorded.

Snowman crumples the sheets up, drops them onto the floor. It's the fate of these words to be eaten by beetles. (347)

Snowman looks at his own handwriting as that of a different person. His life and existence and the meaning of writing has so dramatically changed after the exodus from Paradise that Snowman now assumes that the letter he has written will be of no importance in the future. The words he has written will decompose ("eaten by beetles") just like everything else that belonged to the former civilization he lived in. There are only 'remnants' of the past culture left. Immediately afterwards, in the chapter tellingly entitled "Remnant" (348-54), Jimmy 'declares' his new hybrid subjectivity:

“My name is Snowman,” said Jimmy, who had thought this over. He no longer wanted to be Jimmy, or even Jim, and especially not Thickney: his incarnation as Thickney hadn’t worked out well. He needed to forget the past – the distant past, the immediate past, the past in any form. He needed to exist only in the present, without guilt, without expectation. As the Crakers did. Perhaps a different name would do that for him (348-49)

This declaration is a defining moment in the formation of Snowman’s new hybrid subjectivity. As Sherill Grace has pointed out with regard to *Lady Oracle*, *Handmaid’s Tale* and *Cat’s Eye*, Atwood “questions the human desire for origins and our construction of genealogies, in an individual woman’s attempt to tell her life-story” (“Gender as Genre: Atwood’s Autobiographical ‘I’” 191). As we learn with regard to Snowman, in *Oryx and Crake* this deconstruction of notions of originality and genealogy is of major importance once more. Not just that Snowman realizes that traditional forms of discourse associated with (autobiographical) writing and thus selfhood have become obsolete, he also increasingly rejects notions of origin and genealogy. He rejects his old self, his old names and reinvents himself by giving himself a new name.<sup>103</sup> His new subjectivity is marked by a rejection of the past and the wish to only live in the present. This notion echoes Bhabha’s demand to contest narratives of origin and supports his claim that hybridity means “living on the borderlines of the ‘present’” (*Location of Culture* 1). Yet as Bhabha explains, “that new horizon” is not “a leaving behind of the past” (1) and as for Snowman, the voices in his head, the remnants of the past, and his former life as Jimmy are inescapable. However, old systems of signification can no longer be easily referenced. Time and temporality now follow a different, indefinable course; the time is “zero hour” (3). Unsurprisingly, despite Snowman’s resolution to exist only in the present this experience is disturbing to him, “it causes a jolt of terror to run through him, this absence of official time. Nobody nowhere knows what time it is” (4). He tries to recollect his thoughts and contemplates what to do in his situation:

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<sup>103</sup> The act of giving oneself a new name was also considered a decisive act for former slaves after the abolition of slavery. Naming oneself provides a sense of selfhood and self-ownership. In that sense this detail suggests that Snowman is “freeing” himself from the constraints and colonial practices of his former life as Jimmy.



“It is the strict adherence to daily routines that tends towards the maintenance of good morale and preservation of sanity,” he says out loud. He has the feeling he’s quoting from a book, some obsolete, ponderous directive written in aid of European colonials running plantations of one kind or another. He can’t recall ever having read such a thing, but that means nothing. There are a lot of blank spaces in his stub of a brain, where memory used to be. Rubber plantations, jute plantations. (What was jute?) They would have been told to wear solar topis, dress for dinner, refrain from raping the natives. It wouldn’t have said *raping*. Refrain from fraternizing with the female inhabitants. Or, put some other way...

He bets they didn’t refrain though. Nine times out of ten.

“In view of the mitigating,” he says. He finds himself standing with his mouth open, trying to remember the rest of the sentence. He sits down on the ground and begins to eat the mango. (4-5)

The only ‘advice’ Snowman can remember seems to be coming from some kind of book advising its readers to “adhere to daily routines” and thus remain ‘sane.’ Snowman believes that this book is an advice book written at the time of European colonialism, possibly in the nineteenth century but he is not even sure if he read it himself or if this advice is just some kind of ‘circulating’ discourse, a form of ‘cultural knowledge’ that is present but cannot be traced back to its origin. He realizes that these directives would have been ‘obsolete’ and considered ‘ponderous’ during his own lifetime, yet it is something he remembers and associates with his own situation. His incapacitated mind reveals other associations that also have a colonial context: rubber plantations, jute plantations, dress suitable for tropic climate (solar topis) and a ‘civilized’ dinner, rape of natives. Snowman’s mind is a play-back of signs that signify on colonial history, yet he can make no or very little sense of them. Though he was never witness to this kind of colonial past directly he references these signs. They seem to be the root and cause of his present situation. However, they are empty and even if he tried to follow these directives, they would not change his situation nor bring back the kind of civilization that they seem to define. They ironically resonate with Bhabha’s observation that postcolonial hybridity emerges out of “scattered historical contingencies” (*Location of Culture* 171). He is incapable of ‘reproducing’ discourse of earlier times. His attempts are incoherent utterances that completely lack meaning. While from Bhabha’s theoretical

perspective, this might be read as “ideal” cultural hybridity, Snowman’s vain attempts to ‘reconstruct’ earlier notions of discourse are rather a sign of the importance he still attributes to coherent narration and discourse in the construction and affirmation of his own identity. “He sits on the ground and begins to eat the mango” than ironically signals verbal sophistication, the construction of subjectivity and notions of ‘civilization’ through discourse has given way to very basic needs, such as eating.

While Snowman still remembers bits and pieces of earlier discourse he also invents ‘history’ or rather lore for the Crakers and thus engages in the production of ‘culture’:

They are staring at Snowman expectantly. They must be hoping he’ll talk to them, but he isn’t in the mood for it today. At the very most he might let them see his sunglasses, up close, or his shiny, dysfunctional watch, or his baseball cap. They like the cap, but don’t understand his need for such a thing – removable hair that isn’t hair – and he hasn’t yet invented a fiction for it. [...]

