

# A thesis on Gibson and Cyberpunk

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## 0.0 INTRODUCTION

*"My intention is to tell of bodies changed to different forms."*  
-- Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

During the last half of the '80s, critics of cyberpunk identified its central narrative as the breakdown of boundaries between bodies and machines. Much of this critical writing was outright celebratory in its welcoming a new kind of science fiction which was obviously plugged in to present-state techno-reality. William Gibson even coined a term for the virtual space people started to spend time in - cyberspace, the other side of computer screens. Starting to make their first appearances in the mid-80s, cyberpunk's technologized bodies seemed to provide images through which the readers could imagine their fates in the near future, especially if they were young white males with access to computer hardware.

A lot of current critical thinking has fallen into the prison of the flesh (the body as a central philosophical issue is particularly true among French philosophers, like Gabriel Marcel, Jean-Paul Sartre or Maurice Merleau-Ponty). Even today there is a determination on the part of many critical thinkers to reinsert the meat into the picture, to resist the dreams of a disappearing body which have been influenced by technological fictions of its looming obsolescence.

Although, if there is such an intense fascination with the fate of the body, is it not because the body does not exist any longer ? Foucault is concerned with a continually disintegrating body, "traced by language, lacerated by ideology and invaded by the relational circuitry of the field of postmodern power" (Kroker, *Theses on the...*, 20). Levin writes about of an Anti-System, "an alloy of classical substance and modern force" (Levin, 101), which thinks of the body as an organless, closed and dimensionless surface. This concept of unextended matter and energy, a new body ideal is the manifestation of old and new referents of deconstruction.

The focus of this thesis is the body in interaction with the immersive digital / technological environment in the works of William Gibson. In doing so, I will employ a generous understanding of cyberspace, which is necessary in order to fully grasp the interrelations between physical and virtual space. Thus emphasizing the problematics of corporeality, I wish to signal my opinion that the bodies represented in William Gibson's works show signs of potent de-construction and they are not facialized to the location we now commonly call cyberspace - becoming an itthis is contrary to the majority of cyberpunk literature of past years (Sterling, Stephenson, Egan, Fabi, among others), according to which the body is inherent in the virtual body's sensory s[t]imulations.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter I briefly elaborate on a cyberpunk framework of concepts based on Ihab Hassan's table of dichotomies. In the second chapter I start by establishing cyberspace as a location, as a place, both a social and a living space. Cyberspace is a location that certainly has a life of its own, with specific details, folds, peculiarities, representing a particular reality of feedback.

From the location of cyberspace I pass on to the phenomenon of the body inside and outside cyberspace and two

of its avatars (the doll and the idoru) that are called forth by economic imperatives. I will scrutinize both body and mind, separately and in symbiotic terms. From that very definition of the body I will shift to the phenomenon of gendered technologies, to the impact of cyberculture, cosmetic surgery and virtual sex on the gendered body as the sexual aspect of the new body ideal or its new quality of presence.

I have ordered my thesis around the body's relation with the perception/sensuality of space, the mind (as its superior driving force or its inferior ordering principle) and sexuality. I want to prove that William Gibson's universe is an eclectic compound of post-modernist theories in which the body is coterminous with covert intertextuality and is a fragmented entity seeking to transcend itself.

## 1.0 CYBERPUNK : A FRAMEWORK

Beyond the eclectic and multi-accentual nature of cyberspace lies a strong hybridizing tendency, bringing together the scientific enthusiasm of the Industrial Age, the social enthusiasm of modernism and the sheer disillusionment of postmodernism. I tried to set up a new paradigm shift, a follower of Modernism and Post-Modernism under the name of **cyberpunk**, based on Ihab Hassan's table of dichotomies (Bókay, 247-249).

This classification of Cyberpunk as a paradigm is far from unmistakable. Cyberpunk is also a genre of literature and music, it is a fashion and art trend and also a youth subculture merging punks, hippies and computer campus geeks to represent a politically neutral, elitist and anarchist point of view. Cyberpunk as a paradigm is an effort to speak for all the before-mentioned aspects.

MODERNISM	POSTMODERNISM	CYBERPUNK
Form (conjunctive and closed)	Anti-form (disjunctive, open)	Fragmentation/Hybrid
Hierarchy	Anarchy	Organized chaos, fractals
Proficiency/logos	Exhaustion/silence	Resuscitation/White noise
Isolation	Participation	Spectator mode
Creation	Deconstruction	Gomi
Synthesis	Antithesis	Ephemeral dogmas
Presence	Absence	Shifting/Overlapping existence
Genre/Boundary	Text/Intertext	Hypertext
Semantics	Rhetorics	Memetics
Selection	Combination	Storage/Heaping
Interpretation	Misreading	Filtering
Signified	Signifier	Hyperlink
Lisible	Scriptible	Executable/Functional
Type	Mutant	Hybrid/Heterogeneous
Origin	Trace	Presence through traces
Transcendence	Immanence	Immanence/Imminence

Hassan admits that he has not defined Modernism and he can define Post-Modernism even less. I suggest,

though, that the complexity and unfinished nature of postmodern discourse has evolved into an open, evolving and at the same time, stable paradigm. Cyberpunk's determinate and open-to-analysis characteristics is due to its integrity with technology.

It is observable that cyberpunk as a tendency is defined by a process of three steps, namely those of fragmentation / dissolution; a re-combination which forms a whole in which original components are still observable, and the re-introduction ("execution" as in running a program) of the new "hybrid" form into the environment from which it has been ripped away. The new hybrid will - due to its enhanced nature - establish connection with the old environment from the *outside*. It analyzes, organizes, stores and filters while not returning wholly to its previous state. It will act just as cyberpunk does in general - merge the most applicable functions that are most appropriate in any given state.

Flesh becomes integrated with machinery, in the process of something that is rightly called the dissolution of the body by Weinstein and Kroker & Kroker. Weinstein claims that the mind is being exteriorized (which I call the "spectator mode" in which the entity is capable of analyzing / filtering, seeing, immersing yet not being there in physical reality), Kroker & Kroker reveal that "we are being processed through a media scene consisting of our own (exteriorized) body organs in the form of second-order simulacra" (21). The body, according to them, is immersed in multiple subordinations to power apparati, ideologically, epistemologically, semiotically and technologically. In due order, these refer to the screenlike phase of the mutating body being inscribed by the fashion industry; a process of conditioning of the body for possibility for the operation of postmodern power; the body as a floating signifier of the imperatives of advanced capitalism and the subordination of the body to hyper-functionality.

Bodies as self-contained wireless information entities (cf. chapter 2.0), in terms of information theory are hypertexts, pieces of information connected by hyperlinks. Hypertext, as the concept for a non-sequential form of writing which could only exist in a computer environment, was coined by Ted Nelson in 1965. Nelson suffered from ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) which caused him to forget a train of thought if interrupted, getting lost in a plethora of other associations. Ironically, hypertextuality / hyperlinking is a memory aid by which one can completely forget what they are looking for.

Bodies, entities of unity are not forgotten, though but are under the knife of the new paradigm, namely, the **update**. Cyberpunk age offers brochures advertising new implants and body parts instead of clothes. The inner (metabolical, psychological, psychosomata) harmony is facaded by a cascade of chaos, one of systematic randomness. Gibson's characters exist in traces left in logs of computer transactions, notes of illegal clinics, memory fragments of ominous oracle-like figures (like the Finn or Ratz). What they are is built up of what they had done or seen. The life of Molly, for example, swarms with.

Galaxies of supposition, rumor, conflicting data. Streetgirl, prostitute, bodyguard, assassin, she mingles on the manifold planes with the shadows of heroes and villains whose names mean nothing to Angie, though their residual images have long since been woven through the global culture. (*Mona Lisa Overdrive*, 285)

The chapter "40: Pink Satin" of *Mona Lisa Overdrive* and chapter 23 of *Neuromancer* are one of the best examples of fragmented, and at the same time, completely organized way of perception.

