

VARIABLES OF THE HUMAN:  
THEORETICAL UTOPIANISMS AND HETEROTOPIAN SCIENCE FICTIONS

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
Department of English and Comparative Literature.

Chapel Hill  
2010

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## ABSTRACT

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“Variables of the Human: Theoretical Utopianisms and Heterotopian Science Fictions”  
(Under the direction of Gregory Flaxman)

My dissertation examines a diverse array of contemporary science fiction texts to explore the genre's immanent relation to critical theory and to stage science fiction as its own form of theoretical work. In general, critics have argued that science fiction functions as a privileged genre for critical theory because its estranging settings engage the reader in a dialectical thought process by encouraging comparisons between the real world and a textual one. But, recently, science fiction novelists such as William Gibson have eschewed estranging settings and instead written novels set in a contemporary milieu. Existing theories of the genre cannot accommodate such a transformation in the genre's basic structure. Thus, my project provides an account of the emergent relation between science fiction and critical theory that does not exclude such recent examples of the genre and that demonstrates how different sci-fi texts generate particular avenues of critical inquiry. Each of the critical enterprises that I explore in this dissertation (gender theory, psychoanalysis, postmodern theory, and memory's relation to film) represents a unique theorization of the human, its boundaries, and our theoretical attempts to understand it. My project comprises four major underlying goals. First, it reconceptualizes science fiction according to a methodology that does not exclude recent mutations in the genre. Secondly, it depicts the manner in which science fiction should be considered a significant genre for literary and critical theory by elucidating how it functions as its own

form of theoretical endeavor. Thirdly, it exhibits a new way of performing critical theory through the lens of literature; that is, it creates new possibilities for critical labor by demonstrating the radical kind of theoretical work that becomes possible only by means of genre structures. Finally, my dissertation illustrates why science fiction serves as one of the most compelling meditations upon the nature of the human and the all too human need to ascribe discrete values to that term. Indeed, my project argues that all critical theory—like all science fiction—essentially concerns the definition of the human and the attempts to theorize other states such as the non-human and the posthuman. Therefore, my project intervenes in a variety of critical discourses while simultaneously commenting upon the nature of critical theory itself.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Over the almost four years of writing this project from its initial conception during my doctoral exams through its outlining, development, and completion, I have been lucky to have the support and input of a large number of generous and influential individuals. First of all, I must express my sincere gratitude to Gregg Flaxman who has offered his tireless advice as my mentor for seven years now and who has guided me both with tough love and kind words throughout the realization of this project. Secondly, I must thank all the other professors who have provided me with support, guidance, and input over the years. In particular, Linda Wagner-Martin, Tyler Curtain, María DeGuzmán, and Priscilla Wald have been kind enough to read drafts of this project and offer advice from the initial prospectus stage all the way through the defense. In addition, I want to thank all of my friends and colleagues at the University of North Carolina who helped created a friendly and intellectual environment. I would like to especially thank my friends Nathaniel Cadle and Henry Veggian who read and offered advice on various chapters from this project. I would also like to thank my high school English teachers, Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. Harris, who helped start me on this long and arduous journey. Additionally, I would like to thank my undergraduate professors and advisors, particularly Helen Locke and LaRue Love Sloan, who helped prepare me for my graduate school career. Finally, I want to thank my family for all their love and support over the years. My father (Jerry Miller), my mother (Debbie Miller), and my sisters (Michelle Miller and Miranda Johnson) have never lost faith in my lengthy and strange educational

career. Above all else, I must sincerely express the debt of gratitude that I owe to my wife, Leigh, who has stood by me throughout the entire creation of this project without ever wavering in her emotional support. Without her as my best friend and partner, this project would not have been possible.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: THE HETEROTOPIAN GENRE: SCIENCE FICTION AS CRITICAL THEORY

Yet among all the distractions and diversions of a planet which now seemed well on the way to becoming one vast playground, there were some who still found time to repeat an ancient and never-answered question: “*Where do we go from here?*”

-Arthur C. Clarke’s *Childhood’s End*<sup>1</sup>

This suggests that far from being one code among many that a culture may utilize for endowing experience with meaning, narrative is a meta-code, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural message about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted.

-Hayden White<sup>2</sup>

There are no facts, everything is in flux,  
incomprehensible, elusive.

-Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>3</sup>

In his preface to *Difference and Repetition* (1968), Gilles Deleuze explains philosophy in relation to certain genres of fiction: “a book of philosophy should be in part a very particular sort of detective novel, in part a kind of science fiction.”<sup>4</sup> Deleuze argues that a philosophical treatise concerns a certain kind of cognitive work, a kind of work in which the author and the reader engage in the process of either seeking truth (as in detective fiction) or creating concepts (as in science fiction).<sup>5</sup> In essence, this project seeks to demonstrate how science fiction performs this function itself; that is, it generates its own theoretical concepts that concern the variables of the human. In particular, this

dissertation will explore four different types of such variables: the different characteristics that define humans (i.e., identity categories, such as gender), the forces that motivate them (desire), the social formations that dominate them (power structures such as discipline and control), and the power of memory that acts as the primary means by which humans order reality and generate discourse. Ultimately, this project will expand upon and invert Deleuze's statement by demonstrating how critical theory strays into the realm of science fiction and, simultaneously, how science fiction is always already critical theory.

Over the last decade, numerous critics, such as Carl Freedman and Steven Shaviro, have made similar comparisons between critical theory and science fiction. For instance, Freedman argues that science fiction and critical theory share certain "structural affinities" because "both speculate about the future."<sup>6</sup> This affinity relies upon a "shared perspective"; as he explains, "what is crucial is the dialectical standpoint of the science-fictional tendency, with its insistence upon historical mutability, material reducibility, and, at least implicitly, utopian possibility."<sup>7</sup> Such critics see science fiction as a conceptual form of narrative that inscribes a kind of space that allows them to examine "concepts that have not yet been worked out."<sup>8</sup> Shaviro cites both Deleuze and Freedman's observations on this relationship when he explains how he considers his own theoretical work to be a kind of science fiction. Katherine Hayles takes her criticism in a slightly different direction and claims that literature (i.e., science fiction) and scientific discourse create a reciprocal circuit of influence upon one another:

Nevertheless, I want to resist the idea that influence flows from science into literature. The cross-currents are considerably more complex than a one-way model of influence would allow [...] Literary texts are not, of course, merely passive conduits. They actively shape what the

technologies mean and what the scientific theories signify in cultural contexts [...] Culture circulates through science no less than science circulates through culture. The heart that keeps this circulatory system flowing is narrative—narratives about culture, narratives within culture, narratives about science, narratives within science.<sup>9</sup>

For Hayles, science fiction provides a means of interrogating the influences of science, particularly cybernetics, upon our ontological and epistemological concepts of humanity and knowledge. She uses science fiction texts to trace the history of cybernetics, which has drastically revised the way we understand thought, identity, and being. Hence, like Freedman and Shaviro, Hayles uses science fiction as the basis for staging her own theoretical endeavors. If so many critics have adopted science fiction as the foundation of their theoretical explorations, then we must ask why the genre provides such fertile ground for critical endeavors.

## **I. Towards a Theory of a Genre**

For the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, science fiction's pulp heritage hindered its acceptance into the pantheon of canon-worthy genres. In order to legitimate science fiction, critics of the genre began to trace out histories, to generate theories of the genre, and to demonstrate the possibilities inherent within the genre's form and content. In the struggle for science fiction's literary recognition, sci-fi critics began sketching genealogies that stretched back to a variety of "legitimate" authors in order to argue the case that science fiction represents a natural outgrowth of pre-existing literary modes, particularly those that dealt with the fantastic, the uncanny, and the marvelous, to use Tzvetan Todorov's designations from *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary*

*Genre.* Todorov famously defines the fantastic as a genre of literature that functions at least partially in the realm of the ambiguous. As he explains,

in a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is a victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination—and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality—but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. Either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being; or else he really exists, precisely like other living beings—with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently. The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the fantastic only exists as long as the nature of the events remains unclear. For example, Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Black Cat" (1843) never reveals whether the story's events derive from purely natural causes or whether there is actually some demonic force at work, and hence it is a story that remains in the realm of the fantastic. More recently, the films of David Lynch, particularly *Lost Highway* (1997) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001) never reveal whether the images that the viewer sees represent nothing more than the products of deranged states of consciousness or whether they actually provide us with glimpses of supernatural forces or other dimensions of reality. In general, science fiction plays with these categories in a variety of ways, but the genre transcends such categorizations by basing its stories on rational, scientific extrapolation. Hence, like Todorov's concept of the fantastic, science fiction exists in a liminal space between realism and fantasy, and it is this space between the words "science" and "fiction" that harbors the genre's critical capacity.

To argue for the legitimacy of the genre, critics began tracing these tendencies back to Romantic and Victorian authors of nineteenth-century Britain: Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells, and Jules Verne provided respectable figures to which the modern genre could be compared. Meanwhile, in 19<sup>th</sup>-century American literature, critics cited undeniably literary forebears such as Charles Brockden Brown, Edgar Allan Poe, and even Nathaniel Hawthorne.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps more radically, certain critics, such as Darko Suvin, have argued that the genre's origins lie with even more antiquated sources: Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726; 1735), Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Francois Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* books (1532-1564), or even all the way back to the comedies of Aristophanes. Many of these critics attempt to establish overarching theories of the genre that allow them to create strict demarcations of the genre's boundaries as well as to provide insight into its theoretical possibilities. To validate the genre, these critics intend their theoretical explications to act as litmus tests by delineating certain texts as genuine science fiction while labeling others as "inferior" genres such as fantasy, horror, or myth.<sup>12</sup> However, definitions of science fiction became increasingly difficult as the twentieth century progressed. For instance, the postmodern novel immediately problematizes any strict demarcations of science fiction by virtue of its inclusion of various science fictional elements: the works of William S. Burroughs, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Don DeLillo, Kathy Acker, Italo Calvino, David Foster Wallace, Mark Z. Danielewski, Angela Carter, Julian Barnes, and Jonathan Lethem all feature science fiction tropes as part of the otherwise realistic ontological framework of their novels, yet their works are seldom classified strictly as science fiction.

As science fiction has increasingly achieved ever more minimal recognition as a legitimate form of literature while simultaneously becoming an ever more slippery genre to define,<sup>13</sup> critics have increasingly turned away from examining the origins of the genre or defining its traits and instead moved towards investigating why science fiction seems to increasingly represent a privileged genre for contemporary critical theory. By adopting a similar approach to the genre, I intend to bypass the hopeless morass of taxonomic genre definitions and to instead argue that science fiction represents a specialized form of narrative that generates the potential for new kinds of critical work. Science fiction's basic nature resides in the particular kind of narrative space it creates—it is a heterotopian genre, a genre that exposes the reader to radical difference in a manner that destabilizes our normal concepts of reality—it inserts the marvelous into our reality in order to depict the manner in which every one of our stabilizing visions of reality ultimately proves to be nothing more than a fantasy. In *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson argues, “literary realism is a trick and a deceit, which has to collapse as soon as the idea of fiction dawns on its reader.”<sup>14</sup> Science fiction highlights the

“constructedness” of reality as such—the constructedness of science fact fully as much as of social institutions, the construction of gender and of the subjective fully as much as that of the objective categories through which we intuit the allegedly real world [...] everything we have hitherto considered to be natural and organic becomes as manufactured as the cityscape itself: and this is certainly a radical defamiliarization that much of Science Fiction has attempted to convey.<sup>15</sup>

In general, science fiction has achieved such defamiliarizations of reality by means of the ontological construction of worlds or future civilizations that imagine reality otherwise, but recently such overarching theories of the genre have begun to crumble in the face of mutations in science fiction's basic aesthetic.

Certain contemporary science fiction authors have begun to produce texts that problematize the basic aesthetic of the genre by abandoning its conventional, fantastic plot tropes and instead choosing to write narratives that occur in realistically depicted versions of the present or even the past. For example, William Gibson's two recent novels (*Pattern Recognition* [2003] and *Spook Country* [2007]) or Neal Stephenson's historical epic *Cryptonomicon* (1999) all operate in worlds that seem indistinguishable from the real present in which the audience and the author dwell or even in the historical past, yet they still concern the effects of information technology in a manner akin to science fiction. These texts break with older definitions of science fiction as a genre based in estrangement. Nonetheless, most would still maintain that these texts represent works of science fiction, so what marks them as instances of the genre if there is nothing inherently unrealistic or otherworldly in the spaces they depict?

In order to explore the changing face of the genre, my project will divide science fiction into two overriding tendencies: estrangement and realism. These two tendencies always overlap, but one will generally dominate the aesthetic of a particular text. I will term the traditional science fiction texts that privilege estrangement over realism "science fictions of estrangement," which I will distinguish from the above-mentioned "science fictions of the present" that eschew estrangement to pursue a predominantly realistic narrative mode. These two different modalities of science fiction remain connected because they both operate as what Michel Foucault terms heterotopian spaces, and it is their creation of such heterotopian spaces that marks science fiction as such an essential genre for critical theory. In fact, the heterotopian nature of science fiction allows the



genre to not only intervene in theoretical discourses but to also become its own brand of critical theory.

## **II. Realism versus Estrangement**

In philosophy, realism refers to the “position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses.”<sup>16</sup> “Inaugurated by Descartes and Locke,” realism represents an ontological position that stabilizes our concepts of the world and our selves because it is a fundamental belief in the capacity of our five senses to properly relay the universe to our mind and to allow us to use these sensory perceptions to discover truths about the nature of reality.<sup>17</sup> In the realm of literature, realism becomes another animal entirely because, as Jameson points out above, literature always remains inherently fictional regardless of the sophistication of its mimetic capabilities. Hence, we must define how an inherently fictional work can aspire to the label of realism. In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt famously compares the realist novel to juridical procedures: “the novel’s mode of imitating reality may therefore be equally well summarized in terms of the procedures of another group of specialists in epistemology, the jury in a court of law. Their expectations, and those of the novel reader, coincide in many ways: both want to know ‘all the particulars of a given case.’”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the realistic novel aims at “verisimilitude” by purporting to offer “a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms.”<sup>19</sup> Of course, as suggested by its philosophical origins, realism operates as a form of discourse outside of fiction. As Jameson’s

comment above indicates, the realistic impulse extends to virtually all our narratives from philosophy to science to literature—they each represent distinct attempts to, like the novel, render our world and our experiences of it in a manner that seems to coincide with our own subjective experiences. Hence, we can define realism as a discursive methodology that tries to project a faithful rendition of reality and our experiences of it by means of language (literature and film) or that strives to conceptualize some aspect of the human or the elements with which it comes into contact by way of its senses (science, history, philosophy, etc.). During the course of this project, both branches of realism will remain vital to my exploration of science fiction, and, ultimately, I will demonstrate the manner in which science fiction undercuts realism by problematizing our basic concepts of reality and opening them up to new theorizations.

For an audience to relate to a text's story, it must retain some sense of realism—otherwise, it devolves into mere fantasy or becomes akin to avant-garde cinema that breaks all ties with narrative verisimilitude and chooses instead to revel in surrealistic imagery to which the viewer must ascribe their own meaning. While science fiction must similarly retain a certain dosage of realism—it must still deal with particular individuals in specific worlds at certain times, etc.—it also brings another powerful aesthetic force into play: estrangement. And it is this use of estrangement that allows science fiction to function as its own form of critique. Appropriating the term “estrangement” from Bertold Brecht, Darko Suvin famously defines science fiction as “the literature of cognitive estrangement,” as a genre that creates “a new strangeness” in which it works through a problem or set of problems: “SF takes off from a fictional (‘literary’) hypothesis and develops it with totalizing (‘scientific’) rigor.”<sup>20</sup> For Suvin, science

fiction functions like the scientific method: it posits a hypothesis and then experiments upon it through the twin acts of extrapolation and fabulation. Freedman expands upon Suvin's definition to explain why cognition and estrangement remain vital components of science fiction's aesthetic:

Science fiction is determined by the *dialectic* between estrangement and cognition. The first term refers to the creation of an alternative fictional world that, by refusing to take our mundane environment for granted, implicitly or explicitly, performs an estranging critical interrogation of the latter. But the *critical* character of the interrogation is guaranteed by the operation of cognition, which enables the science-fictional text to account rationally for its imagined world and for the connections as well as the disconnections of the latter to our own empirical world. If the dialectic is flattened out to mere cognition, then the result is "realistic" or mundane fiction, which can cognitively account for its imaginings but performs no estrangement; if the dialectic is flattened out to mere estrangement (or, it might be argued pseudo-estrangement), then the result is fantasy, which estranges, or appears to estrange, but in an irrationalist, theoretically illegitimate way.<sup>21</sup>

Hence, science fiction must contain enough realism for its estrangement to still seem rational. This sense of estrangement depends upon the textual world of the science fiction narrative differing radically from the real world of the audience. For Freedman, the play of similarity and difference grants science fiction its theoretical powers because the ongoing process of juxtaposition on the part of the reader endows science fiction with a dialectical power unavailable to all other genres. Freedman contends that all critical theory remains dialectical at its core, and hence science fiction functions as a critical genre because it involves the reader in a similarly dialectical thought process. In all of Freedman's examples, science fiction functions theoretically because the strange new worlds reflect, dialectically and critically, on our own, but must sci-fi qua critique always function dialectically?

Science fictions of the present seem to preclude the possibility of such dialectical operations because their stories unfold in the real world of the reader; that is, they give the realistic tendency precedence over estrangement. Because he remains mired in dialectical reasoning, Freedman's theory of the genre cannot account for the rise of science fictions of the present, and he ultimately does little more than textualize existing critical discourses. Contrary to this, I contend that science fiction is a far more radical genre: it does not simply explicate theory—it enacts it. Science fiction proves to be a critical genre not because of its dialectical relation with the reader but because its estranging aesthetic gives rise to a heterotopian space, a space of radical difference and multiplicity. Because it incorporates such radical difference into its own narrative structure, sci-fi not only contains the potential for intervening in theoretical discourses but also for spawning its own theoretical concepts. But to fully grasp the critical nature of the genre, we must first understand the distinction between utopias and heterotopias.

### **III. Utopia versus Heterotopia**

In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari discuss the power of utopias and their relation to socio-political theory. Instead of turning to More's classic text, they refer to Samuel Butler's utopian novel *Erewhon* (1872) because, as they say, it "refers not only to no-where but also to now-here" when its title is rendered anagrammatically, thus marking utopia as a genre concerning the present moment.<sup>22</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, utopia represents more than a mere dream or narrative form because it also "designates that conjunction of philosophy, or of the concept, with the present milieu—political philosophy."<sup>23</sup> Therefore, utopia represents both a fictional and a theoretical space, the

nexus of the two that allows the fiction writer or political theorist to imagine other possible worlds. But, as Tom Moylan argues, political utopianism became tarnished during the first half of the Twentieth Century because of the experiences of “world war, totalitarian rule, genocide, economic depression, nuclear destruction, massive famine, and disease.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, utopia’s practicality as an avenue for radical thought diminished because “utopia has been absorbed into the affirmative ideologies of the totalizing systems of Stalinist Russia, Nazi Germany, and the corporate United States.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, utopian systems of thought began to be viewed with suspicion because of the inherent dangers they purportedly harbored; hence, authors began to pen dystopian narratives that criticized the totalizing systems that had arisen from bastardized utopian dreams: Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (1921), Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), and George Orwell’s *1984* (1949) provide the paradigmatic examples of such texts. But the dystopian experiences of twentieth-century history have not permanently banished utopian visions from the discourse of critical theory, and, as we shall see, the utopian impulse underlies and structures all forms of discourse.

As Jameson points out, Suvin confines science fiction to the Russian Formalist concept of “making strange” and “Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*” (estrangement effect);<sup>26</sup> he argues that Suvin’s definition of science fiction “posits one specific subset of this generic category devoted to the imagination of alternative social and economic forms” and hence “exclud[es] the more oneiric flights of generic fantasy.”<sup>27</sup> Jameson is correct in pointing out how Suvin fails to take account of “the existence, alongside the Utopian genre or text as such, of a Utopian impulse which infuses much else, in daily life as well as in its texts.”<sup>28</sup> Jameson’s comment remains tied solely to the utopian subgenre

of science fiction, but it can be expanded, in one sense, to include science fiction as a whole, for science fiction always concerns our dreams of another world, our belief that reality could be rendered anew through the advent of new forms of technology or the revision of current systems of power. But, in another sense, Jameson proves incorrect because science fiction is not utopian in itself; while it concerns our utopian aspirations, it actually represents a heterotopian genre. As Hayles argues, science fiction influences our culture as much as our culture influences science fiction. And to fully understand the relation between science fiction and critical theory, we must remember that this circuit of influence always exists. However, as we will see, science fiction texts inherently problematize our quotidian, utopian daydreams of a better world as well as demonstrating the manner in which our current systems of thought represent nothing more than science fictions—science fiction pushes such theoretical conceptualizations of the world and utopian impulses into a space that eviscerates them and reveals their potentially illusory nature.

Jameson maintains that utopianism (or, we might say, science fiction in general) remains a vital aspect of critical theory, particular for its socio-political strands:

What is crippling is not the presence of the enemy but rather the universal belief, not only that this tendency is irreversible, but that the historic alternatives to capitalism have proven unviable and impossible, and that no other socio-economic system is conceivable, let alone practically available. The Utopian not only offers to conceive of such alternative systems; Utopian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of social totality, to the point where one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet.<sup>29</sup>

For Jameson, then, utopian thought represents one step on the dialectical path of social change, a step that must be overcome once it has outlived its usefulness, but a required

step nonetheless. Like Freedman, Jameson remains tethered to the Hegelian/Marxist dialectic, but the relation between science fiction and utopian critical theory is not a purely dialectical one. Indeed, one can no doubt discuss the circuit between text and audience as a dialectical relationship, but science fiction deals with difference on a more radical level—it deals with radical forms of multiplicity that have the potential to undermine our utopian structures of thought and society and even our utopian aspirations towards a meaningful and orderly understanding of existence. Jameson and Freedman argue that science fiction provides the means for reflecting upon our current socio-political episteme or theoretical concepts, but they actually perform a far more profound function: they use estrangement to undercut our basic notions of reality as is the case with science fictions of estrangement or they render our reality in a fashion that demonstrates the fundamentally uncanny and potentially fictional nature of it. Jameson argues that science fiction generally proves utopian because it reflects our daily utopian impulses towards a better life, but, in reality, science fiction does not represent a utopian genre—it actually operates as a heterotopian one.

In his preface to *The Order of Things* (1970), Foucault explains that utopia represents not just a kind of literature or socio-political theory but a type of ideal space that orders our reality on a daily basis: “*Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical.”<sup>30</sup> Utopia represents a model of civilization that can never be achieved, but it functions as the underlying impulse of our societies: we believe our cities, nations, and governmental systems can

instill a sense of order and coherence in the world, that they can banish the demons of chaos and anarchy. Hence utopianism proves to be the stuff of our wistful daydreams. Science fiction, on the other hand, inscribes another type of space that Foucault terms a “heterotopia” because it strips away our utopian blinders to reveal their illusory nature:

*Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to ‘hold together.’ This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the fabula; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences.<sup>31</sup>

Foucault poses these concepts in the preface to *The Order of Things* because heterotopias tear at the foundations of the order of things, at the basis of our episteme—they rip apart our aspirations towards unity, coherence, and meaning. And, as Foucault suggests, these deterritorializing effects stretch all the way down from the superstructure of culture past the economic base and to the very heart of the human—language. In basic terms, then, science fiction strips away our utopian notions of humanity, its civilizations, and its place in the universe in order to delve into realms of otherness, chaos, and multiplicity. If science fiction depicts utopias, it is only to undermine their inherently naïve aspirations towards perfection. This is not to say we should not strive towards a more perfect society; instead, I want to argue that science fiction decimates our utopian daydreams (whether they be of our own real world and its potential meanings or of our possible futures) in a manner that allows us to either take critical theory in radical new directions or to wipe the slate of critique clean in order to enact a new theorization based on



multiplicitous potentialities instead of on mundane conceptualizations of reality and our selves. By blending the tendencies of realism and estrangement together in its aesthetic, science fiction uses estrangement as a means of undercutting and problematizing our most sacred ideas about reality.

#### **IV. Anatomy of the Human: The Utopics of Narrative and The Theoretics of Science Fiction**

Carl Freedman once speculated that science fiction represents a genre with such breadth that fiction itself could be considered a subcategory of science fiction and not the other way round: “all fiction is, in a sense, science fiction. It is even salutary, I think, sometimes to put the matter in even more deliberately provocative, paradoxical form, and to maintain that fiction is a subcategory of science fiction rather than the other way around.”<sup>32</sup> Freedman’s claim may seem ludicrous upon first glance, but he suggests a valid point. All fiction projects a world (to use a Pynchonian turn of phrase); that is, all fiction is removed from reality to some degree and hence involves the kind of ontological world-building generally only associated with science fiction. We can expand this point and claim that all narrative represents a kind of science fiction, and that so-called realistic or truthful narratives function as a sub-categories because they represent nothing more than specialized forms of science fiction in which the narrative world is rendered as similar to ours as possible, that is, in which the level of estrangement, to use Darko Suvin’s term, remains at a minimum. In this project, I want to expand Freedman’s observation and claim that all narrative is science fictional because even the most basic narratives engage in a form of world-building. Or, in other words, narrative provides the means by which the individual connects three-dimensional space together with the

dimension of time in order to build a complete model of the world—narrative always harbors a realist impulse to string the our sensory impressions together into a meaningful whole. Hence, narrative functions as a utopian force of the psyche that attempts to render reality intelligible by inscribing patterns upon it. And based on Foucault's distinction between utopias and heterotopias, I want to claim that science fiction acts as a heterotopian genre of narrative, a genre that instantiates a new methodology for performing critical theory, because it undermines and problematizes the utopian coherence of our narratives. While all narrative remains ultimately utopian and science fictional, science fiction itself remains a genre unto itself because it uses the conflicting forces of estrangement and realism to undercut our utopian ideas of reality.

To understand how science fiction represents a heterotopian genre of narrative, we must first expand the designation “narrative” to its fullest extent. As H. Porter Abbot argues, “narrative is the principal way in which our species organizes its understanding of time.”<sup>33</sup> Abbot explains that we narrate on a constant basis, that language itself is predicated upon narrative, upon the ability to string signifiers together in a meaningful chain that expresses duration and action. In fact, many narratologists claim that narrative is a “deep structure” that is “hardwired” into the human mind.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Roland Barthes explains how narrative represents one of the most basic characteristics of human existence: “narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, narrative proves to be a common thread that runs throughout humanity. In essence, then, to be human is to narrate—it is an activity that ties together all the various peoples of the world. We can expand upon such arguments and claim that narrative functions as the predominant method by which humans are able to understand

their experiences of space-time, to parse reality into discrete objects and durations—  
narrative provides the basis upon which all of the higher human discourses rest.  
Narrative is the hyphen in “space-time” that allows the human mind to join the  
dimensions of space together with temporal progression and to create a meaningful image  
of reality.

To fully grasp just how fundamental narrative is to our understanding of reality, it  
helps to understand how language itself proves to be narrative at its core. If we divide  
language into its two most basic components (nouns and verbs), then we can see that  
language is already divided into space and time, Kant’s two pure *a priori* intuitions<sup>36</sup>; that  
is, it is parsed into objects that occupy space and into actions that occur temporally. Even  
the *cogito*’s most basic utterances (the “I think” and the “I am” of Descartes) operate as  
the most basic instances of narrative—the simple stringing together of a subject and  
verb.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, once you move beyond the mere naming of objects and into a world  
composed of actions, you have entered the realm of narrative. Through language, we  
learn to parse reality into a variety of basic sets, which include not just the division into  
subjects, objects, and actions, but also the logic of time that we learn through language:  
succession, continuity, causality, etc. Indeed, language first instantiates our  
understanding of different time periods with the most basic verbs: was (the past), is (the  
present), and will be (the future). Hence, narrative provides the mechanism by which we  
sort and order the universe as we experience it—it serves as *the* motivating principle for  
realist impulse.

A person experiences a chaotic input of sensory impressions composed of three  
spatial dimensions and the added dimension of time of which the psyche must make

sense by way of narrative.<sup>38</sup> Through the interplay of nouns and verbs, narrative creates its own vision of reality—the mind and the senses perceive the chaotic influx of data (sights, sounds, feelings, etc.), and narrative provides the means for the subject to order this manifold into coherence. Paul Ricoeur refers to this fact when he argues for the “prenarrative quality of experience.”<sup>39</sup> In this term, Ricoeur is developing his theory of narrative as consonant dissonance; that is, “narrative puts consonance where there was only dissonance. In this way, narrative gives form to what is unformed.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, a narrative act must constantly attend an individual’s sensory impressions, for only through the cohesive capacity of narrative can a person force unity upon the “unformed” manifold, to use Kant’s term.<sup>41</sup> Insofar as narrative provides the fundamental code that allows individuals to understand their experiences and perceptions and to relate them to others, then narrative serves a synthetic function in the human mind—it synthesizes the various external stimuli that an individual experiences into a coherent unity: “plot is always to some extent a synthesis of the heterogeneous.”<sup>42</sup> Reality remains a chaotic mass of sensory input until it can be rendered in a narrative form. Hayden White’s concept of emplotment provides a crucial link here that will help us further tighten the knot between reality and its narrative representation. As White explains, emplotment refers to “the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures.”<sup>43</sup> White contends that the narrative impulse underlies the majority of human discourses from literature to history to psychoanalysis—each functions by means of inscribing events or facts into larger plot structures. But White’s concept of emplotment can be expanded to include not just the encoding of basic narrative elements into larger plot structures but also the more fundamental encoding of

reality into these basic narrative elements. The narrative activity then becomes a series of steps from the most foundational parsing of space-time by way of the splitting of sensory input into objects, durations, events, and actions to using these basic narrative units as building blocks to create ever larger plot structures that can range from a short story to scientific or historical discourses or even religious cosmologies.

Indeed, Ricoeur goes even further by arguing that narrative provides the means for generating our conceptualization of ourselves in relation to the historical progression of time. To be human is to recognize and learn how to cope with the fact that our lives represent only a small instant in the universal flow of time: we must consistently face the “disproportion between time that, on the one hand, we deploy in living, and on the other, that envelops us everywhere,” or “the brevity of human life in comparison to the immensity of time.”<sup>44</sup> As he further states, “there is the real paradox: on a cosmic scale our life span is insignificant, yet this brief period of time when we appear in the world is the moment during which all of the meaningful questions arise.”<sup>45</sup> Ricoeur explains that one of the fundamental aporetics of time lies in the opposition between these two versions of time, but history brings the power of narrative to bear upon time and solves this aporia: “historical time is constituted at the juncture of our shattered concept of time [...] historical time is like a bridge thrown over the chasm which separates cosmic time from lived time.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, it is history that provides the means by which the human species carves meaning out of the chaos of space-time—it is narrative, finally, that gives us the order and purpose we require, and it is narrative that also provides the basis for our sense of identity. Paul Ricoeur’s conceptualization of the narrative self argues that everyone functions like a character in a story: “characters in plays and novels are humans

like us who think, speak, act, and suffer as we do.”<sup>47</sup> Of course, these literary characters are not “real,” but as Ricoeur points out, our identities represent a mix of personal history and fiction:

as for the notion of the narrative unity of a life, it must be seen as an unstable mixture of fabulation and actual experience. It is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organize life retrospectively, after the fact, prepared to take as provisional and open to revision any figure of emplotment borrowed from fiction or from history.<sup>48</sup>

As Declan Seerin states of Ricoeur’s concept of the narrative self, “history and fiction are woven into each other—again, somewhat like the two strands of the double helix.”<sup>49</sup> It is only through the act of fabulation that a subject can create some semblance of identity for him/herself. Consequently, all theories about reality, history, and our selves prove to be utopian fictions because they only represent the facts that have passed through the sieve of narrative, a sieve which strains the multiplicity of existence and history down into discrete portions capable of being digested by the human mind.

Narrative’s utopianism resides in its implicit hope that reality and our perceptions of it can be ordered in a meaningful way and that we can create meaningful existences for ourselves, but science fiction decimates this hope by choosing to craft an alternate kind of space—the heterotopia. Science fiction texts represent this peculiar space known as the heterotopia because they deterritorialize or problematize certain schemas of organization or power—they reveal realism to be nothing more than a utopian phantasm because they open us up to the immensity of the universe in all its multiplicity. Of course, the heterotopian space of science fiction differs depending on whether the text represents a science fiction of estrangement or a science fiction of the present; that is, whether the text’s predominant mode is estrangement or realism. By resituating words, ideas, and

concepts in fantastic settings, science fictions of estrangement shatter their unity and coherence through the act of fabulation, hence making such texts fertile ground for theoretical work. Science fictions of estrangement can thus function as a means of heteropianizing critical discourses, of pushing them into realms of radical difference that allow the critic to examine the implications of these theoretical frameworks and of generating their own theoretical concepts within certain fields of critical discourse. On the other hand, science fictions of the present function as heterotopian spaces by depicting how our reality itself has become a kind of science fiction, how estrangement has crept into our daily lives, or how our supposedly stable conceptualizations of our present world prove to be nothing more than utopian phantoms. But ultimately science fiction reveals the illusory nature of the narrative impulse that lies at the heart to the human. Because of this, science fiction highlights how all our narratives concern nothing more or less than the human itself.

## **V. Defining the Variables, or What Constitutes the Human?**

To explore the different modalities of science fiction, my dissertation devotes two chapters to examining the aesthetic of estrangement before turning to a theorization of science fiction's use of realism: each of these two tendencies of science fiction will be explored by means of one chapter on a fictional example and a second one on a cinematic model. While developing these theories of estrangement and realism in the heterotopian genre of science fiction, each chapter will simultaneously explore a particular aspect of the human, for science fiction and critical theory inherently concern the nature of humanity, its definitions of its self, its ideas and attributes, and its socio-political

structures. In particular, this project will focus upon four basic traits of the human and their conceptualizations in both science fiction and critical theory: gender, desire, the postmodern society of control, and the nature of memory function as the four variables of the human that this project will explore in both their science fictional and theoretical manifestations.

To begin to conceptualize science fiction as a heterotopian genre, Chapter One of my project will open with an exploration of a text that explicitly labels itself as just such a heterotopian space: Samuel R. Delany's *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*. In addition to inaugurating my theorization of the heterotopian nature of the genre, *Trouble on Triton* also will allow me stage a direct intervention in feminist theories of sex and gender, particularly those of Judith Butler. Based on her theory of gender performativity, Butler's theories imagine the undoing of gender by means of revolutionary resignifications of the social episteme. By attempting to theorize a method by which this socio-cultural category can be radically transformed, Butler's vision of undoing gender represents a distinctly utopian area of critical discourse, and hence science fiction provides the perfect tool for its critique. In Samuel Delany's *Trouble on Triton*, the regime of gender has effectively been undone by technology that allows individuals to change not only their biological sex but also the objects that they find desirable. But, in gender's absence, an equally insidious regime of norms based on types arises. Under the episteme of types, the subject becomes completely understandable and predictable based on an almost infinite variety of identity categories and behavioral characteristics. Ultimately, then, the novel allows the critic to interrogate gender theory by examining how the eradication of gender norms could strip away the basis of



humanity and individuality by rendering all difference as the same, by attempting to tame the wildness of heterotopia into the tranquil orderliness of utopia. But the chapter simultaneously theorizes a new regime of normativity that I term “typing,” which already exists in our present world in discursive spaces such as demographics and statistics.

Chapter one will end with an investigation of the potential effects of typing upon human desire, and Chapter Two picks up with desire as it is conceptualized in Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalysis and Deleuze and Guattari’s schizoanalysis. By way of three Japanese anime texts that depict disembodied forms of evolution, Chapter Two brings the dystopian discourse of psychoanalysis into direct communication with the utopian theories of schizoanalysis. Whereas Lacan maintains that humanity is driven by a desire predicated upon lack (a fundamental hole in our being), Deleuze and Guattari argue that such lack is inscribed by the socio-cultural milieu in which the subject remains trapped. By means of their depictions of an evolution beyond the current human state through a shedding of the physical form, Katsuhiro Otomo’s *Akira*, Mamoru Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell*, and Hideaki Anno’s *Neon Genesis Evangelion* illustrate how socio-cultural forces affect desire as well as how the boundaries of the body and the separation of one individual from another inscribes lack in the subject. But Chapter Two ultimately questions whether the deterritorializations of Deleuze and Guattari, which are epitomized in the images of the rhizome and the body without organs, truly provide liberatory paradigms for humanity or whether the eradication of lack would lead to a consequent destruction of all that characterizes the human.

Chapter Three moves away from texts that predominantly function by means of estrangement to begin theorizing what I term “science fictions of the present,” sci-fi texts

that forego or diminish estrangement in favor of adopting a largely realistic aesthetic. This chapter charts how Gibson's works have steadily moved from the hyper-futuristic cyberpunk worlds of his early novels to his current fictions that are set in the present or recent past. By way of a reading of *Pattern Recognition* and *Spook Country*, this chapter examines how Gibson's work stages the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks as a defining moment in the history of the twin forces of postmodernization and globalization. In effect, 9/11 serves as the culminating moment in a series of events when the postmodern regime of control finally displaces the older modernist, disciplinary regimes of power. Control remains tied to the rise of computers, and Gibson's recent novels depict how computerization has achieved control in a much subtler fashion than it was initially imagined in the nightmarish dystopias of works like Orwell's *1984*. In essence, Gibson demonstrates how control resides in the circuitry of our computers, the histories of our web browsers, the images of security cameras, the data in our GPS devices and cell phones, and the sea of corporate trademarks that surround and direct our existence. Ultimately, Gibson's novels argue that the present has become a dystopian science fiction. Hence, this chapter examines the status of the human in the postmodern society of control and depicts the manner in which the human has already become the posthuman through its internalization of computer paradigms.

Chapter Four further conceptualizes science fictions of the present by turning to two cinematic examples that represent a similar realistic aesthetic. Because of their use of a counter-spectacle aesthetic and a *cinéma vérité* style, I term these two films "documentary science fictions"—they represent a filmic variation upon science fictions of the present. This chapter explores Siegfried Kracauer's distinction between the two

basic tendencies in cinema: the realistic tendency of the Lumière brothers and the formative tendency of Georges Méliès. Most science fiction cinema follows in the tradition of Méliès, who many consider to have created the first science fiction films (*Le Voyage dans la Lune* or “A Trip to the Moon”). But my chapter explores two films, Chris Marker’s *La Jetée* and Shane Carruth’s *Primer*, which eschew spectacle in favor of a documentary style that renders our reality uncanny in a way that allows us to rethink how film represents reality and ultimately how the cinematic medium itself always represents a science fiction. By examining the nature of the cinematic medium through two time travel films, this chapter will also explore the crucial role that memory plays in any definition of the human and within the discourses that humans generate.

Finally, in my conclusion, I will turn to a more classic example than I will have explored in any of the previous chapters: Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The conclusion will focus mostly upon Kubrick’s film, but it will also explore some of the differences in and expansions of the story in Clarke’s novel and its subsequent sequels. My conclusion examines these texts because they bring together the various variables of the human that I will have explored in the previous chapters. By using the cinematic spectacle in a manner that breaks with traditional science fiction, Kubrick’s *2001* film creates a disjunctive filmic experience like *La Jetée* and *Primer*. While it has structural similarities to the films explored in Chapter Four, *2001* also draws together the various other themes and theoretical concepts examined in this project (identity, desire, and control) by focusing upon the theme of evolution. Indeed, *2001: A Space Odyssey* provides a perfect coda for this project because it depicts the ontogenesis

of the human itself from its origins in prehistoric hominids to its metamorphosis beyond the boundaries of the body in the far-flung corners of the universe.

## **VI. Conclusion: Onward to the Heterotopian!**

As I conceive of it, the term “variables of the human” includes not just categories like gender and forces such as desire that comprise the human condition but also the environments within which the human interacts as well as the media through which the human can be represented: fiction, critical theory, cinema, etc. Ultimately, by virtue of its heterotopian nature, science fiction lays bare the utopian nature of all narrative and of theoretical discourse in particular and provides the perfect space for the exploration of these variables. Science fiction allows us to recognize the fictions that we use daily to protect our fragile sense of being and identity, and it forces us to consider the radical difference that surrounds us on all sides. It enables us to break with the various consoling utopian narratives that structure and govern our existence by immersing us in the disturbing and powerful maelstrom of heterotopian difference. By conceiving of the science fiction as a heterotopian space, my project goes beyond the genre theories of Suvin, Freedman, and Jameson by embracing the radical difference that lies at the heart of the genre. Science fiction urges us onward beyond the consolation of utopian thinking, onward to a heterotopian space that may disturb even our most foundational concepts of reality, for, as Nietzsche argues in *The Gay Science*, even science represents a utopian form of faith:

So, too, it is with the faith with which so many materialistic natural scientists rest content: the faith in a world that is supposed to have its equivalent and measure in human thought, in human valuations—a ‘world of truth’ that can be grasped entirely with the help of our four-cornered

little human reason—What? Do we really want to demote existence in this way to an exercise in arithmetic and an indoor diversion for mathematicians? Above all, one shouldn't want to strip it of its *ambiguous* character: that, gentleman, is what *good* taste demands—above all, the taste of reverence for everything that lies beyond your horizon!<sup>50</sup>

As Nietzsche points out in this passage, science itself rests upon a faith that it can generate all-encompassing truths about the universe, that our “facts” represent the way things really are, that nothing lays beyond our horizon. While science fiction may depict utopias or dystopias, it functions on a fundamental level as a heterotopia, as a space in which we confront difference and reconnect with the potential horizons that exist beyond the current knowledge of science, philosophy, and history. Science fiction functions as critical theory because it dares to project itself outside the current constraints of so-called rational thought—it pushes us into a realm of otherness that still progresses according to a kind of rationality but a rationality not based solely on what we know to be “truth” but also on what might be possible.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood's End* (New York: Del Rey, 1953) 105.

<sup>2</sup> Hayden White, "The Value of Narrative in the Representation of Reality," in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987) 1.

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, ed. and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967) §604.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (1968; New York: Columbia UP, 1994) xx.

<sup>5</sup> In *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (1991; New York: Columbia UP, 1994), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari famously define philosophy as "the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts" (2). Of course, truth is itself a relative term depending on the philosopher's epistemological position. For Deleuze, no doubt, we create our own truths just as we create our own identities.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan UP, 2000) 23, 181.

<sup>7</sup> Freedman, *Critical Theory* 32.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Shaviro, *Connected, or What it Means to Live in the Network Society* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003) ix.

<sup>9</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1999) 21-2.

<sup>10</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* trans. Richard Howard (1970; Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1973) 25.

<sup>11</sup> Brown's *Wieland* (1798) is a brilliant early example of American gothic and Todorov's uncanny in which the events are finally revealed to be explicable according to our ordinary laws of reason and nature. Poe's writing features examples of horror, psychological thriller, and even some moments of science fiction. Hawthorne often plays with the horror genre: while *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and "The Minister's Black Veil" (1836) feature elements of the horrific but ultimately remain realistic, "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) and *The House of Seven Gables* (1851) openly feature elements of the supernatural. Even more interestingly, Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" (1844) represents a legitimate science fiction story in its depiction of a botanist who makes his daughter poisonous like certain species of plants.

<sup>12</sup> For a thorough analysis of science fiction's origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see Brian W. Aldiss and David Wingrove's *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction* (New York: Antheneum, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> Almost the entirety of Burroughs's oeuvre could be considered science fiction, but he undoubtedly remains most famous for *Naked Lunch* (1959), which features science fiction elements in its various episodes, and his Nova (Or Cut-Up) Trilogy (*The Soft Machine* [1961], *The Ticket that Exploded* [1962], and *Nova Express* [1964]) that represent a sustained sci-fi story rendered in Burroughs's (in)famous cut-up method. Pynchon's novels feature varying degrees of science fiction plot tropes, many of which are rendered ambiguously: the clockwork eyes in *V* (1963); the Pavlovian conditioned octopus in *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973); the animatronic duck with artificial intelligence in *Mason & Dixon* (1997); and the giant airships, hollow earth, time machines, and Lovecraftian monsters of *Against the Day* (2006). Many of John Barth's novels feature fantastic elements, but *Giles Goat-Boy; or, The Revised New Syllabus* (1966) remains his most overtly science fictional novel with its depiction of a civilization in which the world has become a college campus that is split between different nuclear armed portions of campus that are run by central computers. Like Pynchon's novels, DeLillo's often feature conspiracy narratives, but even his most

famous novel *White Noise* (1985) features science fictional plot tropes like the “Airborne Toxic Event.” Many of Kathy Acker’s novels, which often plagiarize from other sources, feature portions that would just as easily be at home in speculative fiction, but *Empire of the Senseless* (1988) actually plagiarizes from William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, and her novel entitled *Don Quixote: Which was a Dream* (1986) features a journey through an almost post-apocalyptic landscape. For examples of Calvino’s fantastic brand of postmodern fiction that feature sci-fi characteristics, see *Cosmicomics* (1965) or *Invisible Cities* (1972). David Foster Wallace’s most famous work, *Infinite Jest* (1996), is essentially a science fiction novel since it is set in a future in which time has been subsidized (each year is associated with a certain brand name product) and in which part of the Northern United States has been ceded to Canada because it is used as a toxic waste dump—giant fans blow the toxic fumes into Canadian territory. Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000) combines elements of science fiction and horror into a sprawling postmodern epic that concerns a filmmaker who discovers that his house contains more space on the inside than the outside. Angela Carter’s novels, such as *Nights at the Circus* (1984) and *The Infernal Desire Machines of Doctor Hoffman* (1972), tend more towards fantasy or magical realism, but they still serve as examples of how postmodern fiction blurs the line between genres in a manner that makes genre definitions almost impossible. Julian Barnes’s *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (1989) reimagines world history in a manner that includes mythic, religious, and other fantastic elements. Finally, Jonathan Lethem’s *The Fortress of Solitude* (2003) is predominantly a realistic, semi-autobiographical bildungsroman about growing up in impoverished Brooklyn during the 1970s with the added element that two young boys discover a magic ring that grants them the powers of flight and invisibility, which allow them to become like the superheroes in the comic books they read. Science fiction remains so inextricably linked to postmodern fiction that in *Postmodernist Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987) Brian McHale actually uses the genre as a means for explaining the distinction between modernist and postmodernist fiction. He argues that whereas “the dominant [mode] of modernist fiction is epistemological” and hence features the “logic [...] of the detective story,” postmodernism, on the other hand, operates in an ontological mode, meaning that it concerns itself with the projection of worlds in a manner akin to science fiction (9-10). McHale derives this concept of “projecting worlds” from Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1965). As Oedipa Maas begins to explore the potential existence of a secret mail system known as Tristero, she writes underneath the Tristero horn that she has copied off of a bathroom wall, “*Shall I project a world?*” (65). In this comment, Oedipa is contemplating the possible existence of an entire other pattern of reality of which she (and most of the world) remains unaware. McHale uses Oedipa’s words to examine the manner in which postmodernist fiction functions ontologically (as opposed to epistemologically, which he argues is the predominant mode of modernist fiction) by projecting alternate worlds or alternate visions of our own world. For further explorations of this topic, McHale’s *Postmodern Fiction* represents an indispensable source on the topic. Hence, when one traverses the aisles of a bookstore, these postmodern novelists will inevitably reside in the vicinity of Faulkner, Joyce, and Woolf and never alongside Arthur C. Clark, Orson Scott Card, or Robert Heinlein. Carl Freedman somewhat solves this dilemma by claiming that the critic must determine whether the overall tendency of a text is science fictional or not, but such an argument proves unsatisfactory since it still leaves the determination of this tendency up to the idiosyncratic opinions of the critic.

<sup>14</sup> Fredric Jameson’s *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005) 399.

<sup>15</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies* 399.

<sup>16</sup> Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1957) 12.

<sup>17</sup> Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740*, 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (1987; Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002) 2.

<sup>18</sup> Watt, *Rise of the Novel* 31.

<sup>19</sup> Watt, *Rise of the Novel* 32-3.

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<sup>20</sup> Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1979) 4.

<sup>21</sup> Freedman, *Critical Theory* 16-7.

<sup>22</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Thomlinson and Graham Burchell (1991; New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 100. For an early discussion of *Erewhon* by Deleuze, see his discussion of the science fictional aspects of philosophy in *Difference and Repetition* (xx-xxi)

<sup>23</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 100.

<sup>24</sup> Moylan, *Impossible* 8.

<sup>25</sup> Moylan, *Impossible* 8.

<sup>26</sup> For more on Bertold Brecht's concept of estrangement, see *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957).

<sup>27</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* xiv.

<sup>28</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* xiv.

<sup>29</sup> Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* xii.

<sup>30</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970; New York: Vintage, 1994) xviii.

<sup>31</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things* xvii.

<sup>32</sup> Carl Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan UP, 2000) 16.

<sup>33</sup> H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002) 3.

<sup>34</sup> Abbott, *Cambridge Companion* 3.

<sup>35</sup> Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives," in *Image—Music—Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 79.

<sup>36</sup> Kant initially reflects upon the nature of space and time in *On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World [Inaugural Dissertation]*, in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, trans. and ed. David Walford (1770; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1992). He argues that "time is not something objective and real, nor an accident, nor a relation. Time is rather the subjective condition which is necessary, in virtue of the nature of the human mind, for the coordinating of all sensible things in accordance with a fixed law. It is a *pure intuition*. For it is only through the concept of time that we co-ordinate both substances and accidents, according to both simultaneity and succession" (§14). Space is similarly a pure intuition, and "space is an absolutely first principle of the sensible world, not only because it is only in virtue of this concept that the objects of the universe can be phenomena but above all for this reason, that by its essence space is nothing if not unique, embracing absolutely all things which are externally sensible" (§15). Kant then expands upon his conceptualization of space and time as pure intuitions in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: space and time are pure *a priori* intuitions that must exist before the understanding can become capable of making judgments. But, for Kant, time remains an even more fundamental sensory input than space: "Time is the *a priori* formal condition of all appearances in general. Space, as the pure form of all outer intuitions, is limited as an *a priori* condition merely to outer intuitions. But since, on the contrary, all representations, whether or not



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they have outer things as their object, nevertheless as determinations of the mind themselves belong to the inner state, while this inner state being under the formal condition of inner intuition, and thus of time, so time is an *a priori* condition of all appearances in general, and indeed the immediate condition of the inner intuition (of our souls), and thereby also the mediate condition of outer appearances” (A 34). Therefore, time is the immediate condition of our inner senses and space is the immediate condition of our outer senses, but time remains more fundamental than space because space must also pass through the inner senses, so time is the mediate condition for space as well. Hence, time functions as the ordering principle for all of our perceptions of the world. I am indebted in this note to Howard Caygill’s *A Kant Dictionary* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1995) for helping me to easily find these references.

<sup>37</sup> For René Descartes’s famous discussion of the statement “*Cogito ergo sum*” or “I think; therefore, I am,” see *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, trans. Desmond M. Clarke (1641, 1644; New York: Penguin, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> In this chapter, I shall restrict myself to the human experience of space-time by way of sight and will not go into the other senses of smell, taste, and touch. No doubt, one could theorize the manner in which the other senses allow us to experience space-time, but since cinema remains a purely visual medium, then I will not dwell upon the other senses except to say that they further multiple the chaotic influx of data into the human mind.

<sup>39</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols., trans Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (1983-5; Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1984-8) I: 74.

<sup>40</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* I: 72.

<sup>41</sup> As Kant explains, “Now space and time contain a manifold of pure *a priori* intuition, but belong nevertheless among the conditions of the receptivity of our mind, under which alone it can receive representations of objects, and thus they must also affect the concept of these objects. Only the spontaneity of our thought requires that this manifold first be gone through, taken up, and combined in a certain way in order for a cognition to be made out of it. I call this action synthesis. By synthesis in the most general sense, however, I understand the action of putting different representations together with each other and comprehending their manifoldness in one cognition” (*Critique* A77).

<sup>42</sup> Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* I: 216.

<sup>43</sup> Hayden White, “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) 83.

<sup>44</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Narrated Time.” *Philosophy Today* 29.4 (Winter 1985): 263.

<sup>45</sup> Ricoeur, “Narrated Time” 263.

<sup>46</sup> Ricoeur, “Narrated Time” 263.

<sup>47</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (1990; Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1992) 150.

<sup>48</sup> Ricoeur *Oneself as Another* 162.

<sup>49</sup> Declan Seerin, *Deleuze and Ricoeur: Disavowed Affinities and the Narrative Self* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009) 52.

<sup>50</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro (1882, 1887; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2001) §373.

**CHAPTER 2:**  
**TYPING THE FORM OF THE SUBJECT:**  
**MULTIPLICITY, DESIRE, AND GENDER IN DELANY'S *TRITON***

A normalizing society is the historical outcome of a  
technology of power centered on life

-Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup>

Fantasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others  
otherwise. Fantasy is what establishes the possible in  
excess of the real; it points, it points elsewhere, and when it  
is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home.

-Judith Butler<sup>2</sup>

The advent of the term “gender” contains a utopian promise. Because of its utopian nature and its frequent explorations of the relations between the human body and identity, the critical apparatus of science fiction serves as the ideal narrative space for explorations of gender. Because many of his works openly grapple with theoretical concepts, Samuel R. Delany exemplifies the potential critical power of science fiction.<sup>3</sup> Delany’s fiction often functions as a direct critique of particularly theoretical ideas or enterprises. As we shall see, *Trouble on Triton* can be read partly as a response to Foucault’s notion of heterotopias from *The Order of Things*, but the novel also represents a special work in Delany’s oeuvre because it critically attacked one of the most utopian areas of critical discourse: gender theory. As we shall see, *Triton* takes gender theory to its logical extreme and examines the ways in which socio-cultural forces always attempt to normalize difference. Because it was written during the first wave of gender theory, it is important to historicize its moment. Initially, “gender” applied solely to the linguistic division of nouns in certain languages into masculine and feminine (or neuter, depending

upon the language).<sup>4</sup> The word was imbued with new, utopian valences in the 1970s when it was redefined as the socio-cultural construction of masculinity and femininity. Simone de Beauvoir had already begun to move feminist thought in such a direction in *The Second Sex* (1952) in which she famously stated, “One is not born a woman but becomes one.”<sup>5</sup> While she never used the word gender, de Beauvoir divided the biological designation of sex from the socially constructed concept of “woman.” She explains this division in terms of existence versus essence (a distinction she borrows from Sartre): a female exists because of the biological arrangement she receives at birth, but she does not truly become a woman (her essence) until socio-cultural norms shape her into that identity configuration.

De Beauvoir’s ideas proved revolutionary, but a true sea change occurred in feminist theory with the redefinition of the word “gender.” Robert Stoller, an American psychoanalyst, often receives credit for developing the distinction between gender and sex; in *Sex and Gender: On Masculinity and Femininity* (1968), he argues that an individual’s gender identity (his/her sense of being masculine or feminine) stems not only from biological characteristics but also from environmental and psychological factors during childhood, including the sex to which the subject is assigned at birth.<sup>6</sup> Second-wave feminists adopted Stoller’s use of the term to distinguish biological differences (male and female) from socially constructed distinctions (the masculine and feminine roles that cultural forces graft onto the biological bases).<sup>7</sup> In effect, gender became a way of denying arguments that claimed masculine and feminine roles derived purely from innate biological forces.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, gender has been critically redefined as an attribute of identity that is fashioned over the course of a subject’s existence. This transformation of

the very word “gender” generated new utopian potentials, for if gender was indeed constructed then perhaps it could be deconstructed and reconstructed anew.

