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TECHNOLOGIZED DESIRE:
SELFHOOD AND THE BODY IN POSTMODERN SCIENCE FICTION

By

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ABSTRACT

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Technocapitalist media have reformatted subjectivity, the body and the self as ultraviolent, pathological phenomena in the postmodern world. Selfhood is a technology. It is what Marshall McLuhan has called an "extension of man," a creative projection from the body of the subject that encompasses everything from language to electronic machinery. Our technological extensions have become raw products of the commodity spectacle. The cultural matrix that they collectively define in turn reproduces the factory of subjectivities that bear them as mediatized desiring-machines. Such a volatile, aggressive process instills in "terminal" subjects a desire to both embrace and transcend the socioeconomic (dis)order. The human is addicted to as much as it is repulsed by its media, which are not passive formations but active mediators of social relations. This oppositional emotional condition is the fundament of terminal identity. Despite desire, agency from consumer-capitalism is a fiction. The human is obligated by its own pathological unconscious to always-already choose to be enslaved by technocapital.

Technologized Desire analyzes the evolution of the technological self as it has been represented by postmodern science fiction. It is informed by a range of postmodern theory, particularly Scott Bukatman's *Terminal Identity*, a study of how cybernetic technologies have affected and revised the human condition in predominantly cyberpunk narratives. My scope is resigned to proto- and post-cyberpunk narratives in an effort to

deliberate the origins, the contemporary condition, and the alleged future of terminal identity. Ultimately I try to point to a postcapitalist subjectivity that has become an extension of technocapitalism rather than the other way around.

The texts I examine include television, comics, stories, philosophy, cultural theory, novels and films. They function as cognitive maps of late capitalist space that engage with the problem of terminal choice. Either they critique this problem, or they reify it by being unaware of it, or both. Each text uniquely illustrates a map of the technocapitalist mediascape and commoditocracy, representing the would-be agential desires of the human to be paradoxically enslaved by and free of the machine. The machinic nature of the human is (re)affirmed by dint of this representation. My primary texts are, respectively, Cameron Crowe's film *Vanilla Sky* (2001), select books on simulation and the hyperreal by Jean Baudrillard, Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), the cut-up novels of William S. Burroughs, Sam Raimi's film *Army of Darkness* (1993), Deleuze and Guattari's books on capitalism and schizophrenia, Max Barry's novel *Jennifer Government* (2003), and the Wachowski brothers' Matrix trilogy of films. Whatever they purport to be, I regard all of these narratives as simultaneous science fictions and critical analyses that ultraviolently theorize the dawning postcapitalist condition by providing "panic" readings of the postmodern landscape.

For my parents, Harlan and Beth Wilson, whose unshakable support and encouragement was the jet fuel of this machinery. I love you guys.

Hence schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, its death.

—Deleuze & Guattauri, *Anti-Oedipus*

GOOD ASH
"Who are you? Are you me?"

BAD ASH
"I'm bad Ash. And yer good Ash. Yer little goody two-shoes Ash!"

Bad Ash dances a funny jig around good Ash, smacking him in the face. Suddenly a shotgun barrel is shoved into bad Ash's frame.

BLAMMITY-BLAM!!!

The blast blows bad Ash off of his feet into a double backflip. He slams into a tree, slides to the ground. Clutching the smoldering shotgun, good Ash stares down at the corpse of his evil self.

GOOD ASH
"Good. Bad. I'm the guy with the gun."

—Ash & Doppelgänger, *Army of Darkness*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5 Terminal Choice in the Wachowski Brothers' Matrix Trilogy

INTRODUCTION

On the subject of Frederic Jameson's postmodern theory, Sean Homer writes:

> The central problem with the cultural logic thesis is that it remains at too
>
> high a level of abstraction; on the one hand, Jameson presents a
>
> persuasive account of an individual subject's experience of the
>
> disorienting world of global capitalism, and, on the other, a very
>
> generalized theory of the structural transformations of the system itself.
>
> What this work lacked, and the monumental *Postmodernism, or, The*
>
> *Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* failed to deliver, was any systematic
>
> account of the mediations between the individual subject and the world
>
> system. (186)

This lack of mediation is hardly a flaw. The aim of Jameson's project is to cognitively

map the "strange new landscape" of late capitalist reality in broad, exteriorized terms

(xx). Building on his 1984 essay, "The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," he describes

the condition of postmodernity in terms of its various media and economies. The focus

of his project is not the individual subject. It is the diverse productions of subjected

communities of individuals. Homer argues that Jameson's thesis is too ambivalent. But

this is precisely his point: "*Postmodernism* is not something we can settle once and for

all and then use with a clear conscience. The concept, if there is one, has to come at the

end, and not at the beginning, of our discussions of it" (xxvii). Scott Bukatman uses this

notion as a starting block for *Terminal Identity*, a study of subjectivity in postmodern

science fiction. He contends that the flourish of electric technologies in the 1980s have

1

led to "a deep cultural ambivalence . . . across a wide range of phenomena," citing Jameson as a harbinger of this theory. Like Jameson, Bukatman expresses an anxiety about the condition of perception, ideology, language, being and power in the postmodern world. His theory is much more specialized, however, concerning itself explicitly with science fiction, especially that produced during the cyberpunk era. The general thesis of *Terminal Identity* is that "it has become increasingly difficult to separate the human from the technological" and that "it has fallen to science fiction to repeatedly narrate a new subject that can somehow directly interface with—and master—the cybernetic technologies of the Information Age" (2). Bukatman employs science fiction as a tool to map out the coordinates of the postmodern subject as produced by virtual and cybernetic forces. It is from this angle of incidence that the following project makes its departure.

While Bukatman's book is localized to a particular kind of science fiction, its scale is rather large, drawing on a range of contemporary cultural theories of the postmodern in order to interpret a variety of media that include literature, film, video, television, comics, and computer games. The book's five chapters are arranged thematically and read into narratives that address image-culture, (virtual) spatial relations, body and mind invasion, and the figuration of the cyborg. Bukatman's culminating argument is that cyberpunk texts contain the most effective representations of terminal identity, which produces an anxious, defensive subject who is compelled to mediate "a complex trajectory between the forces of instrumental reason and the abandon of a sacrificial excess. The texts promise and even produce a transcendence which is also always a surrender" (329). Arthur Kroker and David Cook would call this

sentiment a panic reading of the postmodern condition, a "hypertheory . . . for the end of the world" that aspires to map out the entropic social economy of electronically technologized space (ii). Such a reading can be extended to the fictions that are scrutinized in *Terminal Identity*, most of which can function as critical hypertheories. I operate under this assumption in *Technologized Desire*. I approach science fiction texts as sources that can be read as technocultural phenomenon as well as sources that themselves read into the nature of technoculture. My scope, however, is more particular than Bukatman's. It is resigned to proto- and post-cyberpunk texts in an effort to deliberate the origins, the contemporary condition, and the supposed future of terminal identity. Additionally, whereas Bukatman discusses the terminal subject broadly, mapping out its defining coordinates, my interest is more theoretical. I am specifically concerned with how the terminal subject is produced as both self and other by the forces of technocapitalism and how human nature has been refigured by the technology of the commodity form. With this in mind, I try to achieve a mediation between the individual subject and the world system that is abstracted in Jameson's *Postmodernism*.

The terms *self* and *selfhood* have been used in numerous contexts. Some use them interchangeably with *subject* and *subjectivity* as markers for the individual as affected and produced by sociocultural machinery. Others differentiate the two. In his *Écrits* and seminars, for example, Jacques Lacan has portrayed the self as a node in a symbolic network of other nodes constituted by images and a desire for the Other (which is ironically the self), while in a discussion of Baudelaire's poetry in *Blindness and Insight*, Paul de Man portrays it as an authorial voice and courier of meaning (172). For Foucault the self is a technology that allows "individuals to effect by their own means,

3

or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being" in order to achieve a higher emotional and ontological state (225). The notion of selfhood as a technological organism is particularly relevant considering the explosion of high media technologies in the postmodern era that have revised the nature of low technologies like language, power and production. In the last fifty years, media such as television, video, cyberspace and virtuality have opened up new existential matrices. Kroker and Cook consider this formation in *The Postmodern Scene*, defining the self as a hollow shell, raped of its insides by media technologies:

> The self is now like what the quantum physicists call a 'world strip,'
> across which run indifferent rivulets of experience. Neither fully
> mediated nor entirely localized, the self is an empty sign: colonized from
> within by technologies for the body immune; seduced from without by
> all of the fashion tattoos; and energized by a novel psychological
> condition—the schizoid state of postmodern selves who are
> (simultaneously) predators and parasites. (vii)

Although it has some validity, this apocalyptic, essentially Baudrillardian definition of the self as a schizophrenic template onto which culture is imprinted is a postmodern cliché. Kroker and Cook essay that the self is not a technology but rather something that is produced (to be schizophrenic) by technology. They also imply that the self originates outside of the theoretical body it exists on. Postmodern logic of this kind implicitly disconnects the self from the subject. These chapters attempt to reconnect the two, viewing the self as a creative, technological extension of the subject. My position

derives from the theory of electronic media developed by Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media*. Published nearly forty years ago, the book is in many ways more applicable now than ever to contemporary identity politics. McLuhan opens with the following remarks:

> After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man—the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media. (19)

Foreshadowing a final phase of social implosion that has already materialized to some degree (e.g. the Internet), McLuhan technologizes the human by arguing that the technological is an externalization of the human's internal machinery. This is not a post-industrial formation. The individual and collective human's technological extensions have always been its definitive characteristics, beginning with the technologies of language and hieroglyphics, culminating in capitalist media technologies. These extensions constitute postmodern selfhood. Born from the machinic body of the subject, selfhood originates in the cultural atmosphere produced by the very technology that

constitutes it. The technology of culture produces subjectivity and influences how the self extends from the body. Hence the self is always-already embroiled in a vicious circle of production that has reached a dangerous level in the realm of advanced capitalism. Simply put, the self has become ultraviolent.

McLuhan suggests that our electric technological extensions are progressively more determined by corporate forces and that soon they will become sheer consumer-capitalist *enfants terrible*. Like Baudrillard (although not to such a dire and prophetic extreme), he forecasts an age of implosion when ontological, metaphysical, ideological and linguistic boundaries are terminally collapsed by the media. Few high technologies today are not produced for some sort of capitalist gain (or rather, excess), a practice that reproduces low technologies like language according to a consumer ethic. In addition to being the ultimate medium for narrating the cybernetic subject, as Bukatman says, the science fiction genre is an efficient medium for critiquing the ways in which the *consumer* subject is narrated by electric technology, which we have become dependent on. This is mainly how I extend (and diverge from) Bukatman's work: by shifting focus exclusively to the commodification of the subject and the self as it figures in science fiction. As our technetronic dependency intensifies, the genre becomes more important not only in terms of extrapolating potential futures but of representing and assessing the socioeconomic structure of contemporary life. A principal aim of my discussion is to convey an awareness of how bodies and identities are distinguished by a mediatized anomie. The discussion is thus situated within the developing field of study that Patrick O'Donnell has called "cultural pathology" (*Latent* vii).

Pathology (mainly in the form of paranoia, psychosis and schizophrenia) runs rampant in postmodern science fiction, which, jacked into the matrix of implosive, technocapitalist society, abandons the boyish science fiction of the Golden Age that was characterized by a sense of wonder and discovery. Beginning most meaningfully in the early 1960s with the New Wave, a term borrowed from the experimental cinema of French filmmakers Jean-Luc Goddard and François Truffaut,[1] science fiction writers like Harlan Ellison, J.G. Ballard, Philip K. Dick and others practiced a darker, more psychological method, often representing the subject as a construction of the media landscape.[2] This aesthetic was furthered in the 1980s by cyberpunk narratives, which Jameson has repeatedly been quoted as saying are "the supreme literary expression[s] if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (419). Writers associated with this subgenre include Rudy Rucker, Pat Cadigan, Lewis Shiner, and most importantly William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, whose respective novel, *Neuromancer* (1984), and anthology of short fiction, *Mirrorshades* (1986), are its foremost touchstones. Inspired by the artistic and cultural sensibility of the beat generation, cyberpunks continued to explore the psychological condition of the postmodern subject, underscoring its schizophrenic body and fixating on its production by hard technology and the theater of hyperreality. Larry McCaffery writes in *Storming the Reality Studio*:

> cyberpunk authors constructed works that moved seamlessly through the
> realms of hard science and pop culture, realms that included chaos theory
> and Madonna, dada and punk rock, MTV and *film noire*, Arthur

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[1] *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, p. 865.

[2] Most identified with and representative of the New Wave aesthetic is Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* (1967), an anthology of thirty-three science fiction stories.

Rimbaud and Lou Reed, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Oliver North,

instant reruns and AI. Decked out in mirrorshades and leather jackets,

the cyberpunks projected an image of confrontational "reality hacker"

artists who were armed, dangerous, and jacked into (but not under the

thumb of) the Now and the New. (12-13)

Employing physical, psychic, linguistic and narrative violence, cyberpunk still offers the

sharpest representations of cultural pathology and the most salient critiques of

technocapitalist subjectivity and selfhood. The 1990s saw the assimilation of the

cyberpunk subgenre into mainstream science fiction, which was itself bleeding into

mainstream pop literature (e.g. the novels of Michael Crichton), as many formerly

distinctive cyberpunk tropes and contrivances began to materialize in the real world (e.g.

the computer revolution, cyberspace, the cult of surgically altered identity). Neal

Stephenson, Jeff Noon, Steve Aylett and other neocyberpunks have carried on the

tradition to some degree, but the well from which they draw has lost the feeling of "the

Now and the New"; as the neocyberpunk Wachowski brothers show in their Matrix

trilogy of films, whose innovation stems almost entirely from camerawork and CGI,

cyberpunk cannot exist in the contemporary postmodern universe except as a chestnut.

Advanced electric technology is no longer the novelty or even the curio it used to be. In

the last decade more than ever, it has not only become a standard of daily life, but an

outright addiction that is nurtured with a profound air of *jouissance*. The sexualized

obsession with the "extensions of man"—that is, with the technological/self—is at the

center of my concept of how the postmodern subject is pathologized by our present day

commoditocracy.

A trend in postmodern science fiction has been to posit agency from the terminal constructedness of the technocapitalist body. As I demonstrate in chapters two and three, one way this has been executed is by dint of madness. In soft science fiction films like *Brazil* (1985) and *Army of Darkness* (1993) and the protocyberpunk cut-up novels of William S. Burroughs, for instance, psychosis is deployed as a cure for the postmodern condition. Pathology is ironically used to combat pathology. The subject does not achieve a transcendence but rather a metaphysical and perceptual shift; meanwhile its body remains plugged in to the machine. More prevalent than this kind of agency is free will. A symptom of some recent postmodern science fiction is the desire to escape the production powers of capitalist technologies by dint of human choice. These texts suggest the human has the organic capacity to choose a selfhood that is distinct from the technological. They fail to acknowledge that the self *is* the technological, that subjectivity is retroactively refashioned by the technological, and ultimately that choice is an illusion essential for maintaining systemic order. Fantasy dictates the structure of reality—this is the fundament of my concept of terminal choice, which avows that the only choice available to the postmodern subject, despite all desire and action, is rooted in a dependency on (and devotion to) consumer-capitalism and the ultraviolent schizophrenic production of the commodity-self. Terminal choice means that free will is a fiction.

I treat the texts examined in this work as cognitive maps of late capitalist space that engage with the problem of terminal choice. Either they critique this problem, or they reify it by being subject to it (that is, by not being aware of it), or both. Whatever they do, each uniquely illustrates a map of the technocapitalist mediascape, representing

the agential desires of the human to be free of the machine and, by way of this representation, (re)affirming the machinic nature of the human. The first chapter is a reading of Cameron Crowe's film *Vanilla Sky* (2001). I begin with this text because it dynamically portrays the state of the contemporary, postmillennial mediatized body. The protagonist is a New York City publishing executive who, after a car accident disfigures him, is reinvented in a computer program he purchases online. Unaware that his real body is stored in cryogenic freeze and that his diegetic reality is a fantasy, he vows to become a more assiduous capitalist and partner to his girlfriend. The program, however, experiences a glitch. Assisted by technical support, he realizes that he is living a dream and is given the opportunity to choose between returning to the real world or to another, glitch-free dream. The trouble with the film is its moral imperative. Crowe equates goodness with a return to the real world and a functional capitalist existence; badness, in turn, is equated with virtual, pseudocapitalist activity. This is a representative instance of terminal choice that sets the tone for the rest of my discussion.

In the second chapter I revert back forty years to the cut-up trilogy of William S. Burroughs: *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962) and *Nova Express* (1964). These wild satires of American image-culture are derivative examples of the pathological postmodern condition, the reconstruction of the body by media technologies, and the spectacle of consumerism. The dominant media technology Burroughs uses to convey his message is film. He constructs a cognitive map that delineates how 1950s and 60s America used cinematic imagery to mediate social relations between people. The elements of film are infused in his narratives, creating an irreality fit for the schizophrenic character of postmodern subjectivity. Burroughs

essentially engages in a pathological form of play that he uses to revolt against terminal constructedness. The effect is not agential. Nor is it intended to be. Establishing itself as a certifiable panic hypertheory, the cut-ups demonstrate that there is no escape from the machine and no choice but to live as a technopathological extension of the machine. This idea spills over in my next chapter, a schizoanalysis of the more recent *Army of Darkness* in which a department store clerk named Ash attempts to escape his meager, monotonous life. I show how Ash is a terminal subject whose journey into the medieval past can be read as a schizophrenic delusion of grandeur exposing his machinic unconscious. In his wish-fulfillment fantasy, Ash aspires to transcend his coded, capitalist self; but he only succeeds in reifying his status as a common postmodern subject. To bring Ash's experience to light, I use the anti-Oedipal theory of Deleuze and Guattari, two of postmodernity's most dynamic capitalist philosophers and stylists. Conversely, I use his experience to read against Deleuze and Guattari, arguing that their seemingly revolutionary theory is constrained by the parameters of the socioeconomic matrix they seek to subvert.

From this point I return to the twenty first century and concentrate on science fiction texts that speak more directly to the present state of postmodernity by representing potential futures that terminally historicize the past. Chapter four is a reading of Max Barry's novel *Jennifer Government* (2003). Unlike *Army of Darkness*, Burroughs' cut-ups and *Vanilla Sky*, all of which operate in diverse realms of fantasy, this novel operates in a realistic diegesis. It depicts a near-future society where the consumer-capitalist system has evolved into a fascist regime. Governed by gigantic multicorporations that have created a global free market, the subjects of this society are

identified by the dynamism with which they produce and consume commodities. Barry has conceived of what Larry McCaffery calls "the ideology of hyperconsumption," which he associates with "the next phase of capitalist expansion" ("Still Life" xviii). In this way, *Jennifer Government* envisions a postcapitalist future in the sense that postmodernism is an extension of some aspects of modernism and an innovative breaking away from other aspects of it. My interest in this chapter is on the varying levels of violence that the ideology of hyperconsumption invokes. Violence is the lifeblood of postmodern cultural pathology, and I pursue it further in my fifth and final chapter, a study of the postapocalyptic Matrix trilogy, namely the latter two films, *Reloaded* (2003) and *Revolutions* (2003). Falling into the subgenre of "neurorealism," the trilogy is a pastiche of tropes and clichés that constitutes the historical body of the science fiction genre. It is a kind of Deleuzoguattarian rhizome that can be entered and exited from multiple doorways, and like much twentieth century science fiction (among them Deleuze and Guattari's books on capitalism and schizophrenia), it presents a humanistic line of flight from technocapitalist oppression. The trilogy is a deterritorializing map critiquing the agential desires of the science fiction genre, which has recurrently insinuated that the human is distinct from the technological and that a "natural," non-capitalist selfhood is realizable. The Wachowski's films represent the genre's collective anxiety that, in the postmodern world, nature has become a machine.

Like Bukatman's *Terminal Identity*, *Technologized Desire* encompasses a range of narratives, including stories, novels, comic books, television shows, philosophy, cultural theory, and especially films. As we drown in the torrent of media that floods our daily experience, and as the technology of writing continues to be usurped by the

technology of images, cinema is becoming the dominant artistic and cultural medium. In many ways it is already the dominant postmodern medium, and it is certainly one of the largest global late capitalist enterprises. With its focus on the visualization of extrapolated and imaginary devices, entities and realities, science fiction is a perfect site for filmmakers to test the limits of media technology, particularly in terms of special effects, which have evolved at an accelerated rate in the computer age. The Matrix trilogy itself revolutionized filmmaking with its virtual "bullet-time" CGI; since the first film was released in 1999, these effects have appeared in a number of other films inside the genre and have spilled outside of it as well. This is indicative of a greater development: the science fictionalization of reality.

What used to be an alternative genre of scientific speculation and fantasy is rapidly becoming mainstream as its fictional innovations continue to be actualized and normalized (and thus *de*novated) in the real world. These denovations[3] are almost invariably produced by capitalist technologies for some kind of socioeconomic end. It is an ever more pathological and violent form of production that has spread itself across the social mediascape and emerged as terminal identity's most visible characteristic. *Technologized Desire* explores the variables of this characteristic in an effort to make a sketch of what is ultimately a potential postcapitalist identity. The sketch is admittedly rough as we are still enmeshed in the beginnings of such a development. But it points to a not-too-distant future that lay beneath our feet, waiting to be yanked out.

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[3] According to Peter J. Hugill, denovations are what happen to innovations when they cease to be creative phenomenon and are destroyed, liquidated, or, in this case, normalized.

CHAPTER 1

Terminal Constructedness and the Technology of the Self in Cameron Crowe's

Vanilla Sky

The Technological/Self

Arthur Kroker and David Cook have said that the postmodern body is "a power grid, tattooed with all the signs of cultural excess on its surface, encoded from within by the language of desire" (*Postmodern* 26). A product of late capitalism, this language of desire's foremost task is to uphold and perpetuate a community of consumers whose cyborg bodies bear the brightly colored marks of the media. These marks warn us not to be less than avid (if not rabid) consumers lest we fall short of being adequate, functional social subjects. The postmodern body, in other words, is a desiring-machine whose contours are defined by the technetronic mediascape of late capitalism, which equates adequacy with excess. This dynamic has been most effectively represented and mapped out by the science fiction genre, as Scott Bukatman indicates in *Terminal Identity*: "It has fallen to science fiction to repeatedly narrate a new subject that can somehow directly interface with—and master—the cybernetic technologies of the Information Age, an era in which, as Jean Baudrillard observed, the subject has become a 'terminal of multiple networks'" (2). By means of technology, the real world has seen the actualization of what science fiction narratives of old only imagined. The result is the terminal or blip subject, a conflation of the human and the technological distinguished by a new, oppositional subjectivity that is as transcendental as it is submissive.