Combination of the old and the new implies a resuscitation of obsolete materials and themes. However fragmented bodies of combination may be and whatever parts they might include, their union results in *white noise*, by this I mean a total masking of the self. Bodies are masked, dissolved, hidden by their existence in fragments. The very same semblance is used in Mark Fabi's *Wyrms*, describing the facilities of a military

complex :

"Your guest cards [...] adjust the settings for things like temperature, illumination level, even what kind of Muzak plays when you're on the elevator [...]. You can customize your settings now - in fact, I'd strongly advise it - the Muzak default is Mantovani."

"What if there's more than one person on the elevator ?" George asked.

"Then it compares the various lists of preferences and tries to come up with the best compromise. If it's a total loss - say, Brahms, Anthrax, and Yanni - it'll just pump in some white noise." (187)

## 2.0 CYBERSPACE : THE PHENOMENA OF VISITATION

Cyberpunk's eclecticity and multi-accentuality is paralleled by those of its related phenomena of Virtual Reality (VR), or also known as cyberspace. "Virtual Reality", the phrase coined by the computer scientist and visual artist Jason Lanier in the late 1980s, is "computer-created sensory experience that allows a participant to believe and barely distinguish a 'virtual' experience from a real one. VR uses computer graphics, sounds, and images to reproduce electronic versions of real-life situations" (Franchi).

The body immersed in the virtual environment of cyberspace crosses over to the domain of the hybrid, for its humanity is irreversibly connected to non-human apparati. For example, Case, the console cowboy protagonist of *Neuromancer* who lived for the paradise of cyberspace, is "a byproduct of youth and proficiency, jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix" (*Neuromancer*, 12). He experiences his exultation from cyberspace as the Fall as well as involving "a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. [...] Case fell into the prison of his own flesh" (*Neuromancer*, 12).

The interpenetration of the organic and the inorganic elicits ambivalent responses, on one hand, technology is viewed as a magical potion which multiplies human powers ad infinitum, on the other, technology is associated with the engulfment of the human by the machine. Either way, the body constructed via technology displaces the binary opposition between wired and organic corporeality (I will elaborate upon this matter in chapter 3.4, concerning the symbiosis of the body in mind in cybernetic symbionts).

This binary opposition is resolved in the idea of Arthur Kroker and Michael A. Weinstein, transcending the concept of the wired nervous system buried in living flesh :

The hyper-texted body with its dedicated flesh [...] wants to be an Internet. [...] Operating by means of the aesthetic strategy of over identification with the feared and desired object, the hyper-texted body insists that ours is already the era of post-capitalism, and even post-technology. Taking the will to virtuality seriously, it demands its telematic rights to be a functioning interfaced body : to be a multimedia thinker, to patch BUS ports on its cyber-flesh as it [...] goes wireless. (*The Theory of the Virtual Class*)

Gibson's bodies are similarly **not** interfaced to the Net via modems and miscellaneous software; they become their own self-contained nets, as in cruising cyberspace the players get physically involved with oceans of data that impact directly on their nervous systems and senses. Black ICEs are the most notorious picturesque example for this. These are mechanisms produced by artificial intelligences which can literally kill hackers

initiating illicit incursions.

Gibson's cyberpunk takes virtual technology further by posing the possibility of a NIL (Neural Interface Link) between the human brain and the computer. This connection is effected by means of sockets situated behind the ear that can receive chips and thus grant access to digital memory. Once these gadgets function, human bodies and minds are not only in a position to enter an intimate relationship with computers, they also become able to access the ultimate virtual space and interact with other bodies and minds, they transcend the individual and the community to form a location which is built up of themselves.

## 2.1 THE PHENOMENA OF VISITORS

This narcissistic totalization of the self is best represented by the ominous Dixie Flatline of *Neuromancer*. It is "a ROM personality matrix... given sequential, real time memory" (99), de facto, the personality of a top hacker burnt into ones and zeroes, who (which ?) acts as if he were "there", on location with Case in c-space. Without an access to Case's memory banks he (it) is just a (relatively) simple flood of logic and catchwords :

"Hey, bro", said a directionless voice.  
"It's Case, man. Remember ?"  
"Miami, joeboy, quick study."  
"What's the last thing you remember before I spoke to you, Dix ?"  
"Nothin". [...]  
"Okay, Dix. You are a ROM construct. Got me ?"  
"If you say so", said the construct. "Who are you ?"  
"Case."  
"Miami", said the voice, "joeboy, quick study". (*Neuromancer*, 99-100)

The motif of transcending into an entity of higher integrity (Dixie becoming a part of Case) is turned upside down in *Count Zero* and *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, where characters are ridden/possessed by voodoo gods/demi-gods.

In *Count Zero* cyberspace riders are thus not only situated along the symbolism of hi-tech societies but also along a religion that is close to that we know as Voodoo. Names and functions of loa connote a double referentiality, those of Voodoo and Christianity. This postmodern cyber-anthropology is stripped to the bone, formed by the connectivity of an artificial intelligence, the one that had been formed during the Straylight action minutely described in *Neuromancer*.

Cyberspatial existence in *Count Zero* is extended through suspension vats and sensory links and most importantly, biotechnology that takes over silicon. The motif of parallel worlds (existences) and their overlap climaxes in biochips, hybrid cancer cells transplanted into circuitries, cyberspace and manipulated human memory spontaneously intertwines. In *Mona Lisa Overdrive* the Finn becomes "a construct, a personality job, [...] real-time memory if I wanna, wired into c-space if I wanna" (164) and Bobby Zero appears as a corpse wired into an Aleph, which is "completely interactive. And it's a matter of scale. [...] he literally could have anything at all in there. In a sense, *he could have an approximation of everything...*" (154).

## 2.2 THE APPROXIMATION OF LOCATION

Digital technology is a language in which we - for the first time - have the possibility of manipulating, controlling and having responsibility over language to create the references we want. By controlling and

manipulating it we create a location, even if it lacks any "real-life" spatial settings - a location that lives a life of its own, with its details, peculiarities, a place that doesn't allow external breathing, it's captured, *approximated* - and we're captured within. Cyberspace is the result of what once seemed an impossibility : the creation of space in the electronic frame. The creators of [im]possibilities make up a perceptual understanding complete with physical experience and comprehension. This phenomena translates into an awareness of how images function on various levels of the communication scale, creating an architecture that does not only put forward prospects for viewing, but most of all creates spaces with which the images interfere, so as to gain their own topology *in loco*. Space is still a necessary place, but architecture is no longer bound by the static conditions of locally defined place, but as architecture in data space, as it is shown by its most famous representation in *Neuromancer* :

Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts... A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding... (67)

Jorge Luis Borges in a short story ("The Aleph", 1949) evokes an image of something called the Aleph. According to his definition, "an Aleph is one of the points in space that contains all other points [...] the only place on earth where all places are - seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending" (Borges). This contention does not stand far from the Barlowian quotidian and vague idea of cyberspace, "the place where you are when making a phone call". Borges' revelations further clarify this, "I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency. What my eyes beheld was simultaneous, but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive".

In Gibson's brief description of the c-landscape,

...and flowed, flowered for him, fluid neon origami trick, the unfolding of his distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity. Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Mitsubishi Bank of America, and high and very far away he saw the spiral arms of military systems, forever beyond his reach. (Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 69)

perceiveable is the notion of implacement applied to cyberspace, a further representation of united components of the "natural world" and the "generated world". If we perceive images and building blocks, like spiral arms, chessboards and pyramids realities of space that create the environment, their presence and participation will contribute to the creation of spatiality.

The counterbalance of perceived constraints in corporeal society and the envisioned freedom of an electric self raises questions about how physical reality is valued in relation to its virtual counterpart. VR enthusiasts sometimes speak of VR as an alternative to the physical world, a place where constraints can be overcome and new freedoms can be discovered. On one level, this is classic techno-rhetoric. New technology always promises more. For some, VR suggests that electronic identity offers something greater or more fulfilling than bodily existence. As Case says in *Neuromancer* : "the body is meat". For Case, jacking into cyberspace is a life-enhancing experience that is more meaningful than being in his body. In cyberspace, Case, a marginal figure in real life, displays a cunning intelligence in breaking through barriers to crack information codes, and he shows

considerable courage in maneuvering his way through a cascade of intrusion countermeasure electronics. In a world of collapsed boundaries between the artificial and the real, the symbolic world of the net becomes for Case a more intense and expansive reality than his corporeal one.