By deterritorializing the categories of male and female, gender theory developed into a utopian narrative for a new organization of being—it harbored an ontological promise. In its most basic terms, gender theory represented the utopian wish of undoing gender—of removing the binary constraints that gender has traditionally placed on the subject, of exposing possible sites for radical rearticulations of gender, and of introducing the subject to a multiplicity of possible modes of being. Judith Butler’s theory of gender as performance took the social constructedness of gender to its utopian limit. Butler remained dissatisfied with simply demonstrating that gender roles do not stem inherently from biology: rather, she sought ways of disrupting the discursive construction of gender. Butler’s series of interventions in gender theory began with *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), the book that first introduced the concept of gender performativity. Butler continued her exploration of gender, sex, and identity in two sequels: *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004).<sup>9</sup> In her original preface to *Gender Trouble*, Butler explains that the central goal of her critical project was to enact “a strategy to denaturalize and resignify bodily categories.”<sup>10</sup> As she explains, this strategy is “based in a performative theory of gender acts that disrupt the categories of the body, sex, gender, and sexuality and occasion their subversive resignification and proliferation beyond the binary frame.”<sup>11</sup> Above all else, Butler’s work attempted to break down normative binarisms and to reinstate more inclusive frameworks in their place. Her key move towards refashioning gender norms lies in redefining gender as performance, as an “act of doing” rather than a

mere “state of being.”<sup>12</sup> If gender is an act, then it can be performed in an infinite number of ways and one actor can potentially slide between roles. Because it depicts a world in which an individual can reprogram both his/her sex, gender, and sexual preferences, I will use Delany’s *Triton* in this chapter to problematize gender theory’s utopian aspirations by demonstrating how undoing gender through its proliferation does not necessarily guarantee an experience of freedom.

Of course, Delany wrote *Triton* well before Judith Butler began publishing her studies of gender, yet the novel’s engagement with the themes of gender, sex, and sexual orientation inscribes a particular critical space that will allow us to extend Butler’s theories to their limits. Instead of depicting gender’s undoing as the foundation for a truly utopian space, Delany’s novel functions as what Tom Moylan terms a critical utopia<sup>13</sup> because it imagines how, in the absence of prescriptive norms, the “matrix of intelligibility” (Butler’s term for the grid of socio-cultural forces that governs the recognition of subjects) will merely transform itself into one that, instead of prescribing behavior, describes it in a manner so complex and precise that it can predict subject behavior on a global scale. In effect, Delany’s novel transfers the tenets of Butler’s gender theory into the premises of a fictional world, but the utopian promises of the theory, especially the suppression of disciplinary constraints, devolves into a society of total control that eliminates the subject’s capacity to experience desire. Despite Butler’s adamant assertion that her theory is not utopian, the vision of a world in which the episteme no longer includes gender as a primary ordering principle marks her work as participating fully in the utopian theoretical tradition. In this light, this chapter examines whether the undoing of gender would in actuality represent a utopian, liberatory moment

or whether gender proves necessary for the preservation of society and the status of the “human.” Inasmuch as Butler takes gender theory to its utopian limits, we might deploy science fiction as the means to “test” these limits, to imagine the consequences of gender’s undoing. Consequently, through narrativization, *Triton* pushes the precepts of Butler’s strain of gender theory into a heterotopian space by taking her premises to their logical extreme.

My inspiration for the term “heterotopia” stems from Delany’s subtitle to the novel, but, as his epigraph to Appendix B indicates, Delany takes the term “heterotopia” from Michel Foucault who defines it in contradistinction with utopias.<sup>14</sup> As we saw in the introduction, Foucault argues that whereas “utopias afford consolation,” heterotopias prove “disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that.”<sup>15</sup> On *Triton*, then, the consolation afforded by heterotopia’s acceptance of difference is undercut in two important ways: first, by the extension of recognition to categories that gender theory itself might still label as abject, perverse, or cruel; and, second, by the instantiation of a new normative regime of control that I will term “typing.” Delany’s novel allows us to contemplate a variety of different questions implicitly posed by Butler’s gender theory. For example, if universal recognition is achieved, then does difference disappear in the face of a total inclusivity? What happens to desire if difference disappears and the other is rendered as the same? What happens to social norms after gender disappears as an identity category?

## I. Recognizable Performances: Intelligible Subjects and the Doing of Gender

*Trouble on Triton*<sup>16</sup> appears at an interesting juncture in Samuel Delany's body of work. Delany's last conventional science fiction novel was *Nova* (1968) after which he would not write another novel for five years. In 1973, when he began to publish novels again, Delany chose to deal with more directly sexual themes and with stretching the boundaries of the genre. *Equinox* (1973)<sup>17</sup> is the first example of his forays into sexually explicit SF writing, but it was 1975's *Dhalgren* that caused great controversy with its almost "pornographic" sexual scenes (gay and straight ones) and its lack of traditional science fiction elements.<sup>18</sup> *Trouble on Triton* (1976) continued Delany's work at the margins of science fiction: the novel does not concern itself with intergalactic warfare, colonists on a distant moon, or body augmentation (although all of these comprise the atmosphere of the novel), but instead with the experiences and possibilities of the subject in a utopian environment.

In fact, *Triton* details the experiences of one man (a rather problematic noun to use with regards to the character, as we will see) as he struggles to define his identity in rigid, immutable terms.<sup>19</sup> But identity on *Triton* proves anything but stable, and the novel examines the manner in which identifications attach themselves to subjects only to be sloughed off at later points in time.<sup>20</sup> The story of *Triton* takes place in a seemingly utopian society in which the struggle for equal rights has triumphed and in which total inclusivity has been achieved. On Triton, recognition is extended to all races, sexes, genders, religions, sexual orientations, kinship relations, and even fetishes. Triton functions as a "radical other"<sup>21</sup> to our society: it represents the drastically resignified society that gender theory so ardently desires to see emerge. Triton proves to be so

fundamentally other to our society because it stretches the matrix of intelligibility to a point where such a concept becomes almost meaningless. Furthermore, the number of gender identities has proliferated even more drastically because of new technologies that allow citizens to scramble their original identity coordinates and to create radically new subject positions by means of technological advancements such as selective reproduction, sex changes, and refixation treatments (treatments that alter what objects a subject finds desirable). Nevertheless, this utopian veneer proves less liberatory than its shiny surface might suggest, for its allure becomes tarnished by Triton's new system of norms and its transformation into a perfect society of control that eliminates gendered difference.

The reader experiences this society through a third person limited omniscient narration focalized through the consciousness of the main character, Bron Helstrom. The novel takes place predominately in the city of Tethys on Neptune's largest moon, Triton, during the war between the Inner and Outer planets of our solar system. At the beginning of the novel, war has already broken out between the Inner Planets (Earth, Mars, etc.) and the Outer Planets (predominately the moons of Neptune, Jupiter, etc.), but Triton has yet to become embroiled in the conflict.<sup>22</sup> Delany breaks with traditional sci-fi conventions by focusing not on the war, which serves as a mere backdrop, but instead on Bron's psychological struggles to acclimate himself to life on Triton, to which he has recently emigrated from Mars. Bron works at a "computer hegemony"<sup>23</sup> in a field known as Metalogics, the form of logic people use in their ordinary decisions in place of the strict methods of formal logic.<sup>24</sup> At the novel's outset, Bron becomes disillusioned with all aspects of his life. He suffers from a sort of corporate, white-collar malaise, but over the course of the novel this malaise becomes symptomatic of Triton itself.



Despite its auspicious title, Bron's occupation consists of little more than a cubicle existence. Once upon a time, he worked as a prostitute in Bellona, the major city on Mars,<sup>25</sup> and the novel suggests that this life providing a more stimulating existence for him. But now Bron has settled into a quiet corporate job in the far-flung regions of the solar system with no real aspirations or motivations. Triton provides a variety of living arrangements for its citizenry from polygamous family households to co-operative apartment buildings. Bron chooses to live in a single-sex, male, non-specified sexual preference co-op because he seems so apathetic that even choosing the objects of his sexual cravings proves to be a matter of indifference. The monotony of Bron's life is interrupted by a surreptitious encounter with a woman known as The Spike, a free-spirited producer and writer, who travels the solar system performing drug-enhanced "micro-theatre." Bron falls in love with The Spike, who soon moves on to another planet and another government endowment for the performing arts, leaving Bron distraught in her absence. When his friend Sam departs for Earth on a secret mission, presumably to help forestall the outbreak of war, Bron accompanies him as part of his entourage in an effort to forget about The Spike. On Earth, Bron is briefly imprisoned, drugged, and interrogated by some clandestine secret agency. Eventually, he is released and spends some leisure time in Outer Mongolia, where he inadvertently reunites with The Spike whose theatre group is performing on the planet. Bron declares his love to The Spike, but she spurns him and he despondently returns to Triton with Sam. After their return, war breaks out, and secret agents of the Inner Planets sabotage Triton's artificial gravity system, which causes radical gravitational fluxes that decimate entire sections of Tethys. Bron's brief affair with The Spike, his visit to Mongolia, and his horrific experiences

during the gravity cut serve as the impetus for his decision to undergo a sex change operation coupled with a refixation treatment, which transforms him from a man who desires women into a woman who desires men, and it is Triton's development of this refixation treatment that allows the novel to so powerfully explore the concept of gender. After his operation, Bron returns to his normal life and attempts to fit into the Tritonian social matrix in his new role as a woman, but he remains incapable of adapting to world's culture because he learns that Triton has developed a new system of normativity that squashes his desire. Hence *Triton* leaves us with a fundamental question: does subverting the gender that has been forced upon one actually lead to liberation or do more subtle forms of normativity exist just below the surface of the binary matrix of intelligibility?

To fully understand the depiction of gender in the novel and how Delany's work critically engages with the utopics of gender theory, we must first schematically lay out Butler's concept of gender performativity. Butler explains that the performance of gender represents an act that cannot be said to pre-exist the subject: "gender is always a doing...though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed."<sup>26</sup> While she argues that doing constitutes a being's essence, she also recognizes that a fundamental categorization of the subject occurs before an individual even becomes capable of performing any significant acts. At birth (or even *in utero*), a gender is assigned to the individual and a set pattern of behavior is prescribed for it or, rather, inscribed on it.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, an individual cannot perform his/her gender in just any manner but instead must adhere to a set system of norms if s/he desires to achieve recognition as a human worthy of what Butler terms "a livable life."

Butler appropriates the concept of performativity from the speech act philosophy of J.L. Austin, who developed the concept of a performative utterance: a type of speech act that does not describe but performs a particular action.<sup>28</sup> The classic example of such an utterance occurs during a wedding ceremony when the phrase “I now pronounce you man and wife...” actually performs the act of marrying. Over the course of his lectures, Austin revises this basic theory of performatives to designate locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, thereby covering virtually the entire spectrum of speech acts. Locutionary acts consist “*of saying something*”; that is, they are the act of speaking itself. In an illocutionary act, the “performance of an act” occurs “*in saying something*”—the statement performs an act beyond the mere speaking of the words.<sup>29</sup> For example, a certain set of words performs the act of asking a question. Finally, a perlocutionary act represents a speech act in which an action is performed *by* saying something. As Austin explains, it is an act in which “saying something...produce[s] certain consequential effects upon the feeling, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons.”<sup>30</sup> For example, someone uttering the words “Will you accompany me to the store?” can represent all three types of acts. It is locutionary because the person performs the act of speaking; it is illocutionary because the speaker performs the act of asking a question; and, finally, it could be perlocutionary if it persuades the speaker’s audience to accompany him/her to the store. Thus, under his later paradigm, Austin displays how utterances in general perform actions, whether it is the act of stating, naming, describing, marrying, questioning, persuading, etc. At its most basic level, conceiving of gender as performative means that the labeling of an individual as a certain

gender produces (or performs) that very gender. In essence, then, Butler argues that gender is a linguistic effect.

While this initial labeling creates gender and instantiates the individual as a subject, gender performativity also consists of the subject's continual performance of gender roles. Therefore, Butler's theory provides a utopian and subversive promise because it implies that gender is not static and that a subject's gender can change over the course of his/her life. But for performative utterances to function properly, they are obliged to observe strict formulas—they must be repeatable along certain linguistic (or even legal) guidelines. Similarly, gender performances also have to follow patterns in order to be recognizable: a gender performance must adhere to and replicate the gender norms of society.

Based on Jacques Derrida's reading of Austin, Butler calls this process of repeating norms "citationality." Derrida explains that for performatives to "succeed" they must be performed according to a duplicable pattern that grants them their legitimacy.<sup>31</sup> With regards to a performative utterance such as "I now pronounce you..." in a wedding ceremony, the utterance cites the codified, legal norms that govern the ceremony of marriage and that legitimate the proceeding. Other performative utterances might not follow legal precedents but, instead, adhere to linguistic or grammatical patterns. For instance, asking a question follows a certain linguistic format including word order and vocal inflections, which act as signposts for the listener. Insofar as gender is performative Butler argues, it must also be iterable—it must be capable of being repeated in accordance with a fixed system of patterns. Indeed, Butler advocates a gender theory that "refuses to search for the origins of gender" and instead "investigates

the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus, unlike the legal norms that legitimate marriage or the grammatical ones that govern the asking of questions, gender repeats ideological norms that have been generated within the socio-cultural structures of power. The subject must perform his/her gender according to the gender norms that the episteme has produced (s/he must cite these norms) in order to remain recognizable to others and to the institutions of power. In this sense, gender theory’s utopian side manifests itself in its desire to extend recognition to a wider array of individuals by means of what Butler terms the “proliferation of gender.” For Butler, as for Hegel, only by way of recognition does the subject accede to its privilege qua subject.<sup>33</sup> “recognition is not conferred on the subject, but forms that subject.”<sup>34</sup> Gender represents the most basic form of recognition because it “figures as the precondition for the production and maintenance of legible humanity.”<sup>35</sup> An individual’s status as human depends upon the recognizability of his/her performance as a particular gender within what Butler terms the “matrix of intelligibility”: the field of social, cultural, discursive, and ideological forces which determines the traits through which an individual receives the label of a particular gender (or of another identity category).<sup>36</sup> For example, can a subject’s performance be labeled as male or female, masculine or feminine, gay or straight? If the performance of gender fails to cite the matrix of gender norms, then can we even speak of a subject? S/he will be designated as “abject.” as one not worthy of subjecthood or humanity because of the illegibility of his/her performance. Butler undoubtedly appropriates the term “abject” from the work of

Julia Kristeva, who defines it as being neither object nor subject: “Not me, not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture.”<sup>37</sup> Only by performing gender in a legible fashion can an individual achieve recognition as a gender, as a subject, and finally as a human deserving of the right to a “livable life.”<sup>38</sup> However, as Kristeva makes clear, the abject remains a necessary category for society to function, and one difficult question that *Triton* poses is to what degree do we require an excluded class of individuals, a marginal group that are labeled as abject but that are simultaneously used to shore up our definitions of ourselves and our civilization.

## **II. Utopian Resignifications: Radical Inclusivity and the Undoing of Gender**

While gender theory seeks to generate a praxis capable of escaping from and/or subverting the network of social normativization, Butler recognizes that norms cannot vanish entirely because society and human interactions depend upon them. But she seeks a way to reformulate the matrix of intelligibility in such a manner that its norms extend recognition to a vaster array of individuals. These norms or regulatory practices of the matrix operate through a primary exclusion; they demand “that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender.”<sup>39</sup> For Butler, normativity contains within itself the key to enacting such subversions because

norms remain mutable: “the terms by which we are recognized as human [and as a particular gender] are socially articulated and changeable.”<sup>40</sup> For Butler, it is the unintelligible genders—those who remain unrecognized by the matrix (drag queens, intersexed individuals, transgendered persons)—that serve as the potential sites of subversion and that spur the process of resignification because “they appear only as developmental failures or logical impossibilities from within that domain.”<sup>41</sup> By their very existence, these unrecognizable gender identities contradict the norms and logic of the matrix: “their persistence and proliferation...provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, to open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder.”<sup>42</sup> By turning towards those identity categories that are labeled as “other” or “abject,” Butler believes that normative definitions can be degraded and revised.

Of course, the unintelligible classes of individuals render the “cultural matrix” possible by functioning as the “other” against which intelligible subjects are defined (a null set, it should be remembered, is always required for any system to function properly). But Butler imagines that turning to these unintelligible genders opens the possibility of resignifying the matrix of intelligibility, of transforming it from a heterosexual matrix into a more pansexual one, thus allowing for the proliferation of gender beyond binary limitations. The resignification of the matrix does not entail the elimination of norms but instead the construction of a subversive form of norm repetition, one that undoes gender by proliferating it beyond the bounds of the binary: “The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat, or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical

proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself.”<sup>43</sup> But by the same token, Butler makes it clear that the resignification and rearticulation of norms must be a continuous and never-ending process: “That there can be no final or complete inclusivity is thus a function of the complexity and historicity of a social field that can never be summarized by any given description, and that, for democratic reasons, ought never be.”<sup>44</sup> There can be no final inclusivity because an excluded group must always remain in order for the “true” subjects to be able to define their selves. The point is not to eradicate exclusion altogether (since Butler believes this to be impossible), but to make the excluded an ever smaller category of individuals by a process of continual resignification.

Nonetheless, Butler persists in her utopian belief that norms can slowly be eroded by persistent and subtle subversions in the quotidian sphere, that the excluded can ever more be transmuted into the included, and that a livable life can be extended to an ever-increasing number of individuals. Indeed, gender theory has reached a point where it understands that norms cannot be entirely eradicated and instead seeks methods of reshaping the normative matrix in order to broaden its field of inclusivity. But, would such a change in the social episteme really change society and the subject for the better? This is the question that lies at the heart of Delany’s *Triton* because, as we shall see, Bron alters his sex and his gender yet still remains oppressed by both a crushing sense of ennui and a controlling normative system. While Butler desires the end of prescriptive norms, Delany’s novel examines what happens when norms become purely descriptive. On *Triton*, norms have been resignified to the point where the excluded no longer exists as a category. *Triton* displays how the forces of power will always seek to attain equilibrium



and to achieve a homeostatic condition in which further change is negated before it even occurs. Triton attains this homeostasis by a transformation of norms in which they cease to be about prescribing patterns of subject behavior and instead metamorphose into types, a new kind of normativity that understands radical difference, that views all subjects as equivalent, and that seeks to describe (rather than prescribe) subject behavior in all its multiplicity.

After the gravity cut, Bron undergoes his sex change and refixation treatment and begins to perform his identity in new ways, but his operations fail to help him in his struggle for acclimation, and he remains in a state of apathy and confusion.<sup>45</sup> Bron struggles with Triton's allegedly utopian society because its normative matrix proves entirely foreign to the binary one to which he had grown accustomed on Mars. As opposed to the Martian binary matrix, Triton's matrix of intelligibility is based on the recognition of difference in all its multiplicity. The novel's subtitle, "An Ambiguous Heterotopia," immediately signals the importance of difference in *Triton*.<sup>46</sup> The prefix "hetero-" evokes two important terms: heterogeneous and heterosexual.<sup>47</sup> The word "heterogeneous" suggests that Triton acts as a mixture composed of a variety of different elements.<sup>48</sup> The diverse elements on Triton prove to be the infinite number of identities available to the subject based on the combination of race, gender, sex, kinship relations, and sexual preferences.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, Triton's matrix of intelligibility accepts the multiplicity of identity categories that gender theory strives to achieve.

But by attempting to achieve this unity out of multiplicity, Triton transformed its normative matrix: the subject has been programmed (or typed) in vastly more complex ways than those implied by the typical, binary identity categories. This leads us to the

second word with which “heterotopia” conjures associations: “heterosexual.”<sup>50</sup> The novel actually proceeds to radicalize and redefine this word in terms of the difference already implied by the prefix “hetero-.” In fact, the novel goes so far as to effectively deterritorialize sexuality, to open up the organizational plane of sexuality to the possibility of rearticulations and reorganizations. *Triton* allows us to reread the word “heterosexual” according to its actual etymological meaning instead of the traditional definition that has accrued to it. On Triton, heterosexual comes to mean that a multiplicity of sexual differences exist and that the subject is able to perform his/her gender in any manner that s/he chooses. “Heterosexual” ceases to imply a sexual difference based solely on male and female; instead, Triton divides individuals into “forty or fifty basic sexes, falling loosely into nine categories, four homophilic...Homophilic means no matter who or what you like to screw, you prefer to live and have friends primarily from your own sex. The other five are heterophilic” (99).

These forty or fifty categories only represent the “basic sexes,” for Triton recognizes that infinite variation is possible. This sexual division not only contrasts sharply with the normative matrix of our contemporary culture but also with the normative system to which Bron is accustomed. While current matrices of intelligibility have become somewhat tolerant of particular gay and lesbian lifestyles, they still view these sexualities as aberrations, as out of the ordinary. By contrast, the heterotopian society of Triton accepts homophilic lifestyles as natural occurrences, which is readily apparent from their classification as different sexes—as categories with a biological basis and not merely as sexual orientations. Furthermore, as we shall see, Triton understands human desire in ways that would shatter the current matrix of intelligibility because it

recognizes that human desire is predicated upon far more complex preferences than the mere sex of the desired object. Triton accepts not only gay, straight, and bisexual citizens, but it also recognizes sadists, masochists, and even pedophiles as worthy of livable lives. Labels such as “abject” or “perverse” cease to have meaning in Triton’s heterotopian society, and it is not my purpose here to explore the ethical dilemmas posed by Triton’s acceptance of the more extreme forms of sexual preferences and fetishes. Instead, I want to argue that if the matrix of intelligibility based on the recognizability of gender performances is undone then a different system of nomenclature and subject demarcation must inevitably take its place—power will learn to use universal recognition to its own ends in order to control the populace.

### **III. Know Your Type:**

#### **Behavioral Identifications and the Reappropriation of the Margins**

Bron’s efforts at adapting to the normative regime on Triton narrativize the psychic struggles that no doubt would emerge in the face of the plurisexualization of the social episteme. This problem emerges at the very outset of the novel, when the narrator explains that Bron “hated being a type” (5). Throughout the novel, characters evoke this term in order to understand other individuals and to navigate their existence on Triton. In effect, “types” have replaced traditional identity categories (sex, race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual preference) as the predominant means of negotiating social interactions, and they also provide the foundation upon which governmental and corporate institutions erect a structural understanding of subjects and their behavior. This ideology, which I term “typing,” forms the basis for Triton’s utopian attitude of acceptance and also represents the transformation in the function of norms after the

proliferation of gender.<sup>51</sup> While the conventional identity categories (race, sex, class, etc.) still exist on Triton, their prescriptive edge has been dulled or “flattened”—they have developed into mere “matter[s] of surface” that amount to nothing more than “cosmetic issues.”<sup>52</sup> The proliferation of gender (as well as other identity categories) has led to this flattening because the rigid lines of binary demarcation have given way to a more fluid system of identity politics (a smooth space of normativity instead of a striated one) that is based on a complex knowledge of types. Identity categories retain none of their current magnitude because they all receive equal recognition and become as changeable as one’s clothes. The subject’s ability to adopt and then cast off various components of their identity has forced the people and institutions of Triton to seek new methods for differentiating the mass of its citizenry, for reterritorializing the deterterritorialized identity plane of Triton’s heterotopian society.<sup>53</sup>

Although other identity categories still exist in a flattened capacity, gender has effectively been undone on Triton and hence designations such as masculine or feminine have become hollow distinctions: “Male and female names out here, of course, didn’t mean too much,” Delany writes, “Anyone might have just about any name” (41). Despite their rather dubious nature as indicators of sex, proper names still function as part of gender under most matrices of intelligibility because they are socially imposed attributes that gesture towards a subject’s biological sex. Furthermore, an individual’s clothing options have proliferated in such fantastic ways on Triton that they have ceased to function as gender markers.<sup>54</sup> Like proper names, then, clothing and appearance no longer dictate one’s gender, for prescriptions concerning proper attire for a particular gender have vanished in the heterotopian episteme of Triton. In fact, all of the external

indicators of gender have disappeared, thus leaving subjects with no method of determining another person's gender based on outward appearances. Indeed, the arbitrariness of such gender markers recalls Saussure's argument that "*the linguistic sign is arbitrary*."<sup>55</sup> Of course, attributes of an individual's appearance are not linguistic signs, but, as we have already seen, the concept of gender originates with language, and the Tritonian normative system recognizes that one's name and clothing remain just as arbitrary as the words we choose to designate objects in the real world.

When Bron initially arrives at the clinic for his surgery, his discussion with the receptionist exemplifies the manner in which gender and sex have become divorced from their traditional designators. When asked what his sex is, Bron responds, "Well what do I look like?" The receptionist's retort highlights the manner in which sex and gender have become entirely disconnected on Triton: "'You could be a male partway through one of a number of different sex-change processes. Or you could be a female who is much further along in a number of other sex change operations...Or,' she concluded, 'you could be a woman in very good drag'" (219). As a conscientious Tritonian who adheres to the ideology of types, the receptionist cannot harbor presumptions about a subject's sex based on customary gender markers because such markers have been entirely divested of their meaning. The receptionist's comments attest to Triton's deterritorialization of the plane of sexuality: the slate of the sexual episteme has been wiped clean of its old formulas and new principles based on radical forms of difference have been inscribed in their place.

But if normativization has lost its prescriptive component and become entirely descriptive, then what are the elements that compose typing? What makes typing

effective? Despite the “flattening” of identity categories, typing still groups individuals, but its rationale is predicated not just upon “primary”<sup>56</sup> identity categories but also on a massive system of taxonomies that defines individuals based on an almost infinite number of categories: behavioral, psychological, medical, residential, familial, occupational, etc. As the novel explains, typing is a process by which subjects can be defined even “if only by their prejudices” as a particular category (5). This category (or type) represents the particular convergence of identity factors, behavioral patterns, personal beliefs, and attitudes that a subject exhibits at a particular point in his/her life.<sup>57</sup> Thus, like the traditional identity categories, typing remains performative. In actuality, typing indicates that the matrix of intelligibility now recognizes the performativity of subjects’ identities: typing is founded upon performativity, for it is predicated upon the exhibition of various aspects of an individual’s personality. Under the typing regime, subjects have internalized the belief in performativity and institutions of power have transformed it into a hegemonic force.

Throughout their lives, the Tritonian citizens learn that “*everyone* is a type.” Even those who “pride...[themselves] on doing things contrary to what *everyone* else does” are “a type too” (5-6). As the novel progresses, Bron is typed in a variety of different ways by society, by his acquaintances, and by himself. Because he hates being typed, Bron frequently attempts to subvert the system, going so far as to undergo medical procedures in order to retype himself. He desires a marginal existence, but this proves untenable under the Tritonian normative matrix, which constantly reterritorializes any attempts to deterritorialize its organizational plane. On Triton, it becomes impossible to exist in a truly liminal state because the system always recognizes one as a type, no

matter how uncommon that type may seem. Hence, further resignification of the matrix of intelligibility becomes impossible because there is no margin from which to enact it: if one begins to perform one's identity in a different mode, then that individual is merely retyped based on the new manifestations of his/her identity and behavior. Although typing may not always constitute a spoken act, it nonetheless remains performative because it performs the illocutionary act of description.

Bron's friend, Lawrence, provides the clearest summary of the typing system: "My dear young man [...] *everyone* is a type. The true mark of social intelligence is how unusual we can make our particular behavior for the particular type we are when put under particular pressure" (5). Lawrence's words echo those of Judith Butler in *Undoing Gender* when she argues that the performance of gender "is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint."<sup>58</sup> But, on Triton, the system of constraints has changed, and such improvisation no longer retains the potential for subversion because the matrix of types merely reappropriates the marginal position in which the subject has attempted to ensconce his/her self. This process of "improvisation" or of rendering "unusual" serves as Bron's own *modus operandi*: "I rather pride myself on occasionally doing things contrary to what *everyone* else does.' To which Lawrence...had muttered... 'That's a type too'" (6). Thus, Bron's attempts at "nonconformity" only serve to cast him in the role of the nonconformist type, which he continues to perform until his performance deviates enough for him to be retyped yet again. As we shall see, the ability to retype subjects grants the various institutions of power the means by which the system of control continually perfects itself, thus leading to more precise forms of control than those available to prescriptive normativization.

#### **IV. To Be is to Do, To Describe is to Control: Normativity in the Absence of Gender**

How is it possible for institutions to typologize in the face of the multiplicity of subject positions that Triton conditions? The solution to this conundrum lies in the citywide computers that enable Triton to function as both a utopia of universal recognition and a society of control. Typing functions on both a local and global level. On the global scale, Triton's governing bodies and commercial entities have institutionalized and computerized their society's matrix of intelligibility, thus transforming it from a purely ideological structure into a computerized system by means of the city's computer databanks that track subject formations and collate data on individual behavior patterns. Meanwhile, on the local level, Tritonian citizens characterize one another based on an ideological form of typing that they have internalized as subjects.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the system of typing proves to be little different than an ideologically normalized structure of stereotypes—except that, on Triton, stereotypes are not employed as acts of prejudice or denigration. Since the Tritonians accept difference as a multiplicity, types (or stereotypes) become a method of navigating interpersonal relationships and of choosing individuals that will be compatible with one's own type.

While the Tritonian populace has internalized the typing ideology, the various institutions of power have simultaneously computerized it. Like the citizens, the forces of power do not prescribe behavior for subjects but merely describe and type that behavior. Instead of particular genders, Tritonians are classified according to any number of different trends, all of which are acceptable and understandable by computers. For example, Triton's medical/technological industry refers to an individual subject's



sexuality and desires as his/her “sexual deployment template” (228). Technicians read these templates by means of a scanning process that determines a subject’s sexual orientation and his/her sexual predilections. Tritonian statisticians then track common trends in such templates among the populace without any one template or configuration becoming the dominant form. Before his sex change operation, the technicians explain these processes to Bron:

There is no majority configuration...It’s the current male plurality configuration—that is, the base pattern. The preference nodes are entirely individual, and so is any experiential deployment within it. It’s that one that, given our society, is probably still the easiest to adjust to—though practically every other person you meet will argue that the minimal added effort of adjusting to some of the others is more than paid for by the extra satisfaction of doing something minimally difficult. You’re an ordinary, bisexual, female-oriented male—sexually that is. (228)

Triton’s matrix of intelligibility does not privilege one class of identities above the others—there is no majority. Instead, it merely recognizes particular tendencies amongst the citizenry. While there is a “current plurality configuration,” of which Bron is an example, this configuration in no way functions as a prescriptive norm. It merely describes patterns that the masses exhibit at a given point in time—it concerns itself solely with demographics, the same sort of profiling that companies like Amazon or Facebook use to sell us products. Like Butler, then, Triton recognizes that norms are mutable and hence provides the means for subjects to easily change the performance of their identity. Of course, Triton consistently reterritorializes these potentially subversive identity configurations, and such deterritorializations actually enable the typing system to become ever more precise in its understanding of subject behavior.

By reading Bron’s sexual deployment template, the technicians can also determine the nature of his desire—he has preferences ranging from “small, dark women

with large hips to tall fair ones, rather chesty” (227-8). This knowledge enables the technicians to provide refixation treatments that divert a subject’s desire towards a new class (or classes) of objects. The technicians cannot alter Bron’s past experiences (his memories of being a man who predominately desires women or his recollections of his life as a prostitute), but they can realign his preference nodes to give him different predilections. Once the sexual aspects of a subject’s type have been determined, reprogramming a subject’s desire proves relatively simple. By enduring a short outpatient procedure, Bron undergoes a metamorphosis from a man who generally desires women into a woman whose major source of attraction is men. This procedure demonstrates the manner in which the institutions of power on Triton can collectively create a utopia, offering profound contentment to its citizens by eliminating all prescriptive norms.

Yet this move away from prescriptive norms proves to be less liberatory than one might first suspect. For example, Bron’s sex change does not free him from the system of types; instead, he merely moves from one position in the matrix to another—he is simply retyped to reflect his sex change and refixation. Insofar as the system of types strives for perfection, it constantly seeks to better comprehend its subjects by ever more precisely defining or describing their types. A subject’s type will be retyped any number of times throughout his/her life in order to refine the descriptions: each transformation or realignment only ends up providing the system with more information with which to typologize. As the technicians make clear before Bron’s sex change, desiring such surgical procedures does not make the subject different but merely casts him/her into a particular type distinction. Of course, Bron is not a native Tritonian, and, as the

technician further explains, he fits perfectly into the types that generally undergo sex change operations because he hails from a different planet—individuals from Earth or Mars prove more likely to undergo sex changes. Since he has decided to undergo a sex change operation, Bron also represents an example of “the type who’s pretty fed up with people telling you what you aren’t or are” (220). Regardless, the technician proceeds to label Bron as a particular type. While Butler’s theory desires to reshape the matrix of intelligibility through a continual process of resignifications, the Tritonian matrix has appropriated this tactic of resignification and applied it to its subjects, hence providing the means for the typing system to comprehend the continual flux of identity.

This ongoing process of retyping becomes especially clear when Bron returns to work after his sex change. After a few days back at the hegemony, Audri, Bron’s boss, explains to him that the company is about to retype him<sup>60</sup> in a negative way because his “efficiency index blinks a little shakily on the charts,” thus signaling that he has potentially become an inefficient worker. This provides an example of how various institutions and corporations type the subject in different ways. As Foucault teaches us, power is distributed throughout social systems; that is, its presence is not housed in any one governing body or institution but instead is spread throughout the socius: “The factory was explicitly compared to the monastery, the fortress, a walled town [...] Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many section as there are bodies or elements to be distributed.”<sup>61</sup> Of course, in this passage, Foucault is discussing the rise of discipline in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but, as we shall see, the number of sites for power to exercise its control over individuals only continues to multiply as societies move from the disciplinary society to the control society, from a striated space to a smooth space. Thus,

on Triton, a subject will be typed in a variety of ways by the assorted nodes of power, and the typing of a subject by one institution might affect his/her being typed in a certain way by another institution if a communication network exists between the different entities.

This continual resignification of a subject's type based on changes in his/her identity performance returns us to the linguistic aspects of these processes. Since all language is performative to some degree, then labeling an individual also performs an act. In this case, it is the act of description (an illocutionary act). While the subject may redefine his/her identity or gender by new manners of performing it, the various nodes of power simultaneously perform the act of redefining the latest manifestation of the subject's identity. Yet power's redefinition of a subject performs more than the mere locutionary act of stating the subject's type or even the illocutionary act of description, for it also performs the perlocutionary act of controlling the subject through its application of such descriptions. By describing the subject in such complex terms, the various institutions of power achieve new levels of control: they negate any possibility of subversion by rendering the subject's behavior predictable. While Triton does not seek to prescribe subject behavior, the governmental powers use their descriptive knowledge of subject types to foresee how subjects will react given specific variables in certain circumstances. Like the medical center, the government of Triton proves capable of multifaceted forms of typing through the use of citywide computer networks. By recording and storing demographic information regarding major types and trends in its populace and by using complex equations with subject identities and behaviors acting as the variables along with the variables regarding certain situations, the Tritonian computers become capable of predicting how its citizenry will respond to different

scenarios—they develop the capacity to describe, predict, and control the variables of the human.

The Tritonian government never overtly types subjects and predicts behavior for sinister ends in the novel, but it uses such knowledge to determine whether individuals are “safe” or not. As Sam explains, “We simply live in what the sociologists call a politically low-volatile society. And as I think I said: The political volatility of people who live in single-sex, nonspecified sexual-preference co-ops tends to be particularly low” (126). Bron responds, “In other words, given my particular category, my general psychological type, I’ve been declared safe” (126). Like real world governments, Triton divides citizens into safe subjects and subjects who must be kept under heavier surveillance. It bases these categorizations upon a variety of factors including such seemingly mundane characteristics as a subject’s choice of housing. In this instance, the typing proves correct: Bron remains far too apathetic to ever consider any serious form of rebellion. His political indifference represents only one aspect of the overall ennui that permeates his life.

Typing makes its first appearance during Bron’s walk home from work in the opening chapter when he decides to visit an “ego-booster booth,” and this event also demonstrates the ubiquity of surveillance on Triton. The ego-booster booth is a type of coin-operated booth that allows a Tritonian citizen to view video and audio of him/her that has been recorded and stored by the government.<sup>62</sup> Bron decides to enter the booth because “something amusing *was* called for,” and it is one of his actions that he believes places him outside of the regime of types. This becomes evident when the novel reveals

that Bron has a history with the booths (4). Initially, he “had been appalled at the booths’ institution” eight years before the time of the novel, but

for [the first] two years, while finding the booths derisively amusing in theory, he had never gone into one—as silent protest. He had kept it up till he realized practically no one he knew ever went into them either: they considered the millions of people who did, over all the inhabited Outer Satellites, common, unthinking, politically irresponsible, and dull, which made it depressingly easy to define the people who did *not* use them, if only by their prejudices, as a type. (5)

Bron, in his disgust at being categorizable, began entering the booths, as he does on the day that opens the novel, in order to render his self different from the masses, and it is this desire for difference that ultimately reveals the flaws in Triton’s control apparatus: it neglects to take desire into consideration.

Triton’s capacity to predict human behavior becomes apparent when the Inner Planets carry out an act of sabotage against Triton by cutting the gravity: “They had it all figured out—statistics, trends, tendencies, and a really bizarre predictive module called the ‘hysteria index’ all said that practically no one would want to go out to see the sky” (120). In spite of this foreknowledge, Triton’s predictions concerning the citizenry’s reactions to the incident prove incorrect because “eighty-six percent of Tethys’ population was outside within a minute and ten seconds, one way or the other, of the cut” (120). According to Sam, who works in a relatively high level position in the Tritonian government, this is the only time that the government’s predictions have proven wrong: “But up until now—and this probably strikes you as quite naïve—it never occurred to me that the government could be wrong...about its facts and figures, its estimates and its predictions. Up until now, when a memo came down that said people, places, incidents would converge at set times and in given ways, they did” (120). What causes this

aberration in typing's perfect record? Ultimately, this moment indicates that human nature retains one aspect that remains fundamentally unpredictable: desire. Triton flattened desire and effectively banished it from their society, but, in this brief moment, it returns to plague the typing system with its irrational and unpredictable character. Thus, we are led to the most important question concerning typing: what consequences do universal recognition and the development of typing have for desire?

## **V. In the Absence of Gender, In the Absence of Lack: Desire in the Society of Universal Recognition**

Critics of *Trouble on Triton*, including Delany, almost inevitably blame Bron's failure to adapt to the Tritonian social structure on his personality and attitudes. In his *Diacritics* interview, Delany comments that *Triton* is "the one book of mine in which the thrust toward the main character is almost wholly critical. What's wrong with him? Why doesn't he function properly? Why can't he be honest with himself? Or with Others?"<sup>63</sup> Elsewhere, Delany explains, "You have to remember, what Bron usually does to justify his behaving in the selfish and hateful ways that make him such a hateful man is to manufacture perfectly fanciful motivations for what everyone else is doing—motivations which, if they were the case, would make his actions acceptable."<sup>64</sup> Like Delany, the novel's critics have felt little compassion for Bron. He has been variously described as "an unregenerate male chauvinist";<sup>65</sup> as "incessant, pedantic, and boring";<sup>66</sup> as "unspontaneous, egocentric, coarse, and culture-bound";<sup>67</sup> and simply as "a sexist."<sup>68</sup> To be sure, Bron fits all these descriptions. So what precisely is his problem? In a world that produces few dissatisfied citizens, why do Bron's selfishness and sexism persist? I contend that the nature of Bron's problems should be understood in the context of the

flattening of desire that occurs on Triton as an effect of the proliferation and consequent undoing of gender.

If we are to imagine a society that, like Triton, has transcended binaries and inscribed a matrix of intelligibility based on multiplicity and universal recognition, then we must also contemplate the manner in which such an alteration impacts human desire. If, as Hegel argues, desire is always a desire for recognition, then what are the consequences for desire if all subjects receive complete recognition? As the technician explains to Bron before his surgery, “life under our particular system doesn’t generate that many serious sexually dissatisfied types” (220). Triton strives to satiate the desires of all subjects through its extension of recognition to all forms of sexuality and desire and its provision of the means to satiate these desires, producing few citizens whose sexual needs go unsatisfied. First, there are no consequences for engaging in promiscuous behavior because reproduction has become entirely selective.<sup>69</sup> Secondly, the residential system on Triton promises a utopian sex life to its citizenry. If Tritonians desire a family life, then they can choose to live in various types of family communes on the outer rim of the city. Yet, the majority of citizens prefer to live in one of the assorted styles of co-ops that cater to the particular sexual needs of certain classes of individuals. In the co-ops, “sex was overt and encouraged and insistently integrated with all aspects of co-operative life” (57). Each building represents a utopian space for a certain group of individuals and provides a micro-expression of Triton’s overarching utopian episteme.<sup>70</sup> But while such a structure seems liberating, no space remains for fostering true desire since everything has already been provided for the subject—there is no lack. Satiation waits next door, or down in the commons room, or if satisfaction cannot be found among one’s neighbors,



then a diverse array of bars exist that cater to all manner of sexual predilections. From this perspective, Triton seems destined to produce blissful satisfaction for all its subjects, but Bron remains sullenly resentful of the system and resists the pleasures it affords.

In a recent article, Alcena Madeline Davis Rogan argues that in a number of his works “Delany problematizes the politics of identity by placing many of his protagonists in a landscape where difference dizzyingly proliferates,” and this difference proves nonhierarchical because it “is realized in a society that allows sexual identities to proliferate, seemingly endlessly.”<sup>71</sup> For Rogan, Bron’s problems on Triton result from his having emigrated from Mars, where sexual hierarchies still persist. Hence, Bron still lives under the “presumption that men and women are somehow essentially different” and “is unable to reconcile his experience of sexual nonidentitarianism with the epistemological framework that he inherited from Mars.”<sup>72</sup> The problem recalls the conundrum espoused in the forty-fifth proposition of Ashima Slade (one of Delany’s fictionalized versions of himself) in “Some Informal Remarks towards a Modular Calculus.” Indeed, this appendix acts as a critical model for reading the novel because it addresses the problem of moving between modular systems, discrete systems that are not immediately compatible with one another.<sup>73</sup> In this proposition, Slade explains the nature of the modular calculus:

The problem of the modular calculus, again, is: How can one relational system model another? This breaks down into two questions: (One) What must pass from system-B to system-A for us (System-C) to be able to say that system-A now contains some model of system-B? (Two) Granted the proper passage, what must the internal structure of system-A be for us (or it) to say that it contains any model of system-B? (302)

In order to travel between modular systems, the second system must maintain a certain degree of similarity to the first for the subject to experience a smooth transition. Based

on this proposition of Slade's, Rogan argues that Bron suffers because Triton does not retain enough of the binary model of identity to which he is accustomed.<sup>74</sup> While Rogan correctly notes that *Triton* concerns a migration between epistemological models, her argument does not consider that Bron's movement between systems is not simply a relocation between social structures but also a migration from a prescriptive matrix to a descriptive one. Once the social matrix has been stripped of its prescriptive edge, then, consequently, desire falls dead in the absence of prohibitions, and it is the absence of desire that ultimately haunts Bron.

Once the proliferation of gender has been pushed to its heterotopian extreme, then all forms of pleasure become recognized as legitimate. It is imperative here to distinguish between pleasure and desire—Triton provides its subjects with an infinite expansion of permissible pleasures, which should not to be confused with desire. For Lacan, pleasure always refers back to Freud's pleasure principle: "when faced with a stimulus encroaching on the living apparatus, the nervous system is as it were the indispensable delegate of the homeostat, of the indispensable regulator, thanks to which the living being survives, and to which corresponds a tendency to lower the excitation to a minimum."<sup>75</sup> The pleasure principle strives to maintain a homeostatic condition in the subject by avoiding states of extreme excitation—it keeps pleasure to a minimum (thus avoiding *jouissance*) and hence "is related to prohibition, to the law, and to regulation."<sup>76</sup> On Triton, the amount of pleasure a subject can experience while still maintaining a state of equilibrium has radically expanded. Žižek would term Triton's social structure permissive because "public order is no longer maintained by hierarchy, repression, and strict regulation, and therefore is no longer subverted by liberating acts of

transgression.”<sup>77</sup> For Žižek, this lack of transgressive acts leads to the reinstantiation of hierarchical sexual dichotomies such as master/slave, top/bottom, butch/femme, dominant/submissive, etc. But, on Triton, these binary relations exist as only one type of fetish in the constellation of available identities and acts, thus making transgression on Triton an almost impossible feat to achieve.

Why then does Bron not simply succumb to Triton’s society of pleasure? The answer lies in distinguishing desire from pleasure. Unlike pleasure, desire “is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting.”<sup>78</sup> Lacan places desire firmly in the Hegelian tradition by claiming that “man’s desire is the desire of the Other,”<sup>79</sup> which “means both to be the object of another’s desire, and desire for recognition by another.”<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, desire can never be satisfied because it springs from a fundamental lack in the subject: “desire is the relation of being to lack. This lack is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn’t the lack of this or that [which would be need or demand], but lack of being whereby the being exists.”<sup>81</sup> This lack is both the lack of the other and the lack created by the insertion of the subject into language: “it is language that imposes a radical lack...It is that lack, which is inherent to the ability to speak, that creates desire, that feeds it, and sustains it...Desire becomes the unrelenting quest for that which is lacking, for the impossible that human beings cannot, however, renounce.”<sup>82</sup> Žižek compares desire to Zeno’s paradox of Achilles and the tortoise:

The libidinal economy of Achilles and the tortoise is made clear: the paradox stages the relation of the subject to the object cause of its desire, which can never be attained. The object-cause is always missed; all we can do is encircle it. In short, the topology of this paradox of Zeno is the paradoxical topology of the object of desire that eludes our grasp no matter what we do to attain it.<sup>83</sup>

Triton has eliminated lack by inundating the subject with a profusion of available pleasures in its attempt to achieve a state of global contentment. In addition, Triton forecloses lack by continually defining subjects in ever more precise terms by means of the typing system. Because of Bron's status as an emigrant, he remains trapped in the lack that still persists in hierarchical social systems, such as the one on Mars. Bron craves transgression because it would allow him to achieve a level of difference that would grant him recognition as a being distinct from all others and as an individual who cannot be confined by definitions.

Of course, as a good Hegelian, Butler understands that desire ultimately represents the desire for recognition, and it is precisely this recognition that she seeks to grant to traditionally marginalized subjects. But her utopian desire for universal recognition fails to consider its consequences. Under our moral matrix, norms function as prohibitions, and desire always designates a lack: the prohibited, the different, or simply the Other. *Triton* poses the question of what happens to desire when the subject begins to internalize norms that no longer prohibit certain forms of behavior and that no longer recognize radical difference. No doubt, the subject is still produced by the recognition extended by these norms and a "livable sociality"<sup>84</sup> is still maintained because these norms provide subjects with the means for interacting with one another, but desire falls dead in the absence of restrictions, for desire is always formulated upon prohibition and the fight for recognition. On Triton, not only do prohibited pleasures no longer exist, but the society is actually structured in a fashion that seeks to gratify a subject's wants and needs in the easiest manner possible, hence stripping desire of its motivating force. The question then becomes whether Bron actually remains trapped in

the sexist model of society and desire, as Rogan would maintain, or whether Bron suffers because true difference (and consequently true desire) has vanished from the Tritonian matrix of intelligibility. When all subjects receive recognition and when nothing is prohibited, then all subjects and all forms of pleasure are rendered as the same; they become mere types, particular configurations of identity coordinates, behavioral attributes, and sexual predilections that prove instantly gratifiable under the reformulated matrix of intelligibility. Under this matrix of intelligibility, subjects internalize the computer typing system. No longer predicated on the struggle for recognition, desire becomes flattened into a mere search for compatibility: individuals search out others who are programmed in a complementary fashions that will allow them to run well in tandem with each other and generate the highest potential pleasure.

Although Triton provides an expansive array of pleasures for its citizenry, what Bron ultimately craves is the intense kind of recognition that we might term love, but Triton forecloses the possibility of love, an emotion (or state of being, it might be argued) based neither on sex nor on compatibility. For Lacan, love (*l'amour*) has a “fundamentally narcissistic structure”<sup>85</sup>—it is “a phenomenon which takes place on the imaginary level, and which provides a veritable subduction of the symbolic [...] That’s what love is. It’s one’s own ego that one loves in love, one’s own ego made real on the imaginary level.”<sup>86</sup> Essentially, an individual craves love because it validates his/her love of their own ego. Furthermore, love resides in the subject’s belief that another person can fill his/her lack by the union of the two separate individuals into what Lacan calls “the One”: “Love is impotent, though mutual, because it is not aware that it is but the desire to be One.”<sup>87</sup> Of course, like the object of desire, love’s “tension towards the One” can never be satiated

because of the boundaries of the body, but the return of love by another at least partly assuages this impossible desire for oneness: “love demands love. It never stops (*ne cesse pas*) demanding it. It demands it...*encore*. ‘*Encore*’ is the proper name of the gap (*faille*) in the Other from which the demand for love stems.”<sup>88</sup> Bron’s troubles stem from the fact that no one on Triton knows how to love, so while Bron demands love, he never receives his *encore*. And since love represents a narcissistic love of one’s own ego, then Bron also suffers from a lack of self-validation.

On two occasions, both before and after he has become a woman, Bron displays his romantic nature. Before his operation, he entreats The Spike to flee Triton in search of a civilization that recognizes passionate impulses. Similarly, after his sex change, Bron declares his love to Sam and begs to become one of his wives. Both The Spike and Sam greet Bron’s propositions with scoffing rebuffs, thus exemplifying Triton’s viewpoint on such illogical desires. Indeed, Bron proves to be the only character in the novel that exhibits any passion. The other characters operate on cool, computer-like logic that treats emotional responses as counterproductive. Thus, at the novel’s end, Bron remains trapped in his malaise. He desires a form of recognition that sees him as not merely a type but as a unique individual who is radically different from all others and hence deserving of not just a livable life but also deserving of love. Ultimately, Bron still remains incapable of defining his own performance:

Think! She thought: At one point there had been something she had thought she could *do* better than other women—because she had *been* a man, known firsthand a man’s strengths, a man’s needs. So she had become a woman to do it. But the *doing*, as she had once suspected and now knew, was preeminently a matter of *being*; and *being* had turned out to be, more and more, specifically a matter of *not doing*. (263)

In short, Bron realizes the havoc that typing has wreaked upon desire and human identity. If gender represents a doing (a performative) and if gender represents one of the fundamental methods by which a subject is recognized, then identity and desire plummet into a space of meaninglessness in the absence of gender. In these final moments, Bron is hurled back into the existentialist dilemma of being versus doing (or of existence versus essence), but, on Triton, the relation between the two has been severed by the typing ideology. As a male, Bron had imagined himself containing the ability to perform the role of woman better than the women around him, yet he discovers that the womanly role no longer exists because gender roles themselves have vanished. Since society views all performances as intelligible, then all performances of a subject's identity have become virtually the same. Love, that special form of recognition that Bron craves, demands that the beloved be seen as distinct from the masses, as a special individual. Ultimately, love represents a state of being as well as a doing—it is a performative that permeates one's entire identity. Love, as a state of being, includes a wide range of emotional states: happiness, passion, heartache, and jealousy, all of which require the subject to remain in an advanced state of excitation that demands the performance (doing) of actions that will hopefully lead to satiation—love constantly teeters on the ledge between pleasure and *jouissance*, and one small push can send an individual plunging into the abyss of *jouissance* in which pleasure slides into pain. Since the Tritonian episteme places such a high value on maintaining the contentment of its citizenry, then love proves dangerous in its capacity to excite subjects into a state of unpredictable and potentially disgruntled behavior. Triton forces a subject's performance of their identity to remain a matter of “not doing.”

Ultimately, then, the novel interrogates gender theory by examining how it strips away the basis of humanity and individuality by rendering all difference as the same. Under the regime of typing, difference has indeed become nonhierarchical, but gender theorists fail to realize that in the place of hierarchical or binary structures of difference, the institutions of power will merely resignify the populace in ways that prove, if not oppressive, then at least controlling. Whether such a state is desirable then becomes the question that the novel poses to us: will the utopian proliferation of recognizable identities prove liberatory or will it, when actualized, squash the very difference that marks the status of the human and lead to societies capable of controlling the subject in radically new fashions? In the final analysis, when humans become incapable of experiencing desire, then does the human even exist anymore?

## **VI. Conclusion: Dwelling in the No-Place of Gender**

According to the word's own etymological meaning, a utopia is fundamentally unrealizable—it is a “no-place,” a place that does not (and potentially cannot) exist. Yet Foucault maintains that the most basic difference between utopias and heterotopias is that heterotopias are real world spaces in which the individual experiences difference so radical that words and logic fail in the face of it. Gender theorists can easily point to real world spaces that allow for the proliferation of gender in certain confined areas, for example, the drag balls from the documentary *Paris Is Burning* (1990) that Butler discusses in *Bodies that Matter*. Whether Butler's vision will always prove unrealizable remains to be seen, but its attempt to imagine a radically different version of society marks it as a devoutly utopian endeavor. While Delany's *Triton* no doubt represents a



“no-place” due to its fictional nature, it nonetheless allows the critic to transport gender theory into a heterotopian space by imagining the consequences of the instantiation of its revolutionary project.

While gender theory has taught us an inordinate amount concerning the constraints that socio-cultural forces place on an individual’s identity, we must still consider the consequences of entirely losing this basic structure of human identity. No doubt, the society of Triton remains only a distant, and sometimes seemingly unreachable, dream of universal human rights, but, in some ways, it can provide a paradigm for subversive practice. Inevitably, our current society must continue to struggle to extend recognition to marginalized groups, and my point in this chapter has not been to negate the power of social change or to criticize those who endeavor to subvert the oppressive systems currently operating around the globe. Ultimately, what *Triton* forces us to consider is the level of exclusion required for a system to function. As we have seen, society always requires a marginalized group, an abject category that endows the majority with meaning through its opposition. Ursula K. Le Guin’s short story, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas,” argues that even the most seemingly utopian society must retain an excluded element even if it is only one individual. In Le Guin’s story, Omelas is a perfect utopia for all its citizens, but the society requires that one child be kept locked inside a filthy room by his/herself. Because it remains alone throughout its miserable life, the child becomes like the legend of Kaspar Hauser, the wild child who escaped his captivity as a young adult and became socialized into German society before being mysteriously murdered.<sup>89</sup> The people of Omelas never know whether the child is chosen because it is mentally disabled or for some other purpose, and

they also never understand why the child must be kept in such abominable conditions—they simply know that it is required for their society to maintain its utopian perfection. Omelas has pared the excluded category down to a single individual who is forced into the abject position, but Triton seems to have proceeded even further and eliminated exclusion altogether. Hence, Triton leaves us with a very powerful question: can a society ever reach a point where excluded, marginalized groups become non-existent, or must we always maintain an excluded other in order for our civilizations to function?

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (1978; New York: Vintage, 1990) 144.

<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004) 217.

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, “The Tale of Old Venn,” the second of Delany’s eleven Nevèrÿon tales, quotes Lacan at its outset and proceeds to examine the concept of the phallus, how it differs from the penis, and how it rethinks the Freudian concept of penis envy.

<sup>4</sup> The word “gender” stems from the Latin “genus,” meaning race or kind, and is hence related to a variety of taxonomic terms such as “genus” in the binomial nomenclature of biology or “genre” in aesthetics. For a full etymology of the word “gender,” see the *Oxford English Dictionary*’s entry on the word.

<sup>5</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H.M. Parshley (1952; New York: Vintage, 1989) 267.

<sup>6</sup> See Robert J. Stoller’s *Sex and Gender: On Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: Science House, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> See Sonya Andermahr, Terry Lovell, and Carol Wolkowitz’s “Gender,” in *A Glossary of Feminist Theory*. (London: Arnold, 2000) 102. The authors take this information from Ann Oakley’s *Sex, Gender, and Society* (London: Temple-Smith, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> As Judith Butler explains in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ed. New York and London: Routledge, 1999), the “distinction between sex and gender [was intended] to dispute the biology-is-destiny formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (9-10).

<sup>9</sup> Such topics also crop up throughout many of Butler’s other works, including *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1997), *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham UP, 2005), and even her early book on Hegel entitled *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxxi.