Much postmodern science fiction can be read as social and political theory, particularly that which represents the oppositional nature of the terminal subject. Istvan Csiscery-Ronay, Jr. says science fiction "is not a genre of literary entertainment only, but a mode of awareness, a complex hesitation about the relationship between imaginary conceptions and historical reality unfolding into the future" (388). Such an unfolding into the future almost always involves some form of innovative or extrapolated technology that manifests itself as a boon, a bane, or both. Cyberpunk narratives, for instance, which Frederic Jameson calls "the supreme literary expression if not of postmodernism, then of late capitalism itself" (419n), feature technophilic universes in which the theme of body invasion is rampant. Widely regarded as the definitive cyberpunk novel, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) is set in an imploded, urbanized world of infoterrorism where the human is technologized in various ways, namely by being wired to the computer; subjects are able to interface with a cyberspacial realm called the matrix[4] by jacking out of their bodies and roaming through a virtual reality mainframe as an incarnate mind's eye. This experience evokes feelings of ecstasy as well as dread. The novel's protagonist, Case (as in basket case, among other things[5]), uses the act of disembodiment, of freeing his mind from his body, as a drug. In this capacity technology functions as agency. At the same time, Case develops an aversion to the flesh. He becomes addicted to the matrix and its transcendental powers,

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[4] Gibson's matrix has been wildly influential in the science fiction genre. Most notable is the recent neocyberpunk trilogy of the Wachowski Brothers, whose matrix is flagrantly neuromantic.

[5] For example, Tony Myers writes, "it is perhaps not fortuitous that the *mise en scène* of much of *Neuromancer* is cyberspace or, more pertinently, the matrix, a word that finds its etymology in 'womb'— the paradigmatic topos of container and contained. In this respect, of course, the name of Case himself is a not insignificant reference to such a spatial formation" (893). The name is also a reference to the man/machine binary, "case" being the sabotaged body that imprisons his mind and denies it the agency of cyberspace, and an insignia of the kind of narrative Gibson writes: a detective novel.

and his own body becomes a source of fear and loathing. Technology functions as an affliction, too. This tension indicates a raw anxiety about how the body and ultimately the self are increasingly spoken by the technological. Critical theory stems from some form of anxiety about a subject, event or condition. It is the anxiety about the mechanization of the self that makes *Neuromancer* and other postmodern science fiction theoretically savvy.

Some science fiction, however, fails to realize that the self has always been mechanized, that the human is always-already spoken by the technological. In the words of Marshall McLuhan, technology is an "extension of man,"[6] and today's "high" technology is merely the most recent, most expansive manifestation of that extension. Thousands of years ago, primitive cultures extended (and in so doing defined) themselves by means of images, tools and ultimately language, just as we do today. The difference is that our extensions are simply more advanced. Instead of hieroglyphics painted on cave walls, we have films playing on superscreens. Instead of arrowheads carved out of bone and stone, we have nuclear warheads constructed out of metal.[7] And unlike the languages of our distant predecessors, ours is a media fabrication schized by the cult of infotainment. Identity is an effect of the process of projecting ourselves outside of ourselves, individually and collectively. The self and technology are not independent of one another, they are co-dependent; and if technology were to somehow be transcended or extracted from the self, the self would cease to exist. In this way, the

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[6] "With the arrival of electric technology, man extended, or set outside himself, a live model of the central nervous system" (53). This sentiment is the dominant theme in McLuhan's *Media Unlimited*.

[7] Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) enunciates this evolutionary technological leap in a famous shot where a bone that a primitive human uses as a weapon to assert his tribe's dominance is supplanted for a nuclear warhead orbiting Earth in the future.

boundary that separates nature and culture collapses as technology (generally considered a cultural formation) is a natural part of the (post)human condition. Any expression of a nostalgia for nature is problematic. A return to nature would simply entail a return to a lesser state of technological existence/extension. This sort of nostalgia is visible throughout the history of the science fiction genre, mainly in science fiction produced during the postmodern era, which has witnessed a terminal extension of the technological.

A recent science fiction film that expresses an anxiety about contemporary technologies, underscores the condition of the postmodern body, and vies for a return to nature is Cameron Crowe's *Vanilla Sky* (2001). The film's protagonist, David Aames, embodies Bukatman's terminal subject; he is "an unmistakably doubled articulation in which we find both the end of the subject and a new subjectivity constructed at the computer station or television screen" (9). As I have indicated, Bukatman's primary thesis in *Terminal Identity* is that postmodern science fiction narratives aspire to create a new subject-position capable of negotiating today's electronic arena of infotainment. Aames adopts this new subject-position by reinventing his body in a virtual reality program where he exists as an imagistic representation of his original, organic self. In the end, however, he renounces this diegesis and his image-self because he becomes aware of it. The knowledge that he is a virtual construct induces a nostalgia in him for the real, for a "natural" life, which he subsequently repossesses.

But the place (and the self) Aames returns to is also governed by technology— the technology of the media that constitutes the universe of advanced capitalism. The underlying moral imperative of Crowe's film is that the self can and should exist

independently of its technological extensions. But one technology is simply supplanted for another. Aames doesn't return to nature. He does not return anywhere. Subject to the technology of the self (because the technology *is* the self), he merely shifts back and forth across different spatial planes that exist on the same hyperreal landscape. His perception is thus dictated by a series of delusions. The greatest delusion of all is that he has the power of choice—he thinks he can choose what kind of self he wants to be. But in postmodernity there is only one self, the capitalist self. Ontological choice is a fiction. In order to function in a productive manner, however, the capitalist system must uphold the delusion that ontological choice is a tangibility. *Vanilla Sky* unknowingly reifies this pathology, illustrating how the purpose of late capitalism is to convey the idea that the self is a matter of personal conviction rather than preordained conscription.

Livin' the Dream

The dream is an important theme in *Vanilla Sky* and operates on several levels. The film opens and closes with actual dreams experienced by Aames. The first is a real dream and will be the focus of this section as it reveals much about his character. The latter is a virtual dream he purchases after a near fatal car accident. As I will explain, both dreams are produced by the technological. There are also frequent visual and verbal references made to the process of dreaming, references that are meant to rouse the attentions of both viewers as well as Aames to the dreamlike states he inhabits. Additionally, Aames, as a prosperous capitalist, is living the American dream, figuratively and imagistically: his personality and self-image are distinguished by an explicit "rugged individualism," and he owns a corporation, an expensive sports car and

a bleached white smile.[8] The casting of Tom Cruise in this role has a metafictional impact here. A movie star and multimillionaire, Cruise himself is living the American Dream, and his image deepens the film's dream motif. In the eyes of the masses, Cruise (like any movie star) is little more than the sum of the personalities he adopts in his films. He is not a real person so much as he is a fiction. It is his fictional self that energizes Aames' character, whose identity is established through the dream and its vicissitudes, and who emerges as a fiction himself.

The film's opening dream sequence does two main things: establishes Aames as a terminal subject, and foreshadows the Lucid Dream that will eventually serve as his surrogate reality. He wakes up one morning to a prerecorded message on his voice-activated clock-radio. The message repeats, "Open your eyes," in a seductive, mysterious female voice until Aames hits the snooze button. He rolls out of bed, immediately picks up a remote control and turns off the big screen television situated at the foot of his king-sized bed. Yawning, he shuffles into the bathroom and diligently inspects his face and hair in a mirror. He finds a grey hair, seizes and plucks it with a tweezers, and frowns at it. Cut to the street. We watch Aames pull out of a parking garage in a rare, chic-looking sports car. It is an early Spring morning in New York City, 9:05 a.m. according to Aames' watch, and he is on his way to work. Strangely, the streets are empty. Cars are parked next to curbs, streetlights are working and business

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[8] White teeth are a commonplace symbol of American image-consciousness, especially in European minds. Jean Baudrillard associates the American fetish for white teeth with a loss of national and individual selfhood. In *America*, he sardonically writes, "Give your emptiness and indifference to others, light up your face with the zero degree of joy and pleasure, smile, smile, smile . . . Americans may have no identity, but they do have wonderful teeth" (34). For Baudrillard, white teeth (and the meaninglessness they conceal) are a symptom of the passive ecstasy that, through the ongoing process of global Americanization, has come to dominate the temperament of Western civilization. Aames is a victim of this condition.

signs are lit up. But Aames is the only one there; he has the city all to himself. Anxiety slowly overwhelms him. He glances around frantically, stops his car in the middle of Times Square, gets out. Still nobody in sight. Full of dread, he begins to run, searching for humanity. But all he sees are the neon images and signs that surround him and seem to be collapsing on him. The background music quickens. Giant TV screens are everywhere, running sitcoms, talk shows, underwear advertisements. The hologram of a monstrous supermodel dances on the side of a skyscraper. Enormous LED displays churn out the green and red numbers that are the nervous system of the stock exchange, and a hypnotic network of neon signs stretches up to the sky and out to the horizon. Realizing there is no escape, Aames stops running. He lifts up his hands, tilts back his head and emits an agonized scream. During the scream the camera performs a low angle panoramic shot that revolves 360 degrees around Aames' waist, and we behold an overwhelming miasma of images staring down at him from every direction.

And then Aames wakes up. It was just a dream. What he doesn't realize is that it is a portentous illustration of his fears and desires. The offshoot of an acutely mediatized upbringing, Aames is inscribed by the technology of pop culture,[9] which has invoked feelings of alienation and dread in him. There are no other people in his dream. There is only his body and the media images that pursue and encircle it like a hungry flock of vultures. The dream could be interpreted as an externalization of Aames' unconscious in which his repressed emotions are laid bare and revealed to him (and, through the filter of his POV, to us viewers). If, as Lacan maintains, the unconscious is structured like a language, then Aames' unconscious speaks the language of consumer

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[9] Crowe acknowledges this in an introduction to his screenplay: "Aames life . . . is defined, like so many of us, by pop culture" (vii-viii).

images. Or rather, the language of consumer images speaks him. And by doing so it devitalizes him, wrangling and regulating the flow of his desires. Aames is a representation of the postmodern subject who is desensitized by contemporary media technologies that exist chiefly to facilitate and empower the capitalist system, one of our collective body's most significant extensions, an extension that we are absolutely dependent upon and *de*fected by. Mark Amerika recognizes this situation in *The Kafka Chronicles* (1993), a cut-up novel written in the vein of William S. Burroughs that critiques and satirizes corporate "Amerika." In the following passage, for example, the narrator says:

> The disease I found myself becoming, an Amerikan, true and bold, was
>
> running out of control, rampant on the scene of our mutual disgust, and I
>
> loved it, it was feeding ground for everybody who knew that to live was
>
> nothing more than losing their creative selves to the artificial means of
>
> production whose disposal was YOU, you who wake up in the morning
>
> and bring yourself to the cumulative psyche of Amerika, the garbage
>
> disposal, the streets of your cities deterritorialized by capital terrorism,
>
> the contamination filtering through your body so that the language you
>
> spew forth becomes a random assortment of criminal sales tactics
>
> designed to reregulate the person you come into contact with's sense of
>
> self . . . as if such a thing as a self could still exist. (162)

Mark Amerika acknowledges the negative effects of consumer society on the self, emphasizing how mechanical production infringes on creativity and how "capital terrorism" corrupts the human condition. He also identifies the self as a schizophrenic

production of the language of consumerism, which causes the subject to "spew forth a random assortment of criminal sales tactics." But he seems to be talking about an organic self, one that precedes language and culture, rather than a self that is assembled by these things; in saying "as if such a thing as a self could still exist," he is suggesting that at some point it used to exist. If we regard selfhood by dint of the magnitude of our technological extensions, however, his narrator's mediatized subject-position doesn't render him a nonentity. On the contrary, it reifies and punctuates his selfhood. It is his subject-position that is negated. The same might be said for David Aames—as his initial dream indicates, he is a mediatized body, too.

Aames' dream underscores his status as a production and subject of the postmodern technoscape. He immediately engages with the technoscape when he wakes up into the dream by means of the clock-radio and its simulated, repeated dictum; the first piece of information he receives is a command given to him by a machine. He proceeds to engage with a number of other commonplace machines (the television set,[10] the car, the watch, streetlights, and finally Time Square's spectacle of images), all of which command him. Then he awakens and performs the same ritual he did in his dream up to the point where he drives off to work. This time the city is populated with people, not just machinery and images, and Aames breathes a sigh of relief as he merges with traffic and heads to work, forgetting the dream.

Not only does the dream allude to what Aames is, it alludes to what he will become. Early in the film at his birthday party, he is greeted by his friend Brian Shelby.

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[10] This moment is deepened in that playing on the television set is a shot from the film *Sabrina* (1954), starring Audrey Hepburn. In *Vanilla Sky's* DVD audio commentary, Cameron Crowe says, "Beginning with Audrey Hepburn in *Sabrina* . . . set such a beautiful tone for me. It was kind of a dream romance that David Aames . . . was having."

Brian asks him how he's doing. Aames replies, "Livin' the dream, baby, livin' the dream," playfully referring to his carefree lifestyle of leisure and extravagance. This utterance is both an allusion to the aforementioned dream and to his upcoming Lucid Dream, a computer program in which his life becomes a "realistic work of art, painted by [him], minute-to-minute" (Crowe 130). Aames' sportive response to his friend eventually becomes a (virtual) reality. The Lucid Dream is a simulacrum constructed out of the pop cultural images and ethics that defined Aames' (hyper)real life; it is a copy of a world fabricated out of mediatized copies of the real. This simulacra is meant to function as a utopia for him, but it soon devolves into a dystopia where he is jailed and put on trial for the murder of his girlfriend. The problem is, once he is inserted into the Lucid Dream, his memory is washed clean; he doesn't know that the program is not reality. The culminating dilemma is epistemological. Aames must choose between the Lucid Dream (reconfigured as the utopia that went bad) or the real world. He chooses the latter. The implication is that the Lucid Dream, a simulation of the real, is morally objectionable, much like the Matrix of the Wachowski Brothers' trilogy. As Daniel Barwick points out in an essay on *The Matrix*, this is a common implication:

> In most cases, people will choose the real world over an illusory one. But that does not mean that an illusory world is immoral; it simply means that people, fed daily on a diet of fiction, prefer the feeling of what is thought to be *real*, and what is thought to *matter*. (Consider the meteoric rise of reality TV.) But notice that those caught in the Matrix think that their surroundings are real and that their lives matter. The Matrix produces an illusory world, not an immoral world. (85)

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The same goes for the Lucid Dream. In and of itself, it is not an immoral place. It is immoral only insofar as it is perceived to be. Which it is. The ironic thing is that the real world Aames returns to is defined by the fiction-wrought ideology of the media. But that doesn't matter to him. A mass man despite his upper class status, he doesn't preoccupy himself with the fictive nature of postmodern reality, assuming he is even aware of it. The knowledge of his existence in the Lucid Dream repels him, on the other hand, but only after he experiences a "glitch" in the program that leads to murder. Had the glitch not occurred, the knowledge never would have presented itself and Aames would have continued to live happily and comfortably in the Lucid Dream, thinking it was reality. It is ultimately technology, not Aames himself, that dictates (or at least induces) his choice to revert back to his body. Moreover, 150 years have passed in the real world during his comparatively short existence in the dream; he will be "returning" to a future where the medical expertise to fully repair his damaged body has been developed, a procedure that he desperately needs in order to be an operative capitalist. The logic of *Vanilla Sky* paradoxically views this process as a reversion to nature, to selfhood, to the real—all of which are effectuated by the technological. The technological thus operates on Aames from the inside as well as the outside, actuating his desires and constituting the worlds he dwells in. But the film only expresses an anxiety about one of these worlds, the second-order simulacra of the Lucid Dream. It does not realize the media-powered simulacra of late capitalist reality. Instead it idealizes late capitalist reality, representing it as an agency whereby Aames might claim the self that the machine-powered simulacra stole from him.

The Mediatized Body

Bukatman explains that "the disappearance of the body is the disappearance of desire (more than the manifestation of the self, here the body represents the terrain of a desire now replaced by its own simulacrum), a symptom of surrender to the desireless rationality of the cybernetic state" (245). Kroker and Cook would agree with this claim. So would most "panic theorists."[11] But Aames' experience in the cybernetic state seems to be the reverse. It is not until he loses his body that desire truly materializes in him. His life as a desiring-machine begins at the beginning of his virtual life, tailor-made to his liking by Life Extension, the corporation from which he purchased the Lucid Dream.

Prior to his car accident, Aames is a narcissistic playboy lacking empathy and conviction. He treats people (namely the "intricate network" of women he entertains) as objects, feeding off of their adulation for his upper class power-image, and has no interest in running the company he inherited from his father. He later admits it during a conversation with Dr. McCabe, the psychologist appointed to him by the court after he is accused of murder: "I'm a big nothing, living from woman to woman, from compliment to compliment, and sleepwalking through that job" (Crowe 119). After the accident, however, when he is first inserted into the Lucid Dream, desire instills itself in him: he willingly maintains a monogamous relationship with a woman and runs his company like a good capitalist. Once he discovers that the world in which he operates as a

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[11] Kroker and Cook describe the role of the panic theorist in *The Postmodern Scene*: "Refusing (with Nietzsche) the pragmatic compromise which only seeks to preserve, *The Postmodern Scene* can recommend so enthusiastically panic reading because it seeks to relieve the gathering darkness by a new, and more local, cultural strategy. That is, *to theorize* with such hyper-intensity that the simulacrum is forced finally to implode into the dark density of its own detritus, and *to write* so faithfully under the schizoid signs of Nietzsche and Bataille that burnout, discharge, and waste as the characteristic qualities of the postmodern condition are compelled to reveal their lingering traces on the after-images of (our) bodies, politics, sexuality, and economy. Hyper-theory, therefore, for the end of the world" (ii).

desiring-machine is a sham, he rejects it in favor of operating in the same fashion in the "real" world. We don't know if he accomplishes this feat; the open end of the film sees him merely waking up from the Lucid Dream.[12] Even if he does, the fact remains that it is the "high" technology of literal simulation that permits him to achieve desire, not the "low" technology of the mediatized reality that bore him and is the womb he may or may not return to. Hence the technology he fears and rejects turns him into the self he was incapable of producing on his own, the main reason being that he is produced as an incapable subject by the media forces of consumer-capitalist society. In this section I want to address how this condition surfaces in Aames, drawing on the theory of Guy Debord and Jean Baudrillard, two of consumer-capitalist society's most important, innovative critics.

Raised as a single child in an upper class urban environment, Aames is performed by the infotainment ethos that speaks our daily lives; his ho-hum attitude and perspective, and the way he "snowboards his way through life," seems to belong to the dreamy, stupid universe of a pop song. We don't learn much about his relationship with his parents, albeit there are indications that he was closer to his mother. There are repeated references to him being a "daddy's boy," but this seems to be more of a wish-fulfillment on Aames' part, his work-obsessed father paying little if any attention to him. (In his autobiography, for instance, Aames Sr. only devotes one sentence to his son: "David Jr. was a delight as a child.") Consequently the figure of his father stands tall in his psyche. Aames describes him in this way:

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[12] Another reading of *Vanilla Sky*'s conclusion is that Aames is simply waking up from a dream—a dream that was literally the entire film, not just the second half of it. Here is another stratum to the "livin' the dream" theme.

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Primer on David Aames, senior. My father was not built for the twenty-first century. He never ate at McDonald's, not once, and never watched television. Yet his biggest magazine is still *TV Times*. . . . Read his book. His autobiography is the manual for every cut-throat publisher in New York. It's called *Defending the Kingdom*. (16)

One of the underlying motifs in *Vanilla Sky* concerns how the authority of images has usurped that of words in the twentieth century. As Michael Stephens suggests in *The Rise of the Image, the Fall of the Word*, the moving image, in lieu of the printed word, has become the principal source of intellectual and emotional development in today's society and will lead to new ways of understanding the (post)human. At first glance, David Aames Sr. (as he is retrospectively characterized by David Aames Jr.) appears resistant to this process. A publishing executive, he made his living by superintending the dissemination of printed words. According to his son, he rejected the authority of images, especially in the form of television, which is the primary means of dispersing images. Ironically, however, Aames Sr.'s most reputable, best-selling publication, *TV Times*, is one that promoted television and the mass ingestion of images; in this capacity the printed word is reduced to the medium of its conqueror. Aames Sr. may not be built for the twentieth century, but he is certainly subject to the twentieth century and the torrent of visual media that characterize it. Images are powerful capitalist vehicles, and the realms of fantasy they provide for us on a daily basis is growing exponentially. So is our desire for those fantasy realms. Says Jean Baudrillard: "The solicitation of and voraciousness for images is increasing at an excessive rate. *Images have become our true sex object*, the object of our desire" (*Ecstasy* 35). While Aames Sr. may not be a

fan of this idea, as a capitalist, and as a desiring-machine, he has no choice but to submit to it.

Unlike his father, Aames grew up a television addict like most postmodern subjects. To use Guy Debord's language, he is a product of the society of the spectacle, of society's real unreality. "The spectacle is not a collection of images," writes Debord, "rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (12). For Debord and his Situationist counterparts, images are capitalist mechanisms that are used to nourish and foment consumer society; they do not constitute the spectacle, they are the agents that facilitate the production of the spectacle. The spectacle itself is an assemblage of media representations erected in the name of capitalism that composes and controls social relationships and negatively affects its watchers, pacifying and alienating them by infringing on self-activity. "Capitalist society estranges workers from the product of their labor, art from life, and spheres of production from consumption, thus inducing spectators to passively observe the products of social life" (Meenakshi 113). Furthermore, the fundament of the spectacle is unilateralism, as Bukatman observes: "The citizen/viewer, no longer participating in the production of reality, exists now in a state of pervasive *separation*, cut off from the producers of the surrounding media culture by a unilateral communication and detached from the mass of fellow citizen/viewers as a new 'virtual' community of television families and workplaces arises to invisibly take their place" (36). As a result of this separation from the production of (un)reality, consumers of (un)reality are inclined to passivity, allowing the forces of production to live their lives for them. The spectacle is a detriment to self-fashioning. It does not annihilate or negate the self—as long as the technology of the

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spectacle exists, so will the self—but it does inhibit the self from the act of creative extension.

David Aames Jr. exhibits the psychological effects of the spectacle. He does not possess his father's hardworking capitalist mentality, and he has no wish to possess it, partly because of the spectacular climate that constructed him, partly because he has the monetary capacity to fully pursue the hedonistic values that have been ingrained in him by the media. When we are introduced to Aames in the beginning of the film, we are introduced to a modern day dandy. The only difference between him and the traditional dandy of the nineteenth century is that he does not lack "noble blood"; unlike the dandies of old, who posed as affluent socialites, adopting outward characteristics that elicited a public and personal illusion of grandeur, Aames is in fact an affluent socialite (he owns 51% of his father's well-to-do company). But he embodies dandyism in terms of his reticence to become a working member of capitalist society and run his company (instead of the "seven dwarves," the board of directors who owns 49% of the company and conduct its daily business). Charles Baudelaire describes dandyism as "no profession other than elegance . . . no other status but that of cultivating the idea of beauty in [one's] own persons . . . the dandy must aspire to be sublime without interruption; he must live and sleep before a mirror" (Seigel 98-99). Aames fits this profile. Entirely self-serving, the only profession with which he concerns himself is the upkeep of his image: he makes this clear in the opening scene when he meticulously inspects his blemish-free face in the mirror and yanks the errant gray hair from his head. An affectation of the spectacle, he focuses on preserving his own existence as spectacle.