*Neuromancer* offers us a scenario in a world where the real is no longer a point of reference. Being is convertible into infinite forms, and values of identity are constituted primarily through the manipulation of technology. The materials which constitute the substance of design have already gone through so many transformations that their essential nature is no longer evident. Cyberspace is a simulacrum, standing on its own as a copy without the real model, its relation to the old model of old materials and ideals is so attenuated that it can no longer properly be called a model.

In addition, cyberspace constructs - data constructs organized in the shape of real-life architectural constructs are both **immanent** (containing and hiding something, protected with passwords and/or ICE mechanisms) and **imminent** (reflecting their inner essence). Cyberspace is then realized through this bi-polarity in the totalizing memory (which is superior, since it is equipped with the interface which interprets the world and reacts accordingly). We're facing a generative structure that doesn't get organized around a centering axis but is actually spread in all directions. It is the real Baudrillardian simulation, the substitution of signs of the real for the real. Cyberspace constructs and the very fabric of c-space itself stands for nothing but itself and refers only to other signs. They are of course grounded by the gravitational pull of contextual meanings but without them component images run together, dissolve and become interchangeable.

It is obvious that the age of ideologies is gone, we're participants of a paradigm shift of electronic transformation which is first envisioned in the cyberpunk scene in *Neuromancer*. We have (both in the Gibsonian setting and in real life) a society of intense information, instead of one that is of intense energy exchange (Nagy, 38). The possibilities and new concepts which are introduced by the electronic [re-]production and sharing of data changes not only society but our frame of mind as well. Leibniz's concept of space which is abstracted from matter by the mind to explain simultaneity and the displacement of matter is no longer working. Cyberspace expands the concept of space through its reductionist environment where everything is reduced to icons, binary codes, height and depth and perpendicularity. It exists independently from what is visible, conceptually embedded in an intelligent mechanism. Cyberspace is spatially transparent, in which physical and electronic realities overlap, in which realities can be constructed, observed and experienced. It is the union of seven "co"s, namely : **co-existence, communion, communication, cohesion, continuity, compensation** and **concept[uality]**.

Foucault calls these kinds of space "heterotopias" (contrasted with "utopias") which are nearly always described as highly political and primarily social spaces designed within the constraints of a well-meaning tyrant's imagination, and which do not exist. Heterotopias are textured spaces that exist in the real world, differentiated social spaces, similar to the cinema, where several contradictory social spaces are juxtaposed in a single real space.

As for the aspects of reality in his definition, they match the Gibsonian cyberspace perfectly, namely, heterotopias exist outside all places and yet they are localizable; they create a space of illusion to show that space is illusory.

All these features and characteristics of cyberspace imply a certain presence of a particular atmosphere and the body's power responding to it. The implied framework is defined by Michael Clynes, one of the forefathers and creators of the "cyborgs" of the 20th century. He says that humanity lives in a "real virtual reality" given to us by our senses. According to him there are no colors, sounds or smells as our brains create the sensory world. "When you see anything", Clynes affirms, "you see it out in space, even though the light touches your retina. [...] when you hear a sound coming, you don't feel it normally at your eardrum, unlike when your body is

touched. Evolution has figured out a projected virtual reality, that your brain creates for you" (Gray, 52).

This problem of reality in reality in (or over) reality is reflected in several key scenes in the *Sprawl trilogy*, the continuous harassment of actors (Case, Bobby Quine) hi-jacked from their own reality to a virtual construct (in a virtual construct !), the appearance of allegedly virtual loas in real-life characters, the mere existence of simstim as the greatest entertainment business in the novel's setting all point towards the fragility of the source of experience. Whenever the user jacks into the matrix, he connects to "virtually" countless levels of potential sensory and intellectual experiencing. The priorities of those different levels are supervised by imperatives which instantly redefine power and gender hierarchies.

When, in *Count Zero* Jaylene Slide grabs Bobby Quine to his own LA flat, a female hacker emerges who has the power to kill all unwanted trespassers in cyberspace, who lives by the entertainment of creating hallucinatory settings in the matrix. The relation to the dark goddess is obvious : she functions as the virtual cold-blooded killer counterpart of Molly Millions' corporeal assassin self. Women are far more powerful with technology than without, and I will elaborate on this in chapter 4.

Summarizing the notion of cyberspace so far, I suggest that it is a game of transmutation that unites location and "non-location", beyond the real and the imagined. In itself it is a multiple spatiality of radical openness, where everything can be found, where the possibility of discovery is endless, where the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the repetitive and the differential come together. In *Mona Lisa Overdrive* the cyberspace community itself receives a fatal blow - however infinite and omnipresent the cyberspace seems to be, biotechnology opens up the prospect of forging new personal universes (which is the Aleph, the extract of the data comprising cyberspace, rigged to *Count Zero*) and the world of loas comes apart from the realm of cyberspace - and at the same time it populates the virtual terrain of human brains. The last fragments of *Mona Lisa Overdrive* serve as an answer to show what virtuality is like, without human beings.

"I don't understand", she said. "If cyberspace consists of the sum total of data in the human system..."

"Yeah", the Finn said [...] "but nobody's talkin' human, see ?" [...]

"My own feeling", Colin said, "is that it's all so much more amusing, this way..." (308)

The gradual dissolution of the human factor thus becomes the precondition of the gradually re-interpreted, overlapping and deconstructed cyberworlds. In *Neuromancer*, the artificial is unbounded by any presence outside it. Gibson's characters have no grounding in the real, they are constructed of motives and impulses that are facilitated by the manipulation of artificial products. While some characters are more human than others, none possess any inherent resistance to the incursion of the artificial in their bodies or their lives and some, like Wintermute (an Artificial Intelligence that intervenes in social life) are totally artificial. Part of the fascination with *Neuromancer* outside the cyberpunk scene is Gibson's portrayal of a world in which the artificial is dominant and where the ability to manipulate it is the most potent human activity.

### 3.0 THE BODY

Every human being is by default located in a certain space and time. Space is either a physical location or it can exist simply as conceived by the mind. The reason of the necessity of "implacement" is that individuals need to interact, to engage in the creation of relations, propelled by the need to understand our limits within the existence that surrounds us. Space functions on the base of intrinsic bonds. These bonds give us parameters for our activity of "signification" in the world. Individuals are immersed in space, from where they obtain all the



necessary information to build their physical and mental spheres, gaining an image of the world that goes beyond the communication of sensorial organs. The opportunity/possibility to travel among multiple environments without violating borderlines (like a gap in the continuity of the experience) relies on two things, firstly, on the individual cultural availability, secondly, on the considerate opinion of the concept of space. In western civilizations we usually think of space as a homogeneous and isotropic entity, in which the subject moves without breaking the continuity.

In technological society (I simplify Gibson's information-processing culture here for the sake of clarity), claim Kroker & Kroker, the body is of a "purely rhetorical existence", it is a "metaphor for a culture where power itself is always fictional". As they center the body as the "rhetorical centre of the lost subject of desire after desire" they differentiate economic, political, psychoanalytical, scientific and sports rhetoric (22). A rhetoric of economics targets the body as a site for the acquisition of private property, forging the archetype of the "possessive individual", investing it with ideologies of desire. A political rhetoric constitutes the body "in the form of 'public opinion' as an elite substitution for the missing matter of the social, and massages, manipulates and mediates public opinion at will" (22). The psychoanalytic rhetoric recovers the body as the signifier of the unconscious, the scientific rhetoric would "speak now of the existence of the teleonomic body at the intersection of genetic biology, structural linguistics, and cybernetics" (22). Finally, the sports rhetoric would celebrate the commodification of certain body parts related to certain sports (feet-soccer, arms-basketball, etc).

This drives me to Kroker & Kroker's postmodern panic theory and the recycling / customizing of the physical body : the projection of the existential crisis onto the enemy without overwritten by the introjection of the public crisis, causing a revision of the body surrounded by a whole contagion of panic virii and panic mythologies (AIDS, herpes, bulimia, anorexia, etc).