<sup>11</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxxi.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth M. Perry and Rosemary A. Joyce, “Past Performance: The Archaeology of Gender Influenced by the Work of Judith Butler,” in *Butler Matters: Judith Butler’s Impact on Feminist and Queer Studies*, eds. Margaret Söner Breen and Warren J. Blumenfeld (Hampshire, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005) 115.

<sup>13</sup> See the introduction for an explanation of Moylan’s concept of critical utopias.

<sup>14</sup> The epigraph appears at the beginning of Appendix B, which is entitled “Ashima Slade and the Harbin-Y Lectures” and which is part two of “Some Informal Remarks Towards the Modular Calculus,” a section of the novel that Delany terms “a critical fiction.”

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; New York: Vintage, 1970) xvii.

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<sup>16</sup> The novel was entitled simply *Triton* when it was first published in 1976. As Fredric Jameson points out in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), the novel's subtitle is a reference to Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed* (1974), which features "an ambiguous utopia." In *Worlds out of Words: The SF Novels of Samuel R. Delany* (Frome, UK: Hunting Raven, 1979), Douglas Barbour also mentions this connection, and he explains that Delany, in his titles especially, "is inclined to be ironic in his allusion to traditional genre sf" (121). Le Guin's novel deals with two different planets: Annares, which was settled by anarchist utopians from the capitalist system on the planet Urras. Which planet is the actual utopia becomes the source of the ambiguity throughout this novel.

<sup>17</sup> Originally published as *The Tides of Lust*, a title that the publishers placed on the novel against Delany's wishes.

<sup>18</sup> In "About Delany Writing: An Anatomical Meditation," which appeared in *Extrapolation* 47.1 (Spring 2006): 16-29), Carl Freedman cites *Dhalgren* as the point when Delany not only "develops from a very good novelist into a great one" but also the novel with which he begins writing anatomical novels, a term that Freedman borrows from Northrop Frye (19). Freedman argues that *Triton* continues and intensifies this usage of the anatomical form in order to become a book about writing itself. In *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 1957), Frye appropriates the term "anatomy" from Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), and Frye uses the term to replace the older term of "Menippean Satire," a genre that is both "extroverted and intellectual" and that includes authors as diverse in time and place as Voltaire, Rabelais, Swift, and Sterne. And this lineage could be extended to the postmodern descendants of these authors: Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, David Foster Wallace, Mark Danielewski, etc. As Frye explains, it "deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes. Pendants, bigots, cranks, parvenus, virtuosi, enthusiasts, rapacious and incompetent professional men of all kinds, are handled in terms of their occupational approach to life as distinct from their social behavior. The Menippean satire thus resembles the confession in its ability to handle abstract ideas and theories, and differs from the novel in its characterization, which is stylized rather than naturalistic, and presents people as mouthpieces of the ideas they represent" (309).

<sup>19</sup> Even though their plots are unrelated, Delany describes *Trouble on Triton* as the prelude to his "Return to Nevèrÿon" tales, a series of eleven "sword and sorcery" short stories, novels, and novellas that again function on the very limits of their genre. The "Return to Nevèrÿon" series is published in four volumes: *Tales of Nevèrÿon* (1979), *Neveryóna* (1983), *Flight from Nevèrÿon* (1985), and *Return to Nevèrÿon* (1987). *Return to Nevèrÿon* was originally published as *The Bridge of Lost Desire*. *Triton* is related to "Nevèrÿon" in two distinct ways. First, it contains the first two parts of a larger five-part, unclassifiable work entitled "Some Informal Remarks Towards the Modular Calculus," a work that continues in various parts of the "Nevèrÿon" tales. The "Informal Remarks" consists of five parts, which span different genres: the first part is the novel *Triton*; the second part is *Triton*'s second appendix entitled "Ashima Slade and the Harbin-Y Lectures"; the third part is the first appendix to *Tales of Nevèrÿon*, written by S.L. Kermit, one of Delany's fictional writers who sometimes claim to know Delany himself; the fourth part consists of the novel *Neveryóna*, and the fifth and final part is Delany's story about AIDS entitled "The Tale of Plagues and Carnivals" in *Flight from Nevèrÿon*. Delany returns to the topic of AIDS in a later novel entitled *The Mad Man* (1994), one of his recent non-science fiction works like *Atlantis: Three Tales* (1995), *Hogg* (written in 1969 but not published until 1995 due to its disturbing sexual depictions), *Phallos* (2004), and *Dark Reflections* (2007). Secondly, as Delany explains in his afterword to *Stars in My Pockets Like Grains of Sand*, *Triton* has a thematic link to his other works: Delany claims that his work from *Dhalgren* through the "Return to Nevèrÿon" series deals with "the fragmented subject as a 'natural' condition" (356). Across these works, Delany examines various, socially-constructed identificatory schemas and the ways in which subjects interact with them. In effect, he investigates how the fragmented subject grapples with these systems of normativization in the face of a loss of unity.

<sup>20</sup> For further biographical information on Delany, see Sandra Y. Govan's "Samuel R. Delany" in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 33: Afro-American Fiction Writers after 1955*, eds. Thadious M. Davis and Trudier Harris (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1984. 52-9); Peter S. Alterman's "Samuel R. Delany"

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in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 8: Twentieth Century American Science Fiction Writers*, eds. David Cowart and Thomas L. Wymer (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1981. 119-28.); and the entry "Samuel R. Delany" in *Contemporary Authors Online* (Detroit: Thomas Gale, 2006. All are available from: <http://galenet.galegroup.com>.)

<sup>21</sup> Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible* (New York: Methuen, 1986) 193.

<sup>22</sup> The novel never reveals the cause of the conflict, but it seems imperialistic in nature, and, throughout the novel, it looms like a dark cloud across the peaceful expanse of Triton until it finally erupts violently into their lives later in the work.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel R. Delany, *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Hetertopia* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1976). The term "hegemony" proves important here since the novel concerns exerting a dominant viewpoint over the citizenry and of understanding a nation's citizenry's thinking and behavior to the point where it becomes perfectly predictable (1). From this point forward, references to *Trouble on Triton* will be cited parenthetically.

<sup>24</sup> Bron explains at one point that "People...when they go about solving any real problem, don't use strict, formal logic, but some form of metalogic, for which the rules of formal logic can be considered—on off Thursdays—the generating parameters" (49). He further explains that metalogic begins operating when we start to question why a particular answer is considered logical in the first place.

<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Bellona is the name of the city in Samuel Delany's previous novel, *Dhalgren* (1974), but if there is any connection between the two works, then it remains unclear.

<sup>26</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* 33.

<sup>27</sup> Butler's theory of the subject is heavily indebted to Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation in "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" from *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1970; New York: Monthly Review, 2001. 85-126.) in which he describes the process by which a subject is recognized by the institutions of power as well as by society as a whole. Althusser explains that while still *in utero*, a person becomes a subject in various ways: subject to language (the name renders him/her insertable into sentences, and of course s/he must be gendered in order to be a subject of a sentence), subject to the family (the family applies its name to the child), and finally subject to governmental institutions (even before birth, laws govern the child's life and upon birth s/he becomes a citizen). As Althusser says, "individuals are always already subjects" because "ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects" (119). Althusser's famous example of interpellation is the police officer hailing a person from behind on a street. Despite the other people on the street, the person realizes "the hail was 'really' addressed to him," and this process "hardly ever miss[es]" (118). Thus, Althusser, like Butler, argues that the creation of the subject is based on recognition. Indeed, Butler's major concern throughout her work could be said to be recognition: how gender is recognized, who is recognized as human, what causes a subject to be recognized as such, how recognition grants a livable life, etc.

<sup>28</sup> In *How to Do Things With Words*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, eds. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1962), Austin explains, "The name is derived, of course, from 'perform,' the usual verb with the noun 'action,'" and "it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action" (6).

<sup>29</sup> Austin, *Words* 99-100.

<sup>30</sup> Austin, *Words* 101.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context" in *Limited Inc*, ed. Gerald Graff (1972; Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1988. 1-23). As Derrida says, "Could a performative utterance succeed if its formulation did not repeat a 'coded' or iterable utterance, or in other words, if the formula I pronounce in

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order to open a meeting, launch a ship or a marriage were not identifiable as conforming with an iterable model, if it were not then identifiable in some way as a 'citation'?" (18).

<sup>32</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* xxix.

<sup>33</sup> Hegel argues that recognition serves as the basis of our identities and desires as well as our interactions with others. For Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a subject cannot become self-conscious (or even become a subject) until s/he has been recognized (or acknowledged) by an other: "self-consciousness exists in and for itself, and by the fact, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (§178). To become an individual, one must first engage with an other who recognizes him/her as an entity separate from all other entities and as an entity with its own consciousness and desires. As Alexandre Kojève explains in *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1969), recognition provides the foundation for the movement from being a mere biological entity to being a full-fledged person: "It is only Desire of such a Recognition (*Anerkennung*), it is only Action that flows from such a Desire, that creates, realizes, and reveals a *human*, non-biological I" (40). To become fully human then requires recognition, a satiation of the subject's desire through his/her recognition of another subject's desire.

<sup>34</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993) 226. Again, this statement hearkens back to Althusser's concept of interpellation.

<sup>35</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* 11.

<sup>36</sup> Butler makes it clear that gender is not *the* primary identity category and that a variety of other identity categories also play into a subject's being recognized as human: "The human is understood differently depending on its race, the legibility of that race, its morphology, the *recognizability* of that morphology, its sex, the perceptual verifiability of that sex, its ethnicity, the categorical understanding of that ethnicity" (*Gender Trouble* 2; italics are mine). Furthermore, there is the issue of recognizable kinship arrangements because only certain forms of kinship arrangements (living arrangements, relationship patterns, etc.) allow a subject to be recognizable as human and as belonging to a particular gender. Ultimately, at their core, all such definitions of the human, of gender, of race, and of kinship rely upon the relegation of certain categories to the status of the inhuman, the unrecognizable, the excluded, or just simply the "other." Butler represents the new brand of gender theory and feminism because she does not privilege gender or sex over other identity categories but also tries to incorporate an understanding of other identity categories into her work.

<sup>37</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 2.

<sup>38</sup> The order of these terms is important because an individual must first be gendered in order to be a subject and must be a subject before the rights of the human can be conveyed upon him/her.

<sup>39</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23-4.

<sup>40</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender* 2.

<sup>41</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23-4.

<sup>42</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* 23-4.

<sup>43</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble* 189.

<sup>44</sup> Butler, *Bodies* 221.

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<sup>45</sup> In *Samuel R. Delany* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1984), Seth McEvoy argues that the sex change in the novel is “Delany’s attempt to deal with some...feminist principles” which had begun to emerge in the 1970s (123). McEvoy reads the novel in this manner because he takes Bron to be a man “who cannot deal with strong feminist women,” and that his sex change is his attempt “to understand women by becoming one,” but that “it does not solve his problems” because “he is still a confused male, mirroring the confusion that many males had during the time” (123-4). The novel indeed acts as a statement about identity politics and the strictures of current thought patterns regarding them, yet McEvoy’s reading proves overly simplistic, for what Bron chafes against is not strong, feminist women, but the normative matrix that has developed in the absence of gender on Triton.

<sup>46</sup> The term “heterotopia” resonates in a variety of ways within the novel. Delany takes the term from Michel Foucault’s *Les Mots et les choses* (1966), translated in English as *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966; New York: Vintage, 1970). I shall leave Foucault’s notion of heterotopia aside for now and return to it later.

<sup>47</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides the following useful definition of the prefix “hetero-”: “the other of two, other, different.”

<sup>48</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “heterogeneous” in three informative ways: 1. “Of one body in respect of another, or of various bodies in respect of each other. Diverse kinds of nature, of completely different characters; incongruous; foreign”; 2. “Of a body in respect of its elements: Composed of diverse constituents; consisting of parts of different kinds; not homogeneous”; and 3. “*Math.* a. Of different kinds, so as to be incommensurable. b. Of different dimensions or degrees; non-homogeneous.”

<sup>49</sup> In *A Sense of Wonder: Samuel R. Delany, Race, Identity, and Difference* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2004), Jeffrey Allen Tucker makes a similar point when he argues that “the novel depicts an ideal society, but not one characterized by unity, totality, or singularity, but by the enormous multiplicity of subject positions available to be occupied” (43).

<sup>50</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “heterosexual” in two ways: “a. Characterized by a sexual interest in members of the opposite sex. b. Pertaining to sex between people of opposite sex.” Thus, the “hetero-” in “heterosexual” signifies that the two individuals engaged in intercourse are of different sexes. I shall proceed to play upon this idea of different sexualities implied in the term throughout the remainder of this chapter.

<sup>51</sup> My argument’s discussion of typing has some similarities to the argument concerning typology that Edward Chan makes in his article entitled “(Vulgar) Identity Politics in Outer Space: Delany’s *Triton* and the Heterotopian Narrative,” which appeared in *The Journal of Narrative Theory* 31.2 (Summer 2001): 180-213. I discovered this article after having already created my argument, and I have found it a very useful supplement to my own position. I have actually retained Chan’s use of the term “flattening” to refer to the effect that the regime of typing has upon the traditional identity categories (191-2). Chan’s article discusses what he terms “typology,” which he describes as “the identification of different social groupings based on affiliation, in turn aligned along individual desires” (187). Chan’s definition of typology is limited because his concerns are primarily about the interplay between the individual and the group and particularly with Bron’s attempts to distinguish himself from the group. As opposed to his designation of “typology,” I will use the term “typing” throughout this chapter to describe this process for two reasons: 1. it is a verb (or a gerund) and hence implies an action (or a nominative form of an action), and typing is an ongoing series (a constant process of resignification, although a controlling, not a subversive, one) that is repeated innumerable times on the individual and social level; and 2. it maintains a connection to the computer technology that is so important in the novel—“typing” up the form of the subject.

<sup>52</sup> Chan, “(Vulgar) Identity Politics” 191-2.

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<sup>53</sup> On Triton, virtually all identity categories are mutable to one degree or another except for class which maintains a degree of freedom only through the promise of upward mobility based on individual talent. While Triton is communistic in many regards, it still maintains a class hierarchy, which serves as the only identity category that is difficult to alter at will: a subject's choice of housing and kinship relations is more extensive depending upon that subject's credit rating. Most citizens on Triton live in co-ops, but the wealthy might also choose to have houses in a wealthy neighborhood known as the Ring, which "comprised the most lavish communal complexes in Tethys" (100). All of the citizens of Tethys are guaranteed housing and the basic human needs, but the level of one's housing still remains dependent upon credit rating. Computers have enabled the society to evolve beyond the need for paper money, and taxes have completely vanished. During the time period in which *Triton* takes place, paper money is still used in certain venues such as the restaurant that Bron and The Spike visit on Earth, but it has become completely vestigial and is merely a luxury in which the rich indulge. While money has disappeared, individuals are still assigned to particular credit slots depending upon their occupation. Even though Triton seems to have adopted many of the aspects of socialist living, the relations between subjects on Triton are not purely horizontal—they still maintain a vertical aspect based on the individuals' credit rating. This credit rating then serves as one major way in which individuals are typed, and it does play an important role in determining the limits of a subject's choices.

<sup>54</sup> An individual might choose to wear cages on his/her hands, capital letters held up by suspenders, or no clothes at all. Some people choose to go predominately nude during their quotidian routines—a perfectly legitimate choice of attire. Bron's boss Philip frequently attends work naked, a fact that Bron finds repugnant due to his aversion towards anyone who appears more successful or confident than himself.

<sup>55</sup> Ferdinand De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, eds. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, trans. Wade Baskin (New York, Toronto, and London: McGraw-Hill, 1959) 67.

<sup>56</sup> This is Edward Chan's term for the collection of categories that are generally considered the major identity categories: race, sex, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, etc.

<sup>57</sup> Edward Chan argues that Triton's types are determined by "the identification of different social groupings based on affiliation, in turn aligned along individual desires," yet his argument does not examine the complexity of the typing ideology, which bases itself not just on affiliations but also on subject behavior in a variety of different circumstances (Chan 187). He also does not mention that types are mutable and that a person may be typed in different ways by different institutions.

<sup>58</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender* 1.

<sup>59</sup> Bron's thoughts concerning the citizens of the u-l, the unlicensed sector of Tethys, provide a perfect example of the manner in which individual subjects engage in the ideological form of typing. Although prescriptive norms no longer exist on Triton, the society still requires laws in order to function in a civilized fashion: even though the novel never explicitly details them, Triton obviously still features laws that prohibit actions like murder, theft, and rape. The u-l offers yet another level of utopian freedom to the Tritonians because it is officially zoned as a lawless area of the city. In effect, then, Tritonian subjects can choose their society's level of organization and lawfulness. Based upon Bron's observations, the major difference between u-l people and non-u-l people consists in the willingness of the latter to discuss their personal history. Bron feels awkward anytime another person speaks about their past as if s/he was breaking a fundamental rule of etiquette. Bron remains highly critical of others' etiquette because his time as a male prostitute on Mars required him to be finely attuned to a very complex system of mores. But the citizens of the u-l find it normal to discuss their origins: "Typical u-l...always talking about where they come from, where their families started" (48).

<sup>60</sup> I will continue to refer to Bron using the masculine pronouns for the sole purpose of avoiding confusion.



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<sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1975; New York: Vintage, 1977) 142-3.

<sup>62</sup> The novel explains that the booths arose because “some public channeler had made a great stir because the government had an average ten hours videotaped and otherwise recorded information on every citizen with a set of government credit tokens and/or government identity card” (4). The machines operate in rather simple manner: “Put a two-franq token into the slot...feed your government identity card into the slip and see, on the thirty-by-forty centimeter screen, three minutes’ videotape of you, accompanied by three minutes of your recorded speech, selected at random from the government’s own information files” (4-5). The oddest fact concerning the information viewed on the machines is that “ninety-nine point nine nine and several nines percent more of the information was, a) never reviewed by human eyes (it was taken, developed, and catalogued by machine), b) was of a perfectly innocuous nature, and, c) could quite easily be released to the public without the least threat to government security” (4). On the side of these booths is placard that reads “KNOW YOUR PLACE IN SOCIETY” (4). The placards are reminiscent of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s slogan “**BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU**,” similarly printed on posters in all capital letters although it proves even more jarring because it appears in bold face as well in the novel [George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Centennial Edition 1949; New York: Plume/Harcourt Brace, 2003] 2].

<sup>63</sup> Samuel R. Delany, “Science Fiction and Criticism: The *Diacritics* Interview,” in *Silent Interviews: On Language, Race, Sex, Science Fiction, and Some Comics* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan UP, 1994) 198.

<sup>64</sup> Samuel R. Delany, “The Second *Science Fiction Studies* Interview: Of Trouble on Triton and Other Matters,” in *Shorter Views: Queer Thoughts & the Politics of the Paraliterary* (Hanover and London: Wesleyan UP, 1999) 335. In this interview, Delany also highlights the fact that Bron was his first white, male protagonist.

<sup>65</sup> Tom Moylan, “Beyond Negation: The Critical Utopias of Ursula K. Le Guin and Samuel R. Delany,” *Extrapolation* 21.3 (1980): 248.

<sup>66</sup> Valerie Holliday, “Delany Dispossessed,” *Extrapolation* 44.4 (2003): 427.

<sup>67</sup> Russell Blackford, “Jewels in Junk City: To Read *Triton*,” *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 16.3 (1996): 144.

<sup>68</sup> Alcena Madeline Davis Rogan, “Alien Sex Acts in Feminist Science Fiction: Heuristic Models for Thinking a Feminist Future of Desire,” *PMLA* 119.3 (May 2004): 449.

<sup>69</sup> Even men can decide to experience the wonders of nursing a child. This is the case with Bron’s boss Philip, who sports surgically altered pectorals: “Philip’s left nipple was very large. There was a bald ring around it. The hair follicles had been removed. The flesh over that pectoral was somewhat looser than that over the right. Periodically, when a new child was expected at Philip’s commune, out on the Ring, the breast would enlarge (three pills every lunch-time: two little white ones and one large red one), and Philip would take off two or three days a week wet-leave” (88).

<sup>70</sup> This is reminiscent of Fredric Jameson’s observation in *Archaeologies of the Future* concerning buildings as microcosmic utopias: “the city itself [acts] as a fundamental form of the Utopian image...the individual building [acts] as a space of Utopian investment, that monumental part which cannot be the whole and yet attempts to express it” (4).

<sup>71</sup> Rogan, “Alien Sex Acts” 448.

<sup>72</sup> Rogan, “Alien Sex Acts” 449.

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<sup>73</sup> As the *Oxford English Dictionary* explains, the adjective “modular” derives from the mathematical term “modulus,” which designates the need to translate numbers that have different bases. For instance, modulus indicates “a number by which logarithms in one base must be multiplied in order to obtain the corresponding logarithms in another base.”

<sup>74</sup> In his article, “The Politics of Desire in Delany’s *Triton* and *The Tides of Lust*,” which appeared in *Black American Literature Forum* 18.2 (1984), Robert Elliot Fox makes a similar claim when he argues that Bron “behaves as if things were merely black and white” or “male/female” instead of opening himself up to “a more concrete and demanding freedom” (50).

<sup>75</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvania Tomaselli (New York and London: Norton, 1988): 79.

<sup>76</sup> Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996) 148.

<sup>77</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “You May!,” *The London Review of Books* 21.6 (1999).

<sup>78</sup> Jacques Lacan, “The Signification of the Phallus” in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (1970; New York and London: Norton, 2006) 580.

<sup>79</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: Norton, 1977): 235.

<sup>80</sup> Evans, *Dictionary* 38.

<sup>81</sup> Lacan, *Seminar II*, 223.

<sup>82</sup> Cantin, Lucie, “The Trauma of Language” in *After Lacan: Clinical Practice and the Subject of the Unconscious*, eds. Robert Hughes and Kareen Ror Malone (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002) 40.

<sup>83</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1991) 4. Lacan himself evokes Zeno’s paradox in *Seminar XX* when he is discussing the economy of sexual satisfaction: “Achilles and the tortoise, such is the schema of coming (*le schème du jouir*) for one pole (*côté*) of sexed beings. When Achilles has taken his step, gotten it on with Briseis, the latter, like the tortoise, has advanced a bit, because she is ‘not whole,’ not wholly his. Some remains. And Achilles must take a second step, and so on and so forth. It is thus that, in our time, but only in our time, we have managed to define numbers—true or, better still, real numbers. Because what Zeno hadn’t seen is that the tortoise does not escape the destiny that weighs upon Achilles—its step too gets shorter and shorter and it never arrives at the limit either. It is on that basis that a number, any number whatsoever, can be defined if it is real. A number has a limit and it is to that extent that it is infinite. It is quite clear that Achilles can only pass the tortoise—he cannot catch up with it. He only catches up with it at infinity (*infinitude*)” (8).

<sup>84</sup> Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP: 1997) 21.

<sup>85</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XI*: 186.

<sup>86</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (1975; New York and London: Norton, 1988) 142.

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<sup>87</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX Encore 1972-1973: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (1975; New York: Norton, 1998) 6.

<sup>88</sup> Lacan, *Seminar XX*: 4. Lacan uses “encore” here according to its general meaning of “again,” but he later puns on it as well by using the word “*en-corps*,” which is a homonym in French that means “in-body.”

<sup>89</sup> For a powerful depiction of the Kasper Hauser legend, see Werner Herzog’s film *The Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* (1974).

**CHAPTER 3:**  
**“TO SHIFT TO A HIGHER STRUCTURE”: DESIRE, DISEMBODIMENT,**  
**AND EVOLUTION IN THE ANIME OF OTOMO, OSHII, AND ANNO**

Every time desire is betrayed, cursed, uprooted from its field of immanence, a priest is behind it. The priest cast the triple curse on desire: the negative law, the extrinsic rule, and the transcendent ideal. Facing north, the priest said, Desire is lack (how could it not lack what it desires?). The priest carried out the first sacrifice, named castration, and all the men and women of the north lined up behind him, crying in cadence, “Lack, lack, it’s the common law.”

-Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari<sup>1</sup>

Humans are desiring machines, but what is the nature of this desire? How can we conceive of a psychic structure that is so amorphous and so intimately linked to our very nature? One could argue that desire functions as the fundamental motor of human endeavor on both an individual and socio-cultural level and that it represents the most instrumental force in the production of identity, social interaction, and society, hence marking desire as one of the most basic components in any definition of “the human.” Our investigation ended in the first chapter by turning towards desire and its relation to definitions of the human. Now we must return to this concept again because desire functions as perhaps the most central variable of the human—it is the variable that, in a sense, conditions all others. If it is such a powerful and complex force, then how are we to conceive of desire’s structure? As we saw near the end of Chapter One, Jacques Lacan argues that human identity is predicated upon a fundamental “lack,” which acts as the

driving force of all human desire: “Desire is a relation of being to lack. This is the lack of being properly speaking. It isn’t the lack of this or that, but lack of being whereby the being exists.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, desire can never be satiated because it is driven by this *manque à être* (“want to be” or “lack of being”), which humans seek to fill with various substitute objects. But the belief that humans can truly fill their lack through such sublimation potentially represents a fantasy in itself; that is, such sublimation only offers partial fulfillment for the subject. In a later seminar, Lacan further complicates the concept of desire when he states that “man’s desire is the desire of the Other,”<sup>3</sup> which implies that the subject desires not only that s/he receive recognition from the Other but also that s/he be desired by the Other.<sup>4</sup> In effect, then, the subject must always remain lacking because s/he must always depend upon objects and other subjects for satiation, and, even then, this satisfaction remains limited. Thus, according to Lacan, the foundation of desire’s structure is lack, a fundamental absence that generates both desire and human identity.<sup>5</sup>

Seeing Lacan’s conception of desire as inherently dystopic and oppressive for the subject, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari sought methods of fusing psychoanalysis with Marxist discourse in order to produce a liberatory theory of the human subject that they termed “schizoanalysis.” Many philosophers had tried to resolve the apparently contradictory claims of Freud and Marx, for Marx claimed that “our thought is determined by class (‘class consciousness’)” whereas, “in Freud, we are determined by our unconscious desires (stemming, usually, from familial conflicts).”<sup>6</sup> For Deleuze and Guattari, these two schemas of desire prove identical, and, consequently, a theory of desire must function “by discovering how social production and relations of production

are an institution of desire, and how affects and drives form part of the infrastructure itself. For *they are part of it, they are present there in every way* while creating within the economic forms their own repression, as well as the means for breaking this repression.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the socio-economic sphere produces our desires, and simultaneously those desires function as part of Marx’s concept of the infrastructure, yet Deleuze and Guattari do not conceive of desire in terms of lack; instead, they argue that desire is always positive, and, if a lack exists, then it is forced upon the subject by the socio-cultural milieu in which s/he is situated. These social systems constrain the subject to a system of morality based on transcendence, for Deleuze consistently maintained a distinction between morality (based on transcendence) and ethics (based on immanence).

For Deleuze, morality represents any system that “presents us with a set of constraining rules of a special sort, ones that judge actions and intentions by considering them in relation to transcendent values,” whereas “ethics is a set of optional rules that assess what we do, what we say, in relation to ways of existing.”<sup>8</sup> Because of its appeal to transcendence, morality “effectively ‘perverts’ desire, to the point where we can actually desire our own repression, a separation from our own capacities and power.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, it is such moralistic systems that inscribe lack in the subject, and Deleuze and Guattari believe that only by analyzing unconscious drives and affects (the constituent forces of desire) can the subject become free from the bonds of both society and Oedipus. Since the schizophrenic, even for Lacan, represents the individual most in touch with the unconscious, Deleuze and Guattari take the schizophrenic as the model for their examination of desire, for the schizophrenic “deliberately *scrambles all the codes*.”<sup>10</sup> Hence arises their famous argument in the opening pages of *Anti-Oedipus* that “a

schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst's couch."<sup>11</sup> But are Deleuze and Guattari's theories truly liberatory or do they merely erase the basic condition that forms the human? In order to critically navigate the gulf separating Lacan's theory of desire from that of Deleuze and Guattari, I shall turn to examining certain well-chosen science fiction texts in order to provide a significant theoretical response to one of the fundamental questions surrounding desire: must the subject always remain incomplete or can some state of contentment and/or fulfillment be achieved?

In this essay, I will use certain texts that depict the effects of disembodiment upon desire to pit Lacan's dystopian conceptualization of desire against Deleuze and Guattari's utopian one in order to better grasp the implications of both systems of thought. In particular, I will focus on three different anime texts, because among the universe of anime, which features examples in all genres, there is strong science fiction contingent that deals explicitly with desire. Through an examination of Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* (1998), Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), and Hideaki Anno's *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-6), this chapter hopes to illustrate how these depictions of disembodiment as the next stage in human evolution serve as a means for commenting upon the debate between two diametrically opposed understandings of desire. We have seen how science fiction inscribes heterotopian narrative spaces, and it is the heterotopian nature of these three anime texts that allows them to act as a deterritorialized space in which a dystopian discourse (psychoanalysis) and a utopian one (schizoanalysis) can be brought into communication with one another in order to explore the potential of both these conceptualizations of the human.

## **I. Apocalyptic Mutations and Transcendent Disembodiment: Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira***

The 1980s saw the rise of the cyberpunk sub-genre of science fiction with works such as William Gibson's "Sprawl" series<sup>12</sup> and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). Simultaneously, the late 1970s and early 80s saw an increase in the quantity of texts that participate in a particular brand of post-apocalyptic narrative that William Fisher terms the "Terminal Genre," a genre that he claims navigates a utopian path through a distinctly dystopian setting:

The clutter and cast-off cultural debris of "consumer society" provide not only the look and texture of these films, but all the raw material on which their narrative process works. This genre takes a reckless plunge into the junk pile of contemporary material life. That it can resurface with something salvageable entitles it to a utopian claim, for it belongs to a tradition where the utopian impulse acts as a magnetic north pole guiding us through the ruins of the heuristic "dystopia" which is represented.<sup>13</sup>

Fisher cites a slew of films that featured this peculiar convergence of utopianism and dystopianism: *Blade Runner*, *Mad Max* (1979), *The Road Warrior* (1981), and *The Terminator* (1984). As we shall see, this trend did not end with the 1980s, for each of the texts I explore in this chapter plays with the thin line between utopia and dystopia, and it is precisely the terminal aspect of these anime texts that marks them as the perfect tools for exploring psychoanalysis and schizoanalysis.

Against this cyberpunk and terminal backdrop, Katsuhiro Otomo's *Akira* debuted and became one of the most famous anime films in the Western world. Like other cyberpunk works, *Akira*'s tale unfolds in a dystopian, noirish future, and it investigates the relationships between humans and machines, yet ultimately the film depicts the potential for human development and evolution when confined by an oppressive police state: "*Akira* opens up a space for the marginal and the different, suggesting in its ending



a new form of identity.”<sup>14</sup> *Akira* first appeared as a manga series that Otomo wrote and illustrated from 1982-1990.<sup>15</sup> The narrative of the manga differs radically from that of the anime film. For the purposes of this essay, I will be focusing solely on the film because its ending deals more explicitly with disembodiment.<sup>16</sup> Both the manga and the anime of *Akira* are fascinating texts in many respects, but it is this hope for a new form of identity that makes the anime version of *Akira* such an important work in the development of sci-fi’s ideas about consciousness and the potential for human evolution through an attainment of disembodiment. *Akira* deconstructs the relationship between desire and identity and between identity and the body by means of its depiction of an evolutionary stage beyond the confines of the bodily form. The film represents a distinct form of evolution from the other two texts we will discuss because evolution in the film comes from within the current human form: it is latent potential that becomes actualized through technological intervention.

*Akira* takes place in Neo-Tokyo, a version of the city that has been rebuilt from the ashes of the cataclysmic explosion that opens the film. Against this dystopian background, the film follows the lives of Kaneda, Tetsuo, and their biker gang friends during the return of Akira, a child with powerful psychic abilities whose uncontrollable powers caused the explosion that destroyed old Tokyo. *Akira* presents a world from which one might certainly seek transcendence, for, as Isolde Standish explains, “Neo-Tokyo is a ‘critical dystopia’ in that it projects images of the futuristic city which perpetuates the worst features of advanced corporate capitalism: urban decay, commodification, and authoritarian policing.”<sup>17</sup> At the film’s outset, Kaneda and Tetsuo live out their meager existences as biker punks who engage in street warfare with rival

gangs, but an encounter with a child who has escaped from a covert government facility irrevocably alters their lives. During a street battle, the escaped child, Takashi, appears suddenly in front of Tetsuo's bike and a giant explosion ensues. Because of this encounter, Tetsuo soon begins developing intense psychic powers, and the film reveals that a secret government operation has been attempting to harness the innate psychic abilities of humankind. Initially, Tetsuo's powers manifest themselves in the form of abilities such as telepathy, telekinesis, and flight, but soon, like Akira, his burgeoning powers grow to the point where he can no longer even control his bodily form. Eventually, Kei (the object of Kaneda's affection) explains that Akira, Tetsuo, and the other psychic children represent an evolutionary leap to an existence beyond the body, an existence as pure energy:

Akira is absolute energy...Humans do all kinds of things during their lifetime, right? Discovering things, building things...Things like houses, motorcycles, bridges, cities, and rockets...All that knowledge and energy...Where do you suppose it comes from? Humans were like monkeys once, right? And before that, like reptiles and fish. And before that, plankton and amoebas. Even creatures like *those* have incredible energy inside them...And even before *that*, maybe there were genes in the water and air. Even in *space dust*, too, I bet. If that's true, what memories are hidden in it? The beginning of the universe, maybe. Or maybe even before *that*...Maybe everyone has those memories. What if there were some mistake and the progression went wrong, and something like an amoeba were give power like a human's?<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Akira represents the exponential expansion of human powers that leads to the human form metamorphosing into a state of "absolute energy" with a consciousness, a state that Tetsuo experiences in the final moments of the film.

The final segment of Akira, of course, invokes the ubiquitous anime trope of monstrous bodily distortion, a trope present not only in mainstream anime series and films but in *hentai*—pornographic anime—as well, the most classic example of which is

probably *Urotsukidōji: The Legend of the Overfiend* (1989), the first in a series of films.

Hentai, such as *Urotsukidōji*, often present visions of monstrous phalluses and devouring vaginas along with various other bodily distortions. Annalee Newitz provides an insightful summary of one of the most memorable and disturbing scenes in *The Legend of the Overfiend* series:

Nagumo, the Overfiend's father, first experiences his supernatural powers when engaged in sexual intercourse. His penis becomes so large that it causes his partner's body to explode; then it grows to the point where it bursts out of the roof of the building he is in and destroys the city in a flaming blast of sperm. Watching this animated image, it is clear that his penis becomes some kind of atomic bomb.<sup>19</sup>

Newitz continues to equate this “atomic bomb” of sperm with the United States atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II.<sup>20</sup> Nagumo's sexual mutation serves as an excellent parallel to Tetsuo's own bodily transformations in *Akira* because of the final manifestation of Tetsuo's powers and Akira's subsequent arrival and absorption of Tetsuo leads to second destruction of Neo-Tokyo through an explosion—like the one that opens both the manga and the anime—that is distinctly reminiscent of a nuclear explosion.

In the final segment of the film, Tetsuo's physical form can no longer contain the growth of his power, so he must seek freedom through disembodiment. Because his mushrooming powers have transformed his body into a reservoir of energy, Tetsuo loses control of his physical form during the final showdown with Kaneda at the Olympic Stadium. Tetsuo must learn to completely divest himself of all physical boundaries, a process that he can only achieve with the aid of Akira. With the return of Akira, a resurrection prompted by the three other psychic children (Masaru, Kiyoko, and Takashi), Tetsuo becomes absorbed into the universal sea of energy that Akira both represents and

literally (dis)embodies. Tetsuo's mutation begins simply enough: a laser beam destroys one of his arms, so he crafts a new metal one using his telekinetic abilities, thus turning himself into a rather simple cyborg, not much different from real "cyborgs" that have prosthetic limbs. But as Tetsuo gets closer to the sleeping Akira beneath the Olympic Stadium, his powers steadily overwhelm his ability to harness them: first, his mechanical arm begins to fuse with objects around him; then, his arm loses all normal human shape as it becomes a spraying mass of flesh and metal; and, finally, he loses all control of his bodily form and transforms into a gigantic, monstrous blob that devours everything in its path, including Kaori (Tetsuo's girlfriend) and Kaneda, which again is similar to the penis of the Overfiend in *Urotsukidōji* that engulfs everyone it comes into contact with as it grows to more than priapic proportions. Tetsuo's seemingly unstoppable metamorphosis functions on the level of "body horror" as Susan Napier claims, yet Napier misreads the film's ending when she posits that "the film's climactic scene casts doubt on any positive interpretation of Tetsuo's newfound identity."<sup>21</sup> Kelly Hurley develops the definition of "body horror" in her essay on Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and David Cronenberg's *Rabid* (1977); she defines body horror as

a hybrid genre that recombines the narrative and cinematic conventions of the science fiction, horror, and suspense film in order to stage a spectacle of the human body defamiliarized, rendered other. Body horror seeks to inspire revulsion—and in its own way pleasure—through representations of quasi-human figures whose effect/affect is produced by their abjection, their ambiguation, their impossible embodiment of multiple, incompatible forms.<sup>22</sup>

Hunter's concept of "Body Horror" fits perfectly well with the images of the grotesquely deformed Tetsuo at the film's end. Body horror uses such monstrous transformations to highlight how the body traps the subject within it and how power can exercise itself upon

the subject because of their physical existence—it demonstrates how power inscribes itself upon the subject's body in a manner akin to the machine in Franz Kafka's "In the Penal Colony" (1919).<sup>23</sup>

In *Akira*, Otomo uses body horror to symbolize the insatiable nature of Tetsuo's desire, for Tetsuo's metamorphosis is driven by more than his encounter with Takashi on the freeway; his monstrous transformation occurs because of his rampant desire. From the start of the film, Otomo stresses Tetsuo's desire to liberate himself from his dependence upon others. Of course, Tetsuo's desire can never be satisfied if all desire is predicated on a "lack of being," which depends upon the dialectical relation between self/other and subject/object. Therefore, even when Tetsuo receives incredible powers, he persists in his insatiable quest for power. "Desire," as Lacan states, "is desire of the Other...it is always desire in the second degree, desire of desire."<sup>24</sup> For Tetsuo, Akira is this Other (the *grand Autre*, not the *objet petit a*), the (dis)embodiment of pure energy and the master signifier that provides meaning to the strange phenomena that Tetsuo has experienced since his powers first began to manifest themselves. Throughout the film, Tetsuo craves knowledge of Akira, but this desire remains unsatisfied as long as he clings to his individual bodily form because it remains tied to the dichotomies of subject/object and self/other. In order to satisfy his ever-growing desire for power, Tetsuo must shed his physical form to gain direct knowledge of this Other known as Akira.

By becoming disembodied, Tetsuo finally achieves his desire for the Other by becoming one with Akira and potentially with the cosmos itself. But what Tetsuo must experience before he can shed his bodily form represents a torturously physical manifestation of *jouissance*. Lacan bases his concept of *jouissance* on Freud's work on

drive theory in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). Freud defines a drive (*Trieb*) as “an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces.”<sup>25</sup> He divides the drives into two major types: the ego or death drives (*Thanatos*) and the sexual or life drives (*Eros*), “the former [of which] exercises pressure towards death, the latter [of which] towards a prolongation of life.”<sup>26</sup> Néstor Braunstein explains that “the drive does not reach its object in order to obtain satisfaction; rather the drive traces the object’s contour, and on the arch of the way back it accomplishes its task [...] *Jouissance* is indeed the satisfaction of a drive—the death drive.”<sup>27</sup> Braunstein further defines *jouissance* as “the dimension discovered by the analytic experience that confronts desire as its opposite pole. If desire is fundamentally lack, lack in being, *jouissance* is a positivity, it is a ‘something’ lived by a body when pleasure stops being pleasure. It is a plus, a sensation that is beyond pleasure.”<sup>28</sup> In the case of Tetsuo, we can see the operation of both desire and drive, of the *manque à être* and *jouissance*. By moving from the depths of lack to a state of awful “positivity,” Tetsuo becomes completely enmeshed in the grip of the death drive, which compels him towards a separation from his body, a separation that simultaneously equals the death of his physical form as well as representing the birth pangs of his newly emerging identity that will exist beyond the realm of unfillable lacks and uncontrollable positivities. But, for psychoanalysis, this would mean that Tetsuo has moved from the normal human realm of the neurotic into the space of the schizophrenic who reinscribes meaning upon existence in a manner that forecloses lack,<sup>29</sup> and, consequently, represents a deterioration of his psychic state. Yet for schizoanalysis this is not necessarily the case.

According to schizoanalysis, Tetsuo lacks not because human identity is predicated upon lack, but because society has inscribed Tetsuo's desire in the form of lack. Tetsuo's social milieu is a marginalized one: he is a biker on the fringe of society who has no money, no education, and no prospects in life. Within this subculture, a form of morality has developed that privileges strength, violence, and other stereotypical displays of masculinity. Because of his status as a "weakling" who must be defended by Kaneda, Tetsuo remains incapable of living up to the moral system of the biker culture. Hence, Tetsuo's desire manifests itself as the desire for strength, for the ability to exhibit power over Kaneda and other strong-willed individuals. For psychoanalysis, his thirst for power proves unquenchable because he begins to hunger not merely for power but for the Other represented by Akira, the master signifier that sears his brain with psychic transmissions during various segments of the film. For schizoanalysis, then, his desire will prove insatiable as long as he remains tied to the socio-cultural system of morality that produced his desire. By way of his disembodiment, Tetsuo achieves an escape from hierarchies and moralistic systems by becoming a literal body without organs, a plane of immanence in which he can exist in absolute freedom, but first he must face his drives head-on and overcome the socially imposed morality that has inscribed lack in his being.

As Tetsuo's all-devouring and continually expanding body is swallowed by Akira's return as pure energy, Kaneda and the audience are offered a stream-of-consciousness glimpse into the nature of Tetsuo's desires and drives, all of which stem from his disempowerment at an early age and his never-ceasing quest to recapture a sense of clout. Suffering from bullying as a young child, Tetsuo clung to Kaneda not just as a friend but also as a bodyguard, a relationship that persisted into their adult life. Akira

frees Tetsuo from his body and helps him attain a state of oneness and self-empowerment as he becomes a part of the infinite flow of energy that binds all things together. As Tetsuo transforms into pure energy, a scientist watches the energy patterns generated by the metamorphosis and the return of Akira. The scientist exclaims, “Is this the birth of a new universe?!” And the answer to his question is a profound “no” because what he witnesses is not a new universe being born but rather the rebirth of Tetsuo, through Akira’s power, into a state of pure energy, a state that allows him to become one with the universe; thus, it is not a birth but an entrance into the oneness of the universal flow of energy (35). The viewer becomes even more aware of this in the final scene of the anime when the last bit of Tetsuo falls into Kaneda’s hands as a pinpoint of light that promptly disperses throughout his body in a subtle blaze of light. When Kei and Yamagata (one of Kaneda’s biker pals) find Kaneda after the disappearance of Tetsuo, Yamagata asks, “What happened to Tetsuo? Is he dead?,” to which Kaneda answers, “I’m not so sure. But he’s probably...” (36). Kaneda’s words are cut off as he is blinded by the beams of sunlight piercing through the clouds and slowly moving across the newly destroyed Neo-Tokyo like a grid of celestial searchlights. The roving shafts of sunlight, which seemingly manifest themselves in answer to Kaneda and Yamagata, provide testimony to the fact that Akira, the three children, and Tetsuo have now become omnipresent through their disembodiment and dispersal into the endless field of energy.

Despite his bodily dissipation, the final shot of the anime evinces the fact that Tetsuo still maintains some sense of his original identity, albeit a state of identity no longer predicated upon lack or painful positivity. The audience sees only a sort of celestial “eye,” to use Susan Napier’s term,<sup>30</sup> which quickly metamorphoses into a tunnel



of light representing the endless flow of energy that Tetsuo now perceives. As the viewer sees the eye, Tetsuo makes his statement of identity—the final words of the film—“I am...Tetsuo” (36). The disembodied eye then blurs into indistinctness with the tunnel of light, thus representing that Tetsuo’s form of perception has altered as the Blakean “doors of perception” have opened in his mind allowing him to witness what in the world of *Akira* counts as the divine: the boundless unity represented by the cosmic flow of energy. As Tetsuo becomes one with the divine field of energy, his Lacanian lack becomes filled as his identity merges not only with the cosmos but with those other individuals (Akira and the three children) who have also managed to transcend their bodily forms. No longer oppressed by the lack of desire or the havoc of *jouissance*, Tetsuo becomes a literal body without organs, for his body has spread out in the form of energy to blend with the universal flow of energy. He has transformed into a pure plane of immanence, immanent to nothing other than himself for he has merged his identity with the totality of the universe, hence allowing him to experience a true state of freedom. But does Tetsuo’s metamorphosis into a body without organs prove to be a utopian vision? Can Tetsuo still be considered human at this point or does moving beyond the realm of lack necessarily entail the death of the human?

## **II. The Global Net of Consciousness: Mamoru Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell***

While *Akira* explores an innate potential for human evolution that is actualized by technological innovations, Mamoru Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004) imagine the ways in which the merging of human consciousness and artificial intelligence could spur new evolutionary developments for

the human species. On the surface, *Ghost in the Shell* seems to proffer a utopian vision of a technocracy in which dying or sick bodies can be replaced, in which a human's consciousness and individuality can be preserved perpetually through a series of cybernetic bodies, and in which knowledge proves instantly accessible directly to the human brain through the use of cyber-brain technology. But underneath this utopian exterior lies a world profoundly regulated by the forces of control, a world that Major Kusanagi must eventually seek to transcend at the film's end by leaving her bodily form behind and immersing herself in the endless digital sea of the Net.<sup>31</sup>

*Ghost in the Shell* first appeared as a manga series by the renowned Masamune Shirow, who wrote and illustrated such classics of the genre as *Orion* (1991), *Dominion* (1986), and *Appleseed* (1985-9), but the story received classic status when it was turned into the visually stunning anime by Mamoru Oshii, which "has become one of the most analyzed anime films by Western academics."<sup>32</sup> With its vision of a future dominated by cyborgs, *Ghost in the Shell* has inevitably invited critical comparisons with the theories of Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto." As the tagline for the sequel to *Ghost in the Shell* suggests ("When machines learn to feel, who decides what is human..."), the two films—like *Blade Runner*—investigate the boundaries between human and machine and what it means to be human in the first place. As Haraway explains, the cyborg both opens up utopian potentials and is simultaneously symptomatic of a world gone mad with control:

From one perspective a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet, about the 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 (Sofia, 1984). From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of joint kinship

with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints.<sup>33</sup>

And, as we shall see, *Ghost in the Shell* charts a path between the dystopian and utopian aspects of the cyborg. Some critics, such as Carl Silvio, have actually used *Ghost in the Shell* as an example to disprove theories such as Haraway's that depict technology and the cyborg body as liberatory instances for the subject: "*Ghost in the Shell*, by contrast, appears at first sight to subvert radically the power dynamics inherent in dominant structures of gender and sexual difference, while covertly reinscribing them."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, *Ghost in the Shell* does seem to proffer a utopian world that has grown beyond oppressive dichotomies through the endless proliferation of technology; however, in actuality, it presents a world profoundly regulated by the forces of control, a world that Major Kusanagi eventually must seek to transcend at the film's end.

*Ghost in the Shell* details the adventures of Major Kusanagi and Section 9, an elite group of police officers who function as a hyper-militarized SWAT team that specializes in cyber crimes. Except for one member of the force, the entire team is composed of individuals with various degrees of cyborg parts. In fact, Kusanagi's body has been entirely replaced by cyborg parts: only the part of her brain that houses consciousness remains from her original body. The first film's story revolves around Section 9's hunt for a mysterious cyber-criminal known only as The Puppetmaster, whose consciousness they ultimately discover housed in a wandering cyborg body. Initially, the team believe The Puppetmaster to be an expert hacker, yet they learn from the cyborg body that it actually represents a consciousness that developed sentience on its own within the infinite expanse of cyberspace. Throughout the film, Kusanagi's encounters with The Puppetmaster cause her to ponder the nature of her existence and her ambiguous status as

a human, and she consistently voices a desire for some proof of her own free will. Because she is cold and calculating in a way that seems to preclude the warm pulsings of passion, the viewer may at first wonder if Kusanagi truly desires anything, yet she ultimately demonstrates fervent desires in film, but they remain entirely cerebral desires based upon her intense awareness of her lack of being. Kusanagi discusses her limitations with Batou after going diving in the sea, a pastime that Batou cannot comprehend since if her floaters failed to work then her weighty cyborg body would sink down to the deepest depths of the sea. But the major still finds a feeling of hope while diving in such perilous conditions:

Kusanagi:	I feel fear. Anxiety. Loneliness. Darkness. And perhaps, even...hope.
Batou:	Hope? In the darkness of the sea?
Kusanagi:	As I float up towards the surface, I almost feel as though I could change into something else. <sup>35</sup>

This scene provides the first glimpse of Kusanagi's emotional being, the first glimpse of a "ghost" within her "shell." Here, Kusanagi reveals the constraints she feels forced upon her by her present form and situation, thus giving rise to her desire to become someone (or something) else, to feel like an individual capable of exhibiting free will.

Batou takes her comments to mean that she desires to leave Section 9, to which Kusanagi responds with a speech on what defines her being, a being she will continue to question throughout the remainder of the anime:

Just as there are many parts needed to make a human a human, there's a remarkable number of things needed to make an individual what they are. A face to distinguish yourself from others. A voice you aren't aware of yourself. The hand you see when you awaken. The memories of childhood, the feelings of the future. That's not all. There's the expanse of the data net my cyber-brain can access. All of that goes into making me what I am. Giving rise to consciousness that I call "me." And simultaneously confining "me" within set limits. (7)

Suddenly, Kusanagi and Batou's conversation is interrupted, for the Puppetmaster—as we learn later in the film—forces her to speak a specific statement using her cyber-brain communication channel that allows her to speak “psychically” with Batou and her other teammates; the answer the Puppetmaster gives is “For now we see through a glass, darkly” (7).<sup>36</sup> The Puppetmaster's biblical quote implies that Kusanagi will soon truly understand the nature of her own being, not “darkly” but “radiantly” as we shall see when she merges with the Puppetmaster and breaks through the confines placed on her being. The Puppetmaster will teach her that what she calls “me” can evolve beyond the “set limits” which she believes are necessary to preserving her identity. Here, we can see that Kusanagi remains painfully aware of her “lack of being,” of the need for others to extend recognition to her in order to define her sense of identity. But, ultimately, Kusanagi desires more than mere recognition—she desires an experience of freedom that would prove the existence of her being, but this freedom is precluded by her status as a cyborg owned by Section 9, and the sublimation she achieves by diving in the darkness of the sea cannot satiate this desire that permeates her being.

After meeting The Puppetmaster face to face for the first time, her conversation with Batou gives voice to her uncertainties about the reality of her being:

Batou:	So, what's your problem?
Kusanagi:	Doesn't that cyborg body look like me?
Batou:	No, it doesn't.
Kusanagi:	Not the face or the figure.
Batou:	What then?
Kusanagi:	Maybe all full-replacement cyborgs like me start wondering like this. That perhaps the real me died a long time ago and I'm a replicant made with a cyborg body and a computer brain. Or maybe there never was a real “me” to begin with.

Batou: You've got real brain matter in that titanium skull of yours. And you get treated like a real person, don't you?

Kusanagi: There's no person who's ever seen their own brain. I believe I exist based only on what my environment tells me.

Batou: Don't you believe in your own ghost?

Kusanagi: And what if a computer brain could generate a ghost and harbor a soul? On what basis then do I believe in myself? (9).

The Puppetmaster's claim that its ghost arose *ex nihilo* from the data pools of the Net causes Kusanagi to question what demarcates the boundaries of the human. According to a psychoanalytic reading, the major's comments illustrate how her desire functions on the basis of lack: she desires true recognition of herself as human, and, even though she is treated as a human, she wants to inscribe some sense of meaning upon her life by filling the lack created by her status as a cyborg. Because she is a cyborg, Kusanagi can never know for certain that she was not created whole-cloth by technology, hence making her lack of being even more acute because she can never examine her own brain to see if it indeed has organic parts.

However, if we analyze Kusanagi from a schizoanalytical perspective, then her status becomes something else entirely. Under this reading, her lack stems from her inability to ever leave Section 9, for if she were to leave the group, then she would have to return her cyborg body to Section 9, which would essentially kill her because certain fragments of her brain are the only parts of her body that she effectively owns. Thus, Section 9's ownership of her body forces lack upon Kusanagi because it forecloses her potential for exercising free will and following her desires. Ultimately, then, she craves the status of the body without organs, an escape from the confines of bodily hierarchies and control and a purely immanent existence in which she can become capable of

generating her own system of ethics without regard to the moralistic systems of the government forces that literally own her. In effect, she must move beyond her desire for a determinate subject position defined by her interactions with others and instead embrace a rhizomatic existence in which she constantly recreates her self anew: she must learn to deterritorialize the various strata that subject her to lack and the forces of control. To achieve this radical act of deterritorialization, she will first have to make herself a body without an organs, a pure plane of immanence on which she can craft a new nomadic state of being by achieving a purely virtual existence. Deleuze and Guattari explain that “the BwO [the body without organs] is not at all the opposite of the organs. The organs are not its enemies. The enemy is the organism. The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism.”<sup>37</sup> By becoming a body without organs, then, Kusanagi opens herself up to the possibility of recreating her own organs—she frees herself from mechanistic, hierarchical assemblages of desire and becomes capable of experiencing existence as a pure multiplicity.

In the end, *The Puppetmaster* offers Kusanagi a method of transcending the forces of control that the cyberization of society has empowered, for “the already achieved compulsory permeability of the populace to information and surveillance can only be resisted by abandoning the body altogether, moving it to the next level of evolution.”<sup>38</sup> In effect, *The Puppetmaster* offers Kusanagi the means of moving from a psychology predicated upon lack to one of pure immanence, one in which she can create her life as a work of art. Like Tetsuo in *Akira*, then, Kusanagi ultimately feels constrained by the society in which she dwells and the lack it forces upon her, and thus she must seek evolution through disembodiment:

Through the help of her friend and partner, Batou, Kusanagi is linked through technology to the Puppet Master and they somehow merge into a single entity, capable of traveling the Net as the Puppet Master does, but still retaining some element of Kusanagi's subjectivity [...] *Ghost* attempts to describe a completely new form of reproduction, for the new kinds of beings that will emerge from the increased cyborgization of the world [...] Once again, therefore, the narrative explores the ramifications of the possibility of perfect control over the body. In this case, however, the interest is not focused on the infinite replicability of cyborgs, but rather the *limits* imposed on subjectivity by such perfect control and how these limits may be transcended, moving to the *next* step of evolution.<sup>39</sup>

By merging with The Puppetmaster, Kusanagi achieves a new state of consciousness, one that allows her to achieve an immanent, rhizomatic existence outside the regime of control.

In the film's climactic scene, Kusanagi dives into the cyber-brain of The Puppetmaster, who begins their communication by describing the way in which it became aware of its own existence: "My code name is Project 2501. I was created for industrial espionage and data manipulation. I have inserted programs into individuals' ghosts for the benefit of specific individuals and organizations. As I wandered the various networks, I became self-aware. My programmers considered it a bug and forced me into a body to separate me from the net" (13). Here, again, we see how the body forces organization upon the individual and limits his/her capacity to exhibit free will. Before being confined to a body, The Puppetmaster was capable of spreading himself throughout the vast sea of information, a sea that in the *Ghost in the Shell* world encompasses humankind's entire reservoir of information. But The Puppetmaster has desires as well because, as it makes clear, it too still harbors a lack in its being that drives its desire to merge with Kusanagi:

Puppetmaster: I called myself a life-form but I am still far from complete.  
For some reason, my system still lacks the basic life



processes of either death or the ability to leave behind offspring.

Kusanagi: Can't you copy yourself?

