# Cyberpunk Themes w/ Camp K’s

## General

### Origin/AT: Other Cyberpunk

#### Cyberpunk and the New Wave era are intrinsically tied – need to incorporate previous arguments instead of breaking radically

Lantham 20 --the author of Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption (2002) and the editor of The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction (2014) and Science Fiction Criticism: An Anthology of Essential Writings (2017). He was, for two decades, a senior editor of the journal Science Fiction Studies (Rob, “Literary Precursors,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 2, p14) //le

In sum, and contra the claims of critics such as Pfeil and Bukatman, cyberpunk owes a significant debt to the New Wave era. As stories such as Brunner’s, Tiptree, Jr.’s, Galouye’s, and Silverberg’s clearly show, sf of the 1960s and 1970s had already begun to develop a number of the major pillars of the cyberpunk worldview, from the conviction that information technologies would radically reshape global society to the belief that capitalist forms of commodification and control would inevitably channel this process toward profitable ends. The biotech assault on centered subjec- tivity mounted by classic cyberpunk was also powerfully prefigured in New Wave treatments of proto-VR technologies, with their ability to project artificial environments and thus shatter and remold the perceiving self. A careful comparison of key New Wave and cyberpunk texts is likely to elicit as many similarities as differences: Even the 1960s obsession with “inner space” is echoed in Gibson’s famous evocation of cyberspace as a “consensual hallucination” (67), and the hard- boiled textures and tones of the 1980s were adumbrated in Tiptree, Jr.’s wise-cracking style and Silverberg’s cynicism. Seeing the two movements as radically opposed—or, as I put it in a previous essay, “focus[ing] on rupture at the expense of continuity” (45)—thus ignores the ways in which the sf mode actually grows and evolves: not by breaking radically with what has gone before but by adapting and refashioning past achievements into new and compelling forms.

### Generic Impact

#### 4 Impacts: cybercrime, cybogrized lifestyles, elimination of reality, abandoning of mortal “meat”

Lantham 20 --the author of Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption (2002) and the editor of The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction (2014) and Science Fiction Criticism: An Anthology of Essential Writings (2017). He was, for two decades, a senior editor of the journal Science Fiction Studies (Rob, “Literary Precursors,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 2, p8) //le

In fact, four key cyberpunk themes were foreshadowed in specific works of the New Wave era: (1) the emergence of an information economy, with all its complex impact on the social order, in particular the spread of cybercrime and forms of info-warfare; (2) the resultant hypercom- modification of culture and the attendant growth in cyborgized lifestyles; (3) the proliferation of synthetic realities, to the point that simulated experience has begun to supplant the real thing; and (4) the possibility of a transhumanist “uploading” of consciousness, allowing individuals to abandon the mortal “meat” in favor of a virtual existence as discorporate data. All of these themes are perceived as quintessentially cyberpunk, yet all were powerfully prefigured—indeed, basically crystallized—in important sf works of the 1960s and 1970s.

### Continuous Evolution/Co-Opts

#### Capitalism coopts cyberpunk through creating marketable products – extension and revision key to evade

Kilgore 20 -- currently serves as special programs coordinator for Teaching & Learning Innovation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He has published on cyberpunk, narrative theory, and graphic narrative. In his spare time, he maintains an online fantasy novel system, The Adasir Project (www.adasir.com). (Christopher D., “Literary Precursors,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 7, p48) //le

By the end of the 1980s, cyberpunk risked becoming a pastiche of itself or, worse still, merely one more marketable product. As Andrew M. Butler argues in Cyberpunk, “the cutting-edge nature of cyberpunk ensured that it rapidly became a cliché: like many avant-gardes, it was obsolete as soon as the mainstream media took notice” (43). Butler’s assessment is reinforced by multiple claims that rapid commodification had effectively killed cyberpunk as the 1990s dawned.1 At the same time, cyberpunk tropes remain resilient in science fiction, giving rise to a new label— post-cyberpunk—whose short- and long-form fictions contribute to cyberpunk’s thematic arcs. In their collection Rewired: The Post-Cyberpunk Anthology, James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel explain that post-cyberpunk builds upon cyberpunk’s initial obsessions: “some writers extend them, some react against them, some take them for granted and move the basic attitudes into new territories” (x). For example, a “key insight of CP [cyberpunk], extended still further in PCP [post-cyberpunk], is that we are no longer changing technology; rather it has begun to change us” and “human values are not imprinted on the fabric of the universe because what it means to be human is always negotiable” (Kelly and Kessel x, xi). At the same time, the “punk in post- cyberpunk continues to make sense if it is pointing toward an attitude: an adversarial relationship to consensus reality” (Kelly and Kessel xii). Post-cyberpunk therefore represented an expansion of cyberpunk beyond the initial literary forms embodied by the fictions of William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, or Lewis Shiner; post-cyberpunk’s emergence in the 1990s was fostered by social milieus and climates that increasingly resembled the cyberpunk that had emerged a decade earlier but was now fast becoming quotidian reality. In particular, post-cyberpunk extends and revises core cyberpunk concerns in its handling of (dis)embodiment, online realities, networked subjectivities, and techno-biological viruses.

#### Snowcrash shows the evolution of Cyberpunk – interaction between language and code

Kilgore 20 -- currently serves as special programs coordinator for Teaching & Learning Innovation at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He has published on cyberpunk, narrative theory, and graphic narrative. In his spare time, he maintains an online fantasy novel system, The Adasir Project (www.adasir.com). (Christopher D., “Literary Precursors,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 7, p48-49) //le

While critics point to a host of authors,2 Neal Stephenson quickly emerged as one of the most prolific and important figures associated with post-cyberpunk, particularly given the immense success of Snow Crash (1992), an influential novel that played a pivotal role in transforming lit- erary cyberpunk and popularizing post-cyberpunk. At its most basic level, Snow Crash delivers cyberpunk’s tropes of virtual spaces, techno-biological viruses, ambivalence about embodiment, and hacker heroes with a hefty dose of enthusiastic, playful irony. The novel embraces the flashy, stylish, surface-oriented features of cyberpunk, while simultaneously undermining them as al- ways already amenable to commodification. The novel’s protagonist, dubbed Hiro Protagonist, caricatures the elite hacker (anti)hero and yet still functions in traditional hacker-hero fashion, saving the world from L. Bob Rife, televangelist, oil baron, and the novel’s obligatory megaloma- niac. Finally, Stephenson’s portrayal of the near-future U.S. parodies cyberpunk’s urban sprawls

with the brilliant neon ‘loglo’ of the multinational ‘franchulates’ into which society has devolved, articulating a scathing anti-capitalist satire in the process—yet also deploying, in support of Hiro, the outsized corporate figureheads of Cosa Nostra Pizza’s Uncle Enzo and Mr. Lee of Mister Lee’s Greater Hong Kong. Snow Crash shares with the tradition of postmodernist parody the propensity toward simultaneously critiquing and embracing materialism and commodification.3 The paper- back jacket copy sums up Snow Crash’s post-cyberpunk approach in one blurb: “Cyberpunk isn’t dead—it has just (belatedly) developed a sense of humor.”

Snow Crash was both intellectually stimulating and fun—and as much as it provided a rollicking adventure story, it also presented cyberpunk more as a way of approaching and understanding hu- man experience than a set of easily commodified tropes and motifs. The novel carries out this shift in stance through its transformation of core cyberpunk concerns. First, Stephenson’s depiction of the online Metaverse reworks the central trope of cyberspace, in sharp contrast to Gibson’s early vi- sion. Whereas Gibson’s Sprawl trilogy (Neuromancer [1984], Count Zero [1986], Mona Lisa Overdrive [1989]) envisions an instrumentalized cyberspace, rendered in basic geometric shapes that represent a complex file system, Stephenson envisions a livelier and more heavily populated environment that has more in common with the visual-aural language of first-person or role-playing games. That is, Gibson’s system of representation has been supplanted by Stephenson with a more polyvocal simulation. Second, no one in Snow Crash seems able to encode a mind directly into the Metaverse (as in Gibson’s Neuromancer or Rudy Rucker’s Software [1982]), nor do they want to. Stephenson therefore appears to side with common critiques of early cyberpunk’s ambivalence (if not outright rejection) toward embodiment. Instead, the novel fully embraces body augmentation, or what Lisa Swanstrom calls a “networked” conception of subjectivity (77). For Stephenson, mind, brain, and body form a meaningful interactive process that collectively constitutes an individual.

Stephenson explores this networked subjectivity in two key ways. First, hacker elites like Hiro and his colleagues use digital technologies as extensions of their perceptions and capacities, and in so doing render themselves physically and mentally vulnerable to visual-textual hacking. For example, Hiro’s hacker friend Da5id is reduced to a persistent vegetative state by the Snow Crash viral computer program. At the same time, L. Bob Rife can physically hack people and infect them with the DNA-based version of the virus, rendering them part of a larger cyborg superor- ganism that unquestioningly follows Rife’s programming. Stephenson therefore presents not an opposition between the digital and the ‘meat’ but rather a cultural system vulnerable at all levels to manipulation.

Snow Crash’s complicated relationship to embodiment is also part and parcel of Stephenson’s re-conceptualization of viral infections, or virality, which up to this point in cyberpunk were largely tools or weapons. The viral contagion deployed by L. Bob Rife, however, is not a digital-age invention. Instead, the Snow Crash virus originates in Sumerian Asherah myths and in the connections that language orchestrates between cognition and volition or action. Stephenson therefore projects the computational logic of code onto the semantic system of language, whereby human discourse becomes as amenable to hacking as computer networks. As the vector for dis- cursive virality, he chooses revealed religion, the ecstatic tradition of glossolalia or “speaking in tongues,” an ecstatic eruption of syllables. As Snow Crash depicts it, this virality, built around the language-processing deep structures of the brain, self-propagates through human communities. Stephenson therefore finds the Asherah virus everywhere, including the temple prostitutes of ancient Babylon, medieval Europe, and revivalist sects in modern America. Indeed, the idea itself seems to operate virally for Stephenson, who shifts in the course of the novel from a conception of the virus as a self-propagating entity to a conception that sees-as-viral almost everything about human civilization.

Snow Crash therefore depicts both information and viral contagions as free from any one me- dium, tearing virality loose from the digital media that dominated (and limited) earlier cyberpunk.

Similarly, Stephenson’s Metaverse constitutes a much more social space, a playground for human discourse in all its historical and international variety. Finally, concerns about embodiment take on an additional dimension: The networked human mind-body complex becomes vulnerable, in precisely the same way as systems of human community become vulnerable to the Asherah virus.

### Link

#### The idea of superheroes or superhumans links – gets commodified

Higgins\* and Iung^, 20 -- \* is the speculative fiction editor for the Los Angeles Review of Books. He is a tenured English faculty member at Inver Hills College in Minnesota, and his article “Toward a Cosmopolitan Science Fiction” won the 2012 SFRA Pioneer Award for excellence in scholarship. He has published in American Literature, Science Fiction Studies, Paradoxa, and Extrapolation, and his work has appeared in edited volumes such as The Cambridge History of Science Fiction 2019. In ad- dition, he serves as the Second Vice President for the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts (IAFA). ^ is an English major at Concordia University in St. Paul, MN, and he serves as an editorial assistant for the Los Angeles Review of Books. His publications have appeared in Con- cordia’s newspaper The Sword as well as online in Talking Comics and DM du Jour. Matthew is an aspiring fiction writer with a lifelong love of comics, literature, and the arcane.. (David M., Matthew., “Comic Books,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 12, p94-95) //le

Some regard the 1990s as the beginning of a ‘post-cyberpunk’ era, or a moment when the initial ideas, images, and aesthetics of cyberpunk became a broadly recognized and shallowly commodified style (Booker and Thomas 117–18). Thomas Foster, in contrast, suggests that during the 1990s cyberpunk experienced a “sea-change into a more generalized cultural formation” that responds to and reflects diverse conditions of social, technological, and economic change much more broadly than the original close-knit cadre of cyberpunk authors were able to imag- ine (xiv). Both of these tendencies—the shallow commodification of cyberpunk style and the use of recognizable cyberpunk sensibilities to interrogate contemporary life—are present within

mainstream superhero comics during the early 1990s. As Mark Oehlert observes, various cyborg heroes had been appearing within mainstream comics since at least 1941, when Marvel created Captain America, one of the first genetically modified ‘cyborgian’ superheroes (112). Other cyborg figures—such as Iron Man (1963), Deathlok (1974), Rom (1979), Cyborg (1980), and Cable (1990)—had appeared with increasing frequency within mainstream comics since the 1970s, but it wasn’t until the early 1990s that mainstream comics truly started to explore the terrain of cyberpunk. As Daniel Martin argues, for example, the Marvel comic Spider-Man 2099 (1992–96) “deploys the themes and tropes of cyberpunk fiction in the service of a postmodern superhero nar- rative” (467). Spider-Man 2099 was the most popular of a wave of 2099 titles from Marvel (includ- ing The Punisher 2099 [1993–95], Doom 2099 [1993–96], and Ravage 2099 [1992–95]) that were set in a grim, dystopian, cyberpunk future: “[I]n 2099, your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man is a little less friendly. So is the neighborhood” (qtd. in Martin 470). As Martin shows, Spider-Man 2099 offers ambivalent portrayals of “genetic engineering, cybernetic enhancement, and artificial intelligence” and, like many other cyberpunk texts, reflects a variety of “Orientalist cultural anx- ieties and regressive gender codes” (466).

## Bio-Cyberpunk

### Link

#### Biopunk link: genetic modification is a pervasive technological invasion

Schmeink 20 -- is the project lead at the “Science Fiction” subproject of “FutureWork,” a research network funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research. He was the inaugural pres- ident of the Gesellschaft für Fantastikforschung from 2010 to 2019 and has published extensively on science fiction and posthumanism. He is the author of Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society, and Science Fiction (2016) and co-editor of Cyberpunk and Visual Culture (2018). (Lars, “Biopunk,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 10, p73) //le

While it is not quite clear when and where the term ‘biopunk’ was first used, its heritage reflects two distinct traditions of literary science fiction (sf): that of cyberpunk, on the one hand, and that of biological sf, on the other.1 The latter, of course, is the far older tradition, with biology provid- ing a “thematic emphasis emerg[ing] very early in the development of science fiction” (Parker 35), including such foundational texts as Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818) or H.G. Wells’s The Island of Doctor Moreau (1896). The thematic focus of biological sf most relevant to biopunk is genet- ics, whether genetic mutation or “the feasibility and desirability of planned genetic alteration” (Parker 35). Cyberpunk, the other tradition informing biopunk, plays directly into mainstream culture’s scientific interest in genetics and the issues “about the nature of life itself, about what it is to be human, about the future of the human race” (Reiss 13). Many of cyberpunk’s themes connect with biological sf. Bruce Sterling, for example, writes about the loss of control by governments and big corporations as technology is no longer a tool of those in power, but “visceral,” “pervasive, utterly intimate” (Preface xiii). Technology is for everyone to use and invades the minds and bodies of cyberpunk society. By extension a central theme in cyberpunk is that the borders of what consti- tutes the ‘human’ are being crossed, blurred, or erased. For example, in the documentary No Maps for These Territories (Neale 2000), Sterling reminisces upon cyberpunk’s earliest days: “We were able to make computers glamorous. [...] This was a supermodel among technologies. [...] They were going to be cute; they were going to be miniature; they would be designed; they would be ador- able. The boundaries of the human body would be crossed.” Brian McHale notes that biopunk, just as cyberpunk, is founded upon the “centrifugal self” but in terms of prominent themes ascribes to it the revision of “Gothic-horror motifs of bodily invasion and disruption” (257). What differen- tiates biopunk from cyberpunk, therefore, is that it deals with the hybridization of the human not with machinic elements but with other organisms: human, animal, bacterial, fungal, viral, and so on. In biopunk fiction, the invasion of the body is intimate and visceral as it takes place on the level of the cell, or smaller still, on the level of the nucleotides that form all living matter.

### Biopunk > Cyberpunk

#### Biopunk overcomes the shortcomings of cyberpunk – able to challenge environmental issues

Schmeink 20 -- is the project lead at the “Science Fiction” subproject of “FutureWork,” a research network funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research. He was the inaugural pres- ident of the Gesellschaft für Fantastikforschung from 2010 to 2019 and has published extensively on science fiction and posthumanism. He is the author of Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society, and Science Fiction (2016) and co-editor of Cyberpunk and Visual Culture (2018). (Lars, “Biopunk,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 10, p74-75) //le

As Thomas Foster has pointed out (and many of the entries in this collection further demon- strate), cyberpunk needs to be viewed as a cultural formation interacting with the posthuman: it acts as “an intervention in and inflection of a preexisting discourse, which cyberpunk signifi- cantly transformed and broadened, providing a new basis for the acceptance of posthuman ideas

in contemporary American popular culture” (Foster xiii).4 In spite of its posthuman potential, however, cyberpunk often retains a humanist subjectivity based on a position of human excep- tionalism and the underlying idea that “there is a distinctive entity identifiable as the ‘human,’ a human ‘self’” (Nayar 6). Cyberpunk, in many instances, depicts cybernetic technology as a means to enhance humans and overcome “any number of natural human limitations such as aging, death, suffering” (Philbeck 175). As a result, cyberpunk’s transhumanist concepts of cyborg enhance- ment, up to its extreme position of uploading one’s consciousness into fully realized machine bodies, are ways to allegedly free humanity from its biological limitations, or so the transhumanist arguments go. The humanist self, though, is untouched by these enhancements, transcending its bodily prison to consolidate its position of exceptionalism.