They ask questions at least once a week. He gives the same answer. Even over such a short time – two months, three? He’s lost count – they’ve accumulated a stock lore, of conjecture about him: *Snowman was once a bird he’s forgotten how to fly and the rest of his feathers fell out, and so he is cold and he needs a second skin, and he has to wrap himself up. No: he’s cold because he eats fish, and fish are cold. No: he wraps himself up because he is missing his man thing, and he doesn’t want us to see. That’s why he won’t go swimming.* [...]

Now they all begin at once. “Oh Snowman, oh Snowman, can we have feathers too, please?”

“No” he says.

“Why not, why not?” sing the two smallest ones.

“Just a minute, I’ll ask Crake.” He holds his watch up to the sky, turns it around on his wrist, then puts it to his ear as if listening to it. They follow each motion, enthralled. “No,” he says. “Crake says you can’t. No feathers for you. Now piss off.” (8-9)

The passage above illustrates how Snowman invents fiction and thus culture in order to explain the world for the Crakers. But this ‘invention of culture’ is not one-sided or simply imposed upon the Crakers. They too invent lore and narratives about Snowman, the mysterious creature, physically so distinctly different from themselves. The Crakers speculate about why Snowman’s body is only partially covered with ‘feathers’ and why he wraps himself in a blanket. Snowman’s ‘difference’ is inscribed onto his body (feathers, dress) and ironically the supposed absence of his “man thing.” Old discourses and artifacts (e.g. the dysfunctional

watch) are integrated into the emergence of these new narratives.<sup>104</sup> Ironically, Snowman's watch once capable of measuring "official time" is now dysfunctional and converted into a "communication device" Snowman uses to address the "god-like" mythical figure of Crake, who has also become an integral part of the Crakers' lore. The broken watch signifies on the fact that 'official time,' i.e. social temporality, institutionalized frameworks of references, and 'civilization' are no longer existent but it also ironically suggests that the hybrid 'culture' of the Crakers is made up of "debris" (discursive as well as material debris) of the earlier colonial culture.

In the end the text foreshadows the development of a "culture" through the Crakers. The lore and myths they develop about their own origin and Snowman, Crake but also Oryx strongly remind of "myths of origin" of various "primitive" human cultures and societies. This fact seems to suggest that history starts repeating itself. One might even argue that despite Crake's careful planning, the text suggests that the development of culture, myths, questions about origin and destiny are inevitable whenever there is language and narration present. Though Crake claimed to have genetically eliminated the need for "symbolic thinking" (361) in the Crakers, their interaction with Snowman and their exposure to language and narration that contains abstract concepts soon awakens in them the desire to know more and to develop explanatory narrations about where they come from and the world they are exposed to. In the end, the text leaves the question whether or not this will lead to a social hierarchy, repression, the development of a 'civilized society' etc. open. Like Bhabha, who locates hybrid culture as "living in the present" the hybrids of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* live their lives an 'everlasting present' where notions of temporality

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<sup>104</sup> This, of course, could also be read as a form of mimicry.

no longer exist. Accordingly, the book closes with the words “Zero hour, Snowman thinks. Time to go” (374).

### **TOWARDS A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF POSTCOLONIALITY**

With Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and Homi Bhabha’s theoretical approach, I have looked at two different notions of the postcolonial body. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity and mimicry are, as I have argued, exclusively located in the realm of culture and that culture in turn is viewed by him as language, i.e. narratives, only. Bhabha’s approach does not just ignore the socio-economic realities of the postcolonial subject, especially if we think of ‘Third World’ countries, but - despite his acknowledgement that difference is formulated as being racially and sexually inscribed into the body – also undermines the body as a locus of the exercise of power as well as agency. This is especially problematic with regard to mimicry, since this concept would lend itself particularly well to notions of performativity that are not just rooted in language but also in the body. Bhabha’s refusal to take the physical body into account is, of course, a strategic move on Bhabha’s part, who seeks to avoid the ‘essentialist trap’ that ascribes certain cultural features to notions of ‘race’ or ‘sex.’ Defining hybridity *not* in terms of the body but exclusively in terms of discourse places him alongside other poststructuralist theorists, making his own claims on ‘postcoloniality’ sometimes hard to localize on a ‘concrete’ level of fiction and narration. Bhabha attributes language and discourse ‘reality-changing’ properties and thus claims that in order to establish hybrid subjectivity and hybrid agency one needs to radically review the sign, question narratives of origin, and ‘live in the present’ without forgetting the past. While I would not necessarily dispute the importance of discourse and narration in forming identity, subjectivity and imagined community, nation, and generation, Bhabha’s approach strikes one as being utopic.

This is not to reject his approach completely but to understand it as a somewhat ‘incomplete’ attempt to describe the ‘postcolonial condition,’ and last but not least, to give agency to hybrid postcolonial subjects that are already living and writing, for that matter, the kind of hybridity Bhabha verbosely prescribes as a remedy.

It is a lack of *discourse about the body* in Bhabha’s theories that makes his approach so slippery and so incomplete. What, if not *discourse and the body* comes to our mind when we are confronted with a term as ‘hybridity’? The cultural and biological implications are, of course, not neatly separated, nor do they align as two different ‘sets of knowledge.’ Since Foucault we know how one operates upon the other, how scientific discourse, in this case the pseudo-scientific notion of ‘human races,’ and cultural beliefs nourish each other and create hierarchies of power that ultimately make up social realities.

Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* also takes up the notion of hybridity and ‘imagines’ it in a way that becomes the more meaningful when put in dialogue with Bhabha’s theory. Atwood does not just criticize the neo-colonial implications of globalization, retells formative colonial texts, such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, but also imagines hybridity as being both ‘biologically’ and culturally determined. I put ‘biologically’ in inverted commas since the very notion of what constitutes the ‘biological’ or ‘*natural*’ is contested and challenged in *Oryx and Crake*. Atwood draws our attention not just to what might be possible in terms of biotechnology in the future but also, mainly through means of irony, points out the interdependence of supposedly ‘hard scientific knowledge’ and cultural beliefs. The lesson learned is that we are not just the sum of genetic codes of our bodies but that our existence is also determined by discourse. The Crakers, genetic hybrids, turn out to be not quite as they were genetically ‘planned’ by Crake. Their existence is determined by discourse just as much as genes. The same holds true for Snowman, who though biologically not a hybrid of

different species, is perceived of as ‘other’ by the Crakers due to his ‘abominable’ appearance. Both are hybrids but in the ‘society’ or narrative universe Snowman and the Crakers form no one is more privileged than the other. They signify difference without hierarchy and in that they ideally incorporate the utopic dimension of Bhabha’s theory.