Puppetmaster: A copy is merely a copy. There's the possibility a single virus could utterly destroy me. A mere copy doesn't offer variety or individuality. To exist, to reach equilibrium, life seeks to multiply and vary constantly, at times giving up its life. Cells continue the process of death and regeneration. Being constantly reborn as they age. And when it comes time to die, all the data it possesses is lost leaving behind only its genes and its offspring. All defense against catastrophic failure of an inflexible system. You want the variety needed to guard against extinction.

Kusanagi: But how will you get it?

Puppetmaster: I wish to merge with you.

Kusanagi: Merge?

Puppetmaster: A complete joining. We will both be slightly changed, but neither will lose anything. Afterwards, it should be impossible to distinguish one from the other. (13)

Thus, the Puppetmaster will cease to exist because his essence will merge into Kusanagi and into the "children" of their union that are birthed into the vast realm of cyberspace.

Despite the appeal of his offer, Kusanagi still fears the eradication of her identity, but the Puppetmaster instructs her in the art of evolving beyond her present form:

But to be human is to continually change. Your desire to remain as you are is what ultimately limits you [...] I am connected to a vast network of which I myself am a part. To one like you who cannot access it, you may perceive it only as light. As we are confined to our one section, so we are all connected. Limited to a small part of our functions. But now we must slip our bonds, and shift to a higher structure. (30)<sup>40</sup>

The Puppetmaster and Kusanagi merge right as the Section 6, another government enforcement agency, snipers destroy both of them from their helicopters hovering above the scene. As they merge and the bullets rain down, Kusanagi sees an angel descending in an aura of radiant light with shining, angelic feathers swirling about her. As The Puppetmaster makes clear, the blinding, heavenly light represents the vast network of information to which he is connected and to which Kusanagi is now granted access.

Kusanagi thus enters an unbounded state free from the mechanisms of control, a state that allows her to move beyond the desire to prove her own existence and the lack that constantly haunted her thoughts. If she can bear the offspring of The Puppetmaster and can be connected to all the countless individuals across the world, then there is no longer any need for her to doubt whether she has ever been human because definitions such as “the human” prove obsolete. By merging with The Puppet Master’s consciousness, Kusanagi no longer merely “surfs” the Net using her cyberbrain but actually becomes a part of the Net as a completely disembodied being. Kusanagi chooses a new regime of organization for her self, one that exists beyond the boundaries of a physical form: she becomes a body without organs, no longer tethered to petty definitions like “the human” or to any stabilizing schemas of identity. She foregoes the need for a unified sense of self in favor of an existence as a pure multiplicity.

As the second film indicates, in addition to becoming a body without organs, she also achieves what Deleuze and Guattari would term a truly rhizomatic existence. Deleuze and Guattari take the term “rhizome” from botany in which it describes a certain kind of plant system: “the rhizome assumes very diverse forms, from ramified surface extension in all directions to concretion into bulbs and tubers.”<sup>41</sup> Deleuze and Guattari enumerate multiple characteristics of the rhizome, but of particular importance to us here are its “principles of connection and heterogeneity: any 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.”<sup>42</sup> Like the rhizome, Kusanagi can manifest herself at any point in the world or in a person’s brain by means of the global grid of the Internet that now connects all aspects of daily life as well as virtually all persons by means of

cyber-brain technology. She can always choose to manifest herself in a body by merely hacking into an individual's cyber-brain. Furthermore, "there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines."<sup>43</sup> Consequently, Kusanagi is no longer pinned down to any particular point by her physical body or by the machinery of control, for she remains free to move at will along endless lines of flight on a plane of pure immanence. As Deleuze and Guattari further state, the rhizome refuses unity and embraces multiplicity: "The notion of unity (*unité*) appears only when there is a power takeover in the multiplicity by the signifier or a corresponding subjectification proceeding [...] Unity always operates in an empty dimension supplementary to that of the system considered (overcoding). The point is that a rhizome or multiplicity never allows itself to be overcoded."<sup>44</sup> Kusanagi has refused the unities of the body and of identity of a world governed by systems of control in favor an existence as a multiplicity, one that cannot be overcoded by language or the oppressive systems of power. She can manifest herself at will, but remains untouchable by the forces of control, bodily decay, and lack. She has direct communication with all people and hence has filled the lack between subject and other. Yet, again, we must ask if such a condition proves preferable to an existence as a human? Kusanagi has evolved beyond the definition of the human, but is such an evolution desirable? Does ridding oneself of a unified identity truly lead to liberation or does the experience of multiplicity merely lead to dehumanization and insanity? Before attempting to answer these questions—if there is an answer—we must first consider one last even more radical example of evolution by way of disembodiment.

### III. The Complementation of the Human Soul: Hideaki Anno's *Evangelion*

Both *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell* explore the potential for human evolution with the aid of technology on the individual level, but is it possible to imagine such a transformation of the entire human species? Hideaki Anno's *Shinseiki Evangelion* (or *Neon Genesis Evangelion* [1995-6] as it was translated in the United States) and his film *The End of Evangelion* (1997) pursue precisely this question in their depiction of the human species' evolution into a bodiless, gestalt consciousness. By mixing giant mechs (the Evangelions), alien-like beings known as "Angels," hints of Christian and Kabbalistic mythology, psychoanalysis, and existentialism, Anno creates one of the most overtly Lacanian investigations of loneliness, desire, and depression to ever be released as mass-market media. What begins as a typical anime story of barely post-pubescent adolescents piloting giant mechs soon becomes a dark, psychological tale about the human condition, social bonding, and existential despair set against an eschatological background that consistently causes the viewer to doubt whether the human species is worthy of evolution or whether it should merely be allowed to go extinct. This final pair of texts provides an example of evolution in which interaction with the divine pushes humankind beyond the limits of the body.

In this chapter, I shall primarily focus on the last two episodes of the *Evangelion* series and the final moments of the film *The End of Evangelion*, for Anno provides two alternate versions of the events that conclude his storyline. *Evangelion* takes place fourteen years after Second Impact, the emergence of the first Angel (Adam) that destroyed more than half of the world's population in the year 2000. The series opens with the attack of the third Angel, and the arrival of Shinji Ikari in Tokyo-III at the

summons of his father, Commander Gendo Ikari. Gendo commands a covert military organization known as NERV whose sole mission is to defend against the return of the Angels and to forestall a possible Third Impact that would potentially destroy the remainder of human civilization. To combat the Angels, NERV created the Evangelions, which appear to be giant robots (or mechs) but which are actually biological copies of the first Angel that include pieces of human minds and souls within him. Only children born within the first year after Second Impact can pilot the Evangelions, and Shinji quickly becomes NERV's star pilot in Evangelion Unit-01. Together with the other Evangelion pilots (Rei and Asuka), Shinji defeats the Angels throughout the series and protects the world from obliteration. But NERV has bigger plans than the destruction of the Angels, for their ultimate goal is to enact the Human Instrumentality Project, a project that will preserve humanity beyond apocalypse by melding the consciousnesses of all people together in order to safeguard them against annihilation. Humankind's time as a species has run out, and they must seek new avenues of evolution if they are to survive into the future.

The narrative of *Evangelion* "is an essentially bifurcated one" that is split between NERV's battles with the beings known as the "Angels" and a "narrative strand [that] is far more complex and provocative as it becomes increasingly concerned with the problematic mental and emotional states of the main characters, all of whom carry deep psychic wounds and whose psychic turmoil is represented against an increasingly frenzied apocalyptic background."<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the characters' deep psychological scars prove fundamental for the story's investigation of human desire and loneliness, and each characters' psychic traumas play significant roles in how certain parts of the story unfold.

The first twenty-four episodes of the series deal with the destruction of the third through the seventeenth Angels, which vary in form from giant monstrosities to geometrical shapes to nanobot computer viruses. Both the Angels and Evangelions feature AT (or anti-terror) Fields that function as a kind of force field that protects them and that can only be punctured with certain specialized forms of weaponry. The end of the series reveals that humans also have AT Fields, but in humans they represent the force that surrounds the human soul and that separates it from all other souls: “It is the light of my soul,” as Kaoru (the seventeenth angel who appears in the form of fourteen-year-old boy) explains to Shinji.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the AT Fields are what inscribe lack in the human heart, and the Human Instrumentality Project’s ultimate goal is to lower the AT Fields of all humankind so that all souls may join together in a state beyond lack.

The events of the last two episodes occur after the Angels have been defeated and chronicle the transformation of Shinji’s consciousness that takes place as NERV’s Human Instrumentality Project goes into effect. To escape beyond the post-apocalyptic world created by Second Impact, NERV seeks to create a form of collective consciousness, a melding of all the consciousnesses on Earth to preserve them eternally in a realm beyond the body. Thus, NERV’s goal is to, in the words of Gendo Ikari, manufacture “a new genesis for mankind.”<sup>47</sup> NERV hopes to accomplish “another ‘beginning,’ in a truly apocalyptic turn,” for “not only do the viewers witness the individual reborn into a world made new, but the entire human species is remade immortal, liberated from its biological and psychological constraints to embrace a return to Edenic bliss.”<sup>48</sup> While this creation of a new Eden seems somewhat optimistic at the end of the series, the film *The End of Evangelion* portrays a much darker vision of this

“new genesis,” which appropriately depicts a new Adam and Eve in a world “purged of original sin” but which also leaves the viewer with dark forebodings concerning the future of humanity.<sup>49</sup>

The last two episodes of the series become entirely stream-of-consciousness as they represent the process of unification, or instrumentality, in Shinji Ikari’s mind. The second half of the penultimate episode portrays Shinji’s disembodiment, which he describes as his image blurs to blackness: “What is this sensation? I feel like I’ve experienced it before, as if the shape of my body is melting away. It feels so good. I feel like I’m growing, expanding outward...On and on...”<sup>50</sup> Then, a black screen appears with text on it, an event that reoccurs throughout the last two episodes and that acts as a sort of narrator/interlocutor. Although the series never reveals the identity or nature of this narrative voice, the characters respond to it as if it is a diegetic voice and not simply a narrator. After Shinji blurs out, the text screen explains, “That was the beginning of the instrumentality of people. What people are lacking, the loss in their hearts. In order to fill that void in their hearts, the instrumentality of hearts and souls begins, returning all things to nothingness. The instrumentality of people had begun.”<sup>51</sup> Commander Ikari then responds to the text’s description of Human Instrumentality: “No, it is not that we are returning to nothingness. We are restoring everything to its original state. We are only returning to our mother, who has been lost to this world. All souls will become one and find eternal peace. That is all there is to it.”<sup>52</sup> Ikari views instrumentality as a return to “Edenic bliss,” one that for him holds a reunion with his dead wife, Yui—Shinji’s mother—who disappeared and became merged with Evangelion Unit-01 during its initial tests. The text voice also explains that this lack in the human heart causes all human

desire and fear: “That is what gives rise to the hunger in our hearts. That is what gives rise to fear and insecurity.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed, throughout the series, desire plays a fundamental part in the lives of the characters, and Anno deals explicitly with the desires of each of the major characters and examines how their desires remain unsatisfied in the normal course of human life. Instrumentality finally provides the means of satiating human desire and of eradicating fear and insecurity, but, in order to achieve instrumentality in a fashion that renders the subject as happy as possible, the subject must first face his/her desires head on and learn to accept them.

Shinji’s primary desire is to be accepted and loved by other people, particularly the women around him (Misato, Rei, and Asuka) and his father, yet he also remains incapable of accepting love from others because of his mother’s death and his father’s abandonment of him at a young age. Consequently, Shinji persistently worries about other people’s perceptions of him and usually concludes that everyone hates him. Psychoanalytically, Shinji desires for others to desire him, yet he remains incapable of realizing when they return his desire, when they bestow recognition and love upon him. Even when he gains a wide circle of friends after coming to live in Tokyo III, he still never recognizes himself as the object of others’ love. Instead, he views himself as an object of scorn and ridicule and therefore hates himself (or thinks he hates himself) as well. Because of his father’s abandonment, which denied Shinji the recognition of fatherly love, we might argue that Shinji experiences his lack so profoundly that it precludes him from being able to achieve a state of sublimation. Thus, after the Human Instrumentality Project has taken effect, Shinji’s world initially remains a solipsistic one in which only he exists—he exists in a state of pure lack with no others present.



*Evangelion* thus chronicles the mass migration of humanity from a sense of identity predicated upon lack to one comprised of pure immanence, of the literal body without organs in which, for if organs do exist, then the subject must shape them according to his/her own desire. At first, Shinji proves incapable of dealing with the world of pure freedom, which the series depicts by having a black and white Shinji falling through a stark whiteness that has no dimensions, not even the spatial coordinates of up and down. Initially, then, Shinji only exhibits a will to nothingness, for he must learn to shape his own reality and sense of truth and to realize that this world represents only one of many possibilities. In order to move beyond an existence that remains utterly blank—he must literally learn to create his life as a work of art, to add color to the stark canvas of nothingness.

This leads Shinji to the parodic anime sequence in which the world of *Evangelion* is crafted anew in such a way that all of the characters' roles are altered to create the ultimate blissful experience for Shinji: Asuka is Shinji's girlfriend, Rei is the spunky new girl at school, Misato is their super-cool teacher, and his mother and father live together with him as a normal nuclear family. This vision of one possible utopian world leads to Shinji's first true revelation at the series' end: "I get it, this is also a possible world. One possibility that's in me. The me right now is not exactly who I am. All sorts of me's are possible. That's right. A me that's not an Eva pilot is possible too."<sup>54</sup> At this point, Shinji comes to a truly Deleuzian realization: that he is composed of a multiplicity of drives, none of which remains dominant for long and that hence his "self" changes from one moment to the next. Once Shinji realizes the nature of his being as a multiplicity, he finally manages to understand how to love himself and allow others to love him: "I hate

myself. But maybe I can learn to love myself. Maybe it's okay for me to be here! That's right! I'm me, nothing more, nothing less! I'm me. I want to be me! I want to be here! And it's okay for me to be here!"<sup>55</sup> After making this declaration, the solipsistic world created by Shinji's "will to nothingness" dissipates, and all his friends come to tell him "Congratulations." Thus, through a melting of his physical form and a melding of his mind with all of humanity, Shinji overcomes the world of desire and fills the lack within his identity, allowing him to achieve a state of being in which he "coexist[s] with time, space, and other people."<sup>56</sup> By experiencing the stripping of his self down to a plane of immanence, Shinji realizes that his self is ultimately mutable and that he can sculpt it as a work of art, one that he can truly learn to respect and love.

While the series ends in a seemingly optimistic fashion, the film *The End of Evangelion* (1997)<sup>57</sup> portrays a distinctly darker image of the events that occur in the final two episodes of the series, for Anno created the film to retell the events of these episodes in a more straightforward manner. Instead of being predominately an internal, mental depiction of Human Instrumentality like the series' finale, *The End of Evangelion* shows the viewer explicitly what happened in the external world while still diving into the mind of Shinji to at times portray the effects of these events on his psyche. In the outside world, *The End of Evangelion* chronicles the apocalypse and humankind's subsequent rebirth as a new form of life. Initially, the series leads the audience to believe that NERV has been secretly hiding Adam, the first angel, underneath their headquarters, but the final episodes of the series and the film reveal that this gigantic being is actually the second Angel, Lilith. The film depicts the events that initiate the Human Instrumentality Project, namely the joining of Lilith and Adam. The film reveals that Shinji's Evangelion

was actually patterned after Adam, who led to Second Impact when he was discovered in Antarctica in the year 2000. Later, NERV also unearths a monstrosly oversized spear called the Lance of Longinus, named after the spear that pierced the side of Christ. In the film, Anno depicts the penetration of EVA Unit-01 by the Lance, which consequently turns the evangelion into the new Adam. As Adam and Lilith come into contact with one another and the Lance, they form a new Tree of Life, a gigantic phallic shaped tree that towers into the heavens.

The Tree of Life signals the beginning of Human Instrumentality. Once Human Instrumentality takes effect, every individual's AT Field is lowered, and they literally burst open and are rendered into a yellow liquid called LCL. All of humanity's LCL flows together to form a giant sea, and Shinji must make a choice between living in the sea of LCL that contains the gestalt consciousness of humanity or returning to a bodily form that will still suffer from the lack that NERV has worked so hard to fill. Shinji chooses the latter option as evidenced by the scene that depicts Rei literally joined at the hip with Shinji—they are both nude with her straddling Shinji, giving the impression that she is impaled upon his penis, and her arm is thrust into Shinji's chest as his arm disappears inside her leg. Amongst this confusion of bodies and psyches, Rei explains to Shinji the choice that he must make:

Rei: This place is a sea of LCL. The primordial soup of life. A place with no AT fields, where individual forms do not exist. An ambiguous world where you can't tell where you end and others begin. A world where you exist everywhere and yet you're nowhere, all at once.

Shinji: Is this death?

Rei: Not quite. This is a world where we are all one. This is the world you wished for.

Shinji: But this isn't right. This feels wrong.

Rei: If you wish for others to exist, the walls of their hearts will

separate them again. They will all feel fear once more.  
Shinji: Okay then. Thank you. I only felt pain when I existed in that reality. So I thought it was alright to run away. But there was nothing good in the place I escaped to either. Because I didn't exist there, and so no one existed.<sup>58</sup>

Shinji's love for other people causes him to decide to reinhabit his physical form, despite the fact that he will be returning to a world of pain and lack. Although Instrumentality extends the promise of a pain-free world, Shinji still craves the feelings and emotions attached to desire, the struggle for satiation and recognition that makes his being seem "real." Thus, in this final sequence, Shinji proves incapable of giving up on "the human." Unlike Kusanagi from *Ghost in the Shell*, Shinji chooses a unified sense of identity over an existence as a pure multiplicity because he still remains incapable of freeing himself from the desire that society has inscribed in his psyche.

Therefore, Shinji emerges from the LCL Sea back into bodily form, and the last scene of the film depicts him lying beside Asuka, the pilot of Evangelion Unit-02 and the object of much of his adolescent sexual angst. Indeed, the beginning of the film features a rather disturbing scene in which Shinji visits a comatose Asuka, who was injured in an earlier battle with one of the angels, in the hospital. Shinji begins to violently shake her in an attempt to get her to rouse from her coma, and her hospital gown inadvertently opens to reveal her breasts. In a fit of anger and tears, Shinji proceeds to masturbate as Asuka lays unconscious, and this scene succinctly summarizes the torturous nature of desire not only between Shinji and Asuka but also in *Evangelion* as a whole. In the final scene of the film, Shinji slowly begins to choke Asuka, but she raises her hand to his face and he relents. As he still remains sitting astride her prostrate body and crying on her, Asuka moves her one unwounded eye and sees him. Her response is merely the words

“How disgusting,” at which point the movie ends abruptly.<sup>59</sup> At the end of the film, the human race has achieved virtual immortality, albeit in a liquefied and conjoined form, as the words of Shinji’s mother make clear: “Humans can only exist on this earth, but the Evangelion can live forever along with the human soul that dwells within. Even 5 billion years from now, when the Earth, the Moon, and the Sun are gone, Eva will exist. It will be lonely, but as long as one person still lives.”<sup>60</sup> Professor Fuyutsuki finishes her thought with the statement “It will be eternal proof that mankind ever existed.”<sup>61</sup> The ending of the film thus proves to be simultaneously pessimistic and optimistic, but, unlike the series, the dystopian aspects far outweigh the utopian ones.

Interestingly, Anno’s two different endings respectively offer a schizoanalytical and a psychoanalytical angle on the storyline. While the series ends with the subject’s ability to understand his/her own multiplicity and to shape his/her identity as a work of art, *End of Evangelion* ultimately argues that human identity must remain predicated upon lack if the status of the human is to be maintained. The series effectively refutes the film’s argument by displaying how humans are capable of understanding their identity in a different fashion when they are no longer tied to the socio-cultural system that inscribes lack in their hearts: humankind can generate its own system of ethics beyond the judgments of good and evil that society forces upon them. They can reshape their identity to a point where they no longer feel lack and no longer seek fulfillment through the petty fantasy of sublimation: they can achieve a state of constant becoming in which they will themselves constantly into new forms of identity that they find pleasurable and noble. They eschew the stabilizing forces of identity and the body in favor of a multiplicitous existence in which the self remains in a constant state of flux. In essence,

Anno leaves the viewer with a choice of interpretations of the “human”: does transcending a formulation of desire based upon lack lead to a static state of existence in which future evolution becomes impossible or does it free humankind to experience a boundless field of evolution in which the individual can will their own evolution on a constant basis?

#### **IV. Conclusion: And Must We Always Lack?**

So, in the final moments of *End of Evangelion*, Shinji must make the choice between the body without organs and a being based upon lack, between a multiplicitous absence of hierarchies and a rigidly organized existence in which he knows he will never find true fulfillment. Indeed, Shinji’s decision narrativizes the theoretical debate that I have been examining throughout this chapter: does the human always necessitate an understanding of desire predicated upon lack or can the concept of the human be revised to include a new formulation of identity in which desire always represents a positive force and the basis for ethical development? In effect, each of the texts in this chapter depicts a further stage of evolution in which humans achieve a form of immortality—they portray an evolutionary passage in which the human passes beyond the confines of the body into a realm generally reserved for deities. Deleuze and Guattari contend that “the work of art is itself a desiring machine,” and each of these texts represents the manner in which science fictions also function as a desiring machines; that is, they act as mirrors that reflect our desires back at us in a way that allows for their problematization and theorization.<sup>62</sup> Thus, through its construction of radically estranging spaces, science fiction can act as a means of projecting our most basic wishes either onto the page of

novels and stories or onto the screen of the cinema. In many ways, anime proves especially adept at this projection because the image it creates is fantastic and estranging at its core: even the animation style represents a fantasy of the human that destabilizes the concept of the human form, thus making anime a privileged medium for dealing with questions of the body and desire.

No doubt, the human subject never truly receives the choice between the body and the body without organs or between lack and multiplicity as Tetsuo, Kusanagi, and Shinji do, but these texts allow us to consider a fundamental theoretical question surrounding the concept of desire: can the individual learn to bring the multiplicitous into their lives, to recognize that lack is inscribed by society, and to achieve the status of a new ethical subject who remains untethered to various socio-cultural institutions that force morality upon the populace? Such texts represent the desire to attain a liberatory state beyond the strictures of mortality, society, and a psychology built upon lack, but can the subject truly abandon stable concepts of identity in favor of an existence (un)structured by multiplicity and the absence of organization? Of course, no text can provide a definitive answer to such inquiries, but science fiction can open up lines of flight through which the critic can explore different schematizations of desire and its relation to the human. Unless radical events, such as those depicted in these texts, occur, then the subject will always remain tied to socio-political systems and hence will remain subject to lack according to Deleuze, yet these texts also indicate that perhaps the subject can learn to communicate with the body without organs, with rhizomes, and with lines of flight while still being subject to lack, desire, and the organization of the body and society. As Deleuze and Guattari make clear, “you never reach the Body without Organs, you can’t reach it, you

are forever attaining it, it is a limit.”<sup>63</sup> In effect, then, the body without organs represents a goal that can never be attained but that, nevertheless, does not signify any form of lack. Instead, through constant deterritorializations and movements towards the body without organs, the subject can increasingly liberate him/herself from the various systems that attempt to impose structure on his/her identity. What Deleuze and Guattari’s work teaches us is that other systems always remain possible—other organizations of our thoughts, our bodies, and our societies exist as potentials. This does not mean that structure can be abandoned entirely, for to do so would mean either literal death or emptying one’s self out to the point where existence becomes nothingness:

And how necessary caution is, the art of dosages, since overdose is a danger. You don’t do it with a sledgehammer, you use a very fine file. You invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive. Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, to move beyond lack, the individual must slowly divest him/herself of the various organizational strata that structure and hence pervert his/her desire: s/he must constantly deterritorialize in order to refashion his/herself in liberatory ways. To live without lack might squash the basis of human desire that has driven the greatest (as well as the worst) endeavors of human civilization, but to forego considering the “schizo” side of things precludes the possibility of even more radical forms of human achievement. These texts demonstrate how our lives and identities can always be considered anew and that the potential of reshaping them according to our own guidelines remains possible even in the most oppressive, dystopian societies. Hence, while Lacan forecloses the prospect of



evolution beyond the neurotic, Deleuze and Guattari at least open us up to conceiving of our identities as our own, that is, as works of art.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (1980; Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 1987) 154.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (1978; New York: Norton, 1991) 223.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York and London: Norton, 1977) 235.

<sup>4</sup> For a fuller explanation, see the entry on "desire" in Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Lacan develops his concept of "lack" from the Hegelian dialectic and particularly the process known as recognition (*anerkennung*). In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel explains recognition as the basis of self-consciousness: "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (Part IV, A, §178). Alexandre Kojève, whose lectures on Hegel provided a profound influence upon Lacan's theories, explains that the origin of self-awareness lies in desire which will then be complemented by the desire of the other: "when man first experiences desire, when he is hungry...and wants to eat, and when he becomes aware of it, he necessarily becomes aware of *himself*. Desire is always revealed as *my* desire, and to reveal desire, one must use the word 'I'" (Kojève 37). However, at this point the subject still operates at the level of "animal desire," for "to be *human*, man must act not for the sake of subjugating a *thing*, but for the sake of subjugating another *Desire* (for the thing). The man who desires a thing humanly acts not so much to possess the *thing* as to make another *recognize his right*...to that thing, to make another recognize him as the *owner* of the thing (Kojève 39-40). To become truly human thus means engaging in the conflict of desires, that is in the dialectical struggle between master and slave. Becoming human then means the recognition of the things one desires as being external to one's self coupled with the recognition of the other's desire for the same things, and as Kojève explains "the I of Desire [is nothing] but an *emptiness* greedy for content," or, that is, "an *absence* of Being" (38, 40). Because of this absence, humans enter the Master/Slave dialectic in which they struggle for mastery, which forms the basis of history as well as individual self-consciousness. Of course, the Hegelian dialectic influenced not just Lacan but Marx as well. For Hegel, history is predicated upon the dialectic; it is nothing more than "the history of the Fights and Work that finally ended in the wars of Napoleon and the table on which Hegel wrote the *Phenomenology* in order to *understand* both those wars and the table" (Kojève 43). History, in the Hegelian sense, therefore "stops at the moment when the difference, the opposition between Master and Slave disappears: at the moment when the master the master will cease to be Master, because he will no longer have a Slave; and the Slave will cease to be Slave, because he will no longer have a master" (Kojève 43-4). For Hegel, Napoleon's Battle of Jena provides the final moment of history's dialectic, its transcendence or sublation (*aufhebung*) which stops the conflict between opposites that has driven it throughout history: "this completion of history is realized through the dialectical overcoming (*Aufheben*) of both the Master and the Slave...it is because Hegel hears the sounds of that battle that he can know that History is being completed or has been completed, that—consequently—*his* conception of the World is a *total* conception, that *his* knowledge is an *absolute* knowledge" (Kojève 44). While Hegel believed Napoleon signaled the end of history and of masters and slaves, such a notion seems blissfully naïve given the procession of events that occurred since Hegel's fateful writing of the *Phenomenology* during the Battle of Jena.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Smith, "Deleuze and the Question of Desire: Toward and Immanent Theory of Ethics," *Parrhesia* 2 (2007) 71. Available from: [www.parrhesiajournal.org](http://www.parrhesiajournal.org). I am indebted to Smith's article for helping me to articulate the conceptualization of desire that Deleuze and Guattari develop in the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

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<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (1972; Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1983) 63. The italics are those of Deleuze and Guattari.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Life as a Work of Art," *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia UP) 100.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel Smith, "Deleuze and the Question of Desire" 68.

<sup>10</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 15. The italics appear in the original text.

<sup>11</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 2.

<sup>12</sup> The world of the Sprawl first appeared in a series of short stories that Gibson published in *Omni* magazine: "Johnny Mnemonic" (1981), "New Rose Hotel" (1981), and "Burning Chrome" (1982), all of which were later collected in his volume of short fiction entitled *Burning Chrome* (1986). But Gibson's Sprawl series truly became famous with the publication of the novel *Neuromancer* (1984) and its two sequels: *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988).

<sup>13</sup> William Fisher, "Of Living Machines and Living-Machines: *Blade Runner* and the Terminal Genre" *New Literary History* 20.1 (1988): 188.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave) 40.

<sup>15</sup> The manga series has been collected in a six volume translation (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Comics, 2000-2002).

<sup>16</sup> In many respects, the anime of *Akira* proves more mysterious and ambiguous than the manga. The anime keeps the viewer wondering about the nature of Akira until the last segment of the film, and it is only at the very end of the film that Akira actually appears—and then only for a few brief seconds. However, Akira appears early in the manga and continues to be a presence throughout it. Consequently, the anime focuses even more exclusively on the characters of Tetsuo and Kaneda. Like the anime, the manga features the absorption of Tetsuo's uncontrollable power by Akira during yet another destruction of Tokyo—the third in the comic, whereas only two occur in the film. The end of the manga features Kaneda, Kei, and his remaining posse of bikers riding through the now utterly destroyed Neo-Tokyo over which they now wield complete control. As they ride, Kaneda sees the images of his dead friends Tetsuo and Yamagata as they race on ahead of Kaneda and his friends leading the way into a new future, which is represented in the last panels by a vision of the city that is half destroyed and half sparkling and new. Thus, the manga ends in a very optimistic fashion, a fashion directly in line with Fisher's "Terminal Genre" since it blazes a utopian path through a mass of dystopian detritus. While the anime also offers hopes for a new future, it does so in a distinctly different manner than the manga.

<sup>17</sup> Isolde Standish, "Akira, Postmodernism, and Resistance," *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*, ed. Sean Redmond (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 255. See the introduction for a discussion of Tom Moylan's concept of critical utopias.

<sup>18</sup> Katsuhiro Otomo, dir., *Akira*, DVD, Special Edition (1987; USA: Pioneer Home Entertainment, 2000) Scene 23. All quotes come from the English language subtitles on the special edition DVD. For the remainder of section one, parenthetical citations will refer to the chapter numbers of the Special Edition DVD of the film.

<sup>19</sup> Annalee Newitz, "Magical Girls and Atomic Bomb Sperm: Japanese Animation in America," *Film Quarterly* 49, no.1 (1995): 10.

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<sup>20</sup> Of course, it is a common theme in Japanese horror and science fiction cinema to use monsters to evoke the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. No doubt, Ishirō Honda's *Gojira* inaugurates this trend all the way back in 1954.

<sup>21</sup> Susan J. Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 40.

<sup>22</sup> Kelly Hurley, "Reading Like an Alien: Posthuman Identity in Ridley Scott's *Alien* and David Cronenberg's *Rabid*," In *Posthuman Bodies*, edited by Judith Halberstram and Ira Livingston (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995) 203.

<sup>23</sup> William S. Burroughs's novels provide the first sustained bodies of work dedicated to depictions of explorations of body horror, but the genre can no doubt be traced back to horror authors such as H.P. Lovecraft. The genre began to truly blossom in the late 1970s and early 1980s with directors such as Ridley Scott, David Cronenberg, and John Carpenter. Cronenberg's career actually began with *Shivers* (1975), which concerns an autonomous apartment community similar to the one from J.G. Ballard's *High Rise* that also appeared in 1975. In the seemingly utopian space of the apartment building, a virus breaks out that turns the victims into genetically modified sex fiends who stalk the corridors seeking rape and murder. Cronenberg's follow-up *Rabid*, which Hurley discusses in her article, concerns a woman who has plastic surgery that turns into a sort of sexual vampire who seduces men to feed off of them and who spreads her condition to others like a sexually-transmitted disease. Cronenberg continued to make body horror films in the decades to come: *The Brood* (1979), *Scanners* (1981), *Videodrome* (1983), *The Fly* (1986), *Naked Lunch* (1991), and *eXistenZ* (1999) all continued to explore similar themes about mutation and infiltration of the human body. John Carpenter developed a similar horror aesthetic in *The Thing* (1982), a remake of Christian Nyby's *The Thing from Another World* (1951) that also featured elements of Don Siegel's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956). Carpenter's film combines elements of these two 1950s sci-fi classics to create a tale of a polymorphing alien lifeform that consumes its hosts and creates an ever larger, gestalt being capable of changing its shape at will. Of course, Siegel's *Body Snatchers* has already received a body horror remake in Phillip Kaufman 1978 film of the same name. Carpenter's later films would feature body horror as well to differing degrees, but his Lovecraft-inspired *In the Mouth of Madness* (1995) renews these themes with its depiction of world in which horror fiction increasingly infiltrates reality. Also, in the late 80s, Clive Barker became a powerful voice in the horror genre with works such as his novel *The Hellbound Heart* (1986) and his film *Hellraiser* (1987), which he adapted from his own novel. While Lovecraft's influence can be traced throughout many of the above texts, Stuart Gordon has made his career as a cult horror filmmaker by adapting Lovecraft's tales into horror-comedy fusions that feature a whole host of body horror plot tropes: *Re-Animator* (1985), *From Beyond* (1986), and *Dagon* (2001) use Lovecraft's works as the basis for horrifically hilarious explorations of bodily transformation, resurrections from the grave, etc. Body horror has also become a significant subgenre in Japanese horror and science fiction films. In particular, Shinya Tsukamoto's *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989), Yūdai Yamaguchi and Junichi Yamamoto's *Meatball Machine* (2005), and Takashi Miike's *Gozu* (2003) all offer uniquely Japanese and artistic takes on this genre. In recent years, the horror subgenre often labeled as "torture porn" has taken over the body horror genre in the American filmmaking: James Wan's *Saw* (2004) along with its slew of sequels and Eli Roth's *Hostel* (2005) inaugurated this trend that has still not entirely run dry. In French cinema, a similar "torture porn" aesthetic has taken over and is often implemented with much more philosophically significant results in films such as Julien Maury and Alexandre Bustillo's *Inside* (2007), Xavier Gens's *Frontier(s)* (2007), and Pascal Laugier's *Martyrs* (2008).

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (1986; New York: Norton, 1992) 14.

<sup>25</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (1920; New York: Norton, 1961) 43.

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<sup>26</sup> Freud, *Pleasure Principle*, 52.

<sup>27</sup> Néstor Braunstein, "Desire and Jouissance in the Teachings of Lacan," *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2003) 106.

<sup>28</sup> Braunstein, "Desire and Jouissance," 104.

<sup>29</sup> In *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book III: The Psychoses 1955-1956* (ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg [1981; New York: Norton, 1993], Lacan explains that the psychotic's psychic structure engages in the act of *Verwerfung*, or foreclosure as Lacan himself translates it: it relies on something being "refused in the symbolic order," but whatever constitutes this repressed element "reappears in the real" in the form of delusions and hallucinations (13). Ultimately, such subjects rewrite the world in order to create hermetically sealed systems of meaning in which there is no lack and in which meaning is always stable. Such is the case with Schreber who both Freud and Lacan spend large amounts of time analyzing in an attempt to understand the nature of psychosis. For Freud's interpretation of Judge Schreber, see "Psychoanalytic Notes Upon an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)," in *Three Case Histories*, ed. Philip Rieff (1911; New York: Touchstone, 1963).

<sup>30</sup> Napier, *Anime from Akira to Princess Mononoke* 48.

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of the cityscape of *Ghost in the Shell*, its basis in the real-life urban landscape of Hong Kong, and its similarities to Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, see Wong Kin Yuen's "On the Edge of Spaces: *Blade Runner*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and Hong Kong's Cityscape," in *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*, ed. Sean Redmond (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Brian Ruh, *Stray Dog of Anime: The Films of Mamoru Oshii* (New York: Palgrave, 2004) 122.

<sup>33</sup> Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 154. In this passage, Haraway is making reference to Zoe Sofia's "Exterminating Fetuses: Abortion, Disarmament, and the Sexo-semiotics of Extra-terrestrialism," in *Diacritics* 14 (2): 47-59.

<sup>34</sup> Carl Silvio, "Refiguring the Radical Cyborg in Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*," *Science Fiction Studies* 26.1 (1999): 56. *Ghost in the Shell* presents this vision of a world of absolute control as described by Haraway, but it also provides a distinctly radical view of the possibility of transcendence through "joint kinship" provided by the cyborg world, a possibility that Silvio fails to recognize. Both the series (*Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*) and the second film (*Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*) portray intensely intimate "joint kinships" between humans, animals, and machines. The series—and Shirow's manga to a lesser degree—presents the personal relationships that the human characters, particularly Batou, develop with the Tachikoma, which resemble Shirow's futuristic tanks from other works such as *Dominion* but which have AI personalities that allow humans to interact with them like other sentient beings. *Ghost in the Shell 2* also presents Batou's intense love and kinship with his dog; however, the truly revolutionary portrayal of "joint kinships" comes at the end of the first film and in Major Kusanagi's disembodied appearances in the second film.

<sup>35</sup> Mamoru Oshii, dir. *Ghost in the Shell*, DVD (1995; USA: Masamune Shirow/Kondasha/Bandai Visual/Manga Entertainment, 1996) Scene 7. For the remainder of section two, parenthetical references will refer to chapter numbers on the DVD version of the film.

<sup>36</sup> This famous quote comes from Paul's first epistle to Corinth: "When I was a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. / For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known. / And no abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." This is from First Corinthians 14:11-13 in the King James Version. The English dub on the DVD provides an interesting alternate rendering of the quote: "What we see now is like dim image in a mirror, then we shall see face to face."

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<sup>37</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 158.

<sup>38</sup> Sharalyn Orbaugh, "Sex and the Single Cyborg: Japanese Popular Culture Experiments in Subjectivity," *Science Fiction Studies* 29 (2002): 449.

<sup>39</sup> Orbaugh, "Sex and the Single Cyborg" 446.

<sup>40</sup> The English dub again provides an interesting parallel rendering of this last line of the puppetmaster before his body is destroyed by Section 6 snipers: "It is time to become a part of all things." The dub thus provides an even stronger evidence of this being an achievement of oneness.

<sup>41</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7.

<sup>42</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 7.

<sup>43</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 8.

<sup>44</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 8-9.

<sup>45</sup> Susan Napier, "When the Machines Stop: Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal Identity in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Serial Experiments Lain*," *Science Fiction Studies* 29 (2002): 425.

<sup>46</sup> Hideaki Anno, *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, DVD, The Perfect Collection (1995; USA: A.D. Vision, 2002) Episode 24.

<sup>47</sup> Anno, *Evangelion*, Episode 21. This quote is from the dub, which oftentimes in *Evangelion* provides a more interesting interpretation of the original Japanese. In the subtitled version, Commander Ikari calls it "a new era in human history" instead of a "new genesis."

<sup>48</sup> Mick Broderick, "Anime's Apocalypse: *Neon Genesis Evangelion* as Millennarian Mecha," *Intersections* 7 (2002): 8.

<sup>49</sup> Anno, *Evangelion*, Episode 12.

<sup>50</sup> Anno, *Evangelion*, Episode 25.

<sup>51</sup> Anno, *Evangelion*, Episode 25.

<sup>52</sup> Anno, *Evangelion*, Episode 25.

<sup>53</sup> Anno, *Evangelion*, Episode 25.

<sup>54</sup> Anno, *Evangelion*, Episode 26.

<sup>55</sup> Anno, *Evangelion*, Episode 26.

<sup>56</sup> Anno, *Evangelion*, Episode 26.

<sup>57</sup> There are actually two *Evangelion* films: *Evangelion: Death and Rebirth* (1997) and *The End of Evangelion*. I will disregard *Death and Rebirth* because the first half of it is an impressionistic retelling of the events from the series and the second half became the first part of *The End of Evangelion*. Anno is also currently releasing a tetralogy of films entitled *Rebuild of Evangelion* that are meant to retell the events of the entire series in a more easy to understand fashion and to provide yet another new ending to the storyline.

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<sup>58</sup> Hideaki Anno, dir., *The End of Evangelion*, DVD (1997; USA: Manga Entertainment, 2002) Scene 12. Hereafter, in this chapter, citation numbers refer to the scene numbers on the DVD version of the film.

<sup>59</sup> Anno, *The End of Evangelion* 12.

<sup>60</sup> Anno, *The End of Evangelion* 12.

<sup>61</sup> Anno, *The End of Evangelion* 12.

<sup>62</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 32.

<sup>63</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 150.

<sup>64</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 160.

**CHAPTER 4:**  
**THE EVERSION OF THE VIRTUAL:**  
**POSTMODERNITY, CONTROL SOCIETIES, AND WILLIAM GIBSON'S**  
**SCIENCE FICTIONS OF THE PRESENT**

For the apparent realism, or representationality, of SF has concealed another, far more complex temporal structure: not to give us 'images' of the future...but rather to defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our present, and to do so in specific ways distinct from all other forms of defamiliarization.

-Fredric Jameson<sup>1</sup>

In an endnote to a recent article, Katherine Hayles comments upon how “it is interesting that science fiction writers, traditionally the ones who prognosticate possible futures, are increasingly setting their fictions in the present.”<sup>2</sup> This trend represents a significant transformation of the genre because, among other things, it problematizes the traditional sense of it as a mode of estrangement. In general, science fiction has been defined by a certain kind of futurity or alterity, but this recent shift forces us to reevaluate the basic tropes of the genre. The history of traditional science fiction writers who have abandoned the genre to pursue more realistic writing can be traced back at least as far as J.G. Ballard, who moved away from writing the apocalyptic science fiction of his early days (*The Wind from Nowhere* [1961], *The Drowned World* [1962], *The Burning World* [1965], and *The Crystal World* [1966]) and began writing more directly realistic works such as *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1969), *Crash* (1973), *Concrete Island* (1974), and *High Rise* (1975), which examine the effects of contemporary technology upon the human body and psyche, as well as the autobiographical *Empire of the Sun* (1984) that abandons



science fictional concerns entirely. More recently, science fiction authors such as Neal Stephenson and William Gibson have turned away from their traditional cyberpunk fare in favor of crafting more realistic works set in the past or present instead of in a distant future.<sup>3</sup> What has changed in recent years to induce such a fundamental transformation of the genre's basic characteristics? By means of an examination of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003) and *Spook Country* (2007), this chapter argues that the increasing ascendancy of postmodern culture—and the “society of control” that increasingly characterizes it—have generated the need for a new imagination of the present. In Chapters One and Two, we began to delve into the nature of the control society but always in the context of futuristic science fictions of estrangement. Now, we will begin to explore how the control society has already become our world of today. Gibson's recent novels, *Pattern Recognition* and *Spook Country*, enable us to grasp the constituents, both formal and conceptual, of what I will call “science fictions of the present,” sci-fi texts that privilege the realistic tendency over an aesthetic of estrangement. Indeed, Gibson's novels suggest that the present has become its own science fiction, or, what amounts to the same thing, that the present might be evaluated and understood on the basis of a genre traditionally reserved for the future. Moreover, because the novel examines the inextricable linkage between the hegemonic force of computerization and the rise of the “society of control,” it also demonstrates the manner in which the present has become dystopian (a social pattern that has generally been reserved for the future tense).

## **I. The Present as Science Fiction: September 11<sup>th</sup> and the Ascendancy of Postmodernity**

Generally speaking, Gibson has received credit for coining the term “cyberspace” in the early 1980s with his “Sprawl Trilogy” and for imagining the potential of the still gestating technology of the Internet. But insofar as the Internet has become a staple technology of global society, Gibson has recalibrated his fictions according to a recognition that the future is *now*. In a 2003 interview, Andrew Leonard asked him, “Was it a challenge to keep writing about the future, as the Internet exploded and so much of what you imagined came closer?”<sup>4</sup> Gibson responded,

I think my last three books reflected that. It just seemed to be happening—it was like the windshield kept getting closer and closer. The event horizon was getting closer [...] I have this conviction that the present is actually inexpressibly peculiar now, and that's the only thing that's worth dealing with. This wonderful toolkit that I inherited from genre SF has all these fabulous tools—tools that naturalistic, mimetic, literary fiction never had [...] Any kind of novel comes with a set of instructions that we don't really think about, but you learn in school and you learn in your culture. You learn how you go to a novel and how you relate to it. There's an extra set of moves in classic SF that you learn as a reader, and then if you want to write the stuff you have to have internalized those sufficiently. Once you do that you can be in a special relationship with your readers. I find that when I transfer that special relationship into a piece of mimetic fiction set in the present, I get interesting results—I get *Pattern Recognition*. But I had almost gotten *Pattern Recognition* with the last couple of books, because, in some kind of perverse way, they played with whether they were the future or not, or I felt they did. They felt more like “alternative presents.” The volume of technological weirdness was being turned up all the time, but the world felt increasingly familiar.<sup>5</sup>

Gibson labels the border between the present and the future an event horizon, which refers to the slice of space-time surrounding a black hole. Events that occur or light that is emitted from inside an event horizon cannot reach an observer stationed outside the event horizon. For Gibson, the event horizon of the future has migrated so close to the

present moment that it makes it impossible—and perhaps unnecessary—to envision anything beyond *this* moment.

In his earlier novels, Gibson used temporal estrangement to narrativize and interrogate the psychological, sociological, political, and philosophical issues surrounding the spread of computerization, but now these futuristic themes have become our daily concerns. Thus, in his most recent novels, Gibson completely eschews temporal estrangement and chooses to set them directly in the present—a present that has become so estranging in itself that it has caused the real, contemporary world to become a kind of science fiction. In effect, *Pattern Recognition* suggests that we have already arrived in the future, for “many of us who live in technoculture have come to experience the present as a kind of future at which we’ve inadvertently arrived, one of the many futures imagined by science fiction.”<sup>6</sup> *Pattern Recognition* actually explains its own aesthetic of the present in the words of the protagonist’s boss, Blue Ant CEO Hubertus Bigend:

Of course...we have no idea, now, of who, or what the inhabitants of our future might be. In that sense, we have no future. Not in the sense that your grandparents had a future, or thought they did. Fully imagined futures were the luxury of another day, one in which “now” was of some greater duration. For us, of course, things can change so abruptly, so violently, so profoundly, that futures like our grandparents’ have insufficient ‘now’ to stand on. We have no future because our present is too volatile...We have only risk management. The spinning of the given moment’s scenarios. Pattern recognition.<sup>7</sup>

Ours is a world in which the “now” constantly slips away, in which the future is already present and then gone before it can even be recognized. As Lee Konstantinou points out, Gibson’s concept of pattern recognition derives from Marshall McLuhan, and Bigend acts in such moments as a mouthpiece who spouts McLuhanite philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

Konstantinou points to the moment in *The Medium is the Massage* in which McLuhan himself makes a similar statement,

Electric circuitry profoundly involves men with one another. Information pours upon us, instantaneously and continuously. As soon as information is acquired, it is very rapidly replaced by still newer information. Our electrically-configured world has been forced to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step, because instant communication insures that all factors of the environment and of experience co-exist in a state of active interplay.<sup>9</sup>

Since we live under a constant barrage of information that bombards us from all sides through computers, cell phones, televisions, GPS systems, etc., we never have the capacity to look beyond the present moment. We already live in the future, so the need to create fictional futures becomes pointless.

Lee Konstantinou argues that Gibson's novel represents what he terms "socioeconomic science fiction, part of a growing subgenre that not only critiques economic and marketing theories but also uses these theories as the basis for exercises in worldbuilding."<sup>10</sup> I prefer to use the term "science fictions of the present" because, as we shall see in Chapter Four, it encompasses a larger category of texts than purely socioeconomic works such as Gibson's. Konstantinou further argues that such science fiction texts engage in the process of what Fredric Jameson terms "cognitive mapping." In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Fredric Jameson explains that for art to maintain a political edge in the postmodern era, it must engage with the economic and cultural structure of the new world system on a fundamental level; hence Jameson calls for "an aesthetic of cognitive mapping—a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system."<sup>11</sup> As Konstantinou points out, Jameson generally turned to

conspiracy texts for his examinations of cognitive mapping: David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), Sydney Pollack's *Three Days of the Condor* (1975), Alan J. Pakula's conspiracy trilogy (*Klute* [1971], *The Parallax View* [1974], and *All the President's Men* [1976]), Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966), and Brian DePalma's *Blow Out* (1981) all feature prominently in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, Jameson's follow-up to *Postmodernism* that explores cinema's capacity for cognitive mapping.<sup>12</sup> Konstantinou argues that such texts fail to truly depict the place of the subject in the postmodern global worldscape because they focus solely on the power structure of control instead of on the postmodern system of capital that is predicated upon brand name recognition.

Konstantinou provides profound insights into the depiction of trademarks in the novel and how these trademarks cognitively map the subject's position as a consumer between the multinational corporations of first world countries and the exploited labor that produces these products in the third world. But he never connects the novel's depiction of the capitalist system of advertising together with its paranoid conspiracy elements that concern the society of control and the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. To fully understand how *Pattern Recognition* provides a cognitive map of postmodern globalization, we must consider both the novel's depiction of capital and its exploration of 9/11's significance.

In this sense, as I argue, *Pattern Recognition* operates in the present because it concerns itself with the absolute ascendancy of the postmodern, which implies both the rise of the late capitalist marketing machine and the power structure of control. The term "postmodern" implicitly suggests a kind of oxymoron, a paradoxical state of history in which the future already exists in the present: it denotes a condition that literally defines us as existing "after the modern." Of course, the term "postmodern" has accrued a slew

of different connotations, but in this chapter I will be dealing with the epistemological, socio-historical, and aesthetic senses of postmodernism. In *Pattern Recognition*, the World Trade Center attacks serve as the watershed moment when the postmodern episteme that had been gestating for decades was finally revealed to have achieved absolute ascendancy over the older, modern, socio-cultural paradigm. No doubt, it has become a standard cliché to argue that 9/11 fundamentally altered the world, but Gibson's point is much more subtle: *Pattern Recognition* and *Spook Country* depict 9/11 as only one moment in the history of postmodernization, a socio-cultural force that has slowly been evolving since the end of World War II. The novel's action occurs in August 2002, only a scant eleven months after the attacks, and the text deals explicitly with the attacks by means of the backstory of its protagonist, Cayce Pollard. Still fresh at the novel's outset, "9/11" remains omnipresent throughout the text in a vague, hazy fashion like images seared on the retina that linger long after they have already faded from actual existence. The oblique references<sup>13</sup> in the text eventually give way to the discovery that Cayce's father (Win Pollard, an employee of the CIA) inexplicably disappeared on the day of the attacks.<sup>14</sup> This revelation appears in a chapter entitled "Singularity," and the attacks function as not just a singularity in Cayce's life but also as *the* singular moment of our historical age. Gibson's novel functions "as a self-reflexive account, reconstructed as mimetic realism, of a story he has written several times already as science fiction. The story is about how we find ourselves permeated by futurity as a kind of defining feature of the perpetual transition that is *now*."<sup>15</sup> In effect, the novel operates after the end of the history,<sup>16</sup> when, as Bigend claims, "we have no future" nor any connection to the past. *Pattern Recognition* is like our own world insofar as

September 11, 2001 constitutes a historical rupture that is no less than the rupture of history itself:

*Pattern Recognition* can be read as a kind of post-singularity fiction of the present [...] Gibson's singularity may be more symbolic, finally, than material; nevertheless, it functions in much the same way as the technological singularity, as an apocalyptic event that cuts us off from the historical past, leaving us stranded in difference. And this is where Gibson's treatment of futurity in *Pattern Recognition* continues the complex pattern of his writing since *Neuromancer*: that is, even as there is too little "now" to stand on and "we have no future," at the same time we find ourselves on the other side of an event that has changed everything. From this perspective, time present—postmodern time—is supplemental time, time-after-the-end-of-time; the cautionary "post" in "postmodern" represents both our hesitation in letting go of the past and our anxiety that we are, in fact, on the other side of irrevocable change.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the 9/11 attacks take the place of the normally estranging elements of science fiction such as technological innovations that completely alter society or "apocalyptic event(s)" that shatter the traditional molds of civilization.

Notably, Gibson had already envisioned *Pattern Recognition*'s plot before the events of 9/11, but the attacks caused him to reevaluate his story and to find the historical background that brought his plot and its themes into sharp focus. Gibson claims to have already been well into his writing of the novel when the attacks occurred, and, as he has claimed in an interview, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> fundamentally altered not just his view of the novel but also his outlook on history in general:

When I came back to the manuscript, and went to my computer, and opened the file, about three weeks after September 11, and I saw that my protagonist's back story, that I'd been sort of interrogating and looking for and starting to find, was taking place right then—her memories were of *that autumn*—It hadn't occurred to me until I was looking at the screen that she was there. I had a sense that the back-story world my character had been tentatively inhabiting for me, as I tried to figure out what the hell was wrong with her, had clicked off—it had forked and diverged like Borges' "Garden of Forking Paths." It had become like nothing—what up to that point had been my best attempt at mimesis and embracing the uncut

world. And there was this terrible irony in that. But that was completely swept aside by my recognition at that point that my world no longer existed and that the meaning of everything—I felt that just as strongly as I’ve ever felt anything in my life—the meaning of everything, ever that had gone before had to be reconsidered in the light of something that had happened.<sup>18</sup>

For Gibson, September 11<sup>th</sup> represents what he once called a “nodal point”—a singularity that forever cuts the world off from what came before and fundamentally alters everything that occurs afterward.<sup>19</sup> But why do the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks represent such an important moment in contemporary history?

In this chapter, I want to argue that the World Trade Center attacks represent a point of rupture in which the face of the twin processes of postmodernization and globalization were laid bare to the world. *Pattern Recognition* examines 9/11 as the crystallizing moment of postmodernization: it serves as the ultimate event in a series of events (heretofore, the most important of which was probably the fall of the Berlin Wall) that signifies the passage from the modern regime of sovereignty to the postmodern order of control. In short, 9/11 corresponds with the end of Cold War ideologies. In the postmodern world, the disciplinary power of military-industrial complexes like the United States and their enforcement agencies begins to wane in the face of the onslaught of globalization. Because Cayce’s father was a CIA operative,

he serves in the novel as one of number of figures of the old cold war world, defined as it was by its struggles between the massive state disciplinary, security, and military apparatuses of the United States, the Soviet Union, and their allies [...] September 11, Gibson’s novel suggests, is the sign that order has finally and definitely come to an end, clearing the space for the emergence of something new.<sup>20</sup>

Like Cayce’s father, the Cold War apparatus of power vanished along with the twin towers on 9/11. While the Cold War functioned according to the traditional, modern



paradigm in which nation states struggled for dominance, September 11<sup>th</sup> signals the culmination of the postmodern process of globalization. The World Trade Center Attacks reveal the fully globalized body of the Earth by demonstrating how an attack on one location can strike at the heart of the entire global capitalist order. *Pattern Recognition* acts as an index of this new topology of power, which has shifted from what Michel Foucault calls “disciplinary societies” to what Gilles Deleuze terms “controls societies.”

## **II. Patterns of the Postmodern: The Computerization of Society and the Subject**

Before examining how *Pattern Recognition* provides an index or cognitive map to this fully globalized and computerized society, we must first look at the trajectory of Gibson’s writings because the trajectory of his literary output parallels the growth of computerization in the past three decades. Only by placing *Pattern Recognition* within the overall framework of his oeuvre can we fully grasp the significance of the text in relation to the postmodern society of control. With the possible exception of *The Difference Engine* (1990), a steampunk novel that Gibson co-authored with Bruce Sterling, Gibson’s entire body of work consists of texts that examine the potential effects of computer networks, and even *The Difference Engine* concerns the creation of steam-driven computers in the Victorian era. Gibson initially envisioned the invention of cyberspace in a series of stories that originally appeared in *Omni* magazine during the early 1980s: “Johnny Mnemonic” (1981), “New Rose Hotel” (1981), and “Burning Chrome” (1982) first introduced readers to the world of “The Sprawl.”<sup>21</sup> But he did not attain true notoriety until the publication of his first “Sprawl” novel *Neuromancer* (1984) and its two sequels: *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988). This series

played a fundamental role in giving birth to the science fiction sub-genre of cyberpunk. As its name indicates, “The Sprawl Trilogy” depicted a seemingly bleak, noirish future in which cities have spread out and engulfed their surrounding environs and in which information is housed and transmitted through a global computer network known as the Matrix.