Biopunk may therefore be a better vehicle for posthuman lines of inquiry than cyberpunk; after all, cyberpunk’s desire to transcend human biology is a “fantasy of escape” (Braidotti 91) and a “grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist view of the self” (Hayles 286–87). Biopunk, on the other hand, is founded upon what Donna J. Haraway refers to as “to become with many” (4). After all, Haraway reminds us that only 10% of the cells in a human body consist of human ge- nomes, while “the other 90% of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm. I am vastly outnumbered by my tiny companions” (3–4). According to Haraway’s understanding, human has thus always already been a hybridized existence, inextricably linked to other species. Therefore, biopunk powerfully ex- plores the potential and the consequences that stem from this realization and best embodies the idea of a hybridized and pluralized posthumanity “constituted by and constitutive of multiple forms of life and machines” (Nayar 2).

Biopunk not only addresses the question of how the human relates to other forms of life, but it also challenges human relations with the environment, with the world. Cyberpunk’s enclosures, zones, and virtual worlds are representations of the impact of human technology, their differences highlighting the fragmentation of ontology into what McHale calls “multiple-world spaces” (250). In other words, our practices shape and form the world we live in; culture and technology define the boundaries and makeup of our world. In their focus on technologically shaped worlds, many cyberpunk texts see the world, as Veronica Hollinger points out in her contribution to this collec- tion, as defined by technology, with nature notably absent. Simply put, issues of human influence on ecology, or what is today referred to as the Anthropocene, act merely as background noise and not as narrative centers in cyberpunk. The scant attention paid to them lends credence to Gerry Canavan’s critique that cyberpunk has traditionally offered a shortcut “for getting outside scarcity and precariousness—simply leave the material world altogether, by entering the computer. In virtual space, with no resource consumption or excess pollution to worry about, we can all be as rich as we want for as long as we want (or so the story goes)” (9).

Biopunk, on the other hand, highlights the unrepresentability of the world, preferring to leave the scale of the human behind to address a “grey ecology” which “propels us beyond our own fin- itude, opens us to alien scales of both being (the micro and the macro) and time (the effervescent, barely glimpsed; the geologic, in which life proceeds at a billion year pace)” (Cohen 383). In other words, biopunk is an intervention in the discourses of the Anthropocene by exploring human life on a micro scale, the Harawayian becoming-with of viruses and bacteria. At the same time, biopunk also challenges our conceptions of life on the macro scale. For example, both the retrovirus of “Our Neural Chernobyl” and the single-cell lifeforms of Blood Music spread to all forms of life; their impact is global and will be irreversible for the Earth as a whole.

### AT: Realism Good

#### Cyberpunk controls realism – the integration of technology means their theories are wrong

Tomberg 20 -- is a senior researcher of Contemporary Literature in University of Tartu, Estonia. His research focuses on science fiction, realism, utopia, and the philosophy of literature. His two monographs focus on the poetics of Science Fiction, and his essay “On the ‘Double Vision’ of Realism and SF Estrangement in William Gibson’s Bigend Trilogy” won the Science Fiction Research Association’s Pioneer Award in 2014. He is the editor of the Estonian Avant Garde mag- azine Vihik and, besides research, has written two plays. (Jaak, “Non-SF Cyberpunk,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 11, p81-82) //le

During the first years of the 21st century history—or, more precisely, technological development— finally seemed to have caught up with cyberpunk. The various technological phenomena and processes common to cyberpunk increasingly started to pop up in everyday reality, including virtual communication technologies, digital networking, and the emerging social media plat- forms; advances in genetic engineering and increasingly common prosthetic supplementations to the body; the mediated intimacy of historical events and the eventual emergence of cyber-war; and the overall onslaught of the society of the spectacle and the virtualization of finance capital.2 These all became more evident, more strongly felt in quotidian late-capitalist reality. In a way, several of cyberpunk’s central speculative elements seemed to have ‘bled’ straight from fiction into the everyday.

More important than the manifold materializations of cyberpunk’s particular thematic ele- ments, though, was the sheer speed and intensity of overall technoscientific developments that brought them about, and the corresponding over-accelerated pace of cultural change felt in ev- eryday life. All of a sudden, change seemed to have been the only constant of contemporary glo- balized existence. And this, in turn, posed some novel imaginative and representational problems to science fiction (sf) in general and cyberpunk in particular.

That something was happening (or had already happened) with cyberpunk became es- pecially evident after the ‘realist turn’ of one of its central figures and founders, William Gibson. With his 21st-century trilogy of novels (Pattern Recognition, 2003; Spook Country, 2007; Zero History, 2010—collectively known as the Blue Ant trilogy) Gibson forfeited his usual future-oriented cyberpunk extrapolations and started writing contemporary novels that were situated in the immediate present or recent past. As Brian McHale fluently summarized, the protagonist of Pattern Recognition “suffers jet lag, uses e-mail and Photoshop, consults on the design of a corporate logo, goes ‘cool-hunting’ for street fashions, encounters post-Soviet oligarchs, and becomes obsessed with an online video clip” (182). No fully immersive virtual realities, no artificial intelligences, and no technological transformations of the body so com- mon to cyberpunk can be found—the novels of the Blue Ant trilogy “are indistinguishable from contemporary thrillers from the point of view of their plots and worlds” (McHale 183). In place of extrapolative projections of the future, Gibson offers us the realist cognitive mapping of the globalized present.

In an interview given at the time, Gibson attributed his realist turn to an imaginative deadlock provoked by the contemporary pace of change:

In the ’80s and ’90s—as strange as it may seem to say this—we had such luxury of stability. Things weren’t changing quite so quickly in the ’80s and ’90s. And when things are changing too quickly, as one of the characters in Pattern Recognition says, you don’t have any place to stand from which to imagine a very elaborate future. (Nissley)

Gibson seems to suggest that the over-acceleration of the everyday also affects the extrapolative imagination, drawing the horizons of futurity decisively close to the present. Several commenta- tors on the contemporary status of sf have voiced concurring statements. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, quoting the feminist theorist Zoe Sofia, has characterized the contemporary situation as “the collapse of the future onto the present” (“Futuristic” 27), and added that “as the transformations reach a certain pitch, the very idea of transformation changes from mystical to statistical, from transcendence to a selection of alternatives” (Seven Beauties 58). In more genre-related terms, Veronica Hollinger has usefully and plausibly argued that “science fiction is ‘the literature of change,’ but change is exactly what now defines the present. It no longer guarantees the future as the site of meaningful difference” (453). Pattern Recognition therefore seems to point to the possibility that “science fiction’s founding assumption—that the future will be different from the present—has become outdated. Today the present is different from the present” (Hollinger 465). Thus, it wouldn’t be too far-fetched to say that the technical over-acceleration of the present also in a way makes it a science-fictional one—and it is precisely this present, different from itself, that informs the realist focus of Gibson’s novels. No wonder then that McHale noted the plots and worlds of the Blue Ant trilogy (as well as some of the works by Neal Stephenson, notably Cryptonomicon [1999] and REAMDE [2011]) are indistinguishable from contemporary thrillers and the prose, “bristling with brand names, technical jargon, specialized knowledge, and calculatedly strange juxtapositions,” continues to read like sf, “testifying to the fact that our everyday reality in the new millennium actually seems to have the texture of science fiction” (183; see also Tomberg).

In other words, Gibson’s realist prose focuses on the contemporary globalized everyday and estranges in the same specific way that sf used to estrange. The contemporary pace of change, together with the technological saturation of the present, has thus also led to changes in the con- temporary genre system, and, more precisely, to the relative positions of realism and sf therein. The underlying premise is that as the contemporary late-capitalist cultural space-time has become increasingly techn(olog)ical, its realism, aspiring towards credible reflections of this space-time, has inevitably become increasingly science-fictional. Since both Gibson and Stephenson are closely associated with cyberpunk, and since the specific tropes and thematic motifs that seem to have ‘bled’ from fiction into reality are ones that feature most centrally in cyberpunk’s repertoire, it is fair to claim that of all the sub-categories of sf, cyberpunk is the one most directly involved in the current close feedback-loop between realism and sf. In a sense, cyberpunk has by now realized itself to such an extent that, to borrow a very attentive remark from Sherryl Vint, it would be more useful to see cyberpunk “less as a subgenre of science fiction and more as part of the cultural milieu that informs our contemporary existence of technologically mediated reality”

(266–67). Vint de- velops this notion on Thomas Foster’s claim that (probably sometime during the 1980s and 1990s) cyberpunk “experience[d] a sea change into a more generalized cultural formation” (xiv). In an article on the convergence of virtual and material battlefields in cyberpunk cinema, Vint coins a generic concept for contemporary works that convey this cultural formation: non-sf cyberpunk.3

### AT: Perm Do Both

#### Biopunk cannot utilize the government or big corporations – gets co’opted

Schmeink 20 -- is the project lead at the “Science Fiction” subproject of “FutureWork,” a research network funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research. He was the inaugural pres- ident of the Gesellschaft für Fantastikforschung from 2010 to 2019 and has published extensively on science fiction and posthumanism. He is the author of Biopunk Dystopias: Genetic Engineering, Society, and Science Fiction (2016) and co-editor of Cyberpunk and Visual Culture (2018). (Lars, “Biopunk,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 10, p77-78) //le

Taking up the critique voiced by these artists and turning it into social activism is a loose group of DIYbio, biohackers, or biopunks (self-proclaimed) that came together around the turn of the 21st century and in “The Biopunk Manifesto” found a kind of philosophical treatise to express their

values. Meredith Patterson, author of the manifesto and a computer scientist, is seen as a leading figure in the biopunk movement and approaches biology through its connection with information technology—thus conceptually drawing a parallel between cyberpunk and biopunk, between the anti-authoritarian practices of hacking code and hacking DNA. Speaking for biopunk activism, she demands scientific research be open, free, and in the hands of the public, arguing for empow- erment through “scientific literacy” and the goal of “making the world a place that everyone can understand.” In her manifesto, she explicitly states that engineers and scientists (professional or hobbyist) need to become political actors and activists, involved in policy because both corpo- rations and politicians “wish to curtail individual freedom of inquiry.” As such, DIYbio is part of the movement toward open practices (i.e., open data, open publishing, open education, open source, and open access), and biohackers have joined with lawyers and social activists to fight, for example, against the patenting of human genomic information or against the restrictions of access to biological materials.

The biohackers and biopunks organized around “The Biopunk Manifesto” are remarkably similar to Sterling’s biohackers in “Our Neural Chernobyl”: They see the potential of biology for changing the world but refuse to leave it in the hands of big science corporations or govern- ment institutions; they instead claim it as a public good. They are “the visionaries whose imag- inations were set on fire by the knowledge that we had finally sequenced the human genome” (Newitz). In their pursuit of knowledge, they do not need the high-tech equipment of corporate laboratories, but rather rely on “the hack”; or, as journalist Marcus Wohlsen has pointed out, “[b]iohacking in the form promoted by DIYbio is about engineering elegant, creative, self- reliant solutions to doing biology while relying not on institutions but wits” (5). In this utopian conception of biopunk, freedom of data, scientific method, and research provide solutions to problems posed in medicine and biology, such as the hacking and curing of diseases (through crowdsourcing its genetic deciphering) or the creation of cheaper therapies (by decoupling them from corporate interests).

## Feminist-Cyberpunk

### General

#### Cyberpunk reimagining is a useful heuristic for analyzing the structures unpinning society

Yaszek 20 -- is a professor of Science Fiction Studies in the School of Literature, Media, and Com- munication at Georgia Tech, where she researches and teaches science fiction as a global language crossing centuries, continents, and cultures. Her books include The Self-Wired: Technology and Subjectivity in Contemporary American Narrative (2002/2014), Galactic Suburbia: Recovering Women’s Science Fiction (2008), and Sisters of Tomorrow: The First Women of Science Fiction (2016). Her ideas about science fiction as the premiere story form of modernity have been featured in The Washing- ton Post, Food and Wine Magazine, and USA Today and in the AMC miniseries James Cameron’s Story of Science Fiction. A past president of the Science Fiction Research Association, Yaszek currently serves as an editor for the Library of America and as a juror for the John W. Campbell and Eugie Foster Science Fiction Awards. (Lisa, “Feminist Cyberpunk,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 5, p32-33) //le

Women’s interest in the organizing themes of cyberpunk—including technoscientifically induced alienation, corporate global domination, a rapacious media landscape, and the often-reckless use of new technologies to transform bodies and minds—is as old as science fiction (sf) itself. The fury experienced by Mary Shelley’s artificial human in Frankenstein (1818) when he learns that he is the throwaway product of bad science and bad parenting is every bit as charged as the electricity that an- imates him. As such, Shelley anticipates the dilemma of cyberpunk’s grifters, sex workers, and other outsiders who eventually realize that they, too, are the disposable products of a technoscientific cul- ture. As sf developed into a unique popular mode with its own creators, publishing venues, and rules for good writing, women began to explore the perils of capitalism in greater depth. For example, both Lilith Lorraine’s “Into the 28th Century” (1930) and Thea von Harbou’s Metropolis (published as a novel in 1925 and produced as a film by Fritz Lang in 1927) imagine futures where the mad science of technologically reorganizing human life for profit becomes standard practice in globe-spanning “Industrial Dictatorships”—and where women band together with each other and fringe communi- ties of “reformers, scientists, and radicals” to change the course of history (Lorraine 257).

In the 1960s and 1970s, women associated with the development of feminist sf explored sim- ilar concerns in relation to new media technologies, including television, early video games, and early computers. Feminists writing proto-cyberpunk in this era specifically envisioned “media

landscape” futures where everyday women undergo radically invasive technological procedures to remake themselves in the media’s image of feminine perfection (Pringle and Nicholls). Stories in this vein include Elisabeth Mann Borgese’s “True Self” (1959), Evelyn E. Smith’s The Perfect Planet (1962), Kit Reed’s “The New You” (1962), Kate Wilhelm’s “Baby, You Were Great” (1968), and, most famously, James Tiptree, Jr.’s “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” (1973). Like Shelley’s creature before them, the protagonists of these stories are monstrously alone, isolated from other women, and alienated from the men who use them for profit. Collectively, these authors insist that there is no way out from the media landscape because the forces of technologically-enabled capitalism prevent women from connecting with one another in meaningful ways.

### Timeframe (Solvency)

#### Revolution is a slow continuous process

Yaszek 20 -- is a professor of Science Fiction Studies in the School of Literature, Media, and Com- munication at Georgia Tech, where she researches and teaches science fiction as a global language crossing centuries, continents, and cultures. Her books include The Self-Wired: Technology and Subjectivity in Contemporary American Narrative (2002/2014), Galactic Suburbia: Recovering Women’s Science Fiction (2008), and Sisters of Tomorrow: The First Women of Science Fiction (2016). Her ideas about science fiction as the premiere story form of modernity have been featured in The Washing- ton Post, Food and Wine Magazine, and USA Today and in the AMC miniseries James Cameron’s Story of Science Fiction. A past president of the Science Fiction Research Association, Yaszek currently serves as an editor for the Library of America and as a juror for the John W. Campbell and Eugie Foster Science Fiction Awards. (Lisa, “Feminist Cyberpunk,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 5, p37) //le

Contemporary feminist cyberpunk’s focus on families that extend across time and space is closely connected to its emphasis on slow revolution. Chris Moriarty’s Spin series (Spin State, 2003; Spin Control, 2006; Ghost Spin, 2013) revolves around the adventures of a far-future aug- mented human and her pansexual AI lover as they negotiate the collapse of the human empire and the war between various species for control of the future; at the same time, Madeline Ashby’s Machine Dynasty series (vN, 2012; iD, 2013, reV, 2015) relates the multigenerational saga of a hybrid human-AI family that must contend with a very real religious Rapture that changes the balance of power between humans and machines on Earth. Nnedi Okorafor’s The Book of Phoenix (2015) does not provide much detail regarding the radical changes that occur between the main action of the book (set in a near-future much like our own present) and the frame narrative (which takes place in a far-future post-oil society), but the very lack of detail only underscores how long and complex the process of change can be. Such stories stand in sharp contrast to Cadigan’s Synners, where globe-spanning technological and economic networks are destroyed and rebuilt in a matter of weeks, and Hopkinson’s Brown Girl in the Ring, in which the Canadian government is destroyed and rebuilt in a matter of years. While earlier generations may have envisioned digital revolutions happening quickly because digital technologies were themselves new phenomenon, contemporary authors who have witnessed multiple generations and iterations of digital technologies treat revolution as a slow process that takes place over great spans of time and space.