Atwood’s literary treatment of the notion of hybridity is highly ironic. Not just that the ‘new hybrid existence’ she describes is made up of remnants of an earlier culture; in her imagination the complete erasure of our present civilization and bodies of knowledge is a presupposed condition for the emergence of hybridity. Her greatest accomplishment, however, is to imagine hybridity in a way that transcends essentialism. Though she takes up racist discourses (and ironically subverts them), she does not fall into the ‘essentialist trap’ that Bhabha so vehemently seems to avoid altogether by *not* mentioning the body. This is of course possible, because literature can do things theory cannot. In her own words,

Literature is an uttering, an outering, of the human imagination. It puts the shadowy forms of thought and feeling – heaven, hell, monsters, angels, and all – out into the light, where we can take a good look at them and perhaps come to a better understanding of who we are and what we want, and what our limits may be. Understanding the imagination is no longer a pastime or even a duty but a necessity, because increasingly, if we can imagine something, we’ll be able to do it. (“The Handmaid’s Tale and *Oryx and Crake* in Context” 517).

Atwood’s comment is undoubtedly directed at the future of the sciences and the chimeras that might arise out of the unregulated use of bio-technologies. However, her comment is also significant in the postcolonial context. As I have shown, Atwood does not just imagine scientific chimeras but also challenges us to think hybridity and postcoloniality along unfamiliar lines by problematizing scientific discourse as colonial discourse. The hybrid bodies of *Oryx and Crake* emerge out of discourses of ‘progress’ and colonial social practices, yet after the apocalypse they truly become *post*-colonial by incorporating the past and living in a non-hierarchical present.

**DIALOGUES BETWEEN LITERATURE AND THEORY: AFTERWORD**

Based on my initial assumption that Theory has produced ‘utopic bodies,’ whereas literature has taken a dystopic stance towards the changing political, technological, and cultural landscape since the 1970s, I set out to investigate how and why their projections differ. Furthermore, I asked what strategic political claim each discourse makes through the trope of the body, and, what the consequences of these claims on notions of subjectivity are. As I have suggested, the insight into the discursive constitution of the body has served Theory not just as a powerful tool of social criticism but also held a great potential for utopic discourse. Theory thus produced ‘critical utopias’ that trace ‘new vectors of opposition’ along the lines of the body and its discursive construction. The utopic nature of these ‘vectors of opposition’ arises out of the fact that the subjectivities they attempt to formulate are rarely in accordance with social realities or even the ‘actual’ physical bodies of the subjects these theories attempt to represent.

As my discussion has shown, each theoretical text makes very specific strategic claims on notions of subjectivity. Yet despite their differences, these texts all share the notion that in order to renegotiate the discursive construction of the body and thus refute the repressive mechanisms of discourse, one has to problematize the role of the author. Gilles Deleuze’s ‘Body Without Organs’ is a rejection of notions of subjectivity that are based on discourses of physical unity and wholeness. Furthermore, his notion of ‘rhizomatic writing’ does not just try to erase the Author as a source of originality but consequently also refutes the notion that subjectivity is derived from authorship. Deleuze cites William Burroughs’s texts as examples of ‘rhizomatic writing’ but as I have argued Burroughs’s and Deleuze’s political objective are incommensurate. In contrast to Deleuze who seeks to establish a venue for radical democracy through the inclusion of all difference possible, Burroughs’s literary texts convey anxiety

towards the female subject and seek to establish gay male subjectivity based on conventional notions of the male author. In Burroughs's texts the integrity of the gay male subject is constantly threatened either physically by women (they slaughter and symbolically castrate them) or by the effeminate gay who becomes a 'Talking Asshole' and thus denies his 'true' hypermasculine identity. This does not just run counter to Deleuze's political objective but also reaffirms rather conventional notions of authorship and masculinity which Deleuze explicitly scolds as repressive and fascist. So despite the fact that Deleuze frequently cites Burroughs and their concepts of 'rhizomatic writing' and 'cut-up' bear some resemblance, they arrive at distinctly different answers to questions of authorship, the body, and subjectivity.

The dialogue I staged between Donna Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" and William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* has also shown that both texts negotiate subjectivity along the lines of discourse and the body. Each text projects a future in which the coupling of man and machine will be a reality and questions of subjectivity will have to be renegotiated. Donna Haraway's notion of 'cyborg' is the utopic draft of a future in which the body will be elevated to a *material-semiotic agent*. Dualisms like man/woman or human/machine and the repressive systems of signification that derive from these dualisms will be erased. Emphasizing the role of myth and fiction Haraway insists that the cyborg will be "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" ("Manifesto" 7). But instead of subjectivity being derived from notions of authorship and originality, Haraway sees cyborg subjectivity as being grounded in the participation in greater structures of technologically processed information. The body's DNA as well as the intellectual contributions of the cyborg to a global network of technology will create a technological polis in which the lines between



individual self and collective self blur. Thus, conventional notions of subjectivity no longer apply.

William Gibson's draft of the future is less optimistic. In the world portrayed in *Neuromancer* cyborgs are already a reality but their lives are far from being blissfully utopic. The cyborgs of *Neuromancer* participate in cyberspace ('a voluntary hallucination') but despite the pleasure the individual potentially gains from escaping the prison of his/her own flesh, their existence as cyborgs also constantly undermines their subjectivities. The loss of subjectivity and originality is the downside of an unregulated capitalist system that has generated the cyborg. The text does not just draw an ambiguous picture of the cyborg but also signifies, as I have shown, on rather traditional notions of subjectivity and masculinity. Despite the visionary futuristic aspects of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, the text remains ambiguous not just towards the technological 'advancements' it portrays but also towards its own medium. In the end *Neuromancer* seems to express anxiety towards the loss of subjectivity based on authorship in a future that no longer values cultural production.