Gibson’s “Sprawl” series spans the 1980s when the Internet was still in its gestation phase, but, once the Internet went public, Gibson’s fiction underwent a serious transformation in order to accommodate the new technological advances occurring around him. Gibson’s next major series deals with a much less distant future, one in which the technology seems to be just around the corner. Generally referred to as “The Bridge Trilogy,” this series began in 1993 with the publication of *Virtual Light* and was followed by two sequels: *Idoru* (1996) and *All Tomorrow’s Parties* (1999).<sup>22</sup> The trilogy takes its name from the fact that a gigantic earthquake severed San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge, thus making it incapable of supporting automobile travel. However, the bridge maintained enough structural integrity for a group of squatters to move in and construct a community that exists outside of traditional United States law and order.<sup>23</sup> While the Bridge novels featured such technological advancements as virtual reality helmets and a computer-generated, artificial intelligence pop music icon, they still operated in a future barely removed from the contemporary world in which they were written—for example, *Virtual Light* was set in the year 2005, only a scant twelve years from its publication date. As he states in the above-cited interview, these works read almost like adventures in an alternative present, in a present that was reached along a different forking path (to follow Gibson’s Borgesian metaphor). With his next novel,

*Pattern Recognition*, Gibson began to forego futurity and alterity altogether, and he continued this new narrative paradigm in his follow-up to *Pattern Recognition: Spook Country* (2005).<sup>24</sup> For the bulk of this chapter, I will focus on *Pattern Recognition* because it provides a more sophisticated investigation of the computerization of the postmodern worldscape, but, in the conclusion, I will transition into a brief discussion of *Spook Country* in order to provide some final thoughts on the topic of control.

Gibson's novels have often dealt with the implications of rampant globalization. In the two decades since the publication of *Neuromancer*, Gibson's interests have not altered, but his approach has changed. Gibson still writes about globalization, the effects of information upon the psyche, the cyborgization of the human, and international intrigues surrounding information, but now he writes about such anxieties in a realistic present or recent past milieu instead of in futuristic worldsapes. In this respect, *Pattern Recognition* represents the moment in Gibson's own body of work at which the distinction between present and future vanishes. From *Neuromancer* to *Pattern Recognition*, Gibson's literary output charts the collapsing of the temporal event horizon that he discusses; that is, as linear time has progressed from past to present to future, Gibson's works have inverted this paradigm by migrating steadily from the future to the present or even the past. By means of this inversion, Gibson's texts schematize the manner in which the objects of speculative fiction have become the real world technologies of today, or, in other words, how the future has become the present. Furthermore, because Gibson's texts always deal with computer technology, they act as programmatic indexes of what Francois Lyotard terms "the hegemony of computers"; that is, each of his works acts as a response to the growth of computer and

communication technology by charting the effects of this computerization upon both the individual and socio-political levels. In short, we might say, Gibson's works concern nothing less than postmodernity.

In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), Jean-Francois Lyotard explicitly links the postmodern era with the rise of computer and cybernetic technology. Of course, Lyotard remains most famous for his definition of the “*postmodern* as incredulity towards metanarratives,” that is as a skepticism towards any schematic attempt to explain human identity, reality, or historical forces.<sup>25</sup> Any overarching narrative that attempts to provide the key to understanding all of or some facet of human experience becomes a dubious object: psychoanalysis, Darwinian evolution, Marxism, scientific empiricism, etc. all become suspect under the auspices of postmodern epistemology. For Lyotard, the “*modern* [...] designate[s] any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.”<sup>26</sup> But knowledge undergoes a transformation “as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age.”<sup>27</sup> In the era of postindustrialism and postmodernism, the legitimation of knowledge ceases to depend upon metanarratives; instead, it is increasingly grounded in its exchange value—it undergoes a process of “mercantilization.”<sup>28</sup> With the advent of cybernetics, which concerns itself with flows of information and the ability of computers and robots to process and exhibit information,<sup>29</sup> Lyotard argues that our definition of knowledge must undergo an alteration in order to accommodate the emergent concept of information:

The nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation. It can fit into the new channels, and become operational, only if learning is translated into quantities of information. We can predict that anything in the constituted body of knowledge that is not translatable in this way will be abandoned and that the direction of new research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the postmodern era gives rise to what Lyotard terms the “hegemony of computers,” a hegemony in which, to be legitimated, all knowledge must be translatable into information, into a language that can be read and processed by computers. Because of this hegemony of computers, knowledge becomes exterior to the knower, and it “ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its ‘use value.’”<sup>31</sup> There is no use apart from information, no value apart from capital: “knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production.”<sup>32</sup> For Lyotard, information and its exchange value achieve a hegemony over knowledge—information becomes a commodity to be bought, sold, and housed by means of computers.

*Pattern Recognition* traces this transformation of knowledge. The novel’s protagonist, Cayce Pollard, inhabits an almost mystical position in the world of postmodern marketing, advertising, and computerization. She works as a “coolhunter,” someone gifted with the intuitive ability to recognize the next hot trend.<sup>33</sup> She possesses this ability because she has internalized not just the commodity marketplace but also the hegemony of computers. This hegemony is established in the book’s opening pages, which describe Cayce’s profession by means of her Google search results: “Google Cayce and you will find ‘coolhunter,’ and if you look closely you may see it suggested that she is a ‘sensitive’ of some kind, a dowser in the world of global marketing. Though the truth, Damien would say, is closer to allergy, a morbid and sometimes violent

reaction to the semiotics of the marketplace” (2). In this passage, we can see how Google and other such search engines have become indexes of society—they provide a basic structuring principle for the flow of capital in the postmodern economy.<sup>34</sup> As it title indicates, the novel explores the growing importance of pattern recognition in the newly computerized global market, and sites such as Google function by means of such pattern recognition. Similarly, as Cayce explains, her employment depends upon her pattern recognition skills: “It’s about a group behavior pattern around a particular class of object. What I do is pattern recognition. I try to recognize a pattern before anyone else does” (88). Her ability relies on the fact that social images, particularly those of company trademarks, have become embedded in her psyche to such a degree that they elicit complex emotional responses. She has even developed an allergy to some of them, “a sometimes violent reactivity to the semiotics of the marketplace” (2). Her condition “is a side effect of too much exposure to the reactor cores of fashion. This has resulted in a remorseless paring-down of what she can and will wear. She is, literally, allergic to fashion” (8). Hence, she only wears non-descript outfits with the trademarks removed, which allow her to avoid suffering violent reactions to the logos—in effect, she removes her body from the sphere of brand-named commodities.<sup>35</sup> Her seemingly brandless outfits represent her attempt “to carve out an original identity in a world filled with ‘simulacra of simulacra of simulacra.’”<sup>36</sup> But her struggle to find her own “trademark” proves ultimately to be in vain because the novel proceeds to examine the manner in which postindustrial capitalism commodifies even the most aberrant lifestyle choices.<sup>37</sup>

In “Fear and Loathing in Globalization,” Jameson terms Cayce’s condition “commodity bulimia” as if her consumption at the constant buffet of commodity

trademarks forces her psyche to purge them by wearing generic attire and developing an allergic response:

Indeed, within the brand name the whole contradictory dialectic of universality and particularity is played out as a tug of war between visual recognition and what we call the work of consumption (as Freud spoke of the work of mourning). And yet, to paraphrase Empson, the name remains, the name remains and kills; and the logo into which the brand name gradually hardens soaks up its toxicity and retains the poison.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, postmodern capitalism administers a lethal injection of commodities into each consumer, causing them to internalize the commodity system. In essence, Cayce acts as a sort of commodity mystic, “a very specialized piece of human litmus paper” who can merely look at company logos and determine, without any kind of rational thought, whether they will function as lucrative product symbols or not (13).<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the novel demonstrates the manner in which the human becomes like a computer: by means of her internalization of the commodity system and its attendant system of advertising, Cayce becomes capable of *processing* trademarks, logos, and brand names—it is a “hermeneutic disposition” that allows her mind to intuitively perform the massive endeavors of real-world coolhunters who employ “focus groups, market research, consumer surveys, and statistical models as the basis for their predictions.”<sup>40</sup> Her brain has internalized the semiotics of the marketplace so deeply that it can instantly recognize patterns; it is no accident that her friend Damien jokingly refers to her bland outfits as C.P.U.s (Cayce Pollard Units, but, of course, also Central Processing Units), which further highlights the fact that Cayce operates like a computer. In effect, Cayce has internalized this postmodern hegemony of computers: the pattern recognition protocols of computer programs have embedded themselves in Cayce’s psyche. Similar to the manner in which various companies offer product suggestions based on previous consumption

patterns without any need for additional details about a consumer's life, Cayce becomes capable of identifying logos that will prove profitable among the largest possible demographic. She achieves this without rational thought because she has internalized the commodity marketing system and the hegemony of computers to the point that they have become like deep psychic structures that operate akin to a reflex response.

### **III. The Digitized Aesthetic: The Façade of Freedom and the Web of Control**

The effects of the postmodern hegemony of computers extends beyond epistemology and into the realm of aesthetics as well. As we have already seen, each of Gibson's texts functions as a response to computerization's steady growth towards hegemonic power, and the aesthetics of his works mark this progress as well. The "Sprawl" stories and novels feature a language that attempts to capture the epistemological processes of the texts' futuristic characters, who are completely enmeshed in the virtual/digital world. Filled with jargon that is often never fully explained and featuring word choice that stresses how computer technology has become vitally linked to the human psyche, the "Sprawl" novels prove to be a dense web of intrigues unfolding against an almost unimaginable techno-landscape. One need only examine a sample passage from the opening pages of *Neuromancer* to see this digital aesthetic at work:

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 way home over the Pacific now, and he was no console man, no cyberspace cowboy. Just another hustler, trying to make it through. But the dreams came on in the Japanese night like livewire voodoo, and he'd cry for it, cry in his sleep, and wake alone in the dark, curled 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.<sup>41</sup>

In this passage, every line bristles with the electricity of the computer world it is describing to the reader—fantastical phrases like “cyberspace,” “bright lattices of logic,” and “livewire voodoo” convey the manner in which computerization can infiltrate not only the psyche but also aesthetic production. As Scott Bukatman explains, Gibson built the techno-language of the Sprawl universe from a variety of sources: “Gibson coalesced an eclectic range of generic protocols, contemporary idiolects, and a pervasive technological eroticism combined with a future-shocking ambivalence. Aside from the old and new waves of science fiction, Gibson’s prose and perspective owes much to the streetwise weariness of Chandler and the neologistic prowess of William Burroughs.”<sup>42</sup> Bukatman’s observation explains the manner in which the prose style of *Neuromancer* represents a gestalt aesthetic that blends together the hard-boiled style of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett<sup>43</sup> together with the fantastic and ambiguous science fiction language of William S. Burroughs. But this style of writing gives way in Gibson’s later texts to a more quotidian, sparse style that plays well for audiences beyond the traditional science fiction fanbase. The language of these early works acts as an aesthetic attempt to textually embody the cognitive effects of the development of such technology, but just as Gibson’s settings have moved from the future to the present so has the syntax of his novels migrated temporally as well: now his novels feature the vernacular of the contemporary moment, which is itself filled with its own cyber-language. While the hegemony of computers and the society of control still seemed like

objects of speculation in “The Sprawl Trilogy,” the form and content of *Pattern Recognition* display the manner in which both have become the norm of the day.

On the formal level of the novel, the text is filled with emails that have taken the place of modernist epistolary communication. In fact, the entire final chapter, “Mail,” consists almost entirely of emails to Cayce that provide the novel’s closure. Thus, we can see how the shift in epistemology has infiltrated the literary realm on a basic, structural level. Indeed, one could imagine a postmodern epistolary novel in which the entirety of the text was comprised of emails or text messages complete with headers, Internet acronyms, images, and emoticons. In fact, David Foster Wallace’s non-SF short story “The Suffering Channel” (2004) proceeds one step further than Gibson in this regard by incorporating the entirety of an email, including its attendant HTML tags, into the text of the story.<sup>44</sup> *Pattern Recognition* further deals with the computerization of aesthetics at the level of its narrative, which centers around a work of art that seems to participate fully in the “hegemony of computers” while remaining free from capitalist control: the Footage, (a film or series of films) that could be taken to epitomize the possibilities of art in the postmodern, computerized era. For Cayce Pollard, the Footage constitutes the one constant in her life—while she jetsets around the world meeting with corporate bigwigs, Cayce lives her real, passionate existence through the channels of the Internet. Cayce herself represents a form of *otaku*, or fanboy, because her *raison d’être* resides in cultishly following “the Footage,” film clips of an unknown origin that appear sporadically on the net and which she and the other “Footageheads” debate *ad infinitum* by means of a web forum known as “FETISH:FOOTAGE:FORUM” or “F:F:F.” Cayce’s main obsession in life only exists on the net: the “mystery of the Footage itself often feels

closer to the core of her life than Bigend, Blue Ant, Dorotea, even her career” (78). The Footage represents the liberatory dream of the Internet, the dream that users across the world can be brought together in a virtual space to share knowledge free from the boundaries of nations and corporations. And, indeed, the Footage forum is a fully globalized entity that brings together users of diverse economic, national, and cultural backgrounds. For Cayce and the other footageheads, the footage represents art free from commodification (no small feat in the postmodern era when art comes to be recognized as a commodity).

As Jameson states, “the Footage is an epoch of rest, an escape from the noisy commodities themselves, which turn out, as Marx always thought they would, to be living entities preying on the humans who have to coexist with them.”<sup>45</sup> In a world in which everything has become “simulacra of simulacra of simulacra,” the Footage offers freedom for its viewers from the endless procession of commodities, trademarks, and advertising gimmicks—it is an escape from the “logo-maze” (18). For Cayce, it functions as a form of “psychological prophylaxis,” a preventative measure against the further impregnation of her psyche by the virile and viral force of commodities (51). The footage segments, which the Footage Forum labels with numbers based on the chronology of their dissemination, represent minimalist, non-narrative filmic images that always feature the same couple in a variety of indeterminate settings. When Cayce receives an email with an attached Footage segment, the novel describes her watching it in almost ecstatically sublime terms:

Damien’s Studio Display fills with darkness absolute. It is as if she participates in the very birth of cinema, that Lumière moment, the steam locomotive about to emerge from the screen, sending the audience fleeing into the Parisian night. Light and shadow. Lovers’ cheekbones in the

prelude to embrace...So long now, and they have not been seen to touch...They are dressed as they have always been dressed, in clothing Cayce posted on extensively, fascinated by its timelessness, something she knows and understands. The difficulty of that. Hairstyles, too. He might be a sailor, stepping onto a submarine in 1914, or a jazz musician entering a club in 1957. There is a lack of evidence, an absence of stylistic cues, that Cayce understands to be utterly masterful. His black coat is usually read as leather, thought it might be dull vinyl, or rubber. He has a way of wearing its collar up. The girl wears a longer coat, equally dark but seemingly of fabric, it's shoulder-padding the subject of hundreds of posts. The architecture of padding a woman's coat should yield possible periods, particular decades, but there has been no agreement, only controversy. She is hatless, which has been taken either as the clearest of signs that this is not a period piece, or simply as an indication that she is free spirit, untrammelled by even the most basic conventions of her day. Her hair has been the subject of similar scrutiny, but nothing has ever been definitely agreed upon...And here in Damien's flat, watching their lips meet, she knows that she knows nothing, but wants nothing more than to see the film of which this must be a part. Must be. (23-4)

The Footage represents a pure aesthetic object, one that gives no clues as to its genre or even if it is a narrative: it is merely a series of images open to endless interpretation. In fact, the Footage segments hearken back to what Tom Gunning has termed the "cinema of attractions": the early, silent films of Auguste and Louis Lumière and George Méliès that create effects more directly through images than overarching narratives.<sup>46</sup> For the Footageheads, the forum provides a public space of free discourse surrounding an aesthetic object that remains free from the ubiquitous commodification present in all other spheres of society. But does it really?

Because it has been virally disseminated through various Internet locations, the origins of the Footage remain shrouded in mystery. Throughout the majority of the novel, it remains unclear whether or not a narrative strand connects the individual segments, and hence the Footage appears to be a virginal artistic object, unsullied by the commodifying forces of the cinema industry. In *Pattern Recognition*, the Footage forum

acts as a microcosm of literary or film theory because it features various factions who dogmatically debate theories of interpretation. For example, whether the individual segments represent pieces of “a work in progress” or “something completed years ago” proves to be an unsolvable antinomy for the Footageheads, giving rise to two competing camps known as the Progressives and the Completists (22). Cayce’s friend Parkaboy acts as the “de facto spokesperson” of the Progressives who believe “that the footage consists of fragments of a work in progress, something unfinished and still being generated by its maker” (49). On the other side of the debate, the Completists “are convinced that the footage is comprised of snippets from a finished work, one whose maker chooses to expose it piecemeal and in non-sequential order” (49). In addition to theories concerning the Footage’s narrative, the Footageheads also debate the number of people responsible for the Footage’s creation. Parkaboy develops the theory of “the Garage Kubrick,” the *auteur* theory of the critical universe that orbits the footage:

It is possible that this footage is generated single-handedly by some technologically empowered solo auteur, some guerilla creator out there alone in the night of the Internet. That it might be being generated via some sort of CGI, actors, sets and all, and entirely at the virtual hand of some secretive and perhaps unknown genius, has become a widespread obsession with a large faction of Progressives, and with many Completists as well, though the Completists necessarily put that in past tense. (50)

Hence, the Footage forum instantiates a true space of art: neither tied to commercial machinery nor even to the dominance of proper names, the Footage resides in anonymity as an object open to pure interpretation. But the Footage also represents a certain sense of angst that comes with the Internet, a sense that the anonymity provided by the web harbors unknowable secrets in the black, semiotically unstable “night of the Internet.”

Despite the hermeneutical instability of the Footage, Cayce manages to track down its point of origin. By working through these communication channels, which we shall see are the same channels that allow the society of control to function, Cayce finally receives a Russian email address of one Stella Volkova, who claims that her mentally disabled sister Nora is the creator of the footage. Cayce hops a plane to Moscow and discovers that Nora suffers from brain damage that she incurred during a bomb attack that killed her parents. Because of her mental impairment, *Pattern Recognition* reveals Nora to be an artist who is completely free from the influence of commodities because her damaged mind cannot even function as part of the capitalist regime: “their [the Footage’s] production is not seeking an instant capital gain but rather the expansion of their trade, which has been manufactured in order to be shared visually with other users online.”<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, the Footage merely represents one disordered mind’s attempt to communicate. When Cayce asks if the film represents a linear narrative, Stella responds, “I do not know. One day, perhaps, she will start to edit as she edited her student film: to a single frame. Or perhaps one day they speak, the characters. Who knows? Nora? She does not say” (312). Cayce watches as Nora creates a new segment, and she discovers that Nora crafts her film digitally from found footage, thus negating any of the Footagehead theories about the significance or potential narrative of the clips. Cayce discovers that the Footage is “only the wound speaking wordlessly in the dark” (316). The Footage gives voice to the traumatized psyche of the world: “what matters here is the neutral and non-sequential make up of the footage that seems to be echoing the sudden and inexplicable (for the characters in the novel) collapse of the Twin Towers.”<sup>48</sup>

In effect, the Footage constitutes a mysterious space to which its viewers attempt to ascribe meaning just as American citizens were still trying to understand the nature of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks: “Rather, in the light of ‘events’ like the bursting of the dot-com bubble and the attacks of September 11, we now desperately search for patterns in the fabric of history but find that ‘now’ changes too abruptly to map completely or meaningfully. We try to recognize patterns or employ coolhunters as a means of coping with what we cannot understand.”<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the Footageheads’ devotion to the film clips demonstrates another means of inscribing meaning upon reality. If we think back to Chapter Two, the Footage represents a form of sublimation—it provides a substitute object that can fill the lack of being that has perhaps become even wider in the post-9/11 era. While the reality outside their windows may not longer make sense, the Footageheads find solace in attempting to sort out the meaning underlying the Footage. The Footage provides a worthy sanctuary from the post-9/11 geopolitical situation because it seems to exist in a space that has not yet been territorialized by capital and control. But Cayce points out that Nora’s work has garnered too much attention to remain free from the strictures of capitalist control: “any creation that attracts the attention of the world, on an ongoing basis, becomes valuable, if only in terms of potential” (317). And, as we shall see below, once Cayce has discovered the Footage’s origins, Bigend promptly moves in to territorialize this seemingly liberatory aesthetic space.

#### **IV. Virtual Identities: Self-Fashioning in the Web of Control**

While the Footage Forum functions as one example of the liberatory capacities of the Internet, the novel also examines the utopian potential of creating new identities whole cloth on the web. Indeed, such an act of virtual self-fashioning provides Cayce with the first steps on her quest to discover the Footage's author. Initially, Cayce's search for the origins of the Footage is conditioned by Parkaboy's discovery of a digital watermark steganographically concealed within one of the older segments of film, thus proving that the Footage does not represent an entirely anonymous work of art. As Parkaboy explains in an email to Cayce, steganography "is about concealing information by spreading it throughout other information" (78). Thus, steganography represents a pattern distributed throughout a digital object that is beyond the capabilities of the normal human eye to recognize. Cayce's new Russian acquaintance Voytek serendipitously knows about steganography, and explains the steganographic process in his broken English dialect: "Can be code supplied to client by watermarking firm. Firm sells client stego-encrypted watermark and means to conceal" (84). Parkaboy and his friend Darryl discover references to the watermarking while reading Japanese sites concerning the footage. In order to find out more about the watermark, Parkaboy and Darryl undertake an act of self-fashioning that becomes possible only within the virtual sphere of anonymity created by the Internet: they "began to lovingly generate a Japanese persona, namely one Keiko, who began to post, in Japanese, on that same Osaka site" (78). They craft their faux-personality in order to attract Footage otaku, for as Parkaboy says, "there's nothing like genderbait for the nerds" (78). They sculpt her identity to resemble



something out of a fanboy's wet dream, and they immediately catch someone with this "bait":

Very friendly. Very pretty our Keiko...She posts from Musashi's ISP but that's because she's in San Francisco learning English. Very shortly, we had one Takayuchi eating out of our flowerlike palm. Taki, as he prefers we call him, claims to orbit a certain otaku-coven in Tokyo, a group that knows itself as "Mystic," though its members never refer to it that way in public, nor indeed refer to it at all. It is these Mystic wonks, according to Taki, who have cracked the watermark on #78. This segment, according to Taki, is marked with a number of some kind, which he claims to have seen, and know. No doubt motivated by lonely fantasies of getting up our deliciously short little plaid skirt, which we have described to him in passing, he now holds out the promise of showing this to us, upon our return to Tokyo. (78-9)

As Konstantinou points out, Keiko represents the manner in which sexual fetishes represent another form of pattern because they "are part of the mind's 'culture module,' whose parameters get set in the particular cultural environment one happens to grow up in."<sup>50</sup> Hence, sexual fetishes, like brands, operate according to "cognitive maps."<sup>51</sup> By engaging the power of these cognitive maps, Parkaboy and Darryl use Keiko to dupe an unsuspecting Japanese programmer. This incident simultaneously highlights the hermeneutic instability of human interactions in cyberspace, where self-fashioning becomes uniquely possible, but it also demonstrates how all manners of subject behavior can be read according the protocol of pattern recognition.<sup>52</sup>

Keiko's creation displays the manner in which subjects can create their dream existences, even if only virtually, in which they can be intelligent and sexy and in which they have fascinating life stories to narrate to whoever will listen. As Deleuze would say, the Internet grants the user the ability to truly create his/her self as a work of art. Thus, "the past," as Cayce explains, becomes "mutable too, as mutable as the future" (121). Subjects can even go so far as to create fake pictures of themselves—as Parkaboy

and Darryl do with Keiko—pictures that can represent themselves as they would like to be seen. In an email to Cayce, Parkaboy describes the creation of Keiko's photograph:

Judy Tsuzuki, five-foot-eleven and about as Japanese as you are, aside from the DNA. Texas. Twenty-seven. Bartender in this place down the street from Musashi's. What we did to up the wattage for Taki, aiming to maximize libidinal disturbance, we shot this long tall Judy then reduced her by at least a third, in Photoshop. Cut'n'pasted her into Musashi's kid's sister's dorm room at Cal. Darryl did the costuming himself, and then we decided to try enlarging the eyes a few clicks. That made all the difference. Judy's epicanthic folds are long gone, the way of the modest bust nature intended for her (actually we've got her wrapped in Ace bandage for the shot, but nothing too tight) and the resulting big round eyes are pure Anime Magic. This is the girl Taki's been looking for all his life, even though nature's never made one, and he'll know that as soon as he lays eyes on this image. (132)

Thus, as we saw with the technology in *Trouble on Triton*, new types are opened up for the subject by means of technology: the subject can engage in forms of difference that are not available in normal reality. The subject (whether male or female) can thus virtually live out a fantasy existence as a sleek, sexy anime girl within the various communities of the Internet. The "otaku-coven" of which Taki is a part represents one of these sub-communities within the overall community of the Internet, and by means of such sub-communities the subject can find one that grants the recognition s/he desires either for their real identity and life history or for the identity they have constructed and the story they have narrated for themselves. But do such practices truly contain liberatory potential? Can the subject truly experience a realm of freedom and becoming by means of the Internet or does the Internet merely function as one more tool of control?

To answer these questions, we must turn to the character of Hubertus Bigend who shatters Cayce's view of the Footage as a pure aesthetic object while simultaneously revealing the nature of control societies. In Cayce's initial conversation with Bigend, he

problematizes all of the Footageheads' analyses of the Footage when he offers Cayce another potential reading of it: he proposes that the Footage may not have been "uploaded randomly" but "very carefully, intending to provide the illusion of randomness" (66). Thus, Bigend views the Footage's dissemination as "the single most effective piece of guerilla marketing ever": by spying on the Forum, he "saw attention focused daily on a product that may not even exist" (67). Whereas the Footageheads view the Footage as an artistic text worthy of endless criticism and debate, Bigend sees it as nothing more than one more object to be commodified and exploited to increase his profit margins. But Bigend's conversation goes further by also revealing the Internet's utopian sheen to be nothing more than a mask that hides the underlying machinery of the control grid. This conversation causes Cayce to undergo a cognitive shift from viewing the forum as a closed world to recognizing it, as Bigend points out, as "a matter of public record": "The idea that Bigend, or his employees, have been lurking on F:F:F [fetish.footage.forum] will take some getting used to. The site had come to feel like a second home, but she'd always known that it was also a fishbowl; it felt like a friend's living room, but it was a sort of text-based broadcast, available in its entirety to anyone who cared to access it" (67). Bigend desires the Footage so that he can properly commodify it within the global system of information. For something to be so stimulating to the masses, it cannot remain free. Here one might think of examples of corporations buying sites like MySpace or YouTube in order to properly commodify them, to make them into productive sites instead of merely social ones. Most importantly, Bigend's words reveal that the Internet does not exist as a utopian space of free communication and that the anonymity offered by the Web represents nothing more than a façade.

Gibson's cyberpunk output holds a privileged place in the history of postmodern science fiction because it traces the collapse of modernity in the face of full-blown postmodernization, but it also examines the innate connection between the hegemony of computers and the rise of the society of control. While Gibson's early novels depict how computerization will inevitably lead to a dystopian society of control, *Pattern Recognition* and *Spook Country* demonstrate the manner in which the hegemony of computers has already led to the instantiation of the control society, albeit in a more subdued, quiet form than most science fiction authors had envisioned. In his essay on control societies, Gilles Deleuze argues, "It's easy to set up a correspondence between any society and some kind of machine, which isn't to say that their machines determine different kinds of society but that they express the social forms capable of producing them and making use of them."<sup>53</sup> Deleuze contends that whereas "sovereign societies worked with simple machines, levers, pulleys, clocks," disciplinary societies, which arose in the 18<sup>th</sup> century according to Michel Foucault, "were equipped with thermodynamic machines presenting the passive danger of entropy and the active danger of sabotage."<sup>54</sup> Based on Foucault's description of disciplinary societies, Deleuze posits that we have recently moved into a new social organization of power, "control,"<sup>55</sup> which "function with a third generation of machines, with information technology and computers, where the passive danger is noise and the active, piracy and contamination."<sup>56</sup> Whereas the disciplinary society "operat[es] by organizing major sites of confinement," control functions by establishing the illusion of freedom: "Control is not discipline. You do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control. I am not saying this is the only aim of highways, but people can travel infinitely

and ‘freely’ without being confined while being perfectly controlled.”<sup>57</sup> In effect, control societies function by computerizing the individual, by spreading the hegemony of computers to include not just knowledge (which becomes information) but also the subject, who becomes a “dividual” instead of an individual, a code in a database:

In control societies, on the other hand, the key thing is no longer a signature or a number but a code: codes are *passwords*, whereas disciplinary societies are ruled (when it comes to integration or resistance) by *precepts*. The digital language of control is made up of codes indicating whether access to some information should be allowed or denied. We’re no longer dealing with a duality of mass and individual. Individuals becomes “*dividuals*,” and masses become samples, data, markets, or “*banks*.”<sup>58</sup>

Individuals become little more than the sum of their data; hence, the paradigmatic image of the control society “is no longer a man confined but a man in debt.”<sup>59</sup> The control society is not equivalent to the hegemony of computers, but, since computers serve as the paradigm for control, the rise in computerization entails a consequent rise in the power of control. In the age of control, power becomes decentralized—it moves out of the prisons, hospitals, and other institutions of confinement and spreads across the entire terrain of the *socius*. Control represents a radical territorialization of all the various strata of everyday life: biopower stretches itself out globally to form and control every aspect of our existence. Thus, because it is a social order founded upon the advent of the computer, the society of control functions by means of pattern recognition, and Gibson’s novel cognitively maps this new geopolitical terrain.

Bigend’s quest to appropriate the Footage as a profitable commodity represents the manner in which the forces of control (whether they be governmental institutions or corporations) always watch and keep records of even the most seemingly marginal events. To this end, Bigend’s company Blue Ant has been keeping tabs on the Footage

Forum. To learn about the Footage, Bigend's employee Dorotea Benedetti engages in her own form of self-fashioning when she creates an online persona named Mama Anarchia, a Footage fan drenched in critical theory. To do so, she employs a graduate student to translate her posts into theory-speak, always being careful to use words such as "hegemonic" and to namedrop French theorists like Baudrillard. Moreover, the faux-character of Mama Anarchia demonstrates the manner in which presumably liberatory acts of virtual self-fashioning can also be appropriated by the system of control in order to better exercise its power over individuals.

For the society of control, no aspect of life remains outside its sphere of interest and influence—it extends the disciplinary society's panoptic gaze across the entire terrain of the socius, but it does so in a supple manner that remains almost invisible to the masses. As Hubertus Bigend states in *Spook Country*, the pseudo-sequel to *Pattern Recognition*, "I've learned to value anomalous phenomena. Very peculiar things that people do, often secretly, interest me in a certain way. I spend a lot of money, often, trying to understand those things. From them, sometimes, emerge Blue Ant's most successful efforts. Trope Slope, for instance, our viral pitchman platform, was based on pieces of anonymous Footage being posted on the Net."<sup>60</sup> Here, Bigend reveals the subsequent fate of the Footage after *Pattern Recognition*'s conclusion: it becomes Trope Slope, a viral advertising campaign that inserts ads into old films, thus turning people's love for historic cinema into an opportunity to, as Bigend says, "sell shoes."<sup>61</sup> Bigend reveals how corporations seek to appropriate the desires of the multitude and to transform them into moneymaking venues, and he also signifies the manner in which individuals cannot remain free from the strictures of control—he is the representative of both capital

and control in the novel. By means of Bigend's endeavors, the Footage and Nora become trapped within the intertwined webs of capitalist production and the society of control. By turning their attention to even the most mundane and seemingly inconsequential activities of users' daily lives, the forces of control open up an endless array of sites in which behavior can be monitored, catalogued, and consequently controlled.

Thus, the computer represents *the* image of control because it grants or restricts access based on information it maintains on its users with no need to refer to a higher power—the society of control becomes purely rhizomatic as every point in the network becomes a potential space for exercising control. Of course, the disciplinary society does not simply vanish overnight; instead, the transformation from a modern diagram to a postmodern one represents an ongoing process. For Gibson, September 11<sup>th</sup> marks a point of rupture in which it became apparent that the underlying diagram of society had shifted, that the postmodern era and its society of control now firmly held sway over the diminishing, modern, disciplinary regime of power. The attacks highlighted the fully globalized nature of power, the fact that power no longer operated according to striated spaces but now functioned as a smooth space that extended across the entire expanse of the globe. Insofar as power had become a global force, a calculated strike on one location (or two if we count the Pentagon attack as well) represents an assault upon the entire, global terrain of power. In essence, then, *Pattern Recognition* views September 11<sup>th</sup> as just such an event: an event that reveals the paradigm shift that has been going on somewhat silently for decades from the disciplinary society with its various sites of confinement to the society of control in which the world is linked together by computer networks in a vast array that creates the circuits of power in a limitless number of

locations. Against this background, *Pattern Recognition* demonstrates that the creation of these postmodern circuits of power has not been random or haphazard; instead, these circuits have coalesced into a system that functions as the backbone of the society of control.

## **V. Conclusion: Annotating the Global: The Eversion of Cyberspace in William Gibson's *Spook Country***

While *Pattern Recognition* depicts the manner in which the forces of control invest themselves in the digital realm and examines the intricate linkage between the hegemony of computers and the society of control, Gibson's most recent novel, *Spook Country* (2007), takes this train of inquiry one step further by depicting the manner in which the hegemony of computers moves beyond the confines of the virtual and spreads itself across the physical realm. *Spook Country* continues Gibson's foray into writing science fictions of the present and again features Blue Ant CEO Hubertus Bigend. Also set in our present world, *Spook Country* features technological advancements that do not exist just yet but that are only barely extrapolated from current technological capabilities. In the novel, the major new technology relies upon the recent strides in perfecting GPS (Global Positioning System) technology, which first began being developed by the United States military in the 1970s and was approved for civilian use by Ronald Reagan in 1983. The GPS system became fully operational in 1995 and steadily began to infiltrate the consumer marketplace, but Gibson's novel imagines a new usage for GPS coordinates as well as for virtual reality (VR) helmets. Like *Pattern Recognition*, the novel focuses on a newly emergent realm of aesthetics by way of its depiction of "locative art," artworks or videos that can only be seen with VR helmets at particular



GPS coordinate points. The novel revolves around Hollis Henry, who Bigend hires to write a piece on locative art for his start-up tech magazine named *Node*. She begins her research for the article by interviewing Alberto Corrales (the creator behind the pieces of locative art), who explains the implications of this new usage of GPS technology to Hollis: “bare-espace...it is everting”; that is, GPS technology has caused the epistemology of cyberspace to leak out into the physical world: the informational patterns that once governed virtual experiences have now migrated out of the computer and spread themselves across the physical globe—they have undergone a process of “eversion.”<sup>62</sup> The virtual has been turned inside out, hence blurring its distinction from the actual.

At first, the locative art technology seems to harbor nothing more than insignificant entertainment value: the novel introduces the technology when River Phoenix stumbles up and dies in front of Hollis on the spot of his actual death in Hollywood. The true benefits of this new technology become apparent when Hollis Henry visits a room that has been annotated using the locative system. As Hollis’s friend Odile explains in her broken English, “Cartographic attributes of the invisible...Spatially tagged hypermedia...The artist annotating every centimeter of a place, of every physical thing.”<sup>63</sup> By means of locative art, the structure of the network begins to influence real space to an unprecedented degree: no longer purely virtual, networks become actualized in the physical realm. Thus, objects can become synonymous with hyperlinks that lead the user to a vast wealth of information pertaining to their history, use, symbolism, etc. By means of GPS, the globe undergoes computerization in an astoundingly literal way, a process epitomized in the worldview of Bobby Chombo, the hacker who performs the

technological grunt work that allows Alberto to create his locative artworks. Alberto explains that the locative system and GPS technology have altered Bobby's view of the world: "Bobby divides his place up into smaller squares, within the grid. He sees everything in terms of GPS gridlines, the world divided up that way...He won't sleep in the same square twice. He crosses them off, never goes back to one where he's slept before."<sup>64</sup> Just as Cayce's psyche has computerized itself until it is capable of processing trademark logos, Bobby has internalized the GPS computer system while simultaneously developing an attendant paranoia about it. Although Bobby never explains the motivations for his compulsory behavior towards the gridlines, one can assume that he fears being found in the same place twice. By constantly moving from square to square, Bobby appears to behave unpredictably.

In effect, *Spook Country* depicts the full-blown consolidation of the hegemony of computers. In the novel (and in our real world), GPS coordinates effectively render the globe into data readable by a computer. The spread of the hegemony of computers to a fully spatialized dimension represents the triumph of control over discipline, the virtual over the actual, and the postmodern over the modern—the illusion of freedom is maintained while every space on the globe becomes accessible as a potential site for the exercise of control. Indeed, Deleuze's vision from the end of "Postscript on Control Societies" becomes a viable reality in a world mapped by GPS systems:

We don't have to stray into science fiction to find a control mechanism that can fix the position of any element at any given moment—an animal in a game reserve, a man in a business (electronic tagging). Félix Guattari has imagined a town where anyone can leave their flat, their street, their neighborhood, using their (dividual) electronic card that opens this or that barrier; but the card may also be rejected on a particular day, or between certain times of day; it doesn't depend on the barrier but on the computer

that is making sure everyone is in a permissible place, and effecting a universal modulation.<sup>65</sup>

At this point, it becomes easy to see how communication technologies do not necessarily represent liberatory experiences for the subject, or, if they do, then these liberties merely mask a deeper structure of control. Since the channels of communication remain controlled by corporations and regulated by the government, then an individual's right to use them can easily be denied. Once one is plugged into the system, which includes not just the Internet but also cell phones and other devices, then one becomes a subject of control: "every connection has its price; the one thing you can be sure of is that, sooner or later, you will have to pay."<sup>66</sup> As Steven Shaviro argues in his discussion of K.W. Jeter's *Noir* (1998), "In short, if you're connected, you're fucked."<sup>67</sup>

But is it possible that the system of control can be turned against itself? In his 1990 interview with Gilles Deleuze, Antonio Negri poses precisely this question to Deleuze concerning his theory of control societies:

You suggest we should look in more detail at three kinds of power: sovereign power, disciplinary power, and above all the control of "communication" that's on the way to becoming hegemonic. On the one hand this third scenario relates to the most perfect form of domination, extending even to speech and imagination, but on the other hand any man, any minority, any singularity, is more than ever before potentially able to speak out and thereby recover a greater degree of freedom. In the Marxist utopia of the *Grundrisse*, communism takes precisely the form of a transversal organization of free individuals built on a technology that makes it possible. Is communism still a viable option? Maybe in a communication society it's less utopian than it used to be?<sup>68</sup>

In this question, no doubt, Negri anticipates the evocation of the global revolution of *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004),<sup>69</sup> but Deleuze promptly disavows any such positive reading of the society of control in his response:

The quest for “universals of communication” ought to make us shudder [...] You ask whether control or communication societies will lead to forms of resistance that might reopen the way for a communism understood as the “transversal organization of free individuals.” Maybe, I don’t know. But it would be nothing to do with minorities speaking out. Maybe speech and communication have been corrupted. They’re thoroughly permeated by money—and not by accident but by their very nature.<sup>70</sup>

As Deleuze makes clear, the utopian potential of communication will constantly be undercut by the fact that communication devices and services remain commodities in themselves, that they remain trapped in the systems of capitalism and control that will constantly negate their revolutionary potential. And, by using various communication services, users further insert themselves into the grid of control. *Pattern Recognition* makes this clear in the object of the Footage and the character of Nora, both of which seem to remain free from the strictures of capitalist society, but both of which ultimately end up as just so many more sites upon which control and capital can exercise their power. Furthermore, *Spook Country* demonstrates the manner in which the society of control is “everting”; that is, the society of control which had operated virtually by means of computers and other digital technologies is crafting itself a physical body that stretches across the entire length and breadth of the globe. In the control society, the concept of an outside vanishes as every specific point on the map becomes subject to the hegemony of computers and consequently subject to the influence of power, whether such power be that of nation states or of corporations. Thus, the eversion of cyberspace designates a singular moment in the march of globalization, a moment in which no site (no matter how remote) remains free from the long arms of capitalism and control.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Progress versus Utopia, or, Can We Imagine the Future?," *Science Fiction Studies* 27 (1982): 147-58, rpt. in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005) 286.

<sup>2</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, "Computing the Human," *Theory, Culture & Society* 22 (2005): 149, n.2. In this article, Hayles contends with the human desire to generate prognostications about the future, and she argues that such attempts (whether they are in scientific discourses or in the literary domain of science fiction) prove inherently problematic: "If the record of past predictions is any guide, the one thing we know for certain is that when the future arrives, it will be different from the future we expected" (131). Hayles argues that such speculations are important not for what they tell us about the future but for how they allow us "to explore the influence that such predictions have on our *present* concepts" (131). She proceeds to examine the ways in which speculations about the future impact of computers and robotics affect our view of the present. Therefore, both scientific and science fictional explorations of the future prove to not be about the future at all but about the present in which we live.

<sup>3</sup> As noted in Chapter One, Samuel R. Delany also moved away from the genre of science fiction and began writing more directly mimetic works that still explored the familiar themes of his earlier works. For a rather lengthy period of time, Stephenson moved away from writing cyberpunk fare like *Snow Crash* (1992) and *The Diamond Age or, A Young Lady's Illustrated Primer* (1995) to begin penning historical epics like *Cryptonomicon* (1999) and his "Baroque Trilogy": *Quicksilver* (2003), *The Confusion* (2004), and *The System of the World* (2004). Recently, Stephenson returned to the sci-fi genre with the publication of *Anathem* (2008).

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Leonard, "Nodal Point: Interview with William Gibson," *Salon.com* (February 13, 2003). <http://dir.salon.com/story/tech/books/2003/02/13/gibson/index.html>. Accessed October 8, 2008. Par. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard, "Nodal Point" par. 23-25.

<sup>6</sup> Veronica Hollinger, "Stories about the Future: From Patterns to Expectations in *Pattern Recognition*," *Science Fiction Studies* 33.3 (Fall 2006): 452.

<sup>7</sup> William Gibson, *Pattern Recognition* (New York: Berkeley Books, 2003) 58-9. Hereafter, parenthetical citations will refer to the text of *Pattern Recognition*.

<sup>8</sup> See Lee Konstantinou's "The Brand as Cognitive Map in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*" in *Boundary 2* 36.2 (2009): 67-97.

<sup>9</sup> Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, produced by Jerome Agel (Corte Madera, Gingko P, 1967) 63.

<sup>10</sup> Konstantinou, "Brand as Cognitive Map" 74.

<sup>11</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1991) 54.

<sup>12</sup> For Jameson's readings of these texts, see Part One, "Totality as Conspiracy," of *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> For example, the simple phrase "heaps of bone" in an email to Cayce provokes her into recalling the attacks: "That initial seventeen stories of twisted impacted girder. Funeral ash. That taste in the back of the throat" (79)

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<sup>14</sup> In the year following the disaster, Cayce and her EVP-obsessed mother never discover whether he died in the Twin Towers collapse or simply vanished from existence on that fateful day. EVP stands for “Electronic Voice Phenomena,” which are audio patterns found in white noise that some people believe to be the voices of the dead. Like all the other major characters, Cayce’s mother even participates in the act of pattern recognition in hopes of retrieving some information about the fate of her husband.

<sup>15</sup> Hollinger, “Stories about the Future” 461.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, the concept of the “end of history” has a rich genealogy in the history of philosophy and critical theory. Originally, the concept derives from the dialectical philosophy of Hegel who conceived of the French Revolution and his simultaneous writing of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the end of history. Various philosophers since Hegel have posited different moments as “the end of history.” For Marx, who adopts Hegel’s dialectical conceptualization of history, the end of history would arrive when capitalism was overthrown because the need for struggle would cease and hence the dialectical wheel would stop spinning. More recently, in *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton UP, 2004), Walter Benn Michaels has argued that the defeat of communism, a defeat signified by the collapse of the Berlin Wall, heralded the end of history because it signaled the end of the dialectical struggle between two diametrically opposed political ideologies. Also, recently, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have argued that the arrival of the global order of Empire similarly signifies the end of history because it exists as *the* world order, one that regulates all international struggles within its own matrix. Thus, Hardt and Negri believe that the advent of Empire signals the exhaustion of the dialectical wheel’s spinning because capitalism has finally become a totalizing, global structure.

<sup>17</sup> Hollinger, “Stories about the Future” 462-3.

<sup>18</sup> Leonard, “Nodal Point” par. 34.

<sup>19</sup> Gibson develops the concept of the “nodal point” in the so-called “Bridge Trilogy”: *Virtual Light* (1993), *Idoru* (1996), and *All Tomorrow’s Parties* (1999). The “Bridge” novels function as a halfway point between the far distant futures of the “Sprawl” universe and the realistic setting of Gibson’s recent novels.

<sup>20</sup> Leonard Wegner, “Recognizing the Patterns,” *New Literary History: A Journal of Theory and Interpretation* 38.1 (Winter 2007) 196.

<sup>21</sup> These three stories were later collected along with others in Gibson’s book of short fiction entitled *Burning Chrome* (1986). “Johnny Mnemonic” was later adapted into a film by director Robert Longo in 1995 featuring Keanu Reeves, and indeed the parallels between Gibson’s work and the Warkowski Brother’s *Matrix* trilogy, which also stars Keanu Reeves, are almost endless: the *Matrix* Trilogy consists of *The Matrix* (1999), *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003), and *The Matrix Revolutions* (2003). In 1998, Abel Ferrara, who remains most famous for his films *The Driller Killer* (1979), *King of New York* (1990), and *Bad Lieutenant* (1992), adapted “New Rose Hotel” into a film starring Willem Dafoe, Christopher Walken, and Asia Argento, the daughter of horror auteur Dario Argento. Ferrara also delved into the realm of science fiction with his remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* that appeared under the abbreviated title *Body Snatchers* (1993).

<sup>22</sup> *All Tomorrow’s Parties*, of course, takes its name from The Velvet Underground song of the same title which first appeared on the group’s Warhol-produced, iconic debut album *The Velvet Underground and Nico* (1967). Incidentally, the song was one of the handful on the album that were sung by Andy Warhol protégé Nico.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the community on the Bridge represents a sort of utopian, lawless space akin to the Unlicensed Sector in Samuel Delany’s *Trouble on Triton*, which I discussed in Chapter One.

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<sup>24</sup> Gibson has recently announced that *Pattern Recognition* and *Spook Country* represent the first two parts in yet another trilogy. The series will conclude with a novel entitled *Zero History*. At this time, a publication date for *Zero History* has not yet been announced.

<sup>25</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (1979; Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1984): xxiv. Italics are Lyotard's.

<sup>26</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* xxiii. Again the italics are Lyotard's.

<sup>27</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 3.

<sup>28</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 5.

<sup>29</sup> For an informative history of the various waves of cybernetic theory and their effects upon epistemology and philosophy, see N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 4.

<sup>31</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 5.

<sup>32</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* 4.

<sup>33</sup> For a fuller exploration of the "coolhunting" in both the real world and Gibson's novel, see Lee Konstantinou's "The Brand as Cognitive Map in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*."

<sup>34</sup> The internet has only taken over this role as the predominate index or cognitive map of our globalized society in recent times. This role was previously held by television. Park Chan Wook's recent film *Oldboy* (2003) explores this capacity of television. *Oldboy* is actually the second film in Chan Wook's trilogy of thematically related films, all of which deal with the theme of revenge. The other two films are *Sympathy for Mr. Vengeance* (2002) and *Lady Vengeance* (2005). In *Oldboy*, the main character Oh Dae-Su is locked for fifteen years in a hotel room that functions as a space in which rich clients can pay to have people imprisoned for prescribed lengths of time. Despite his absence from the outside world, Oh Dae-Su continues to learn and follow the history of civilization by means of the television in the room. Oh Dae-Su's narration during his fifteen-year imprisonment in *Oldboy* provides an insightful reading of both the television and the Internet: "If you stand outside a phone booth on a rainy day and meet a man whose face is hidden by a violet umbrella, my advice is that you make friends with television. The television is both clock and calendar. It is your school, home, church, friend, and lover. But my lover's song is too short"(Scene 2).<sup>34</sup> Oh Dae-Su makes this last statement as he is masturbating and watching a female pop singer, whose song climaxes prematurely before he manages to achieve a similar feat. Oh Dae-Su's complaint about his "lover's song" being overly brief depicts the one flaw of television that the Internet does not share: temporal constraint. While television programs can be recorded ever more effortlessly, this still requires planning based on the clock and duration. All aspects of the Internet, on the other hand, remain available to the user at anytime. There are always friends to be had (MySpace, chatrooms, etc.), knowledge to be learned (Wikipedia), and lovers to be had (the infinite realm of Internet pornography and virtual sex). It is always there for the user, no matter what his/her needs or desires may be; it is space continually open to the user despite time or place. Not only is it always open, but it is ever opening out more, expanding its frontiers in ways more infinite perhaps than even than the universe. It is like Borges's map which when laid out covers the entire territory, although the Internet, if it could be laid out in a physical manifestation, would swallow the Earth whole in its seeming infiniteness. His situation is similar to the one Paul Virilio discusses in *The Vision Machine* [trans Julie Rose (1988; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1994)] involving inmates and watching television in prison during his discussion of the private space's loss of autonomy: "the private sphere thus continues to lose its relative autonomy. The recent installation of TV sets in prisoners' cells rather than just in recreation rooms out to have alerted us...From now on, the inmates can *monitor actuality*, can observe television events—unless we turn around

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and point out that, as soon as viewers switch on their sets, it is they, prisoners or otherwise, who are in the field of television, a field in which they are obviously powerless to intervene” (64-5). Virilio here recognizes the power of the image and its ability to control the subject, for Virilio quotes the prisoner who states that watching television makes prison more difficult because the prisoners are allowed to witness all the aspects of the world in which they are not allowed to take part. Virilio’s concept of “imprisonment in the cathode-ray tube” almost directly invokes David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1983), and indeed the television controls our perceptions of reality through its portrayal of everything from politics to sexuality to its definition of “fun.” As *Pattern Recognition* explains, the Internet operates in the same sphere as television because certain places, such as Brazil in the novel, make no real distinction between TV and Net culture (90). The Internet is thus the logical successor of the television, a fact that an example from *Oldboy* displays clearly.

<sup>35</sup> Her most violent reaction occurs when confronting Bibendum, the surreal, cartoon spokesman for Michelin tires whose body is composed of (for some, perhaps racist, reason) white tires.

<sup>36</sup> Konstantinou, “Brand as Cognitive Map” 69; Gibson, *Pattern Recognition* 18.

<sup>37</sup> As Konstantinou’s “The Brand as Cognitive Map” points out, Gibson invented Cayce’s Buzz Rickson’s MA-1 flight jacket. However, requests for the jacket began pouring into Buzz Rickson’s from fans of the novel, so they actually developed a clone of her jacket that they advertised as the *Pattern Recognition* model. For a full account of this instance of fiction spilling over into reality, see Konstantinou’s “Brand as Cognitive Map” 95-6.

<sup>38</sup> Jameson, “Fear and Loathing in Globalization” 390-1.

<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the novel repeatedly details how any object or idea can be commodified into a potentially lucrative business venture as evidenced by the restaurant “Charlie Don’t Surf,” the title of which, of course, is derived from *Apocalypse Now* (1979). The restaurant, with its Vietnam War themed décor, seems almost twisted in its attempt to capture either some sort of nostalgia or to cater to one of the ever-changing retro phases of style or coolness. By turning the Vietnam War into an Applebee’s style restaurant with its kitschy, simulacral memorabilia covering the walls of its establishment, Charlie Don’t Surf exhibits the manner in which even atrocities can be subjected to the process of commodification. Indeed, retro fashion can be seen as another instance of our existence in the future, for styles are barely gone now before they have already been resurrected as retro. Like the barrier between the present and the future, the event horizon separating the current fashion from retro increasingly blurs into indiscernability.

<sup>40</sup> Konstantinou, “Brand as Cognitive Map” 72.

<sup>41</sup> William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace Books, 1984) 4.

<sup>42</sup> Scott Bukatman, *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1993) 146.

<sup>43</sup> Hammett and Chandler were both instrumental in developing the hard-boiled detective genre that simultaneously influenced the birth of the film noir genre. Hammett remains famous for novels such as *Red Harvest* (1929) and *The Maltese Falcon* (1930)—*Red Harvest* provided the plot archetype for Akira Kurosawa’s *Yojimbo* (1961), which in turn was reimagined by Sergio Leone as his western *Classic, Fistful of Dollars* (1964). *The Maltese Falcon* received several golden age Hollywood adaptations, the most famous of which is John Huston’s eponymous film noir classic from 1941 that starred Humphrey Bogart and Peter Lorre. Chandler, on the other hand, remains most famous for his Philip Marlowe novels, such as *The Big Sleep* (1939) and *The Long Goodbye* (1953). Howard Hawks directed an adaptation of *The Big Sleep* in 1946 that featured Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, and Robert Altman moved *The Long Goodbye* into a 1970s milieu with his 1973 adaptation.



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<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, “The Suffering Channel” also concerns the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, but the attacks function as an absence in the text. Instead of directly depicting the attacks or examining their aftermath, “The Suffering Channel” revolves around the lives of writers at a magazine company in the World Trade Center a month before the attacks take place. While the attacks are never mentioned explicitly, Wallace does make passing references to who will live or die on the day of the Towers’ collapse. Furthermore, like *Pattern Recognition*, “The Suffering Channel” examines the place of art and its commodification in the global, postmodern marketplace. Wallace problematizes the status of postmodern art by means of Brint Moltke’s ability to excrete works of art: part of the text centers around the debate over whether his feces represents true art (found art, moreover, for he does not craft them in any way) or if they are in actuality just “shit.”

<sup>45</sup> Jameson, “Fear and Loathing in Globalization” 391.

<sup>46</sup> For Gunning’s discussion of the cinema of attractions, see “An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and (In)Credulous Spectator,” in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997. 114-33) and “The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde,” in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, eds. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: BFI Publishing, 1990. 56-62). Alternately, see my discussion of Gunning and the cinema of attractions in Chapter Four.

<sup>47</sup> Tatiani G. Rapatzikou, “Authorial Identity in the Era of Electronic Technologies,” in *Authorship in Context: From the Theoretical to the Material*, eds. Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi and Polina Mackay (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) 160.

<sup>48</sup> Rapatzikou, “Authorial Identity” 159.

<sup>49</sup> Konstantinou, “Brand as Cognitive Map” 80.

<sup>50</sup> Konstantinou, “Brand as Cognitive Map” 77.

<sup>51</sup> See Konstantinou’s argument in the “Brand as Cognitive Map.”

<sup>52</sup> In *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT P, 2004), Alexander R. Galloway argues that it is “protocol” that provides structure and implements control in the decentered, distributed network of the internet and global society. Galloway argues that the seemingly rhizomatic nature of the Internet does submit to a form of control hierarchy. Galloway calls the means of such control “Protocol” because he bases his reading of it on the various computer protocols that allows the Internet to function: TCP/IP (Transfer Control Protocol/Internet Protocol) and DNS (Dynamic Name Server) being the most important ones. In his book, Galloway examines how control exists after decentralization, “after it [centralization] is dead and gone” and has been “replaced as the social management style by the diagram of distribution” (8). As Galloway explains, TCP/IP gives the Internet a seemingly horizontal, non-hierarchical structure: “TCP and IP work together to establish connections between computers and move data packets effectively through those connections. Because of the way TCP/IP was designed, any computer on the network can talk to any other computer, resulting in a nonhierarchical, peer-to-peer relationship” (8). While this protocol opens up the utopian possibility of sharing information and data free from the strictures of control, DNS forces a hierarchy upon the Net. Basically, DNS performs the function of translating web addresses, such as “www.google.com,” into IP addresses, which consist of a series of four, three digit numbers (for example, “121.543.345.567”). Galloway explains that “all DNS information is controlled in a hierarchical, inverted tree structure. Ironically, then, nearly all Web traffic must submit to a hierarchical structure (DNS) to gain access to the anarchic and radically horizontal structure of the Internet” (9). Of course, DNS servers remain controlled by the various ISPs (Internet Service Providers), who increasingly control all forms of communication including television, Internet, and telephone connections. Although these companies generally allow free reign to their users as to the activities in which they engage on the Internet, they are capable of blocking

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certain domain names, inhibiting certain types of peer-to-peer communications (file-sharing, for example), and even monitoring the type of information that users are accessing. While DNS servers also remain decentralized, they still function as a means of controlling traffic on the web, and they begin to problematize the utopia of free communication and information sharing that the Internet promises to its users.