### Political Cuteness – ALT?

#### Take back the Internet through political cuteness – solves

Yaszek 20 -- is a professor of Science Fiction Studies in the School of Literature, Media, and Com- munication at Georgia Tech, where she researches and teaches science fiction as a global language crossing centuries, continents, and cultures. Her books include The Self-Wired: Technology and Subjectivity in Contemporary American Narrative (2002/2014), Galactic Suburbia: Recovering Women’s Science Fiction (2008), and Sisters of Tomorrow: The First Women of Science Fiction (2016). Her ideas about science fiction as the premiere story form of modernity have been featured in The Washing- ton Post, Food and Wine Magazine, and USA Today and in the AMC miniseries James Cameron’s Story of Science Fiction. A past president of the Science Fiction Research Association, Yaszek currently serves as an editor for the Library of America and as a juror for the John W. Campbell and Eugie Foster Science Fiction Awards. (Lisa, “Feminist Cyberpunk,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 5, p39) //le

Women and other feminist-friendly people put these insights to work in both everyday practice and art. Kishonna L. Gray explains that women of color use digital technologies and social media (such as ‘Black Twitter’) to disrupt negative narratives of black femininity disseminated by the mainstream media and “to capture the uniqueness of marginalized women” (176). They perform this double operation by employing “diverse ways of speaking” and incorporating “music [...] poetry or spoken word [...] or other cultural art forms in their online lives” (187). Elsewhere, artists associated with the Cybertwee Collective propose that women and other marginalized people might take back the Internet by using tactics that have been historically devalued as “cute” or “femme”:

[F]ar too long we have succumbed to the bitter edge of the idea that power is lost in the sweet and tender... sentimentality, empathy, and being too soft should not be seen as weak- nesses [...] Our sucre sickly sweet is intentional and not just a lure or trap for passing flies, but a self-indulgent, intrapersonal biofeedback mechanism spelled in emojis and gentle selfies. (Emphasis added)

The Collective demonstrated the political potential of cuteness with their 2015 Dark Web Bake Sale, which aimed to domesticate the dark web—a space notorious for both cybercrime and ram- pant racism and sexism—by providing volunteers with $15 of bitcoin and instructions on how to spend it on cupcakes the collective sold online. Much like their literary counterparts N.K. Jemisin, Rem Warom, and Chris Moriarty, cyberfeminists associated with such recent phenomena as Black Twitter and the Dark Web Bake Sale celebrate the kind of “feminism at ease with computation” that has long been central to feminist cyberpunk and that is increasingly part of all people’s lives today (Laboria Cuboniks).

## Janelle Monáe (afrocyberpunk)

### Alt – Music

#### Embracing music to access different vibrations allows for challenging stereotype, critiquing history, and envisioning the future

Capetola 20 -- is an Andrew W. Mellon Engaged Scholar Initiative Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research mobilizes sound and vibration as analytics for studying identity formation and historicizing the recent past. She has an article on Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean” in Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society, is a mu- sic writer for Bitch Media, and blogs about contemporary pop and R&B on her website www. christinecapetola.com. (Christine, “Janelle Monáe”,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 30, p246) //le

As one of our most exciting and thought-provoking contemporary artists, Monáe creates her own black, queer, and feminist version of cyberpunk through interfacing her body and musical technology. In the words of Shana L. Redmond, Monáe “uses her body to critique and resituate history, including the identities produced from and within it” (394). By drawing on the music of 1980s black pop stars, Monáe places herself within a lineage of black artists who use sound to in- tervene in stereotypes of black, female, and/or queer people—and to call attention to the struggles of minoritarian subjects in America and the African diaspora. Even more important, Monáe con- tinues the trend of pushing back on visual stereotypes of black people as criminals, welfare queens, or (art) objects—a resistance that had begun with the work of MTV stalwarts such as Michael Jackson and Prince. Jackson and Prince were among the first black artists to go into heavy rota- tion on MTV and the first pop artists of any racial background to experiment with relatively new (at the time) digital synthesizer and drum machine technology. Such experimentation helped them re-humanize themselves and citizens of black communities as a whole in the face of dehumanizing images of black people circulated during Ronald Reagan’s presidency. Monáe has continued this foundational work in her own oeuvre and the sonic connections between Monáe’s Dirty Computer and 1980s black pop stars exemplify the resonances of ‘history’ in her present/future moment.

Dirty Computer partakes in the cyberpunk—and also Afrofuturistic—project of envisioning the future to reflect on the present.5 In this vein, Dirty Computer works as a reflection of how black—and female, queer, trans, and nonbinary—people continue to be objectified and policed in the 2010s. In the futuristic world of Dirty Computer, we encounter many of the same technological and political problems prevalent in today’s America. During the emotion picture’s opening, Jane narrates this dystopian setting: “They started calling us computers. People began vanishing. And the cleaning began. You were dirty if you looked different. You were dirty if you refused to live the way they dictated. You were dirty if you showed any form of opposition at all. And if you were dirty, it was only a matter of time.”

As they are captured, the dirty computers are sent to a cleansing center where their minds are erased memory by memory by a duo of white men called “memory erasers,” all while the androids strive to keep their memories as a means of resistance. For example, one of Jane’s memories in- volves her and a friend in a car being pulled over by an automated police drone floating through the air. As beacons of surveillance, the drones are all-seeing, forcing the two women into silence and stillness. Giving the automated surveillant some subtle side eye as they produce their IDs and retinas to be scanned, they wait for the drone to zoom out into the distance before letting the rest of their friends out of the trunk, all while the song “I Got the Juice” begins to play. After “I Got the Juice” abruptly stops, the scene shifts to one of automated drones hovering above a group of dark- and light-skinned people outside at night. While a voiceover reads from the Declaration of Independence—“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”—a row of people rocking piercings, asymmetrical haircuts, and

gender nonconformity are lined up accordingly. This drone round-up contrasted with the audio clip of the Declaration is a stark visualization of who in this society is considered a dirty computer. In the emotion picture, music is the means by which Jane and her friends attempt to find freedom, to move to their own beat. In other words, music allows them to exist on a different vibration that is grounded not only in the contributions of black culture but in solidarity with expansive notions of queerness and feminism. As jazz composer, poet, and Afrocentrist Sun Ra remarked from the planet that he has set aside for black people in the film Space is the Place (Coney 1974), “[t]he music is different here. The vibrations are different on planet Earth.” In taking up Sun Ra’s call to locate a different ‘vibration’ for a (black) collectivity, Jane and the other androids

partake in the Afrocyberpunk project of using (music) technology to set themselves free.

#### We must recognize the dark side of technology and reject that in favor of solidarity

Capetola 20 -- is an Andrew W. Mellon Engaged Scholar Initiative Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research mobilizes sound and vibration as analytics for studying identity formation and historicizing the recent past. She has an article on Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean” in Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society, is a mu- sic writer for Bitch Media, and blogs about contemporary pop and R&B on her website www. christinecapetola.com. (Christine, “Janelle Monáe”,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 30, p249-250) //le

The potentiality of vibration and reclaiming technology remains tenuous through the end of Dirty Computer. Before the credits roll, it appears as if all has been lost: Zen, now a ‘beacon’ at the center, brings Jane through the end of the cleansing process. After she has been made into a beacon herself, Jane greets Ché, who has been strapped down to a table in the cleansing center awaiting processing. But following the credits, vibration—and love—appears to prevail. The soundtrack for this moment is “America,” the final track on Dirty Computer and the very song that Jane re- fused to forget while she was held captive. To the lines of “War is old, so is sex/Let’s play god, you go next,” we see Jane and Zen dragging Ché out of the center. In sync with the synthesizer chords, they place their feet one in front of the other as they move en route to their escape. After the line “Jim Crow Jesus rose again,” Jane smiles, remembering the multiple times in the emotion picture when she completed the lyrics to this line in protest—and was subsequently gassed with Nevermind in an attempt to make her forget her love for Zen (and Ché) and the possibility of a black, queer, and feminist collectivity. To the sounds of synthesizers making high-pitched 1980s synth sounds, Zen pushes open the door of the cleansing center and leads the group into the light.

It is therefore sound—and vibration—that ultimately brings the trio back into the light. As the audio track proclaims “Love me, baby/Love for me who I am” to the sounds of synthesizers that sound like church organs, Jane stares out into the camera before turning around and joining the others in their flight, letting the sounds guide her. She has not forgotten who she is—and the vibrations of the song have helped her to hold on to what those at the cleansing center have tried so forcefully to erase. In the tension between human and machine, love prevails, albeit one that does

not gloss over the dark side of technology and their being embedded within structures of white heteropatriarchal capitalism. As Francesca Royster asks through a reading of Monáe’s music at the end of her book on post-soul black sounds, “[h]ow do we keep creating a future that includes all of us?” (191). Through a mobilization of the Afrocyberpunk potential of digital music technology, Monáe offers us a way to imagine a solidarity among blackness, queerness, and femaleness that locates points of overlap among all three while simultaneously holding onto the beautiful differ- ences that distinguish us as people—and androids—in the first place.

#### Pop music can break through discourse and everyday practices to build collectivity

Capetola 20 -- is an Andrew W. Mellon Engaged Scholar Initiative Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research mobilizes sound and vibration as analytics for studying identity formation and historicizing the recent past. She has an article on Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean” in Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society, is a mu- sic writer for Bitch Media, and blogs about contemporary pop and R&B on her website www. christinecapetola.com. (Christine, “Janelle Monáe”,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 30, p247-248) //le

The genius of Dirty Computer is that it uses pop music to visually and sonically situate histories of black suffering within a context of struggles for widening understandings of gender and sexu- ality beyond the purview of sterile and respectable whiteness. Through mapping the sounds and vibrations of pop music onto Afrocyberpunk aesthetics, Monáe emphasizes how racial minorities and androids who are categorized as ‘other’ can turn their being read as (or being) queer and gender non-normative into a mechanism for building collectivity. Both androgyny and queerness have always been part of the mix for Monáe, as evidenced by the shouts of “Queer!” during the chorus of her 2013 single “Q.U.E.E.N.” and her later confirmation that she identifies as pansexual. For example, using repurposed James Brown-styled dance moves to try to escape her jailers in the music video for “Tightrope” (2010),6 Monáe challenges the dominance of the guards’ white maleness and underscores femaleness and queerness as critical elements of black musical traditions and black life (Royster 188).

Given these intersectional interests, Dirty Computer is optimistic that pop music—i.e. poptimism— can work as a catalyst for change in the world. The emotion picture challenges the gender ste- reotypes that have been grafted onto musical genres, beginning with the assumption that pop is more ‘feminine’ than rock—and therefore the politically weaker of the two. In a 2014 op-ed, critic Saul Austerlitz bemoans that poptimism (versus rockism) favors “disco, not punk; pop, not rock; synthesizers, not guitars; the music video, not the live show,” adding that “[i]t is to privi- lege the deliriously artificial over the artificially genuine.” But rather than reinforcing the “de- liriously artificial,” Monáe mobilizes both pop and the technology of synthesizers to expose the behind-the-scenes workings of the memory erasers that keep white heterosexist patriarchy alive. In addition to challenging the black masculinist tendencies attributed to James Brown and other artists creating music at the intersections of rock and funk,7 Monáe utilizes pop music technol- ogies on Dirty Computer to accentuate how blackness is constructed by discourses and everyday practices while simultaneously using these same technologies to explore how gender and sexuality complicate notions of blackness which are still too much indebted to heteropatriarchal and het- erosexist tendencies. In other words, pop on Dirty Computer is a site where Monáe can reimagine race, gender, and sexuality.

### Communication

#### Music is an effective method of communication – Dirty Computer proves

Capetola 20 -- is an Andrew W. Mellon Engaged Scholar Initiative Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research mobilizes sound and vibration as analytics for studying identity formation and historicizing the recent past. She has an article on Michael Jackson’s “Billie Jean” in Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society, is a mu- sic writer for Bitch Media, and blogs about contemporary pop and R&B on her website www. christinecapetola.com. (Christine, “Janelle Monáe”,” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 30, p245) //le

To accompany the release of her new audio collection Dirty Computer (2018), Janelle Monáe released a concept film—what she refers to as an emotion picture— of the same name that son- ically and visually recounts how Jane 58721 (Janelle Monáe) and her android friends attempt to hold onto their feelings (of black solidarity, of feminist collectivity, of same-sex desire) in the wake of a white-washed ruling power that wants to render them all complacent—and emotionless— machines. In what we can call an example of ‘Afrocyberpunk,’1 Dirty Computer is Monáe’s fusion of cyberpunk visuals and 1980s pop sounds to inspire us to act in the present and build a different future than the dystopian one portrayed in the film. In so doing, Dirty Computer centers black- ness and the African diaspora as a pivot point for pushing back against the technological grip of a hyper-globalized society, and although they are considered ‘dirty computers,’ Jane and her friends utilize the technologies of black musical traditions to continuously display the ‘human’ desires for sex, love, and connectivity. For example, during the performance of “Django Jane,” Jane 58721 sits atop a throne dressed in a regal maroon suit, white shirt, black tie, white leather boots, and maroon kufi cap with gold embroidery; a cohort of black lady androids with black leather jackets and sunglasses layered atop similar outfits surround her, supporting her regal position. The group nods along as Jane raps, “Yeah, yeah, this is my palace/ Champagne in my chalice,” alluding to both the queens and kings of African history and the power of global collectivity rooted in shared experiences of blackness. The androids move their machinery along with the beat, connecting with the felt oscillations of sound that are the song’s vibrations. After lifting their arms in the air, they quickly pull them back down to their right in the fashion of a militaristic salute. Using the hard-hitting synthesizer and drum machine sounds as catalysts for movement, they invoke Janet Jackson’s “Rhythm Nation” (1989), the black pop star’s successful single on which she calls her fans to “Join voices in protest to social injustice/A generation full of courage, come with me.” For Monáe, “Django Jane” highlights how vibration is a source of identity-making that works both in conjunction with and in excess of sound to create points of connectivity that push on the limits of visual representation. Through being drawn into movement along with the oscil- lations of a sound’s vibrations, they channel the fluidity of identity formation into the project of history-making (Capetola 4).

## Posthumanism

### General

#### Cyberpunk and posthumanism combine to challenge what it means to be human – new cognitive technologies can challenge health span, cognition and emotion capabilities

Julia **Grillmayr 20** is a literature and cultural studies scholar as well as print and radio journalist, based in Vienna and Linz, Austria. Her postdoc project at the University of Art and Design in Linz (funded by the Austrian Science Fund FWF) investigates ‘scenario thinking’ in contemporary science fiction and futurology (see <https://scifi-fafo.com>). (Julia, “Posthumanism(s)” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 33, p273-274) //le

What contributes to cyberpunk’s ongoing importance is without question its capability to put the idea of an original human essence to the test; this applies to the cadre of Movement-era authors1 in the 1980s onwards. Cyberpunk shows bodies and minds that are constantly altered, enhanced, or perverted by bio- and nanotechnological prostheses, cognitive implants, and/or new orifices that interface with digital networks and cyberspatial domains. The definition of what it means to be human becomes slippery in cyberpunk as categories of identity, nature, and essence crumble: everything is interdependent, in flux, and defined rather by what it does than what it is. Closely linked to cyberpunk’s emergence comes the advent of what is loosely called the posthuman, a concept which focuses on the same central themes—the amalgamation of bodies and technology, brain-machine interfaces, and potential habitats for humans in virtual spaces and space colonies. Various writers, cultural theorists, and philosophers have been conceptualizing what posthuman bodies in an increasingly posthuman present and future could and should look like. It is therefore imperative to identify and differentiate the two major strands of understanding the posthuman that not only set different priorities but contradict each other in fundamental assumptions: trans- humanism and critical posthumanism.

First, transhumanism is all about transcendence. The prefix is short for ‘transitional human,’ an intermediate stage of human development into, at some future endpoint, the posthuman. Transhumanists put forth the freedom of the human individual to technologically alter their cor- poreal body—referred to as “morphological freedom” (More 4)—through prosthesis, but more often through speculative bio- and nanotechnology. In this respect, one of the main goals is the extreme postponement or even abolition of death. “Becoming posthuman,” argues Max More in “The Philosophy of Transhumanism,” “means exceeding the limitations that define the less desirable aspects of the ‘human condition’” (4). Posthuman beings would not only “no longer suffer from disease, aging, and inevitable death,” but would “have vastly greater physical capability and freedom of form” (More 4). Furthermore, More explains transhumanists “typically look to expand the range of possible future environments for posthuman life, including space coloniza- tion and the creation of rich virtual worlds” (4). Moreover, transhumanists extrapolate that new cognitive technologies will not only enhance human capabilities to think and remember, but also to feel. Nick Bostrom, one of the most prominent voices of the transhumanist movement, identifies health span, cognition, and emotion as the three areas where posthuman capacities, “greatly exceeding the maximum attainable by any current human being without recourse to new technological means,” should be developed (28–29). Together with intellectual capacity and “the capacity to remain fully healthy, active, and productive, both mentally and physically,” Bostrom

stresses that “the capacity to enjoy life and to respond with appropriate affect to life situations and other people” would be ameliorated (29). In sum, transhumanist discourse sees becoming posthuman as akin to the transition from childhood to adulthood as a logical next step in human evolution (Bostrom 42).