**KROKER'S POSTMODERN PANIC THEORY** - Panic is the key psychological mood of postmodern culture" (*Panic Encyclopaedia*, 13). Kroker argues that his interpretation of panic has the reverse meaning of the word's classical sense. The classical meaning refers to the appearance of the god Pan, a moment of arrest, calm, "a resting point between frenzy and reflection" (16), the Krokerian panic signifies firstly, the dissolution of the internal entity, secondly, the disappearance of "external standards of public conduct". His panic theory includes a fully technologized self at a point where culture and science are mirror-images of each other. Panic materializes the catastrophic and the hyperreal.

Kroker & Kroker's custom-made/customized panic body is a discursive, symbolic entity, a deleted body which is held together by the memories of the mind, by names, by the gloss of the Japanese fashion zines. It is not an invitation to action, a potentiality of movement as it had been. As a result, the meaning of the body has become a strategic concept that exists pragmatically at the interface of design and use. Gibson's characters have designed themselves, without any external ethical imperatives or an inner sense of self to guide them.

### **3.1 THE MIND WITHOUT BODY : THE MIND EXTERIORIZED**

The concept of the mind as an interface is no longer viable. Marshall McLuhan's assumption that the media-net would become merely an extension of the human nervous system with the humanoid core remaining its "same old self" provided a touch stone for both the liberation rhetoric of writers such as Howard Rheingold and for tele-evangelists seeking the redemption of the free market through the virtual corporation : a model of business as the management of flows that is at once homely and sublime.

Disembodied intelligence is often a con in cyberpunk literature. Glowing elite minds having migrated into data-

space at some point recognise a co-dependency with the material world and a new kind of physicality emerges, something like what J. G. Ballard imagines in his metaphor of the supercession of civilisation by the crystalline. The entropic and troublesome flesh that is sloughed off in cyberpunk fiction allegedly of strongly masculine essentialism is implicitly intervoven with the dynamics of self-processing cognition and intentionality that are relegated to a substance called mind.

The first step of the body's reconfiguration emerges in Kevin Kelly's description of the body in the 21st century :

We know that our eyes are more brain than camera. An eyeball has as much processing power as a supercomputer. Much of our visual perception happens in the thin retina where light first strikes us, long before the central brain gets to consider the scene. Our spinal cord is not merely a trunk line transmitting phone calls from the brain. It too thinks. We are a lot closer to the truth when we point to our heart and not to our head as the centre of behaviours. Our emotions swim in a soup of hormones and peptides that percolate through our whole body.

Out of this body which is muddled with peptides, hormones, viruses, pesticides, sugars and illicit substances emerges the cognitive body. To avoid the dread of the machinic body, let me acknowledge that the homo sapiens evolved as a result of a deep, co-evolutionary intimacy with the "inhuman", with tools, with the machine-like. At the very core of our development lies the gradual bootstrapping of the brain which according to neodarwinist evolutionary theory, is by great likelihood the result of a possibility space opened up through the development of the opposable thumb. A mutation in a part of a body with far-reaching side effects on all others opens up an explosive array of relations with other forms of matter - the greatest sign of our real post-human state.

Computers are embodied culture, hard-wired epistemology and in the area I am focusing on two parallel sequences. They are implicitly related but operate in different ways. One is the renewal of encyclopaedism.

At the centre lies the desire for the enforcement of meaning. The encyclopaedic organisation of data preserves a point of privilege from where the eye can frame the objects of its desire. There are no obstacles in cyberspace, only straight paths cleared to open unimpeded vistas. Within this space, intention steps toward the user, to be understood without the hidrance of literary convention. All can be conveyed from within the universal iconic language, a visual and pre-linguistic key, clearly carrying reference to the ciphered world. The virtual architectural space has been constructed by an unseen author, whose intention is usually to impose a closure on a narrative, to provide the goal to be reached by means of one of many approaches, the reader / user / participant / player, can wander, but must not stray from the intended thoroughfares. From any point it is possible to look back and take solace in the fact that everything experienced is recorded, marked, referenced and ultimately retraceable.

The other sequence is the bureaucratisation of the body into organs and the privileging of the eye in multimedia.

### **3.1.1 THE BUREAUCRATIZATION OF THE BODY INTO ORGANS**

Much has been made of the notion of the eye as the primary organ around which bodies - literally - organise. The eye is seen as a unifying and explanatory media in its own right.

Within multimedia, the desire to transfer information without transforming its integrity has remained strong and the senses have been prioritised and valorised in order that this system should work efficiently. With the eye situated as the locus of authority, assurance is passed to the other sense, which are called upon to further validate the evidence presented before them. Following the sales mantra "Image, text, sound, video !", graphical

interfaces reinforce this rigorous separation of the senses into a hierarchy of feedback devices.

Within the sight-machine of contemporary multimedia then, the mind has to be re-thought or re-programmed as a simple processor of information graphics. Once recognised and regulated, sense can be made and order imposed on data.

Through a representation stacking a mind-melding transparency can be achieved : interfacing the disembodied mind and disinterested data. The mind is immersed in the encyclopaedic data-space. That the eye, sloughing off the meat in an attempt to fuse mind and data, one electronic pulse with another, chooses to confirm its conferred status, shouldn't be a surprise. The eye, released from constraint, with a "mind" of its own, can take any position it wishes. What is remarkable is that this pursuit of the eye realises itself in most contemporary multimedia as nothing much more than a subset of behaviourism.

### **3.2 THE BODY WITHOUT MIND : THE BODY EXTERIORIZED**

In an "age of affordable beauty" (Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 9) the body is dealt with in terms of manipulation. Implants, the availability of aphrodisiacs and the differentiated conjuncture of plastic and cosmetic surgery shifts the contrast from natural to artificial, from flesh to metal, from real to the ungraspable. Manipulation appears as a multi-layered add-on virus, dehumanizing subjects, legitimizing tendencies of cyborgization.

Among manipulating techniques concerned with the relationship of the organic/mechanic, bio-engineering and bionics play a prominent role. Bio-engineering focuses on the possibility of applying technological principles to the body by studying organic structures in analogy of the mechanical properties of substances (like muscles and bones). Bionics works on the premise that the human body's design principles may be used as models for new mechanical devices. Gibson offers an imaginative articulation of these developments in techno-science to show that the body as a product is in fact a shifting territory of specific cultural contexts, of competing structures of meaning that cannot be explained as parts of nature. Gibson shows exactly what Wajcman notes about technology, that "it also fundamentally embodies a culture or set of social relations made up of certain sorts of knowledge, beliefs, desires or principles" (Cavallaro, 74).

The systematic management of the body's minutest functions by medical technologies seem to annihilate its materiality, pointing towards an evacuated and disintegrating organism. Though I propose that this is not the demise of the flesh, it is the materialization of the transcendence myth, transcending, **updating** the body through disembodiment to telecommercial data fluxes, personality engineering, mind recordings and simstim comas. Gibson alters his bodies but he does not yet transcend them. Materiality in his images of vat-grown flesh, organ commerce or exoskeletons play a crucial role as it underlines the heavy physical setting of his stories. McCaffery presents him as a "gomi no sensei", a master of junk as his planet is filled with gomi (waste, garbage). Gibson's fascination with the bodily qualities of gomi mirrors his own stylistic proclivities. In the McCaffery interview he describes his method of writing like this : "stiching together all the junk that's floating around in my head. One of my private pleasures is to go to the corner Salvation Army thrift shop and look at all the junk" (McCaffery, 277).

The "average" cyberpunk landscape is choked with the debris of both language and objects. Gibson concentrates on the surface to get to the aesthetic of the age he describes. Does this mean that the human inside becomes completely interchangeable with the artificial outside ? Darko Suvin points out that "for cyberpunks technology is inside, not outside, the personal body and the mind itself" (McCaffery, 352). It is quite clear, then, that technological editing is not something that can be cherished unproblematically. Self-reinvention through consumer desires benefits only the hyper-rich. "Now, some night, you get maybe too artistic", Case is told at the beginning of *Neuromancer* by Ratz, the bartender, "you wind up in the clinic tanks, spare parts" (11).