Finally, the dialogue I have staged between the writings of Homi Bhabha and Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx and Crake* has shown that they find different answers to questions of the body and subjectivity with regard to postcoloniality. As I have argued, Bhabha's concepts of 'hybridity' and 'mimicry' implicitly refer to the body but Bhabha's strong focus on theory, language, and culture makes his notion of 'hybrid subjectivity' utterly utopic and out of touch with the social and political realities of former colonized peoples. As I have argued, passages of *Oryx and Crake* can be read as an ironic re-narration of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Atwood's text thus engages in a form of 'intertextuality' that, similar to Bhabha's concept of mimicry, creates ironic effects and thus renegotiates the position of the (post)colonial subject. But her text also directly takes up the notions of

'mimicry' and 'hybridity' and negotiates them along the lines of the body. By presenting the Crakers of *Oryx and Crake* as biological as well as cultural hybrids, Atwood problematizes scientific discourse as colonial discourse. In the dystopic future outlined in *Oryx and Crake* scientific discourse enables the exercise of colonial power and replaces the cultural function of literature thus eliminating traditional notions of subjectivity. Atwood's text thus projects a dystopic future in which history will not only repeat itself but subjectivity will be contested once more.

In his 2004 essay "The Politics of Utopia" Frederic Jameson provocatively asks, "does this peculiar entity [utopia] still have a social function?" (1). He suggests that apparently "these elaborated social schemes of utopian thinkers [have] become as frivolous as they are irrelevant" and that the consumer culture of late capitalism has "rendered utopian fantasy and speculation as boring and antiquated as pre-technological narratives of space flight" (1). But despite this pessimistic assessment of the state of utopias, he goes on to conclude that "it is difficult enough to imagine any radical programme [sic] today without the conception of systemic otherness, of an alternative society, which only the idea of utopia seems to keep alive, however feebly" (1). Although utopic, the theoretical texts I have discussed in this dissertation serve, as I believe, an important social function. They are 'conceptions of systemic otherness' but this 'otherness' is not played out in elaborate fantasies of the ideal state, it is rather unreeled in strategic claims on subjectivity through the tope of the body. These utopias also do not try to limit our imagination to a particular ideal; rather they acknowledge that the claims on subjectivity they make are strategic and highly context-specific. It is, as I believe, the acknowledgement that various subjectivities may exist simultaneously that constitutes what Jameson has dubbed 'systemic otherness.' The critical

utopias of Theory thus help us to imagine radical political change and possibly a just and better society.

However, the dialogues I have staged between literary and theoretical texts have also shown that literature and Theory offer different answers to questions posed by a changing political, technological, and social landscape in the second half of the twentieth century. The dystopic scenarios outlined by the literary texts I have discussed are not just an articulation of cultural sentiments but also offer a perspective on the negative aspects of technological advancement and the (supposed) 'dissolution' of traditional notions of subjectivity. In fact, as I would suggest, these literary texts have been affirmative of traditional notions of subjectivity, despite or rather *because of* their anxieties towards its loss. Yet, they have also displayed a keen awareness of the ironies and conflicts involved in the formation of the subject in a post-modern context. In that regard, one could claim that these literary dystopias just like their 'counterparts,' the critical utopias of theory, are not 'closed' but are also always aware of the strategic and context-specific claims they seem to make. Literature is thus not only an important part of social criticism; a dialogue between literature and Theory can also offer us a more and complete and balanced perspective on social and political issues.

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## KURZFASSUNG

Der utopische Roman ist in der amerikanischen Literatur seit der Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts mit Ausnahme eines kurzen Wiederauflebens des Genres in der 1970er Jahren quasi völlig verschwunden. Er wurde abgelöst von Texten, die vernehmlich dystopisch oder zumindest mehrdeutig sind. Der Körper hat seit jeher der utopischen Literatur als Trope gedient, über die politische und philosophische Fragen verhandelt wurden. Im Gegensatz zu klassischen Utopien, die den Körper als Allegorie für die ideale organische Einheit des Staates benutzten (z.B. Platos *Republik*, Hobbes' *Leviathan* oder der „Volkskörper“ der Nazi-Propaganda), stehen postmoderne Texte diesen totalitären Ansprüchen meist kritisch gegenüber. Die Trope des „Körpers des Anderen“ d.h. des Körpers, der durch Marker wie *gender* oder *race* als „anders“ perzipiert wird, hat die totalisierenden Körperbilder älterer Utopien abgelöst.

Trotz dieser Verschiebung in der Literatur von utopischen zu dystopischen Texten ist die Utopie, wie ich in dieser Arbeit argumentiere, nicht vollständig verschwunden. Bei dieser These greife ich vor allem auf die Utopie-Definition Richard Saages zurück, der konstatiert, dass Texte, um als Utopien zu gelten, nicht nur „eine rational nachvollziehbare Alternative“ zu den bestehenden politischen und sozio-ökonomischen Umständen der jeweiligen Gegenwart aufzeigen, sondern auch epochenspezifische Innovationen aufweisen müssen (*Utopische Profile*, Bd. 4, S. 78). Diese innovativen Elemente sind laut Saage Vernunft, Freiheit und Gleichheit, das Streben nach Wohlstand und ökologischer Nachhaltigkeit, Minderheitenschutz und die Überwindung des Patriarchats. Da Saage seine Utopie-Definition auf literarische Texte begrenzt, sieht er (wie viele andere) daher mit dem Ende der 1970er Jahre auch das Ende der Utopie. Diese Sichtweise ist allerdings wie ich argumentiere problematisch, da sie nicht nur außer acht lässt, dass die Utopie nie nur rein literarischer Diskurs war, sondern auch, dass die von ihm genannten Kriterien wie Vernunft, Freiheit und Gleichheit, Minderheitenschutz, die Überwindung des Patriarchats, etc. im theoretischen Diskurs des Poststrukturalismus und besonders in dessen Behandlung des Körpers weiterleben.