Critical posthumanism is quite unlike transhumanism as it tells completely different stories about posthumans. Primarily, it does not presume that posthumanity exists in the near or far future; rather, critical posthumanism presumes we have already become posthuman and in part asks how we arrived at our posthuman condition, exemplified by N. Katherine Hayles’s How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics. In the tradition of Michel Foucault, who stresses in The Order of Things that our orders of knowledge are socially con- structed, posthumanists such as Hayles emphasize that our system of beliefs, our epistemes, shape the world, not only on a metaphysical but also on a material level. Foucault calls Man “an inven- tion of recent date” that will eventually be replaced by other ideas and constructs, “erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (387). Posthumanism therefore draws on this insight to resituate liberal humanism as merely one story or invention among others. In this vein, Donna J. Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” tells a different story, a story of dethroning Man from his privileged position as crown of creation; it is a story against anthropocentrism and in favor of the relatedness of humans, animals, machines, and other non-living earth dwellers. The ability to tell ‘different stories’ opens up the possibility of thinking about the emergence of new technologies in tandem with a critique of humanism.

As a result, while transhumanists understand the term ‘posthuman’ as referencing something that comes after the human, for critical posthumanists it connotes the concept of something that comes after humanism. Transhumanism, as More points out, “continues to champion the core of the Enlightenment ideas and ideals—rationality and scientific method, individual rights, the pos- sibility and desirability of progress” (10). It can thus be understood as a “contemporary renewal of humanism” (Sorgner and Ranisch 8) or even conservative “retrohumanism” (Clarke xiv). In contrast, critical posthumanism challenges these Enlightenment ideas and ideals and the anthro- pocentrism they are based upon, and insists on “the urgency of finding new and alternative modes of political and ethical agency for our technologically mediated world” (Braidotti 58).

## Gothicism

### General

#### Gothicism and cyberpunk are compatible

Heise-von Der Lippe 20 is an assistant lecturer with the chair of Anglophone Literatures at the University of Tübingen, Germany. Her research focuses on the parallels between monstrous corporeality and monstrous textuality, as well as the intersections of the Gothic and critical post- humanism. Recent publications include her co-edited collections Posthuman Gothic (2017) and Literaturwissenschaften in der Krise (2018). She is one of the series editors of Challenges for the Human- ities for Narr, Tübingen. (Anya, “Gothicism” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 32, p264) //le

Gothic textuality, Fred Botting argues, is “[u]nstable, unfixed and ungrounded in any reality, truth or identity other than those that narratives provide, [and] there emerges a threat of sublime excess, of a new darkness of multiple and labyrinthine narratives” (181). Cyberpunk, as a more recent, but related narrative mode focusing on the celebration of a kind of “urban uncanny” (Schmeink 25) or techno-sublime, was aesthetically influenced by earlier forms. Its defining com- bination of “low life and high tech” (Ketterer 141) draws on a wide variety of conventions, mixing dystopian and science fiction (sf) elements with film noir and hard-boiled detective fiction, freely combining cybernetic high-tech elements and abject Gothic body horror with postmodern pop culture and futuristic architecture into a unique aesthetics. At the core of both the Gothic and cyberpunk lies a fascination with spaces—virtual or imagined—and the way these are shaped by and, in turn, influence cultural ideas. It would be tempting to read cyberpunk’s fascination with the imaginary architectural patterns of the urban ‘Sprawl’ (see Gibson) as simply a new take on the Gothic sublime; after all, the flickering lights and screens of late-capitalist advertising, which are integral components of cyberpunk, suggest a mere surface aesthetic. Cyberpunk texts, however, often revolve around a much deeper posthuman and ultimately quite Gothic integration of bodies and technologies, undermining and shaping our understanding of what it means to be human.

#### The combination of Gothicism and cyberpunk is a useful heuristic to challenge Anthropocene capitalism

Heise-von Der Lippe 20 is an assistant lecturer with the chair of Anglophone Literatures at the University of Tübingen, Germany. Her research focuses on the parallels between monstrous corporeality and monstrous textuality, as well as the intersections of the Gothic and critical post- humanism. Recent publications include her co-edited collections Posthuman Gothic (2017) and Literaturwissenschaften in der Krise (2018). She is one of the series editors of Challenges for the Human- ities for Narr, Tübingen. (Anya, “Gothicism” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 32, p264) //le

Recent cyberpunk narratives reflect scientific research into longevity and the possibility of overcoming the limitations of the human body. In consequence, they often foreground death as a liminal state to be overcome by technology, but in a climate of Anthropocene capitalism, they do so on a much larger scale, reflecting contemporary concerns with the death of whole populations. In these texts Gothic imagery of death, decay, and abjection is used to underline a critical point which goes beyond the vision of earlier cyberpunk texts like Blade Runner and Neuromancer. These cybergothic texts draw on critical posthumanist discussions of death as a global issue connecting north and south in a framework of institutionalized necropolitical exploitation of marginalized bodies at the hands of greedy global corporations. As Braidotti argues by drawing on Achille Mbembe’s concept of “necropolitics” (Mbembe 11), “the bodies of the empirical subjects who signify difference (woman/native/earth or natural others) have become the disposable bodies of the global economy” (Braidotti 111). Blade Runner 2049 reflects this by showing an orphanage

sweatshop in which a uniformly clad army of pale children with shaved heads disassemble used consumer electronics, presumably to recycle their components.5 The atmosphere of the scene is clearly Gothic—from the gloomy architecture of the vast space to the unsmiling children as uncanny doppelgangers. It is, clearly, not personhood which is at stake for this collective body of children, but rather the underlying question whether any of them will survive this environment, which considers their “wasted lives” (Bauman) as less valuable than the electronic trash they are sorting. Their absorption into the “integrated circuit” (Haraway 291) of production and recycling of high-tech consumer goods has certainly led to a kind of cyborgization and the dissolution of gendered markers (along with any other signs of individuality). The scene, however, presents a techno-capitalist dystopia, a bleak distortion of Haraway’s liberating cyborg myth in which the status of the superrich “depends on the material deprivation of others” (Frase) and automation technology benefits only the rich.

#### Cybergothicism spotlights how technoscienctific creation destabilizes our sense of self, origin, and purpose

Heise-von Der Lippe 20 is an assistant lecturer with the chair of Anglophone Literatures at the University of Tübingen, Germany. Her research focuses on the parallels between monstrous corporeality and monstrous textuality, as well as the intersections of the Gothic and critical post- humanism. Recent publications include her co-edited collections Posthuman Gothic (2017) and Literaturwissenschaften in der Krise (2018). She is one of the series editors of Challenges for the Human- ities for Narr, Tübingen. (Anya, “Gothicism” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 32, p270-271) //le

This kind of abject body horror, which casts the human body as soulless raw material for bio-technological experiments, can be traced back to Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818). As Veronica Hollinger argues, in contemporary re-readings, Shelley’s novel “has been transformed into a precursor text of cyberculture” (192). Dongshin Yi, for instance, reads Frankenstein as a key text in the Genealogy of Cyborgothic [sic], as Victor Frankenstein’s “workshop of filthy creation” (Shelley 32) conjures questions of creation and (identity) production, as well as creative and nar- rative authority. Shunned by society and abandoned by his creator, Frankenstein’s creature ulti- mately begins to reflect on his existence and the manner of his creation—a query mirrored in the novel’s epigraph from Milton’s Paradise Lost (1667): “Did I request thee maker from thy clay to make me man? Did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me?” The novel, like its cybergothic descendants, draws attention to how the infinite possibilities of technoscientific creation tend to destabilize human individuality and our sense of self, origin, and purpose to the point where we begin to question our concept of humanity as a rational, clearly demarcated species. Cyber- gothic texts, from Frankenstein’s proto-posthuman Gothic explorations of these questions on- ward, take these destabilizations and anxieties and aestheticize them to create fully fleshed (or bio-technoscientifically engineered) monstrous horrors. As Cavallaro argues, “the bodies that populate these worlds are themselves intrinsically uncanny [...] threshold phenomena precariously suspended between materiality and immateriality” (172) Cavallaro associates this liminality of cyberpunk bodies with Gothic forms of embodiment: “An intricate and befuddling incarnation of often repressed desires and fantasies, the Gothic body eludes labelling and its appeal is accordingly

complex. Above all, it is boundless; this condition is most famously epitomized by the formless pulp of the unfinished female creature that Dr Frankenstein ends up scattering over the floor of his laboratory” (172).

## Baudrillard

### General

#### Baudrillard and cyberpunk theory are intertwined

Haar\* and McFarlane^ 20 -- \*received her Ph.D. from the University of Tübingen, Germany. She conducted research on simulation and virtuality in theory, as well as technology and media representations in postmodern society. She studied modern German literature, media studies, and musicology. Aside from media history, media, and film theory, her areas of research comprise game studies and comic studies. ^ is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at Glasgow University with a project entitled “Products of Conception: Science Fiction and Pregnancy, 1968–2015.” She has worked on the Wellcome Trust-funded Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities project and holds a Ph.D. from the University of St Andrews on William Gibson’s science fiction novels. She is the editor of Adam Roberts: Critical Essays (2016) and has served as blog and reviews editor for the journal BMJ Medical Humanities. (Rebecca, Anna, “Simulation and Simulacra” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 31, p255-256) //le

Perhaps the most important voice in theorizing the entanglement of ontology, reality, virtuality, and simulation is that of Jean Baudrillard, whose work intertextually influences cyberpunk at some of its key moments and even acts as a kind of cyberpunk theory, blurring the lines between the fiction and its commentary, the territory and the map. Baudrillard’s key text is Simulacra and Simulation in which he develops some of his most important concepts, including that of the hyperreal. Baudrillard argues that we are living in an increasingly mediated world, constructed

of simulations and simulacra: While simulations are intended to represent or to copy objects or systems, simulacra are simulations with no corresponding original. By drawing attention to the proliferation of simulacra and their impact on the human mind, Baudrillard’s work suggests a dystopian society as humans live under the illusion that they are engaged with some kind of ‘truth’ when actually there can be no access to such a thing in our so-called reality; in fact, ‘truth’ cannot exist in our current state, an idea that rings increasingly true in the era of fake news, false accusations of fake news, and the proliferation of conspiracy theories via social media. Rather than merely predicting a future dystopia, Baudrillard’s work argues that dystopia had already been realized at the time of writing. He coins the term ‘hyperreality’ to describe this society in which simulacra shape the human life world and a pretense at a reference to reality is no longer required. Baudrillard’s work resonates with the almost-contemporaneous development of cyberpunk as a cultural mode: While some cyberpunk grappled with the new frontiers represented by cyberspace, Baudrillard saw VR technology as the acceleration of the destruction of the real by its hyperreal double (Perfect Crime 47).

#### We are reaching the hyperimmersive stage of reality where the power to code and control remains unevenly distributed

Haar\* and McFarlane^ 20 -- \*received her Ph.D. from the University of Tübingen, Germany. She conducted research on simulation and virtuality in theory, as well as technology and media representations in postmodern society. She studied modern German literature, media studies, and musicology. Aside from media history, media, and film theory, her areas of research comprise game studies and comic studies. ^ is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at Glasgow University with a project entitled “Products of Conception: Science Fiction and Pregnancy, 1968–2015.” She has worked on the Wellcome Trust-funded Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities project and holds a Ph.D. from the University of St Andrews on William Gibson’s science fiction novels. She is the editor of Adam Roberts: Critical Essays (2016) and has served as blog and reviews editor for the journal BMJ Medical Humanities. (Rebecca, Anna, “Simulation and Simulacra” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 31, p255-256) //le

Cyberpunk texts use technological simulations in order to analyze the increasingly mediated and hyperreal nature of our environment, but in the meantime, technology has been catching up to the science-fictional imaginary, albeit sometimes in unexpected ways. At the beginning of the 2000s, VR barely had any cultural sway but since then games have tried to bring players into a virtual world, as far as the technical possibilities allow. The development of the Internet as an encompassing space thanks to WiFi and satellite navigation technologies, a development that some sf writers (and readers) anticipated but could otherwise barely have been imagined in the 1990s,

makes VR possible as an everyday technology. In this context the 2000s can be thought of as a cultural turning point from a medial society, one in which reality was shaped and constructed through the media, to a digital society, one in which digital technologies allowed new possibilities for active user participation while also excluding such participation through the hidden work done by inaccessible coding. The move from the medial to the digital required a change in user behav- iors, as humans learned to navigate the new digital landscape (or were left behind by it), as well as economic responses as digitization affected industries (and nations) of all kinds. Digitization was not so much a goal as a tool, but a tool that enabled new forms of work and changed communi- cation through new information technologies, enabling the emergence of new networks as well as the exacerbation of social cleavages, notably in the socioeconomic divisions impacting social classes vis-à-vis access to technologies and the friction caused by First vs. Third World geopolitics that has repeatedly seen the technological wonders of the former predicated upon the cheap, if not exploitive, labor of the latter.

The (de)evolution from a medial society to a digital one is now being supplanted by the next stage. Gundolf Freyermuth, for example, argues that the increasing use of VR marks a further cultural shift: the hyperimmersive turn. In current VR technology, simulation and reality are clearly distinguishable, but the higher degree of immersion and the tendency towards augmented or mixed reality are already becoming apparent; for example, data glasses are being marketed that are increasingly within financial reach for the average user, mobile phones can now be used as windows into VR, and an online presence is presumed for everything from headhunting and job applications to tax filings. Tellingly, hyperimmersion, like digitization, raises the problem of that which is hidden from end users. Thorsten Holischka points out that the current generation is growing up with technologies that were not considered possible a decade ago and that such widespread use is only possible when technologies are made available without the need for special knowledge (32). It seems that the more widespread a technology, the more reliant it will be on a user interface that is welcoming to inexperienced users while, at the same time, hiding the digital language that structures the user experience. As a result, the power to code and control networked or virtual environments remains unevenly distributed; even in the relative infancy of VR technol- ogy, cyberpunk acts as a discourse for thinking about these problems.

#### In a technological world, a meaningful identity is impossible to inhabit

Haar\* and McFarlane^ 20 -- \*received her Ph.D. from the University of Tübingen, Germany. She conducted research on simulation and virtuality in theory, as well as technology and media representations in postmodern society. She studied modern German literature, media studies, and musicology. Aside from media history, media, and film theory, her areas of research comprise game studies and comic studies. ^ is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at Glasgow University with a project entitled “Products of Conception: Science Fiction and Pregnancy, 1968–2015.” She has worked on the Wellcome Trust-funded Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities project and holds a Ph.D. from the University of St Andrews on William Gibson’s science fiction novels. She is the editor of Adam Roberts: Critical Essays (2016) and has served as blog and reviews editor for the journal BMJ Medical Humanities. (Rebecca, Anna, “Simulation and Simulacra” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 31, p260-261) //le

The importance of virtual worlds in mediating social encounters and managing, if not out- right shaping, the political spectrum is evidenced in the controversies surrounding Cambridge Analytica, foreign troll farms, and Russian interference in the 2016 American presidential elec- tion. These instances, and the management of the perception of authorities in dictatorships

or Communist systems, such as Chinese and North Korean censorship of internal computer networks, emphasize the importance of cyberpunk’s critique. For example, Blade Runner 2049 (Villeneuve 2017) evokes nothing so much as the desperation of an individual who knows their reality is a simulacrum but continues to function through the cruel optimism it offers, since this is the only defense against a slide into nihilistic solipsism. Even though K (Ryan Gosling) knows he is a replicant he fantasizes about being something more; even though he knows his companion, Joi (Ana de Armas) is a hologram he believes the positive feedback she offers.3 The desperate need for the validation of the newsfeed is dramatized as he moves through his lonely world in which the hustle and bustle of the multicultural cityscapes in Blade Runner (Scott 1982) is replaced with a world in which K is most often pictured alone. Ryan Gosling’s distancing affect portrays K as perhaps most alone when interacting with others onscreen. Blade Runner 2049 reflects a world in which the replacement of life with its simulation—through replicant identity, which acts as an analogy for living through the simulated identities created through social media—is complete, and as a result a meaningful identity is impossible to inhabit and K is left with the distinct sen- sation that his world has been emptied out, with meaningful action that might change society happening ‘out there,’ out of his control.

#### Authentic encounters can only occur through a rejection of the technological society we inhabit

Haar\* and McFarlane^ 20 -- \*received her Ph.D. from the University of Tübingen, Germany. She conducted research on simulation and virtuality in theory, as well as technology and media representations in postmodern society. She studied modern German literature, media studies, and musicology. Aside from media history, media, and film theory, her areas of research comprise game studies and comic studies. ^ is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at Glasgow University with a project entitled “Products of Conception: Science Fiction and Pregnancy, 1968–2015.” She has worked on the Wellcome Trust-funded Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities project and holds a Ph.D. from the University of St Andrews on William Gibson’s science fiction novels. She is the editor of Adam Roberts: Critical Essays (2016) and has served as blog and reviews editor for the journal BMJ Medical Humanities. (Rebecca, Anna, “Simulation and Simulacra” *The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture*, Chapter 31, p261) //le

The issues of alienation from ontological meaning as a result of social media simulation is taken up in many more contemporary post-cyberpunk texts. For example, the anthology series Black Mirror (2011–) repeatedly returns to the possibilities for ontological meaning in a world dominated by the simulations and simulacra of online identity, and again in ways that act as commentary on contemporary socio-political realities and possibilities. The episode “Nosedive” (2016) features a social system that has been compared to China’s Social Credit System which aims to assign each citizen a rating that can be affected by feedback on one’s social activities.4 The episode shows the quick decline of one woman’s social credit as she attempts to attend a friend’s wedding but finds herself embarrassed and socially bankrupt. The episode concludes with the woman imprisoned, having hit rock bottom. She begins an exchange with the occupant of the cell next to her own, and the episode ends with them shouting increasingly creative insults at each other, culminating in them angrily and gleefully shouting “fuck you” at one another. Of course, the premise of the episode is not based on a future social credit system, whether the one under development in China or any other; rather, the episode critiques the attention to appearances that must be paid in order to develop social capital on social media and suggests a freedom that can be found in being ex- cluded from these systems, in becoming an outcast. In this relatively liberatory ending, the show offers some hope for an authentic encounter with others and with one’s own being.