In addition to Debord's neo-Marxist theory of the society of the spectacle, Aames' character can be read by way of Baudrillard's theory of the society of the simulated. Baudrillard is deeply influenced by Debord and the Situationist project. He shares many of his beliefs, most importantly the belief in the increasing technological mediation of interpersonal relations.[13] At the same time, he argues that a new social development had dawned. "For Baudrillard, we leave behind the society of the commodity and its stable supports; we transcend the society of the spectacle and its dissembling masks; and we bid farewell to modernity and its regime of production, and enter the postmodern society of the simulacrum, an abstract non-society devoid of cohesive relations, shared meaning, and political struggle" (Best 6). Whereas Debord is auspicious, hoping to transform the media and its blasé subjects, Baudrillard is pessimistic and fateful, arguing that there is no agency from the media. In his view, the ever-increasing dominance of the cult of infotainment is pushing us closer and closer to a dystopia where reality and fantasy, self and other, subject and object can no longer be distinguished from one another.

Baudrillard's vision of the world as a technopiated, hypperreal, sign-infested matrix resonates in *Vanilla Sky* both when Aames' body is a presence in the real world and especially when it is a presence in the simulated world of the Lucid Dream. In the hurricane's eye of implosion, Baudrillard professes, is the eclipse of the subject by the object. "It is no longer the desire of the subject, but the destiny of the object, which is at

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[13] Steven Best and Douglas Kellner offer additional similarities between the two in *The Postmodern Turn*: "Both Baudrillard and Debord theorized the abstraction involved in the development of the consumer and media society. . . . Both saw the media as one-way modes of transmission that reduced audiences to passive spectators; both were concerned with authentic communication and a more vivid and immediate social reality apart from the functional requirements of a rationalized society" (95).

the center of the world" (*Ecstasy* 80). Individuality, identity, selfhood—these things are

determined by the surrounding mediascape; they are constructed from the outside-in, not

the inside-out. The self is a blank slate onto which identity is imprinted rather than an

organism whose identity is cultivated and fashioned. For Baudrillard, subjects are mere

screens on which a prerecorded production is always being played out. Simply put, they

are images, copies. Hence when Aames enters the Lucid Dream as a virtual image of

himself, he is entering it as a virtual image of an image of himself.

Baudrillard has many critics. Some think of him more as a science fiction writer

than a cultural theorist, sociologist, philosopher, metaphysician, metaleptic, transversal,

moralist, or however one likes to refer to him (he has been called several things by

himself and others). His writing employs numerous science fiction tropes, for example,

as well as a "hypertechnologized, jargon-ridden language that refuse[s] the possibility of

a critical position" (Bukatman 72). The way in which he absolutizes the process of

implosion, predicting the fall of the real like Revelation's John,[14] also has its science

fiction undertones.[15] Nonetheless his basic principles are deft enough. A central

principle relevant to my discussion of *Vanilla Sky* is passive ecstasy, a psychosocial

condition incited by the parade of images and signs that are perpetually marching

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[14] Consider the following passage from *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, one of Baudrillard's most would-be prophetic books: "But nothing will halt the implosive process, and the only remaining alternative is between a violent or catastrophic implosion, and a smooth implosion, an implosion in slow motion. There are traces of the latter, of various attempts to control new impulses which are anti-universalist, anti-representative, tribal, centripetal, etc.: communes, ecology, ZPG, drugs—all of these undoubtedly belong to this order. But we must not delude ourselves about a smooth transition. It is doomed to be short lived and to fail. There has been no balanced transition from implosive systems to explosive systems: this has always happened violently, and there is every chance that our passage towards implosion may also be violent and catastrophic" (61).

[15] For a closer look at Baudrillard's sf tendencies, see Istvan Csisnery-Ronay, Jr.'s essay "The SF of Theory: Baudrillard and Haraway."

through our daily lives. He describes it in this way: "There is no longer any transcendence or depth, but only the immanent surface of operations unfolding, the smooth and functional surface of communication. In the image of television, the most beautiful prototypical object of this new era, the surrounding universe and our very bodies are becoming monitoring screens" (12). Alongside panic theorists like Donna Haraway and Paul Virilio, Baudrillard "constructs a trajectory that propels the subject into the machine" (Bukatman 17). The result is a cyborg. His cyborg is an idle human body with a television for a head—a production/performance of the media who takes pleasure in being produced/performed to be idle.

We have created a world in the image of our desires, says Baudrillard, and the world has come home to roost with the voracity of Frankenstein's monster. The media images that pervade the goings-on of our lives all exist in the name of capitalism in one way or another. They relentlessly whisper in our ears, "If you are not consuming, you are less than human," and we believe what we hear. We unconsciously surrender ourselves to this dictum, and we consciously enjoy it. That is the ideology of the postmodern masses, the complacent, blasé middle class to whom Baudrillard collectively refers as "nothingness," "inertia," "the strength of the neutral" and ultimately "the silent majority" (*Shadow* 1, 2). In terms of the media that produce/perform us, however, class doesn't matter: we are all part of the masses. It is merely a question of the degree to which we are nothing, inert, neutral, silent. David Aames is a member of the upper class in terms of his income. Yet he is a model mass man in terms of his phlegmatic psychosocial disposition and behavior. *Vanilla Sky* contends to be about his awakening. More specifically, it contends to be about the

demediatization of his body, a body negated by media technology (the society of the

spectacle/simulated) and dispatched through the vehicle of media technology (the Lucid

Dream).

Aames is not demediatized, of course. The media, after all, functions as his

medium for agency from being mediatized. Moreover, if he does return to the real world

of the future at the end of the film as a gung ho desiring-machine and tycoon (assuming

the entire film is not a dream narrative), he will still be a zero degree subject, still a cog

in the machine of advanced capitalism. The difference is he will work harder at being a

cog; he will labor for a capitalistic ideal rather than simply exist as a neutered, imagistic

representative of it. This is implied by his name itself. He is *aiming* for a less

impassive, more powerful subject-position—the subject-position that belonged to his

father. Aames may awaken out of the Lucid Dream, but he does not awaken out of the

dream of hyperreality. No matter what, he is always-already livin' it. As such, he

successfully fulfills the role of the terminal subject, repulsed by the technological yet

invariably needing and demanding it for his existence as an active, effective postmodern

body. Right now I want to look closer at some of the details of *Vanilla Sky* in order to

further explicate this point.

Open Your Eyes

Vanilla Sky is a remake of Alajandro Amenábar's Spanish film *Abre los ojos* or *Open*

Your Eyes (1997). Basically it's the same film, visually and thematically. The one thing

Crowe does differently is set the film in an American context, casting it in the mold of

pop culture.[16] But the structure and syntax of Crowe's film follows Amenábar's closely; sometimes he copies Amenábar shot for shot, not to mention that Penelope Cruz plays the same character in both films. Furthermore, the title of the Spanish filmmaker's movie resonates throughout *Vanilla Sky*. In fact, the first and last lines of dialogue we hear are "Open your eyes," calling attention to the aforementioned awakening that Aames does (and does not) undergo. This awakening takes numerous physical and figurative forms. The most crucial form concerns his status as a blasé subject and the utopian figure of Sophia, who not only makes him aware of his status, but contributes to his desire to transcend it. His love for Sophia opens his eyes to the passive ecstasy that prescribes his emotional spectrum. As a result, he is motivated to remake his emotional spectrum. What he doesn't recognize is that his love for Sophia is not for Sophia. It is for the image of her—metaphorically in the real world, literally in the Lucid Dream. Like all of the other elements that contribute to the development of Aames' character, she is a form of media, too, a technology that penetrates his subjectivity and renders him a becoming-thing. According to Mcluhan, "technology is directly responsible for our desire for wholeness, empathy and depth of awareness (21). This is precisely what the technology of Sophia does for Aames.

Aames meets her at his birthday party. They hit it off and he ends up spending the night at her apartment, talking, flirting, watching TV and, most importantly, being

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[16] The pop culturization of *Abres los ojos* is accomplished in three major ways. One I mentioned earlier: the casting of Tom Cruise, a pop culture icon, in the leading role. In addition, Crowe represents the world as an explicitly hyperreal space whereas Amenábar does not, and Crowe depends upon an Oedipal element to establish his protagonist as a mediatized body. César, the protagonist of *Abres los ojos*, is an orphan like Aames who inherits a fortune from his parents. Unlike Aames, however, his quest in the film is not that of a *becoming-father* in the capitalist universe. César does not own a corporation that he must aspire to rule with an iron fist—he simply has a big bank account—and the memory of his father does not candidly haunt and produce neuroses in him.

celibate. Aames' prior relationships with women had always been premised upon the physical act of sex and the emotional absence of love. Lacan sees love as being in a state of demand where the lover wants to give something to the loved that cannot be given and wants to receive something from the loved that likewise cannot be given. Aames never experiences this demand until connecting with Sophia, and in order for the demand to manifest itself in him, it is necessary for their relationship to begin in a sexless context. Aames' demand is premised upon the need for repressing his sexual impulses and getting to know the "real" Sophia first. But this is an elementary power-relation. More important is that which Sophia represents for him: a romanticized idealization of himself, of what is lacking in his own constitution. In this way he is a distinctly Lacanian subject. As Lacan says in *Seminar 1*, "Love, the love of the person who desires to be loved, is essentially an attempt to capture the other in oneself, in oneself as object" (276). This is an impossibility, of course, as the other is an imaginary object that the lover narcissistically creates in order to satisfy his unrealizable demand.

Aames' love emerges as the desire to capture himself in the image of Sophia. The interesting thing is that it is an image he formulates based on a collection of images: a collage of photographs he sees on Sophia's refrigerator. Crowe explains in his screenplay that these photos "represent a hard-working, hard-earned, committed and passionate life. Shot moves across the photos. A young girl's hard-working and happy life. Group photo of co-workers. A few from a vacation. A whole new cast of characters, all committed, and they all look inviting to [Aames]" (43). In a DVD audio commentary, Crowe goes on to say: "Here [Aames] falls in love with the image of a girl leading a real life, a life more real than his life. In a way he's been living a dream, and

he wants reality." Crowe's use of the words "real" and "reality" are in reference to the forces of labor. When he says Sophia leads a "real life," he means she has to work for a living, to struggle to survive financially in urban America by juggling multiple jobs and playing her part in the game of consumer-capitalism, an experience Aames knows little about. In this context, his dream life is a life free from capitalistic constraints, limitations and anxieties. The film portrays this freedom negatively, as more of a state of bondage than freedom, and Sophia is portrayed as the key that will unlock him from the prison of leisure and prodigality. He sees in her what society has demanded from him all of his life. Until meeting her he chooses to ignore that demand, but love (a demand in itself) "opens his eyes." The problem is that this love is the product of yet another simulacrum—of Aames' idealization of himself in the image of Sophia based on photographic images of her. Not only is he terminally constructed by image-culture, he is terminally reconstructed by it.

This dynamic is magnified in the Lucid Dream. Created in the image of Aames' perfect world, the Lucid Dream is the setting for the second half of the film. Both he and Sophia exist as literal image-constructs; Aames' mind is jacked into a cyberspace à la *The Matrix* (1999) where he is more or less a "mental projection of [his] digital self," and an avatar of Sophia (as well as the rest of humanity) is implanted into cyberspace with him. He is effectively god here in that this diegesis is for him alone. Moreover, like the protagonist of Alex Proyas' film *Dark City* (1998), he has the power to conduct and redirect the operations of the world. He just doesn't know it. Viewers (as well as Aames himself) are not made aware that he is literally livin' the dream until the film's end when Edmund Ventura, Life Extension's tech support representative and the key

source of exposition, explains what has been going on. But before turning to the film's denouement I need to briefly discuss Aames' accident and its consequences.

Prior to meeting Sophia, Aames had been casually dating Julianna Gianni, an aspiring actress and musician. Julianna develops an obsession, stalks him, and finally tries to kill him in a car crash. Aames survives, but the accident deforms him: his shoulder is shattered and his face is grotesquely scarred. He seeks out the best plastic surgeons in New York City to rebuild his face, but nobody can help him, even though money is no object. The technology needed to rebuild him is simply not up to snuff. "This isn't about vanity," he says to a doctor. "This is about functioning in the world. It's my job to be out there functioning." By functioning in the world, Aames is referring to his role as a socialite, but more as a capitalist, an ironic claim in that, prior to his accident, he was anything but a functional capitalist. Thus his disfigurement does the same thing for him that Sophia does: instills a desire for a fantasy-image of himself that cannot be consummated. The reality of his ruined image invokes the desire for the dream of his would-be utopian image. In every way his selfhood is produced by imagistic machinery.

Aames' miscarried relationship with Sophia, however, is the true catalyst of his melancholy. They only spend one night together prior to his accident, which occurs the following morning when a despondent, stalking Julianna appears outside of Sophia's apartment building and asks him to take a ride with her. Feeling sorry for her, he agrees. She tells him he loves him, he doesn't reciprocate, and she drives her car off of a bridge. Aames spends three weeks in a coma and time in rehabilitation afterwards. He is finally healthy enough in mind and body to attempt to reconcile with Sophia, but he is not the

same person anymore. Too self-conscious about the loss of his image—a loss that leaves him looking and feeling like the elephant man—he rubs Sophia the wrong way, and she shuns him. But his love for her, the initial image of himself he sought out in her, still actuates and enables him to become the capitalist he was not able to become prior to meeting her. With the help of his company's attorney, Thomas Tipp, he gains control of his company and defeats the seven dwarves, who pose a constant threat of corporate usurpation throughout the film. In the end (of his real life), he successfully achieves the hardworking ethic he so admired in Sophia. But he still longs for her physical presence, and because he cannot have it, he overdoses on pills and commits suicide.

Before killing himself, however, he purchases Life Extension's Lucid Dream. The purchase reifies his newly acquired subject-position as a functional capitalist, as the Lucid Dream is a commodity—a commodity that becomes his reality. His body is cryogenically frozen and his mind is interfaced with a virtual reality fashioned out of the iconography of his childhood: familiar captions from advertisements, television, films and pop art are used as background props for his environment. In this dream world, his face and shoulder are flawlessly reconstructed, he continues to prevail as an entrepreneur, and his relationship with Sophia flourishes. This is his utopia, an enhanced, romanticized copy of his subjective diegesis that, like a movie treatment of a novel, is adapted from Aames' inmost desires and sculpted out of the mediascape that provided the framework for his actual, hyperreal life. That he lacks the knowledge that this simulated universe isn't real allows him to enjoy and appreciate it.

He gains that knowledge by degrees, and his utopia dissolves into a dystopia. "Your subconscious created problems," Ventura informs him. "Your dream turned into a nightmare." Aames begins to hallucinate that Sophia is Julianna. At first he thinks Julianna staged her death and kidnapped Sophia. It is soon revealed that the problem lay in his own schizophrenic head. Mistaking Sophia for Julianna, he kills her and is charged with murder. Dr. McCabe is assigned to his case to try and determine his motive and state of mind, and it is through the course of his psychotherapy that the characters in and viewers of the film learn about the origin and history of Aames' virtual life. He and McCabe finally go to Life Extension's corporate headquarters where they learn the "truth" once and for all. Ventura divulges to Aames that, in the real world, 150 years have passed since he died. The technology now exists to rebuild his body and face, and he is given a choice: either he can stay in the Lucid Dream and live a happy life in whatever setting with whatever people he wants, or he can go back to the real world where he will have to struggle to make ends meet, just as Sophia once had to struggle. Aames makes up his mind quickly. "I want to live a real life," he says. "I don't want to dream anymore." In the future he will allegedly wake up in, Sophia will be long dead. But that doesn't matter: he is intent on becoming the capitalist-oriented self he originally saw in her, and her use-value as an object (in which Aames objectifies himself) has expended itself. One caveat, though—in order to wake up, he must jump off of the top of a building, defeating his physical and metaphorical fear of heights. It is a cliché dream scenario; he must have faith that he will wake up before he hits the ground.[17]

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[17] Prior to the jump, Ventura informs Aames: "You know what they say. You never die in your dreams. You'll wake up before you hit the ground. The decision is yours" (Crow 146).

He jumps. On his way down his life flashes before his eyes in a gust of mnemonic pictures that flicker onto the screen. It is a life entirely distinguished by the media. Shots of sitcoms, cartoons, album covers, newspaper and rock concert clips are interspersed between shots of Aames' actual life, which is presented mainly through photo stills and cuts from home movies. Here we see more clearly than ever how Aames is a terminal affectation of blip culture, a term conceived by Alvin Toffler designating "a rhetorical (and perhaps 'real') construct within which citizens are becoming blips: electronic pulses which exist only as transitory bits or bytes of information in a culture inundated with information" (Bukatman 27). Aames' blip subjectivity begins with his in-the-flesh self, with the passive man who is produced by the "telefission of the real and of the real world" (*Simulacra* 53). He is an image-construct in a figurative sense when we meet him, part and parcel of the mediatized universe of infotainment, and his blip subjectivity is exacerbated by the Lucid Dream, which turns him into a literal image-construct, a representation of a (hyper)real person whose identity is fabricated by technologies of the real. In the Lucid Dream, Aames is terminally reconstructed as a construct, and it is through this procedure that he is transformed from a dysfunctional into a functional capitalist. While humanistic on the surface, *Vanilla Sky* is ultimately a representation of late capitalist morality in which goodness is equated with commodity reproduction and badness with a lack thereof. If the film had a subtitle, it might read: "Choose Capitalism."

Terminal Choice

"In late capitalist consumerist society," Slavoj Žižek writes, "'real social life' itself somehow acquires the features of a staged fake, with our neighbors behaving in 'real' life as stage actors and extras. The ultimate truth of the capitalist utilitarian despiritualized universe is the dematerialization of 'real life' itself, its reversal into a spectral show" (243). This assertion is written in reference to Philip K. Dick's novel *Time Out of Joint* (1959) and the films *The Matrix* and *The Truman Show* (1998), all of which feature simulated societies of the spectacle that are a cross between Baudrillardian and Debordian theory. Additionally, the plot of each text involves the awakening of its protagonist from ignorance to enlightenment (and subsequently to conviction); *Time Out of Joint*'s Ragle Gumm, *The Matrix*'s Neo and *The Truman Show*'s Truman Burbank are all introduced as ignorant subjects that are unaware of the "spectral shows" of which they are the stars. For them, real social life is technically a staged fake. And yet they do not know it is a staged fake—they think the stage is reality—so in a sense, the stage *is* reality. As Morpheus explains to Neo: "What is real? How do you define real? If you're talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain." In other words, reality is a matter of perception. What any given subject genuinely perceives to be real is real, whether it is really real or not.

It is only when a knowledge of the really real is leaked into the subject's consciousness that a glitch occurs and leads to some kind of alteration in the flow of the subject's desires. Gumm, Neo and Burbank are likened to David Aames in this respect. The glitch that Aames experiences occurs in the Lucid Dream. It causes a "revolution of

the mind" and exposes him to the reality of the unreality of his virtual existence. This exposure is intolerable. Aames cannot bear the knowledge that his life is a spectacular simulation. Nor can his psychologist when he finds out. "Mortality as home entertainment?" exclaims McCabe. "This can't be the future!" His reaction is distinctively Phildickian. Like Aames, the ignorant McCabe discovers that the world around him as well as his own existence is a fraud; he is just a program, an unknowingly subjected object in Aames' subjective virtuality whose nature is "to fight for his own existence." The difference between he and Aames is, once the Lucid Dream is terminated, so is McCabe; he has no life outside of the simulation as he has no originary body to return to. Such a dilemma is consistently represented by science fiction, particularly in the postmodern era. Both Aames and McCabe are cast in a future where the human mind and body are produced by technocapitalist media. It is an imaginary future as much as it is the (hyper)real present in terms of how certain tropes that once belonged to the science fiction genre now belong to the "desert of the real."

Bukatman says that "the ultimate embodiment (or *dis*-embodiment) of terminal identity is the electronically enhanced simulation of a human" (253). What are the consequences of being terminal? According to texts like *Vanilla Sky*, perhaps more than anything it is the loss of the freedom of choice. The technological is increasingly taking away individual choice by surrendering it exclusively to the wiles of capitalist enterprise. Aames is given the option to choose between what is presented as one form of being (nature) and another (culture), but what is in fact the same being existing in different technologically empowered realms, one characterized by the mediascape, the other by a virtuality (where the mediascape is represented). Aames then is not making

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an ontological choice, as the film suggests. When he jumps off of the building, he is merely choosing to reenter the "real" hyperreal world of capitalism as a productive and thus "moral" subject.[18] In the end, it is the only choice one can make, or in any case the only choice that matters in the postmodern world. Contrary to popular belief, the development of higher technologies is not an indication of human intellect; it is a means of increasing the power and fluidity of the consumer-capitalist system, which uses technology as its motor (Hugill 89). To choose capitalism—this is the terminal subject's core purpose, an inevitability that must be endured whether s/he likes it or is aware of it.

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[18] We aren't told exactly what kind of socioeconomic future Aames will awake in, or if he will even awake in a future at all. Ventura mentions that the world is "very different" and his "money will run out soon, and there are no guarantees" (Crowe 145). Based on the underlying modus operandi of *Vanilla Sky*, however, there is every reason to believe that, if he finds himself in the future, it will be a capitalistic one driven by technology. (There is one indication of this eventuality, too: in the screenplay, Ventura says that "people live to be 200 years old now," suggesting that the technological has continued to develop and that humanity's reliance upon it has intensified.)

CHAPTER 2

Gongs of Violence: The Pathological Play of William S. Burroughs' Cut-Up Novels

Pathologizing the Subject

The film *Brazil* (1985) is a Kafkaesque nightmare in which the protagonist, Sam Lowry, struggles to mediate the culture machine that attempts to program and process him like a cog. A clerk in the fascist Ministry of Information, Lowry fantasizes about escaping his petty, monotonous life. In his dreams he is a superhero who contends with evil forces and pursues the love of a woman bearing a striking resemblance to a Barbie doll in a wedding dress. Throughout the film, his dreams intensify as the culture machine's subjection of him intensifies in his real life. Finally the dream and the real collapse, and his world implodes. The ending of *Brazil* leaves us with the image of an insane Lowry strapped to a chair, a dumb little smile plastered onto his face. Director and screenwriter Terry Gilliam has referred to this as a happy ending. What makes it happy is that Lowry believes he is driving off into the sunset with the woman he loves. By actualizing his dreams on a permanent basis—that is, by going insane—he ceases to be a functional cog. The subject has experienced de-*cog*-nition.

In *Looking Awry*, Slavoj Žižek discusses Lowry's plight. He references Lacanian psychoanalysis to explain how insanity is a way of distancing himself from the sociosymbolic universe of the film. "Although functioning as a support for the totalitarian order, fantasy is then at the same time the leftover of the real that enables us to 'pull ourselves out' . . . When we become crazed in our obsession with idiotic enjoyment, even totalitarian manipulation cannot reach us" (128). Thus the Althusserian

notion that the subject cannot get out of the ideological machine which interpellates it (because ideology "has no outside" or is "nothing but outside") is disturbed by the emergence of idiotic enjoyment, a form of *jouissance* that is symptomatic of ideology ("Ideology" 175). In other words, the subject that travels this path becomes a kind of village idiot existing both apart from and as part of the village—apart from the village in its idiocy, part of the village insofar as it is the village which induced and perpetuates its idiocy. The village is progenitor and parent, and the village idiot's idiocy is a symptom of the village.