Die oben genannten Kriterien zeichnen den Poststrukturalismus als Sozialkritik aus, deren Anwendung zu sehr *konkreten* politischen Maßnahmen wie z.B. *affirmative action*, *gender-mainstreaming*, *political correctness* etc. geführt hat. Gleichzeitig aber qualifizieren die radikalen

Gegenentwürfe zu der bestehenden Gesellschaftsordnung, die der Poststrukturalismus als Alternativen hervorgebracht hat, diesen theoretischen Diskurs als Utopie. Dieses utopische Potential erwächst aus der Tatsache, dass der Körper seit den 1960er Jahren nicht nur zur primären Trope der Sozial- und Gesellschaftskritik geworden ist, sondern auch daraus, dass der Körper als rein diskursives Konstrukt verstanden wird. Ein wichtiger Meilenstein in dieser Entwicklung war die Veröffentlichung Michel Foucaults *Geschichte der Sexualität* (1976), in der Foucault argumentiert, dass der Körper nicht allein eine „biologische Tatsache“ sei, sondern vor allem ein kontextspezifischer diskursiver Effekt. Damit erhebt Foucault Körper und Diskurs zum zentralen Bezugspunkt seiner historischen und politischen Analyse. Die Einsicht, dass der Körper diskursiv konstituiert ist, erwies sich als besonders gangbare Argumentationsgrundlage für die Sozialkritik des Feminismus und der sogenannten *Minority Studies*. Es erlaubte ihnen nicht nur via Diskursanalyse kulturelle Vorurteile, sondern auch repressive Mechanismen aufzudecken und zu dekonstruieren. Gleichzeitig aber hat die Annahme, dass Körper und Subjektivität rein diskursiv konstituiert sind, wie ich meine, zu der Entstehung von *critical utopias* geführt, die mit den sozio-ökonomischen Umständen der Menschen, für deren Interessen sie vermeintlich eintritt, oft nur wenig zu tun hat.

Ich benutze den Begriff *critical utopias* in Anlehnung an Raffaella Baccolinis und Tom Moylans Konzept des Begriffs, die ihn benutzen, um den Zusammenhang zwischen den utopischen Romanen der 1970er Jahre und der politischen Protestbewegungen der 1960er Jahre hervorzuheben. Wie Baccolini und Moylan erörtern, unterscheiden sich die *critical utopias* von klassischen Utopien dadurch, dass sie den Vorstellungshorizont der Utopie nicht auf ein bestimmtes Ideal reduzieren, sondern stattdessen „offen“ lassen: *“By forging visions of better but open futures, these utopian writings developed a critique of dominant ideology and traced new vectors of opposition”* (*Dark Horizons* 2). Obwohl ich den Begriff der *critical utopias* nicht auf literarische, sondern auf theoretische Texte anwende, erscheint mir dieser Gebrauch gerechtfertigt, da die Theorie in ähnlicher Weise dominante Ideologien kritisiert und neue Vektoren der Opposition aufzeigt. Der „Körper des Anderen“ dient der Theorie dabei als wichtigste Trope diese neuen Vektoren der Opposition zu formulieren und ähnlich wie bei den *critical utopias* der Literatur existieren die utopischen Körperkonzepte der Theorie gleichberechtigt nebeneinander. Der Feminismus, die *African-American*, *Post-Colonial* und *Queer Studies* haben allesamt utopische Körperkonzepte hervorgebracht, durch die sie strategische Subjektbegriffe formulieren, um politischen Grund zu gewinnen.

Die Fragen, die aus dieser Beobachtung erwachsen, sind vielfältig. Welche politischen Ziele werden durch diese utopischen Körper verfolgt? Wie unterscheiden sich die utopischen Körper- und Subjektbegriffe der Theorie von den dystopischen Entwürfen der Literatur? Welche Konsequenzen haben diese Unterschiede für unser Verständnis von Subjektivität? Diese und andere Fragen beantworte ich in drei Kapiteln, in denen ich einen Dialog zwischen jeweils einem theoretischen und einem literarischen Text inszeniere. Um mein Argument zu unterstreichen, dass es sich bei der Formulierung utopischer Körperbilder in der Theorie und dystopischer Körper- und Subjektbegriffe in der Literatur keineswegs um ein isoliertes Phänomen handelt, entstammen die Texte, die ich in meiner Arbeit analysiere, alle ausschließlich dem Kanon zeitgenössischer Theorie und Literatur. Darüber hinaus habe ich, um eine sinnvolle Analyse im Rahmen eines *new historicist approach* zu gewährleisten, jeweils Texte gegenüber gestellt, die aus dem gleichen geschichtlichen und kulturellen Kontext entstammen und sich mit ähnlichen Fragestellungen und Problemen auseinandersetzen.

Im ersten Kapitel widme ich mich den Texten des französischen Philosophen Gilles Deleuze und William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* (1959) und seiner „retroactive utopia“ *Cities of the Red Night* (1981). Das Werk Gilles Deleuzes ist erst in der neueren Vergangenheit in den Kanon der theoretischen Texte, die an amerikanischen Universitäten gelehrt werden, aufgenommen worden. Dies hängt vor allem damit zusammen, dass seine Texte nur schwer zugänglich sind und sie im Gegensatz zu den Werken anderer französischer Philosophen, die große Popularität in den USA genießen, keine kohärente Kultur- oder Sprachtheorie formulieren. Dieser Mangel an Kohärenz hat dazu geführt, dass sich seine Texte als Mittel der Gesellschafts- und Sozialkritik innerhalb der Kulturwissenschaften nur begrenzt eignen. Wie ich allerdings argumentiere, ist es gerade dieser Mangel an Kohärenz, der Deleuzes philosophisches Werk als utopisch auszeichnet.