In conclusion, technological simulation today has successfully mapped ‘reality’ in its entirety, from the capabilities of Google Earth to the tracking of human individuals via their social media accounts. We have entered, according to Christoph Kucklick, a granular society in which the digital begins to replace reality (10). Kucklick understands granularity as a measure of resolu- tion, the precision of data, because through digitalization our world is already mapped and the changes now are in the finesse of the resolution (10). Such a view reflects Baudrillard’s diagnosis that we are living in a hyperreal simulacrum and that the differences that will be made to that situation are merely those of degree. In the more optimistic exemplars of post-cyberpunk there are suggestions that the real is not gone forever and might be accessed, either through worker solidarity or through reconnecting with others without the mediation of social networks. Hopes such as these represent a departure from Baudrillard’s bleak outlook and show that cyberpunk and, perhaps more effectively, post-cyberpunk continue to engage with the concepts of simula- cra and simulation but in different ways, attempting to open out new ways forward. As cyber- punk and post-cyberpunk continue to show, we can refuse to be stranded in the deserts of the electronic night.

## Afrofuturism

### Janelle Monáe

#### Janelle Monáe uses technology to free herself and listeners from the powers that be

Isiah Lavender III\* and Graham J. Murphy^ 20 is the Sterling-Goodman Professor of English at the University of Georgia, where he researches and teaches courses in African American literature and science fiction. His books include Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement (2019) and Race in American Science Fiction (2011), as well as the edited collections Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction (2017) and Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction (2014). He is a co-editor of the oldest science fiction journal Extrapolation. ^is a professor with the School of English and Liberal Studies (Faculty of Arts) at Seneca College (Toronto). In addition to more than two dozen articles published in a va- riety of edited collections and peer-reviewed journals, he is also co-editor of Cyberpunk and Visual Culture (2018) and Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives (2010), and co-author of Ursula K. Le Guin: A Critical Companion (2006). (“Afrofuturism,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 42, p358) //le

Arguably, the most obvious descendant of Sun Ra is American R&B artist Janelle Monáe, whose explicitly Afrofuturist/Afrocyberpunk work on The ArchAndroid (2010), The Electric Lady (2013), and Dirty Computer (2018) shows a deep awareness of how racial identity politics blended with sound technology can impact an ever-quickening global popular technoculture defined by race. As Christine Capetola writes in her contribution to this collection, Monáe “creates her own black, queer, and feminist version of cyberpunk through interfacing her body and musical technology” (246) and, in so doing, partakes in an “Afrocyberpunk project of using (music) technology” to free herself and her listeners from racist, sexist, heteronormative power structures (247). Monáe’s oeuvre is loosely organized around the struggles of her android alter ego, Cindi Mayweather, in a dystopian near future where the freedom to love is circumscribed by the pow- erful Droid Authority, prompting Mayweather’s growth from the persecuted Other in Metropolis: The Chase Suite (2007) to the revolutionary icon of an android underground in The ArchAndroid, a time traveling icon who may have gone missing in Electric Lady but has proven inspirational to “droids from all across Metropolis [who] gather in nightclubs [...] and barbershops where they revel in the otherness that separates them from humans” (Pulliam-Moore). “The android,” Monáe explains in an interview with Dorian Lynskey, “represents a new form of the Other [...] And I believe we’re going to be living in a world of androids by 2029. How will we all get along? Will we treat the android humanely? What type of society will it be when we’re integrated? I’ve felt like the Other at certain points in my life. I felt like it was a universal language that we could all understand.” This focus on the ‘universal language of the Other’ fuels Monáe’s Dirty Computer and its accompanying film, or what Monáe calls an emotion picture, that depicts an oppressive future where humans who don’t conform to ‘proper’ codes of behavior are quarantined by New Dawn agents and forced to undergo a “cleansing,” a euphemism for a techno-chemical lobotomy where rebellious memories are wiped away and the subject reprogrammed accordingly. Having revealed that Dirty Computer is definitely part of the larger Cindi Mayweather narrative universe,6 Monáe’s Afrofuturist and Afrocyberpunk promises to expand her artistic oeuvre in exciting and much-anticipated directions.

### Perm

#### Cyberpunk and Afrofuturism are compatible

Isiah Lavender III\* and Graham J. Murphy^ 20 is the Sterling-Goodman Professor of English at the University of Georgia, where he researches and teaches courses in African American literature and science fiction. His books include Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement (2019) and Race in American Science Fiction (2011), as well as the edited collections Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction (2017) and Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction (2014). He is a co-editor of the oldest science fiction journal Extrapolation. ^is a professor with the School of English and Liberal Studies (Faculty of Arts) at Seneca College (Toronto). In addition to more than two dozen articles published in a va- riety of edited collections and peer-reviewed journals, he is also co-editor of Cyberpunk and Visual Culture (2018) and Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives (2010), and co-author of Ursula K. Le Guin: A Critical Companion (2006). (“Afrofuturism,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 42, p359-360) //le

Although space prevents a full analysis of Afrofuturism and Afrocyberpunk in other media, it would be remiss not to at least point to the cyberpunk influences in Afrofuturist art and fashion. For example, aside from the fact King T’Challa’s suit in Black Panther is a cybernetic enhance- ment, turning him into a cyberpunk-styled cyborg,7 the Afrofuturist fashion that was lauded when the film was released is a central component of black cultural identity in the 21st century. As Connie Wang writes, “it’s easy enough to spot: powerful Black men and women dressed in Besotho blankets, Himba braids, Maasai collars, as well as Egyptian anks and crowns inspired by Yourban deity Oshun—remixed with superhero textiles, gravity-defying jewelry, and technicolor hair,” some of which is reminiscent of cyberpunk visual motifs. Fashion is also a key draw to the immensely successful Afropunk Festival which, inspired by the documentary Afro-Punk (Spooner 2003), provides opportunities to showcase black arts in all forms of cultural expression. Similarly, the Afrofuturist art show “In Their Own Form” at the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago (12 April, 2018, to 8 July, 2018) featured more than a dozen contemporary artists, includ- ing Senegalese Alun Be whose “Edification” series includes photographs of young black children wearing virtual reality goggles (Sayej). Or, as Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum points out, Kiluanji Kia Henda’s photo-based project, Icarus 13 (2006–08), imagines Angolan astrophysicists preparing for the first expedition to the sun, weaving the Icarus myth and Apollo 13 that “provides another example of a creative practice that collapses myth into sf while simultaneously igniting African postcolonial imaginings” (118). Even something as mundane as searching for Afrofuturist fashion on Pinterest reveals cyberpunk influences in the litany of images. Afrocyberpunk remains a viable and ongoing strain in the larger Afrofuturist field, particularly when it comes to the visual splen- dor on display in fashion and the visual arts.

In closing, with its focus on “issues of social justice in a global and technology-intensive world” (Lavender, Afrofuturism Rising 3), Afrofuturism has grown more complex since Dery’s “Black to the Future” and has become a useful analytical tool that has, in many ways, evolved beyond its early roots in cyberpunk, at least conceptually or theoretically. For example, as Bould demonstrates in his work on Afrocyberpunk cinema, Afrofuturism anticipates “a transformation” in sf studies, all the while working against “the typical cyberpunk acceptance of capitalism [and] assimilation of certain currently marginalized peoples into a global system that might, at best, tolerate some relatively minor (although not unimportant) reforms” (182) by breaking with the colorblind future of sf. Sim- ilarly, Afro-British philosopher Kodwo Eshun discusses how Afrofuturism establishes a “webbed network,” an historical matrix reflecting black people’s “perpetual fight for human status, a yearn- ing for human rights, and a struggle for inclusion within the human species” which continues beyond chattel slavery far into the future as it connects black people across time (More Brilliant 00[- 006]). Elsewhere, Eshun identifies such connections as “countermemories that contest the colonial archive, thereby situating the collective trauma of slavery as the founding moment of modernity” (“Further” 288). Thus, Afrofuturism recuperates a seemingly stolen past that many people would like to forget—the scene from Black Panther when Erik Killmonger (Michael B. Jordan) lectures the white museum curator about stolen African history comes immediately to mind—and creates options for cultural analysis. Or, as Kilgore notes, “Afrofuturism can be seen as less a marker of black authenticity and more a cultural force, an episteme that betokens a shift in our largely uncon- scious assumptions about what histories matter and how they may serve as a precondition for any

future we may imagine” (564). The recovery work suggested by Eshun and Kilgore, coupled with the transformative anticipations that Bould highlights, represents Afrocyberpunk moments where readers dive into this historical archive to retrieve a sense of black humanity separate from the cy- borg image—i.e., the “coded as natural machines” that Dery describes—that has been created for black people by typically white power structures. In this respect, Afrofuturism and Afrocyberpunk enable black people to see themselves in the technocultural world as more than the flesh machines they have been regarded as for much of history in the New World, and while the ongoing develop- ment of both Afrofuturism and Afrocyberpunk is deeper and richer in its scope than anything Dery could have imagined, “reflecting counter histories, hacking and or appropriating the influence of network software, database logic, cultural analytics, deep remixability, neurosciences, enhance- ment and augmentation, gender fluidity, posthuman possibility, the speculative sphere, with trans- disciplinary applications” (Anderson and Jones x); it still reflects a cyberpunk heritage as it considers hacking, remixing, augmentation, and the posthuman as central conceits, while allowing for other modes of storytelling in black speculative fictions.

## Indigenous Futurisms

### 1NC

#### Link – without recognizing the impact of indigenous contributions to imagining futurisms, colonial violence is recreated

Corinna Lenhardt 20 is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the University of Münster, Germany, where she also earned her Ph.D. in American studies in 2018. Her research and teaching interests include ethnic studies and African American studies, race, gender, and gothic fiction. She has published articles and chapters on Indigenous fiction, film, and online activism. (“Indigenous Futurisms,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 41, p344) //le

Since Grace L. Dillon (Anishinaabe) published her watershed anthology of Indigenous science fiction (sf) writing, Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction (2012), Indigenous futurisms—the plural indicating the vast variety of culture-specific negotiations and inventions from Indigenous peoples across the globe1—conceptualizes two distinct, yet intimately related aspects of Indigenous speculative cultural productions. First, creators of “Indigenous futurisms sometimes intentionally experiment with, sometimes intentionally dislodge, sometimes merely accompany, but invariably change the perimeters of sf” (Dillon, Walking 3). Grappling with mainstream sf’s troubling persistence in settler colonial fantasies2 and hegemonically configured and reinforced race discourses, Indigenous futurisms provide an alternative to the “steady diet of the feathers and the fantasy” fed to non-Indigenous audiences “as what it supposedly means to be a ‘real Indian’” (Adare 1). This by no means entails only the inclusion of authentic Indigenous characters as part of futurist texts; rather, “they are generated by and inspirational for Native peoples” (Medak-Saltzman 143). This latter aspect already implies the second key aspect prevalent in Indigenous futurisms; that is, the understanding of Indigenous futurisms as age-old Indigenous cultural practices predating western concepts of sf easily by thousands of years: As Dillon writes, “[m]any experimental narrative tech- niques that cutting-edge SF authors congratulate themselves for discovering have actually been around for millennia in Indigenous storytelling” (“The People” Pos. 116). She goes on to remark that “[s]lipstreams, alternative realities, multiverses, time traveling—the stock tropes of mainstream SF are ancient elements of Indigenous ways of knowing” (“The People” Pos. 116). By working from within Indigenous spiritual, cultural, and scientific worldviews and traditions, which entail concepts that have not just been dismissed in mainstream sf, but in the wake of the western Enlightenment generally, Indigenous futurist texts position indigeneity at the heart of both scientific progress and sociocultural futurity. In sum, Indigenous futurisms indigenize mainstream sf by re-envisioning its tropes and motifs from complex, culture-specific Indigenous perspectives; the historically and still predominately white genre is mobilized from both within and without to push Indigenous peoples from the stereotype-ridden margins to the center of sf and, thus, into futurity.

#### The alt is embracing a survivance mentality – solves perpetually viewing Indigenous peoples as victims

Corinna Lenhardt 20 is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the University of Münster, Germany, where she also earned her Ph.D. in American studies in 2018. Her research and teaching interests include ethnic studies and African American studies, race, gender, and gothic fiction. She has published articles and chapters on Indigenous fiction, film, and online activism. (“Indigenous Futurisms,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 41, p344-345) //le

Dillon’s optimism regarding sf’s potential to “honor Native traditions, to dig into history lingering behind myth, and to share with readers the ramifications of indigenous diasporas in ways that recognize their accountability” (“Miindiwag” 236) intersects with the work of Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) and his oft-cited concept of “survivance.” Survivance com- bines Indigenous ‘survival’ with ‘endurance’ and ‘resistance.’ It implies an “active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (Vizenor, Fugitive 15), that is both a rejection of estab- lished images of ‘the Indian’ and connected narratives of victimization and an insistence on

Indigenous continuance and adaptability. This insistence neither denies the historical process of colonization nor its contemporary impact; rather, it refuses to see Indigenous peoples defined by these processes as perpetual victims without agency. Translated to the context of sf, survivance entails pride, optimism, and (self-)empowerment in the face of white mainstream practices of stereotyping and exclusion—Indigenous peoples and cultures are alive and kicking, today as well as in fantastic futures.

### Solvency

#### Indigenous futurism can be a useful tool for analyzing dominant ideologies

Corinna Lenhardt 20 is a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer at the University of Münster, Germany, where she also earned her Ph.D. in American studies in 2018. Her research and teaching interests include ethnic studies and African American studies, race, gender, and gothic fiction. She has published articles and chapters on Indigenous fiction, film, and online activism. (“Indigenous Futurisms,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 41, p345) //le

Given her understanding of Indigenous futurisms as intersection of survivance and sf, as renun- ciation of hegemonic dominance through continuous and creative practices of cultural identity and resistance, it is not surprising that Dillon is also the first scholar to hint at the possibility of cyberpunk narratives by Indigenous artists. Arguably, cyberpunk’s punk attitude commits this sf subgenre to showing “how and why dominant ideologies marginalize dispossessed strata of the population” (Cavallaro 20). Cyberpunk’s mostly dystopian, technologically enhanced, urban societies in which “globalization and capitalism have led to the rule of multinational conglomerates, while margin- alized individuals live in a post-industrial setting defined by cold metal technology, virtual reality, and crime” (Lavigne 11), lend themselves to the Indigenous practices of survivance in the face of oppression and marginalization while subjected to dystopian colonial realities. Dillon’s anthological inclusion of Red Spider White Web (1990), an important novel by Misha (Métis) that “interpenetrates the cyberpunk” with Indigenous tribalism (Dillon, Walking 185), has triggered a necessary inquiry into the possibilities and limits of Indigenous cyberpunk cultural practices. In 2018, this inquiry fueled Brian K. Hudson’s (Cherokee) “Indigenous Cyberpunk Manifesto”:

Gibson constructed the console cowboy, but we are the digital Natives. We are the original Natives of the web, the tech-savvy NDNs weaving in and out of discussion threads, the warriors with keyboards who carry sparks into cyberspace.3 We are the coders who create sovereign virtual worlds, the digital code talkers who braid Indigenous tongues into networks of resistance. We’ve navigated the webs of branching nodes since time immemorial—before kubernētēs became cybernetics and before punk was ponk. Our digital allies boost our signals. We are Indigenous cyberpunks.

## Empire

### General

#### The historical colonialism underpinning the structure of society shifts to the body under a cybernetic lens

John Rieder 20 is the author of Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction (2008) and Science Fiction and the Mass Cultural Genre System (2017). He received the Science Fiction Research Asso- ciation’s Pioneer Award in 2011, and the Pilgrim Award in 2019. After receiving his Ph.D. at Yale University in 1980, he taught at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa until his retirement in 2018. (“Empire,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 40, p339) //le

Sterling’s summary of body and mind invasion makes clear that cyberpunk’s tropes of invasion are all about the permeability of boundaries that formerly seemed solid. As Donna J. Haraway observed in her “A Manifesto for Cyborgs,” written in the same years and in response to the same social upheaval as the fiction of the cyberpunk coterie, the boundaries between organism and ma- chine, human and animal, and the physical and non-physical turn out to be porous and unreliable in the society taking shape around cybernetic command and control. The invasion of the body by prosthetics and of the mind by digital data and software highlights not only the contingency of individual identity but perhaps even more the vulnerability of the employee or citizen to forces of control that are mediated by technology but structured by several centuries of symbiosis between capitalism and colonialism. As the regime of flexible accumulation takes hold in the 1970s and 1980s, stripping U.S. labor of industrial and manufacturing jobs and cheapening production by exploiting formerly colonized labor markets, domestic labor and citizenship are systematically devalued by neoliberal attacks on the power of labor unions and the entitlements of citizens. If Moylan is right about the importance of the re-structuring of labor to cyberpunk’s construction of characters, the boundaries being violated in the fictions respond to this systematic invasion of boundaries formerly relied upon to protect the livelihood of first world workers. Cyberpunk’s array of hackers and meat puppets hyperbolizes the insecurity of the Rust-Belt-era labor market and the immense asymmetry of power that leaves workers increasingly at the mercy of multinational corporate strategies.