Broadly speaking, the postmodern era has seen schizophrenia eclipse paranoia as the dominant cultural mode of "village idiocy." The mediatization of the body and the intensification of late capitalist desiring-production have reproduced the self as a fragmented object devoid of a fixed, organic identity. In *The Postmodern Scene*, Arthur Kroker and David Cook write:

> The self is now like what the quantum physicists call a 'world strip,'
> across which run indifferent rivulets of experience. Neither fully
> mediated nor entirely localized, the self is an empty sign: colonized from
> within by technologies for the body immune; seduced from without by
> all of the fashion tattoos; and energized by a novel psychological
> condition—the schizoid state of postmodern selves who are
> (simultaneously) predators and parasites. (vii)

As a way of negotiating the postmodern self, Kroker and Cook propose hyper-pessimism, "the only realistic basis for a raging will to political action" (vii). Panic is the emotion they harness for their theoretical politics. Overwhelmed by the

technological catastrophe that is the postmodern scene, the late capitalist subject experiences panic as a normative emotion, and in their book they adopt a panic sensibility in order to critique the schizoid determinism of panic society.[19] Apocalyptic and fatalistic, the project is distinctly Baudrillardian, both in content and technique; not only do they write about schizophrenic civilization, they write as subjects of schizophrenic civilization, employing a fractal, jargonized language that reflects the pathological psyche of technocapitalism. They encourage readers to treat the book as "immanently postmodern." What does it mean to be immanently postmodern? Here it means to engage the language of pathology that constitutes mediatized life and allow it to neutralize itself. Such a panic reading, in the eyes of Kroker and Cook and Baudrillard, is a last gasp political gesture, an effort

> to theorize with such hyperintensity that the simulacrum is forced finally
>
> to implode into the dark density of its own detritus, and to write so
>
> faithfully under the schizoid signs of Nietzsche and Bataille that burnout,
>
> discharge, and waste as the characteristic qualities of the postmodern
>
> condition are compelled to reveal their lingering traces on the after-
>
> images of (our) bodies, politics, sexuality, and economy. (ii)

This sort of "hyper-theory . . . for the end of the world" is not agential. It assumes the world is irreversibly imploding, doomed to certain collapse. The only transcendence it offers is a playful reveling in and of itself as it maps out the cultural landscape of the postmodern scene.

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[19] "*The Postmodern Scene* evokes, and then secretes, the *fin-de-millenium* mood of contemporary culture. It is a panic book: panic sex, panic art, panic ideology, panic bodies, panic noise, and panic theory" (I).

A similar panic aesthetic is evident in the subject of this chapter, William S. Burroughs' cut-up novels, which Kroker and Cook amazingly fail to mention in their book. A forefather of cyberpunk narratives and a seminal figure in postmodern literature, Burroughs' surreal, scatological, technophilic narratives are exemplary symptomatic representations of "excremental culture and hyper-aesthetics."[20] His carny portrayals of pathological cyborg bodies infected by the technology of consumer-capitalism have informed numerous panic theorists like him, including novelists, filmmakers and philosophers. Much academic criticism has been informed by Burroughs, too. David Porush's *The Soft Machine*, for example, gets its name from the title of one of the cut-up novels; *Storming the Reality Studio*, Larry McCaffery's anthology of cyberpunk and postmodern fiction and criticism, is a title appropriated from a directive in another cut-up, *Nova Express*; Scott Bukatman also commandeers a phrase from *Nova Express* for the title of his *Terminal Identity*.[21] These three texts contain important critical analyses of cyberpunk, and all of them pay homage to Burroughs.

Pathology is a marked presence in cyberpunk narratives. As Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. contends, "cyberpunk is part of a trend in science fiction dealing increasingly with madness" (189), a result of the literal, metaphorical and psychological invasion of the human by the technological. Science fiction writer Bruce Sterling identifies body and mind invasion as one of cyberpunk's central themes: "prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration . . . brain-computer interfaces, artificial

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[20] The subtitle of *The Postmodern Scene*.

[21] "The entire planet is being developed into terminal identity and complete surrender" (*Nova* 19).

intelligence, neurochemistry—techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self" (xiii). Such techniques are totemic of Burroughs. He was extremely interested in representing how postmodern selfhood has been redefined by technocapitalism. The worlds he depicts in the cut-up novels, to this day his most widely read and revered fictions, are dystopian "interzones" where reality has been subverted by a sultry irreality of terror, absurdism, duplicity and terminal constructedness.

The cut-up novels include Burroughs' masterwork, *Naked Lunch* (1959), and the subsequent trilogy of novels, *The Soft Machine* (1961), *The Ticket That Exploded* (1962) and *Nova Express* (1964). All four books are set in psychedelic diegeses infested with machines of subjugation. These machines take on a variety of forms, ranging from giant sadistic centipedes, to talking assholes with fangs, to apocalyptic cities, to government organizations intent on "the merging of everyone into One Man by a process of protoplasmic absorption" (*Naked* 133), to the technology of the media. Burroughs' characters either fall prey to these machines, or attempt to evade or defeat them, or both—usually both. The result is a schizophrenizing of the self and a pathologizing of subjects who in their struggle to negotiate their subjection seemingly extirpate themselves from it.

Freud confronts the agential power of madness in *Civilization and Its Discontents*:

> One can try to re-create the world, to build up in its stead another world
>
> in which its most unbearable features are eliminated and replaced by
>
> others that are in conformity with one's own wishes. But whoever, in

desperate defiance, sets out upon this path to happiness will as a rule

attain nothing. Reality is too strong for him. He becomes a madman,

who for the most part finds no one to help him in carrying through his

delusion. (31)

According to Freud, pathology, the endpoint of the "path to happiness" that despotic

machines compel subjects to follow, is a bane; the epitome of desperation is "to re-create

the world" and deliver oneself out of the real by dint of madness. Nonetheless it is still

an attempt to correct "some aspect of the world which is unbearable" (32). In

Burroughs' texts this amounts to an attempt to cure the psychosocial disease or illness

that the machines inflict upon subjects and that make subjects subjects.

Pathology as a cure. This *ideé fixe* pervades Burroughs' cut-up novels. It is

particularly apparent in *The Soft Machine*. The title is a reference to the human body in

a state of subjection that manifests itself on two levels. On one level, the soft machine

refers to a body controlled by the desire associated with sex and drugs—a desire that, for

Burroughs, elicits feelings of disgust and terror as well as ecstasy. On another level, the

soft machine references a body controlled by the desire associated with the media, which

also elicits an oppositional emotive response. Burroughs represents postmodern media

as a virus that infects the body and conditions the self to be (or at least to act like) a good

capitalist and consumer. The Burroughsian subject is always-already sick. It is a cog in

the culture machine, and pathology is the cure, the gateway to de-*cog*-nition.

Burroughs sets his sights mainly on American image-culture, constructing a

cognitive map of this space in the vein of Fredric Jameson. A politically fueled

enterprise, cognitive mapping "enables a situational representation on the part of the

individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (Jameson 51). The objective of this chapter is to localize and deliberate one of the key coordinates of Burroughs' unusual cognitive map: the technology of film. Jonathan Beller argues that film is the dominant cultural capital of the twentieth century. It is a form of consciousness that has led to a new reign of socioeconomic conceptualization, practice and value. "As an instrument capable of burrowing into the body and connecting it to new circuits, cinema and mass media in general are deeply imbricated in economic production and circulation in the world system. Indeed, cinema performs a retooling of the sensorium by initiating a new disciplinary regime for the eye" (52). Burroughs writes under the aegis of Beller's notion, depicting film as a sensory and bodily retooler. The text is permeated by references to and representations of the mechanical aspects of film. Moreover, the cut-up style of the text is, like film itself, grounded in the principle of montage. Montage is a violent, schizophrenic method of artistic production that reflects the terrain Burroughs is mapping out; in the cut-ups it serves as an agent of pathology in that he uses montage to color and characterize postmodern image-culture and the terminal illness it invokes.

Burroughs was mainly an artist, but he was also a political activist—being political was part of being beat—and his cognitive map, similar to Jameson's in *Postmodernism*, is a critical methodology whose design is to expose the political strategies and power relations at work in a specific cultural matrix. That matrix is 1960s wartime America, which saw political upheaval in concert with a surge of media technologies moralizing the specter of consumerism. During the writing of the cut-ups, America was unconsciously realizing itself as a thoroughly mediatized body and

commoditocracy whose *raison d'être* was to reproduce and entertain spectacles that used images to mediate social relations between people.[22] Burroughs' cognitive map delineates this mediation, treating film as the foremost purveyor of images. He thus projects film onto the irreality of his narratives as a means of representing the way in which images operate as social mediums, a process that is integral to the schizophrenizing of the postmodern self. Burroughs representation is hyperbolic, dreamy and ultraviolent—like a big budget action movie, his map is full of special effects. He engages in a pathological form of play that reflects and critiques the schizophrenic social landscape of early postmodernity. This play is used as a weapon against terminal constructedness, but not an agential weapon. As his cut-ups show, there is no escape from being constructed by the powers of capitalist technologies, and no choice but to choose to live as an extension of technocapitalism. For him, play is a gun loaded with blanks, a sword with a plastic blade whereby he calls attention to the absurdity and inevitability of the postmodern self's pathology. The cure Burroughs offers for the subject's psychosocial disease is metaphorical. It is not a matter of healing the body, of getting better by getting rid of the disease. As I will explain, it is a matter of *becoming the disease itself.*

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[22] Guy Debord's overarching thesis in *The Society of the Spectacle*. Like Burroughs' trilogy, *The Society of the Spectacle* was published in the 1960s (in France) and is a cognitive map of the commoditocracy as perceived by Debord. He writes: "The world the spectacle holds up to view is at once *here and elsewhere*; it is the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience. The commodity world is thus shown *as it really is*, for its logic is one with men's estrangement from one another and from the sum total of what they produce" (26). In terms of the commodification of everything from reality to the human body, Debord and Burroughs share the same political views.

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Cognitive Mapping

I want to begin by discussing Jameson's notion of cognitive mapping in a general sense. A key factor in cognitive mapping is the predominance of space over time, or what he calls the "spatialization of the temporal" (156). Says Jameson:

> The distinction is between two forms of interrelationship between time and space rather than between these two inseparable categories themselves: even though the postmodern vision of the ideal or heroic schizophrenic (as in Deleuze) marks the impossible effort to imagine something like a pure experience of a spatial present beyond past history and future destiny or project. Yet the ideal schizophrenic's experience is still one of time, albeit of the eternal Nietzschean present. What one means by evoking its spatialization is rather the will to use and to subject time to the service of space, if that is now the right word for it. (154)

To illustrate this idea, consider the Internet pirate companies bred by Napster.com at the turn of the century that allow users to download music and videos quickly and for free. Rather than get into your car, drive out to Tower Records, buy a CD or DVD, get back into your car and drive home, all you have to do is log on to the Internet from your home computer and download whatever form of infotainment you want, negating the time-consuming trip to Tower Records (as well as the expense of gas and the cost of a CD or DVD) by a projection of your own space onto the space outside of it. Your space becomes the outside space and vice versa. Implosion occurs, in other words, and time is nullified (or in any case minimized).[23]

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[23] Marx calculated this figuration in the *Grundrisse*, arguing that capital aspires "to annihilate this space with time, i.e. to reduce to a minimum the time spent in motion from one place to another. The more

For Jameson, the cognitive mapper's task is to define the coordinates of the geopolitical space that surrounds us so that we might better understand our imploded place within it. Defining such space, however, is impossible: it can only be represented. Jameson makes an example out of Kevin Lynch's concept of the "alienated" city, "a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves" (51). Urban disalienation requires that people create a sort of Disneyland for themselves to "reconquest of a sense of place" (51). This theory is essentially Lacanian.[24] Jameson also connects it to Althusser's redefinition of ideology as "the representation of the subject's Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence" (51), one of many theses in his "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Althusser advances this argument by claiming that "it is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there" (164). Jameson employs a parallel argument. In order to create cognitive maps of late capitalist society, the operations of which are schizophrenic and difficult if not impossible to mediate, individuals must construct an idea of their surrounding space and their place in it. This idea is not the real, but it masquerades as the real and equips individuals with a sense of selfhood, albeit an imaginary sense of selfhood.

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developed the capital, therefore, the more extensive the market over which it circulates, which forms the spatial orbit of its circulation, the more does it strive simultaneously for an even greater extension of the market and for the greater annihilation of space by time" (539).

[24] *Postmodernism*, p. 51-54.

One final principle of cognitive mapping according to Jameson that is important to my argument: the totalization of history. Patrick O'Donnell articulates this principle in "The Intractability of Culture":

> Jameson's post-Marxist stance ordains that postmodern global culture be regarded as world historical totality, and the role of the cultural theorist to map this totality . . . rather than to study disparate or purportedly separate pieces of it; even if one is "mapping" within the parameters of a specific cultural location (and, in effect, this is the only way that one can effectively read/map culture), this activity must be conducted within the framework of a "total," global history in process. (O'Donnell 135)

Burroughs' cognitive map of the world has its roots in a specific cultural location. Much of his beatnik, hipster vernacular is distinctly American, and his writing in the cut-up novels is often a sardonic reading/mapping of American cultural productions and effects. Consumer-capitalist America is Burroughs' foremost antagonist. His cognitive map represents that antagonist "within the framework of a 'total,' global history in process." His map spatializes time as well. The cut-up technique consists of a process of chopping up and rearranging time sequences, resulting in the splintering and dissemination of time into a particular space. In order to produce a temporally operable film, still shots that capture individual bytes of time must be dissected, systematized, spliced together, organized in such a way that a certain representational space is delineated. Burroughs deploys this method in the cut-ups—the method is why they are called cut-ups. His novels are spatialized assemblages of time bytes, metaphorical films that underscore the constructed, schizophrenic nature of the real.

In a 1962 article in *Evergreen Review*, Burroughs writes, "In Naked Lunch The

Soft Machine and Novia Express . . . I am mapping an imaginary universe. A dark

universe of wounded galaxies and novia conspiracies where obscenity is coldly used as a

total weapon" (Hassan 54).[25] As these words imply, one of the dominant metaphors in

Burroughs' imaginary universe is science fiction. Hassan indicates four more

metaphors: death, sex/obscenity, drugs, and money. One he does not indicate that is

particularly visible in *The Soft Machine* is the metaphor of film. Film takes many forms

in this text. In most cases it is a control mechanism regulating subjects by impregnating

them with itself. I will elaborate on this idea below. Beforehand I want to discuss in

greater detail the connotations of "soft machine," a term that exemplifies the postmodern

subject-position.

Soft Machines

David Porush's *The Soft Machine* (1985) is a critical analysis of postmodern fiction that

has employed the image of the soft machine—often a literal human/machine cyborg—

and is concerned primarily with cybernetic postmodern fiction.[26] The thrust of Porush's

argument is "that all language is based on metaphor and that metaphors therefore hold

the key to deciphering the code of our knowledge, to mapping the hidden vectors of our

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[25] *Novia Express*, not to be confused with *Nova Express*, was the working title for *The Ticket That Exploded.*

[26] Porush's theory is itself a cybernetic formation. His book was first published during the apex of the cyberpunk movement of the 1980s, one year after the publication of the movement's kingpin text, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), a novel strongly influenced by Burroughs.

cosmologies" (xi).[27] His study of the "machine metaphysic" in certain texts is an

exegesis of our technologically frenetic era. "Literature has found in the machine a rich

invitation to create metaphor" (9). Burroughs was a Machiavellian writer in this

capacity. His cut-ups employ the machine as the primary metaphor for marking the

terrain of contemporary American life, a terrain that evokes a sense of enchantment as

well as nausea.

Porush's title seems to suggest that Burroughs' *The Soft Machine* is a keynote

text of his study. Not so. In fact, Porush devotes very little time to Burroughs, using

him more as a springboard to deliberate the "metaphor of the machine" as it is used and

represented by various pre-cyberpunk cyberfictions. But he does have this to say: "In

Burroughs' apocalyptic mythology, the soft machine is the pure end-product of control

by some malicious and all-powerful conspiracy of government, media, and what

Burroughs calls 'the Nova Police,' agents of technology" (Porush 99). He then

stipulates how the soft machine functions as both a controlled and controlling object.

"Not only is the 'soft machine' some sort of communicating device, it has been

implanted on our very nervous system; it is a compulsory 'tape recorder within,' or inner

'writing machine' hooked up somehow to more cumbersome and conventional external

communications devices" (100). Porush conclusively suggests that the soft machine

may signify the text itself. "Curiously, in the volume entitled *The Soft Machine*,

Burroughs nowhere mentions the term, though he portrays a few incarnations of it.

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[27] Porush's thesis is written in the wake of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*, published five years before *The Soft Machine*. The duo argue that the process of cognition is fundamentally metaphorical: "Metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words. We shall argue that, on the contrary, human *thought processes* are largely metaphorical. This is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined" (6). Porush uses this axiom to interpret the postmodern world through the vehicle of science fiction narrative.

Perhaps he means us to understand that the sort of control that the soft machine represents is manifested everywhere in his apocalyptic universe; or perhaps this curious omission is meant to imply that the text we are reading *is* the soft machine" (102). The medium is the message, then, and the text acts as a kind of guidebook or manual for deconstructing the culture machine and the signs it uses to monitor and manipulate its subjects.

The underlying thesis here is that, from Burroughs' perspective, language is an enemy against which we must struggle, a sickness we must strive to remedy. "Language is the weapon used against its victims by 'the all-powerful control board' and their 'symbol books' (102). By language, Burroughs does not mean a system of words so much as he means a method of communication. This method belongs to media imagery in the postmodern world. Hence he constructs a mediatized language of his own, playing with (and playing against) what he perceives to be a linguistic holocaust ignited by capitalist technologies. It is a schizophrenic, ultraviolent, sexualized verbomania in which events are described in excruciating detail. Burroughs' rhetoric paints a vivid picture for his readers that is as close to the experience of watching a film as words can convey; as such, he speaks to mediatized society in its own language. The language is a machine, a technology that countervails the technology of the image, which is the engine of postmodern society. As Porush indicates, this is a modus operandi of much cybernetic fiction.

Porush gives a number of significations of soft machine, but he neglects one that I mentioned earlier: the soft machine as a body controlled by the desire associated with sex and drugs. Burroughs' lifelong experience as a drug user (of opiates mainly) and a

homosexual (especially his pedophilic tendencies) epidemically inform the cut-up

novels, and whereas *Naked Lunch* is, of the four novels, the most preoccupied with

drugs, *The Soft Machine* is the most preoccupied with sex. In these terms, the human

body is controlled by certain metabolic and libidinal forces that exist inside of it.

Helpless against these inner workings, the body can do nothing but obey its thirst—

Burroughs' narrative conveys this view *in extremis*.

This is not to say the body doesn't revolt against its desires. Burroughs is very

interested in bodies that in some fashion attempt to exorcize the control mechanisms that

haunt them from within. Like the cyberpunk narratives he inspired, his narratives are

imbued with a desire for disembodiment. This desire is portrayed as an illness

precipitated by cultural germs. It is a terminal illness (the negation of desire, after all,

would mean the negation of the self). The nature of the body is machinic; postmodern

subjects are desiring-machines, connected to and coded by one another, producing-

productions of one another, and their reality is dictated by desire.[28] Burroughs' desiring-

machines seek "treatment" in pathology. While it doesn't permit them to transcend

desire, pathology is a way for them to rechannel the flows of desire and redefine the

boundaries of reality. The subject can never cease desiring, nor can it cease to be a

subject. But it can alter its subject-nature. This alteration, this cure, this process of

becoming-pathological is one of the cut-up novels' main objectives.

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[28] Deleuze and Guattari's guiding principle in *Anti-Oedipus* and *1000 Plateaus*. While Burroughs'
desiring- machines function according to this principle, they are oppressed organisms subjugated by
cultural powers whereas Deleuze and Guattari's are liberated organisms, alternatives to the repressed
Freudian subject.

The Reality Film

Victimized by cruel and often sadistic forces, Burroughs' pathological characters exist in fantastical "paraspaces." Scott Bukatman appropriates this term from Samuel R. Delany, who defines it as a "nonspace" without a center that lacks "coordinates and boundaries, combined with a paradoxical depthlessness" (169). For Bukatman, paraspace denotes the milieu of cyberspace, but he recognizes that the construction of paraspaces is not limited to cyberpunk texts. Whereas some of the Burroughs' paraspaces are cyberspatial (principally in *Nova Express*, the most science fiction-oriented of the cut-ups), others are not; they are more analogous to the irreal diegeses of Kafka, Gogol and Borges where the cause and effect schema that presides over the real world ceases to hold water, albeit Burroughs is far more graphic and explicitly paraspatial than these comparatively tame, conservative writers. He makes no bones about breaking the laws of causality.[29] What truly makes his diegeses paraspatial, however, is the language he uses to represent them. Paraspaces are "rhetorically heightened 'other realm[s]' . . . 'in which language is raised to an extraordinarily lyric level'" (157).[30] As I inferred earlier, and as I will enumerate later in a close reading of "Gongs of Violence," a chapter in *The Soft Machine*, Burroughs' lyricism and linguistic prowess is the fundament of his paraspaces, which are dreamlike matrixes where reality, nature and the self have no discernable contours.

To illustrate his paraspaces, Burroughs frequently uses the medium of film. This is an effective tactic in that film, like the soft machine, is a control device. According to Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, "Like radio and television after them, the movies were an

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[29] A familiar example is *Naked Lunch*'s tale of the talking asshole that takes over the body of its master (119-21).

[30] The second intertextual citation of Bukatman's quotation belongs to Delany.

exemplary piece of a cultural environment that interacted, over time, with the social

history of its audience, playing a crucial role as an 'agency of mass impressions' in the

large-scale displacement of people. . . . As an agency of mass impression, movies

became a new electronic presence in the social landscape of everyday life" (82). Today

the film industry is not only a tool of mass impression, but of mass production,

influencing social dynamics and behavior. The cult of the movie star, for instance, is a

major provocateur of desire. It has been since the dawn of film, as Walter Benjamin

realized in the 1930s in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction":

"The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the

unique aura of the person but the 'spell of the personality,' the phony spell of a

commodity" (231).[31] The film industry is one of capitalism's principal enforcers and

executors; its mythologization of the real (and exaltation of idealized representations of

the real) is an earmark of postmodern life. More importantly, film reaffirms the process

of capitalist production. Says Beller:

> If 'cinema' as the process and the sign for the dominant mode of
>
> production does not immediately have the same resonance as 'capital,'
>
> one need only begin to think of cinematic relations as an extension of
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> capitalist relations—the development of culture as a sphere of the
>
> production line. Thus cinema is at once a sign for itself as a

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[31] In *The Postmodern Turn*, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner nicely surmise the relationship between the celebrity, the subject and capitalism in a discussion of Debord's society of the spectacle: "Individuals in the society of the spectacle constitute themselves in terms of celebrity image, look, and style. Media celebrities are the icons and role models, the stuff of dreams whom the dreamers of the spectacle emulate and adulate. But these are precisely the ideals of a consumer society whose models promote the accumulation of capital by defining personality in terms of image, forcing one into the clutches and clichés of the fashion, cosmetic, and style industries" (90).

phenomenon and its processes, as well as a sign for capital as a

phenomenon and its processes. (27)

Film is a symbolic form of capital; it is "consciousness *par excellence* of twentieth

century capitalism" (25), a schizophrenic material practice that mirrors the practice of

the postmodern psyche. Burroughs tries to convey this crisis, expressing the negative

effects of capitalism by actually treating his writing like film/capital.