Die utopischen Momente seiner Philosophie verdichten sich zwei utopischen Körperkonzepten, die er in seinen Werken erläutert. Der „organlose Körper“ (*Tausend Plateaus* 1987) und der „maschinische Körper“ (*Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Anti-Oedipus* 1972) sind zwei zentrale Begriffe in Deleuzes philosophischem Werk. Beide Körperkonzepte weisen Vorstellungen von dem Körper als organischer Einheit zurück und widersetzen sich damit laut Deleuze kapitalistischen Zwängen und Vorstellungen wie Vernunft und Rationalität, die Deleuze als repressive Diskurse zu identifizieren glaubt. Während der

„organlose Körper“ als Kritik an der Psychoanalyse (Lacan und Freud) und den von ihr gesetzten normativen Vorstellungen von Vernunft und Rationalität gesehen werden kann, ist der „maschinische Körper“ eine Zurückweisung des kapitalistischen Grundprinzips der Ausbeutung. Durch beide Körperkonzepte versucht Deleuze einen Subjektbegriff zu formulieren, der humanistische Vorstellungen vom Subjekt, die auf körperlicher Einheit und Autorenschaft beruhen, zurückweist. Deleuze insistiert, dass diese äußerst abstrakten Körperkonzepte keine Metaphern seien, sondern eine politische Praxis darstellen. Die Frage, wie diese politische Praxis ausgeübt werden soll, bleibt von Deleuze allerdings weitestgehend unbeantwortet.

Eng verknüpft mit den Körpermodellen, die Deleuze in seiner Philosophie vorstellt, ist das Konzept des „rhizomatischen Schreibens.“ Deleuze recurriert bei seiner Formulierung des „organlosen Körpers“ vor allem auf das literarische Werk William S. Burroughs' und zitiert Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* mehrfach, um hervorzuheben, dass Burroughs' Werk als Prototyp des „organlosen Körpers“ zu lesen sei. Des weiteren vergleicht Deleuze sein eigenes Konzept des „rhizomatischen Schreibens“ mit dem von Burroughs oft benutzten stilistischen Mittel des *cut-up*. Da Burroughs ein prominentes Mitglied der Beat Bewegung der 1950er Jahre war und diese oft ausschließlich unter dem Vorzeichen der Kapitalismuskritik interpretiert wurde, liegt der Vergleich, den Deleuze macht, zwar nahe, ist wie ich meine allerdings weitestgehend fehlgeleitet. Wie ich durch zahlreiche *close readings* der Texte Deleuzes und Burroughs' zeige, ist diese Leseweise Deleuzes nicht aufrecht zu erhalten. Obwohl sowohl *cut-up* und rhizomatisches Schreiben als auch der organlose Körper und *the Talking Asshole* (*Naked Lunch*) einander oberflächlich betrachtet gleichen, verfolgen diese Konzepte jeweils unvereinbare politische Ziele. Während Deleuze eine Auflösung des Subjektbegriffs, der sich an körperlicher Einheit und Autorenschaft orientiert, aufzulösen sucht, implizieren Burroughs' Texte einen Subjektbegriff, der sich gerade an dem Autor (und hier besonders dem männlichen Autor) und dem hyper-maskulinen Körper orientiert. Daher kann, wie ich argumentiere, Deleuzes Ideal des *becoming-woman*, das er als Inbegriff der Abwendung von der repressiven Norm des männlichen Autors sieht, auch nicht auf Burroughs Werk angewendet werden. Im Gegenteil: Burroughs' Texte suggerieren die ständige Angst, dass das männliche Subjekt „verweiblicht“ und damit seiner Subjektivität beraubt wird. Dies konstituiert auch den dystopischen Moment in Burroughs Texten.

Im zweiten Kapitel inszeniere ich einen Dialog zwischen Donna Haraways „*A Manifesto for Cyborgs - Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s*“ (1985) und William Gibsons cyberpunk Roman *Neuromancer* (1984). Inspiriert von dem rasanten Aufstieg der Computertechnologie in den 1980er Jahren behandeln beide Texte die Frage nach der Zukunft des Menschen und seines Status als Subjekt in einer Zukunft, die durch technologischen Fortschritt geprägt ist. Haraways theoretischer Text sieht die technischen Entwicklungen und Möglichkeiten der Zukunft in einem positiven Licht und spekuliert, dass sie besonders dem Feminismus eine Grundlage bieten können, mit repressiven Binarismen wie Mann/Frau, Objekt/Subjekt oder Mensch/Maschine aufzuräumen bzw. sie so umzudeuten, dass sie nicht mehr repressiv sind. Der Begriff des Cyborgs, d.h. des *cybernetic organism*, dient Haraway dabei als Trope ihr utopisches Ideal zu formulieren.

William Gibsons *Neuromancer* bedient sich ebenfalls der Figur des Cyborgs, aber im Gegensatz zu Haraways positiver Sichtweise dieser möglichen technischen Entwicklung, verhandelt Gibsons Text diese Aussicht als ambivalent und bedrohlich.

Wie ich in diesem Kapitel erläutere, ist die Figur des Cyborgs und der Fragestellungen, die sich aus seiner Existenz ergeben, keineswegs neu. Der Begriff „Cyborg“ wird erstmals von Manfred E. Clynes und Nathan S. Kline in ihrem 1960 erschienenen Artikel „Cyborgs and Space“ verwendet, der sich mit selbst-regulierenden Apparaturen im Weltall beschäftigt. Wie Klaus Benesch allerdings in seinem Buch *Romantic Cyborgs* (2002) zeigt, ist die Vorstellung, dass Mensch und Maschine eine „körperliche“ Verbindung eingehen, bereits deutlich älter und kann in der amerikanischen Literatur bis in die erste Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts zurück verfolgt werden. Die sich entwickelnde Massenproduktion von Printmedien und die damit beliebige Reproduktion von Werken wurde, so Benesch, zum einen als bedrohlich empfunden, war zum anderen aber auch die Grundvoraussetzung dafür, Subjektivität erstmals anhand von Autorenschaft und Originalität zu definieren. Diese scheinbar paradoxe Entwicklung spiegelt sich, wie Benesch an zahlreichen Beispielen belegt, in der Figur des Cyborgs in der zeitgenössischen Literatur wider. Der Cyborg kann dabei als „symbolisches Spiegelbild“ des empfundenen Spannungsverhältnisses zwischen Mensch und Maschine interpretiert werden.