The thematic centrality of figures of invasion in early cyberpunk is rivaled by its attempts to imagine totality, or as Sterling puts it in the Mirrorshades manifesto: “the tools of global integration—the satellite media net, the multinational corporation—fascinate the cyberpunks and figure constantly in their work” (xiv). The plot of invasion itself is often driven by an un- derlying transformation of the concept of totality from some kind of spatiotemporal aggregation into disembodied information. In the re-structuring of the global economy this means that the tactical importance of occupying territory gives way to monopolizing access to employment, rights, resources, and information. The Sprawl trilogy responds with a plot built entirely on breaking into corporate data banks and breaking down the barriers that separate and fragment the totality of information in them. But at the same time as cyberpunk often fantasizes niches of resistance or escape (e.g. in Mirrorshades: “Freezone” [1985], Lewis Shiner’s “Till Human Voices Wake Us” [1984], Sterling and Gibson’s “Red Star, Winter Orbit” [1983]), it seldom imagines the possibility of a structural transformation in economic or political terms. Instead, the transfor- mation in Gibson takes place at the level of informational totality with the merging of the two Tessier-Ashpool AIs, while for the workers and citizens of the Sprawl, nothing changes: “Things are things,” as the transformed Wintermute puts it at the end of Neuromancer (270). What has often been said but bears repeating is that neocolonial capitalism has here turned into ‘things’ as such. All too often in cyberpunk, capitalism tends to operate as if it were nature itself, and the premise of capitalist growth as the underlying engine of history may be precisely the reason the Sprawl trilogy reverts to expansionist space travel at its conclusion.

#### The new frontier of cyberspace results in expansionist elements surviving through cyberpunk

John Rieder 20 is the author of Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction (2008) and Science Fiction and the Mass Cultural Genre System (2017). He received the Science Fiction Research Asso- ciation’s Pioneer Award in 2011, and the Pilgrim Award in 2019. After receiving his Ph.D. at Yale University in 1980, he taught at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa until his retirement in 2018. (“Empire,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 40, p339) //le

What happens when the land of discovery is cyberspace? In an essay on Gibson and cyberpunk, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay distinguishes between the expansionist fantasies of early sf, based on co- lonialism and Social Darwinism, and the postmodern and cyberpunk counter-movement he calls implosion, where the rationality of instrumental reason is ground into fragments. In Gibson’s cyberspace, however, a lot of expansionist elements survive. The hackers in “Burning Chrome” (1982) and Neuromancer (1984) use invasive software developed by the military, signaling a world where technological development continues to be driven by military competition, with infor- mation rather than land now the stakes of battle. Gibson’s hacker protagonists are ‘cowboys,’ invoking the expansionist mythology of the American Western. At the end of the entire Sprawl series, in the concluding moments of Mona Lisa Overdrive (1988), an AI, an uploaded cowboy, and a software construct board a virtual vehicle bound for another solar system. Many of the critics less enamored with cyberpunk have complained about the way such plot elements blunt the critical edge of Gibson’s depiction of a dystopian near future. Csicsery-Ronay, for instance, says that the cyberpunks “write as if they are both the victims of a life-negating system and the heroic adventurers of thrill” (192). One might well argue, then, that in Gibson’s cyberspace it is not so much that the tired and wrongheaded ideologies of American self-congratulatory fantasy are abandoned or overcome as that they are restylized and recirculated—combined, first of all, with the cyni- cism that recognizes the ‘life-negating’ environmental and social consequences of contemporary capitalism at the same time as it continues to exploit its expansionist ethos for thrill and adventure. Thus, arguably, Gibson’s Sprawl fictions do not demystify the discoverer’s fantasy but rather recast it with cyberspace as the new frontier. We know very well, the reformulated fantasy would then go, that this space is an artifice constructed by the collective efforts of the corporate economy and supported by the material infrastructure of the entire computing technology of contemporary society, but we act as if were an autonomous realm that sustains itself as an independent reality and is available to appropriation and inhabitation by those able to adapt themselves to its environment. And so the Tessier-Ashpool AIs, the software construct of Julius Deane, and the uploaded minds of Bobby, the cowboy, and Angie, his girl, become in the end the natives, or rather the indige- nized settlers, of a newly opened interstellar frontier.

## Critical Race Theory

### General – Afrocyberpunk

#### Afrocyberpunk offers an explanatory power from which we can examine complicate question

Isiah Lavender III 20 is the Sterling-Goodman Professor of English at the University of Georgia, where he researches and teaches courses in African American literature and science fiction. His books include Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement (2019) and Race in American Science Fiction (2011), as well as the edited collections Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction (2017) and Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction (2014). He is a co-editor of the oldest science fiction journal Extrapolation. (“Critical Race Theory,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 37, p312-313) //le

Led by Delany’s example, established black writers like Barnes, Octavia Butler, Nalo Hopkinson, and Nnedi Okorafor have responded strongly to white cyberpunk by challenging racial hierarchies. Afrocyberpunk clarifies significant moments in American history and enables us to begin thinking through complicated questions of racial inequality, citizenship and rights, freedom, and justice. Counter-stories abound in Afrocyberpunk neutralizing the various racial stereotypes projected across a white cyberpunk while its cyberspace networks, hackers, and cy- borgs look entirely different from mainstream cyberpunk and its racial shortcomings. That’s the

beauty of Afrocyberpunk: It does not at all have to look like cyberpunk, all the while deploying familiar motifs common in cyberpunk. As a result, black writers create entire black planets with which to explore alternative life experiences.

#### Afrocyberpunk can challenge the whiteness of cyberpunk

Isiah Lavender III 20 is the Sterling-Goodman Professor of English at the University of Georgia, where he researches and teaches courses in African American literature and science fiction. His books include Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement (2019) and Race in American Science Fiction (2011), as well as the edited collections Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction (2017) and Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction (2014). He is a co-editor of the oldest science fiction journal Extrapolation. (“Critical Race Theory,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 37, p314-315) //le

In closing, Afrocyberpunk is very much like Afrofuturism, a distinct African American mode of futurism,7 in that it represents another way to describe black speculative cultural practices, only with particular attention to cyberspace, simulations, and/or virtual realities (technical or bi- ological) as sites of revolution and social reform informed by critical race theory. Afrocyberpunk stories by Delany, Butler, Barnes, Hopkinson, and Okorafor register on our collective senses, vibe

with our hearts, minds, and spirits. Call it an embodiment of a soul feedback loop. Undeniably, acknowledgement of Afrocyberpunk amplifies and expands the bandwidth of race studies in sf. Afrocyberpunk divests whiteness as the norm of our technological imaginings without elimi- nating white people. Indeed, these black writers offer us consciously racialized settings in their imaginings, resolutely challenging the whiteness of cyberpunk.

### Alt – Discussion

#### Words can deconstruct the master narrative of the digital divide

Isiah Lavender III 20 is the Sterling-Goodman Professor of English at the University of Georgia, where he researches and teaches courses in African American literature and science fiction. His books include Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement (2019) and Race in American Science Fiction (2011), as well as the edited collections Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction (2017) and Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction (2014). He is a co-editor of the oldest science fiction journal Extrapolation. (“Critical Race Theory,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 37, p308-309) //le

The notion of the digital divide at the turn of the 21st century has become a master narrative of race in our time that is in desperate need of ongoing confrontation. The digital divide con- cerns disparities in access to computers and the internet between whites and blacks, a point Alicia H. Hines et al. reflect on in Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life, remarking how “the digital divide has become a self-fulfilling prophecy, confirming that people of color can’t keep pace in a high-tech world that threatens to outstrip them” (1–2). In his novel Blood Brothers (1996), Barnes anticipates the digital divide but dismantles it with his black hacker/ game designer Derek Waites who goes by the alias Captain Africa. Simply put, Barnes demon- strates how words can deconstruct this master narrative by organizing the novel around a black man with exceptional computer skills, a black hacker as skilled as mainstream cyberpunk’s oft- white hacker elites. Barnes purposely disrupts this image of the digital divide, one founded on the racist assumption that “in image after published image, the face of that [digital divide] is black” (Kevorkian 39), via his counter-story which affords his readers a subaltern view of race in cyberspace.

### Anti-Blackness Link

#### They link – cyberpunk reifies whiteness through rendering racial identities obsolescent

Isiah Lavender III 20 is the Sterling-Goodman Professor of English at the University of Georgia, where he researches and teaches courses in African American literature and science fiction. His books include Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement (2019) and Race in American Science Fiction (2011), as well as the edited collections Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction (2017) and Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction (2014). He is a co-editor of the oldest science fiction journal Extrapolation. (“Critical Race Theory,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 37, p310) //le

Just as they do in the physical world, colorblindness and the digital divide reinforce race and racism in the technocultures of cyberpunk, where cyberspace, criminality, computers, com- panies, and corporeality rule.2 That is why, as Alondra Nelson writes, “the racialized digital divide narrative that circulates in the public sphere and the bodiless, color-blind mythoto- pias of cybertheory and commercial advertising have become the unacknowledged frames of reference for understanding race in the digital age” (6). Cyberpunk’s claim to a post-racial future where human bodies are simply “meat” prisons and human minds can escape to “the bodiless exultation of cyberspace” (Gibson 6), all the while socializing with other post-human technicities,3 is misguided at best. Unhinged from the race and racism of the past, the cy- berpunk future champions high tech low life that renders racial identities obsolescent, as if cyberspace is not a racially coded environment. Instead, cyberspace, imagined as an “eighth continent” where anything goes, reproduces and reifies whiteness in virtual reality’s fictional- ized landscape (Chude-Sokei 6).

### Afrocyberpunk – Perm

#### Critical race theory can be applied to cyberpunk to generate new models of thought

Isiah Lavender III 20 is the Sterling-Goodman Professor of English at the University of Georgia, where he researches and teaches courses in African American literature and science fiction. His books include Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement (2019) and Race in American Science Fiction (2011), as well as the edited collections Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction (2017) and Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction (2014). He is a co-editor of the oldest science fiction journal Extrapolation. (“Critical Race Theory,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 37, p308-309) //le

Cyberpunk explores the near future; loosely articulated, it wrestles with computing questions such as networking, hacking, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence (AI), as well as cyborgs that represent the human/machine continuum and the emergence of the posthuman. These high- tech notions represent the cyber half of the definition. The punk half often signifies street life, dealers and addicts, the contract workers and precariat, the poor and have-nots with no material benefits, sometimes quite literally homeless people living in the streets, relegated far down the socioeconomic scale on the other side of the digital divide and hustling to survive. Although one might think of black folks here because of the disproportionate number of blacks in America op- pressed by poverty and living on the downward slope of the socioeconomic scale, the cyberpunk movement largely ignores this reality. Instead, the punks scholars may think of are the Panther Moderns from William Gibson’s monumental novel Neuromancer (1984), the white hacker street gang prowling through the urban sprawl adorned with micro soft buds implanted behind their ears and face-changing skin grafts.

What has often gone overlooked is black writers’ contribution to cyberpunk, even if that contribution is overshadowed by mainstream cyberpunk. For example, consider Aubry Knight, the black protagonist of Steven Barnes’s Streetlethal (1983) who, as a former mafia enforcer and present Nullboxer (a zero gravity variation of the sport), is inhumanly strong and has a penchant for wearing dark (mirror)shades. Published a year before Neuromancer, this oft-overlooked novel trades in many of cyberpunk’s hallmarks: Barnes perfectly balances cyberpunk’s posthuman street ‘cool’ with the glitz and grime of a near-future dystopian Los Angeles, and Aubry would be at home in any mainstream cyberpunk setting, whether Gibson’s Night City (Neuromancer) or the crowded Los Angeles streets of Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner (1982). Unfortunately, Streetlethal is very rarely ascribed to the cyberpunk movement (or any of its various ‘punk’ siblings, such as ste- ampunk, splatterpunk, or biopunk), instead foreshadowing Afrocyberpunk or cyberfunk, recent divergences made by black writers from cyberpunk’s norms. These more recent variations on cyberpunk distort this mode as a deliberate means of expressing black discontent with the world, global capitalism, and the information age, acutely demonstrating that cyberpunk is not for whites only. Blacks, too, have been, and want to continue, experimenting in their writing as a way of protesting social conditions as a countercultural critique.

Aside from telling wonderful stories, African American science fiction (sf) writers create their own realities to consciously explore racism, recognizing how oppression fluctuates be- tween groups, structurally determined by advantages and benefits that the dominant race takes for granted or feels is their entitlement (i.e., white privilege). Samuel Delany, Steven Barnes,

Octavia E. Butler, and a host of others use their writings to address the empathic fallacies many other writers rely on, and shift the conversations to address the occlusion of race and outright racism within cyberpunk. The subsequent emergence of Afrocyberpunk—i.e., applying critical race theory to the cyberpunk mindset, or what Mark Bould has called “representations of Africa/ Africans/Afrodiaspora in cyberpunk, and cyberpunk by African and Afrodiasporic writers”— with its focus on high tech low life1 brings together sf’s worldbuilding and critical race theory’s challenges. Critical race theory explores racial hierarchies and intentional discrimination at the crossroads of race, law, and power applied to American culture writ large.

#### Afrocyberpunk provides answers to increasingly pressing questions

Isiah Lavender III 20 is the Sterling-Goodman Professor of English at the University of Georgia, where he researches and teaches courses in African American literature and science fiction. His books include Afrofuturism Rising: The Literary Prehistory of a Movement (2019) and Race in American Science Fiction (2011), as well as the edited collections Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction (2017) and Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction (2014). He is a co-editor of the oldest science fiction journal Extrapolation. (“Critical Race Theory,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 37, p311) //le

Despite cyberpunk’s evolution from its earliest forms in the 1980s, however, the apparent permanence of racism prevails in the 21st-century cyberpunk as well. Technology sublimates race, and this misdirection becomes relevant in equating posthuman futures with white-only spaces. From a critical race theory viewpoint, “preconceptions and myths, for example about black criminality, shape mindset” (Delgado and Stefancic 42). American readers have unthinkingly consumed such images for years, and it becomes exceedingly difficult to talk back to culturally embedded stereotypes seen not only in America but all across the world. Instead, white culture reinforces itself with familiar patterns of ‘black=bad’; therefore, that which is different or danger- ous must be quarantined, if not eliminated outright. Efforts to break resistance to white-authored stories deemed as truth and to effect change in sf and fantasy must continually come from fans, scholars, and authors alike. In other words, while cyberpunk signals social media’s runaway de- velopment, the digital revolution, and the increasing importance of technoculture, its portrayal of race remains frozen in most, if not all, of its powerful future projections. From this perspective, critical race theory applied to cyberpunk—i.e., Afrocyberpunk—provides today’s answers to new questions being asked about the social construction of racialized identities imagined by the likes of Gibson, his contemporaries, and their inspired offspring.

## Cyborg Fem

### General

#### Cyberfeminism utilizes technology as an extension of the human for the means of communication and connection with others

Patricia Melzer 20 is an associate professor of German and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies at Temple University. She is the author of Science Fiction and Feminist Thought (2006) and Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women’s Political Violence in the Red Army Faction (2015). Her research interests are in gender and technology in popular culture, feminist and queer theory, and women in radical social movements. (“Cyborg Feminism,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 35, p295) //le

The refusal of the body (i.e., the material more broadly, including animals, nature, etc.) to disappear in humans’ relationship to technology is central to feminist cyberfiction, and these narratives are contemporaneous with cultural theories influenced by cyborg feminism4 that place resistance at the conflicting and imploding intersections of the cultural and the natural in techno- science. Among other things, these theories place feminist cyberfiction in the broader context of what Anne Balsamo refers to as “technologies of the gendered body” and treat it as a space where the relationship of body and technology is explored in ways that “offer a vision of post-human existence where ‘technology’ and the ‘human’ are understood in contiguous rather than opposi- tional terms” (“Feminism” 684). Instead of conceptualizing technology as a medium to erase or overwrite the body, Balsamo argues, innovative feminist texts, such as Pat Cadigan’s oeuvre,5 offer “alternative vision[s] of technological embodiment that [are] consistent with a gendered history of technology: where technology isn’t the means of escape from or transcendence of the body, but rather the means of communication and connection with other bodies” (“Feminism” 703). Here it is not the riddance of the ‘meat’ that forms the underlying, self-denying, ultimately unfulfilled desire of the narrative. Instead, the goal becomes a mediation of embodiment and technology that refuses to treat technology based interactions as abstractions.