### 3.3.1 THE BODY AS COMMODITY : THE BODY WITHOUT MIND

I have previously shown that the body is not impregnable. In fact, the commodification of corporeality is largely based on the illicit trade of body parts, dictated by ideological and economic imperatives. *Neuromancer's* Case is subjected to enhancing neurosurgery so that he may become the perfect pawn in the service of corporational battle. His female counterpart, Molly has deliberately chosen to improve her body to gain power in a social structure that would otherwise identify her only as a ruthless mercenary. The cyber-aristocracy on the other hand who own the economies in which the likes of Case and Molly are manipulated, are able to postpone death - but none of them is ever lucky enough to return to the realm of the flesh - the realm of life. *Count Zero's* multimillionaire Josef Virek has the power to project simulacra of his body in a wide range of simulated contexts but these apparitions are not homogeneous, the gaps between them are all linked to the real body torn by cancer.

Gibson's bodies - both the powerful and the disenfranchised - are symbiotic with medical technologies that are both enabling and oppressive at the same time. Gibson's short stories collected under the title *Burning Chrome* highlight the ambiguity of the body/technology relationship. *Johnny Mnemonic* depicts the protagonist with a data storage in his brain which has been modelled through microsurgery. Though his brain is made to resemble a computer, he cannot know or recall any of the information filed in the storage in his head. Despite Johnny's eventual success with making good money with the help of a so-called Squid mechanism, there are hints throughout the story that Johnny's condition is comparable to some unnameable disease or a demonic possession. "The program. I had no idea what it contained. I still don't. I only sing the song, with zero comprehension" (Gibson, *Burning Chrome*, 17). Right at the end, Johnny fantasizes about the removal of his condition as if it were a cancer : "...one day I'll have a surgeon dig all the silicon out of my amygdalae, and I'll live with my own memories and nobody else's" (22).

The *Belonging Kind* (co-written with John Shirley) dramatizes the body's boundaries. A mysterious woman and her drinking companions whose bodies alter drastically from one bar to the next in all physiognomical signifiers of age, status and class are as fluid as the famous T-1000 model of *Terminator 2 : Judgment Day*. Both the technological and the mythological connotations of sudden metamorphoses that are evoked by Gibson's narrative is reminiscent of Franz Kafka :

...it was there, in the light of a streetlamp, like a stage light, that she began to change. The street was deserted.

She was crossing the street. She stepped off the curb and it began. It began with tints in her hair - at first he thought they were reflections. But there was no neon there to cast the blobs of color that appeared, color sliding and merging like oil sticks. Then the colors bled away and in three seconds she was white-blond. He was sure it was a trick of light until her dress began to writhe twisting across her body like a shrink-wrap plastic. Part of it fell away entirely and lay in curling sheds on the pavement shed like the skin of some fabulous animal. (Gibson, *Burning Chrome*, 46)

The body here is encoded as a function of interior design. The protean bodies the protagonist, Coretti, follows are postmodern items of decoration. They are merely fixtures defined entirely by their sartorial attributes.

In *The Gernsback Continuum* the ephemeral nature of the human body uncertain of its own reality is paralleled by the transitoriness of the body/form of built space. The narrator - an architectural photographer - receives a severe blow when he finds himself penetrating the membrane of probability and when he envisions an airliner breaching the boundaries of his own body. The narrator's frailty stems from his exposure to a culture that makes

the body redundant and iconizes it at the same time.

*The Winter Market* questions the body's materiality by turning it into a vehicle for simstim (simulated stimulation), i.e. commercially edited dreams. At the same time it emphasizes physical dimension in its least savoury manifestations in the character of Lise. She is defined by a fatal illness which induces extreme pain and may only be kept at bay by an exoskeleton. Lise is incapable of tolerating the sensation of total passivity, the exoskeleton accentuates her bodiliness by mapping the body's inside on the outside, doubling her materiality. On the other hand her interfacing with technology attenuates her corporeality for her the ultimate aim is the final escape from the prison of the flesh which she happens to achieve.

*Burning Chrome* embodies Gibson's recurring concerns of the body/technology relationship. It emphasizes, on one hand, the ambivalent nature of cyberspace as a map of incorporeal geometrical abstractions, on the other, a physical world in which ICE mechanisms can literally kill illegitimate users (i.e. hackers). Furthermore it highlights certain analogies between the physical organism and computer technology. Its main male characters are portrayed as "Bobby Quine and Automatic Jack. Bobby's the thin, pale dude with the dark glasses, and Jack's the mean-looking guy with the myoelectric arm. Bobby's software and Jack's hard; Bobby punches console and Jack runs down all the little things that can give you an edge" (Gibson, *Burning Chrome*, 170).

*Burning Chrome* typifies cyberpunk's configuration of the body by simultaneously presenting the natural body as an incomplete entity (dependent on the possibility of a prosthetic enhancement) and emphasizing the central role played by that body in the acquisition of the prosthesis. Rikki is driven by the desire to purchase the Zeiss Ikon eyes which will enable her to become a simstim star. She has to edit her natural form in such a way that her body may be transcended in the pursuit for fame in the simstim scene. In this aspect she is one with Molly of *Neuromancer*, none of them has any choice save the sacrifice of their bodies, short-cutting their sensory perceptions for the delight of "closet necrophiliacs" (Gibson, *Burning Chrome*, 187).

### **3.3.2. THE BODY AS SEXUAL COMMODITY : THE DOLLS**

Issues of materiality are also examined by Gibson through the relationship between the human body and the inanimate imitations of it. Dolls are suchlike anthropomorphic images of humanity imprinted on a non-human world. They are artificial things who (that) in their resemblance to humans, allude to the status of humans themselves. Gibson uses the image of the doll to evoke the artificiality of human appearance, as in the case of Kumiko. Dolls are both attractive toys, encasing the ideal of the perfect body and disturbing reminders of the synthetic nature of identity.

The most unsettling context dolls emanate is voodoo, both in *Count Zero* and in *Mona Lisa Overdrive*. The doll, a classic incarnation of timeless beauty is an icon capable of crossing over into the realm of the monstrous and the menacing as it is represented during the roaming of Slick Henry :

...stuck his head inside and saw hundreds of tiny heads suspended from the concave ceiling. He froze there, blinking in the sudden shade, until what he was seeing made some kind of sense. The pink plastic heads of dolls, their nylon hair tied up into topknots and the knots stuck into thick black tar, dangling like fruit... [A]nd he he knew he didn't want to stick around to find out whose place it was. (179)

The second factor which makes dolls disturbing is their scale. In a technology-driven setting perfection is built into a miniaturized structure, defying the classical discipline of certain cultures which associate power with imposing size. The very dimensions of circuitry call into question these conventional associations between

volume and power. The marriage of smallness and perfection equals dissolution, the small-and-perfect becoming more and more so, in endless loops, until its attributes are no longer perceivable.

Another unsettling connotation of the doll image are conveyed in *Neuromancer*, in "The Doll" scene, in a show staged and enacted by Peter Riviera. In this show, the doll is the product of Riviera's own projection of his sexual attraction to Molly. Riviera virtualizes an image of a room with a bare mattress and upon the mattress - gradually - the spectral image of a woman - the doll - about whom he fantasizes. This figure takes shape slowly in vivid metonymic fragments :

A woman's hand lay on the mattress now, palm up, the white fingers pale. [...] The fingers were coated with a burgundy lacquer.

A hand, Case saw, but not a severed hand; the skin swept back smoothly, unbroken and unscarred. [...]

The act progressed with a surreal internal logic of its own. The arms were next. Feet. Legs. The legs were very beautiful. [...] Then the torso formed, as Riviera caressed it into being, white, headless, and perfect, sheened with the faintest gloss of sweat.

Molly's body. Case stared, his mouth open. But it wasn't Molly; it was Molly as Riviera imagined her. (167-168)

In this scene the image of the doll is used to show the ways human beings give synthetic form to their fantasies formed out of the fragmentary sense impressions. Molly's doll is a fragile psychic debris, an assemblage of memories and desires. The doll is the image with which Gibson comments on the exploitation of the female body, referring to the classical fantasy cliché of the machine-like male physique opposing the sense of boundlessness associated with the female body. The hard and sealed male body, like *Count Zero's* Josef Virek relies on complex machinery for endurance and survival and this reduction to damaged cells to support vats evokes Marinetti's vision of the machine-body. Gibson's rejection of the image of the mechanical superman underlines that corporeality in his cyberpunk setting eludes both synthesis and order.