In one of his later pieces of writing, *Blade Runner* (1979),[32] Burroughs

repeatedly refers to his narrative as a film: "This film is about America . . . This film is

about a city we all know and love . . . This film is about a second chance for Billy the

blade runner, and for all of humanity . . . This film is about the future of medicine and

the future of man" (3, 4, 5, 6). He even subtitles his narrative *A Movie*. Written in the

mid-1970s, *Blade Runner* is a short novella set in a near future where right wing

political activism has incited a medical care apocalypse. By calling his novella a movie,

Burroughs underscores the image-addicted sociocultural state of his near future. This is

one of his favorite themes. For Burroughs, reality is a representation of a prerecorded

fiction, not the other way around. He incorporates film in variety of ways to convey this

message.

The cut-ups are not as self-aware as *Blade Runner*, but filmic qualities are

ubiquitous in all of them except *Naked Lunch*. Unlike the trilogy of novels that followed

it, *Naked Lunch* is primarily concerned with the tribulations of drug addiction and

homosexuality, not with the powers of media technologies. Nevertheless the book

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[32] Ridley Scott appropriated this title for his 1981 film adaptation of Philip K. Dick's novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). *Blade Runner* is a seminal cyberpunk text. Burroughs' presence in it is visible in a number of ways, especially in Scott's presentation of 2022 A.D. Los Angeles as a city entirely dominated (and degraded) by image-culture.

serves as a foundation for the irreal, scatological ethos governing the subsequent trilogy, which cut up and fold in on themselves and "share the metaphoric structures of the 'virus' and the 'film'" (Friedberg 171). There are repeated references to life scripts, mind screens, reality films, sound and image flakes, and The Reality Studio. Paragraphs are constantly fading in and out like scenes in a movie. Mentally imploded schizoids lose the capacity to distinguish between reality and film. Images and photographs come alive in people's flesh. There is a character who is an actual strip of film tape, another has "a vibrating camera gun sewn into [his] fly" (87), another with a "James Dean habit" (27). There is a "sad movie drifting in islands of rubbish" (124), and priests that are "nothing but word and image, an old film rolling on and on with dead actors" (93). In the twelfth chapter of *The Soft Machine*, "1920 Movies," "a black silver sky of broken film" hangs over "a city of black and white movies" (135). One scene depicts a war film shown in slow motion as the audience watching it masturbates in slow motion (79); another scene sees a man learn to think and talk backwards by running a film and sound track in reverse (82). The words *film* and *movie* riddle the cut-ups like bullet holes, exposing the celluloid viscera of a sick, image-plagued social body. In this text, film, in one form or another, lurks in every nook and cranny.[33]

In addition to Burroughs' attentiveness to imagery and his adaptation of the mechanics of filmmaking, his cut-up novels are filmic in that both mediums are montages. Technically film is not linear and does not provide us with a complete view of its imaginary diegesis. On the contrary, film consists of a vast series of shots that, put together in a certain way, form a syntax that gives off the semblance of linearity and

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[33] All of the direct quotations in this paragraph are from *The Soft Machine*.

completeness; and this semblance is obtained only because we are compelled to fill in the gaps of the missing syntax (Wood 222-23). Deleuze explains this process in *Cinema 1* as "instantaneous sections which are called images; and a movement or a time which is impersonal, uniform, abstract, invisible, or imperceptible, which is 'in' the apparatus, and 'with' which the images are made to pass consecutively. Cinema thus gives us false movement" (1). Burroughs' cut-up technique basically operates in these terms. Readers are provided with a sequence of narrative shots that form a certain syntax, although it is a much wilder and more abstruse syntax than the average film. Dashes and ellipses are used to link together random narrative photogrammes in a conceptually linear fashion. Consider the following passage from *The Ticket That Exploded*:

> Movies mix on screen half one half the other—plays in front of movie
> screen synchronized so that horses charge in and out of old Westerns—
> Characters walk in and out of the screen flickering different films on and
> off—Conversations recorded in movies taken during the exhibit appear
> on the screen until all the spectators are involved situations permutating
> and moving—(Since the recorders and movies of the exhibition are in
> constant operation it will be readily seen that any spectator appears on
> the screen sooner or later if not today then yesterday or tomorrow as the
> case may be in some connection—and repeat visitors of course—). (64)

Each fragment is a distinct *mise en scène* in which Burroughs describes a particular event or thing. They have no direct relationship to one another other than the common theme of cinematic manipulation, which is only realized after the fragments are strung

together by dashes and begin to act on and react to each other, forming a "movement-image."[34] This procedure is the narrative equivalent of stringing together celluloid film strips. Additionally, the theme of this particular movement-image calls attention to the theme that dominates the cut-up trilogy: the cinematic manipulation of reality. In Burroughs' universe, the real world not only acts like a film, it has become a filmic diegesis.

This idea was advanced by the writers and thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School. Sharing Marx's theory of historical materialism, the Frankfurt School produced a salient critique of mass culture and media production in twentieth century consumer-capitalist society. T. W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer discuss the cinematization of the real in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*:

> Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound
> film, far surpassing the theater of illusion, leaves no room for
> imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to
> respond within the structure of the film, yet deviate from its precise
> detail without losing the thread of the story; hence the film forces its
> victims to equate it directly with reality. The stunting of the mass-media
> consumer's powers of imagination and spontaneity does not have to be
> traced back to any psychological mechanisms; he must ascribe the loss of
> those attributes to the objective nature of the products themselves,
> especially to the most characteristic of them, the sound film. (126)

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[34] Deleuze argues that the position of actual human perception is a movement-image, equating the production-process of film with the production-process of the psyche and by extension the body and society. Burroughs makes a similar equation, although metaphorically.

According to this logic, film deceives audiences into believing that its diegesis is reality and infringes on creative thinking processes. The real world is perceived as a continuation of film, not as a source from which film is represented and extrapolated. In effect, the real world is confused with a fictional ontological space. Or, as Deleuze says, the real world "becomes its own image."[35] This type of confusion is characteristic of most media and has only become more pronounced since *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was published in 1944, over fifteen years before Burroughs' *The Soft Machine*. Lived experience in the trilogy has not become indistinguishable from the movies. It is a movie.

The premise of Horkheimer and Adorno's neomarxist analysis is that art, namely film, is no longer art, but business, a cog in the capitalist desiring-machine that they refer to as the culture industry.

> The whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture
> industry. The old experience of the movie-goer, who sees the world
> outside as an extension of the film he has just left (because the latter is
> intent upon reproducing the world of everyday perceptions), is now the
> producer's guideline. The more intensely and flawlessly his techniques
> duplicate empirical objects, the easier it is today for the illusion to
> prevail that the outside world is the straightforward continuation of that
> presented on screen. (126)

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[35] "The cinema can, with impunity, bring us close to things or take us away from them and revolve around them, it suppresses both the anchoring of the subject and the horizon of the world. Hence it substitutes an implicit knowledge and a second intentionality for the conditions of natural perception. It is not the same as the other arts, which aim rather at something unreal through the world, but makes the world itself something unreal or a tale. With the cinema, it is the world which becomes its own image, not an image which becomes world" (*Cinema* 56).

Horkheimer and Adorno presage Baudrillard's idea of the hyperreal, a mediatized matrix of implosion where reality cannot be discerned from fantasy and culture has swallowed up nature. Film is a technology and an extension of the human. But in terms of perception, of the way subjects view themselves and their relations to others, the human is a technological extension of film; for Horkheimer and Adorno, authentic reality is increasingly becoming a representation of filmic reality, not the reverse. This is primarily an effect of the development of technocapitalist media and the process of schizophrenic desiring-production. A representative example of the effects of this process is visible in Walker Percy's *The Moviegoer* (1960). Existentialist in tone, the novel depicts a man beset by the monotony and superficiality of everyday capitalist life. In order to compromise the alienation and ennui he feels, he takes refuge in movie theaters, placing a greater importance on the relations between fictional personalities than between real ones. He finds social resonance and stimuli in films, not society itself, which is precisely the sort of "producer's guideline" Horkheimer and Adorno mention: the production of the desire for the culture industry.

Burroughs imparts a similar message, emphasizing how society has been consumed by a filmic ideal that posits fantasy as the dominant ontological space. While Percy's narrative is grounded in realism, however, his is clearly not. One might say that Percy represents social relations whereas Burroughs represents psychic relations. In the cut-ups, society is a studio in which subjects exist as slaves/actors under the thumb of the master/director of capitalism and its Darwinian ideology. "The reality film has now become an instrument and weapon of monopoly. The full weight of the film is directed against anyone who calls the film in question with particular attention to writers and

artists. Work for the reality studio or else. Or else you will find out how it feels to be *outside the film*. I mean literally without film left to get yourself from here to there" (*Ticket* 151). Burroughs is partly being self-referential here. His wildly unconventional, unformulaic, anti-mainstream writing was not well-received by the general public when it was originally published, mainly because of its graphic content and its lack of linearity. Much like an indie film might not use standard Hollywood structures, he did not use normative/commodifiable literary structures. Burroughs uses film to totalize the experience of being subjectified by mass market demands. Failure to mind these demands will result in being thrown out of the reality studio; cut from the "reel," his characters' life scripts will abruptly fade out to black. For them, all the world is literally a stage—or, as Brian McHale suggests, all the world is a film set. "Burroughs makes explicit what can only be inferred from other postmodernist cinematic writing, namely the *thematic* function of the interposed ontological level of the film. Reality in Burroughs is a film shot and directed by others; we are actors in the movie, our lives scripted and fixed on celluloid" (McHale 129).

Fantasy does not serve as a support mechanism for the Burroughsian subject's reality, as it does for actual subjects.[36] It serves as *the* mechanism. Reality is residual, a sideshow at best. The technology of film is used to convey this position. Anne Friedberg says that the cut-ups exploit film as "a metaphor for total control, a 'reality studio' which must be challenged and subverted" (171). Burroughs' response to this exaction, like most of his responses to the sundry Big Brothers that permeate his work, is a call to action, to mutiny: "Storm the Reality Studio. And retake the universe" (*Nova*

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[36] See Slavoj Žižek in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: "fantasy is on the side of reality: it is, as Lacan once said, the support that gives consistency to what we call 'reality'" (44).

59). Such a directive recurs in the cut-ups and often leads to some kind of cataclysm or pathological uproar. These exhibitions of extreme violence are meaningful coordinates on his cognitive map. They are metaphorical representations of society's terminal illness, reflecting the capitalist process of filmmaking and the schizophrenic way human perception has come to function like film. The finest exhibition of this kind occurs in "Gongs of Violence." There are many points of climax on Burroughs' cognitive map. This point is the most acute and revealing of them all.

Gongs of Violence

"Gongs of Violence" is an explosive word salad that satirizes the production powers of the American culture industry. The citizens of America are referred to as citizens of "Gravity" or "Annexia," a paraspace that seeks to convert its subjects into "all out to Heavy Metal. Carbonic Plague of the Vegetable People threatens our Heavy Metal State. Report to your nearest Plating Station. It's fun to be plated" (159). Burroughs' disdain for passivity, conformity, homogenization and so-called moral superiority is conspicuously Nietzschean. He denounces the herd mentality in favor of stark individualism and creative self-expression, and he views social behavior and relations as pathologically performative. Annexia connotes anorexia, equating the "American people" with a body that is unhealthy, weak, listless and addicted to its own decline; Gravity connotes the idea that one is weighed down, inert, unable to fly and exist as an overman (instead of an everyman).

Like Nietzsche, Burroughs moralizes with a hammer, challenging normative conventions and calling out the constructedness of the human condition. At the same

time, their means and ends differ—one writes in the name of transcendence, the other in the name of symptomatology. An enemy of Christianity and Platonic philosophy, Nietzsche located agency from social determinism in aesthetic innovation. In the clutches of the culture industry, only the will of the artist can establish the self, and to do this the artist must suffer as a fleshly and metaphorical social body. Suffering is the gateway to individuation; in order to obtain selfhood, it is a prerequisite that the subject undergo adversity and actively extend itself artistically. The Nietzschean *übermensch* is essentially nothing more than a productive "starving artist," dejected and miserable yet capable and free. In contrast, the Burroughsian subject is not an agential being. It is an affectation, a symptom of the culture industry that does not achieve freedom in artistry. All Burroughsian subjects are artists (namely actors) by cultural default. The problem is that the subject/artist is not an innovator, but a banality, a carbon cutout, a Hollywood cliché. The possibility of artistic individuation is stifled by the mass commodification of culture, which disavows the self. If there is agency in Burroughs, it is the illusion of agency. In short, Nietzsche brazenly repudiates the constructedness of the self, advocating transcendence; Burroughs, in turn, satirizes constructedness, implicitly repudiating it but understanding that transcendence is an impossibility.

Thus Burroughs' represents the world as a film and subjects as actors who have all been allotted the same role and don't realize it. "Now the way I see it is this: *America stands for doing the job* and that's what's wrong with America today . . half-assed assassins . . half-assed writers . . half-assed plumbers . . a million actors . . one corny part . . So we write a darned good part for every actor on the American set . . You gotta see the scene as a *show*" (*Ticket* 123). He compares the experience of being a

capitalist with being an actor on a set, both of which require performativity and are distinguished by routines. He acknowledges society's "real unreality"[37] and commands subjects to perceive it that way so as to actively play it like a game. There is no outside to the "scene as a show," and everybody must play their respective parts. The only possibility for individuation is landing a unique role. Even so, a part is still being played, and it has still been written by a higher power. In the end there is only pathological play. Burroughs portrays capitalist society as schizophrenic and portrays subjects who willfully behave like the schizophrenics they have been conditioned to be. To storm the reality studio and retake the universe is not to overthrow the "producers" of the (un)real and reclaim the self. It is merely to dynamically realize the self as a production of technocapitalist media.

This idea is most noticeable in "Gongs of Violence" in the segment where Burroughs paints a picture of the ominous Slotless City. Jenny Skerl describes it as follows:

> This narrative portrays science-fiction methods of reproduction in a society in which men and women are at war, leading to the creation of fantastic new life forms fighting with each other for existence, and ending with the destruction of all life on earth. The final apocalypse is conveyed in ambiguous cut-up imagery. It is unclear whether the destruction is positive or negative, a victory for the Mob or for the Police, for the disintegration of present reality structures is a form of liberation from control. (68)

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[37] Guy Debord's term for the society of the spectacle (13).

The use of cut-up imagery in this sequence is doubly resonant. Both the filmic nature of Slotless City is emphasized as well as the city's fragmented, dreamlike, ultraviolent code of conduct. "It is unclear whether the destruction is positive or negative" and whether good or evil prevails because the pathological operations of Slotless City, while produced by the laws of causality and moral order that govern the real world, are not necessarily subject to them. It is a place beyond good and evil where the ethical structure of mediatized society explodes, discharging a colorful array of angry desiring-machines. "We are vehement in our desires, there are times when we would like to devour each other—But the 'sense of community' masters us" (Nietzsche 160). A landscape without slots, without constructedness and the imperial codings of late capitalism (yet produced/performed by these things), Slotless City is Burroughs' figurative version of what happens when a sense of community breaks down and we devour one another, each of us playing our individual schiz-roles:

> Have you seen Slotless City? Red mesas cut by time winds—A network of bridges, ladders, catwalks, cable cars, escalators and ferris wheels down into the blue depths . . . constant motion on tracks, gates click open shut—buzzes, blue sparks, and constant breakage— (Whole squares and tiers of the city plunge into the bottomless void)—Swinging beams of construction . . . People rain on the city in homemade gliders and rockets . . . Fights erupt like sandstorms, through iron streets a wake of shattered bodies, heads bouncing into the void, hands clutching bank notes from gambling fights—Priests shriek for human sacrifices, gather partisans to initiate unspeakable rites until they are destroyed by counter pressures—

Vigilantes of every purpose hang anyone they can overpower— Workers attack the passer-by with torches and air hammers—They reach up out of manholes and drag the walkers down with iron claws—Rioters of all nations storm the city in a landslide of flame-throwers and Molotov cocktails—Sentries posted everywhere in towers open fire on the crowds at arbitrary intervals . . . The city pulses with slotless purpose lunatics killing from behind the wall of glass—A moment's hesitation brings a swarm of con men, guides, whores, mooches, script writers, runners, fixers cruising and snapping like aroused sharks—" (154-55)

In this copious microcosmic view of the terrain that he is cognitively mapping, Burroughs uses purely descriptive language. There is no exposition to clarify or justify the absurd, eschatological spectacle. It begins with a portrait of Slotless City's "physical" framework, a sort of demonic amusement park that perpetually reproduces itself and all of the subjects it contains. There is "constant motion," "constant breakage," "swinging beams of construction." Power is not localized to select social sectors, peoples or classes; it resonates everywhere, unrepressed and without restraint. People from all walks of life wreak otherworldly havoc, destroying the city and killing one another with a creative flair and resolve. The play enacted here is pathologically performative, graphic and brutal to the degree that it conveys both a sense of primordial terror and absurdist comedy. The "gongs of violence" that Burroughs is sounding off here and elsewhere in the cut-ups is a cartoon, a wild *cirque de soleil* that seeks to override the late capitalist system of power dominating and inflicting its morality upon the American social body. Such conduct is the cure for (psycho)society I referred to

earlier whereby subjects become their disease, which is to say they become conscious, functional and ultimately hostile schizophrenics.

"Gongs of violence and how—Show you something—Berserk machine" (159). These fragments could serve as an epigram to Burroughs' cognitive map. Not only can we read the gongs of violence as a signifier for the way the Burroughsian subject playfully becomes its own terminal illness, we can read them as a signifier for the culture industry, the vehicle responsible for pathologizing the subject. The gongs of violence, in other words, are the sound of subjects playing at being pathological as much as they are the sound of the machine that is prompting them to do so. Furthermore, they refer to the syntactic montage of Burroughs' cut-ups, the violent, schizophrenic aesthetic he uses to illustrate a violent, schizophrenic social matrix; and by extension they refer to how film as montage is an incarnation of the collective postmodern consciousness, a fusion of "the protocols of [media] representation and capitalist production" (Beller 5).

There are poststructuralist undertones to Burroughs' cognitive map, especially in scenes like "Slotless City." Binaries such as inside/outside, nature/culture, reality/fantasy and self/other appear to be involved in the process of being deconstructed and brought into play. But this is not the case. There are no binaries to deconstruct, and Burroughs' play is not Derridean. His diegesis is constituted by singularities that are the marginalized halves of the aforementioned binaries. There is no outside: the inside is the only ontological and ideological space (or the inside is the outside and vice versa). Nature and reality no longer exist: they have been altogether assimilated by culture and fantasy. And the self is only a self as a result of being produced as an other by culture. This other is a technological being. It is a perversion of the human plugged into and

machined by the late capitalist system, and its play involves the realization and exploitation of its otherness, which is "capable of being represented finally only as a fractal entity" (Kroker v).

Similar to the cyberpunk panic narratives of the 1980s that are indebted to Burroughs, the cut-ups are deeply invested in representing the schizophrenizing technologies of multinational capitalism, invoking a "rhetoric of technology to express the natural world in a metaphor that blurs the distinctions between the organic and artificial" (Hollinger 205). What differentiates Burroughs from his successors is that his panic narratives don't simply blur the organic and artificial. Rather, they assume that the organic has been negated and that artificiality is the rule of thumb. We might say that they are beyond implosion and depict a kind of postcapitalist space. To a degree, they are temporal anomalies, futuristic narratives not only about the future, but *of* the future, mapping out a social, ontological, linguistic and narrative space that is the devolutionary by-product of terminal civilization.

CHAPTER 3

How a Discount Store Employee Defeats an Army of the Evil Dead: Schizoanalysis and Sam Raimi's *Army of Darkness*

Capitalism and Schizophrenia

Jacques Lacan argues that love is a process involving an imaginary relationship. The emotional exchange between two lovers is a fantasy in which each lover attempts to capture his or her self in the other. It is a narcissistic "passive desire to be loved" that is achieved by unconsciously seeking out an idealized image of oneself in the beloved, who serves the lover as a medium for objectification (335). To love then is to project an ego-ideal onto another body and reify the self as image. The crucial thing in love is the aim, the means, the process of reifying oneself as image, not the culmination of the process. If it were to culminate it would cease to be love.

Deleuze and Guattari do well to equate this definition of love with schizophrenia in *Anti-Oedipus*, arguing that schizophrenia is the normative condition of the late capitalist subject. "Schizophrenia is like love: there is no specifically schizophrenic phenomenon or entity; schizophrenia is the universe of productive and reproductive desiring-machines, universal primary production as 'the essential reality of man and nature'" (5). As with love, what matters in the schizoid universe of capital is not a consummation but a process—the process of commodification and "sociodesiring-production." Late capitalist society is dependent upon the media for its existence. Media imagery produces an imploded sense of social un/reality in a way similar to how lovers relate (themselves) to their lovers. Postmodern subjects are compelled to engage in an imaginary relationship with the "essential reality of man and nature," a reality that

is created and supported by technology. The "natural" has become the technological. The terminal "extensions of man"[38] that comprise our physical and social space (and retroactively our mental space) are the defining characteristics of the human, not some innate, organic gestalt. To be human is above all to be a productive capitalist, a mediatized technocrat governed by "the dementia of the capitalist machine and the pathological character of its rationality" (Guattari 53).

Unlike their arch-enemy Freud, Deleuze and Guattari do not merely speculate about whether or not civilization is pathological. They assume it is, building their "schizosophy" on the foundation of madness.[39] For them, it is not a question of one being mad; it is a question of intensities, of the degree to which one is mad. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. "Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough" (*Anti-Oedipus* 131). Not a breakthrough to a transcendental self, but possibly to a new subject-position, a different state of desiring-production. Such a breakthrough can be misperceived as a breakout from the desiring-machine of capitalism, which has no boundaries or walls—it is the one and only postmodern space and thus cannot be escaped. I showed how this is the case in Burroughs' cut-up novels where fantasy is "staged" as a normative diegesis, pathology as a normative condition. Here I want to focus on the plight of the subject itself, as I did in my first chapter, through a reading of Sam Raimi's multigeneric science fiction/horror/comedy, *Army of Darkness* (1993), the third and final film in the *Evil Dead* trilogy. Unlike the focal

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[38] As noted in my first chapter, this is Marshall McLuhan's locution for how technology is a projected representation of the body's nervous system that both liberates and subjugates the human.