#### Our subjectivities are constantly shifting and changing – technology can be used as a metaphor to understand the loose coalescence of the self

Patricia Melzer 20 is an associate professor of German and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies at Temple University. She is the author of Science Fiction and Feminist Thought (2006) and Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women’s Political Violence in the Red Army Faction (2015). Her research interests are in gender and technology in popular culture, feminist and queer theory, and women in radical social movements. (“Cyborg Feminism,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 35, p296) //le

Feminist cyberpunk criticism recognizes the potential of cyberpunk to expand the concept of the feminist subject to include intersectional identities. In other words, feminist cyberfiction departs from the oppositional figuration of the material and virtual that dominates traditional cyberpunk, a framework that inherently privileges patriarchal definitions of technoscience. Instead, we see socially responsible hacking, individuals in intimate relationships with trusted partners, and a central focus on the importance of communal social relationships. Technology is depicted as linking the physical body to virtual/digital spaces that form new realms of experiences. Impor- tantly, as Foster argues, the “telepresence” (130) within feminist cyberfiction locates the body as a point of reference for any presence in cyberspace; the goal is very rarely, if at all, to escape the body completely. Cyborg bodies and the presence of AIs (often embodied by the cyborg/android) display complex and shifting racialized, gendered, and classed identities while transgender char- acters, paired with cybernetic body modifications, create metaphors for gender queerness, as do gender non-binary-coded AIs. Embodiment, in particular the female body, is thereby central to the narratives; however, even in virtual reality where the person’s digital avatar relies on some form of visual representation of the self, these characters represent partial subjects that inhabit a technological space, a fragmentation of the self that allows an engagement with the assemblages that make up our relationship to technology: “This [erosion of boundaries] signifies a complete deconstruction of the body. People are made of bits and pieces—human, animal, mechanical, and mystical pieces that loosely coalesce into a self” (Cadora 368). Subjectivity is therefore envisioned as unstable and constantly shifting, as developing from a symbiotic relationship between technol- ogy and the material body—a relationship that offers new, posthuman assemblages of becoming.

#### Cyberfeminism serves to destabilize naturalized, essential gender categories – ruptures traditional thought

Patricia Melzer 20 is an associate professor of German and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies at Temple University. She is the author of Science Fiction and Feminist Thought (2006) and Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women’s Political Violence in the Red Army Faction (2015). Her research interests are in gender and technology in popular culture, feminist and queer theory, and women in radical social movements. (“Cyborg Feminism,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 35, p296-297) //le

In addition to emphasizing the importance of community and personal intimacies in the char- acters’ navigations of a global capitalism, feminist cyberfiction also reworks the central theme of reproduction by crossing boundaries of virtuality and embodiment while maintaining a classic feminist concern with women’s bodies’ relationship to the politics and economics of reproduction. Technology enables cloned children of lesbian characters, cyborg children, and reproductive tech- nologies that replace narratives of heteronormative families. In He, She and It, for example, Piercy explores various manifestations of maternal roles that thematize the familiar conflict of family and career (e.g., single motherhood) and—specific to technoscience—capitalist exploitations of new reproductive technologies and mothering artificial children, in this case a male cyborg. It is often in the context of reproduction that non-normative sexualities and queer identities are fore- grounded and conventional boundaries between self and other are undermined, such as with the mutant chemical-vat dwellers, Lilim, and their daughters in Harris’s Accidental Creatures, and repli- cation (not reproduction) in Rosenblum’s Chimera, where a clone daughter defines her relationship to her (lesbian) mother as “Mother. Sister. Self” (307). At the same time, these narratives don’t lose sight of the familiar specter of patriarchal, capitalist technoscience in prostitution and surrogate motherhood as women’s options to escape or at least manage poverty (Cadora 364).

Unlike the binary of feminine technology and masculine hacker that masculinist cyberpunk establishes and that shores up a heteronormative narrative framework, in feminist cyberfiction experiences are depicted to destabilize heterosexual relations and offer queer sexualities and non- binary gender constructions (Foster 123–26). Technology does not simply enable a gender-reversal by bestowing masculine tendencies onto female bodies (such as in Molly Millions’ or Sarah’s respective assassin cyborg bodies) but new identifications that go beyond a humanist gender ideol- ogy. For example, in Mixon’s Glass Houses, Ruby’s waldos are gendered and she assumes the gender of whichever machine she remote-enters, making a “rethinking of cyborg gender” possible by ne- gotiating not between the gender binary of male and female, “but between human and machine” (Leblanc 75); similarly, the cyborg/clone protagonist Sparrow in Bull’s Bone Dance is gender fluid. The destabilizing effects of cybertechnology on naturalized, essential binary gender categories are complemented by the almost routine presence of queer/lesbian characters in feminist cyberfiction,

such as Glass Houses’ Ruby and her girlfriend, Slow River’s Lore and Spanner, Trouble and Her Friends’ Trouble and Cerise, and Exit to Reality’s Lydian and Merle, where the female protagonists’ queer sexualities form the center of the story and are instrumental to plot resolution.

#### Cyberfeminism analyzes technology’s role in environmental destruction – to help or to harm

Patricia Melzer 20 is an associate professor of German and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies at Temple University. She is the author of Science Fiction and Feminist Thought (2006) and Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women’s Political Violence in the Red Army Faction (2015). Her research interests are in gender and technology in popular culture, feminist and queer theory, and women in radical social movements. (“Cyborg Feminism,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 35, p297) //le

Finally, the late capitalist worlds that form the default setting in cyberpunk consist of environ- mental destruction and depletion of natural resources.6 Masculinist cyberpunk displays a general indifference toward that destruction, apparently reveling in the pollution of urban sprawls or fancifully suggesting, as Gerry Canavan argues, that “[i]n virtual space, with no resource con- sumption or excess pollution to worry about, we can all be as rich as we want for as long as we want (or so the fantasy goes)” (9). On the other hand, much of feminist cyberfiction thematizes technology’s role in both driving and preventing environmental destruction, such as in Griffith’s Slow River in which bio-ecotechnology has become a major capitalist market. Ecological preser- vation becomes a utopian element in these narratives that is worth pursuing and/or mourning, echoing the long tradition of women’s activism around environmentalism. At the same time, these narratives present technological interactions with what has been constructed as ‘the natural’ as potentially offering alternative, posthuman ways of existing, ultimately de-stabilizing the binary of ‘natural’ and ‘human,’ such as in Harris’s Accidental Creatures, where toxic waste becomes the habitat of a new mutant posthuman species.

#### Feminist cyberpunk can grapple with how digital culture and biotechnology make the world fluid and unstable – litany of examples

Patricia Melzer 20 is an associate professor of German and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies at Temple University. She is the author of Science Fiction and Feminist Thought (2006) and Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women’s Political Violence in the Red Army Faction (2015). Her research interests are in gender and technology in popular culture, feminist and queer theory, and women in radical social movements. (“Cyborg Feminism,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 35, p297) //le

Feminist cyberfiction explores how cyberculture and its multiple cyber-realms highlight the fluid, unstable elements that make up people’s lives. Today, the connections, networks, and temporal instabilities of digital culture and biotechnology reflect the constantly changing environmental assemblages of identities in the material world and both the adverse and beneficiary effects they have. The various ways in which technology facilitates posthuman interactions creates a familiar pattern of the diverse and contradictory ways in which feminism has manifested before cybercul- ture’s digital communications: Women hackers who use coding skills in their social justice activ- ism or to write gender non-binary and/or anti-racist games exist next to the sexist flaming wars that break out against women’s presence within that hacker culture; queer, feminist-identified, and women-centered sex sites exist within an Internet that drives a major mainstream, hetero- sexist misogynist porn culture; social media hosts radical queer anti-capitalist feminist activists next to white-centered, liberal faux feminism that is not actively feminist (colloquially known as ‘Tumblr-feminism’), or black women organizers in the Black Lives Matter movement and immigration-rights activists are maintained by the same servers that enable white supremacist women to disseminate their political views. Profit-driven technoscience has heterosexual couples from the global North travel to the South where they can afford a surrogate to carry their child conceived via donor-sperm, while queer and/or transgender couples in western nations use repro- ductive technologies to form non-normative families. Technoscience demands a framework that confronts gender exploitation and oppression in ways that account for these complex and changing formations. In this vein, feminist cyberfiction integrates elements that have been erased in defi- nitions of feminist subjects: the various pleasures of the human/machine interface, the unpredict- ability of how technology gets applied, and the coupling of matter(s) of various origin(s). Instead of locating a stable identity of the feminist posthuman subject on a ‘grid’ of system intersections, the most innovative and radical feminist cyberfiction incorporates that which lies outside the ‘grid’ into our feminist engagement with cyberpunk culture—“the forces that make subject formation tenuous, if not impossible or even undesirable” (Puar 49).

#### Hacking points to the malleable nature of technology

Patricia Melzer 20 is an associate professor of German and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies at Temple University. She is the author of Science Fiction and Feminist Thought (2006) and Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women’s Political Violence in the Red Army Faction (2015). Her research interests are in gender and technology in popular culture, feminist and queer theory, and women in radical social movements. (“Cyborg Feminism,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 35, p297-298) //le

Feminist cyberfiction’s emphasis on an unstable, constantly changing human/technology in- terface is echoed in the term ‘hacking’ as one of the most important developments in western cyberculture for feminist theories today. ‘Hacking’ here indicates the mastery of a specialized

technology that extends beyond computer coding or digital technologies, such as the Queer, Trans\* and Feminist Village at the 2015 international Chaos Communication Congress in Germany or in an issue of .dpi Feminist Journal of Art and Digital Culture on feminist hacktivism.7 In this sense, hacking links cyberculture’s digital and bio-tech focus to other technologies that can be used to shape daily lives, such as metal works, weather prediction, and food processing and growing. The concept of hacking as using technology for something creative and innovative undermines the privileging of digital technology as the exceptional technology that dominates posthuman discourse. It also links the ‘natural’ with the ‘technological’ in the green-focused tech- nologies of alternative energy, food growing practices, and nutrition that are of concern in much of goddess-related, anti-technology feminist activism. Above all, it points to the malleable nature of technology, to the ways in which it can be learned, appropriated, and changed to adjust to the continuously new encounters, connections, and networks that assemble (post)human experiences and that foreground the instability of bodies and the identities they host. The gender-binary and its default constellation of women versus men has structured much of western feminist thought, and to an extent this gender-binary still underlies an intersectional analysis (which uses multiple but still distinct categories, including transgender) and is challenged in our increasingly cyborgian environment of transgressed boundaries and partiality.

#### Technology can dissolve identity formations

Patricia Melzer 20 is an associate professor of German and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies at Temple University. She is the author of Science Fiction and Feminist Thought (2006) and Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women’s Political Violence in the Red Army Faction (2015). Her research interests are in gender and technology in popular culture, feminist and queer theory, and women in radical social movements. (“Cyborg Feminism,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 35, p298) //le

In closing, Haraway’s cyborg and the promiscuous alliances generated by its problematic becoming-through-technology seem more relevant to feminist theories than ever. The cyborg allows for a view of technology as a tool for dissolving identity formations based in binary ideol- ogies (man/woman, human/animal, organic/non-organic, etc.), both in conceptual and material forms. While the cyborg questions liberal notions of individual agency and autonomy, cyberpunk culture—like any culture—can produce figures of competence and resilience that allow the envi- sioning of effective political resistance, such as the female and/or queer hacker. It is their partiality, that is, their asset, the non-stable assemblages that shift the ground upon which the world works. The cyborg’s power as political myth fails if we do not recognize that certain bodies experience the world very much in categories of control enforced by Foucauldian institutions of discipline and punish, and for whom references to their identities—despite their instability—remain a key tool of resistance. The particular manifestations of technologized existences that our cybercultures produce call for a complex understanding of how our bodies are produced, how our intersectional identities are in fact assembled, and how they find representation in the figures stepping off the pages of feminist cyberfiction.

### Queer Specifc

#### Cyberpunk not only is queer, but queers whatever it touches

Wendy Gay Pearson 20 is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Women’s Studies and Feminist Research at the University of Western Ontario. She teaches sexuality studies, queer theory, queer and Indigenous cinema, and science fiction. She is the co-editor of Reverse Shots: In- digenous Film and Media in an International Context (2014) and the co-author of Zero Patience (2011). In addition, she is the co-editor of Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction (2008). (“Queer Theory,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 36, p306) //le

In conclusion, more recent cyberpunk and cyberpunk-related works—i.e., what Andrew M. Butler has called “cyberpunk-flavored” (57)—are not only displacing the masculinist heterosex- uality that has defined cyberpunk but are also moving beyond the assumption of an overt identi- fication as lesbian that one finds in such feminist-queer cyberpunk as Trouble and Her Friends and Solitaire. At the same time, contemporary works are increasingly avoiding the obsession with ‘stray penetration’ and the paranoia about a continually destabilized, but deeply invested, gender iden- tity that is so much to the fore in Neuromancer or the Mayor’s version of virtual reality in Trouble and Her Friends. Instead, a diverse range of works that help define cyberpunk as a mode can extend queer inquiry into human interactions in and with cyberspace in ways that take up and complicate the idea of cyberspace and its technologies as mutually penetrating/penetrative. What queer(ing) cyberpunk readily makes clear is that cyberspace not only is queer, but queers whatever it touches.

### Links to Fem

#### Cyberpunk is haunted by notions of the body and how different classes of body are represented in cyberpunk thought

Patricia Melzer 20 is an associate professor of German and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies at Temple University. She is the author of Science Fiction and Feminist Thought (2006) and Death in the Shape of a Young Girl: Women’s Political Violence in the Red Army Faction (2015). Her research interests are in gender and technology in popular culture, feminist and queer theory, and women in radical social movements. (“Cyborg Feminism,” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 35, p293-294) //le

Feminist theorists insist on the presence of the body as both an epistemological and ontological basis for any theories of (post)human existence in which “embodiment replaces a body seen as [merely] a support system for the mind” (Hayles 288); consequently, feminist theories point to the gendered, racialized, and classed constructions of the body throughout history which cyberpunk narratives of the posthuman subject are unable to escape, despite their best attempts. In other words, the at-times fetishized role of technology in determining human existence—including its desires and pains—that dominates cyberpunk is continuously disrupted, troubled, and un- dermined by the refusal of the material to disappear. Heather Hicks contextualizes cyberpunk’s romanticizing of the mind/body split as complicit with a larger historical and philosophical west- ern tradition. In other words, the body haunts the narratives of cyberpunk and forms a necessary contrast to masculinist fantasies of digital disembodiment, much as gendered and racialized bodies have formed the necessary contrast within the mind/body split dominating western philosophy.

The denial of corporeality in early cyberpunk narratives takes place in conjunction with an in- herent investment in liberal individualism that contradicts cyberpunk’s gesture toward posthuman existence. Cultural anxieties induced by the postmodern fragmenting of the self underlie these narratives in their attempt to negotiate Man’s interface with technology. These anxieties convey a humanist conservatism that holds on to a liberal autonomous subject: “The ecstatic dissolution of the body,” Scott Bukatman writes, “is counterbalanced by the recuperative strategies of nar- rative and generic structure within which the subject maintains his autonomy and power (‘her’ autonomy and power is another question)” (244). As a result of an initial cyberpunk literature “written for the most part by a small number of white, middle-class men” (Hollinger 207), the protagonist of masculinist cyberpunk is often a male hustler, freelance specialist, aging punk, or console cowboy navigating the material realities of the urban sprawl and, quite often, the abstract realm of infinite cyberspace. Individual autonomy of the male protagonist, however, contrasts with the existence of female figures mediated by technological enhancements or indistinguishable from digital software. These two spaces of the ‘material’ and ‘immaterial’ mirror an inherent tension within cyberpunk around the body’s role in constituting a postmodern subjectivity, an “oscillation [...] between a biological-determinist view of the body and a turn to technologi- cal and cybernetic means in order to escape such determination” (Foster 11). This oscillation is “gender-coded” (Foster 11) in that the female body seems inescapably essential, both through its materiality and the historical significations of said materiality (such as maternity and constituting the object of desire within a heterosexual economy). In contrast, the ultimate goal of the mascu- line (anti)hero is often to escape the confinement of the ‘meat’ (i.e., the body), which he attempts to varying degrees typically using street-level technology.

Again, this binary between human and technology that cyberpunk ostensibly sets out to com- plicate has been problematized in feminist critiques of science and epistemology which seek to uncover the ways in which narratives of science historically have conceptualized nature and tech- nology as feminine and culture, and mastery of technology and science, as masculine.3 The ra- cialized, gendered, and classed characters of these dualisms are deeply humanist in their separation of Man from nature and in turn align people of color, women, nature, and technology as the ‘unanimated’ separate from Man’s ability to reason. The conceptual link of the female body to the realm of the intellectually unanimated, a worldview that includes both animals and machines, places it in a troubled relationship to the image of the cyborg and to the imagined space of dis- embodied virtual reality, the two pillars upon which cyberpunk rests. Consequently, cyberpunk’s

masculinized myth of the transcended body is frequently rendered through its juxtaposition with obviously feminized techno-bodies and techno-spaces. The results are the depiction of an erot- icized feminine (cyber)technology mastered by a male protagonist, on the one hand, and female figures arrested in a sexualized, essential relationship to their (techno)bodies or conflated with a feminized cyberspace, on the other.