Die Fragen nach Subjektivität, Autorenschaft und Originalität werden, wie ich argumentiere, in Haraways und Gibsons Texten gleichermaßen aufgegriffen und neu verhandelt. Haraway begreift den Cyborg als Möglichkeit zur Schaffung einer *technological polis*, in der alle Mitglieder (und deren Körper) in einem technologischen Netzwerk miteinander verbunden sind. Das Geschlecht des Körpers und die mit Geschlechtlichkeit verbundenen repressiven Diskurse würden, so Haraway, an Bedeutung verlieren und so befreiende Momente hervorbringen. An die Stelle dieser Diskurse träte dann die Partizipation eines jeden einzelnen im Diskursgeflecht der technologischen Polis. Teil dieses Diskursen würde, so Haraway, nicht nur die „willentliche Kommunikation“ der Mitglieder der Polis, sondern auch deren DNS, die in Computercodes übertragen werden soll, und so zu diesem Diskursgeflecht und der Produktion von Wissen beiträgt. Wie ich argumentiere, erhebt Haraway damit den Körper zu einem „materiell-semiotischen Agenten“, der Autonomie und Handlungsfähigkeit in der Produktion von Wissen besitzt. Damit verwischt Haraway nicht nur die Grenze zwischen Mensch und Maschine, sondern folglich auch zwischen Objekt und Subjekt. Dies impliziert, dass sie den organischen Körper und den Subjektbegriff, der sich auf originäre Autorenschaft beruft zurückweist. In ihrer utopischen Vorstellung von der Zukunft werden somit durch die Auflösung des Binarismus von Mensch und Maschine neue Formen der Subjektivität geschaffen, die angeblich ausschließlich befreiende Momente haben. Wie ich allerdings in diesem Kapitel kritisiere, besteht einer der größten Widersprüche ihres utopischen Entwurfs darin, dass sie zum einen von der Auflösung von Binarismen wie Mann und Frau spricht, zum anderen aber weiterhin an einem Weiblichkeitsbegriff festzuhalten scheint, der sich auf biologische Funktionen reduzieren lässt.

In *Neuromancer* werden die Fragen, die durch die Möglichkeiten eines *Interface* zwischen Mensch und Maschine entstehen, völlig anders beantwortet. In der fiktiven Zukunft, die in *Neuromancer* porträtiert wird, sind Cyborgs bereits seit langem Realität. Wie ich durch zahlreiche *close readings* zeige, verhandelt der Text diese Kopplung zwischen Mensch und Maschine allerdings ambivalent. Fast alle Menschen in *Neuromancer* sind Cyborgs, d.h. sie haben entweder „maschinelle“ Körperteile, wie z.B. Prothesen, oder sie sind dadurch technologisch „aufgerüstet“, dass ihre Gehirne mit Computerchips ausgestattet sind oder ihre Körper technologisch verbessert wurden. Der Protagonist des Romans Case ist ein solcher Cyborg, aber seine Existenz ist weit von der utopischen Freiheit, die Haraway sich für den Cyborg ausmalt, entfernt. Case ist drogenabhängig und unfrei, da der Rechtsstaat in der

fiktiven Welt *Neuromancers* von global-operierendem brutalem Kapitalismus abgelöst wurde. Der „Wert“ eines Menschen wird nur noch anhand seiner technologischen Ausstattung bemessen. Der Computerchip in Cases Gehirn ermöglicht es ihm zwar, Teil der „Matrix“ zu werden und so in den Genuss sublimer Erfahrungen zu kommen, aber sowohl seine körperliche als auch seine finanzielle Existenz werden permanent von seinen skrupellosen Arbeitgebern bedroht, die seine technische „Ausstattung“ jeder Zeit zerstören und ihn somit verstümmeln können. Die Angst, zum *meat puppet* zu werden, d.h. zum Menschen, der auf seine körperliche Existenz beschränkt ist und nicht am *cyberspace* teilnehmen kann, überschattet nicht nur Cases gesamte Existenz, sondern auch die aller Menschen. Der technische Fortschritt ermöglicht damit nicht nur erhöhtes Vergnügen und Bewusstsein, sondern dient außerdem auch dazu, das Individuum auf die Summe seiner (technischen) Teile zu reduzieren und somit zum Objekt zu degradieren.

Gibsons Entwurf dieser dystopischen Zukunft widerspricht Haraways utopischer Sichtweise damit in einigen entscheidenden Punkten. Zum einen zeigt *Neuromancer* die möglichen negativen Aspekte einer Existenz als Cyborg auf, die sich sowohl direkt auf den Körper und dessen Unversehrtheit auswirken als auch auf die Stellung des Individuums innerhalb eines größeren gesellschaftlichen Gefüges. Anders als bei Haraway ist das Resultat des technischen Fortschritts nicht ein *Socialist Feminism*, sondern eine kapitalistische Gesellschaft, in der das Individuum ausgebeutet und unterdrückt wird. Wie ich in diesem Kapitel allerdings betone, scheint im Hinblick auf die Rolle des Subjekts und der Autorenschaft noch ein weiterer Punkt von Bedeutung zu sein. Während Haraway den Körper zum „materiell-semiotischen Agenten“ erhebt, der das Subjekt ultimativ befreien soll, nehmen die Cyborgs in *Neuromancer* zwar am Cyberspace teil und unterwandern diese Form des Diskurses z.T. sogar, verlieren ihren Status als Subjekt aber gleichzeitig in dieser „endlosen Komplexität“ (*Neuromancer*) dieser virtuellen Welt, die lediglich als Paralleluniversum zur harschen Realität existiert. Darüber hinaus bedient sich *Neuromancer* eher konventioneller narrativer Muster, die im starken Widerspruch zum futuristischen Inhalt des Buches stehen. Daraus läßt sich schließen, wie ich meine, dass *Neuromancer* die Auflösung des Subjekts, das sich auf Autorenschaft (und Körperlichkeit) begründet, ablehnt.