### **3.3.3. THE BODY AS INFORMATION COMMODITY : THE IDORU**

Gibson's idoru exemplifies the idea that bodies are technological products and that technology embodies specific cultural forms of production / consumption. Its paradox lies in its erotic nature, though it is an immaterial construct.

Leading threads in *Idoru* are firstly, the arrangement of an "alchemical" marriage between the synthetic and flesh-and-bone celebrities, secondly, the existence of traces of personal history in the idoru construct which Laney emerges into during the first face-to-face experience with Rei Toei.

In the very structure of her face, in geometries of underlying bone, lay coded histories of dynastic flight, privation, terrible migrations. He saw stone tombs in steep alpine meadows, their lintels traced with snow. A line of shaggy pack ponies, their breath white with cold, followed a trail above a canyon. The curves of the river below were strokes of distant silver. Iron harness bells clanked in the blue dusk. (175)

Thirdly, the idoru is the most drastic break-up of the material boundaries of animate and inanimate objects, making distinctions obsolete. Virtual Light makes reference to nanotechnology describing nano-products as "things that kind of grew, but only because they were made up of all these little tiny machines" (325).

The idoru is a symbolic hypertextual entity, superimposing diverse textual layers upon each other. She is also described as "the result of an array of elaborate constructs that we refer to as 'desiring machines'" (Gibson, 178). There is a pattern of analogies with Deleuze and Guattari who correlate to Gibson by asserting that "there is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together" (Cavallaro, 80). This is asserted by Gibson's speculations about the viability of marriage between humans and synthetic constructs pointing to the fact that neither of them is ever self-sufficient. Desiring-machines like the idoru makes us aware of the alternative of what it might be like to enter a zone of disorganization. As Kroker mentions :

Desiring-machines, production-machines, abstract machines of faciality, organ-machines, energy-source machines. A fantastic density of machinic values that traverses the social field, and within which subjectivity most of all enters into a theatre of death decoded of its memories, deterritorialized of its means of reproduction, and decontextualized. The famous "body without organs" as the first citizen of the state of despotic capitalism. (Kroker, Deleuze and Guattari)

The idoru is an organized body-construct produced by technological means. It organizes the bodies of its fans by itself by harnessing their subjective desires and at the same time, it shatters their sense of wholeness by exposing them to decomposition. The ambivalence in *Idoru* is exemplified by Laney who unites the mystical traits of a soothsayer and those of the cyberspace expert defined by his relation to the computer network. These elements coalesce to produce uncommon skills :

[Laney] had a peculiar knack with data-collection architectures... he was an intuitive fisher of patterns of information : of the sort of signature a particular individual inadvertently created in the net as he or she went about the mundane yet endlessly multiplex business of life in a digital society... he'd spent his time skimming vast floes of undifferentiated data, looking for "nodal points". (Gibson, 25)

In his context, the human body is ephemeral by its intercourse with technology, coded on the basis of its symbiotic relationship with machines and produced by machines. Yet it plays a pivotal role as the marker of individuality, the particular signature recognizable as belonging to one specific person. Thus Laney has difficulties in tracing the rock and roll hero Rez's personality, because he had been constructed in corporational terms and cannot "generate patterns". Trying to identify Rez's signature in a multitude of data is "like trying to have a drink with a bank". Yet the body stubbornly goes on asserting itself as the bearer of traces which would become totally inaccessible, were the body to be discarded. These traces are the actual manifestations of Kroker's body rhetorics and the "presence through traces" concept of the cyberpunk framework. "You cannot construct a pattern of any kind about someone who is 'not a person', who 'doesn't drink' and for whom 'there's no place... to sit'" (Gibson, *Idoru*, 147).

### **3.4. BODY AND THE MIND SYMBIOTIZED**

Commodified technology, as I have shown is an integral part of Gibson's characters. They are dependent on technology which is near top priority in their life. Their bodies as a means of a [re]presentation is dissolved amongst the imperatives of the fashion industry, advanced capitalism and panic memes. Bodies in Gibson are metaphors for their own culture, held together by memories and memes of the mind, bodies are cyborg symbionts.

Under symbiosis I mean the intimate living together of two dissimilar organisms in a mutually beneficial relationship. The implication of the machine as an organism on its own is not a mistake. Technology is inside characters, be it small sacs of neurotoxin in arteries, shade implants or nail blades and technology is what they aspire for, even Case's orgasm is defined in analogy with cyberspace, "flaring blue in a timeless space, a vastness like the matrix, where the faces were shredded and blown away down hurricane corridors" (Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 45). The process of entering cyberspace, "jacking in" bearing sexual, even Oedipal connotations, the "pornographic" behavior of Case towards his equipment clarify the point often touched upon that the notion of cyberspace is female and the event/process of hacking (ICE breaking) is analogous to an intercourse as it is also mentioned in *Count Zero* in a discourse between Bobby and Beauvoir :

"Think of Jackie as a deck, Bobby, a cyberspace deck, a very pretty one with nice ankles [...] Think of Danbala, who some people call the snake, as a program. Say as an icebreaker. Danbala slots into the Jackie deck. Jackie cuts ice. That's all."

"Okay", Bobby said, getting the hang of it, "then what's the matrix ? If she's a deck, and Danbala's a program, what's cyberspace ?"

"The world", Lucas said. (114)

It is this explicit symbiosis which makes me strongly disagree with Haraway on the cyborg essentials. She says, "the cyborg point of view is always about communication, infection, gender, genre, species, intercourse, information, and semiology" (Haraway, XIV). All keywords here are referents to human interaction in society and discourse, with the solitary exception of infection. If we substitute infection with reproduction, we have no difficulties identifying the human as such. Symbiote organisms in the Gibsonian universe in terms of their point of view are about desires fulfilled in speed, sex and data transmission, functionality, penetration and information. Haraway's examples : Lovelock's Gaia principle and a *Mixotricha Paradoxa* bacterium are examples rooted in ecofeminist thought, depicting biological unity instead of cyberpunk's interface of the mind and the machine.

In Gibsonian terms it's the addendum what counts, the implant, the boost, the surplus. Automatic Jack is determined by his detachable myoelectric arm, Molly gains her place and mystique in society by her wired skills and nailblades, hackers become meaningful if and only if they are hardwired to cyberspace. Bobby McQuine gets his boost from women, he "had this thing for girls, like they were his private tarot or something, the way he'd get himself moving" (Gibson, *Burning Chrome*, 198). Solitariness, singleness, purity is inferior in this universe.

#### 4. GENDER AND TECHNOLOGY

As seen from the Jackie-deck comparison in sub-chapter 3.4, I propose that though cyberpunk novels have no political agenda (save a mild level of anarchy), their symbolic and allegorical preoccupations are relatively easy to access. I definitely argue against Balsamo's view on "the female body as a material body and as a body that labors" and the male which is "repressed or disappearing" (Balsamo).

No cyberpunk critique could ever overlook the Chandlerian "tough dame" archetype. Joan Gordon calls cyberpunk "covert feminist science fiction" in which "men and women travel as equals" (McCaffery, 196). Gibson himself denies this in an interview with Tatsumi where he talks of the character of "the strong woman who can't really relate to any of the other men in the narrative except for the one guy who might possibly be as strong as she is, but usually turns out not to be" (McCaffery, 198). This egalitarian toughness - known as the



"riot grrl" attitude - makes this kind of women (in men's clothing) of the male-dominated cyberpunk appealing to feminist Cyberpunk SF criticism. Women, as Gordon notes, "are acculturated to be good; boys will be boys but girls can't misbehave" (McCaffery, 200).