## Marxism

### Acceleration Alt

#### Acceleration of cyberpunk tendencies can override the colonial tendencies of capitalism

Hugh Charles O’Connell 20 -- is an assistant professor of English at the University of Massachu- setts Boston. His current research examines the relationship between speculative fiction and speculative finance. He is the co-editor with David M. Higgins of Speculative Finance/Speculative Fiction (CR: The New Centennial Review 19.1). Recent essays on British and postcolonial science fiction have appeared in The Cambridge History of Science Fiction (2019), Utopian Studies, Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry, Modern Fiction Studies, Paradoxa, and the Los Angeles Review of Books. (“Marxism”The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 34, p288-289) //le

Rather than a ‘hacking’ or a revision of cyberpunk tropes, Eric D. Smith argues that the South African author Lauren Beukes instead radicalizes cyberpunk by accelerating its tendencies.

Beukes’ cyberpunk intervenes [in Csicsery-Ronay’s critique of cyberpunk as the reduction to thrill] by exposing the ideological underpinnings of this nervous ecstasy from a perspective decidedly alternative to that of the still-globalizing first world. She does so, however, not through simple or spectacular opposition to the cyberpunk aesthetic but through the accel- eration of the form to its terminal velocity, through appropriating its penchant for cynicism, stereotype, and kinesis and carrying these to their perdurable limits. (161)

Moreover, the novel eschews the transcendent aspects of cyberspace for a focus on the somatic consequences of real subsumption. Instead of figuring cyberspace as an area to be entered, leaving the body behind, we see how cyberspace instead colonizes the everyday world and the body. Here, the cellphone becomes the key object of cyberpunk real subsumption as an appendage to the body, keeping it permanently yoked to the data sphere as well as acting as the conduit through which we provide free content and labor to so many sites (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram). It is the ubiquity of the cellphone that hides these processes of real subsumption, thereby normalizing them not as labor but as culture (and perhaps this is the best example of the strong Jamesonian thesis of culture as now fully commodified—culture here in Raymond Williams’ sense of a total way of life).

LiPuma and Lee make the key point that the subjective freedoms of connectivity (access to information and communications technology) “are always self-annulling at another and higher level” (46–47). These are the same “conditions of encompassment and domination by circula- tory capital and the infrastructure of the metropole generally” (47). As Shaviro reminds us in Connected: “I do not find myself in the network, having fallen or been thrown. Rather, I exist for the network. I am predestined to it. From the moment I get connected, I am irreversibly bound to its protocols and its finality” (29). As the medium for extending capitalist real subsump- tion, information-connective-technologies illustrate how advertising does not simply operate as

brainwashing (although it does promote desire). Instead, it colonizes our bodies by transforming them into means of information collection and advertising: On the one hand for the neoliberal maintenance and marketing of our own brands, and on the other hand for others in the clothes that we wear, the products that we purchase and then Instagram ourselves enjoying (the mere fact that I can use ‘Instagram’ as a verb in this sentence demonstrates this invasive fact).

### Hacking Alt

#### Hacking can be a useful heuristic to denaturalize conventions and technologies

Hugh Charles O’Connell 20 -- is an assistant professor of English at the University of Massachu- setts Boston. His current research examines the relationship between speculative fiction and speculative finance. He is the co-editor with David M. Higgins of Speculative Finance/Speculative Fiction (CR: The New Centennial Review 19.1). Recent essays on British and postcolonial science fiction have appeared in The Cambridge History of Science Fiction (2019), Utopian Studies, Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry, Modern Fiction Studies, Paradoxa, and the Los Angeles Review of Books. (“Marxism”The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 34, p288) //le

This dissemination of cyberpunk as a cultural dominant and its transformation to post-cyberpunk has also opened up the possibility of critiquing the political and aesthetic limits of its reliance on dig- ital transcendence. Hence, it’s only with the negation of cyberpunk’s affirmation that we can begin to perceive of something like even a weak utopianism, the possibility of possibility. In many ways, as many marxist critics have noted, this has been the case for post-cyberpunk and especially African and postcolonial cyberpunk. For example, Bould argues that the recent spate of Afrocyberpunk films, including Africa Paradis (Amoussou 2006), Bedwin Hacker (El Fani 2003), Les Saignantes (Bekolo 2005), as well as the better-known works by Neill Blomkamp, sidestep traditional cyberpunk’s re- liance on personal transcendence. “They depict transgressions of national and corporeal borders,” Bould contends, “and envision resistance to corporate and state power by pitting the tactical against the strategic [...and] the molecular against the molar” (“Afrocyberpunk” 214). Moreover, in terms of the first three films listed above, their “conditions of production tend to result in films that demon- strate [...] the flipside of a cyberpunk world centered on the flows of capital” (218).

Similarly, Jillana Enteen argues that Nalo Hopkinson’s Midnight Robber (2000) ‘hacks’ cyber- punk tropes in order to “render visible current socioeconomic inequities, suggest [an] alternative formulation of the relationship between humans and technology, and increase the cultural re- pository of ideas that inspire technological and social development” (263). As such, “Hopkinson employs hacking to denaturalize cyberpunk conventions; she also delineates technologies that expose biases inherent in its present formulation” (270). In these examples, African and postco- lonial post-cyberpunk works to denaturalize the technologies of real subsumption and the new domineering presence of global finance by hacking the narrative conventions as well as the tech- nologies used to promulgate these features of everyday late capitalist life.

### Links to Cap

#### Cyberpunk is part of the DNA of modern capitalist culture

Hugh Charles O’Connell 20 -- is an assistant professor of English at the University of Massachu- setts Boston. His current research examines the relationship between speculative fiction and speculative finance. He is the co-editor with David M. Higgins of Speculative Finance/Speculative Fiction (CR: The New Centennial Review 19.1). Recent essays on British and postcolonial science fiction have appeared in The Cambridge History of Science Fiction (2019), Utopian Studies, Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry, Modern Fiction Studies, Paradoxa, and the Los Angeles Review of Books. (“Marxism”The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 34, p282-283) //le

From this vantage point, we can argue that cyberpunk is not really about the “interface of technology with the human subject” (Bukatman 8), offering “new technological modes of ‘being in the world’” (McCaffery qtd. in Bukatman 8). Instead, cyberpunk technology is a vector and

conduit, and cyberpunk is about the subject’s ceaseless invasion by real subsumption under this new stage of financial capital. Jameson comes tantalizing close to suggesting as much in his own belated reading of Neuromancer in The Ancients and the Postmoderns. Here, he reads Case as caught between the virtual-simulated realms of both finance/cyberspace and the real subsumption of the fully capitalized body of simstim, a position which, we have to remember, is dictated by a corporate-conscious AI residing in a Swiss banking computer planning its own transcendence from even these most-minimal of human restraints in the form of the Singularity. And as Bould reminds us, cyberpunk’s notion of the Singularity is perhaps the greatest fantasy of capital: pre- tending as if human labor never existed. “The singularity has already happened,” Bould contends, “and is constantly happening, as humans, ‘already not-human,’ are torn apart by capital, our selves reduced to those abstractions (labor-power, consumption-power) which it needs to operate and perpetuate” (“Why” 133).3 This is the defining ideological fantasy critiqued by one of the most significant post-cyberpunk films, Alex Rivera’s Sleep Dealer (2008), where Mexican laborers in Tijuana cybernetically ‘jack in’ to the net in order to control construction robots in San Francisco: “This is the American Dream, we give the United States what they’ve always wanted... all the work—without the [migrant] workers.”

What I want to suggest, then, is that rather than disappear, cyberpunk’s defining narrative traits have been extended and disseminated. And here I think we need to attend to Derridean readings of this word, not forgetting the masculinist logics of reproduction via the seminal and semen, combined with the masculinist aspects of cyberpunk as critiqued by Nicola Nixon, Jenny Wolmark, and Karen Cadora, as well as the patriarchal-penetrating aspects of neoliberal finan- cialization and cyberpunk’s role, however unintentional, as a mediator and disseminator of the latter.4 In this light, we can see cyberpunk as part of the general DNA of late capitalist culture. Having broken the spell of cyberpunk as an avant-garde, as an artwork in the modernist sense, as semi-autonomous, it is free and we are free to see it disseminated into the mainstream (with all the commodified and reified overtones that this should suggest) not as a style, but instead, in Thomas Foster’s well-known phrase, as a “sea change into a more generalized cultural formation” (xiv), or better yet, simply as the cultural dominant of everyday life under the techno-invasive modes of real subsumption and finance.

### AT: Cap – Perm Do Both

#### Anti-capitalism can only be successful when combined with cyberpunk

Hugh Charles O’Connell 20 -- is an assistant professor of English at the University of Massachu- setts Boston. His current research examines the relationship between speculative fiction and speculative finance. He is the co-editor with David M. Higgins of Speculative Finance/Speculative Fiction (CR: The New Centennial Review 19.1). Recent essays on British and postcolonial science fiction have appeared in The Cambridge History of Science Fiction (2019), Utopian Studies, Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry, Modern Fiction Studies, Paradoxa, and the Los Angeles Review of Books. (“Marxism”The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 34, p282-283) //le

As Benjamin Noys has recently suggested, a return to cyberpunk as the fiction of finance may help in confronting the roots of the 2008 financial crisis and the inability of contemporary fic- tional forms to address it. This is all the more salient when one considers the similar theoretical and representational crises in marxist theory as diagnosed by Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee in Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk, in which, they argue, the traditional critical tropes of marxism (the labor theory of value and emphasis on private property, particularly) wither in efficacy in relation to the immateriality of the derivative and the digital circulatory systems of speculative finance. These present crises—in capitalism, theory, and representation— stem from the formative period of speculative finance in the 1980s, a period that cyberpunk captured more than any other literary form. Thus, as Mark Bould contends in relation to William Gibson’s Neuromancer (1984), cyberpunk “inaugurated the SF of multinational capital and corpo- rate globalization, its depiction of information circulating in cyberspace a potent metaphor for the global circulation of capital” (“Cyberpunk” 220). Therefore, a return to the concepts and conceits of cyberpunk and their afterlife in so many post-cyberpunk fictions of AI, acceleration- ism, and virtual reality is imperative not only for understanding our present, but for any hopes of a postcapitalist futurity.

To begin, it is first necessary to trace a line of thought that has significant consequences both for the history of marxism and cyberpunk as well as their current relationship: What does it mean to take seriously Jameson’s offhand comment that cyberpunk is the literature of postmodernism and thus late capitalism? As Fredric Jameson famously writes in the very first footnote of Postmodernism;

Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism: “This is the place to regret the absence from this book of a chapter on cyberpunk, henceforth, for many of us, the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself” (419n1). Whatever else we might want to note about this statement, it is important for understanding the history of marxist cyberpunk criticism that we begin with a starting place that immediately annuls itself. In other words, cyberpunk serves as the absent center of the defining marxist analysis of postmodernity, late capitalism, and culture.

## Posthumanism + Capitalism

### Transhumanism Links

#### Transhumanism reinforces capitalism – cyberpunk solves

Julia **Grillmayr 20** is a literature and cultural studies scholar as well as print and radio journalist, based in Vienna and Linz, Austria. Her postdoc project at the University of Art and Design in Linz (funded by the Austrian Science Fund FWF) investigates ‘scenario thinking’ in contemporary science fiction and futurology (see <https://scifi-fafo.com>). (Julia, “Posthumanism(s)” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 33, p277-278) //le

In her article “Wrestling with Transhumanism,” Hayles adds an important layer to the posthuman discussion when she recognizes that even though not all versions of transhumanism are guilty of praising disembodiment, they all “perform decontextualizing moves that over-simplify the situation and carry into the new millennium some of the most questionable aspects of capitalist ideology.” Hayles’s link between transhumanism’s over-simplifications and capitalist ideology is an important connection because transhumanism’s feel-good aesthetics often mask its own com- mercial interests. For example, Bostrom’s posthuman scenarios read like bad copy for commer- cials: “You are able to sprinkle your conversation with witty remarks and poignant anecdotes. Your friends remark on how much more fun you are to be around” (31) and “[y]ou have just cel- ebrated your 170th birthday and you feel stronger than ever. Each day is a joy” (32). Perhaps most obvious and extreme in this respect is bestselling futurist and famous transhumanism proponent

Ray Kurzweil who, paired with physician Terry Grossman, advances transhumanist visions of longevity—including various dietary supplements that his readers can conveniently purchase from his and Grossman’s Transcend website. Deeply critical of capitalism, it is thus among cyberpunk’s key functions to push back against these sort of transhumanist visions of the posthuman and to make economic inequality visible. As Gibson has famously remarked in Talk of the Nation, “the fu- ture is already here—it’s just not very evenly distributed” (“Science”), so to ignore the economic realities underwriting human enhancement technologies and ideologies risks the persistence and reinforcement of these structural inequalities.

### Cyberpunk Solves Social Inequalities

#### Cyberpunk forces social inequalities to the forefront – begins the journey to concrete solutions

Julia **Grillmayr 20** is a literature and cultural studies scholar as well as print and radio journalist, based in Vienna and Linz, Austria. Her postdoc project at the University of Art and Design in Linz (funded by the Austrian Science Fund FWF) investigates ‘scenario thinking’ in contemporary science fiction and futurology (see <https://scifi-fafo.com>). (Julia, “Posthumanism(s)” The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture, Chapter 33, p278-279) //le

While cyberpunk may not entirely fulfill the role of a philosophically informed opposition to anthropocentrism and global capitalism, it certainly complicates the streamlined futures that transhumanism promises. Instead of superhumanly smart and strong posthumans, Sterling imag- ines that soon “the Monsters would all have lousy night jobs mopping up at fast-food restaurants” (“Nineties”). Cyberpunk makes it impossible to ignore social inequalities that could potentially be reinscribed by human enhancement. In other words, if cyberpunk portrays some winners who are living in a future as sketched by Bostrom, Kurzweil, or other transhumanist advocates, the losers are at the same time ever-present. Take, for example, Madeline Ashby’s recent cyberpunk novel Company Town (2016). When Hwa, the main character of Ashby’s novel, is told by the ultra-rich Zachariah Lynch that the lifestyle of fully organic people like her, who will soon “be nothing more than specimens in a museum of humanity,” is a “very brave choice,” Hwa sums up the material conditions for so many: “Choice had little to do with it. Money was the thing. When you had no money, you had no choice” (45). Among other successes in the novel, Ashby depicts Hwa and other characters exploited by economic and social precariousness. Finally, with

Hwa’s transformation into a posthuman “changeling” through advanced nanotechnology that she catches like a virus, Ashby offers a critical perspective on how becoming-posthuman might have nothing to do with individual choice, intent, or even consent. In a Cadigan-esque manner, Hwa can only lament that “[e]verything that made me who I am is gone” (Ashby 283).

In conclusion, it bears noting that while the discussion of the complex intersections of cyberpunk sf, transhumanism, and posthumanism continues, this discourse is currently expanding and changing. Working from Mark McGurl’s essay “The Posthuman Comedy,” Bruce Clarke de- scribes this as a shift “from the machinic posthuman to the planetary nonhuman” (xii). As has be- come evident through some of the above-cited examples, the endeavor to understand the merging of humans and machines is fueling broader discussions of the relations between the human and the nonhuman. This development is visible in Donna J. Haraway’s work. After writing “A Cyborg Manifesto,” she soon came to think of “cyborgs as junior siblings in the much bigger, queer fam- ily of companion species” (“Companion” 300) and thus started to focus on the co-evolution of humans and animals under modern (bio)technological conditions. In sf, this is palpable as a shift “away from a cyberpunk imaginary, best embodied in Haraway’s cyborg [...] and toward another technocultural expression of scientific progress: One that favors genetic engineering, xenotrans- plantation, and virology” and is thus often referred to as “biopunk” (Schmeink 7). Cyber- and biopunk are of course not mutually exclusive, but are likely to coexist, as evidenced in the range of texts referenced in this voluminous collection.

If anything, this ongoing development stresses even further the role of sf in complicating escap- ist visions of the posthuman future. Cyberpunk may not provide solutions to social, medical, and environmental issues, but it insists on addressing them, instead of making them disappear through an all too simple technological fix. As Haraway stresses in her recent book Staying with the Trouble (2016), in contrast to the bright and clean futures depicted in transhumanism, she works “with and in sf as material-semiotic composting, as theory in the mud, as muddle” (31). In order to dissoci- ate herself from the adherents of a “transhumanist techno-enhancement,” Haraway also strictly rejects the term ‘posthumanism’ that she considers “much too easily appropriated by the blissed- out” (Gane 140). Instead, she playfully proposes the term “compost”: “We are humus, not Homo, not anthropos; we are compost, not posthuman” (Staying 55). Cyberpunk more often than not gets its hand dirty in the compost by exploring the complicated ways of ‘becoming-with’ nonhu- mans, not least by giving a voice to various nonhuman actors, be it animals, robots, bioengineered or other bacteria, smart objects, or disembodied AIs. Even if cyberpunk generally relies neither on transhumanist nor on critical posthumanist theory and critique, cyberpunk remains ready to engage in such a project of “nonarrogant collaboration with all those in the muddle” (Staying 56).