[39] "There is no danger of this machine going mad, it has been mad from the beginning and that's where its rationality comes from" (*Chaosophy* 53).

character in *Vanilla Sky*, a wealthy New York City dandy, this focal character is a cashier and housewares' clerk at an unknown Midwest American discount store. Although they come from different socioeconomic worlds, "capitalism and schizophrenia" does not acknowledge that difference. Their crises and experiences are vastly dissimilar, but in the end their subject-positions are the same.

Although it is over ten years old, *Army of Darkness* has garnered little attention from academic critics; the wildly juvenile antics, slapstick routines and cartoon ultraviolence make it difficult to take the film seriously. But beyond all of the absurdity lurks a salient critique of advanced capitalism and its pathological effects. The protagonist goes by the one word name Ash. A simple and ordinary man, he is sent back in time to the medieval era by a demonic presence he encounters in a remote cabin in the northern American woods. He is taken in by a group of medievalites ruled by King Arthur. Initially he is enslaved, mistaken as a spy for a rival kingdom, but once he redefines himself by the use of certain futuristic technologies (e.g. the shotgun and chainsaw that were sent back with him), he is deified by the medievalites; they believe he is a messiah sent to free them from the "deadite" zombies that terrorize their community. The enslaved becomes the savior, and Ash leads an army of medievalites to war against an army of deadites who are led by Ash's undead doppelgänger. In the end, "bad" Ash is defeated and "good" Ash emerges as a stereotypical hero. My reading of the film treats it as a pathological wish-fulfillment invoked by the powers of late capitalism in which the war can be interpreted in three ways: human in opposition to inhuman, Ash in opposition to self (as pathologized by late capitalism), and Ash in opposition to capitalism (as the machine that perpetuates a society of the figuratively

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undead). Ash's journey back in time is a fantasy, a schizophrenic delusion of grandeur exposing his "machinic unconscious." In the objective capitalist world, he is a cog; in his subjective dream world, he is a king. And yet he is only a king by dint of his technological savvy and the consumer-capitalist ethic that codes his desires and inscribes his identity onto the social fabric. While his schizoid fantasy may seem agential, it only reifies his status as a common postmodern subject. My reading of *Army of Darkness* also treats it as a critique of Deleuze and Guattari's theory. I argue that the violence of the film is an allegory for the theoretical violence they employ in their work on schizophrenia and capitalism, namely *Anti-Oedipus* and its sequel *A Thousand Plateaus*, which they claim to be fraught with revolutionary potential. The film suggests that this potential is limited to being realized by purely violent measures that are accomplished at the expense of truth. In this sense, Deleuze and Guattari, while certainly innovative and stylish, are not as revolutionary as they are subject to the very system of oppression they seek to revolutionize and subvert.

Postmodern Slavery

In the Wachowski Brother's *The Matrix* (1999), Morpheus reveals the "truth" about "reality" to Neo. "You're a slave, Neo. Like everyone else, you were born into bondage, kept inside a prison that you cannot smell, taste, or touch. A prison for your mind." The prison is a simulation created by sentient machines who were themselves created by humans. It is a cybernetic paraspace in which subjects unknowingly exist as digital, disembodied selves while their dormant bodies are farmed for the bioelectricity they generate. The real world is a dark, apocalyptic wasteland and capitalism no longer

exists in it. But capitalism is the socioeconomic motor of the illusory matrix that the machines preside over, a motor that is essential to the simulation's functionality (originally the machines created a non-capitalist utopia but human nature rejected it). There is an elementary Hegelian relationship between the two parties. The machines need the humans for their bioelectricity, the humans need the machines for their (ir)reality, and each community's selfhood is established by the mediation of this co-dependent relationship. In terms of class, the machines represent corporate powers whereas the humans represent a postmodern middle class of laborers whose machinic production of commodities is the musculature of those corporate powers.[40] The humans are technologies, extensions of the machines that sustain their lives. Concurrently the machines are extensions of the humans, artificial intelligences created for the purpose of quickening capitalistic production who turn against their makers and recreate them as producing-machines. Both parties are excrescences of one another, and both are fluid technologies that need yet detest one another. This is the ontological nature of postmodern slavery: the terminal dependence upon and surrender to the Other that is capitalist technology—an Other that, as an extension of the human, is also the self.

There are also metaphysical and ideological fundaments of postmodern slavery. They can be traced back to Nietzsche and the hermeneutic of suspicion he used to undermine traditional concepts of morality, truth and freedom. Nietzsche's slavemaster is Christianity, which he portrays as a desiring-machine whose end is to brainwash humanity and liquidate the self by promulgating illusory senses of good and evil and

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[40] This is especially visible in the programs that hunt down renegade humans. Agent Smith is the paradigm. His meticulous FBI-like attire, stony mannerisms and tone of voice, and diehard will to power reflect that of the stereotypical corporate figurehead.

free will. Postmodernity's slavemaster is late capitalism, which has replaced

Christianity in the Nietzschean scheme of things. A potent desiring-machine, capitalism

uses media technologies to construct a specific (im)morality and (ir)reality, to code

desire and the body according to a consumerist ideal, and to convey the idea that

freedom of choice exists.[41] This latter component is the crux of postmodern slavery. In

earlier stages of capitalism, class divisions and power relations were much more distinct;

a wide gap divided corporate masters from working class slaves. That gap has

considerably narrowed in the late capitalist era as the social hierarchy has been

homogenized into a giant, variable middle class ruled not by a higher class but by the the

system itself, which is served ready-made with its own precoded symbolic order and set

of values and beliefs. Deleuze and Guattari say that "from the viewpoint of the capitalist

axiomatic there is only one class, a class with a universalist vocation, the bourgeosie"

(*Anti-Oedipus* 253). Established by a principle of immanence, the effect of this

categorical meltdown is a collapse of the traditional master-slave relationship in which

the identity of the one is assimilated by the other.

> But the bourgeois field of immanence . . . institutes an unrivaled slavery,
>
> an unprecedented subjugation: there are no longer even any masters, but
>
> only slaves commanding other slaves; there is no longer any need to
>
> burden the animal from the outside, it shoulders its own burden. Not that
>
> man is ever the slave of technical machines; he is rather the slave of the
>
> social machine. (254)

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[41] Guattari writes, "Of course, capitalism was and remains a formidable desiring-machine. The monetary flux, the means of production, of manpower, of new markets, all that is the flow of desire" (63).

The system thus prescribes subjectivity as subjugated, and any attempt to achieve

agency from it merely increases the intensity of one's subjugation. In *The Matrix*

Revolutions, even Agent Smith, the quintessence of the technological being, cannot "get

free."[42] The closest he can come to it is by becoming every single subject/slave in the

matrix, a feat that culminates in his destruction. In the postmodern world, freedom is an

intricate mythology that penetrates and produces the subject as slave on multiple levels,

rendering the will to power an avowal of powerlessness.

This dynamic is played out in *Army of Darkness* from the beginning. In the

film's opening line of dialogue, the protagonist tells us who and what he is: "My name is

Ash, and I am a slave." His confession of identity can be read in literal and figurative

terms. Literally Ash has been captured by King Arthur and his subjects, who find him in

the desert after he is hurled back in time by the "evil dead." The rival kingdom he is

believed to be allied with is ruled by Duke Henry, a longstanding enemy of Arthur.

When we meet him, Ash is being escorted in chains back to Arthur's kingdom to be

judged. His body belongs to the medievalites and the historical present he now lives in.

But his body also belongs to the future present from which he came in terms of his

subject-position. A flashback shows us what Ash's "life script"[43] used to entail: mild-

mannered and somewhat moronic, he works at S-Mart in the housewares department.

His everyday routine mainly consists of stamping price tags onto merchandise, ringing

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[42] Smith expresses this desire for agency in *The Matrix* while interrogating Morpheus, equating the matrix with a prison: "I hate this place, this zoo, this prison, whatever you want to call it; I can't stand it any longer. . . . I must get out of here. I must get free." Morpheus does likewise earlier in the film, calling the matrix a "prison for your mind." He and Smith represent the binary machine/human in which machine is the dominant half and human is the marginalized. But both are equally subject to and subjected by the technology of the matrix.

[43] A term William S. Burroughs uses in *The Soft Machine* to convey the lived experience of the postmodern subject who is constructed as a pathologically performative organism by media technologies.

up customers and repeatedly urging them to "Shop smart, shop S-Mart." Equating intelligence with consumerism as an advertising artifice, the mantra denotes Ash's status as an automaton, a machine that is always-already processing and echoing a language of "intelligence/ consumerism." His pale blue attire, a uniform worn by all of S-Mart's employees, is as blasé and ordinary as his vernacular. Ash lacks a sense of individualism and purpose, yet he is not consciously aware of it. Unconsciously, however, he qualifies himself as a residual body. Hence the significance of his name, Ash, a byproduct, an exhausted remainder, the useless residue of the fires of the consumer-capitalist machine, which harnesses his "bioelectricity" and uses his body to maintain its functionality. Stating his name in the opening of the film is as much an affirmation of being enslaved as actually calling himself a slave: his name and identity reflect his selfhood and subject-position. Ash is in bondage on two existential planes. His medieval enslavement is a metaphor for his enslavement by the technology of late capitalism. Despite his temporal displacement, he is a conventional postmodern subject.

By my reading, however, his temporal displacement is psychological. He is a schizophrenic breakdown that reinforces his status as a conventional postmodern subject. To use the language of Deleuze and Guattari, his experience in the past is an unconscious effort to deterritorialize himself, to become a "decoded flow," to capture the BwO (Body without Organs). "As for the schizo, continually wandering about, migrating here, there, and everywhere as best he can, he plunges further and further into the realm of deterritorialization, reaching the furthest limits of the decomposition of the socius on the surface of his own body without organs" (*Anti-Oedipus* 35). Ash metaphorically enacts the nomadic way of the schizo by traveling back in time where he

hen traverses a vast desert and forest to retrieve a sacred book (the Necronomicon) containing passages that, read aloud, will both send him home and save King Arthur's kingdom from the deadites. He journies through his own heart of darkness and "plunges further and further into the realm of deterritorialization" in an attempt to manifest the BwO.

Such a manifestation is unrealizable. Deleuze and Guattari point out in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit" (150). Like Lacanian love, the important thing is the process of attaining the BwO, of moving towards it, of setting desire in motion. Ash illustrates this process in order to negate the socius that has been inscribed on the surface of his body, which is to say his subject-position as surface. In reference to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the BwO,[44] Scott Bukatman explains, "The Body without Organs is the state in which we aspire to dissolve the body and regain the world. So the contemporary drama of the subject, *terminal flesh*, is played out upon the *surface* of the body—'depth' is an illusion that belongs to a passing moment of a particular subjectivity" (328). Ash wears his heart of darkness on the outside of his body. He does not endeavor to manifest the BwO in himself, but rather *on* himself. He is produced by the capitalist desiring-machine as a coded flow whose surface-movement is restricted, limited, cut off. His movement towards the BwO—a state Deleuze & Guattari would

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[44] Deleuze and Guattari themselves adopted the concept of the BwO from Georges Battaille, rewriting his "anthropological/psychoanalytic discourse of excess and transgression . . . within the terms of a technological—even electronic—culture" (Bukatman 325).

call his "becoming-thingness"[45]—is an unconscious struggle to decode himself, "to dissolve the body and regain the world." If there is a master in the late capitalist system (other than the system itself), it is the coded body.

As Ash's repeated articulation of his S-Mart mantra indicates, the code that speaks his selfhood is most visible in his own manner of speech. Even when he finds himself trapped in a precapitalist, preindustrial era, he cannot escape being spoken by the postmodern commoditocracy. His articulation of the mantra to the medievalites is particularly revealing. It takes place shortly after he is brought back to the castle. The Arthurian knights have just returned from a battle with Duke Henry and his men, many of which they have captured, including Duke Henry himself. All of them are quickly sentenced to death. So is Ash, despite his protest that he "never even saw these assholes before!" He is thrown into a dungeon-like pit, attacked by zombies, and imperiled by two collapsing walls of iron spikes. With the help of his chainsaw he is able to survive and climb out of the pit. The medievalites take him for a god, especially when he blows Arthur's sword in half with a shotgun. This monologue follows:

> Alright you primitive screwheads, listen up. This—is my boom stick!
> It's a 12-gauge remington, S-Mart's top of the line. You can find this in
> the sporting goods department. That's right, this sweet baby was made
> in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Retails for about $199.95. It's got a walnut
> stock, cobalt blue steel, and a hair trigger. That's right, shop smart, Shop
> S-Mart. You got that!

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[45] The becoming-thing is most notably explicated in *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. This short book redefines and empowers Kafka's writing technique by schizoanalyzing it as an agential process rather than a fixed, Oedipalized terminus.

During the monologue, the medievalites stare at Ash in blank-faced confusion, not knowing how to respond, let alone what he means. Not only have they never seen a gun before, they of course have no concept of commodity production and distribution. Virtually every word Ash communicates to them is foreign; the gun specs, the retail price, the store he is plugging— socially and ideologically, the medievalites are incapable of processing the capitalist lingo used to convey these things. The only thing they do understand is "boom stick," which, in Ash's view, is part of their "primitive" lingo and thus the one utterance that they will process and react to. Nonetheless he continues to communicate information about the gun, residual information that in this context has neither purpose nor meaning. This linguistic residue reflects the residue that is Ash's selfhood. Overcoded by the language of consumer-capitalism, his body is "a power grid, tattooed with all the signs of cultural excess on its surface, encoded from within by the language of desire" (Cook 26). Above all, the monologue is absurd and intended to be comedic on a surface level. But beneath the surface is a commentary on the degree to which Ash, a representative everyman, is consciously and unconsciously territorialized as a desiring-machine. Moreover, the ridiculous nature of his dialogue, of his idiotic failure to treat the medievalites solely as non-capitalist subjects and ignore the code that tells him to do otherwise, alludes to the dreamlike quality of the film and the possibility that what we are seeing is in fact an agential fantasy formulated by Ash. In the beginning, the fantasy merely represents his status as a postmodern slave. But its unfolding sees Ash break his chains and become a hero and idol, a transformation he enacts by exorcizing his coded, "bad" self and literally going to battle with it.

The Doppelgänger

The schizophrenizing powers of technocapitalist media have led to the popularization of filmic and narrative representations of the doppelgänger that function as socioeconomic analyses and critiques. Deployed as the split, fragmented self, the German term for "double" has established a special resonance in postmodernity. Outside of the science fiction genre, the doppelgänger is often a product of image-addiction and a disillusionment with the superficiality of contemporary culture and subjectivity, as is the case in *American Psycho* and *Fight Club* (the books and the films) and practically every David Lynch film.[46] Within the science fiction genre, it is often a product of capitalist virtual and cybernetic technologies, as is the case in *The Matrix* trilogy, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), and many of Philip K. Dick stories and novels.[47] Not so in *Army of Darkness*. The highest technologies in this film are Ash's shotgun, chainsaw and car. Here the doppelgänger is a late capitalist formation brought into being by way of Ash's unconscious will to overpower his constructedness. I read his doppelgänger as a metaphorical illness à la Burroughs invoked by the pathology of terminal culture. It takes the form of a zombie who calls itself "bad" Ash and is born from the physical body of Ash himself. It is a break-flow, a fragmented body spawned by a fragmented body, the schizogenetic residue of a residue. In an attempt to "get free," Ash confronts the dark half of his broken self, a representation of *Ash as affectation*. Only by defeating his "bad," constructed self does he move towards a revision of his subject-position.

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[46] Most notable is *Mulholland Drive* (2001) in which a prototypical young/naive Midwestern girl goes to Hollywood intent on becoming rich and famous and ends up indigent, unknown and schized.

[47] Among the more representative Phildickian novels that feature the doppelgänger are *Ubik* (1969), *A Scanner Darkly* (1977), the *Valis* trilogy (1981-82), and the posthumously published *Radio Free Albemuth* (1985). Not surprisingly, Dick was a schizophrenic who experienced various hallucinatory "doublings" throughout his life (see Lawrence Sutin's *Divine Invasions: A Life of Philip K. Dick*).

Ironically, he defeats his "bad" self with his "good" self, who is also a construction, his identity produced by and dependent upon the existence/antagonism of his Other, and vice versa. In the end, his subject-position, while it moves (in an act of deterritorialization), is not revised—it lingers on the same ontological plane as always(-already). Right now I want to recount how this doubling takes place and explain its implications.

Ash's doppelgänger begins to form on his way to retrieve the Necronomicon when he takes refuge in a windmill that alludes to Cervantes' *Don Quioxote* (1605).[48] There is a mirror in the windmill. Ash looks in it, and his reflection moves of its own volition: it turns up its chin and evil-eyes him. He dashes towards and smashes the mirror. He picks up one of the fragments and looks in it. This time his image behaves, its movements corresponding with his own. Ash tosses the fragment onto the floor and it shatters into smaller fragments, each of which reflect a miniature version of his full body. When Ash turns his back on the fragments, the images in them freeze and then leap out, scurrying across the floor like excited mice. The miniatures collectively assault Ash, prodding him with a fork, shooting him with his shotgun, and finally tricking him into stepping on a nail. Ash slips, falls flat on his back and is knocked unconscious. Later he awakens and thinks the fight was a dream, but when he tries to stand up he realizes it wasn't: the miniatures have tied him to the floor in a way that recalls the

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[48] I am referring to the scene in which Don Quixote ridiculously believes a group of windmills is a battalion of giants and engages in combat with them. Ash and Don Quixote's characters are very similar: both are absurd, tragicomic heroes that exhibit a phantasmagoric, overinflated sense of purpose and selfhood. Whereas Don Quixote's fight with the windmills (which is ultimately a fight with his psychotic self) occurs on the outside, Ash's occurs on the inside, in the body of the windmill, where he contends with the miniature, mirror-image Ashes that constitute his schizoid self.

Lilliputians' treatment of the hero of *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).[49] Two of the miniatures

pry open Ash's mouth while another dives off a rafter beam into it. Gurgling and

choking, Ash breaks free of his confines and stumbles to his feet. He tries to scald the

miniature he has ingested by drinking a tea kettle full of hot water—as with most scenes

in *Army of Darkness*, suspension of disbelief is mandatory here—but he only succeeds

in prompting it to literally break out of him. He feels an itch on his shoulder, tears open

his shirt. Lodged in his flesh is a bulging eyeball that seems to be pushing its way out.

Hysterical, he dashes out of the windmill, exclaiming, "It's getting bigger!" He staggers

and reels in a mad panic as the miniature enlarges and grows out of him. At last it

breaks free—an exact replica of Ash in appearance and stature. "I'm bad Ash," it says,

"and you're good Ash. You're goody little two-shoes Ash." Ash stares in disbelief at

his "bad" self as it repeatedly punches him. He quickly sobers up, blasts it with his

shotgun, dismembers the corpse with his chainsaw, buries the body parts, and continues

on his journey for the Necronomicon. Eventually he finds the book, but he fails to

remember the entire sequence of words he must recite aloud in order to retrieve it

without awaking an army of the dead. He takes the book anyway and flees back to

Arthur's castle, and the dead rise from their graves. Foremost among them is "bad" Ash

whose body parts leap out of the ground and stitch themselves together into the hideous,

deformed monster that leads the deadites back to Arthur's castle to retrieve the

Necronomicon.

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[49] This reference to *Gulliver's Travels* seems more explicit than the reference to *Don Quixote*. Ash is like Gulliver, too, in terms of the absurdities he experiences and the pragmatic ways (e.g. scientific application) he reacts to and negotiates them.

Initially it is tempting to read Ash's experience in the windmill through the lens of the Lacanian mirror stage in which the child establishes its originary subject-position, recognizing its image in the mirror, identifying its station in reality (based on its image's station in fantasy), and ultimately delimiting a self/other binary. Ash is a metaphorical child, after all, or at least a sleeper; and *Army of Darkness* is the story of his birth/ awakening, of identifying himself and fighting to establish a new subject-position. Lacanian theory, however, is not a suitable means of reading Ash considering what happens after he looks in the mirror. Lacan writes: "The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic" (4). Ash does not become an orthopaedic being. He becomes the opposite. He enters the windmill as a totality and leaves as a fragmented (and fluid) body-image—a quintessential Deleuzoguattarian subject. Not a neo-Freudian territorialized totality, but a deterritorialized multiplicity capable of flowing across the "glacial reality" that is the BwO "where the alluvions, sedimentations, coagulations, foldings, and recoilings that compose an organism—and also a signification and a subject—occur" (*A Thousand* 159).[50]

Dismantled, his doppelgänger freed, Ash is now in a position to produce something. What will he produce? Not his selfhood; one's selfhood, while not

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[50] Ash's anti-Oedipal subjectivity is further substantiated by the utter lack of a father or mother figure. His parents and family are neither mentioned nor alluded to in the film, and no character, save Ash himself, adopts or exhibits a distinct parental role. There is no Daddy-Mommy dynamic available to pigeonhole him as a static, fixed, repressed subject. He is presented as a fluid desiring-machine on the surface of the BwO, "scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person . . . running like a lunatic: desert traveler and nomad of the steppes" (*A Thousand* 150).

necessarily fixed, is always a post-production inasmuch as a new selfhood can only be created in lieu of another one. But now Ash can labor to negotiate his selfhood, if only temporarily: his labor is an act of deterritorialization that inevitably culminates in a reterritorialization accomplished in his climactic defeat and annihilation of "bad" Ash. Only "good" Ash remains, the heroic segment of his fragmented mind and body. He returns to the late twentieth century present (a return to consciousness, according to my reading) and his job at S-Mart by means of a magical passage in the Necronomicon. He must also recite the words he failed to recall when he originally retrieved the book. Once again, he can't remember them in their entirety, and so he opens the gateway for another manifestation of his doppelgänger. A second battle/deterritorialization and defeat/reterritorialization takes place, among other things. This final scene problematizes the theoretical texture of the film and will be deliberated in the last section of this chapter. For now, I want to emphasize how Ash is like capitalism itself, continually "reterritorializing with one hand what it was deterritorializing with the other" (*Anti-Oedipus* 259). He is an extreme case of late capitalist economy and technology, an operative schizo who decodes himself to the limit (Guattari 73).

Ash's failure to articulate the keywords to his salvation is indicative of his character. The keywords are "Klaatu Barada Nikto," an allusion to *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). In this classic science fiction film, an alien emissary travels to earth on a mission to warn humans not to disseminate their violent technologies into space. Accompanied by a robot named Gort, the alien calls himself Klaatu. He is wounded before he can give his warning, pursued, and eventually killed. The words "Klaatu Barada Nikto" are used to resurrect him, albeit not permanently, only long enough for

him to deliver his warning: if humans "threaten to extend [their] violence, this Earth . . . will be reduced to a burnt-out cinder" by the robots, the true masters of the universe. The film foreshadows the machinic apocalypse of *The Matrix* trilogy, and the parallel with Klaatu and Christ is forthright (as it is with Neo). The same can be said for Ash. While he is not killed and resurrected, he is the savior of the medievalites, "the one" who quests for the grail-like book that has the power to destroy the tyranny of the deadites forever. Both Klaatu and Ash use the words in an attempt to save humanity. Unlike Klaatu, however, Ash is a buffoon, a mediatized body spoken by the arid, "S-mart" language of consumer-capitalist society. The words not only confuse him, they don't concern him. He has particular difficulty remembering the final word, "Nikto," which he finally utters in the form of an incomprehensible cough, thinking it will suffice. It doesn't, of course. The deadites are awakened, his doppelgänger exhumed.