Im dritten und letzten Kapitel dieser Arbeit widme ich mich den theoretischen Texten Homi Bhabhas und Margaret Atwoods dystopischem Roman *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Ich lese diese Texte als post-koloniale Texte, die über den Körper versuchen einen post-kolonialen Subjektbegriff zu verhandeln. Über die Begriffe *mimicry* und *hybridity*, die beide an biologische Fachbegriffe angelehnt sind, versucht Bhabha in seinen Werken *The Location of Culture* (1994) und in seinem Essay „*Of Mimicry and Man*“ (ebenda), einen post-kolonialen Subjektbegriff zu entwickeln, der auf die ironische Repetition des kolonialen Diskurses abhebt. Bhabha argumentiert, dass das koloniale Subjekt nur durch die Wiederholung von kolonialen Diskursen und kulturellen Praktiken, die Momente der Ironie erzeugen, existieren und sich von der allumfassenden totalitären Kultur des Kolonialherren absetzen kann.

Wie ich in meiner Arbeit kritisiere, beschränken sich Bhabhas wortreiche Ausführungen zum einen nur auf Sprache und Kultur, obwohl sie vermeintlich auf den Körper abheben, zum anderen ist diese Beschränkung seines Subjektbegriff auf Diskurs und Kultur aber auch in höchstem Maße elitär und somit utopisch. Einen Zusammenhang zwischen seiner Theorie und der sozio-ökonomischen Realität post-kolonialer Nationen herzustellen ist daher nur schwer möglich.

Dem gegenüber steht Margaret Atwoods Roman *Oryx and Crake*, der sich oberflächlich betrachtet mit den negativen Auswirkungen wissenschaftlichen Fortschritts und fortschreitender Umweltverschmutzung beschäftigt. Wie ich allerdings argumentiere, problematisiert der Text wissenschaftlichen Diskurs als kolonialen Diskurs und wirft so eine Reihe von Fragen auf, die von Bhabha unbeantwortet bleiben. In der fiktiven Welt von *Oryx and Crake* hat die fortschreitende Globalisierung nicht nur zu einem weltweiten wirtschaftlichen Gefüge geführt, das dem klassischen Kolonialismus durchaus ähnlich ist, kulturelle Praktiken und Literatur sind zu einem baudrillard'schen Alptraum aus „Simulakra“ und „Simulationen“ geworden, die durch die allgegenwärtigen Unterhaltungsmedien wie Fernsehen und Internet pausenlos auf die Zuschauer eindröhnen. Diese dystopische Welt kommt allerdings zu einem jähen Ende als Crake, ein *biotech* Wissenschaftler, die gesamte Population der Erde durch einen im Labor geschaffenen Virus auslöscht. Der einzige Überlebende ist Jimmy, ein Freund Crakes, den Crake vorsorglich gegen den Virus geimpft hat, um sicher zu stellen, dass er die Pandemie überlebt und sich in dieser der „Postapokalypse“ um die *Crakers* kümmern kann. Die *Crakers* sind humanoide Kreaturen, die

Crake durch den Einsatz von *genetic engineering* in seinem Labor gezüchtet hat. Wie Crake glaubt, sind die Crakers den Menschen in vieler Hinsicht überlegen, weil sie die genetischen Merkmale und damit selektiven Vorteile verschiedener Tier- und Pflanzenarten in ihrem genetischen Code vereinigen. Darüber hinaus glaubt Crake auch, dass seine Crakers dem Menschen überlegen sind, weil sie genetisch keine Disposition zur Entwicklung einer Kultur haben und damit auch nicht in Stande sein werden, negative Eigenschaften, die mit der Entwicklung von Kultur einhergehen, wie z.B. Aggression, Rassismus, Sexismus, etc. zu entwickeln. Wie der Leser allerdings durch die Erzählung Jimmys, der sich nach der Apokalypse nur noch *Snowman* nennt, erfährt, entwickeln die Crakers eine Kultur, die sich ironischerweise aus den tatsächlichen und kulturellen Bruchstücken der untergegangenen Kultur zusammen setzt. Damit sind sie nicht nur genetische, sondern auch kulturelle Hybriden.

Der Text verhandelt den Zusammenhang zwischen wissenschaftlichem und kolonialen Diskurs, wie ich argumentiere, über die ironische Nacherzählung von Joseph Conrads *Heart of Darkness*, eines Textes, der als Paradebeispiel rassistisch-kolonialer Texte gilt, weil er Afrikaner als „humanoide Tiere“ porträtiert und somit als unterlegenes Gegenstück zur angeblichen überlegenen westlichen Zivilisation. Die Ironie dieses Vergleichs liegt nicht nur in den Parallelen zwischen der Darstellung der Afrikaner in *Heart of Darkness* und den Crakers in *Oryx and Crake*, sondern auch darin, dass sowohl *Heart of Darkness* als auch die Sichtweise Crakes in ihrem jeweiligen historischen und kulturellen Kontext als „wissenschaftliche Wahrheiten“ verstanden wurden. Damit parodiert *Oryx and Crake* den wissenschaftlichen Anspruch auf Subjektivität und unterstreicht darüber hinaus, dass Kultur und vor allem narrative Strukturen wichtiger Bestandteil in der Konstruktion des Subjekts sind.

Wie ich schlussfolgere ergänzt Atwoods Text damit Bhabhas Überlegungen, indem er über die Trope des Körpers nicht nur die neo-kolonialen Tendenzen der Globalisierung unterstreicht, sondern auch Fragen über die Existenz „biologischer“ und kultureller Hybriden aufwirft. Letztendlich macht der Text, wie ich meine, deutlich, dass diese vermeintliche Unterscheidung problematisch ist, da sie früheren pseudo-wissenschaftlichen Diskursen des Kolonialismus nur allzu ähnlich ist.