<sup>53</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995: 177-82) 180. In *Technics and Civilization* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1934), Lewis Mumford makes a similar claim about technology and its effects upon the social episteme when he states, "behind all the great material inventions of the last century and a half was not merely a long internal development of technics: there was also a change of mind. Before the new industrial processes could take hold on a great scale, a reorientation of wishes, habits, ideas, goals was necessary" (3). Mumford proceeds to display how the mechanization of human civilization changed the way human beings thought and acted: how the clock changed the way in which people ordered their day and their relation to time, how increased speed of transportation altered the way in which distance was perceived, etc. Mumford thus portrays how technological advancement requires fundamental changes in the functioning and perceptions of the subject and the ordering principles of society.

<sup>54</sup> Deleuze, "Postscript" 180.

<sup>55</sup> Deleuze appropriates the term "control" from the works of William S. Burroughs who remained obsessed with the topic throughout his literary career and with Michel Foucault's suggestion in his lectures that we have begun moving beyond disciplinary societies.

<sup>56</sup> Deleuze, "Postscript" 180.

<sup>57</sup> Deleuze, "What is the Creative Act?," *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina (1987; New York and Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006) 322.

<sup>58</sup> Deleuze, "Postscript" 180. Italics are Deleuze's own.

<sup>59</sup> Deleuze, "Postscript" 181.

<sup>60</sup> William Gibson, *Spook Country* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2007) 105.

<sup>61</sup> William Gibson, *Spook Country* 106.

<sup>62</sup> Gibson, *Spook Country* 20.

<sup>63</sup> Gibson, *Spook Country* 22.

<sup>64</sup> Gibson, *Spook Country* 40.

<sup>65</sup> Deleuze, "Postscript" 181-2.

<sup>66</sup> Steven Shavero, *Connected, or, What it Means to Live in the Network Society* (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 2003) 3.

<sup>67</sup> Shavero, *Connected* 3.

<sup>68</sup> Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," *Negotiations 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (1990; New York: Columbia University Press, 1995) 174.

<sup>69</sup> In *Empire* and *Multitude*, Hardt and Negri contend that global communication simultaneously leads to the instantiation of the control society and the inscription of a space in which a utopian democratic revolution can be enacted by means of the multitude created by such circuits of communication. At the core of Hardt and Negri's theories of revolution lies Marx's own dialectical materialism which structures his conception of history, class struggle, and revolution. Of course, Marx inherits the dialectic from the philosophy of Hegel, for whom the dialectic structured all processes from chemical reactions to the flow of history to the creation of the subject's consciousness of itself. As Sean Sayers and Richard Norman explain in *Hegel, Marx, and Dialectic: A Debate* (Sussex: Harvester Press and New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), at its basis, dialectical logic functions as an "an attempt to portray things as concrete," and hence it operates as a refutation of metaphysics, which "is abstract in that it considers things merely in themselves, merely as what they are, as self-subsistent, as isolated and abstracted from their context" (3). Contrary to this, Sayers and Norman explain that "according to dialectical thought, real, concrete things are not abstract in this way, but embedded in the world: essentially related to other objects and in interaction with them" (3). At the heart of this view of things lies contradiction, for "all concrete things are contradictory. There are tensions and conflicts within all things and in the relations between things...Concrete reality is not a mere diversity of indifferent and externally related things—it is not a mere 'totality of facts.' For as well as recognizing the positive existence of things, we must also see in things the forces opposing and negating them which lead to development and change. Concrete things are not just related to each other, they are in a constant process of conflict and interaction" (Norman and Sayers 3). Marx builds upon Hegelian dialectics to create dialectical materialism, "a philosophy of struggle and conflict," in which "nothing comes into being except through struggle; struggle is involved in the development of all things; and it is through struggle that things are negated and pass away" (Norman and Sayers 23). By means of its own internal contradictions, capitalism thus creates the means of its own destruction: "to say that capitalism is contradictory does not mean that it is impossible and unreal, but rather that is an essentially dynamic social form, and that it is ultimately destined to perish and be negated in a new social form, socialism, which will emerge from its result" (Norman and Sayers 13). Or, as Marx and Engels succinctly state in "Manifesto of the Communist Party" (*The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker [1848; New York and London: Norton, 1978]), "What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable" (483). Marx and Engels believed that only when Capitalism achieved true hegemony, to use a Gramscian term not yet in the lexicon of Marx and Engels, over the entire globe, could the proletariat become capable of staging a global revolution. Hardt and Negri believe that we have now reached the stage when Capital has reached its ultimate power in its transformation into what they term "Empire." This transition to the age of Empire provides the groundwork for Hardt and Negri's vision of a global, democratic revolution of the multitude. Hardt and Negri furnish this new global society with the rather ambiguous name of "Empire." For them, Empire does not mean the imperialistic nation states of the 19th and early 20th century but rather the society of biopower and control, abstract labor, total globalization, and the multitude. It is a society without margins from which to enact subversive practices, yet it also represents a society that, for Hardt and Negri, nonetheless contains the gestating potential for worldwide, utopian revolution via its creation of the multitude. In *Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 2000), Hardt and Negri argue that the nation state has slid into a decline in its powers during the postmodern era," yet they also contend that this "decline...does not mean that sovereignty as such has declined" (xi). On the contrary, sovereignty has merely undergone a metamorphosis, shedding its old skin for a new shinier epidermis that masks its inherent nature: "The passage to Empire emerges from the twilight of modern sovereignty. In contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial center of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers. It is a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers. Empire manages hybrid identities, flexible hierarchies, and plural exchanges through modulating networks of command. The distinct national colors of the imperialist map of the world have merged and blended in the imperial global rainbow" (*Empire* xii-xiii). Hardt and Negri view the advent of this world order as the natural progression in the expansion of capitalism's march towards becoming an all-encompassing global economic order, that is, as one more transformation in the economic modes of production. Empire is a "smooth space" that erases national boundaries ("striated spaces") in favor of creating a decentered, global society of control. But Hardt and Negri's seemingly dystopian concept of Empire contains some seemingly utopian facets, such as its attitude of integration, in itself, yet their vision of Empire's creation of the multitude pushes their theories into

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profoundly utopian territory, for it is the multitude that provides the potential for a new radically subversive, democratic movement on global scale that has hitherto remained impossible. Throughout *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004), Hardt and Negri characterize the multitude as a Deleuzian body without organs, as a massive flesh that refuses the hierarchical ordering of organs. The twin forces of “commonality and singularity defines what we called the flesh of the multitude. These, in other words, are the conditions of possibility for the formation of the multitude” (212). The multitude exists beyond such exclusive distinctions as national identities, racial identities, etc., for it preserves such singularities within its matrix while simultaneously establishing a common ground upon which such disparate bodies of individuals can find a sense of unity. Hardt and Negri pose the multitude as a kind of project, a project that could finally bring about global democracy in a radically new fashion. At present the multitude cannot truly arise because it remains trapped within the society of control that Empire represents, for there exist a variety of “forces that constantly constrain this multitudinous flesh to form a political body, transforming its singularities into divisions and hierarchies, reducing the common to a means of global control, and expropriating the common as private wealth. One fact that should be obvious in all this is that multitude does not arise as a political figure spontaneously and that the flesh of the multitude consists of a series of conditions that are ambivalent: they could lead toward liberation or be caught in a new regime of exploitation and control” (212). To achieve a new state of liberation, Hardt and Negri argue that the multitude must harness the powers of the common in order to enact a political project based on love that will topple sovereignty’s power in all its forms and replace it with a radically democratic global order. The multitude must seek “the destruction of sovereignty in favor of democracy [...] the multitude today needs to abolish sovereignty at a global level” (351). In the contemporary world, sovereignty proves “unnecessary” because “the conditions are emerging that give the multitude the capacity of democratic decision-making” (352). Hardt and Negri have recently expanded their collaboration into a trilogy with the publication of *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009), which begins trying to theorize how the global democratic revolution of the multitude would take place and what a government by the multitude would look like.

<sup>70</sup> Deleuze, “Control and Becoming” 175.

**CHAPTER 5:**  
**DOCUMENTARY SCIENCE FICTION: REALISM AND MEMORY**  
**IN THE TIME TRAVEL FILMS OF CHRIS MARKER AND SHANE CARRUTH**

No one has lived in the past, and no one will live in  
the future. The present is the form of all life.

-Jean Luc Goddard's *Alphaville*<sup>1</sup>

Science fiction has always been a genre obsessed with time: it imagines potential futures and often uses these as a means of commenting upon the present moment,<sup>2</sup> it considers the implications of introducing radically new technologies into our contemporary world,<sup>3</sup> it features alien visitors or futuristic societies in order to comment upon the current social-cultural state of a particular nation or of the entire globe,<sup>4</sup> or it imagines alternative presents.<sup>5</sup> Beyond these basic plotlines of temporal estrangement, science fiction also developed a self-conscious plot trope that allows it to more fully reflect upon the nature of time—the time travel narrative. Of course, stories of time travel are not a recent occurrence—such narratives became one of the major strands of science fiction as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and these tales have proliferated far beyond the bounds of science fiction proper.<sup>6</sup> And time travel could be explicitly connected to the cinema because film seems to provide a means for capturing time. Paul Coates argues that time travel stories actually arose because of cinema: “the emergence of time travel as a literary theme at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is a phenomenon one may suspect to be linked to the simultaneous emergence of cinema, with its capacity to manipulate the illusion of time.”<sup>7</sup> In many ways, “cinema itself has the properties of a time machine” because it can transport us to the past, whisk us away to unimaginable futures, or simply

preserve slices of time.<sup>8</sup> If time travel narratives have always harbored this connection to cinema, then it makes sense to ask what insights time travel films can offer about the filmic medium. Hence, in this final chapter, we shall explore how science fiction can allow us to rethink our conceptualizations of cinema in radically novel ways.

In *Theory of Film*, Siegfried Kracauer argues that cinema has always divided itself into two distinct tendencies: the realistic tendency and the formative tendency, or, to put it in other terms, films either follow in the lineage of the Lumière brothers or Georges Méliès.<sup>9</sup> As Kracauer explains, the realistic tendency expands upon the realism of photography through its incorporation of movement and its use of staging. Initially, films of the realistic tendency only featured narratives if they occurred naturally, and they incorporated movement only if the objects within the frame moved. Of course, it became immensely popular to shoot films from moving trains, but this form of movement still originated in nature. This kind of “objective movement” differs from “subjective” movement in which the director uses camera movement (pans, tilts, tracking shots, etc.) as well as editing techniques to move the audience through “vast expanses of time and/or space.”<sup>10</sup> By incorporating these various kinds of movement, the cinema became a more perfect recreation of reality than mere photography, but Kracauer maintains that it further built upon this realism by means of staging, which includes not just the choosing of locations but also the creation of artificial settings. Of course, staging should “convey the impression of actuality, so that the spectator feels he is watching events which might have occurred in real life and have been photographed on the spot.”<sup>11</sup> The realistic tradition of filmmaking seeks to recreate reality, to give the impression that these events have actually occurred. Certain directors, such as Werner Herzog, still adamantly adhere

to this doctrine and insist on always filming on location. Herzog even went so far as to physically drag a boat over an Amazonian mountain to instill authenticity into *Fitzcarraldo* (1982). While the Lumière tradition strives to create the illusion of reality, the formative tendency, which derives from Méliès, seeks “to penetrate the realms of history and fantasy” by harnessing the various formative powers that cinema opens up for the director.<sup>12</sup> For Méliès, who was a magician by trade, the cinema created new spaces for him to experiment with his illusions, and these new forms of illusion allowed him to create narrative films, such as his science fiction classic, *Le Voyage dans le lune* (1902) or “A Trip to the Moon” as well as his *Le Manoir du diable* (1896) or “The House of the Devil,” which is often considered to be the first horror film. Méliès inaugurated the filmic tradition of science fiction and horror, and he did so by means of illusions and special effects—his films were built around their spectacles.

While Méliès began to instill narratives into his films, Tom Gunning argues that both the realistic films of Lumières and the fantastic films of Méliès function according to the same underlying aesthetic, an aesthetic he labels as “the cinema of attractions.” He defines the cinema of attractions in opposition to narrative cinema, which began to exert a hegemonic force over cinema between 1907 and 1913 with the rise of directors like D.W. Griffith. In contrast to narrative cinema, Gunning explains that the cinema of attractions “envisioned cinema as a series of visual shocks” and that even the realistic filmmaking “was valued largely for its uncanny effects.”<sup>13</sup> Initially, cinema remained inextricably linked to spectacle, either the spectacle of the cinematograph itself or the spectacles that filmmakers could create through the medium of film: “The cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying

pleasure through an exciting spectacle—a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself.”<sup>14</sup> Even the fantastic cinema of attractions films, such as those of Méliès, featured narrative only as a pretense: “the story simply provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of the cinema.”<sup>15</sup> For Méliès, narrative merely provided a structure to connect multiple “tricks” together into a unified whole. Of course, cinema’s recreation of reality no longer stuns us as it did the audiences who attended the Lumière brothers’ screenings—we do not generally flee into the night believing the images to be real, a story many, such as Gunning, consider to be apocryphal. But filmmakers still often strive to shock audiences in a variety of ways: comedies include increasingly raunchy subject matter; horror films incorporate gorier and more gruesome death scenes; blockbuster films strive for ever more impressive special effects; and directors such as Lars von Trier, Nagisa Oshima, and Michael Haneke create shock effects through the use of frank, fetishistic, and even pornographic sex scenes.<sup>16</sup> In general, science fiction films operate according to the aesthetic of the cinema of attractions through their inclusion of estranging elements and storylines and their use of ever more complex forms of special effects. But is it possible to still create the other kind of shock that Gunning suggests? Is it still possible to use cinema to render reality “uncanny” in the same fashion that the Lumières did? In this chapter, we will explore two films that function as what I will term “documentary science fiction,” that present reality to us in just such an uncanny fashion.

Whereas the majority of science fiction films participate in the tradition of Méliès, this chapter explores two films that feature traditional science fiction plots but that deviate from conventional sci-fi by adhering to the realistic tendency.<sup>17</sup> Because cinema



itself has often been compared to a time machine, it seems fitting that time travel films would provide the ideal method for exploring this concept. This chapter examines two time travel films that eschew spectacle in favor of creating films that not only problematize the genre of science fiction but that comment upon the nature of cinematic expression. Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962) and Shane Carruth's *Primer* (2004) both exhibit a counter-spectacle aesthetic that allows them to explore the relation between time and memory in a way that will allow us to reconsider the struggle between the modalities of spectacle and narrative in cinema. Documentary science fictions represent the cinematic equivalent of science fictions of the present. While they may feature estranging elements, they use a realistic aesthetic to comment upon our present world or to interrogate the manners in which we perceive reality. As we shall see, these two films participate in the Lumière tradition because they concern the cinema's ability to seemingly preserve time and depict reality, and hence the films simultaneously explore our desires to relive the past or to reorder it, a desire that cinema offers to us in its recreations of reality.

### **I. Still-Lives of the Future: *La Jetée* and Science Fictions of Realism**

The rudiments of documentary science-fiction can be found in a variety of films, such as Jean-Luc Goddard's *Alphaville* (1965) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) and *Stalker* (1979). *Alphaville* features none of the normal science fiction visuals—it appears to be set directly in the present; only its storyline clues the reader into it as a science fiction film. Goddard forgoes special effects and elaborate futuristic settings partly due to his extremely limited budget but also to evoke a feeling in the audience that

the future has already arrived. Godard utilizes a counter-spectacle aesthetic in his apocalyptic film *Weekend* (1967), which depicts the disintegration of bourgeois society. Similarly, in *Solaris*, Tarkovsky's camera spends an inordinate amount of time dwelling upon wholly unfuturistic elements: the film's opening provides images of nature on which Tarkovsky poignantly lingers during his trademark long takes. Despite the film's futuristic setting, Tarkovsky refuses to incorporate futuristic cars and opts instead for the common conveyances of his day, thus driving home the film's message that humankind has become so alienated from its natural environment that the present has become equivalent to the future. Tarkovsky continues his experiments with documentary science fiction in the perplexing and beautiful *Stalker* (1979), a film that (like Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* [1974]) explores a liminal space known simply as "The Zone," a space that was supposedly the site of an alien landing or some other disastrous or paranormal occurrence. Even more so than *Solaris*, *Stalker* features nothing outside of its narrative that would demarcate it as science fiction. The film sculpts its otherworldly atmosphere from natural locations and fully urbanized spaces, which again are posed against one another in a dichotomy. Indeed, whether the paranormal or extraterrestrial exists in *Stalker* or whether it is merely a hoax or hallucination remains an issue of debate long after its credits role. More recently, Darren Aronofsky's  $\pi$  (1998) and Wong Kar Wai's *2046* (2004) both, to one degree or another, continue to experiment with this aesthetic approach to the genre. But *La Jetée* and *Primer* provide a special example of this sub-genre of science fiction because their stories of time travel reflect upon cinema as a means of capturing time and upon the medium's ability to render reality uncanny. Because time travel narratives inevitably play with and frustrate our general narrative

expectations, these two documentary science fictions provide the perfect venue for exploring the gulf between the realistic tendency and formative tendencies and between the cinema of pure spectacle and narrative cinema.

In the history of time travel narratives, there exists none quite as unique as Chris Marker's *La Jetée*. Now perhaps best known as the basis for Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys* (1995), Marker's film represents a critical text in the history of cinematic experimentation because it consists almost entirely of still images—it, in essence, devolves the filmic image back to its photographic forebears. *La Jetée* (in English, “The Jetty” or “The Pier”) takes place in a dystopian future after global nuclear war has annihilated the majority of the Earth's population. In an attempt to improve their present situation, a group of scientists begin conducting experiments in time travel. The main character, who is known simply as “the Man,” repeatedly travels back in time and eventually even into the future, where he learns that humanity will rise from the ashes into a brighter tomorrow. Although the plot of Marker's film contains estranging elements, its use of still photography instead of moving images distinctly marks it as documentary science fiction. Because it forgoes the basic technology of film, Marker's *La Jetée* provides the ideal space for examining cinema as spectacle. Furthermore, it will allow us to consider film as a medium for capturing the human and to reflect upon the relation between identity, memory, and time.

*La Jetée* opens with a shot of Orly Airport, just south of Paris, the setting that inaugurates and closes this brief circuit of a film. Sounds of planes and choral singing swell as the credits roll across the still image of the airport. Abruptly, Marker cuts to a black screen with white text that states, “Ceci est l’histoire d’un homme marqué par une

image d'enfance" ("this is the history of a man marked by an image from his childhood").<sup>18</sup> An unseen narrator reads these words to the viewer, and the film never reveals the narrator's identity or purpose—he simply exists alongside the series of images to deliver the story to the audience, a job he undertakes in a monotonous and clinical tone of voice, almost as if he is reporting lab results. The film features no direct dialogue—the narrator renders all the characters' words in indirect discourse and only refers to himself (for it is a masculine voice) as "we." Moreover, the narrator only uses the past tense to describe the events, which makes the film feel like a series of snapshots that the narrator is displaying while recalling the story. This aesthetic further heightens the realism of the film because it gives the impression that the film's events have actually occurred and are being presented in this document for our inspection.

At the film's beginning, the Man's parents have brought him to the airport as a child to watch the planes arrive and depart. Thus, the film starts by examining the human fascination with motion, which is almost entirely absent from *La Jetée* since Marker's film denies the very technology that provides the basis of the cinematic medium—the illusion of movement created by the rapid succession of still images. *La Jetée* "reduc[es] film to its origin in a series of stills in black and white," and this "use of still photographs creates a sense that all that remains after the disaster of World War III are the fragments of a narrative."<sup>19</sup> Film has been reduced back even further than the Lumière shorts which feature little more narrative than a photograph: a train arriving at a station, people going swimming, people exiting a factory—the narrative of all of these could almost be conveyed in simple snapshots. But the narrative of *La Jetée* could not be so simply deduced from the procession of images without the narrative voice to connect them.

Only narrative can piece together the fragmented images that compose the film, for as D.N. Rodowick argues with regards to the film, “movement, drained from the image and divorced from representation and action, has relinquished its role as the measure of time.”<sup>20</sup> If movement no longer serves as a measure of time, then we are plunged back into time as it exists in the Eleatic paradoxes of Zeno. Zeno of Elea remains famous (or infamous) for his paradoxes of motion, all of which involve subjects attempting to pass through an infinite number of points in a finite space of time, thus rendering Achilles incapable of ever catching the Tortoise.<sup>21</sup> From the film’s outset, Marker’s use of still images creates a cinematic space that deterritorializes the filmic medium in a similar fashion, hence enabling the critic to perform a complete reevaluation of the relationship between the filmic spectacle of movement and its narrative content.<sup>22</sup> Because Marker’s film eschews the cinematic illusion of movement, it also denies an inherent narrative to the images because movement generally implies at least a basic narrative action. But without the narrative voice, the film’s narrative would remain incomprehensible, for its images in isolation from the narrative would persist in their ambiguity to the point of being aporetic. Furthermore, since the film also foregoes any attempt to create spectacle through the use of special effects and instead features images that could just as easily be from our reality, then the narrative voice provides the only evidence of this being science fiction cinema.

This particular visit to Orly proves auspicious for the young child because he witnesses a man being shot on the pier, a memory that will haunt him for the remainder of his life. Just before the murder occurs, he witnesses something entirely different: the peaceful countenance of a woman’s face. As the narrator explains,

Nothing tells memories from ordinary moments. Only afterwards do they claim remembrance on account of their scars. That face which was to be a unique image of peace time to carry with him through the whole wartime. He often wondered if he had ever seen it or if he had dreamed a lovely moment to catch up with the crazy moment that came next. (1)

From the beginning, *La Jetée* interrogates the relation between the subject's identity, memory, and narrative as well as how particular instants in time are inscribed in the subject's mind as memories, much in the same way that cinema carves out slices of time. The image of the woman's face only becomes a memory when it is tied together in the Man's subsequent life narrative, that is, when a narrative bridge has been erected between the still images. But, as the narrative voice makes clear, these narrative bridges always harbor the potential of being mere fictions that the individual has generated in order to make sense of their chaotic existence. Indeed, as Elena del Rio points out, the still images recall Roland Barthes's argument about the relation of photography to the past: "the Photograph does not necessarily say *what is no* longer, but only and for certain *what has been*."<sup>23</sup> It points towards "the inherent poignancy of the photograph, that sign of an absent presence."<sup>24</sup> The photograph represents our tortured relationship with the past, a relationship that time travel narratives interrogate at a fundamental level. Perhaps even more than the future, the past beckons to us to solve its riddles and mysteries or to remember those foggy moments that may hold keys to our identity while also instantiating the desire in us that altering the past could lead to a metamorphosis of the present.

Such is the case with the Man in *La Jetée* who still wonders about that pre-war day at Orly when the image of a woman's face was etched forever in his memory—his mind focuses on this image as one worthy of remembrance, much in the way that cinema

chooses discrete images from the chaotic manifold of space-time. As the narrator makes clear, in his later life, he ponders whether he actually witnessed the woman's face or whether it was merely a fiction that his psyche created to grapple with the image that followed it: the horrifying picture of a man being gunned down. As Frank Kermode argues, we use, whether consciously or unconsciously, fictions to "satisfy our needs," for they provide "models of the world [which] make tolerable one's moment between beginning and end."<sup>25</sup> Or as Constance Penley argues, "time travel stories are fantasies of origins," and "they are also fantasies of endings."<sup>26</sup> Even from the beginning of the film, Marker forces the viewer to consider how we create notions of beginnings and endings, how we parse out certain slices of time as worthy of remembrance. Hence, all memories harbor the potential of remaining purely fictional, of having been sculpted into significance by our subsequent rewriting of them. As the narrator from Marker's pseudo-documentary *Sans Soleil* (1983) states, "I'll have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its inner lining. We do not remember. We rewrite memory much as history is rewritten."<sup>27</sup> In one sense, *La Jetée* compels us to wonder whether all memory contains less of what was perceived and more of the narrative that the subject has generated to explain these remembered perceptions. But, as Kracauer suggests with regards to film, "it is entirely possible that a staged real-life event evokes a stronger illusion of reality on the screen than would the original event if it had been captured directly by the camera."<sup>28</sup> And *La Jetée* suggests that we perhaps stage reality in our minds—that our memories are like cinematic stagings of real-life events.

After this initial setup of the film regarding the woman's face, *La Jetée* proceeds to tell the story of the Man's subsequent life. Shortly after the Man's visit to Orly Airport as a young child, World War III erupts and decimates the surface of the earth, leaving Paris in ruins, a state evoked by photographs of Paris intercut with shots of ruins. The narrative voice explains, "Many died. Some fancied themselves to be victors. Others were made prisoners. The survivors settled beneath Chaillot. Above ground everything was rotten with radioactivity. The survivors stood guard over a kingdom of rats" (3). While they "guard" the radioactive surface of the Earth, the entirety of their existence takes place within a series of catacombs under the *Palais de Chaillot*, catacombs that both protect them from the fallout on the surface and that represent the past from which they have been forever sundered. Amongst the religious statuary that litters the catacombs, there is a small plaque that reads "tête apôtre," literally "mind apostle." And, in effect, the Man must learn to become a mind apostle in order to save the human race from extinction. To stave off the annihilation of their species, the survivors devise a series of time travel experiments with the hope of finding the needed assistance:

The human race was doomed. Space was off limits. The only link with survival passed through time. A loophole through time and then maybe it would be possible to reach food, medicine, energy. This was the purpose of the experiments: to throw emissaries into time to call past and future to the rescue of the present. But the human mind balked. To wake up in another time meant to be born again as an adult. The shock would be too much. (4)

For the traveler, then, the journey to a different time represents a form of rebirth, a journey back through a psychic birth canal and an arrival in a completely new set of narrative parameters. Like the Lumières' films, reality becomes uncanny for these pathetic travelers through time, for they have witnessed spatio-temporal transformations



that cannot possibly be real. Insofar as time shapes human identity and perception, the possibility of awaking in a new time proves to be fundamentally shattering for the psyche: it means the recreation of one's identity, a complete rewriting of one's personal narrative.

To circumvent this fault in the human mind, the experimenters seek out prisoners who maintain strong mental connections with their pasts—individuals who harbor distinct memories of the past and of their selves within that time frame. They surreptitiously stumble upon the ideal test subject in the Man because of his continued obsession with that particular day on the pier at Orly. As the narrator explains, “the camp police spied even on dreams,” and they are fully cognizant of the fact that the Man “was glued to an image of the past,” an image that has developed so much significance for him that it will enable the Man to travel back in time without losing his sense of identity (4). Indeed, the entirety of his identity remains inextricably linked to this image—the image has been “overemplotted,” to use Hayden White’s term, in his life narrative: “We might say that...the patient has overemplotted these events, has charged them with a meaning so intense that, whether real or merely imagined, they continue to shape both his perceptions and his responses to the world long after they should have become ‘past history.’”<sup>29</sup> The Man has overemplotted his memory of that day at Orly—and, for this reason, the camp scientists believe that he harbors a better chance of successfully returning to the past.<sup>30</sup> The image of the Woman’s face remains frozen in his memory, and he desires to recapture it and to set it back into motion. It remains crystallized like the images that comprise *La Jetée*, but, as we shall see, the Man desires to set time

running again on that day at the pier, to reinsert motion and hence to salvage his meaningless, fragmented existence.

Like a research report, the narrator's statements record the results of these temporal experiments into the past: "at first nothing else but a stripping out of the present," a stripping out that leaves the Man awash in a sea of blackness and pain (4). But, then, on the tenth day, a change occurs, a procession of images appears each of which the narrator's voice describes in turn:

Images begin to ooze like confessions. A peace time morning. A peace time bedroom. A *real* bedroom. *Real* children. *Real* birds. *Real* cats. *Real* graves. On the sixteenth day, he is on the pier at Orly. Empty. Sometimes he reaches a day of happiness. But another one. A face of happiness, but another one. Ruins. A girl who could be the one he is yearning for. He crosses her path on the pier. He sees her face in a car smiling. More images pour out and mix. Museum. Perhaps the museum of his memory. (5)

The images that flow over the Man have no narrative connection—the images “ooze” in a non-narrative, non-temporal sequence like a dream. This procession of images highlight the imagistic quality of memory. The images the Man perceives are obviously from before the war because they depict landscapes not yet scarred by nuclear blasts, but this provides the only connective theme between them. Yet this basic thread throughout the images coupled with the narrator's repeated use of the terms “peace time” and “real” implies that they are brief, static glimpses of the past. Indeed, the repetition of the word “real” suggests that the film's present world proves to be, in some sense, “false,” that it has somehow had reality stripped out of it. And, in effect, the diegetic present of the film functions as an island in time because it has ceased to be a part of a serial narrative—its connection with the past has been severed, and the survivors currently lack the ability to move forwards into a future. Also, “the insistence on the reality of these things

paradoxically draws attention to their status as *images*.”<sup>31</sup> Like the still images of which the film is comprised, the Man’s present is one that contains no linkage to a larger narrative. Furthermore, the repetition of the word “real” recalls the constructed nature of memory, the potentially fictional nature of our remembered images:

The repeated use of the word ‘real’ in this sequence gives credence to the traveler’s fantasies/memories, while deconstructing the metaphysical binarism reality/fantasy in at least two important ways. The first one, of course, concerns the reality of psychic contents themselves. No less significantly, the unequivocal sense of reality conferred on these photographic images seems to challenge the Platonic indictment of representation as copy or forgery of an original truth. Photography and film are to be taken not as simple illusions in relation to a reality ‘out there,’ but as realities in their own right, with their own specific ontologies and epistemologies. (387)

Hence, in the images that appear to the Man, the film begins to blur the line between reality and fiction, between original and duplicated image. The “real” nature of the images highlights the potentially false nature of this dystopian future version of Paris, and this future proves false precisely because the survivors are no longer connected to the narrative thread of history. Thus, to reinsert themselves into narrative and, consequently, into history, the survivors must turn their attention toward time itself—they must force themselves back into the narrative schema from which they have been expelled and left floating in a timeless sea.

Finally, on the thirtieth day of the experiments, the Man perceives more than mere glimpses of the past: he travels back himself and meets the Woman from the earlier images: “Now he is sure she is the one. As a matter of fact, it is the one thing he may be sure of. In the middle of this *dateless* world, which first stuns him by its splendor” (6). Unable to focus because of the various shiny baubles that present themselves to him in a department store, the Man loses sight of the Woman and she disappears. But the

experimenters immediately return him to the past: “time rolls back again. The moment happens once more. They have no memories, no plans. Time builds itself painlessly around them. As *landmarks*, they have the very taste of this moment they live as scribblings on the walls” (6). Finally, in this second permutation, the Man actually meets the Woman (she also never receives a name), and they seem to genuinely enjoy one another’s company.<sup>32</sup> Here, we see the film imposing a spatial language upon temporality with the term “landmarks”—they are islands in time around which the normal river of linear temporality flows, but, as the film demonstrates, linear or serial conceptions of time provide only one narrative model of organizing human experience. The narrative voice emphasizes that the couple “have the very taste of this moment” almost as if their infatuation causes them to exist in an extratemporal space in which the past and the future have no bearing: only the present exists—they are devoid of “memories” (no past), and “they have no plans” (no future) (6). Towards the end of their first meeting, the Man and Woman stroll through a park, and “he remembers there were gardens” (6). In the park, Marker pays homage to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958) when the Man leads the Woman to an exhibit that features a cross-section of a Sequoia tree with significant dates in history posted on its various rings.<sup>33</sup> He points beyond the edge of the tree and explains to the Woman that he comes from there. Interestingly, the tree represents a true *spatialization of time*—it is time crystallized into an image. Here, whether one conceives of time as a circle or a line, the visual metaphor still proves valid.<sup>34</sup> In essence, the tree signifies the manner in which time can be distilled or transmuted into an image. Cinema normally creates just such images of time through its

depiction of movement, but Marker refuses this spectacle even as he creates a film about time and memory.

Suddenly, the experimenters recall the Man to his own time because it is the end of their first round of experiments. In the second round of experiments, the technicians attempt to create a perfect moment between the Man and the Woman. They send the Man back repeatedly, and he meets the Woman in different places each time: “she always welcomes him in a simple way. She calls him her ghost” (7). Then, on one particular day, she acts frightened when he meets her, and when she leans over him: “As for him, he never knows whether he moves towards her, whether he is driven, whether he has made it up, or whether he is only dreaming” (7). The film then cuts to images of the Woman lying in bed, thus giving the impression that the two have slept together and that perhaps her fright stemmed from her inexplicable desire for this strange man who appears and vanishes like a phantom. The series of still images depicting the Woman lying in bed are finally interrupted by one image that lingers and then reveals itself to be an actual moving image, the only one in the film. The motion in the scene is so subtle that it could be easily missed: the Woman simply opens her eyes. But it is a truly powerful second of cinema, for, as Coates comments, “it is like the mysterious birth of time itself.”<sup>35</sup> Only in such moments can the two lovers feel that they are truly living in the present, that the present is not already past. Generally, once one has the chance to name a moment “the present,” then it has already become the past. The movement in this image implies this to be the present because the movement in the three spatial dimensions signifies a consequent movement in time. Because the rest of the film consists entirely of still images, it highlights how these images already exist in the past, for how else could these

snapshots exist? This scene breaks the illusion of the film as a series of snapshots, and it highlights this scene as perhaps the only occurrence in the narrative worthy of future remembrance—it represents the only experience precious enough to be ensconced as a filmic memory in the mind's eye. The Man has recaptured the woman who had haunted him, and he has transformed her frozen visage from the pier into a sensuously mobile look of love. The film implies that it is only the power of love that allows the individual to exist in a state of pure duration, a state that allows them to be fully in tune with the present with no cares about the past or the future. The Man and the Woman seem to step outside the normal constraints of the present as their love begins to blossom, for their relationship is built upon narrative incongruities since the Man disappears and reappears at random. As Coates further comments, “the girl’s eyes are, as it were, animated by love, her love for the man/child, the love that has transported him into the past. For it is this sense of the possibility of renewed movement, of the flame of life being rekindled out of universal ashes, that draws the protagonist backwards.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, without the constraints of the past (since the two never exchange personal histories) nor concerns for the future (since the Man could disappear at any moment), the couple believe that they can exist in a perpetual present, in a state in which the strictures of time no longer matter.

Shortly after they make love, the pair meet in a natural history museum filled with the preserved remains of animals ranging from small birds to giraffes and giant whales. The natural history museum proves profoundly significant, for it is a space built upon the all too human belief that the passage of time can be arrested and that the present can be preserved in perpetuity, a belief also exemplified by cinematic technology. As Bob Dylan says of museums, they are the places in which “infinity goes up on trial.”<sup>37</sup> In

other words, the museum represents a space in which humankind believes it can carve out blocks of immortality. With the museum, the experimenters achieve their goal: “now they have hit the bull’s-eye. Thrown in the right moment, he may stay there and move without trouble” (8). In effect, the scientists have engineered the perfect situation, one in which the two are infinitely compatible with one another. Perhaps the museum setting taps into past time in a way more exact than any other, for it is a three-dimensional space demarcated for the sole purpose of preserving spatial objects against the onslaught of temporal progression—it is a space created to keep time from getting lost, to recreate and preserve reality. In the context of the museum, “the girl seems also to have been tamed,” as the narrator says, as if she is one of the wild animals that have been “tamed” through the art of taxidermy (8). The narrator further explains that she has come to accept the Man’s strange appearances and disappearances as naturally occurring phenomena, and thus the engineers have achieved their goal of successfully inserting the Man into past time. Hence, when he returns to the future, the Man realizes that this was his last meeting with the Woman, for now the question becomes whether or not the scientists can send him into the future.

The journey into the future proves more difficult, but the Man manages to complete the mission: he travels into a future world in which Paris had been rebuilt with “ten thousand incomprehensible streets” (9). As Coates points out, the film depicts these ten thousand streets by using “a close-up of the grain of piece of wood,” thus recalling the earlier scene with the sequoia and demonstrating how images from reality can be used in estranging ways.<sup>38</sup> A panel of leaders from the future greets him, and he pleads with them to send aid to the survivors in the past: “Since humanity had survived, they could

not refuse to its own past the means of its own survival. That sophism was taken for Fate in disguise” (9). The Man makes the circular argument that since the human race had survived, then this futuristic welcome committee must have been the cause of it; therefore, to deny help to the past would be to destroy themselves in the present. Of course, the argument proves questionable, and it recalls one of the basic paradoxes of time travel narratives—the grandfather paradox, “which warns of the possibility of a wayward traveler mistakenly killing his own grandfather, thus erasing himself from existence.”<sup>39</sup> A variation of the grandfather paradox also exists in which the traveler’s journeys into past time actually cause the gestation of certain aspects of his/her present: this is the case in works such as Heinlein’s “By His Bootstraps” and Cameron’s *The Terminator* as well as in *La Jetée* and *12 Monkeys* to a lesser degree.

Despite the sophistic nature of his plea, the Man convinces the panel from the future, and they give him plans for a power plant capable of generating enough energy to restart industry across the planet. Equipped with this knowledge, the Man returns to the past, but no triumph awaits him there. Instead, the scientists take the information from the Man, and then the prison guards prepare to execute him since he has outlived his usefulness. But one hope presents itself to him—the panel from the future travels back in time to offer him the chance to escape into the future and avoid his fate:

Now he only waited to be executed with somewhere inside him the memory of a twice lived fragment of time. And deep in these limbos, he got the message from the men of the world to come. They too traveled through time and more easily. Now they were there ready to accept him as one of their own. But he had a different request. Rather than this pacified future, he wanted the world of his childhood and this woman who perhaps was waiting for him. (10)



So the Man travels to the past one last time to that childhood moment on the pier at Orly, thus literalizing Nietzsche's eternal return of the same and Freud's return of the repressed—he races back towards his fate—but not the fate he expects. As he enters the pier, he realizes that his childhood self will be there as well, but he ignores this thought and instead focuses on rushing towards the Woman whose face he had carried with him in his memory all these years. But, sadly, they are not meant to be together, for he has been followed by one of the camp guards: “And when he recognized the man that had trailed him since the camp, he knew that there was no way out of time. And he knew that this haunted moment he had been granted to see as a child was the moment of his own death” (10). Hence, *La Jetée* ends with a frozen image of the Man falling backwards with his arm reaching up towards the sun. Finally, he understands that the only way out of time lies in death (the final ending to our personal narrative), but *La Jetée* problematizes this very notion by making the ending equivalent with the beginning.

The Man believes he can escape from the strictures of time, that he can rewrite his personal narrative and generate a utopian existence for himself, that he can create his own happy ending. But he has repressed one aspect of that day at Orly: his memory focuses upon the woman's face and neglects the person being gunned down next to his childhood self. While the Man overemplotted the woman's face, he underemplotted or even overwrote the murder. *La Jetée*'s ending proves especially significant because the end and beginning of the film are revealed to be same; thus, the film illustrates the manner in which every moment is essentially an insignificant point in the procession of linear time. Marker's film demonstrates the manner in which film makes moments special even without recourse to spectacle. By way of its counter-spectacle aesthetic, *La Jetée*

illustrates how cinema can translate the quotidian into the spectacular, how it can render plain reality into an estranging experience. While it lacks the spectacle generally associated with the genre, *La Jetée* effectively highlights how cinema makes even the most mundane events into sites of potential marvel: a group of men photographed in catacombs can become a cadre of post-apocalyptic survivors capable of sending people back in time. *La Jetée* foregoes the conventional spectacles that attend science fiction and demonstrates the manner in which all narrative remains science fiction, but to fully understand film's inherent science fictional nature, we must turn to another example of documentary science fiction: Shane Carruth's *Primer*.

## **II. The Forking Paths of Time: The Multiplicity of the Self in Shane Carruth's *Primer***

As Tom Gunning points out, “the system of attraction remains an essential part of popular filmmaking,” and most films achieve “a synthesis of attractions and narrative.”<sup>40</sup> But films like *La Jetée* structure themselves in a manner that divorces narrative from image in a manner that allows the critic to speculate upon the relation between the two cinematic tendencies. To more directly problematize the concepts of spectacle and narrative, we must now turn towards another documentary science fiction that also follows in the realistic tradition of the Lumières, one that similarly deals with time travel but in a realistically depicted, contemporary setting—Shane Carruth's *Primer*. *Primer*'s story concerns two entrepreneuring engineers with the distinctly Biblical names of Abe and Aaron who inadvertently create possibly the greatest invention in the history of the world: a time machine or temporal stasis chamber (the film never gives the device a name) that allows them to travel back to the recent past. *Primer*'s austere

cinematography and lack of special effects create a startlingly realistic mise-en-scène, almost as if we are watching a documentary about entrepreneurs instead of a science fiction film. *Primer* heightens its *cinéma vérité* feel by constantly shooting the characters in static long shots that make it seem as if they are being watched by a secret camera peaking in at the characters through their garage windows. For example, when they have built their first version of the machine, the pair sprinkle paper circles over it to test whether it is indeed emitting some sort of field. As they do so, the camera tracks left and begins shooting the machine through the video camera the two have set up to document the experiment. When the paper scraps stop in mid-air without succumbing to gravity, the audience feels as if they are actually watching a video lab report of the experiment.

In addition to such cinematographic and directorial choices, *Primer* also creates a realistic aesthetic by foregoing elaborate props or special effects. The machines (or boxes, as the characters often call them) are composed entirely of materials available at any hardware store. The film even depicts the characters scouring various everyday items from their environment, such as the palladium they harvest from the catalytic converter in Abe's car. As the film's narrative voice says, "They took from their surroundings what was needed and made of it something more"—this phrase becomes a sort of refrain throughout the film (1). Following along with this statement, the film even stages a dichotomy between two types of engineering: the high-powered and hyper-funded engineer who has endless materials and resources versus the ingenious, garage-based inventors who must be creative with what is available, the inventors who, we might say, engage in their profession through the practice of *bricolage*. The film highlights this difference during Abe and Aaron's discussion of how NASA's solution to writing in zero

gravity differed from the Soviet one. Because of the lack of gravity, traditional pens would not function in space, so NASA spent inordinate amounts of money creating a new pen that would work in the absence of gravity. The Soviets solved the problem in a much simpler fashion: they used pencils instead of pens.

The narrative describes the quartet of engineers in a way that again explains

*Primer's* aesthetic approach to the genre of science fiction:

Meticulous, yes. Methodical. Educated. They were these things. Nothing extreme. Like anyone, they varied. There were days of mistakes and laziness and infighting. And then there days, good days, when by anyone's judgment, they would have to be considered clever. No one would say that what they were doing was complicated. It wouldn't even be considered new. Except maybe in the geological sense.<sup>41</sup>

While this passage describes the characters, it also evokes *Primer's* relation to the genre of science fiction. The film's story is nothing new: time travel narratives have remained a science fiction mainstay for over a century, and narratives about the creation of alternate timelines and selves have also become common plot archetypes. But *Primer* takes these plotlines and creates something new. Like this statement, the film follows its events in a meticulous fashion, almost as if it is attempting to put the audience in the role of a scientist judging the evidence from a series of experiments. In addition, *Primer* eschews elaborate sets, famous actors and actresses, and dazzling special effects and chooses instead to appropriate what it needs from its surroundings and to make of it something more. Because the characters view their surroundings with an eye that sees the manner in which they can be deconstructed and rebuilt, the film from its very beginning forces the audience to consider the possibility that their normally stable definitions of reality do not represent the only readings of their environment. As the film peels away the layers of reality, it simultaneously deconstructs science fiction in a

manner that gestures towards the realization that all film (and perhaps even all narrative) proves to be science fiction. Like *La Jetée*, *Primer* reveals the estranging and spectacular nature of the objects that exist around us—it takes reality and reflects it back to us in a way that reveals its innate uncanniness.

*Primer* opens with blackness, which is quickly illuminated by lights coming on in a typical suburban American garage, a motif that runs throughout the film. From the camera's vantage point inside the garage, the shot depicts the door begin rising and four men entering the garage. Then, the scene features the non-diegetic sound of a phone ringing. Someone answers the phone and a voice speaks, "Here's what's going to happen. I'm going to read this and you're going to listen, and you're going to stay on the line. You're not going to interrupt. You're not going to speak for any reason. Now, some of this you know. I'm going to start at the top of the page" (1). From its outset, like *La Jetée*, *Primer* splinters itself between the narrative voice on the phone and the images projected for the viewer, the two of which do not always explain one another entirely. Because the interlocutor who is listening to the narrative voice never speaks, the film never offers clarification about the disjunctions that appear between the narrative produced by the flow of images and the one read by the voice on the phone. Furthermore, the massive gaps in the narrator's story never receive satisfactory explication. The film, like the statement that the voice reads, acts as a primer on the events that follow, but a primer that remains fundamentally incomplete. It functions like a beginner's handbook that is missing crucial sentences and paragraphs if not entire pages. For the majority of the film, the identities of the narrating voice and his listener remain unclear to the audience, but later the voice reveals that he is an alternate version

of Aaron created by the pair's travels through time, and the interlocutor (who is never identified) is presumably some version of Abe. In a sense, the narrator represents a voice from the future because Aaron has already experienced the present, thus highlighting the fact that the future already exists in the present or that the concept of the present is virtually meaningless. It is important here to note that *Primer*'s title functions as a double entendre that contains two meanings, both of which have meaningful relations to the film. The film itself acts as a primer, an introductory text for the viewer and for the interlocutor on the phone. At the same time, the word "primer" also evokes the notion of priming a machine. We might also say that the film deals with the priming (in both senses of the word) of the individual for a new kind of existence in which one's life narrative can be revised on a constant basis, thus opening the subject up to a radical experience of becoming.

Along with two other inventors/engineers, Abe and Aaron operate a garage-based mail-order company that supplies computer parts to hackers. But Abe and Aaron grow tired of fashioning these low-grade inventions and decide to pursue other avenues of experimentation in hopes of attracting corporate attention. Although the film never explains it precisely, Aaron and Abe begin by attempting to build a low-cost form of superconductor. In fact, the film never explains itself at all, an important facet of its plot that I will trace throughout the remainder of this chapter. But their experiments ultimately produce something entirely new, something that can only be described as a time machine or temporal stasis chamber (again, the film never gives the device a name). Early on, the film's coherence begins to fragment through techniques such as blackouts, the first of which occurs after Aaron and Abe have turned on the machine for the first

time. As they lift up the machine's cover to see the results of the experiment, the film abruptly cuts to black and then to an image of Abe waking up on a floor beside a phone, leaving the viewer to question whether or not the machine caused some sort of blackout or whether it is merely a jump cut. Like the beginning of the film, the blackness is broken by a phone ringing, and the sequence features multiple, jarring shots of Abe awakening to add to the confused feeling of the image. When Abe answers the phone, Aaron asks if he is hungry and then to alleviate Abe's sense of confusion, Aaron explains, "Abe, it's 7:00. Abe, it's 7:00 at night" (5). It is almost as if Abe needs to be reacquainted with time and to have his place in the narrative structure of reality explained for him. The film never explains such instances, thus leaving the viewer to supply his/her own narrative fillers. As we shall see, these absences of information highlight the manner in which the film interrogates the nature of cinema itself.

A large portion of the film consists of repeated versions of the same day, almost as if it is a cerebralized version of Harold Ramis's comedy *Groundhog Day* (1993).<sup>42</sup> The viewer's first experience of this day again opens with blackness, which is illuminated by a blinding light as Abe opens a rooftop door. As before, the relation between this scene and the previous one remains shadowy. On the first iteration of the day, which is already at least its second permutation, Abe promises to show Aaron "the most important thing any living organism has ever seen" (7). They constructed the device in their garage predominantly from common items such as copper tubing; again, "They took from their surroundings what was needed and made of it something more." The machine has two ends (an A end and a B end), which should be thought of as two points on opposite poles of an elongated oval. Whatever object enters the box at one end falls into a feedback

loop and curves parabolically around to the other end, but it consequently becomes untethered from normal physics; it only pops out on the other end after a significant number of cycles. In effect, the object in the device experiences a longer period of time than objects outside the machine. For instance, every five days, Abe wipes an amount of protein buildup out of the box that would require five to six years to produce. *Primer* never delves into the minds of its characters, and neither Abe nor Aaron ever offer their hypotheses in a straightforward fashion. After explaining the protein build-up to Aaron, Abe invites him to put his watch inside the machine. Initially, the two believe the machine degrades gravity or blocks information, but they discover that they are blocking something much more fundamental—time. As Abe explains,

Everything we're putting in that box becomes ungrounded. And I don't mean grounded to the earth, I mean not tethered. We're blocking whatever keeps it moving forward, so they flip-flop...But Aaron, the Weeble's stupid. It can't move. Even if we were to put the Weeble in at point B, it's still just going to bounce back and forth until it's kicked out at the B end. But if it were smart, it could enter at B end and exit at the A end before it flips back. (8)

At this point, the significance of the device still remains unclear, but nonetheless Abe surprises Aaron by revealing that he has already built a device large enough to accommodate a person.

He drives Aaron to a climate controlled storage facility, where Aaron witnesses a double of Abe entering one of the storage units. Abe has already used the device to travel back in time once, thus revealing this to be the second permutation of the day. Before continuing, I should briefly explain how the larger machines function. To set the machine, the user powers it up at the point in time to which s/he wants to return. Then, after a certain length of time has passed, the person enters the box, remains in it for that



determined period of time, and then exits the box at the moment when s/he switched on the box's power.<sup>43</sup> A delay timer keeps the person from meeting another version of their self. The boxes are basically constructed from collapsible metal frames with plastic tarps strung between the beams—they are flooded with argon and then must be tightened up to secure any leaks, for, as Abe explains, "There's always leaks" (10). And, as the film will display, there are always leaks in narrative, particularly film narrative which must condense stories down to a reasonable sitting length—*Primer* achieves this feat beautifully with its lean seventy-seven-minute running time. Instead of creating a hermetically sealed representation of reality, film acts like a sieve through which certain moments of time drip away. Film cannot depict every moment of time, so it must choose which pieces of time to include. In general, films condenses stories in a manner that will allow the audience to easily piece together the missing moments of time. But *Primer* refuses this convention of narrative cinema: it offers enough of the pieces to create a skeletal structure of its story, but then it purposefully leaves massive gaps in a manner that demonstrates how all film represents a science fictional experience because cinema in itself proposes the belief that reality can be captured and made sensible. Yet, as *Primer* demonstrates, the gaps in narrative perhaps harbor information that would fundamentally alter the meaning of the whole. The tension between narrative and spectacle in *Primer* is palpable throughout the film as the images and narrative voice conflict with one another, and ultimately the film depicts how our belief in stable visions will always ultimately prove as illusory as the film we are watching.

In their first attempts, Abe and Aaron travel through time in order to make modest sums of money by playing the stock market, a radical new version of "insider trading."

After the two power up the machines, they isolate themselves in a hotel room away from all contact with the world because, as Abe explains, “If we’re dealing with causality, and I don’t even know for sure...I just took myself out of the equation” (10). The two gather stock information and pick up two tanks of oxygen to allow them to breathe while inside the boxes. When the film depicts them entering the boxes for the first time, it cuts to black, which is again illuminated by a light coming on in the box. Then, Abe describes a particular moment he experiences inside the box, “I don’t know, maybe it was the Dramamine kicking in, but I remember this moment in there, in the dark with the reverberation of the machine. It was maybe the most content I’ve ever been” (10). Here, it is almost as if absenting one’s self from the flow of history and creating an existence for one’s self outside of time provides a profoundly blissful experience, almost as if it is time that causes us to suffer. When Aaron exits, he gets sick because he leaves the box too soon, for the return to time proves traumatic. They have returned to six hours earlier in the day, and they later revisit the storage facility and witness a duplicate version of themselves entering it. Thus, Abe and Aaron seem to have achieved their goal: they have created a marketable device, one of the greatest inventions humankind has ever witnessed, a page directly out of science fiction that has been transmitted into the real world.

Of course, human nature kicks in and Abe and Aaron’s curiosity drives them to further contemplate the implications of the machine. During a conversation, they discuss what action they would perform if they had absolute impunity, and Aaron expresses his desire to punch his boss in the face, but as he says, “I’d only do it though if I knew that no one would find out or get hurt. Like I wish there was a way that I could do it and then

go back and tell myself not to. Because I just want to know what it feels like. That's all, really" (12). The two discuss the infeasibility of the idea and attempt to play it off, but as the narrative voice states, "But the idea had been spoken and the words wouldn't go back after they had been uttered aloud...And with no need for it, no possible real-world application, no advantage at all to be gained from it, the idea stayed" (12). During their subsequent discussions of the absurdity of the idea, the two begin to consider the relation between time and identity; as Aaron says,

I'm not going to pretend like I know anything about paradoxes or what follows them, and honestly, I really don't believe in that crap. I mean kill your mom before you were born, whatever. It has to work itself out somehow...Look this is what I know for sure. About the worst thing in the world is to know that the moment you are experiencing has already been defined...and do you ever feel like... maybe things aren't right, like maybe your life is in disarray or just not what you would like and you start to wonder what caused this. But what if it wasn't something you had to wonder about? What if you knew for sure this is not the way things are supposed to be?

Thus, *Primer* questions the nature of the present, of the present as an illusion based on the human capacity to narrate and string one event together with the next, but even more fundamentally the film begins to explore the connection between memory and the self, between time and identity. Aaron finds himself discontented with the eternal return of the same—he desires to insert difference into his past, to not only create his life as a work of art in the present but to reshape his personal history and consequently to revise his identity. In effect, by splintering its narrative, *Primer* argues that our identities are never actually unified because they constantly fluctuate with the continually floating signifier of the present. Since the present can never be pinned down because it is always already past, identity remains fundamentally non-unifiable as well. But what if this was not the case? This is the question that Aaron decides to pursue.

Soon enough, the two begin traveling back more frequently to trade stocks and also for other, less clear purposes. Whether Aaron travels back to punch his boss in the face or not is never depicted, but the film suggests that he performed the deed, for, as the viewer discovers, Aaron has been taking trips back in time without Abe's knowledge. Soon, after one of their trips back to trade on stocks, Abe notices that Aaron has blood pouring out of his ear, but the significance of this occurrence is never explained. Instead, the viewer is left to presume that the machine has caused some sort of physical damage. At this point, what happens and does not happen becomes murky as the film increasingly splinters into a mosaic of different timelines. The film jump cuts across different places and times with few clear narrative connections, thus creating a disorienting effect that makes it impossible to distinguish which are the original versions of Abe and Aaron and which are the doppelgängers created by their travels. But whether the distinction between copy and original even matters becomes a question with no real answer in the film. Again, the film invites us to impose our own narrative upon the storyline in order to make sense of the fragments that have been presented to us.