Like the monologue concerning his shotgun, Ash's cough is intended to be funny and evoke a sense of idiotic enjoyment in his idiotic antics. But it serves as a badge for the way he has been territorialized by the capitalist machine to speak and perceive only the language of the machine. Moreover, the idiotic enjoyment audiences experience calls attention to the (pop) cultural idiocy that affects both Ash and postmodern subjects in general. "The diminishment of human consciousness that emanate[s] from pop culture" is blatantly immanent in Ash (Geyh xvii), who in this capacity is a metaphor for the social machine of capitalism itself. Language here materializes in the vein of Burroughs—"language as a system, as code, as an already received structure against which we all struggle" (Porush 100)—and Ash's struggle against the system/code emerges from the molecularization of his molar, machinic unconscious, from the

breakage of "bad" Ash and the army of deadites connected to him, all of whom are productions of "good" Ash's constructedness.

Paradoxically, this constructedness allows Ash to enact a deterritorialization. Had the keywords resonated with him, neither his doppelgänger nor the deadites would have reanimated and he would have retrieved the Necronomicon without a hitch. Thus his "diminished consciousness" inhibits him yet at the same time empowers and enables him. His salvation is dependent upon his mechanization. In order to redirect the flows of his desire, he must unleash and disperse the "bad" and fight it with the "good" on the battlefield of the BwO. These terms are of course spurious (hence the quotations marks). It is only Ash's unconscious that perceives the dismantled half of himself as bad. In his diegetic reality, "bad" Ash is the hardworking S-Mart employee who constitutes Ash's jejune, dehumanized exterior. "Good" Ash, on the other hand, is the dynamic, creative, passionate entity who has been repressed by sociocultural forces—repressed because he is actually the "bad" one for not being a productive capitalist subject, whereas "bad" Ash, in being productive, is actually the "good" one. This connotes that, in the late capitalist arena, to be good is to be a labor-intensive automaton, and the less emotional an automaton one is, the better. It is fitting then that his doppelgänger is represented in the film as a zombie.

The Metaphor of the Zombie

Army of Darkness alludes to and plays on a number of texts and tropes from different genres. Most noticeable is its similarity to Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). Like the film, the novel is multigeneric, comprising elements of

fantasy, science fiction, comedy, and the "international novel." Allison Ensor describes

the international novel as "a confrontation between an American and the older culture of

Europe" (Twain ix), a style that the stiff upper-lipped Henry James mastered. Raimi

much preferred Twain's tongue-in-cheek style and made use of several themes that

recurred in his narratives. Says Ensor:

> To begin with, there is the device of the "mysterious stranger"—
>
> someone from the outside, someone who does not fit, who comes into a
>
> community, often with disruptive consequences. Allied to this is the
>
> "unrecognized genius" theme, which was used again in Clemens' next
>
> significant novel, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). Here, someone having a
>
> great deal of knowledge appears in a community too ignorant to
>
> recognize his worth and may or may not eventually win proper
>
> recognition from it. The difficulty in distinguishing dream from reality,
>
> found in Mark Twain as early at *Tom Sawyer*, appears once again,
>
> especially in the ending. . . . The Hank Morgan we see at the end of the
>
> novel is also a good example of the Mark Twain theme of the "lost
>
> paradise." Like Adam, Clemens' favorite Biblical character, Morgan is
>
> cut off from an existence which he can never return, from "all that is dear
>
> . . . all that could make life worth living!" (x)

Each of these elements is noticeable in *Army of Darkness*; Ash is analogous to Hank

Morgan in conduct and circumstance.[51] He is a mysterious stranger from the outside

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[51] Ash's character is much like Daniel Carter Beard's description of Hank Morgan: "He is a common, uneducated man. He's a good telegraph operator; he can make a Colt's revolver or Remington gun—but he's a perfect ignoramus" (16). He also refers to the Yankee as course and vulgar, qualities that typify Ash.

who doesn't fit and who disrupts the community of medievalites by stupidly awakening

an army of deadites. This awakening allows his unrecognized genius to come to

fruition: using a Chemistry 101 book to make gunpowder, a basic knowledge of

automechanics to soup up his car into a tank-like war machine, and silly know-how he

very likely picked up from a movie to train the medievalites to fight a proper battle, he

leads them to victory. I have already mentioned the dream-reality schism, and as I will

discuss, at the end of the film Ash does rue his lost paradise, explaining to a S-Mart co-

worker, "I thought about staying. They offered me the chance to lead them, to teach

them. To be king. But my place is here." In contrast to Morgan, however, Ash retains

his would-be paradise shortly after this dialogue when his past/unconscious and his

present/conscious implode.

To a lesser degree, *Army of Darkness* borrows from other texts. There is the

extrapolation of *Don Quixote*'s windmills, *Gulliver's Travels*' Lilliputians and *The Day*

the Earth Stood Still's Klaatu I referred to earlier. There is of course the use of the

Arthurian legend and the quest for the Holy Grail (realized through the medium of *A*

Connecticut Yankee).[52] The Necronomicon is an object originating in the horror

narratives of H. P. Lovecraft; it is a book that in some of his tales contains a mythology

of prehuman beings, and in others spells and incantations. In terms of characterization

and scenery, Raimi applies a comic book sentimentality, as he does in many of his

films.[53] In terms of humor, he draws on the slapstick antics of The Three Stooges,

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[52] The derivative text for the account of the Holy Grail is Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. The story fascinated Twain, who inserted a translated excerpt from Malory's text into the preface of *A Connecticut Yankee*.

[53] Among Raimi's "comic book worlds" are *Crimewave* (1985), *Evil Dead II* (1987), *Darkman* (1990), and most recently *Spider-Man* (2002) and *Spider-Man 2* (2004).

whose violent horseplay is recognizable in Ash and the zombies.[54] The film is a

pastiche, a patchwork of "imitatation[s] of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style" that

has emerged as a response to "the disappearance of the individual subject" (Jameson 17,

16). Frederic Jameson contrasts this notion of postmodern pastiche with modernist

parody. But for him pastiche composed in the realm of late capitalism is devoid of

humor; it is "a neutral practice of mimicry . . . amputated of the satiric impulse" (17).

This is not the case in *Army of Darkness*. The film's humor is explicit and unapologetic

and more akin to modernist parody. Its schizophrenic texture is what makes it

postmodern. The fractal body of the film, its amalgamation of incongruous parts,

reflects the physical and psychic body of the film's protagonist. Physically Ash is a

cyborg. As he reminds us in a voice-over during a flashback to the *Evil Dead II*: "The

book awakened something dark in the woods. . . . It got into my hand and it went bad, so

I lopped it off at the wrist."[55] Ash replaces his hand with machinery: a chainsaw in *Evil

Dead II*, and a mechanical hand made of iron and chainmail in *Army of Darkness*, both

of which he relies upon for survival. Ash is a psychic cyborg, too, subject to the

machinery of late capitalism that constructs him as a desiring-machine with a molecular

unconscious that "is constantly being worked on by global society, that is to say, these

days, by capitalism, which has cut individuals up into partial machines subjected to its

ends" (Guattari 48). And so the film is also a desiring-machine, a machinic extension

of the capitalist system created under its aegis, a composite of breakdowns and schiz-

flows borrowed from other sources and temporalities.

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[54] In a featurette on the *Evil Dead II* DVD, Raimi admits to being influenced by the Stooges, including some of their gags in the film. Similar gags are visible in *Army of Darkness*.

[55] The reference to Ash's hand going "bad" foreshadows the emergence of "bad" Ash from his full body.

On a theoretical level, perhaps the most significant component of *Army of Darkness*'s pastiche is the metaphor of the zombie. In the postmodern era, the zombie has often served as a vehicle for expressing social and political anxieties, beginning most effectively with George Romero's debut film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) in which the zombies can been read as a representation of the atrocities of the Vietnam War. More recent is Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002). Unlike Romero's zombies, who are produced by "space radiation," Boyle's are produced by a virus and can signify contemporary post-9/11 fears of bioterrorism. Even more provocative is Romero's sequel to his debut, *Dawn of the Dead* (1978). Set in a shopping mall, the zombies are conspicuously likened to the lobotomized masses of middle class laborers and consumers that comprise late capitalist society. Additionally, "jokes about the death of capitalism, even while the capitalist instinct survives, are focused on the many goods displayed in the spotless temple of consumerism" (Nicholls 304). Zombies function in a similar fashion in *Army of Darkness*. Their function is more complex, however, especially in light of their kinship with Ash.

Ash's experience as a S-Mart employee is representative of the postmodern mass man socialized by the routine of commodity labor. In essence, it is the same experience of the zombie, who is also socialized by a routine, a job it comes back to again and again till death do them part: to kill and reproduce. As a laborer, Ash has an analogous job, at least in terms of reproduction. The verbal and behavioral image he conveys of himself as an agent of S-Mart merchandise and ethics is premised upon the reproduction of S-Mart consumers. It is a necessity. In the absence of a steady flow of consumers he would be out of a job, the same as a zombie would be out of a job if it did not perpetuate

its kind. Ash also embodies the zombie as a consumer. Like all capitalist subjects, he is inevitably affected, in the words of Stephen Harper, by the "zombifying power of consumer fetishism," which invokes a desire to consume for the sake of consuming, or rather, to reproduce the desire to consume. All this reifies Ash's subject-position as a postmodern slave; similar to the zombies in *Dawn of the Dead*, the only emotion he seems to experience are those that facilitate his ontological purpose. The zombies' purpose is to produce as killing machines. Ash's purpose is to produce as a battery plugged into the capitalist machine. Says Harper: "Zombies function in *Dawn of the Dead* as a *lumpenproletariat* of shifting significance, walking symbols of an oppressed social group. This function is derived in part from their origins in the literature and cinema of the twentieth century, in which zombies are synonymous with oppression and slavery." Metaphorically speaking, the same goes for *Army of Darkness*'s protagonist, who, in the real world of the postmodern present, emerges as the true king of the deadites.

But this dynamic is inverted in Ash's would-be agential fantasy, where neither the zombies nor Ash himself are emotionally territorialized beings, and where their purpose is far more grandiose. Both parties are emotionally charged (and thus deterritorialized) beings, one intent on saving humanity, the other intent on destroying it. The behavioral patterns of the Ash we see in S-Mart and the one we see in medieval England are diametric opposites. No longer the polite, modest, passive discount store employee, Ash is crude, bombastic and animated—a charismatic individual, although not necessarily an appealing one. This is apparent in his speech as much as in his actions. His discourse is peppered with obscenities, and he is a virtual repository of one-

liners. He actively manifests the Lyotardian apothegm that "to speak is to fight."[56] His

conduct is no less belligerent. Usually he is engaged in some form of warfare, and his

general treatment of the medievalites, who he refers to as "primitive screwheads" and

"primates," is outwardly disdainful and antagonistic. Ash's doppelgänger and his army

of zombies exhibit comparable qualities, administering their share of one-liners and of

course violence. Unlike Romero's zombies, Raimi's are intelligent, and the violence

they inflict is calculated. These are not mindless drones, not representations of Ash the

employee. They are representations of Ash the hero, warrior and messiah, except for the

doppelgänger, who *is* Ash, or at least one pole of his unconscious spectrum. "Good"

Ash occupies the other pole, and in between is the army of the dead. Ash is both

protagonist and antagonist and his underlying purpose is to save the medievalites from

himself. Notions of "good" and "bad" are therefore negated. This negation is implicit in

Ash's dialogue the first time he kills his doppelgänger. In response to the

doppelgänger's taunts and to being called "goody little two-shoes," Ash shoots him in

the face with his shotgun and responds, "Good, bad—I'm the guy with the gun."

Morality is not the point. Both characters are equally barbarous. What matters is which

character possesses the resources to capitalize on his barbarism most productively and

efficiently.

    "Good" and "bad" Ash and the deadites together signify Ash's decoded self,

which has been unplugged from the machine, freed from the prison of the "matrix."

Ash's unconscious spectrum is a rhizomorphous warzone in which the shattered

fragments of his schiz-body can flow and interact, and the combat and bloodshed that

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[56] *The Postmodern Condition*, p.10.

these fragments entertain delineate the process of the deterritorialization of his coded

self. The process concludes when "good" Ash kills "bad" Ash a second time,

catapulting the doppelgänger into the night sky perched on a sack of gunpower that

explodes like fireworks. Ashes to ashes—the doppelgänger returns to and reinforces the

state of fragmentation that constituted his zombie-body (a stitched together mosaic of

dead flesh) and his original body (an unconscious piece of the zombified Ash's schizoid

self). It is a reterritorialization for "bad" Ash, who is initially deterritorialized when he

bifurcates from "good+bad" Ash's primal body, creating two fluid organisms whose

production capacity is reliant upon them being foils for one another. The climax of

"good" Ash's deterritorialization, in other words, is the beginning of "bad" Ash's

reterritorialization. The opposition is as appropriate as it is imperative given

capitalism's dependency on both processes in order to maintain itself as a steady

mechanism of production.

Following the death of "bad" Ash, the remainder of the deadites are swiftly

defeated. What does their defeat elicit? The implosion of Ash's unconscious spectrum

and another consequent reterritorialization as the spectrum ceases to be a dynamic space

for production. Stasis sets in; there is no longer any work to be done. The zombies

return to the earth—Ashes to Ashes for them, too—and Duke Henry and King Arthur's

empires are united in harmony. The opposition is liquidated, and violence (that is,

fluidity and procession) no longer has a use-value. Ash must return home to be

reterritorialized. He could stay and be king, but that would be an anti-productive

venture, and whereas Ash has redefined his selfhood, if only unconsciously, he cannot

free himself from capitalist subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari's desiring-machines,

their "lines of escape leading elsewhere," are ultimately not escapist at all since "elsewhere" is a place that exists inside of the capitalist system. What Althusser says about ideology can be said about the ontological and metaphysical technoscape of capitalism: the inside is everything, or there is no outside, or the inside is the outside ("Ideology" 175). Ash has no choice but to return from the past to the present, from his unconscious, decoded self to his conscious, coded self—back to the womb of the "matrix."

Back to the Matrix

Two endings were made for *Army of Darkness*. In the first, Ash retreats to a cave where he drinks a potion concocted from a recipe in the Necronomicon. Each drop of the potion will send him to sleep for one century, so he must take a drop for each century that lay between the medieval past and the late capitalist present. He takes too many drops, of course, and wakes up in a postapocalyptic future. The last scene shows a gaunt Ash wearing tattered clothes and a long, shaggy beard—a Robinson Crusoe of the future. He climbs up an embankment, stares in horror at the ruins of a dead city demolished by a nuclear holocaust, and helplessly screams and curses. This was the film's original ending. It is ineffective for two main reasons, both the result of capitalist forces. The first concerns the marketability of *Army of Darkness* as a commodity. Its producers believed that concluding on such a negative, open-ended, catastrophic note would leave audiences dissatisfied and inhibit the film's sales. For the film to make money, there needed to be a happy ending. The second concerns the theoretical groundwork that I have been mapping out. If Ash "returned" to a decimated future,

from a precapitalist to a postcapitalist society, a reterritorialization could not be consummated as there would be no means of sociodesiring-production. "Good" Ash would be entirely on his own with nothing to plug into or to be plugged into. Additionally, a temporal shift to anything but the originary present would not be a reversion to the conscious but rather a relocating to another manifestation of the unconscious, one in which the deterritorialization that had been achieved in the past unconscious has entropically fizzled out. In order to function according to the binding principles of late capitalism, he has no choice: he must go back to S-Mart and reinstall himself in his derivative subject-position. Without this reversion, the film ceases to be a critical theory. The breakthrough must experience a breakdown. It doesn't work except on the level of many early science fiction pulp narratives: a stupid adventure tale for adolescent boys. A desire to satisfy the consumer market then induces the "happy" reinstatement of Ash in the consumer world.

The second ending does not only bring "good" Ash back to S-Mart. The spirit of "bad" Ash hitches a ride, resulting in the implosion of past and present, conscious and unconscious, "good" and "bad." Like the ousted ending, Ash must drink the magic potion, but this time he must also speak the magic words. He doesn't speak them, not completely, and so the tiled floors and aisles of the discount store become another battlefield on which Ash can reengage in deterritorialization and the process of production. After Ash finishes telling his story to a dubious male co-worker, explaining how he "basically" spoke the magic words correctly this time, a customer turns into a zombie. Ash immediately slips back into the alpha male role of his unconscious self, and the role of Sheila, his medieval love interest, is replaced by a female co-worker.

Sheila is the proverbial damsel in distress who validates the hero's masculinity by submitting to it. (Even when she is zombified by "bad" Ash's kiss and becomes "bad" Sheila, she is still submissive to the hero in that "bad" Ash is merely one part of the hero's psychic body.) Ash pushes her out of the way as the zombie delivers a powerful backhand to his face and sends him flying across the store, appropriately into the firearms department. The zombie tears a cash register off of a checkout counter and threatens to drop it on Sheila's head. Before it can, Ash picks up a rifle, leaps onto a tabletop and blasts the cash register out of its hands. "Lady, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you to leave the store," he says in a polite monotone. The zombie snarls, "Who the hell are you?" "Name's Ash," he replies, and cocks his gun. "Housewares." A fight the likes of Wile E. Coyote vs. the Road Runner ensues. Ash unloads an absurd fusillade of bullets and the zombie leaps off of a trampoline and soars across the store like a trapeze artist before being destroyed. Ash tears off his S-Mart uniform; beneath it is a black, futuristic cowboy outfit. He flips the rifle end over end like a gunslinger, sheathes it in a holster at his side, and embraces his co-worker when she dives into his arms. In voice-over, he says, "Sure, I could have stayed in the past. Could've even been king. But in my own way, I am king." Then, tipping his co-worker over, he says aloud, "Hail to the king, baby," and kisses her.

The likening of Ash to a conventional masculine hero as portrayed by Hollywood cinema is overt: he becomes *Gone with the Wind*'s Rhett Butler, or *Die Hard*'s John McClane, or any of Clint Eastwood's spaghetti western protagonists. The latter reference is particularly apt as the development of Ash's selfhood climaxes in the role of the mythical cowboy. This renders the deterritorializing journey through his

machinic unconscious a process of becoming-cowboy, which is commensurate with becoming-king. For Ash, the journey from present/conscious to past/unconscious back to present/conscious marks his metaphorical and actual journey from slave to king. Contrary to its agential objective, it also marks his reification as a late capitalist subject. Ash may be king, but the streets of his kingdom are paved with linoleum, the buildings built with canned goods and boxes of merchandise. His subjects are the S-Mart employees and their customers. The role of the medievalites he left behind has been sublimated onto them, and he is their messiah, sent to protect and serve them and make certain that the flow of capital is not jeopardized by the wiles of the evil dead (evil because it inhibits the production process by threatening to kill and decrease the number of workers and consumers). He is king "in his own way"—the way of the postmodern subject, which isn't unique at all. As such, he is still enslaved, especially if we read the scene as a megalomaniacal fantasy that we perceive through Ash's point of view. Thus he is a pathological production of capitalism, free only by dint of madness. Reading the scene literally yields the same thing. While Ash's subject-position has moved from a source of robotic subservience to one of dynamic power, he is still bound by the codes and ethics that originally constructed him. Rather than achieve a transcendence, he has consecrated an "eternal return" to that which is immanent in his body: the processes of capitalist reterritorialization and deterritorialization whose ongoing flux stabilizes the "social axiomatic" (*Anti-Oedipus* 258). In this fashion, Ash represents the socius itself. He is slave and master at once—the outside. Or he is the inside, caught in an incessant state of becoming between the two, the hyphen in slave/master. Either way, he has reached the limit of capitalism as a schiz-flow. "Hence one can say that schizophrenia is

the *exterior* limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it push back or displace this limit, by substituting for it its own *immanent* relative limits, which it continually reproduces on a widened scale" (246).

A distinction between Ash as slave/master and mere slave can be drawn by comparing the way he names himself here and in the beginning of the film. Recall that in the beginning he is bound in chains and admits to being a slave. When he introduces himself, he associates his name (and residual identity) directly with slavery ("My name is Ash, and I am a slave"). In the end, he is not only free of any chains, he is holding a weapon—a powerful technological extension that demarcates a key coordinate of his selfhood. He is also standing on a table above a crowd in a position of power accentuated by an up-angle camera shot. When he introduces himself to the zombie, he does not directly associate his name with slavery, but he does implicitly. "Name's Ash. Housewares." He links his identity to the department he works in. The effect is tantamount to that of his earlier monologue when he apprises the medievalites of his shotgun's marketable qualities: the zombie doesn't know what "housewares" means. Nor does it care. "I'll swallow your soul!" it croaks, oblivious to his treatment of it as a shopper. The humor of the exchange is rooted in the notion that everyone, even the undead, is a potential consumer. In any case, Ash still remains a slave bound by the chains of the commodity. But he is a slave amongst lesser slaves (co-workers and consumers) who are bound by the same chains. The difference between Ash and them is that he has realized his full potential as a capitalist desiring-machine. As in his medieval fantasy, this potential is characterized by violence. In *Army of Darkness*, the

pathway to freedom consists of tapping into the unconscious and harnessing and

unleashing its savage libidinal energy.

While Deleuze and Guattari don't dwell on it, violence is an inevitable

consequence of their theory. It is in fact integral to the map of schizoanalysis they draw

in *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*, which is designed to derail and smash the

structure of psychoanalysis. Dependent on constant breakage, collapse, rupture, cutting

and fluxing, schizoanalysis is itself a violent arena in which the territorialization

processes are not smoothly accomplished. The method of narration that Deleuze and

Guattari use to articulate it is likewise violent. They often engage a machinic, fractured

syntax that reflects their subject matter; they compact together a number of

methodologies (mainly philosophy and psychology, but also history, sociology,

anthropology, and literary theory) to unpack their subject matter; and scatological

references stain their writing like graffiti. It is a revolutionary style that depicts the

revolutionary "investment" they believe the schizophrenic process has the power to

invoke in subjectivity.[57] All this is violent conduct. Even many of the authors they cite

to further their arguments are violent in practice, especially Schreber, Artaud, Burroughs

and Kafka.[58] In short, Deleuze and Guattari fight violence with violence, arguing for an

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[57] Deleuze and Guattari explain the revolutionary potential of schizoanalysis at the end of *Anti-Oedipus*: "The schizo is not revolutionary, but the schizophrenic process—in terms of which the schizo is merely the interruption, or the continuation in the void—is the potential for revolution. To those who say that escaping is not courageous, we answer: what is not escape *and social investment at the same time*? The choice is between one of two poles, the paranoiac counterescape that motivates all the conformist, reactionary, and fascisizing investments, and the schizophrenic escape convertible into a revolutionary investment" (341).