Gibson's narratives, unlike feminist SF which confront issues of meaning and direction for the condition of women, are about what Bruce Sterling raves about in his foreword of *Mirrorshades*, the paradigm-shifting impact of technology and its integration with the street-level life (just as the famous motto goes, "hi tech lo life"), "a wide-ranging, global point of view" (Sterling in McCaffery, 346). Women, just as men in the on-going process of counterculture integration, are not merely victims of cultural and memetic imperatives; they are, just as Balsamo talks about cosmetic surgery, aesthetically reconstructed, serving as raw material for the fashion industry, opened up for fertilization by gendered mechanisms of surveillance.

*Neuromancer* is littered with countless examples of the hybridizing / sterilizing fashion imperatives. Angelo, a young subculture member, whose "face was a simple graft grown on collagen and shark-cartilage polysaccharides", showing off "one of the nastiest pieces of elective surgery Case had ever seen", (Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 75-76). Wage, the fence, whose "vatgrown sea-green Nikon eyes" still give him a "forgettable mask" (Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 33), office girls who "looked like tall, exotic grazing animals, swaying gracefully and unconsciously", wearing "idealized holographic vaginas of their wrists" (Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 97) represent the cut-and-paste body politic as mundane. The sterile aesthetization of the female body and severing its ties with nature leads to the establishment of new "naturalness". All of Gibson's female characters, find meaning in totalizing technology in various ways - Molly and Angie in metabolism, Rikki and Andrea in a quest for origin (both physically and "quasi-religiously"), Sandii in destruction, Rei Toei in embodiment etc.

Female roles in cyberpunk's technological context disallow women as equals in the "console cowboy" framework. Women are utilized as metaphors for various threats of invasion and disruption of the male-as-visible, the male-as-familiar. Women iconologies are violently penetrated, dismembered and reassembled into communions with implants that enhance and violate it both at the same time.

Gibson depicts the economic and sexual reification of women in a decision between two options, *pro primo*, they are either subjected to surgery to be turned to lucrative prostitutes (Idoru's Slavic Barbies fall into this category) or *pro secundo*, they subject themselves to prostitution to afford surgery that may enable them to pursue their dreams of independence - Molly and Burning Chrome's Rikki typify this character.

It is in *Mona Lisa Overdrive* that the male imperatives give way to a world portrayed around something I dare to call matriarchal exploitation. Mona's surgical transformation serves to protect Angie, a famous simstim star. The need to protect Angie stems from the jealousy, greed and insanity of a more powerful woman, namely Lady 3Jane Tessier-Ashpool. This is what I call matriarchical exploitation in a profit-driven and deeply patriarchal corporational machine. But what is more important here is the metaphor about that body ideals that cosmetic surgery is supposed to help us achieve are internalized, publicized and promoted by women themselves, despite their origins in male fantasies.

#### 4.1 LONGING FOR UNITY AND DISSOLUTION

In many analyses of virtual bodies, most prominently in those of Balsamo and Sandy Stone, we discover the primal longing of the male for the female. The constant efforts to penetrate the body/machine boundary share conceptual characteristics of that desire. Penetration of the male is passive and sensual as in Stone's garment metaphor, "To become the cyborg, to put on the seductive and dangerous cybernetic space like a garment, is to put on the female" (Balsamo). Along these lines Gibson plays with the idea of the simstim broadcast Molly and Case use in *Neuromancer*. "I'm fitting Moll for a broadcast rig [...] so it's probably her sensorium you'll access. [...] So now you get to find out just how tight those jeans really are, huh ?" (Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 70).

The simstim scene in *Neuromancer* inverts the doll concept, Case is trapped in both cyberspace and the sensorium of Molly. However much he regards the technology a "meat toy", he's rather toying with his masculine freedom instead.

He knew that the trodes he used and the little plastic tiara dangling from a simstim deck were basically the same, and that the cyberspace matrix was actually a drastic simplification of the human sensorium, at least in the terms of presentation, but simstim itself struck him as a gratuitous multiplication of flesh input. [...]

The abrupt jolt into other flesh. Matrix gone, a wave of sound and color... She was moving through a crowded street, past stalls vending discount software, prices felt-penned on sheets of plastic, fragments of music from countless speakers. Smells of urine, free monomers, perfume, patties of frying krill. For a few frightened seconds he fought helplessly to control her body. Then he willed himself into passivity, became the passenger behind her eyes. [...]

"How you doing, Case ?". He heard the words and felt her form them. She slid a hand into her jacket, a fingertip circling a nipple under warm silk. The sensation made him catch his breath. She laughed. But the link was one-way. He had no way to reply. (*Neuromancer*, 71-72)

As bodies are often described in technological terms, machines are often invested with bodily and sexual attributes. The Industrial Age has often been associated with virile masculinity; ships and boats are linked to femininity, most possibly due to their Freudian connotations of the womb. Contemporary computers are ambiguous. Electronic technology is connected with a feminine stereotype, because it is silent, inconspicuous and miniaturized and with a masculine stereotype because its amazing powers and an asexual identity due to its bland appearance.

An opposition can be observed between industrial technology (noisy, thrusting, energetic - hence masculine) and electronic technology (silent, subdued - feminine, at least according to patriarchal conceptions). This opposition is embodied - within cyberculture - by the contrast between the phallic and hypermasculine cyborgs of popular culture and the feminized, mystified computer with its concealed and internal workings. It is of common knowledge that both hardware and software engineers often find computers in all sense of the word hopelessly baffling.

## 4.2 A DREAD OF REPRODUCTION

A similar dread of technology - mapped onto the female body - is clearly exemplified in Fritz Lang's classic film *Metropolis* (1926). It embodies the typical fears of the American science fiction movie : those of becoming uncontrollable on the part of machines and of male-dominated forms of technological reproduction may supplant biological reproduction. The novelty of *Metropolis* is Maria, the lascivious robot, who exemplifies the female crafted from the machine (as man). The fear of change in female reproduction has by the way developed into the body invasion cliché. Movies such as *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *The Fly* (1958) or *Alien* (1979) all articulate the fear of the "other" reproduction, or rather, the fear of losing male control over female reproductive capacity. These movies stress that bodies can be violated and contaminated, that uncontrolled conception and birth are always synonymous with the breeding of monsters.

Adele Clarke takes this argument further to the re/commodification of children in the post-industrial age, taking a peek into the future.

Today among the affluent, the value of children may lie in different social securities of identity, embodiment, enmindment, achievement. [...] Beingness is commoditized : racialized white [Frankenberg 1993], gendered male, tall, athletic, healthy and smart [as implied by IQ]. (142)

Babies, according to Clarke, are targeted towards families in mass delivery, inflicted by "individually tailored technological alternations" (144). The postmodern reproductive processes differentiate three levels of existence, which are 1, the "lived" body, which can be experienced, 2, the social body, a well-grounded symbol for anthropologists to think about relationships between culture, society and nature and 3, body politic, which are "artifacts of social and political control" (Clarke, 140). Along the lines of these three aspects of representative existence she argues that bodies are to be customized and manipulated, so in body as in terms of domestic communities, by social services, medical welfare institutions and zaibatsus. Motherhood is to be deconstructed, family is to become a new niche for industry and marketing.

The children we find in Gibson's stories are notorious. Chrome of *Burning Chrome* is someone with "a sweet little heart-shaped face framing the nastiest pair of eyes you ever saw. She'd looked fourteen for as long as anyone could remember, hyped out of anything like a normal metabolism on some massive program of serums and hormones" (Gibson, *Burning Chrome*, 208), Nance in *Dogfight* is a psychological case who, destabilized by her parents' mindlock is capable only of mental production until the age of 18, the end of her school days. Kumiko is also disabled by the death of her mother and the tyrannical reign of her Yakuza father. Silencio of *All Tomorrow's Parties* is a mystic character capable of accessing highly classified data. Angie Mitchell, the most notorious example of a child literally wired into adulthood. All of these characters exist through their addenda, namely the drugs (Chrome, Nance), technology (Kumiko, Silencio) or both (Angie).