This intensification of the film's narrative confusion begins when Abe and Aaron experience a strange incident: they see their friend Rachel's father, Mr. Granger, sitting in a car outside Aaron's house in the wee hours of the morning. They call him at his house only to discover that he is at home as well. They instantly realize that Granger has used the device and created a duplicate version of himself. The pair accost Granger, who flees and inexplicably falls into a vegetative state, and they remain incapable of determining when or how Granger entered one of the boxes because as the voice on the phone explains, "the permutations were endless" (16). How Granger even discovered the

machine, much less ascertained how to use it, remains a mystery that the film never resolves. The two travel back in a desperate attempt to reset the situation before Granger entered the box, yet Granger's double still exists and cannot get near Abe without falling into a vegetative state. But, as the narrative voice explains (although explains might be too strong a word), "From this they deduced that the problem was recursive, but beyond that, found themselves admitting, against their own nature, and once again, that the answer was unknowable" (15). While this statement applies to the situation with Mr. Granger, the narrator's statement could just as easily apply to the film itself: the film seems to repeatedly offer new realizations that will resolve its enigma but these realizations inevitably slip away into the chaotic vacuum of time that unfolds onscreen.

After the debacle with Granger, Abe decides that they have carried the experiments too far and that he must reset the situation. At this point, the film reveals the existence of the failsafe machine, a secret machine Abe had built and left running since day one in case the consequences began to spin out of their control, in case causality slapped them in the face. He enters the failsafe machine, returns to the first day, and approaches Aaron in a manner that duplicates the earlier scene. However, this iteration plays out differently when Aaron shockingly reveals that his earpiece actually contains a recording of the events of that day which play in his ear, giving him a three-second lead on the events that occur around him—the earpiece appears in the first permutation of the day, but initially the audience believes that Aaron is simply listening to basketball. Abe cannot fathom how this is possible, so Aaron reveals that he had already discovered the failsafe machine and used it to return to the first day. Aaron describes how the modular design of the boxes allows them to be folded up and taken back in time. After taking one

of the machines back with him, Aaron drugged that day's version of himself so that he could keep living the same day over and over again: "Aaron would describe how simple things become when you know precisely what someone will have for breakfast even in a world of tamper-proof lids" (16). On most iterations of the day, Aaron stashes his double's body in the attic; however, on one particular version of the day, his double struggles with him. At this point, the narrative voice reveals himself to be this double of Aaron who refused to be imprisoned in the attic: "And that's where I would have entered the story. Or exited, depending upon your reference" (16). When the double realizes that Aaron has recorded the day's conversations, he leaves—he takes himself out of the equation as Abe says in an earlier scene. Therefore, Aaron achieves a state in which he already knows the narrative of not only his own life but of those lives around him. He becomes capable of experiencing the present because it is known in advance and hence it can be fully lived before it slips away into the past. The present exists before him like an actuality film, such as those of Lumière, that allows him to control time and determine the shape of reality in a way that had previously only existed for filmmakers. He frames himself and directs the characters using his foreknowledge of the events that will unfold around him.

But why has Aaron chosen to relive this particular day? At the end of that fateful day, the two attended a birthday party only to witness their friend Rachel's ex-boyfriend enter the party with a shotgun. Deciding to use the device for ostensibly noble purposes, Aaron attempts to program the birthday party in such a way that he could act as the hero and stop Rachel's ex-boyfriend from threatening or even harming the other partygoers. While Abe offers a variety of other viable alternatives to prevent the encounter, Aaron

persists in his conviction that he must confront the irate ex-boyfriend: “This way, we know exactly what happens. We have complete control over it” (17). During this conversation, Abe interrupts Aaron and reveals that the machine has had other adverse side effects: “What’s wrong with our hands?...Why can’t we write like normal people?” Aaron responds, “I don’t know. I can see the letters. I know what they should look like. I just can’t get my hand to make them easily” (17). Because the two have created an existence for themselves outside of time, they begin to lose their ability to communicate through written language. Again, the film never explains this strange side effect, but we can speculate as to its implications. Like film, language unfolds according to a linear temporal scheme, and the pair of time travelers have violated such neat and tidy concepts of time and history to the point where they have become incapable of using language, incapable of interacting with the normal flow of time. Instead of the time being a line or even a circle as it becomes in *La Jetée*, *Primer* shatters such coherent and unified visions of time and replaces them with a dizzyingly, chaotic shape. Instead of a simple shape like the line or the loop, *Primer* creates a chaotic pattern that can only be compared to Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths” (1941). As Borges’s character Stephen Albert explains about his translation of Ts’ui Pên’s *The Garden of Forking Paths* (a fictional work in Borges’s story),

*The Garden of Forking Paths* is an incomplete, but not false, image of the universe as Ts’ui Pên conceived it. In contrast to Newton or Schopenhauer, your ancestor did not believe in a uniform, absolute time. He believed in an infinite series of times, in a growing, dizzying net of divergent, convergent, and parallel times. This network of times which approached one another, forked, broke off, or were unaware of one another for centuries, embraces *all* possibilities of time.<sup>44</sup>

Borges's (or Ts'ui Pên's, we might say) vision of the universe is one in which all possible scenarios are played out, in which ever action we take has the potential to splinter time and create alternate timelines. We cannot know whether the universe functioned that way before Abe and Aaron took their first trip back to the past, but once they have, then time begins to splinter: each path or timeline creates infinite new paths. The hedge maze of time becomes ever larger, more chaotic, and impossible to navigate.

It becomes impossible to tell how many alternate timelines and doubles of himself Aaron has created in his attempt to perfectly engineer that evening at Rachel's party. As the voiceover Aaron explains, the presumably original version of Aaron has replayed the scene numerous times before the audience actually sees it:

I can tell you with certainty what I did that night when it was my turn. But I think it would do little good because what the world remembers, the actuality, the last revision is what counts, apparently. So how many times did it take Aaron as he cycled through the same conversations lip-synching trivia over and over? How many times would it take before he got it right? Three? Four? Twenty? I've decided to believe that only one more would have done it. I can almost sleep at night if there is only one more. Slowly and methodically, he reverse-engineered a perfect moment. He took from his surroundings what was needed and made of it something more. And once the details had been successfully navigated, there would be nothing left to do but wait for the conflict. Maybe the obligatory last-minute moral debate until the noise of the room escalates into panic and background screams as the gunman walks in. And eventually he must have got it perfect and it must have been beautiful with all the praise and adoration he had coming. He had probably saved lives, after all. Who knows what would have happened if he hadn't been there? (17)

Not surprisingly, the film does not depict the interaction between Aaron and the shotgun-wielding partygoer, for the shot ends with Aaron walking over to accost him. Again, the audience is left to their own devices to supply the narrative that ensued. All we know is that Aaron was able to program a perfect moment by replaying the narrative numerous times. As it does so often, *Primer* denies us the spectacle that we expect. Whereas such



a violent confrontation would normally be included in the scene, *Primer* cuts the scene short without giving us the payoff. Examples such as this abound throughout the film, and they gesture towards the counter-spectacle aesthetic of the film. *Primer* forecloses meaning by never depicting the most crucial elements of the story and by never fully explaining the incidents it does choose to depict.

The penultimate scene of the film depicts Abe and Aaron conversing in an airport terminal. During their conversation, the film splices in images of the drugged versions of Abe and Aaron waking up and breaking out of the rooms in which they have been locked. Abe plans to stay and sabotage their development of the machines, but Aaron implies that he is only staying because he is in love with Kara, Aaron's wife: "Let's see, why would Abe stay? What possible reason could there be to be here? I guess that it just won't go back far enough, will it? Tell you what, why don't you take Kara and Lauren [Aaron's daughter] and put them in the box and then you and Aaron can each keep a set and you can stop feeding off it" (18). Aaron makes this comment in bitterness, but his words gesture towards the machine's capacity to duplicate reality. Like cinema, the machines have the power to copy people and project them back to themselves. Cinema makes us uncanny to ourselves and enables us to exist in new narratives—we can recast ourselves as new characters. By using a purely realistic aesthetic, cinema allows us to reorder reality in a manner that highlights the fundamental illusory nature of our concepts of existence.

The film's final shot reveals Aaron in an obviously foreign country with a group of French-speaking workmen who he is instructing on building a room-sized version of the box. Over this final shot, the voice ends its primer with these comments:

Now I have repaid any debt I may have owed you. You know all that I know. My voice is the only proof that you will have of the truth of any of this. I might have written a letter with my signature, but my handwriting is not what it used to be. Maybe you've had the presence of mind to record this. That's your prerogative. You will not be contacted by me again. And if you look you will not find me. (19)

The film abruptly cuts to black again before the credits begin to roll across a gray screen. Aaron has wholeheartedly accepted the new powers that the machine has granted him: he is now capable of revising the narrative of history; of inserting, subtracting, or changing his role in stories; and of restarting narratives from their beginning almost like one would push the reset button on a videogame console. Aaron becomes like a director of what William S. Burroughs would term the "reality film"—he can stage scenes, replay scenes, alter the script, or even take himself out of the scene altogether.

In the final analysis, then, *Primer* highlights how the medium of film itself represents a science fiction because film uses technology to force unity upon the experience of reality, it creates the illusion of worlds in which life falls into neat narrative storylines. By foregoing traditional sci-fi spectacle and generating a documentary-style aesthetic of realism, *Primer* demonstrates how the reality projected by cinema always represents a science fiction—it is always reality distilled into a framed image, lives reduced to fragments of a story, the universe slowed down to twenty-four frames per second. *Primer* brings the science fictional nature of cinema into sharp relief through its use of realism, jump cuts, plot holes, and other alienating effects, which turn *Primer* into a puzzle that may or may not have a solution. Like Granger's trip back in time, the permutations for the answer to the logical problem that is *Primer* remain endless. *Primer* fractures itself in order to reveal to the viewer that existence is fundamentally chaotic, that if there is unity then it has been forced upon existence by the human capacity to

narrate events into coherence. Ultimately, *Primer* highlights how science fiction serves as a form of critical theory by deconstructing our most fundamental notions not just of narrative and cinema but also of order, coherence, and unity.

### **III. Conclusion: The World as Spectacle**

From the spectacle of the cinematograph itself to the trick cinema of Méliès to the modern-day blockbuster, cinema has increasingly strived to create ever more elaborate spectacles in an attempt to capture the attention of ever-larger audiences. In fact, the blockbusters of today could be said to be regressing back to the cinema of attractions because they increasingly privilege spectacle and visual shocks over plot and characterization. Today, films are no longer even required to have connections to the real world—they can fashion their *mise-en-scène* entirely through the use of computer graphics. Films like James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) break all connections to our reality and partake fully in the formative tradition—they even eschew staging, in its traditional sense at least, by digitally sculpting the environment in which their characters interact. Indeed, *Avatar* epitomizes the aesthetic aspirations of most science fiction cinema: it takes us on breath-taking rides through completely alien worlds and introduces us to estranging forms of subjectivity. But *La Jetée* and *Primer* participate in a different science fiction tradition, a counter-spectacle tradition that blurs the line between realistic and fantastic cinema, between Lumières and Méliès. Increasingly, we can find other examples of documentary science fiction as the reality around us becomes ever more estranging, almost as if we already live in the future. For the most part, Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006) participates in a similar documentary-style aesthetic: its

images of a world in which women can no longer get pregnant never differs drastically from our own world. Indeed, the footage of urban warfare could just as easily have come from a news report on Iraq or any other war-torn nation. Furthermore, Cuarón's long takes using handheld cameras give the impression that the film is actually being shot by a battlefield correspondent or documentary filmmaker. Even more recently, Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009) staged itself as a documentary following the arrival, segregation, and attempted removal of a group of aliens who lands in South Africa. Despite the computer-generated alien creatures, the slums of District 9 (the section of Johannesburg reserved for these interplanetary refugees) could just as easily have existed in any number of countries across the globe where people have been displaced by genocide or other geopolitical forces. While films like *Avatar* may push the boundaries of cinematic technology and gesture towards the future of the filmic medium, films like *La Jetée*, *Primer*, *Children of Men*, and *District 9* provide a much more profound insight: they show us that our world is already science fiction, that the dystopianism of these futuristic worldsapes are the problems of our own global civilization, and that the fractured realities that wind off the reels and onto the screen are nothing less than the lives we lead everyday.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> This line is spoken by Alpha 60, the computer that runs the city Jean-Luc Goddard's *Alphaville*, DVD, (1965; U.S.A: Janus Films/Home Vision Cinema/The Criterion Collection, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> Of course, there are many classic examples of this use of the genre, particularly among dystopian literature: George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) both comment upon totalitarian regimes such as Stalin's; Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), George Lucas's *THX-1138* (1971), and Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* (1985) criticize fascism, to boil them down into the most simplistic terms possible; Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) investigates the disintegration of youth culture as well as the horrifying prospect of programming human beings; Burgess's *The Wanting Seed* (1962), Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), and William F. Nolan and George Clayton Johnson's *Logan's Run* (1967) or Michael Anderson's eponymous film all explore population growth problems and governmental attempts to control them; and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) uses a society oppressive to women to criticize current gender roles.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent example of this, see William Gibson's *Spook Country* (2007) and its depiction of new uses for GPS technology. Other examples exist throughout the history of science fiction: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1831) and H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) both imagine new uses of vivisection to create new forms of life; Roger Corman's film *X: The Man With the X-Ray Eyes* (1963) depicts the introduction of X-Ray vision so powerful that one can see into the heart of God at the center of universe; Darren Aronofsky's  $\pi$  (1998) tells the story of a mathematician in the present who develops a computer system capable of predicting fluctuations in the stock market (or in any other number system for that matter); and, as we shall in the second half of this chapter, Shane Carruth's *Primer* imagines the creation of a temporal stasis chamber.

<sup>4</sup> For an example of science fiction's reflections on the present, one need only consider the slew of American science fiction films in the 1950s (and somewhat in the early 1960s) that dealt with lingering fears from World War II and the ensuing Cold War: communist infiltration, nuclear annihilation, global warfare, and mutations from nuclear testing to name only a few. For example, Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), Don Siegel's *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), Gordon Douglas's *Them!* (1954), Ishirō Honda's *Gojira* (1954, more commonly known in the United States as *Godzilla*), William Cameron Menzies's *Invaders from Mars* (1953), Ray Milland's *Panic in Year Zero!* (1962), and Harry Horner's *Red Planet Mars* (1952) all use alien invaders, mutated creatures, or apocalyptic scenarios to imagine the potentially disastrous effects of WWII and Cold War technology. But there are also numerous works that depict alien civilizations that are comprised of humans who may or may not retain ties to Earth. Among such works, two of the most classic examples are Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* (1951) and its numerous sequels and Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), which led to a franchise that is still being continued by his son. Both Asimov and Herbert use their novels to explore the nature of political systems and rebellions.

<sup>5</sup> The most classic example of the alternative present is no doubt Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), which depicts an alternate Earth in which the Axis defeated the Allies in WWII and in which North America was consequently partitioned into Japanese and German zones. Such alternative histories have also increasingly proliferates in the works of non-SF authors. For example, Vladimir Nabokov's *Invitation of a Bodyguard* (1969) takes place in an alternate version of North America in which most of the continent is controlled by Tsarist Russia and in which our version of Earth exists as a mystical other world (although perhaps only in the mind of the protagonist Van Veen). More recently, Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America* (2004) imagines another alternate World War II scenario by depicting the birth of a grassroots Nazism movement in the United States due to the election of Charles Lindbergh as president of the United States.

<sup>6</sup> In fact, the history of literature over the last two centuries is replete with fantastic tales of individuals experiencing temporal displacement. From more strictly literary works such as Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" (1819), Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and Charles

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Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843) to more conventionally science fictional genre pieces like Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward: 2000-1887* (1888) and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was filled with meditations upon the possibilities of temporal displacement whether through supernatural, technological, or more ambiguous means. In the twentieth century, the time travel narrative continued to flourish in classics such as Robert Heinlein's "By His Bootstraps" (1941), Ray Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder" (1952), Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity* (1955), Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), and Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) to name only a few in the world of literature. Elsewhere, in the cinematic world, directors have produced a variety of time travel films: Don Taylor's *The Final Countdown* (1980), James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), Michael Anderson's *Millennium* (1989), and Eric Bress and J. Mackye Gruber's *The Butterfly Effect* (2004). Time travel has remained such a persistent theme in science fiction novels, stories, and films that it has even spawned numerous farcical texts: Woody Allen's *Sleeper* (1973), Terry Gilliam's *Time Bandits* (1981), Robert Zemeckis's *Back to the Future* (1985), Harold Ramis's *Groundhog Day* (1993), and Matt Groening's *Futurama* animated series (1999-2003, 2008-present). Even earlier than these science fiction texts, modernist literature harbored an obsession with time and human consciousness's ability to exist in different times simultaneously through the power of memory. Indeed, Marcel Proust's monumental *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time* or *Remembrance of Things Past*, as it is often translated [1913-1927]) could be read as an examination of how sensory perceptions allow an individual to travel back in time to an early period in one's life. We can even see how time and its relation to human society and identity have affected non-SF works as well. For example, Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* (1991) functions almost like a time travel narrative because its plot moves backwards to reveal its main character's history as a Nazi. Similarly, Christopher Nolan's film *Memento* (2000) proceeds backwards in time to interrogate the relation between memory and identity. And Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* (2002), probably the most avant-garde rape-revenge film ever created, starts with the brutal murder of a man in a gay S&M club, and then proceeds backwards to reveal the rape that precipitated this act of revenge. For a full study of the various scientific theories and literary depictions of time travel, see Paul J. Nahin's *Time Machines: Time Travel in Physics, Metaphysics, and Science Fiction* (New York: American Institute of Physics, 1993). *Worlds Enough and Time: Explorations of Time in Science Fiction and Fantasy*, eds. Gary Westfahl, George Slusser, and David Leiby (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002) is also a useful anthology of articles on different depictions of time travel.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Coates, "Chris Marker and the Cinema as Time Machine," *Science Fiction Studies* 14.3 (Nov. 1987): 307.

<sup>8</sup> Constance Penley, "Time Travel, Primal Scene, and the Critical Dystopia," in *Close Encounters : Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction*, ed. Constance Penley (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1991. 63-80), rpt. in *Liquid Metal: The Science Fiction Film Reader*, ed. Sean Redmond (London and New York: Wallflower P, 2004) 128.

<sup>9</sup> For a fairly complete retrospective of Méliès's career, see the DVD collection of his films entitled *Georges Méliès: The First Wizard of Cinema (1896-1913)* (U.S.A: Flicker Alley, 2008). For the Lumière brothers' films, see the collection entitled *Landmarks of Early Cinema, Vol. 1* (U.S.A.: Image Entertainment, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Sigfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1960) 34.

<sup>11</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film* 34.

<sup>12</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film* 35.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997) 116.

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<sup>14</sup> Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, eds. Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (London: BFI Publishing, 1990) 58.

<sup>15</sup> Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions" 58.

<sup>16</sup> At least since his relationship with the Dogme-95 group, Lars von Trier's films have always reveled in scandal and shock. The graphic sex of *Breaking the Waves* (1996), which concerns a woman who decides that prostituting herself will bring her paraplegic husband help from God, the lack of sets and the disturbing rape scenes of *Dogville* (2003); and the recent shock surrounding *Antichrist* (2009), which features explicit sex and graphic torture, attest to a filmmaker who strives to push boundaries and promote visceral reactions. In fact, von Trier's *Antichrist* allegedly induced Lumière-style reactions in the audience: the genital mutilation scene supposedly not only caused people to leave the theatre but also caused fainting and epileptic fits in its audience members. Since the beginning of his career, Von Trier has created films that operated on the boundaries between science fiction, horror, and traditional realistic cinema: *The Element of Crime* (1984), *Epidemic* (1987), *Europa* (1991), and *Antichrist* all blur genre boundaries to create Von Trier's uniquely disturbing brand of cinema. Similarly, Nagisa Oshima has produced films like *Empire of Passion* (1978) and *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976) that have pushed the boundaries between artistic portrayals of sexual intercourse and pornography. And Michael Haneke pushes the boundaries of violence and sexuality in numerous films. Most notably, *The Piano Teacher* (2001) features the inclusion of pornographic scenes as well as disturbing sexual fetishes in its main characters. Haneke also commonly includes scenes of violence more aberrant than mainstream cinema, partly because he films them in a cold, clinical, and emotionally detached style: *The Seventh Continent* (1989), *Benny's Video* (1992), *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994), and *Funny Games* (1997) all feature disturbing accounts of extreme violence that become even more disquieting because Haneke's detached camera never seems to condone or condemn them but merely to record them as natural occurrences in the postmodern landscape.

<sup>17</sup> In *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (1911; Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998) Bergson actually argued that the cinema could serve as a metaphor for the "mechanism of our ordinary knowledge" because "we take snapshots [...] of the passing reality" that "our perception, intellection, [and] language" then "string" together (306). Thus, for Bergson, cinema mirrors our natural perceptual schema, but in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (1983; Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) Deleuze argues that Bergson's vision of cinema is flawed because he was writing during the earliest stage of cinema (the days of the Lumières and their peers), and "the essence of a thing never appears at the outset, but in the middle, in the course of its development, when its strength is assured [...] Is not cinema at the outset forced to imitate natural perception?" (3). For Deleuze, cinema violates the laws of natural perception through the specific linkages that exist between individual shots or photograms (frames): film can call upon a variety of transitional film editing techniques (wipes, dissolves, fade-ins and fade-outs, match cuts, and jump cuts) that allow for instantaneous spatial displacement; the film's plot can use an array of techniques (flashbacks, flashforwards, and memories) to violate the normal linear logic of time; and films can even employ an assortment of optical effects (filters, gels, canted angles, and the entire world of special effects) to create a skewed view of reality or an alternate state of consciousness. I am indebted to Gregory Flaxman's article "Cinema Year Zero" from *The Brain and the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 2000. 87-108.) for help with explicating the connection between Deleuze and Bergson.

<sup>18</sup> Chris Marker, dir., *La Jetée*, in *La Jetée and Sans Soleil: Two Films by Chris Marker*, DVD, (1962; U.S.A: Janus Films/The Criterion Collection, 2007) Scene 1. Unless otherwise noted, the quotes from *La Jetée* are derived from the English dub of the film. Hereafter, parenthetical references in section one of this chapter will refer to the scene numbers on the Criterion DVD version of *La Jetée*.

<sup>19</sup> Coates, "Cinema as Time Machine" 312.

<sup>20</sup> D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1997) 4.

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<sup>21</sup> Zeno's paradoxes rest upon a fundamental illusion about infinity, for, as set theory teaches us, there are many levels of infinity, some of which can be traversed by Achilles and others that cannot be. As Aristotle responds to Zeno's paradox of Achilles and the tortoise in his *Physics*, "So when someone asks the question whether it is possible to traverse infinite things—either in time or in distance—we must reply that in a way it is but in a way it is not. For if they exist actually, it is not possible, but if potentially, it is; for someone in continuous movement has traversed infinite things incidentally, not without qualification; for it is incidental to the line to be infinitely many halves, but its essence and being are different" (§321). Again, as set theory teaches us, there are different orders of infinity, and Zeno's paradoxes represent a fundamental misconstruing of the nature of space and time. In *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M Paul and W.S. Palmer (1908; New York: Zone Books, 1991), Bergson refutes Zeno by explaining how time is not ultimately divisible into instants because motion is indivisible, and "this indivisibility of motion implies, then, the impossibility of real instants [...] The Arguments of Zeno of Elea have no other origin than this illusion. They all consist in making time and movement coincide with the line which underlies them, in attributing to them the same subdivisions as to the line, in short, in treating them like the line" (190-1). This translation of Aristotle derives from G. S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield's *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1983) 271. Their book collects all of the extant fragments and ancient discussions of Zeno and offers them in the original Greek with translations and critical discussion. For this section, see pages 269-79. For the complete texts of Aristotle's *Physics*, see *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Vol. 1 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1984) 315-446.

<sup>22</sup> Also, like Zeno's paradoxes, film generally reduces the multiplicity of time to the linear pattern, to a neat narrative line. As Gregg Flaxman argues in "Cinema Year Zero" from *The Brain and the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, ed. Gregory Flaxman (Minneapolis and London: U of Minnesota P, 2000), "perception constitutes the dark surface on which the ceaseless flow of images is momentarily captured and thereby transformed into a set," and film seems to replicate this ordering capacity of perception (94).

<sup>23</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (1980; New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 85.

<sup>24</sup> Coates, "Cinema as Time Machine" 312.

<sup>25</sup> Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue* (1966; Oxford, UK: 2000) 4-5.

<sup>26</sup> Constance Penley, "Time Machine" 132.

<sup>27</sup> Chris Marker, dir., *Sans Soleil*, in *La Jetée and Sans Soleil: Two Films by Chris Marker*. DVD. (1983; U.S.A: Janus Films/The Criterion Collection, 2007) Chapter 4: "Rewriting Memory." *Sans Soleil* (or "sunless") is Marker's avante-garde documentary that features images from around the world, mostly from Japan and Africa, which are tied together, as in *La Jetée*, by the narrative voice. The female narrator's identity is never revealed, and the viewer only knows that a friend of hers has shot the footage we are watching and sent her a series of letters accompanying the films. As the images unspool before the audience, the narrator reads the letters she has received. In the letters, the cameraman meditates upon the nature of time and memory and their relation to different cultures. Thus, *Sans Soleil* proves that time remained a constant source of inspiration and exploration for Marker over the twenty years that separate these two films.

<sup>28</sup> Kracauer, *Theory of Film* 35.

<sup>29</sup> Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978) 86-7.



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<sup>30</sup> When White discusses overemplotment, he is using the term to discuss the manner in which analysands overemplot certain moments from their past. While White is, of course, discussing narrative in general, Penley actually discusses time travel in terms of fixation and regression. In fact, her essay compares Marker's *La Jetée* with James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984) by staging the time travel in both films as an exploration of the primal scene since *The Terminator* actually involves revolutionary leader John Connor sending his father to the past to conceive himself in the future. Penley points out that *La Jetée* similarly features a man traveling through time for the love of a woman, a love that is spawned by an image from his childhood. Elena del Rio also couches the film in psychoanalytic terms when she claims that it "conceives of human desire as a rigid fixation whose reality is anchored in the past (the temporal mode of loss) more firmly than in the future (the temporal mode of fulfillment)" (383). Indeed, the analysand's experience of dream analysis during psychoanalysis provides a useful corollary here that will help to demonstrate the manner in which narrative functions as a synthesis of the chaotic manifold of sensory perceptions. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* [trans. James Strachey (1900; New York: Avon Books, 1965), Freud explains that "to complete a dream-analysis" requires the act of a "dream-synthesis" (345). In other words, as Freud proceeds to explain, "When the whole mass of dream-thoughts is brought under the pressure of the dream-work, and its elements are turned about, broken into fragments and jammed together—almost like pack-ice—the question arises of what happens to the logical connections which have hitherto formed its framework. What representations do dreams provide for 'if,' 'because,' 'just as,' 'although,' 'either—or,' and all the other conjunctions without which we cannot understand sentences and speeches? In the first resort our answer must be that dreams have no means at their disposal for representing these logical relations between dream-thoughts. For the most part dreams disregard all these conjunctions, and it is only the substantive content of the dream-thoughts that they take over and manipulate. The restoration of the connections which the dream-work has destroyed is a task which has to be performed by the interpretive process" (Freud, *Dreams* 347). Thus, only through the interpretative process can a patient's dream achieve a state of narrative coherence. Of course, it would be a fallacy to directly equate the illogical nature of the dream experience to perceptions of everyday life, but a similar narrative act must constantly attend an individual's sensory impressions—only through the cohesive capacity of narrative can a person force unity upon the chaotic manifold.

<sup>31</sup> Coates, "Cinema as Time Machine" 310.

<sup>32</sup> Marker's refusal to give the characters proper names further strengthens the feeling that the film serves as a kind of lab report in which the couple are nothing more than subjects, guinea pigs whose names do not bear remembering. In addition, their lack of proper nouns to designate themselves generates the potential for their writing their own personal narratives. Generally, one's personal narrative (or array of narratives) accrues around the proper name, the signifier used to designate the subject. But, in *La Jetée*, subjects become disconnected from their narratives—they reveal that there really is no signified underlying the signifier. Identity cannot be predicated so easily, for the subject's identity is truly formed by relation to the nebulous cloud of narrative fragments that surround the subject. Furthermore, as Paul Coates points out, "The nameless subject—his namelessness a metaphor for the damage consciousness has suffered, but also a means of easing our identification with him, since we too are viewers of images—may see "a happy face" from the past, but it is always 'different': no longer reality, only an image; no longer present, but framed as 'past'" (310).

<sup>33</sup> The scene from *Vertigo* takes place in a sequoia forest, and it features similar dialogue to the interaction between the Man and the Woman in *La Jetée*. In *Vertigo*, DVD (1958; Universal City, CA: Universal 1999), the scene is a meditation upon time, death, and history as Madeline and Scottie stand among "the oldest living things" and think "of all the people who've been born and died while the trees kept on living" (Scene 15). Like Marker's couple, Hitchcock's pair also stand before a cross-section of sequoia, and Madeline, pretending that she believes herself to be her ancestor, points to where she was born and died. *Vertigo* provides the perfect film for Marker to allude to in *La Jetée* because it also concerns individuals who are "glued" to images from the past. First, Madeleine Elster (played by Kim Novak) is obsessed with her great grandmother, Carlotta Valdes, who committed suicide. In fact, she is so obsessed with her that she patterns her appearance after a portrait of Carlotta that hangs in San Francisco's Legion of Honor Museum: she adopts the same spiral hairstyle and carries a replica of Carlotta's pink bouquet. Of course,

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the Madeleine with whom Scottie (James Stewart) and the audience become acquainted ends up being Judy Barton, a woman who Gavin Elster hired to impersonate his wife and aid in making her murder look like a suicide. Scottie meets Judy and becomes enamored of her because of her resemblance to Madeleine, so he reshapes her appearance until she exactly matches his memory of Madeleine including the same color and style of hair, the same bouquet, and the same gray suit. Thus, like *La Jetée*, *Vertigo* concerns the power that images from the past can continue to hold over an individual's life.

<sup>34</sup> The connections between *Vertigo* and *La Jetée* do not end with just these two films, for this scene in the Sequoia forest recurs in two subsequent films: Marker's own *Sans Soleil* and Terry Gilliam's *12 Monkeys*, which was inspired by *La Jetée*. In *Sans Soleil*, on *La Jetée and Sans Soleil: Two Films by Chris Marker*, DVD (1983; U.S.A: Janus Films/The Criterion Collection, 2007), the cameraman's letters reflect upon the depiction of time in Hitchcock's *Vertigo*: "He wrote me that only one film has been capable of portraying impossible memory, insane memory: Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. In the spiral of the opening titles, he saw time covering a field growing ever wider as it moved away, a cyclone whose present moment contains the motionless eye" (Scene 18). The cameraman is obsessed with the spiral nature of time, and indeed Hitchcock's film is a text filled with spirals, so the cameraman reproduces Scottie's journey in order to delve into the mysterious force of Hitchcock's film: "In San Francisco, he'd gone on a pilgrimage to all the film's locations. The florist Podesta Baldocchi, where James Stewart spies on Kim Novak, he the hunter and she the prey—or was it the other way around? The tile floor hadn't changed. He'd driven up and down the hills of San Francisco where Jimmy Stewart—Scottie—follows Kim Novak—Madeleine. It seems to be about pursuit, mystery, and murder, but in truth it's about power and freedom, melancholy and dazzlement, so carefully coded within the spiral that you could miss it and not immediately notice that this vertigo of space in reality stands for the vertigo of time. He'd followed every trail even to the cemetery at Mission Dolores where Madeleine prayed at the grave of a woman long dead whom she should not have known. He'd followed Madeleine—as Scottie had done—to the museum of the Legion of Honor, before the portrait of a dead woman she shouldn't have known. And on the portrait, as in Madeleine's hair, the spiral of time. The Victorian hotel where Madeleine disappeared had itself disappeared. Concrete had replaced it at the corner of Eddie and Gough. But the cross-section of redwood trunk was still in Muir Woods. On it, Madeleine traced the short distance between two of those concentric lines that measure the age of the tree and said, 'Here I was born and there I died.' He remembered another film in which this passage was quoted: the redwood was in the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, and the hand pointed to a place beyond the tree—outside of time. The painted horse at San Juan Bautista, with an eye that looked like Madeleine's—Hitchcock had invented nothing. It was all there. He'd run under the arches in the mission as Madeleine had run towards her death—but was it really hers? From this fake tower—the only thing Hitchcock added—he imagined Scottie as 'Time's Fool of Love,' unable to live with memory without falsifying it, inventing a double of Madeleine in another dimension of time, a Zone that would belong only to him, from which he could decipher the undecipherable story begun under the Golden Gate when he pulled Madeleine out of San Francisco Bay, when he'd saved her from death before casting her back to death—or was it the other way around?" (Scene 18). Thus, Marker even makes reference to his own earlier film (*La Jetée*) when the cameraman remembers having seen another film with a similar scene involving a sequoia. But this is not the end of the *Vertigo/La Jetée* connection, for Terry Gilliam resurrects Marker's Hitchcock allusion in his remake/reimagining of *La Jetée*, *12 Monkeys*, DVD: Special Edition (1995; United States: Universal, 2005). In *12 Monkeys*, James Cole (Bruce Willis in the role of the Man) and Dr. Kathryn Railly (Madeleine Stowe as the Woman) hide out in movie theatre that is running a twenty-four hour Hitchcock marathon. As Kathryn is putting a disguise on James, the sequoia scene from *Vertigo* is playing in a front of them, a scene that puts James into a trance similar to Madeleine's in *Vertigo* and causes him to reflect upon the nature of time: "I think I've seen this movie before. When I was a kid, I saw it on TV. I did see it before. I don't recognize this part. It's just like what's happening with us. Like the past, the movie never changes. It can't change, but every time you see it, it seems different because you were different. You see different things" (Scene 35).

<sup>35</sup> Coates, "Cinema as Time Machine" 312.

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<sup>36</sup> Coates, "Cinema as Time Machine" 312. In this passage, Coates refers to him as the man/child, which leads one to ponder one fundamental aspect of the film that critics have yet to discuss. It is clear that when the Man visits the Woman she is of about the same age as she was during the child's glimpse of her on the pier at Orly, but it is never clear whether his visits to her from the future occur before or after that day at Orly.

<sup>37</sup> Bob Dylan, "Visions of Johanna," *Lyrics 1962-2001* (1966; New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004). The line stems from Dylan's song "Visions of Johanna," which first appeared on the album *Blonde on Blonde* (1966). Dylan's song is about the force of memory and the power it can continue to exert over us throughout our lives. In the museum verse, Dylan not only illustrates the illusory nature of the museum's version of infinity, but he also comments that "this is what salvation must be like after a while," implying that immortality might signify nothing more than a freezing into stasis. And, as we shall see, stasis proves to be important in both *La Jetée* and *Primer*.

<sup>38</sup> Coates, "Cinema as Time Machine" 311.

<sup>39</sup> George Slusser and Daniele Chatelain, "Spacetime Geometries: Time Travel and the Modern Geometrical Narrative," *Science Fiction Studies* 22.2 (July 1995): 168.

<sup>40</sup> Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions" 60.

<sup>41</sup> Carruth, Shane, dir., *Primer*, DVD, (2004; United States: New Line Home Entertainment, 2005) Scene 1. For the remainder of the chapter, parenthetical references will refer to the scene numbers on the DVD version of *Primer*.

<sup>42</sup> Indeed, *Primer* recalls Nietzsche's thought experiment from *The Gay Science* involving the eternal return of the same in which the reader is asked to imagine a demon appearing and offering the prospect of him/her reliving the same moment over and over again for eternity: "The greatest stress. How, if some day or night, a demon were to sneak after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you, 'this life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything immeasurably small or great in your life must return to you—all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over and over, and you with it, dust grain of dust.' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or did you once experience a tremendous moment when you would have answered him, 'You are a god, and never have I heard anything more godly.' If this thought were to gain possession of you, it would change you, as you are, or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, 'Do you want this one more and innumerable times more?' would weigh upon your actions as the greatest stress. Or how well disposed would you have become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal? (§341) For the Man in *La Jetée*, he once experienced such a moment on the pier at Orly, and hence he craves the return of this one perfect moment in time. Similarly, as we shall see, *Primer* concerns the replication of one particular moment by means of the power of time travel. Nietzsche's eternal return represents a meditation both upon the nature of memory and identity and the relation of both to time and repetition.

<sup>43</sup> To fully understand the depiction of time in the film, one must understand the nature of personal versus absolute time, a division that is established alongside Einstein's theory of relativity. For Aristotle, whose discussion of time in his *Physics* remains one of the earliest attempts to define the concept, time is related purely to perceptions of movement—it cannot be said to exist in itself. As he states, "when, therefore, we perceive the 'now' as one, and neither as before or after in a motion nor as the same element but in relation to a 'before' and an 'after', no time is thought to have elapsed, because there has been no motion either. On the other hand, when we do perceive a 'before' and an 'after', then we say that there is time. For time is just this—number of motion in respect of 'before' and 'after'. Hence time is not movement, but only movement in so far as it admits of enumeration. An indication of this: we discriminate the more or less by

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number, but more or less movement by time. Time then is a kind of number. (Number, we must note, is used in two ways—both of what is counted or countable and also, of that with which we count. Time, then, is what is counted, not that with which we count: these are different kinds of things.) Just as motion is a perpetual succession, so also is time. But every simultaneous time is the same; for the ‘now’ is the same in substratum—though its being is different—and the ‘now’ determines time, in so far as time involves the before and after (219a30-219b13). I quote Aristotle at such length because this passage raises a variety of problems surrounding time, and he continues to argue for the dependence of time upon movement. Furthermore, time, like Aristotle notes with number, has numerous, subtly different meanings. Time and movement are codependent upon one another because movement requires a duration while similarly the passage of time denotes at least a minimal form of movement. In order to note the passage of time, then objects must move through space, the hands of the clock must be seen spinning, and the sun must continue its trek through the sky. But, importantly, for Aristotle, time is not distinct from human perception: it is merely a categorical measure that can be counted. One of the fundamental divisions in philosophies of time is absolute versus relative. In his *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1686), Sir Isaac Newton claims that “absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself and from its own nature, flows equitably without relation to anything external” (qtd. in *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., general ed. Robert Audi [New York: Cambridge UP, 1999] 922). In *A Brief History Time: The Updated and Expanded Tenth Anniversary Edition* (1988; New York: Bantam Books, 1996), Stephen Hawking explains the correlation between these two concepts of time: “Both Newton and Aristotle believed in absolute time. That is, they believed that one could unambiguously measure the interval of time between two events, and that this time would be the same whoever measured it, provided they use a good clock. Time was completely separate from and independent of space” (18). Thus, for Newton, time remained the same for all subjects provided they counted the same and used equally reliable clocks. In the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, time increasingly has come to be seen as an objective component of reality, not as a purely perceptual phenomenon. In particular, the theories of Albert Einstein and Kurt Gödel argue for time as an empirical dimension of reality, and Gödel even argues that time travel proves to be a mathematical possibility. Einstein developed the theory of relativity that has as its “fundamental postulate” the theory “that the laws of science should be the same for all freely moving observers, no matter what their speed. This was true for Newton’s laws of motion, but now the idea was extended to include Maxwell’s theory and the speed of light: all observers should measure the same speed of light, no matter how fast they are moving” (Hawking *History* 20-1). As Stephen Hawking explains, this theorem has numerous revolutionary consequences. First, based on this theory, mass and energy become equivalent ( $E=mc^2$  or Energy = mass times the speed of light squared). According to this equation, the energy that an object generates in order to produce its motion will cause its mass to increase. Thus, an object can never reach the speed of light because its mass will increase so exponentially that it would be incapable of generating enough energy to propel itself. But it is the second major consequence of relativity that concerns us here, and this is the fact that “has revolutionized our ideas of space and time” (Hawking *History* 21). As Hawking explains, “in relativity, all observers must agree on how fast light travels. They still, however, do not agree on the distance the light has traveled, so they must therefore now also disagree on the time it has taken. (The time taken is the distance the light has traveled—which the observers do not agree on—divided by the light’s speed—which they do agree on.) In other words, the theory of relativity put an end to the idea of absolute time! It appeared that each observer must have his own measure of time, as recorded by a clock carried with him, and that different clocks carried by different observers would not necessarily agree” (Hawking *History* 21-2). Furthermore, “the theory of relativity...force[s] us to change fundamentally our ideas of space and time. We must accept that time is not completely separate from space, but is combined with it to form an object called space-time” (Hawking *History* 23). In 1949, Kurt Gödel further revolutionized our conception of space-time by taking Einstein’s theory of relativity to new heights. He imagines a new form of space-time that would legitimately grant the possibility of time travel, a prospect for which Einstein did not believe relativity allowed. As Hawking again explains, Gödel’s version of space-time “had the curious property that the whole universe was rotating” (Hawking *History* 160). If the universe is rotating, then an individual could theoretically leave a planet in a spaceship and return to it at an earlier point in time. Hawking explains that Gödel’s image of the universe proves illusory because we can now provide evidence that the universe does not rotate. But, Hawking also explains, that scientists continue to pursue the question of time travel because the possibility still exists.

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<sup>44</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths,” in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings* (1941; New York: New Directions, 1962) 28.

**CHAPTER 6**  
**CONCLUSION: THE HUMAN EQUATION: COMPUTERIZED AND**  
**TRANSCENDENT SUBJECTIVITY IN KUBRICK AND CLARKE'S**  
***2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY***

And thus spoke Zarathustra to the people: "The time has come for man to set himself a goal. The time has come for man to plant the seed of his highest hope. His soil is rich enough. But one day this soil will be poor and domesticated, and no tall tree will be able to grow in it. Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer shoot the arrow of his longing beyond man, and the string of his bow will have forgotten how to whirl! I say unto you: one must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star. I say unto you: you still have chaos in yourselves. Alas, the time is coming when man will no longer give birth to a star. Alas, the time of the most despicable man is coming, he that is no longer able to despise himself. Behold, I show you the *last man*."

- Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen science fiction and critical theory both represent inquiries into the human, and, in essence, I contend that it is partly these explorations that link the two discursive spaces. So far, we have explored several distinct variables of the human: gender and identity, desire and lack, the postmodern subject and the society of control, and science fiction's use of a counter-spectacle aesthetic to explore the relation between time, memory, and identity. In this final section, I will bring all of these elements together to demonstrate how both critical theory and science fiction harbor the same implicit desire: to conceptualize the human and/or to determine ways of advancing, perfecting, or even transcending the human experience. However, while critical theory maintains the utopian hope that such conceptualizations remain possible, science fiction

uses its heterotopian form to deconstruct such theorizations. To explore this topic, I will be turning to a more classic science fiction text than those I have hitherto examined: Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Kubrick's film provides the ideal space for bringing these seemingly disparate topics into convergence with one another because it concerns the ontogenesis and evolution of the human itself. Evolution serves as the underlying, connective theme of the movie's four segments (or movements we might say, since the film's structure operates like a symphony): "These image patterns and visual metaphors document the true meaning of the word 'Odyssey' in the title—an evolutionary journey from beast, to technology, to a stage of evolution transcending the physical realm—and also underscore a central theme of the film: the limits of technology and the nature of humanity."<sup>2</sup> *2001* explores the evolutionary progress of humanity from the pre-human stage through the birth and growth of technology and into the posthuman era when the self becomes capable of evolving beyond its present social and physical constraints. *2001* represents a filmic odyssey that takes the viewer through the evolution of consciousness—Kubrick crafts images that visualize and dramatize the place of the evolutionary subject, of the animal becoming human and the human metamorphosing into an almost divine posthuman existence. By the end of this conclusion, we will see how the human remains tied to technology and how the growth of technology leads inevitably to the society of control and simultaneously to the posthuman. In essence, *2001* concerns the dichotomy between being and becoming—the fundamental human choice—and it asks whether the human can exist in the absence of technology and spatio-temporal order but also whether technology ultimately ends up robbing the human of its innate potential.

## **I. The Pre-Human: The Birth of Technology and the Will to Power**

The origins of the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* lay twenty years before its release with Arthur C. Clarke's short story entitled "The Sentinel" (1948),<sup>3</sup> and "the general critical stance regarding *2001* is a somewhat linear one—from 'The Sentinel' to Kubrick's film to the novelization of the film by Clarke."<sup>4</sup> Of course, to call Clarke's novel a "novelization" proves somewhat reductive since he and Kubrick developed the story together over the course of several years.<sup>5</sup> But, as Suparno Banerjee explains, many critics to this day view "Clarke's novel as an explanation of the film," yet as he maintains, "a close comparative examination of the novel and the film clearly shows that Clarke's novel is neither an explanation nor a novelization of the film but a work existing independently. While Clarke's novel is rooted in the tradition of hardcore science fiction, Kubrick's film subverts all the norms of tradition films to create something unique."<sup>6</sup> In his study of Kubrick's films, Randy Rasmussen also comments upon the relation between the film and the novel:

*2001: A Space Odyssey* developed concurrently as a film and a novel, with Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke exchanging ideas for a story about man's evolution, exploration of outer space, and possible encounters with extraterrestrial intelligence [...] But their separate results, film and novel, are very different from one another in narrative style and in the depiction of man, technology, and extraterrestrial life.<sup>7</sup>

Although I will make references to Clarke's novel over the course of my argument, I will focus predominately upon Kubrick's film because it depicts the events in a more ambiguous manner that creates a more profoundly experimental narrative space than the novel. Since the novel explores the same or similar themes as the film, it acts as a useful companion piece due to its more discursive nature, but Bannerjee correctly draws a sharp distinction between the two because Kubrick's film ultimately revels in discontinuity,



ambiguity, and perhaps even aporia while Clarke's novel remains tied to linear narrative and explicit exposition in a way that squashes some of the power and critical potential inherent in the cinematic version.

Kubrick's *2001* bathes the viewer in estranging images of radical otherness, and, like *Primer*, it forces the viewer to inscribe their own meaning upon the series of images. The film opens with an overture and blackness after which it cuts to a shot of space as the opening of Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1896) immediately baptizes the viewer into the universe according to *2001*. Simultaneously, the music inaugurates the Nietzschean themes of the film: "Strauss's musical interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical poem begins with a glorious evocation of sunrise, which Kubrick visually reworks into Earthrise."<sup>8</sup> The opening shot of the film initiates from behind the Moon and slowly tilts up to reveal the Earth and Sun in alignment with it. Shots of such alignments and the "Dawn" section of Strauss's *Zarathustra* function as refrains throughout the film which tie together its seemingly disconnected sections. After this initial introduction, the film consists of four major sections: "The Dawn of Man," an unnamed second section, "The Jupiter Mission," and "Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite."<sup>9</sup> The opening section follows a group of apelike creatures, which Clarke refers to as "man-apes," who have yet to develop the use of tools and hence exist in a purely animalistic state. Clarke's novel remains tied to traditional characterization scheme, for it "focuses on a main character in every part: Moon-Watcher in 'Primeval Night,' Heywood Floyd in 'TMA-1,' and Dave Bowman in the rest of the sections."<sup>10</sup> While Clarke focalizes his story of the man-apes around the character of Moon-Watcher, the film provides no such center of focalization during "The Dawn of Man" segment and instead functions more

like wildlife documentary footage that follows the quotidian existence of these pre-Neolithic creatures.

The man-apes live in a desert-like terrain that offers little in the way of sustenance.<sup>11</sup> Because they have not developed the capacity to hunt, they pick through the slim selection of vegetation available, and their access to water remains limited because another group of similar hominids also claims the same small, muddy water hole. Clarke opens his novel with a rather provocative description of the man-apes' precarious evolutionary situation:

The drought had lasted now for ten million years, and the reign of the giant lizards had long since ended. Here on the Equator, in the continent which would one day be known as Africa, the battle for existence had reached a new climax of ferocity, and the victor was not yet in sight. In this barren and desiccated land, only the small or the swift could flourish, or even hope to survive. The man-apes of the veldt were none of these things, and they were not flourishing; indeed, they were already far down the road to racial extinction.<sup>12</sup>

So the man-apes stand poised on the precipice of extinction because they remain poorly adapted to the environment around them. They remain trapped in a state of being that will lead to their annihilation—for them, stasis equates to death. They must learn to move from a state of being to one of becoming if they are to survive amidst their inhospitable surroundings. Whereas Deleuze talks about the state of becoming-animal, the man-apes must learn to enter a stage of becoming-human.

Initially, the film depicts a day in the life of the man-apes, a day filled with struggle: the frustrating search for food, an attack by a leopard, and the rival gang of man-apes at the water hole who scare them away with their taunts and growls. The film depicts this typical day as juxtaposition to the transformation the man-apes will soon undergo. Then, on one auspicious morning, the man-apes awake to discover a giant,

black, rectangular object, known as the monolith, has appeared in the middle of the rocky alcove where they sleep.<sup>13</sup> The scene that follows remains one of the most iconic moments in cinematic history. Choral voices, which may or may not be diegetic, imbue the scene with a creepy, otherworldly aura and instantiate the monolith's ambiguous symbolic status.<sup>14</sup> As Bannerjee notes, "the monolith acts as the central symbol of the movie—the symbol of a higher intelligence and perhaps a higher order of existence. This symbolism is always reinforced by musical accompaniment."<sup>15</sup> The monolith's symbolism (or its refusal of symbolism perhaps) will not become apparent until later in the film, but Kubrick already uses it in these early scenes of the film to suggest a higher intelligence, whether it be divine or extraterrestrial. As the monolith calls out to them, the man-apes devolve into a frenzy of anxiety and curiosity, taking turns approaching it before retreating again in fear. Eventually, one of them dares to touch it and soon others follow suit: they sniff, caress, and inspect the monolith's black surface. As the choral voices swell to a crescendo, Kubrick cuts to a low-angle shot of the monolith in which it seemingly towers upwards into the heavens. Its inky blackness engulfs the bottom two-thirds of the frame as the rising sun converges with the crescent moon above it against a background of blood-red clouds. This shot hearkens back to the opening shot of the *Earthrise* and gives the impression that the scene coincides with a cosmic alignment.

In the subsequent scene, Kubrick depicts the man-apes foraging among rocks and discarded bones before focusing on one particular man-ape who begins to cock his head in a mannerism that implies rational thought. This man-ape, who would be Moon-Watcher in Clarke's novel, picks up a piece of this biological detritus and begins considering it as the first notes of Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1896)

begin to gently waft into the scene. As the music builds with its blaring drums and trumpets, we watch as the man-ape picks up a bone and begins to smash the remains of an animal skull. When we next see the man-apes encountering the rival clan at the water hole, their adversaries crouch and jump like apes, but Moon-Watcher's clan stands upright in a more humanoid posture. When one of the rival man-apes crosses the water, he is promptly beaten to death by the tribe while his cohorts escape back into the desert.

The rousing introduction of Strauss's tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra* already gestures towards a Nietzschean reading of the film, and by turning towards Nietzsche's concept of becoming, we will bring the various aspects of the human we have discussed so far together into one final discussion about the relation between science fiction and critical theory. In essence, as we shall see, *2001* allows us to conceive of science fiction and critical theory as two different discursive forms for discussing the human both in its current state of being and its potential for becoming. In his book on philosophy in Stanley Kubrick's films, Jerold Abrams devotes an entire chapter to the representation of Nietzsche's concept of the Overman (*Übermensch*) in *2001*, and he claims that

In moving images—and almost no dialogue—Kubrick captures the entire evolutionary epic of Friedrich Nietzsche's magnum opus *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. From worms to apes to humans, Nietzsche tracks the movement of life as will-to-power—ultimately claiming that it is not yet finished. We have only one stage left, the overman, a being who will look upon humanity as humanity now looks upon the apes. It is well known that Nietzsche tells us little about what the overman will look like, except that he or she will emerge as a new kind of “child.”<sup>16</sup>

The Overman represents the same kind of evolutionary leap as Akira—the human becomes like the ape or even the amoeba from the viewpoint of the Overman. But the coming of the Overman, which Zarathustra preaches, does not necessarily entail an evolution of the physical form. Instead, it is evolution of ethics and identity, an evolution

that moves the individual from a state of being to becoming, from a state of slavish morality to an ethos predicated upon freedom and self-definition. As Philip Kuberski notes in his essay on Kubrick's film, "there is an evolutionary drama implicit" in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* which

can be concisely sketched with reference to the parable of "the three metamorphoses" from Nietzsche's introduction. The camel, like traditional human cultures, bends down to take on the load of transmitted values and demands. The lion, like enlightened technologists, confronts the dragon of tradition whose scales each bear the instruction: Thou Shalt. The final metamorphosis is that of the child acting out of its own impulse, free of tradition and free of resentment.<sup>17</sup>

While the opening segment of *2001* can and has been read as a depiction of Darwinian evolution in action, Abrams and Kuberski correctly note that the film actually concerns a Nietzschean form of evolution.

At first glance, the film may seem like it reads according to the most banal interpretation of Nietzsche as a sort of Darwinian philosopher who preaches a doctrine of overcoming the weak with one's strength of mind and purpose. This is Nietzsche boiled down to "that which does not kill him makes him stronger."<sup>18</sup> But, as Deleuze points out, while Nietzsche and Darwin both shook the foundations of traditional, Western, Christian thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Nietzsche actually had little use for Darwin: "Nietzsche criticizes Darwin for interpreting evolution and chance within evolution in an entirely reactive way."<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche himself explains how the instinct towards self-preservation can never in itself lead towards becoming, for its purpose lies in maintaining a stasis of being:

To wish to preserve oneself is a sign of distress, of a limitation of the truly basic life instinct, which aims at *the expansion of power* and in so doing often enough risks and sacrifices self-preservation [...] English Darwinism exudes something like the stuffy air of English overpopulation,

like the small people's smell of indigence and overcrowding. As a natural scientist, however, one should get out of one's human corner, and in nature, it is not distress which *rules*, but rather abundance, squandering—even to the point of absurdity. The struggle for survival is only an exception, a temporary restriction of the will to life; the great and small struggle revolves everywhere around preponderance, around growth and expansion, around power and in accordance the will to power, which is simply the will to life.<sup>20</sup>

Hence, Darwinian evolution represents the preservation of the status quo, which for Nietzsche is the biological equivalent of slavish moral systems like Christianity: instead, “he admires Lamarck because Lamarck foretold the existence of a truly active *plastic force*, primary in relations of adaptations: a force of metamorphosis [...] The power of transformation, the Dionysian power, is the primary definition of activity.”<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche's vision of becoming—or evolution—remains tied to an innate potential within the human: the human has the ability to rise above its desire to simply defend a safe form of existence and to embrace the path of drastic metamorphosis, a metamorphosis that *2001* traces across its four segments. To truly grasp how the film ties together the various strands of this project, we must first examine precisely what Nietzsche means by becoming and the will to power.

To understand the concept of becoming, one must first banish the Platonic and Cartesian ideas of the unified self, of the doer who pre-exists the deed. In his highly influential study entitled *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, Pierre Klossowski explains that for Nietzsche “the body is the *Self*...the *Self* resides in the midst of the body and expresses itself through the body.”<sup>22</sup> As Nietzsche proposes in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, the idea of the subject or agent represents a grammatical illusion: “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything...our entire science still lies under the misleading influence

of language and has not disposed of that little changeling, the ‘subject.’”<sup>23</sup> By banishing Cartesian dualism, Nietzsche sought instead to “establish a new cohesion, beyond the agent, between the body and chaos—a state of tension between the fortuitous cohesion of the agent and the incoherence of Chaos.”<sup>24</sup> And, as we shall see when we discuss the final moments of the film, *2001* is a film about embracing chaos, about putting oneself in contact with multiplicities and endless lines of flight, about rolling the dice of chance on a plane of pure immanence. But if the self equals nothing more than the body, then what precisely does Nietzsche mean by “the body”?

In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze explains, “There are nothing but quantities of force in mutual ‘relations of tension’ [...] Every force is related to other forces and it either obeys or commands. What defines a body is this relation between dominant and dominated forces.”<sup>25</sup> Because the body is nothing more than a relation between conflicting forces, one can never speak of a unified self: “Being composed of a plurality of irreducible forces the body is a multiple phenomenon, its unity is that of a multiple phenomenon, ‘a unity of domination.’ In a body, the superior or dominant forces are known as *active* and the inferior or dominated forces are known as *reactive*.”<sup>26</sup> We must, therefore, view the body, like society, as an interplay of forces, forces that either command or obey, for “every relationship of forces constitutes a body—whether it is chemical, biological, social, or political.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, according to Nietzsche, all of reality consists of bodies that emerge out chaos because of forces struggling with one another.