#### 4.3. GENDER ROLES IN CYBERPUNK

Cyberpunk's approach to gender roles is highly ambiguous - it appears to perpetuate as well as to subvert stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity. Gibson's *Virtual Light* amusingly comments on these stereotyping tendencies of gender polarizations. Describing Rydell's response to computer imaging as a high school kid, the narrator observes : "...the girls were always doing these unicorns and rainbows and things, and Rydell liked to do cars, kind of dream-cars, like he was some designer in Japan somewhere and he could build anything he wanted..." (Gibson, *Virtual Light*, 316). The irony lies with the fact that the girls' overtly fantastic creations are not all that different from Rydell's constructs, given the latter's own fantastic character. As far as generalizations go, males can be identified with mind in the *Sprawl* trilogy, females with the body. This gender-specific arrangement breaks down when stereotypical traits are imposed upon the other sex.

In *Neuromancer*, Case is a potential reincarnation of the macho crook of classic crime fiction, yet he never conveys an image of triumphant masculinity. His mental atrophy, emotional dislocation and physical frailty do little to evoke impressions of virility. Molly's gender connotations are also ambivalent. Reminiscent of the tough dame of the mean-street genre of Chandler, she may alternatively be read as the liberated woman or a stereotype. Her description of a working girl means either a tenacious fighter or a prostitute of a special rank (the doll). As hinted later in *Neuromancer*, her task was to cater the desires of sadists while she was neurally cut out by a software. Her vulnerability is emphasized by the fact that she has suffered more than anyone in the trade due to an incompatibility between the cut-out chip implanted in her body (which is to ensure she cannot be aware of what is done to her by her clients) and the circuitry implanted by the Chiba black clinics.

Molly's sexual exploitation and her encoding as a representation of death seemingly endows her with a passive identity. She is physically and psychologically objectified, sexually dominant and in intercourse with Case, she is described more competent and active than her partner. Of course, it could be argued that even the image of an

assertive and sexually/professionally independent woman may contribute to the perpetuation of patriarchal stereotypes. Arguably, the reason for this type of woman being popular among male consumers of action fiction is that she incarnates the hard and thoroughly technologized female body and is able to counteract the sense of threat that is traditionally associated with the soft and unbounded "natural" body of woman. Evidence for this is supplied by the fact that in physically possessing Case, she is instrumental to the surfacing of potent mental impressions in his self, sex with her evokes in Case pictures of a lost cyberspace. Her competence is also conveyed throughout the novel by various descriptive details : consider the image of Molly "dissecting her crab with alarming ease" (Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 90), followed by a display of table manners : "Molly.. extruded the blade from her index finger and speared a grayish slab of herring" [Gibson, *Neuromancer* 91]. Note also that Molly cannot cry, her tearducts have been routed back into her mouth so that she can spit instead of crying.

The sense of mystery associated with the notion of intercourse above and the sexual act's inevitable implication with the meat its heroes are supposed to long to escape underscores that sex based on the interplay of the human and the technological is not totally mechanical, for powerful bodily energies are incessantly at work :

It was a place he'd known before; not everyone could take him there, and somehow he always managed to forget it. Something he'd found and lost so many times. It belonged, he knew - he remembered - as she pulled him down, to the meat, the flesh the cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea of information coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong blind way, could ever read. (*Neuromancer*, 284-285)

The fact that "only the body" is capable of reading the "sea of information" underscores the enduring powers of the flesh. Also, in accessing cyberspace, console cowboys both protract a myth of patriarchal dominance and are rendered impotent by their absorption in a disorienting array of data.

Furthermore, *Neuromancer* challenges the cultural codes that define individuals in sexual terms, as either active or passive. In the virtual interactions between Molly and Case (in the simstim scene), Case experiences things through Molly's body, catching a glimpse of what it might be like to be a woman. He realizes "just how tight those jeans really are" and finds the "passivity of the situation irritating" (Gibson, *Neuromancer*, 70, 72). At the same time, passivity is displaced from the female to the male body, as Molly is in a position to reproduce powerful tactile impressions without Case being able to reciprocate.

#### **4.3.2 OSMOSE : A FEMININE CONSTRUCT IN CYBERSPACE**

Cyberpunk, as I have shown, is not unproblematically dominated by patriarchal imperatives. Although cyberspace perpetuates male myths of spatial conquest, women also actively contribute to the construction of Net structures that address specifically feminine issues and developed their own versions of virtual reality. A particularly interesting case is Osmose, a virtual space developed by Char Davies and her team in the mid- to late 1990s.

Osmose is an immersive and interactive VR environment comprising twelve interrelated levels : the Cartesian Grid; the Clearing; the Forest; the Cloud; the Earth; the Code; the Text; the Pond; the Abyss; the Leaf; the Tree and the Life-World. These realms are non-linear, "semi-representational and translucent" (Davies, *Changing Space*) and are characterized by a certain quality of fluidity. Osmose, according to Char Davies' "very emotional", its interface is founded upon breathing and balance, not upon the traditional navigational system of the prying eye and the probing head. It is a metaphor for the mutual absorption and dissolution of body and mind, inner and outer, self and world, man and machine. Osmose is compared to a deep sea/ocean dive, resembling "pure limitless space, fluid, enveloping, interior, embryonic" (Davies). It is "an expression of

longing. The desire to re-affirm our essential physical and spiritual inter-connectedness, to heal the estrangement between ourselves and Nature, between ourselves and "being", is a germinal force behind OSMOSE" (Davies).

## 5. CONCLUSION

Cyberpunk radically reconfigures our grasp of corporeality with repercussions on gender issues. As it can be seen, cyberculture articulates a deep sense of instability. Definitions of cyberculture itself are fundamentally unstable due to their openness. Additionally, our understanding of both cyberculture and its fictional constellations in cyberpunk is destabilized by intimations that technology is steeped in fantasy. This ambiguity of biological and urban bodies alike typify the general atmosphere of impermanence evoked by cyberpunk.

We cannot conceptualize an autonomous body in cyberpunk fiction. Bodies and identities are not subjectivities, they are intertextualities. The new cyber body in the grasp of the autonomous conscious mind becomes a faciality that signifies a body more textual and technological, than physical.

The massive data exchange of the information society reinterprets bodies as files, quantities of data that belong together. Case, Bobby Quine, Tick and all other console cowboys are self-contained nets upon whom data transfers impact directly - physically. In this respect the whole world is reinterpreted. Material bodies, just as Kroker says, disappear. Technology serves as an opportunity of the reinterpretation and reorganization of cultural narratives of gender and race identities.

Cyberspace (the matrix, the womb) shifts the realms of desire, sensuality and sexuality to a state-of-being which enables characters to embody traits of the opposite sex, to objectify their lusts and to immerse in a sensory realm where their minds can converge the same level of dissolution of their bodies.

The cyborg framework which Gibson introduces works on the basis of interchangeability, functionality and addenda. The classical body of Greek aestheticism now requires a prosthesis of its own to accommodate to the "hyperreal". These bodies exist without meaning, referring only to themselves. They designed themselves and propel themselves onward, driven by powerful imperatives of economy, self-totalization and sexuality.

The post-industrial zeitgeist led to the re-adaptation of the body as the gate of the senses. The body tries to include the mind - the user - into itself, beyond complete dissolution of consciousness. VR interface links man and machine to symbiotic proximity. VR projects images directly to the mind and the ever increasing sense of reality blurs the simulation between digital and real worlds, clarifying the point that both cyberspace and its inhabitants are rightfully dubbed as simulacra. A new human ideal appears, schizoid in the sense that in its unitary physical body springs up a longing for a multiplicity of identity models which is completely attainable through biotechnology (cf. the revolutionary biochip technique in Angie Mitchell through which she can access cyberspace's Voodoo spirits), biochips or constructs such as Dixie Flatline.

As for what Gibson replies to the question "Is cyberspace a better world ?",

There is an tendency in our culture, in a broader sense the western civilization, to reject the body in favor of an idea of the spirit or the soul. I have never been entirely sure that that's such a good thing, and in an interesting way this technology is pointing in that direction. One could imagine a very ascetic sort of life growing out of this, where the body is ignored. This is something I've played with in my books, where people hate to be reminded sometimes that they have bodies, they

find it very slow and tedious. But I've never presented that as an desirable state, always as something almost pathological growing out of this technology. (Joseffson)

projects a new evolution which slowly but indiscernably evades the body, jumping from animal to man, from man to cyborg, from cyborg to a corporate triumvirate of identity, integrity and structure.

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