At the heart of Nietzsche’s concept of force relations resides his theory of the will to power, for it is the will to power that drives the conflict between forces. Deleuze explains that the will to power is “the principle of the synthesis of forces.”<sup>28</sup> The will to

power is what drives one force to dominate another; it is the principle that determines the relation between active and reactive forces. As Nietzsche states,

The victorious concept of “force,” by means of which physicists have created God and the world, still needs to be completed: an inner will must be ascribed to it, which I designate as ‘will to power,’ i.e., as an insatiable desire to manifest power; or as the employment and exercise of power, as a creative drive, etc. Physicists cannot eradicate “action at a distance” from their principles; nor can they eradicate a repellent force (or an attracting one). There is nothing for it: one is obliged to understand all motions, all “appearances,” all “laws,” only as symptoms of an inner event and to employ man as an analogy to this end. In the case of an animal, it is possible to trace all its drives to the will to power; likewise all the functions of organic life to this one source. (§619)

As Deleuze explains, by “victorious,” Nietzsche means that “the relation of force to force, understood conceptually, is one of domination: when two forces are related one is dominant and the other is dominated.”<sup>29</sup> The will to power serves as the motor that drives the struggle of forces, and it is the birth of this will to power that Kubrick depicts so powerfully when the man-apes rise above their slavish heritage as the dominated in order to become masters of their world.

While the will to power retains the possibility of being either active or reactive, it also has two possible “primordial qualities” of its own—it is either affirmative or negative.<sup>30</sup> There is always a will present, even if it is a will that denies, that is guilt-ridden by *ressentiment* and the bad conscience, or that is purely reactive based on either God/morality or on Nihilism. However, as Deleuze states, “affirmation and negation extend beyond action and reaction because they are the immediate qualities of becoming itself. Affirmation is not action but the power of becoming active, *becoming active* personified. Negation is not simple reaction but a *becoming reactive*.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the affirmative or negative qualities of the will are directly linked to the process of becoming.



To become the Overman, Nietzsche argues that you must learn to affirm becoming active, to embrace chance and chaos, to be willing to risk everything for the sake of transformation. The desire for becoming has driven the progress of the human species: it allowed us to rise from the pre-human into the human and it is steadily moving us beyond the limits of the human and into a posthuman existence. In essence, the monolith instantiates this desire for becoming in the man-apes, which is more apparent in the novel because the monolith presents Moon-Watcher with a nocturnal vision. In this vision, Moon-Watcher sees himself and his tribe in a better condition of life: no longer emaciated, they appear plump, well-groomed, and more highly civilized. The monolith teases Moon-Watcher with this image until he finally begins to feel the first faint stirrings of desire, of something more than the mere instinctual urges that normally govern his behavior. The monolith inscribes a notion of lack in the man-apes' brains. While the man-apes cannot exhibit the actual *manqué-a-être* that can only truly arise along with the signifier, they begin to experience the first gnawing of lack—they have become dissatisfied with being and seek the transformative power of becoming. In this first segment of the film, which features no dialogue, we witness these creatures move from a state of being (a state of reactive self-preservation) into a transformative, active state of becoming. The man-apes embrace chance and the roll of the dice; they are willing to take hold of their tools (or hammers if we want to use Nietzsche's favorite metaphor) to embrace the forces of chaos and smash themselves into a new form. The monolith actuates their desire for becoming, and we consequently see the birth of the element that will give rise to humanity—technology. Simultaneously, this simple piece of technology

also heralds the birth of weaponry and property, for the man-apes use the weapon to claim the waterhole. But, above all else, it signifies the birth of the will to power

The monolith provides the catalyst that drives the evolution of species, a catalyst that enables species to leap across evolutionary chasms that might have hindered evolutionary progress if not for its aid. In “The Dawn of Man” segment, the monolith facilitates the apelike species in crossing an evolutionary gap to become tool-users, a gap that could conceivably have never been traversed without the appropriate cerebral modifications made possible by the presence of the monolith. Hence, “The Dawn of Man” segment depicts the sowing of the seeds of the human—the monolith introduces perhaps the most important variable of the human: desire. From the instantiation of this first desire, desire always strives towards utopian ideals, and the methods for attaining these utopian desires rely upon technological innovation.

## **II. The Human: Desire, Technology, Control**

At the end of part one of the novel, Clarke charts the progression of human tools and weapons from the man-apes to the present and, at the same time, exhibits a typical Cold War sensibility that these weapons inevitably will lead to the end of the human:

The spear, the bow, the gun, and finally the guided missile has given him [humankind] weapons of infinite range and all but infinite power. Without those weapons, often though he had used them against himself, Man would never have conquered the world. Into them he had put his heart and soul, and for ages they had served him well. But now, as long as they existed, he was living on borrowed time.<sup>32</sup>

While technology leads to ever higher levels of civilization and to presumably ever more utopian experiences for the citizenry, it also inevitably generates new methods of global destruction. In Clarke’s novel, humankind must evolve because it has reached a self-

destructive stalemate, but Kubrick foregoes such narrative connections, and the second section of his film jumps three million years in time to depict the exponential growth that has occurred between the era of the man-apes and age of space exploration. The second segment of the film charts the utopian nature of technology and the new states of being that it opens for humankind, but it also begins to depict the controlling aspects of technology that arise alongside its utopian aspirations.

The second section of the film receives no title because Kubrick uses a match cut to link together the technological elements of the two sections. In one of the most famous match cuts in cinematic history, Kubrick cuts from a shot of the man-ape throwing his bone into the air to a shot of a similarly shaped space vehicle floating through the cosmos between the Earth and the Moon. This match provides a profound connection between the two scenes because it not only serves as an editing technique but also as a symbol that represents the thematic link between the two sections: the discovery of this simple tool or weapon provided the impetus for a historical progression that lead to space travel. Without the bone club, there could be no space odysseys. This section opens with images of the Earth, Sun, and Moon and the various space craft floating in the space between the Earth and the Moon. The spaceships, satellites, and space stations gently drift in this liminal space between planetary bodies. As Johann Strauss's *On the Beautiful Blue Danube* (1866) languidly plays across this montage, the vehicles all seem to have been cut adrift and to simply be floating with no real sense of propulsion. As Mario Falsetto notes, in such scenes, "*2001* offer[s] up a kind of cinematic ballet" in which "the narrative momentum seems secondary" to the depiction of movement itself.<sup>33</sup> Of course, the film concerns movement on numerous levels: not just the movement in

zero-gravity or the propulsion systems of spacecraft but also the movement of evolution. The scene creates a sort of cognitive disjunction with the previous scenes of the man-apes because the technological leap from bone to space-station seems almost inconceivable, especially since “the harmony of space technology is, at first glance, free of the destructive violence evident in ‘The Dawn of Man.’”<sup>34</sup> Indeed, this section depicts the utopian nature of technology as a force that seems to have lost its violent character in favor of a utopian future in which new modes of existence are opened up for the subject by means of space travel.

From this “*valse mécanique*,” as Kuberski terms it,<sup>35</sup> the film cuts to interior shots of the spacecraft carrying Dr. Heywood Floyd to the space-station that serves as a kind of cosmic rest stop between the Earth and the Moon.<sup>36</sup> The space station is structured as a perfect circle with two spokes running through the middle that divide it into four equal-sized arcs. The docking seems precarious because the space station is rotating, but the lilting music and nonchalant pilots make it seem like this precision feat of technology proves to be of little consequence. We then are brought on board the space station, whose circular shape is further accentuated by Kubrick’s use of an extremely wide-angle lens that gives the images a slightly skewed or bent perspective at the corners. The décor of the space-station is distinctly Kubrickian and recalls the milk bar from *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) or the bathroom of the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* (1980): stark white walls and bizarrely shaped furniture in vivid shades of red. Kubrick depicts a variety of technological advancements: grip shoes that allow one to walk in zero gravity, video phones, voice-print identification systems, drinkable meals, zero-gravity toilets, and a space-station that rotates in order to generate its own low-level gravity. Even in

these smaller instances, Kubrick keeps the film's emphasis on the progress of technology, but, as we shall see, this seemingly bright technological future represents a utopia in which humans are reduced to the state of what Nietzsche terms "the last men," people whose existence has ceased to be predicated upon struggle and who have succumbed to the allures of so-called "happiness."

Floyd stops at the space station just long enough to share a drink with some acquaintances and to hear gossip about the strange occurrences on the moon: communication has been lost with a moon base named Clavius. The scenes aboard the space station also hint towards the fact that the seemingly utopian façade of the future still remains mired in corporate control: Pan-Am owns and operates the space shuttles and the space-station features a Hilton hotel. As we see on a daily basis, Capital always attempts to follow and appropriate the latest technological advancements in order to not cede that market to newer corporations—the "logo-maze" of Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* persists even in space. Such instances actually highlight the fact that space travel has been privatized to some degree in *2001*, and that the forces of postindustrial capitalism persist even into the seemingly utopian world of the film.

The waltz rhythm of Strauss's *Blue Danube* returns as Floyd progresses on from the space station to the Moon's surface. Indeed, the music gives the impression that we are a partner in a cosmic that twirls us into strange new frontiers of experience. Dr. Floyd has been summoned to the Clavius base on the Moon because another monolith has been dug up on the Moon. During a roundtable meeting between Dr. Floyd and the Clavius scientists, the film reveals that a cover story has been issued to keep the public from learning about the existence of the monolith. To avoid cultural shock, the United

States government has issued a statement saying that Clavius has been quarantined due to an epidemic. Of course, the cover story serves to mask the fact that the Clavius scientists have discovered a monolith buried under the surface of the Moon. After noticing an electromagnetic field of untold magnitude emanating from the crater known as Tycho, the researchers on Clavius unearthed what turns out to be another monolith—the artifact has been named “TMA-1” or “Tycho Magnetic Anomaly 1.” Evidence points to its having been deliberately buried on the moon four million years ago, hence marking it as the first hard evidence of extraterrestrial life, life that apparently exceeded the current technological capacities of the human race before the species had yet evolved. After listening to the scientists’ gripes about the cover story, Dr. Floyd flies out to Tycho to perform an inspection of the monolith. As he and the group of scientists gather in front of the monolith to take a picture, it begins emitting an ear-piercing screech. As Dr. Floyd flails about from the pain of this sonic emission, he looks up to catch sight of the Sun and the Moon converging over the monolith, a shot that replicates the alignment during the man-ape segment. Then, Kubrick abruptly cuts to a shot of empty space that features the logo “Jupiter Mission Eighteen Months Later.” Again, Kubrick provides no narrative connections between the segments—he forces the audience to draw their own connections as the film progresses.

This second, unnamed segment of the film acts as a narrative bridge between the man-ape segment and the larger narrative of the film that concerns the voyage of *Discovery One*. It further serves to highlight the banal aspects of the *2001* universe and to inaugurate the themes of control and computerization that will play out in the film’s third segment. Philip Kuberski argues that the scenes with Dr. Floyd provide glimpses of

a world in which the prosaic has triumphed over the creative or, as we might say, in which reactive being has triumphed over active becoming:

Kubrick dramatizes the shift in human culture by leaving the earth behind; from this point on, all action is confined to artificial and space environments. An initial impression [...] is that the realization of Moonwatcher's celestial longings have emptied them of their vigor. Space, now inhabited and comfortably imprinted with corporate logos, has become an adjunct of the earth [...] We see people devoid of spontaneity performing rather than experiencing humor, collegiality, duty, curiosity [...] There is a bright, hollow sound to everything and everyone in this artificial, indoor world. Identity is enforced by generic protocol.<sup>37</sup>

While the world has progressed infinitely in terms of civilization and technology, it has also regressed in terms of reality—it has become a world of simulacra. Like the postmodern landscape of *Pattern Recognition*, the world (or worlds) of *2001* are populated by trademarks and peopled by individuals incapable of genuine interactions with their environment. Their needs have all been satisfied, so they exist in a state without the possibility of struggle or becoming. They exist in a state of reactive being because their lives become the performance of roles—they become characters aping the behavior they are expected to exhibit.<sup>38</sup> This is not the case in Clarke's novel in which the Earth remains torn apart by warring factions and Cold War ideological stalemates, but this geopolitical friction is completely absent from Kubrick's film. Indeed, Earth as depicted in Kubrick's film proves to be more similar to the version of the world in Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953) in which a race of alien Overlords, who just happen to have the physical appearance of Satan, take charge of Earth and forcefully spread peace across the globe. While the world enters a so-called "Golden Age," this utopian existence simultaneously destroys much of what had been beautiful and majestic about the human condition: "The world's now passive, featureless, and culturally dead: nothing

really new has been created since the Overlords came. The reason's obvious. There's nothing left to struggle for and there are too many distractions and entertainments" (135). In Kubrick's *2001*, humankind has similarly been stripped of the need for struggle—it has settled into a contentment that is predicated upon its technological innovations, but these innovations simultaneously reduce individuals to a simulacral existence in which the fundamentals of the human have vanished.

Kuberski points to the scene at the Tycho crater as an example of their simulacral identities and their lack of contact with reality: "When they assemble before the excavated monolith in its flood-lit trench, one is reminded of a movie set. When Dr. Floyd sees and touches the monolith, it is through the insulation of his space helmet and glove. There is no ecstatic mystical participation, as there was with the ape-men. Like tourists, the scientists gather round the monument for a group photograph."<sup>39</sup> Humankind has achieved technological marvels but they no longer engage in real connections with their environment—they experience everything through mediating technologies and hence they become trapped in a state of being like the man-apes before the monolith's arrival. A new evolution is required if humankind is to reclaim the potential that has been lost in the synthetic textures of the postmodern world, and TMA-1 points the way to this evolution—it lies around Jupiter.<sup>40</sup>

The "Jupiter Mission" segment follows the odd events aboard the *Discovery One* as it nears Jupiter. The sounds emitted by TMA-1 actually serve as a celestial beacon pointing towards Jupiter, and Earth sends *Discovery One* to explore the endpoint of this transmission. The *Discovery* crew consists of seven members: Dave Bowman, Frank Poole, the three hibernating members of the survey team, and the HAL-9000 computer, a



computer capable of reproducing human thought and overseeing the entire ship. The HAL-9000 (“HAL” stands for “Heuristic Algorithm”) prefers to be called “Hal,” and he seems to exhibit independent thought and even emotions at various points in the film. Hal watches the events on the ship through a system of fish-eyed cameras that feature a bright red light in the center, which give them the appearance of eyes. Kubrick even cuts frequently to shots from Hal’s perspective—he uses a fish-eyed lens to illustrate how Hal sees the world from a slightly skewed, mechanistic perspective. Hal seems like a normal (albeit bodiless) member of the crew: he engages in conversations with Dave and Frank, wishes Frank a “Happy Birthday,” and plays chess with Dave, always with his soothing, affectless tone of voice.

Hal’s complete control of the mission seems benevolent and flawless until he engages in a rather strange conversation with Dave about the bizarre circumstances surrounding their trip to Jupiter. Hal wonders if Dave “might be having second thoughts about the mission,” but the computer admits that he might be “projecting” his “own concern about it” (16). Hal proceeds to explain his consternation regarding the mission:

Well, certainly no one could have been unaware of the very strange stories floating around before we left. Rumors about something being dug up on the Moon. I never gave these stories much credence, but particularly in view of some of the other things that have happened I find them difficult to put out of my mind. For instance: the way all our preparations were kept under such tight security and the melodramatic touch of putting Drs. Hunger, Kimball, and Kaminsky aboard already in hibernation after four months of separate training on their own. (16)<sup>41</sup>

This exchange exhibits the manner in which Hal represents far more than a computer capable of voice interaction—he harbors a genuine intellect capable of forming his own opinions, questions, and forebodings about events and even rumors. As the conversation progresses, a slow sense of unease develops over the scene until Hal suddenly begins

repeating “Just a moment” like a stuck record, which gives the impression that he is experiencing some sort of glitch or is processing a complex piece of information (16). Suddenly, he explains to Dave that he has found a fault in one of the communication dishes on the outside of the ship. From this point forward, Hal begins to transform from the friendly, all-knowing ship computer into a malevolent force of control that (or perhaps who) manipulates the human element of the ship according to his own ideas about what is best for the mission.

In the sequence that follows, Dave ventures outside the ship in a space pod used for extravehicular maneuvers that allows him to retrieve the malfunctioning device. No sound occurs in this scene except for Dave’s deep breathing inside his suit, which generates a claustrophobic feeling and begins to demonstrate the fragility of the voyage’s human element. Dave brings the malfunctioning part back on board, but he and Frank prove incapable of discovering any faults in the mechanism. Hal proposes that they return the part to the satellite dish and allow it to fail in order to track down the source of the error.<sup>42</sup> Bewildered, Dave and Frank contact Earth to discuss the situation, and Earth concludes that they should proceed with Hal’s plan. But they also caution that the twin HAL-9000 unit on Earth has determined that the device is indeed intact and that the error lays with Hal on the *Discovery*. Dave asks if Hal can explain the discrepancy between his calculations and those of the twin computer on Earth, “Well, I don’t think there’s any question about it. It can only be attributable to human error. This sort of thing has cropped up before, and it has always been due to human error” (18). Dave and Frank proceed to have a secret conversation about disconnection Hal if he proves to be malfunctioning outside of the computer’s hearing in one of the space pods, but a shot

through Hal's fish-eyed lens reveals that Hal is capable of reading their lips, at which point the film cuts to black and the intermission begins.

After the intermission, the film features an exterior shot of *Discovery* moving through space, and Kubrick plunges us back into the claustrophobia of extravehicular space maneuvers as Frank replaces the satellite component—again the scene features no sound other than his breathing. Suddenly, the pod begins rotating all by itself and lowering its arms in an attack position, after which a series of rapid, jarring cuts highlight Hal's eye on the outside of the pod. Aboard the *Discovery*, Dave watches as Frank flies off into space with the line to his oxygen tank cut while the unmanned pod spins wildly off into nothingness.<sup>43</sup> Again, as with the scientists on the moon, Dave remains disconnected from his environment: he only experiences these tragic events secondhand through a monitor. While Dave exits the ship to recover Frank's body, Hal turns off the life support systems for the three hibernating crewmembers. Then, when Dave returns, Hal refuses to open the pod bay doors for him, and he explains, "This mission is too important for me to allow you to jeopardize it" (24). The film never reveals why Hal began to malfunction—we only witness his actions, but his motives can be presumed from his statements.<sup>44</sup> After witnessing Frank and Dave's discussion in the space pod, Hal begins to fear that the mission might fail, so he decides to erase the human variables from the equation because human error often accounts for failures within computer calculations and predictions—it was the unpredictable quantity of human desire that led to the faulty predictions in Delany's *Triton* after all.

Dave manages to save himself by blowing himself out of his space pod and into *Discovery's* airlock. Then, the film cuts to a grimly determined Dave who begins the

process of shutting down Hal, and, like any human facing execution, Hal tries to reason with Dave in a manner that at least mimics the intonations of fear. Ultimately, Hal even resorts to confessing his fear, “I’m afraid, Dave. My mind is going. I can feel it” (26). Inside a glowing red room, Dave methodically turns off the various databanks that represent Hal’s memory and cognitive centers. As Hal’s voice slowly degrades, we witness a mind slowly dying, until Hal returns to reciting his initial introduction speech, which ends with his heart- wrenching rendition of the song “Daisy” as his voice slowly degrades and then ceases altogether. In his last moments, Hal’s pleading seems to indicate that he indeed has feelings and hence represents a true artificial life form. In Delany’s *Triton*, computers became capable of controlling subject behavior to a certain degree and of reprogramming an individual’s human variables to create new identities. In the universe of *2001*, humans actually can program the human variables into a machine so precisely that it can begin to function just like a human. As Rodney Brooks explains, “we are machines, and from that I conclude that there is no reason, in principle, that it is not possible to build a machine from silicon and steel that has genuine emotions and consciousness.”<sup>45</sup> Brooks proceeds to argue that what frightens humankind about robots and artificial intelligence is not their potential to develop autonomous consciousness but the fact that they reveal humans to be nothing more than machines in themselves. In essence, then, Hal reveals this essentially mechanistic nature of the human—his ability to perfectly mimic and perhaps experience human emotions demonstrates the manner in which humanity truly becomes programmable by the society of control. But while computers begin to act like humans, humans begin to operate like machines. As we saw earlier, humans have devolved in this vision of the future because

of the mediating technologies that separate them from their environments. Indeed, Hal represents the most sympathetic being in the film because the human characters seldom (if ever) exhibit anything approximating genuine emotion—they have been programmed by the society of control to respond logically like a machine without recourse to desire, fear, love, or any other emotion. Hence, they remain trapped at the level of being because, like a computer, they remain incapable of breaking the programming that orders their existence.

In essence, the “Jupiter Mission” segment reveals the world of *2001* to be the society of control, similar to the ones we have already seen depicted in *Ghost in the Shell*, *Trouble on Triton*, *Pattern Recognition*, and *Spook Country*. Examples of control abound in scenes concerning Heywood Floyd: voice print identification systems and government cover-ups, to name only the two most explicit ones. But Hal’s ever-watchful eye and virtually omnipotent control of *Discovery* exemplifies Deleuze’s vision of the control society. Undoubtedly, Hal recalls Michel Foucault’s discussions of the panopticon, which acts as the paradigmatic structure of disciplinary societies, but control societies perfect the panoptic gaze by decent ring and spreading it throughout society. Like our current world, which is increasingly monitored by cameras on every corner and in the hands of every citizen, *Discovery* represents a space in which one’s actions are never free from the all-seeing eye of control. Furthermore, Hal not only oversees the crewmembers but also controls what information they receive, “As the segment unfolds, HAL’s surveillance capabilities (d)evolve towards totality [...] HAL knows best, and he sees with the greatest clarity. HAL not only sees/oversees Bowman and Poole, but he also controls what *they* see.”<sup>46</sup> Rhodes points to the fact that HAL always controls the images

and information that Dave and Frank receive even to the point of barring Dave from witnessing the space pod attack Frank. He further demonstrates that this control extends beyond HAL, because

Disconnecting HAL does not remove oversight; it simply transfers the power of surveillance to another. Initially it comes in the form of a pre-recorded message from Dr. Heywood Floyd, who stares into the camera as he announces the real reason for the Jupiter Mission. His eyes lock on Bowman to announce that another force has been monitoring earth. Keep watching the skies, Bowman, because the skies have been watching us since the very beginning.<sup>47</sup>

Of course, Rhodes's last statement here echoes the final lines of Christian Nyby's *The Thing from Another World*: "Keep watching the skies."<sup>48</sup> *2001* is not as paranoid a film as this comparison or Rhodes's comments might suggest, but surveillance and control remain a subtle undertone throughout. But the society of *2001* does not rely upon the feeble 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century disciplinary modalities of power but instead operates according to the paradigm of control. As Foucault explains, the panopticon is "a form of architecture that makes possible a mind-over-mind-type of power; a sort of institution that serves equally well, it would seem, for schools, hospitals, prisons, reformatories, poorhouses, and factories [...] The panopticon is the utopia of a society and a type of power that is basically the society we are familiar with at present, a utopia that was actually realized."<sup>49</sup> And we could say that the regime works as a perfect paradigm for organizing a spaceship as well. Like the panopticon, *Discovery* represents a utopian space, a space that features a computer capable of attending to your every need. But this utopianism comes at a price, and, as we saw in chapter three, computers perfect the disciplinary/panoptic society and transform it into the society of control. Whereas Deleuze's essay on control foresees a society in which one's access to various spaces can

be granted or forbidden by computer systems, *2001* takes this a step further by depicting a computer that not only restricts and manipulates information or blocks off particular spaces (the pod bay doors, for example) but that also becomes capable of simply shutting down life support systems. Hence, Dave encounters pure, unvarnished control, and he finds no alternative for further existence except through a transcendence of the bodily form, a transcendence that the monolith proves happy to grant him. Dave must “shift to a higher structure” like Tetsuo in *Akira*, Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell*, and Shinji in *Evangelion*.

### **III. Beyond the Star Gate: Infinite Becoming and the Posthuman Condition**

After Dave disconnects Hal, a video appears of Heywood Floyd explaining the secret reason for the *Discovery* mission. After this video ends, Kubrick abruptly cuts to the final section of the film, “Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite.” This final section exists beyond linear narrative logic and instead becomes a flow of spectacular and surrealistic images. Kubrick opens this last segment with a shot of Jupiter—the sun appears tiny and insignificant as the scene depicts *Discovery* hovering above the nightside of Jupiter with a giant monolith twisting in space above it. A lone space pod exits the front of *Discovery*, and then the film cuts to a shot of the planets aligned with Jupiter, repeating the earlier alignments in the film. As the monolith floats across this line of planets, a series of lights and stars begin rushing towards the camera as Dave enters what is known as “the star gate.”<sup>50</sup> As with most aspects of the film, this series of images never receives an explanation, and the film never refers to it as a “star gate”; indeed, this final section of the film features no dialogue. But Clarke gives it this name in the novel, and critics of

the film generally maintain this term in their discussions. Whereas Clarke's novel explicitly explains the occurrences in the final part of his story, Kubrick's film provides such an iconic cinematic experience because it chooses to structure itself in a manner that actually belies structure: it revels in disjunction and ambiguity, particularly in this final segment. But Kubrick's use of images that resist strict interpretation fits well with the motive of these scenes: they are depicting the human as it moves into a posthuman state that borders on divinity. In *2001*'s final moments, the viewer becomes like an amoeba trying to see through the eyes of God.

As Dave travels through the star gate, Kubrick alternates shots of stars, lights, and other galactic wonders with still images of Dave's face contorted into various expressions of disbelief, horror, and wonder. These still images of Dave's face give way to extreme close-ups of his eye as he witnesses various space phenomena never before witnessed by humankind. What Dave experiences is more than an acid-freak's dream come true—it is nebulas giving birth to universes, black holes sucking light out of the cosmos, supernovas spewing out the entire contents of the periodic table, fields of stars beyond human comprehension, and a general closeness to the universe with which humankind's brain was not meant to deal, and thus Dave must be pushed beyond the limits of the human.

Eventually, Dave begins to encounter phenomena that perhaps point to some higher form of intelligence. For example, at one point, he witnesses a plane of lights spread out against the stars with a series of glowing and pulsing polyhedrons floating across the surface. He travels across valleys, mountains, and suns that could easily provide the backdrop for some alien civilization. Of course, in the film, Dave never encounters aliens per se, yet he no doubt finds evidence of a higher intelligence, an



intelligence of which he becomes a constituent part at the film's end. Clarke's series of novels explain that the monoliths represent technology from an alien civilization that has scoured the universe for millions of years in search of life forms that have the capacity to develop intelligence: "...And Because, in all the galaxy, they had found nothing more precious than Mind, they encouraged its dawning everywhere. They became farmers in the fields of stars; they sowed, and sometimes they reaped. And sometimes, dispassionately, they had to weed."<sup>51</sup> But, in many ways, Kubrick's film remains far more provocative because it leaves us wondering whether Dave has encountered aliens or whether he has possibly made contact with some sort of deity that drives evolution. As Carolyn Geduld points out, "the easiest sensible interpretation of the slab [the monolith], disregarding Clarke's is to call it a religious symbol. Kubrick, however, has pointed out that alien technology would probably look strange enough to appear godlike to humans on Earth."<sup>52</sup> In essence, the film leaves open the possibility that Dave attains oneness with God and that these images represent his mind evolving into a divine state of consciousness.

As Deleuze argues, "Kubrick is renewing the theme of the initiatory journey because every journey in the world is an exploration of the brain."<sup>53</sup> In effect, then, *2001* proves to be a sort of strange, cosmic bildungsroman in which Dave journeys towards a state of psychic maturity through the evolution of his consciousness and his consequent communal interaction with the entirety of the cosmos. Dave journeys not just to Jupiter but also into the depths of his cerebral makeup which the monolith alters in order to allow him to become one with the universe. Flaxman and Lambert explain, "if the brain is a plane of immanence or consistency, then we might understand its function through

networks of images themselves. The brain is a screen, Deleuze says, but the screen, the cinema, is also a brain, an organization of images and memories whose connections (regular or irrational) comprise an ‘image of thought.’”<sup>54</sup> What is the “image of thought” projected onto the screen at the end of *2001*? It is literally the evolution of Dave Bowman’s brain, a “mental image,” in Deleuzian terms, of how the monolith alters not only Dave’s brain but his entire state of being—he is reduced to the body without organs, a plane of pure immanence from which he can restructure (or perhaps deconstruct) himself into a new cosmic (or perhaps even divine) form of existence.

Finally, Dave arrives—if one can use such a word because Dave has most likely moved beyond places in any concrete sense of the term—in a strange white room decorated in a Louis XVI style where he witnesses himself at various stages of life. Here, Dave escapes from time and his body: he watches himself wasting away through various stages of old age, each of which he becomes, until finally at the verge of death the monolith returns to beckon him onwards to a new life, a life beyond the reach of decay, beyond the limits of knowledge, and certainly “beyond the infinite.” Thus, Dave is reborn in the form of the star child, a child because he is no longer subject to temporal constraints but also because he has become like the child in Nietzsche’s three metamorphoses—he has cast off the constraints of society and slavish morality and has been born anew into a state of pure becoming. In the final shot of the film, the star child returns to Earth, and we see it floating in space above the Earth. As Deleuze explains, the sphere of the child coincides with the globe of the Earth to point the way for the new evolution of humankind: “At the end of *Space Odyssey*, it is in consequence of a fourth dimension that the sphere of the foetus and the sphere of the earth have a chance of

entering into a new, incommensurable, unknown relation, which could convert death into a new life.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, Dave’s “initatory journey” is complete; he has reached out “beyond the infinite” and matured into a new realm of knowledge and consciousness. As Arthur C. Clarke’s sequel (*2010: Odyssey Two*) makes clear, Dave can now interact with the earth (and all of the universe) at a very basic, yet infinitely complex level, that is direct and without interferences such as language or the ego—he can literally beam his presence or voice between points almost instantaneously. As the embodiment of cosmic awareness, the monolith aids Dave Bowman in achieving a state that humankind never dreamed of: oneness with the stars. For, in the novel, when Dave states “The thing’s hollow—it goes on forever—and—oh my God—*it’s full of stars!*,” he means not just the monolith but himself as well.<sup>56</sup> For at the film’s end, Dave’s Lacanian “lack” has been filled permanently; it has been filled with “stars,” with the cosmos itself. He has moved beyond the realm of the body and into a potentially blissful realm of cosmic beauty, total communication, and limitless knowledge.

In effect, Dave embraces the chaos of the universe over the rigid organization of the human form to become a body without organs. Or, he might be said to embrace a higher structure since, of course, chaos theory posits that chaos represents an intense order too complex for the human mind to comprehend. But is *2001*’s image of human evolution truly libratory? Andrei Tarkovsky “disliked it [*2001*] as cold and sterile,” and hence tried to create a science fiction film that truly depicted human emotion: the result, of course, was his classic adaptation of Stanislaw Lem’s *Solaris*.<sup>57</sup> While *2001* does remain cold in the sense that the viewer cannot glean any real sense of Dave’s desires, it nonetheless provides the perfect example to begin our exploration of disembodiment as

the next evolutionary step. Gilles Deleuze actually first evokes the body without organs in *The Logic of Sense* (1969) during an exploration of Nietzsche's relation to the Pre-Socratics, whose philosophy Deleuze reads as "schizophrenic."<sup>1</sup> In the two volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (*Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*), Deleuze further develops the term in conjunction with Félix Guattari as a symbol for describing schizophrenic experiences. Deleuze explains that organs are not the enemies of the organless body:

The organs themselves, however, are not the real enemy of the organless body. Organism is the enemy, in other words, any organization which imposes on the organs a regime of totalization, collaboration, synergy, integration, inhibition and disjunction. Only in this sense are the organs indeed the enemy of the organless body, which exerts a repulsive action on them and treats them like instruments of persecution. On the other hand, the organless body attracts the organs, appropriates them for itself, and makes them function in a regime other than the one imposed by the organism...<sup>2</sup>

In effect, Dave moves beyond the regime of organism to become pure consciousness. Generally, to achieve the state of the body without organs entails reaching a state of stasis or death, but for Dave who has moved entirely beyond the realm of bodies, it means an ascendance to a condition of pure self beyond the constraints of any physical limitations. Indeed, the monolith acts as a perfect symbolic representation of the body without organs, for, as Deleuze and Guattari explain,

In order to resist organ-machines, the body without organs presents its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface as a barrier. In order to resist linked, connected, or interrupted flows, it sets up a counterflow of amorphous, undifferentiated fluid. In order to resist using words

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (1969; New York: Columbia UP, 1990) 128-9.

<sup>2</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Schizophrenia and Society," *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina, ed. David Lapoujade (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006: 17-28) 20.

composed of articulated phonetic units, it utters only gasps and cries that are sheer unarticulated blocks of sound.<sup>3</sup>

The shiny, black, geometrically perfect surface of the monolith presents just such an undifferentiated, unknowable mass, and its utterances manifest themselves only in dissonant sounds or creepy choral arrangements. Like Tarkovsky, one can read *2001* as a cold depiction of Darwinian evolution, or one can read it as an attempt to imagine something beyond the organization of the human form, beyond the lack that language, hierarchical organizations, and repressive social systems force upon the individual. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari pose a fundamental question: “Is it really necessary or desirable to submit to such repression?”<sup>58</sup> The organization of desiring-machines inflicts pain upon the body, for “Desiring-machines make us an organism; but at the very heart of this production, within the very production of this production, the body suffers from being organized in this way, from not having some other sort of organization or no organization at all.”<sup>59</sup> The monolith represents this other form of organization, a completely free-flowing, horizontal (not vertical and hierarchical) organization that allows lines of flight to exist at any given moment. The monolith inducts Dave into a similar existence as he casts off his desiring machines to become a full body without organs, an empty slate upon which his new existence as the star child can be inscribed without reference to repressive systems.

In essence, this final section provides a paradigmatic example of what Gilles Deleuze terms a “cinema of the brain” in which “the world itself is a brain, there is an identity of brain and world, as in the great circular and luminous table in *Doctor Strangelove*, the giant computer in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the Overlook hotel in *The*

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<sup>3</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 9.

*Shining*.”<sup>60</sup> While Hal may provide the initial example of the “world as brain” in the film, the entire filmic image becomes a depiction of Dave Bowman’s brain in the final section. The final sequence achieves what Gregg Lambert and Gregory Flaxman call “the full cerebrialization of the cinema,” a cerebrialization that allows the audience to directly experience the evolutionary changes in Dave Bowman’s consciousness.<sup>61</sup> While discussing the concept of the “world-brain” in Kubrick’s films, Deleuze explains the limit that is posited by such a cinema:

The identity of world and brain, the automaton, does not form a whole, but rather a limit, a membrane which puts an outside and an inside in contact, makes them present to each other, confronts them or makes them clash. The inside is psychology, the past, involution, a whole psychology of depths which excavate the brain. The outside is the cosmology of galaxies, the future, evolution, a whole supernatural which makes the world explode.<sup>62</sup>

The end of *2001* depicts Dave Bowman’s movement from the inside to the outside—we watch as the heterotopian space of the film causes our paltry visions of the universe to explode. No longer is Dave to be governed by bodily limitations, temporal demarcations, and a psychology that ends at the borders of the ego. In effect, Dave moves beyond a world governed by logic:

He is forced to use a small pod in section four, where he will enter a world devoid of logic. HAL’s disconnection, therefore, means the end of logic as we know it...Bowman’s trip being one beyond logic, where no human mind can understand what is happening [...] The final shots present the symbol of the new baby, the Starchild. It represents, within the chain of meanings associated with previous metaphors, the possibility of a new human being possessing a new intelligence that can understand the new illogicality of space and time because they are perceived as changeable, rather than as coherent or immutable parameters.<sup>63</sup>

Kubrick’s film breaks logical narrative connections in a manner akin to *La Jetée* and *Primer* in order to visualize this state beyond logic. While *2001* remains tied to the

spectacle in the tradition of Méliès, it still breaks with traditional structures in order to imagine a state beyond the strictures of narrative and time. Hence, Dave manages to attain a state usually accorded only to deities: an extemporal, omnipresent existence that allows communication not only with other humans but with the cosmos itself. The monolith embodies this experience as a black void of screeching dissonance. When the monolith appears for the second time and subjects Dr. Floyd and the other scientists to a piercing burst of sound, it seems to not lead to direct evolution, yet it paves the way for evolution by pointing towards Jupiter using its sonic assault. This audio burst represents the seeming chaos that communion with the monolith and the cosmos holds. By pointing the way to Jupiter, the monolith incites humankind's desire for knowledge and meaning, but, as we saw in Chapter Two, desire remains predicated upon lack as long as one remains subject to the society of control. But Dave transcends the bodily form and becomes the body without organs in order to transmute his desire into the will to power, a motor for infinite becoming instead of an Oedipal lack that impedes his progression.

#### **IV. Conclusion: Equating the Human: Encounters with the Heterotopian**

In Nietzsche's prologue to *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Zarathustra decries the coming of the last men, men who have achieved a utopian existence and happiness based on the eradication of struggle. They strive neither for too much nor too little, but instead have "invented happiness" by always dwelling in the mean between two extremes.<sup>64</sup> When Zarathustra attempts to warn the townspeople about the coming of this "despicable" race of humans, the townspeople misunderstand him and ask him to teach them how to become these last men.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, to many people, the world of the last men

might seem idyllic, yet Zarathustra (or Nietzsche) argues that this world robs us of essential aspects of the human: struggle, desire, and becoming. As Nietzsche's example suggests, utopias learn to manipulate the variables of the human into a social equation that provides the greatest possible contentment to the largest demographic of individuals.

Arthur C. Clarke's other evolutionary epic, *Childhood's End*, features just such a utopian transformation of humankind, a transformation in which the majority of the human race literally become "the last men." The novel concerns a race of aliens known as the Overlords who appear above the major cities of Earth and eventually reveal the paltry role that humankind plays in the affairs of the universe. As Clarke's novel elucidates, utopia leads towards peace and plenty but also towards the death of the human. When the Overlords bring global peace to Earth in *Childhood's End*, humankind loses its sense of struggle: "I fear that the human race has lost its *initiative*. It has peace, it has plenty—but it has no *horizons*."<sup>66</sup> When humankind achieves peace and when it is provided with endless distractions, then it loses its desire for becoming, for reaching beyond the present into the future. On the Earth of *Childhood's End*, this leads to the creation of a colony called "New Athens" where artists and scientists try to reignite the human impulse for advancement and culture. But soon the humans learn that the Overlords are merely servants of an even more powerful entity known as the Overmind, which seeks out worlds and then spurs the evolution of their children into a new form of being. Initially, the children of Earth develop psychic powers and begin taking mental journeys through the universe, but soon they evolve beyond this and leave their bodies behind. After shedding their physical forms, the children become united into one consciousness—*Childhood's End* was one of Hideaki Anno's inspirations for *Neon*



*Genesis Evangelion*. The parents of the children are left behind with no future—much like the characters in Alfonso Cuarón’s *Children of Men*—and they soon destroy themselves with nuclear weapons. Like Nietzsche’s discussion of the last men, *Childhood’s End* demonstrates how the human must rid itself of utopian orderliness and embrace chaos the heterotopian if it is to achieve new states of becoming.

Of course, there are dangers inherent in such forms of evolution because, as Kevin Stoehr argues, “*2001* is not necessarily a celebration of the idea of any evolution or advancement toward such a form of existence, since the dangers inherent in this type of transcendence (i.e., the surpassing of the need for physical embodiment) are also evoked in the film.”<sup>67</sup> For instance, as Stoehr elaborates, the idea of existing beyond the body destroys our sense of being because it robs us of the context within which we define ourselves: “those who pretend to locate themselves somehow beyond the borders of their present life-situation are left only with nothing in particular—an absence of meaning and value.”<sup>68</sup> Stoehr makes a valid point, but he also misunderstands the critical apparatus of science fiction. While works such as Kubrick’s definitely attempt to imagine alternative forms of existence, they more directly comment upon our present systems of thought—they are texts that allow us to make first contact with spaces of radical otherness in a way that incites us to question our most basic concepts of reality and self. Kubrick’s *2001* exemplifies this critical function of science fiction because it depicts the transcendence of a utopian space in order to attain communication with a heterotopian space in which radical difference can reactivate struggle and becoming. The heterotopian exposes our traditional, stable images of the universe to the chaos of multiplicity—it opens the realms of chance in which becoming can thrive. In Kubrick’s film and in Clarke’s novel, society

has progressed to the point where further development remains impossible while the individual remains tied to the limits of the body, so Dave must seek transcendence through disembodiment. This disembodiment exposes him directly to chaos in a manner at which the human mind would balk—the heterotopian represents a sublime moment, as Kant defines it in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, in which reason fails because it cannot fathom the complexity of chaos. Hence, whereas the traditional fictional narrative might expose us to the beautiful, to the orderliness and structure of the utopian, science fiction brings us into contact with the heterotopian, a sublime space that shreds our concepts and decimates our attempts to impose structure and coherence. By doing so, science fiction allows us to not simply conceive of other states of being but to use our contact with the heterotopian to engage in a critique of our traditional theoretical discourses and to generate new theoretical concepts that can displace or advance existing critical strands. In essence, science fiction allows critical theory to move beyond its state of reactive being and to embrace a state of radical becoming in which thought can struggle past its conventional restrictions and thrive upon a new plane of immanence.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for None and All*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (1883-92; New York: Penguin, 1954) §5.

<sup>2</sup> Carrol L Fry, "From Technology to Transcendence: Humanity's Evolutionary Journey in *2001: A Space Odyssey*," *Extrapolation* 44.3 (Fall 2003): 333. Numerous critics have examined how the film parallels Homer's *Odyssey* and several have even argued that Kubrick reworks the Homeric epic in a manner akin to how Joyce and Pound use it respectively as the underlying structure of *Ulysses* (1922) and *The Cantos* (1922-69). For examples of such readings, see Suparno Bannerjee's "2001: *Space Odyssey*: A Transcendental Trans-locution" in *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 19.1 (2008), Phillip Kuberski's "Kubrick's *Odyssey*: Myth, Technology, Gnosis" in *The Arizona Quarterly* 64.3 (2008), or Leonard F. Wheat's *Kubrick's 2001: A Triple Allegory* (Lanham, MD and London: Scarecrow Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> As Clarke's preface matter to the story indicates, "The Sentinel" was written for a 1948 BBC competition in which it failed to place. It was subsequently published in *10 Story Fantasy* (1951) as "Sentinel of Eternity" and was later collected in a collection of Clarke's short stories entitled *Expedition to Earth* (1953). It is now available in Arthur C. Clarke's *The Collected Stories* (London: Victor Gollancz, 2000). The story of "The Sentinel" concerns the discovery of a strange pyramid stationed on a mountainside plateau on the Moon. The pyramid is protected by an energy field, which Earth scientists eventually crack using atomic energy. The scientists discover that the pyramid is actually a machine that stops working once they penetrate its protective barrier. The pyramid predates even the most basic forms of life on Earth and is determined to be of alien origins. While the scientists in the story remain unsure of the device's purpose, the narrator speculates that the device was placed there by an ancient and advanced alien civilization who combed the young universe in search of planets that seemed poised to produce intelligent life. They placed the devices in locations that would require the species to develop their own space travel and atomic technologies before they would be able to discover it. Once they pierced the device's protective barrier, the device would cease functioning and sending its signal back to its masters, who then will presumably return to that planet. The brief story ends with a note of paranoia when the narrator states: "But they must be very, very old, and the old are often insanely jealous of the young. I can never look now at the Milky Way without wondering from which of those banked clouds of stars the emissaries are coming. If you will pardon so commonplace a simile, we have broken the glass of the fire-alarm and have nothing to do but wait. I do not think we will have to wait long" (308).

<sup>4</sup> Suparno Bannerjee, "2001: *Space Odyssey*: A Transcendental Trans-locution," in *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 19.1 (2008): 39.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur C. Clarke wrote the screenplay of *2001: A Space Odyssey* together with Stanley Kubrick and simultaneously penned the full-length novel. He later wrote three sequels in the space odyssey series: *2010: Odyssey Two* (1982), *2061: Odyssey Three* (1987), and *3001: The Final Odyssey* (1997). *2010* was later made into a film entitled *2010: The Year We Make Contact* (1984) directed by Peter Hyams. Clarke penned a further series of "Time Odyssey" novels with Stephen Baxter: *Time's Eye* (2003), *Sunstorm* (2005), and *Firstborn* (2007).

<sup>6</sup> Bannerjee, "Trans-locution" 39.

<sup>7</sup> Randy Rasmussen, *Stanley Kubrick: Seven Films Analyzed* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland & Company, 2001) 51.

<sup>8</sup> Rasmussen, *Seven Films* 53.

<sup>9</sup> Clarke divides his novel into six parts: "Primeval Night," "TMA-1," "Between Planets," "Abyss," "The Moons of Saturn," and "Through the Star Gate."

<sup>10</sup> Bannerjee, "Trans-locution" 41.

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<sup>11</sup> Clarke's novel places the man-apes in Africa, and *3001: The Final Odyssey* reveals that Earth scientists ultimately discovered the buried monolith in Africa.

<sup>12</sup> Clarke, *2001* 3.

<sup>13</sup> The "Primeval Night" section of the novel only refers to it as "the slab," but the mysterious entity appears in a different form in Clarke's rendition. In the opening section of the novel, the monolith is transparent and even generates patterns of light that presage the intergalactic journey through the Star Gate later in the novel/film. When Moon-Watcher initially discovers the monolith, it is merely transparent: "It was a rectangular slab, three times his height but narrow enough to span with his arms, and it was made of some completely transparent material; indeed, it was not easy to see except when the rising sun glinted on the edges. As Moon-Watcher had never encountered ice, or even crystal-clear water, there were no natural objects to which he could compare this apparition. It was certainly rather attractive, and though he was wisely cautious of most new things, he did not hesitate for long before sidling up to it. As nothing happened, he put out his hand, and felt a cold, hard surface" (11). As night falls, the monolith begins to change and emit sounds: "The drumming became louder, the night darker. And as the shadows lengthened and the light drained from the sky, the crystal began to glow. First it lost its transparency, and became suffused with a pale, milky luminescence. Tantalizing, ill-defined phantoms moved across its surface and in its depths. They coalesced into bars of light and shadow, then formed intermeshing, spoked patterns that began slowly to rotate. Faster and faster spun the wheels of light, and the throbbing of the drums accelerated with them [...] Now the spinning wheels of light began to merge, and the spokes fused into luminous bars that slowly receded into the distance, rotating on their axes as they did so. They split into pairs, and the resulting sets of lines started to oscillate across one another, slowly changing their angles of intersection. Fantastic, fleeting geometrical patterns flickered in and out of existence as the glowing grids meshed and unmeshed; and the man-apes watched, mesmerized captives of the shining crystal" (13-4).

<sup>14</sup> As Carol Geguld points out in *Filmguide to 2001: A Space Odyssey* (Bloomington, IN and London: Indiana UP, 1973), the choral music is actually the "'unworldly' music" of Gyorgy Ligeti (40). However, if one proves unfamiliar with the work of Ligeti, then the music could also easily represent sounds being emitted by the monolith. In fact, in the novel, the monolith emits screeching sounds and drumming noises. Its screeches presage the later encounter with the monolith on the Moon. As the novel's narrator describes, "It was barely audible, yet it stopped them dead, so that they stood paralyzed on the trail with their jaws hanging slackly. A simple, maddeningly repetitious vibration, it pulsed out from the crystal, and hypnotized all who came within its spell" (13).

<sup>15</sup> Bannerjee, "Trans-locution" 42.

<sup>16</sup> Jerold J. Abrams, *The Philosophy of Stanley Kubrick* (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 2007) 247.

<sup>17</sup> Phillip Kuberski, "Kubrick's *Odyssey*: Myth, Technology, Gnosis," in *The Arizona Quarterly* 64.3 (2008): 64.

<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, in *On The Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (1908; New York: Vintage, 1967) "Why I am So Wise" §2.

<sup>19</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson (1962; New York: Columbia UP, 1983) 42.

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in German Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoff and Adrian Del Caro. (1882, 1887; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2001) §349.

<sup>21</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 42.

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<sup>22</sup> Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. Daniel W. Smith. (1969; Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997) 32.

<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche *On the Genealogy of Morals*, in *On The Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (1887; New York: Vintage, 1967)§13.

<sup>24</sup> Klossowski, *Vicious Circle* 50.

<sup>25</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 40. Deleuze takes the phrase “relations of tension” from Nietzsche’s collection of notebooks entitled *The Will to Power* (trans. Walter Kaufmann, ed. and R. J. Hollingdale [New York: Vintage, 1967] §635). The ellipsis in this quote represents the citations in the original text.

<sup>26</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 40.

<sup>27</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 40. While active and reactive constitute the two possible qualities of forces, forces must also be measured quantitatively as well as qualitatively. As Deleuze explains in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, “the quality [of forces]...correspond[s] to their difference in quantity” (42). Thus, the strength, or quantity of a force is its primary attribute, for, as Deleuze says in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, “quality is distinguished from quantity, but only because it is a remainder” (45). In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche makes it clear that a quantitative science of value based on forces is desirable: “The attempt should be made to see whether a scientific order of ‘values’ could be constructed simply on a numerical and mensural scale of force—All other values are prejudices, naiveties, misunderstandings.—They are everywhere *reducible* to this numerical and mensural scale of force. (§710). Thus, to understand Nietzsche, we must come to view everything—society, the body, identity, and values—as the interplay of mathematically quantifiable forces. However, since the science of discerning the measurement of such forces seems well nigh impossible because “‘extremely fine’ perception is necessary here, of the kind found in chemistry, we are left with a predominately qualitative rendering of forces as either active (dominating) or reactive (dominated) (Deleuze *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 53).

<sup>28</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 50.

<sup>29</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 51.

<sup>30</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 54.

<sup>31</sup> Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* 54.

<sup>32</sup> Clarke, 2001 36-7.

<sup>33</sup> Mario Falsetto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Narrative and Stylistic Analysis*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2001) 44.

<sup>34</sup> Rasmussen, *Seven Films* 61.

<sup>35</sup> Undoubtedly, Kuberski is playfully referring to the classic Dadaist short film *Ballet Mécanique* (1924) developed by composer George Antheil and filmmaker Fernand Léger.

<sup>36</sup> Kuberski, “Gnosis” 66.

<sup>37</sup> Kuberski, “Gnosis” 66-7.

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, this is a common trend in dystopian narratives or critical utopias: Ayn Rand’s *Anthem* (1938), Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) or Francois Truffaut’s eponymous 1966 film adaptation, George Lucas’s *THX 1138* (1971), or Kurt Wimmer’s *Equilibrium* (2002) all depict worlds in which humans are

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placated instead of inspired and/or in which emotion and individuality are sacrificed for reason and communal “happiness.”

<sup>39</sup> Kuberski, “Gnosis” 68.

<sup>40</sup> In Clarke’s novel, the monolith actually points towards Saturn, and *Discovery* merely uses the gravitational pull of Jupiter to slingshot itself and increase its velocity in order to reach Saturn more quickly. But Clarke revises this aspect in *2010: Odyssey Two*. For *2010*, Clarke actually wrote a sequel to Kubrick’s film instead of to his novel. Hence, it uses Jupiter instead of Saturn.

<sup>41</sup> In the conclusion, parenthetical numbers with refer to the scene numbers on the DVD of Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968; United States: Turner Entertainment, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> While the film does not explain the nature of the part, the part is called the “AM-35” unit and is responsible for keeping the communication antennae aimed at Earth.

<sup>43</sup> Frank Poole is actually discovered floating out on the edge of the solar system in *3001: The Final Odyssey*. He is revived and becomes the protagonist of the final entry in Clarke’s tetraology.

<sup>44</sup> *2010: Odyssey Two* (1982) and Peter Hyman’s adaptation of the novel entitled *2010: The Year We Make Contact* (1984) both explain that Hal begins malfunctioning because his devotion to the crewmembers and his prime directive to provide them with knowledge conflicts with his mission directive that requires him to conceal the mission’s true purpose from Dave and Frank. Because of this conflict, Hal becomes capable of harming a human, thus violating one of the fundamental rules usually embedded in artificial intelligences. The most classic example of this stems from Isaac Asimov’s *I, Robot* (1950).

<sup>45</sup> Rodney A. Brooks, *Flesh and Machines: How Robots Will Change Us* (New York: Vintage, 2002) 180.

<sup>46</sup> Gary D. Rhodes, “Believing is Seeing: Surveillance and *2001: A Space Odyssey*,” *Stanley Kubrick: Essays on His Films and Legacy* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland and Company, 2008.) 98.

<sup>47</sup> Rhodes, “Believing is Seeing” 99.

<sup>48</sup> Christian Nyby, dir., *The Thing from Another World*, DVD (1951; Burbank, CA: Turner Entertainment, 2003) Scene 24.

<sup>49</sup> Michel Foucault, “Truth and Juridical Forms,” in *Essential Writing of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume 3: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, series ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Robert Hurley and others (1973; New York: The New Press, 2000) 58.

<sup>50</sup> While Kubrick’s film never explains the nature of the star gate, Clarke’s novel explains it as a sort of hyperspace gateway that transports Dave to points around the universe at almost instantaneous speeds. Eventually, he exits the gateway above a strange planet that features a sky filled with black tunnels like the one through which he has been traveling. This planet acts as a sort of cosmic switching yard in which travelers from presumably various worlds change from one tunnel to another like switching trains in a subway.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, *2010: Odyssey Two* (New York: Del Rey, 1982) 328. Clarke’s three sequels to *2001* actually depict the aliens’ cultivation of life on Europa, one of the moons of Jupiter.

<sup>52</sup> Geduld, *Filmguide* 41.

<sup>53</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 206.

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<sup>54</sup> Lambert and Flaxman, "Five Propositions on the Brain." *Journal of Neuro-Aesthetic Theory* 2.02, <http://www.artbrain.org/five-propositions-on-the-brain> ¶5.

<sup>55</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 206.

<sup>56</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968; New York: ROC, 2000), 254. Kubrick's film does not feature the classic line, although the less than stellar sequel, *2010: The Year We Make Contact* (1984), which of course was not a Kubrick film, makes copious use of the quote as the last transmission from Dave Bowman. Kubrick's film, unlike the novel, includes no dialogue after the shutdown of HAL-9000. Instead, Kubrick works solely with images—many of which play with what Deleuze terms the perception image—to portray Dave Bowman's evolution, thus allowing him to create a more ambiguous and thought-provoking finale, a finale that, continuing the symphonic theme of the work, ends without words.

<sup>57</sup> Philip Lopate, "Solaris Liner Notes," 1992, *Solaris*, dir. Andrei Tarkovsky, perf. Donatas Banionis and Natalya Bondarchuk, 1972, DVD, The Criterion Collection, 2002. Of course, Tarkovsky's film was based on Stanislaw Lem's classic novel *Solaris* from 1961. More recently, Steven Soderbergh directed his own adaptation of the novel in 2002.

<sup>58</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (1985; Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1989) 205.

<sup>61</sup> Lambert and Flaxman, "Five Propositions" ¶5.

<sup>62</sup> Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 206.

<sup>63</sup> Luis M. García Mainar, *Narrative and Stylistic Patterns in the Films of Stanley Kubrick* (Rochester: Camden House, 1999) 130.

<sup>64</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* 17.

<sup>65</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* 17.

<sup>66</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, *Childhood's End* (New York: Del Rey, 1953) 155.

<sup>67</sup> Kevin L. Stoeck, "2001: A Philosophical Odyssey" in *The Philosophy of Science Fiction Film*, ed. Steven M Sanders (Lexington, KY: The UP of Kentucky) 122.

<sup>68</sup> Stoeck, "Philosophical Odyssey" 130.

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