[58] With the exception of Schreber, whose *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903) recounts a paranoid schizophrenic fantasy in which Schreber's body is brutally mechanized by God, all four of these authors enact a narrative violence in addition to the violence that exists in the content of their narratives. This is most visible in Artaud's theater of cruelty, Burroughs' cut-ups, and the many stories and fables of Kafka where subjects are preyed on by the specter of the Law.

agential outpouring of the technology of capitalism in contrast to an inhibiting Oedipalization of it.

A text like *Army of Darkness* can be read as an allegory of this undertaking. More importantly, it raises a seminal question: Is there any other way to jack out of the matrix other than by means of violent praxis? Is, as Baudrillard claims, "theoretical violence, not truth . . . the only resource left to us" (163)? If so, this is another instance of how Deleuze and Guattari's "lines of escape" are not altogether escapist. They certainly offer a new way of negotiating and abiding the matrix. But the way remains, like Ash, bound in chains. Deleuze and Guattari admit it. "But in every respect, capitalism has a very particular character: its lines of escape are not difficulties that arise, they are the conditions of its own operation" (*Anti-Oedipus* 67). One could say something like the same thing about their theory: in every respect, it is as much an open range as it is a jail cell—despite whether or not it is "good" or "bad" in comparison with the praxis it seeks to overthrow. In this sense, they are writers of science fiction, as Scott Bukatman indicates: "Deleuze and Guattari are cyberpunks, too, constructing fictions of terminal identity in the nearly familiar language of techno-surrealism" (326). And like many cyberpunk writers, Deleuze and Guattari's science fictions are deeply theoretical, critiquing the postmodern condition by mapping out its coordinates and, most importantly, by technologizing desire.

CHAPTER 4

"Capitalizm" Unbound: Max Barry's *Jennifer Government*

The Ideology of Hyperconsumption

The production of subjectivity and the self by capitalist technologies is a central issue in

Max Barry's science fiction novel *Jennifer Government* (2003). Unlike *Army of*

Darkness, Burroughs' cut-ups and *Vanilla Sky*, all of which are grounded in fantasy, this

novel is grounded in realism. Set in a near future where the capitalist system has

matured into a Marxist nightmare, it is the epitome of the "Avant-Pop" narrative,

representing "the logic and technologies associated with the next phase of capitalist

expansion, initiated during the Reagan era: the ideology of hyperconsumption"

(McCaffery xviii). Dictating the course of psychological, behavioral, and social

patterns, this ideology is distinguished by various forms of violence that stimulate desire

and define postmodern reality. Such violence is a reaction to the filtering of notions of

truth, reality, and ultimately value through the sieve of the commodity. Says Brian

Donahue: "one can argue that the violence is a sign of the growing socioeconomic

system in which all value has been translated into market value, a situation that sends

parents to work for more hours of the week and leaves children to be surrogate-parented

by television and other forms of commercial mass culture, which merely replicate and

augment the alienation of the adult world, cynically positioning them solely as

consumers representing market segments" (27). *Jennifer Government* is a map of this

process, portraying the hypercommodification of the human condition as violence on

multiple levels. Deleuze and Guattari argue that capitalism is dependent upon continual

breakdown for its existence. In this chapter I want to explore some of the variables of

this breakdown, especially that which concerns the subject's relationship with its technological self. This relationship is a site of violent disruption within the system that italicizes the condition of the current capitalist matrix. At the same time, it delineates a futuristic postcapitalist matrix distinguished by a spectacular implosion of class divisions and a pathological desire to reconstruct the self in the form of the commodity.

In Barry's near future, the world is governed by gigantic, predominantly American corporations. It is a bourgeois utopia where free marketeering has become an ontological prerequisite. Countries and continents are identified by the dynamism (or lack thereof) with which they produce and consume commodities. The world is divided into three primary regions: United States Federated Economic Blocs (North, Central and South America, the United Kingdom, Russia, South Africa, India, Japan, Indonesia, and the Australian territories), Non-United States Economic Blocs (Cuba, Europe and China), and Fragmented Markets (Africa, the Middle East and Western Asia). All territories are subject to the socioeconomic dominance of the USA, "land of the free market"[59] where taxes have been abolished in order to create a more fluid capitalist system and where public institutions are historical remnants. Formerly public institutions (e.g. the police) have been privatized and operate like corporations. Even the government has been subject to privatization insofar as it cannot punish criminals without adequate funding from individual parties.[60] Global society is anti-Marxist to an

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[59] This label appears on the novel's back cover. On it is a global map of Barry's future demarcating the different territories.

[60] Hunting down the killer of Hayley McDonalds, for instance, requires Jennifer Government to obtain funding from the girl's parents. "In order to pursue the perpetrators, we need funding, yes," she says. "The Government's budget only extends to preventing crime, not punishing it" (64). Hayley's parents subsequently sell their house to pay for a retributive investigation. In this case, even vengeance is a commodity.

extreme degree,[61] and culture only exists as a compliment to the dissemination of money; high art, for example, is a pair of intricately designed, grossly overpriced, cleverly promoted Nike sneakers. It is in fact an incident involving a pair of sneakers that initiates the action of the novel. The incident is an act of violence that spurns a war between corporate powers. Predicated on the technology of commodity fetishism, the dominant technology in *Jennifer Government*, the war is portrayed as the natural state of the late capitalist system and, by extension, of human existence.

The antagonist of the novel is John Nike, "Guerrilla Marketing Operative," a title that overtly equates him with a soldier. Pioneer of "the concept of marketing by refusing to sell any products," he is in charge of new products (Barry 4). When we meet him in the book, he and his colleague (another John Nike) are promoting a new pair of shoes, Nike Mercurys, which cost thousands of dollars a pair and have been withheld from the market long enough to instill a frenzied consumer desire for them. But John's strategy is not only a matter of retention. In addition, he contracts an assassin to kill a select number of people who buy Mercurys the day they are released to the general public. Murdering customers, he believes, will greatly increase the shoes' market value. "We take out ten customers, make it look like ghetto kids, and we've got street cred coming out our asses. I bet we shift our inventory within twenty-four hours" (5). To do the job, John deceives Hack Nike, an insignificant "Merc Officer," into signing a contract for a job in the marketing department; little does Hack know that the contract's small print mandates a killing spree. Hack gets cold feet and subcontracts the job to the police, and the police subsequently subcontract it to the NRA. Following the

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[61] As Marx writes in *The Communist Manifesto*, "the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property" (68).

assassinations, the government is contracted to hunt down the responsible parties by the parents of one of the victims. The rest of the novel concerns or relates to the pursuit of John Nike by former advertising firm executive turned government operative Jennifer Government. For the most part, the plot is disposable, formulaic—clearly written to be easily adapted into a film. The interesting thing is the cognitive map of late capitalist society that Barry lays out. Like many cyberpunk texts, *Jennifer Government*'s map designates a postcapitalist society that critiques contemporary capitalist technologies by mildly extrapolating the current ideology of hyperconsumption. Ideology refers to belief systems as much as to power relations.[62] Barry represents these systems and relations in terms of a ubiquitous, divinized commodity culture. He effectively realizes Walter Benjamin's edict that the experience of the modern subject is "that capitalism will not die a natural death" (*Arcades* 667).

Unlike stereotypical cyberpunks, Barry does not hinge his postcapitalist universe on virtual and cybernetic technologies. The most compelling work of cyberpunk gurus like William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, Pat Cadigan and others thematizes the integration of hard technology with the body and mind, "the fusion of being and electronic technology in a new, hard-wired subjectivity" (Bukatman 244). The cyberspatial "interzones"[63] of these writers and their offspring (most recently the Wachowski brothers, whose Matrix trilogy is working directly out of the cyberpunk tradition) are arenas in which the self, subjectivity and ultimately the subject are

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[62] As Terry Eagleton writes in *Ideology*, "The term ideology . . . would seem to make reference not only to belief systems, but also to questions of *power*" (5).

[63] Interzones are one of cyberpunks' most definitive tropes, as Bruce Sterling suggests in *Mirrorshades*: "The cyberpunks, being hybrids themselves, are fascinated by interzones: the arenas where, in the words of William Gibson, 'the street finds its own use for things'" (xiii).

renegotiated, reinscribed and reinvented. A cyberpunk fundament is that the absolutism

of capitalism as an ideology has produced an explosion of high technologies that have

penetrated as deeply into the social and cultural body as they have into the human body.

Barry's novel treats only the former, making it a unique piece of postcapitalist science

fiction. The novel exhibits some paradigmatic cyberpunk traits—the detective story, the

femme fatale, the dominance of multinational corporations—but there is an utter lack of

technophilia except for the presence of that which exists today in the form of television,

the Internet, and similar media. Instead Barry focuses on how the subject is produced by

late capitalist ideology alone; late capitalist technology is treated as subsidiary,

producing little in the postmodern psyche. This inattentiveness is both problematic and

profitable. On the one hand, it dissociates technology from capitalism, which are reliant

upon one another for their existence. In the absence of advancing technologies, the

capitalist system cannot become more fluid; likewise, if the capitalist system fails to

become more fluid, so will technologies fail to advance. Each process produces the

other, and negating one of them would automatically negate the other. At the same time,

Barry is not altogether inattentive to technology; he simply doesn't account for the

dependence of capitalist innovation on technological innovation. His prioritizing of

ideology over technology (rather than the other way around) as a producer of the

postmodern psyche distances *Jennifer Government* from its cyberpunk precursors.

Nevertheless it does not submit an alternate reading of how capitalism—or, as Barry

refers to it, *capitalizm*—defines the interrelations of postmodern subjects. *Jennifer*

Government, like the conventional cyperbunk text, reveals that violence is the principal

determinant of terminal identity. What kind of violence? If we understand that

technology and selfhood are interchangeable terms, the kind that effectuates from the retroactive reconstruction of subjectivity by the extensions of its technological self.

(Later) Late Capitalist Identity

Jennifer Government is divided up into six parts, each of which contains numerous short chapters. Each chapter itself contains a mosaic of short scenes that leap back and forth between the novel's various subplots. Temporally the narrative progresses forward in a linear fashion, but its structure is fragmentary, a montage, a schizoid assemblage that reflects the socioeconomic structure of the novel's diegesis and ultimately the postmodern condition. The structure recalls Burroughs' cut-ups, which, as I discuss in my second chapter, reflect the postmodern condition in a similar manner, albeit Barry's cut-ups are much more user-friendly given Burroughs' atemporality and splintered syntax. In this way, *Jennifer Government* exhibits what Fredric Jameson calls the "schizophrenic disjunction" of late capitalist identity and the way it is produced by transnational corporate reality (*Postmodernism* 29). (The same might be said for the online computer simulation game, *Jennifer Government: NationStates*, which Barry created in order to sell more novels.[64])

The first short scene establishes this disjunction. The scene is a water cooler conversation, a cliché, almost imaginary experience that, in the business world, signifies a sense of freedom, leisure and community distinct from the machinic drudgery of

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[64] On the *Jennifer Government: NationStates* website, Barry is asked why he made the game. His response: "Because it seemed like a fun idea, and a way to let people know about my novel *Jennifer Government*. With luck, some of the people who play *NationStates* will buy the book. Then my publisher will think I am a left-field marketing genius, instead of a chump who blew four months on a web game when he should have been working on his next novel."

pencil-pushing and number-crunching. In reality, the water cooler is a myth. It is merely a vehicle for conveying where postmodern slaves/subjects, whose mediatized reality is constituted by a mythic sensibility, relate to one another and discuss issues that may not be directly connected to their daily labor (e.g. television sitcoms). *Jennifer Government* appropriately opens within the confines of this myth when Hack Nike bumps into "the suits" or, as they are later called, "the Johns" (3). The meeting is a fluke as the water cooler on his floor, Merchandise Distribution, has run out, so he goes to the Marketing floor to use its cooler. Here we are made aware of the great difference between mediating commodities and marketing them; in the novel's diegesis, one is a trivial form of menial labor, the other is a well-respected, well-paid form of artistry and power. The difference is presented as a class division (lower-middle/upper-middle), only both classes are contained by the corporate sphere. At first, the Johns think Hack is one of them. "They were smiling at him as if he was an equal—but of course, Hack was on the wrong floor. They didn't know he was just a Merc Officer" (2). They quickly figure it out, however, and devise a plan to use him as a scapegoat. It is a plan they have been waiting to hatch for some time. They ask Hack if he would be interested in doing some marketing work. Overjoyed, Hack breaks down and cries. Not only will he receive a wage increase, he will receive the social prestige and political clout that accompanies the art of marketing. It isn't until after he has hastily signed a contract without reading it that he realizes the Johns are insincere: in the contract are terms stipulating that Hack must assassinate consumers of the newly released Mercury shoes.

In addition to introducing readers to the ethical system of the novel's hyperconsumerist society, this scene is a portrait of late capitalist identity, particularly

the way in which the postmodern self is projected by a subject-position that is increasingly mediatized by technocapitalism. This is assuming four things: 1) the self is an extension of the subject; 2) the self is an assemblage of technologies projected outside of the body that distinguish the body in some way; 3) the subject is an assemblage of technologies injected into the body (by the Other of culture) that construct it and to varying degrees determine its selfhood; and 4) the Other of culture is merely the self in disguise. The subject and the self form a fluid binary, in other words, designating internal/external, and both halves are produced by technocapitalist machinery, which endeavors to collapse them into one another. This is terminal identity, although not specifically in the sense proposed by Scott Bukatman: "The ultimate embodiment (or *dis*-embodiment) of terminal identity is the electronically enhanced simulation of a human" (253). In broader terms, terminal identity indicates the disappearance of the subject→self into the commodity spectacle. The technetronic modification of the human is merely one means of accomplishing the disappearance of the subject→self.

Terminal identity thus materializes in the opening scene most visibly by way of the characters' surnames. Despite the class division that distinguishes them, Hack and the Johns alike are identified not by their family and ancestry but by their corporate employer. Such is the case with all of *Jennifer Government*'s characters, including others like Buy Mitsui, Billy NRA, Michael Microsoft, Jason Mutual Unity, Rendell ExxonMobil and Vanessa Fashion-Warehouse.com; and if people are not old enough to have a job, they are marked by the names of their schools, all of which are owned by corporations (e.g. Pepsi, McDonalds, Mattel). This form of identification binds social subjects to their capitalist labor in the sense that subjects only exist through the medium

of their employers. Few characters are not bound in this way since unemployment is virtually nonexistent. The reason: no taxes. Student Hayley McDonalds explains in a class presentation called "Why I Love America":

> Before USA countries abolished tax, if you didn't have a job, the Government took money from working people and gave it to you. So, like, the more useless you were, the more money you got. . . . But now America has all the best companies and all the money because everyone works and the Government can't spend money on stupid things like advertising and elections and making new laws. They just stop people from hurting each other and everything else is taken care of by the private sector, which everyone knows is more efficient. (7)

This is an ironic foreshadowing of Hayley's murder and martyrdom. Her death by consumption (of a commodity) is a key to the success of the Johns' marketing artwork. She also serves Barry as a vehicle of exposition, allowing him to explain to readers early in the novel what "capitalizm" is and how it affects subjectivity. From an early age, the morals and values of American hyperconsumerist society are instilled in children as they are trained to speak the language of terminal identity.[65] Their surnames are a kind of ethical badge. The few subjects who do not have jobs are identified only by their first names, a sign of immorality in contempt of the socioeconomic order. As the narrator says of a nomad named Billy, once employed by Bechtel Corporation, later by the NRA:

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[65] The language of terminal identity is tantamount to the language of Guy Debord's society of the spectacle, which "is composed of *signs* of the dominant organization of production—signs which are at the same time the ultimate end-products of that organization" (13). In spite of their constructed relationship with the bodies they signify, names are perceived as a keynote of identity (at least in terms of distinguishing one person/capitalist from another), and in *Jennifer Government*, they are used to designate the capitalist organization of production.

"The truth was he wasn't Billy Bechtel anymore, of course; he was just Billy, unemployed wanderer. But it was too embarrassing to announce yourself without a surname. People thought you were a bum" (24).

Barry terminally identifies some characters by their first names as well as their surnames. The impact is Dickensian, the names reflecting their personalities. Hack, for one, is just that: a hireling employed to perform an unpleasant task for money who, unable to carry out the terms of his employment, sells the job to the police and later becomes a terrorist, leading a failed resistance against the system of capitalizm because he could not "hack" it as a operative capitalist subject. The name John is appropriate for the antagonists, its abundance and overuse signifying the lack of individuality and machinic character that the capitalist system creates. It is also interesting that the name John's ethnic origin is Hebrew and translates as "God Gave." The antagonist's full names are thus God Gave Nike, which lends a biblical connotation to their identities and to capitalizm in general (violent and productive, the Johns are the ultimate capitalist desiring-machines). Another meaningful name is Buy Mitsui. Buy "was an Account Manager, Competitive Accounts Group, Southern Region, which meant he was a stockbroker, which meant he was a salesman" (13). Of French origin, he changed his name from Jean-Paul when he moved to a "USA country" to reflect the American way (15). Such nomenclature is a tool Barry uses to underscore the great degree to which identity and subjectivity are determined by "the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience" (Debord 26).

In *America*, Jean Baudrillard contends that "America has no identity problem. In the future, power will belong to those peoples with no origins and no authenticity who

know how to exploit that situation to the full" (76). This future has come to fruition in *Jennifer Government*. Origins and authenticity have been usurped by capitalist know-how as insignia of identity, rendering identity a matter of power-knowledge. At stake is the type of knowledge that is empowering: knowledge of postmodern desire, which entails, above all, the desire to exist as an operative, productive cog in the machine of American commodity-culture.[66] All other forms of knowledge (of history, science, the "streets," etc.) are trivial, disposable, hobbies at best. This epistemological mutation has gained momentum in the postmodern era—consider especially the rising de-emphasis on education and the liberal arts in the US—positing "the *self* [as] the haunted repository of sensitivity, vulnerability, and emotion, of need and desire. The *commodity* increasingly invades the realm of satisfaction" (Ewen 263). In the novel, the commodity has conquered the realm of satisfaction. Everybody is an adamant capitalist desiring-machine connected to everybody else in the vein of Deleuzoguattarian theory.[67] Desire has been Americanized, a process attributable to America's devotion to productivity. John Nike tells Hack:

> You want to know why Americans took over the world, Hack? Because
>
> they respect achievement. Before this was a USA country, our ideal was
>
> the working-class butler, for Christ's sake. If Australians ruled the
>
> world, everyone would work one day a week and bitch about the pay. . . .

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[66] John Nike expresses this idea when he says: "We're all cogs in wealth-creation machines. That's all" (222). The absence of the machines, he implies, would negate the subject, the body, desire.

[67] Say Deleuze and Guattari: "What defines desiring-machines is precisely their capacity for an unlimited number of connections, in every sense and in all directions. It is for this very reason that they are machines, crossing through and commanding several structures at the same time" (*Anti-Oedipus* 126).

Then there's the British, who thought there was something wrong with

making money. No surprise they ended up kissing the colony's ass. The

Japanese, they think the pinnacle of achievement is a Government job.

The Chinese are Communist, the Germans are Socialists, the Russians

are broke . . . what does that leave? . . . America . . . The United States of

America, the country founded on free-market capitalizm. I tell you those

Founding Fathers knew their shit. (55-56)

In John's view, the Americanization of desire was an inevitability as the non-United

States "economic blocs" had aberrant interests in the productivity of material, social and

cultural capital. As such, it is implied that their identities were aberrant by dint of their

failure to embrace the technology of the commodity as the dominant technology of the

self. Global capitalizm, however, has freed them from their mulish ways, asserting that

the natural state of the human condition is one that is always-already immersed in the

process of capitalist production. Nature is thus linked to the commodity, particularly

commodity fetishism. Marx contends that this is a fundamental bourgeois perspective in

the first volume of *Capital*. In a passage that critiques the lack of a critique of labor in

terms of value, he writes:

Political economy has indeed analysed, however incompletely, value and

its magnitude . . . But it has never once asked the question why labour is

represented by the value of its product and labour-time by the magnitude

of that value. These formulas, which bear it stamped upon them in

unmistakable letters that they belong to a state of society in which the

process of production has the mastery over man, instead of being

controlled by him, such formulas appear to the bourgeois intellect to be as much a self-evident necessity imposed by nature as productive labor itself. (84-85)

According to the bourgeois intellect, then, which is the *only* intellect in the diegetic reality of *Jennifer Government*, capitalist production and commodity fetishism are demanded by nature. They are natural extensions of the human, and it is the proportions of these extensions that determine the identities of communities and individuals. In these terms, identity emerges as the measure of capital one possesses, subjectivity as the dynamic way that capital is acquired, and selfhood as the commodities one produces and consumes with that capital. This is basically the way things are today. What distinguishes late capitalism from Barry's capitalizm is an issue of consciousness. In his biography of Marx, Karl Korsch writes: "Only by keeping the people unconscious of the real contents of those basic relations of the existing social order . . . only through the fetishistic transformation of the social relations between the class of specialists and the class of wage laborers, resulting in the 'free and unhampered' sale of the 'commodity labor-power' to the owner of 'capital,' is it possible in this society to speak of freedom and equality" (53). On the other hand, subjects of capitalizm (that is, later late capitalism) are not unconscious of the relations of the existing social order. They are acutely conscious of the commodity-fetishization of society and of themselves, regardless of their economic and ethical status, mainly because there is only one class, the bourgeois, which has assimilated the socioeconomic strata beneath and above it. Divisions still exist, but only within the consummate bulk of the bourgeois matrix, and subjects that are disillusioned by the ruling commoditocracy and have ethical objections

to it only do so because they lack the capital to do otherwise. Ethics are thus determined by income. The same can be said for identity. Moreover, the constructedness of identity is not something that occurs solely from the outside-in, it is something that subjects actively pursue in hopes of realizing the "goodness" that accompanies wealth-creation. In short, there is a fervent, conscious desire on the subject's part to be constructed by capitalist technologies on a social and moral level. While this desire has not been fully realized in the late capitalist era, Barry is clearly suggesting that it is on the horizon and the world is rushing towards it.

The Technology of the Tattoo

Names are a telling marker of identity in *Jennifer Government*, and there is nothing subtle about what they signify: the commodification of the body. Capitalizm has tightened the connection between the name and the body. Not so, for the most part, in late capitalism. From a structuralist perspective, there is of course no inherent relationship between a name/signifier and a body/referent. A person's name says and represents nothing about that actual person; it is merely a word we associate with one's flesh and *Dasein*. Subjects of capitalizm, however, experience a different relationship. The natural state of their social bodies is a capitalist state. Unlike Marxist subjects, their bodies are not denatured by the bourgeois socioeconomic matrix, alienated from one another and from themselves by the forces of commodity production. They can't be: the bourgeois socioeconomic matrix is the only ontology that exists. Nature is not a space that exists outside the domain of capitalist technologies, it *is* that domain. In capitalizm,

names have a more intimate connection with bodies, signifying the specific labor and commodities that define bodies and reifying the fusion of economy and desire.

In addition to the linguistic technology of nomenclature, Barry employs the imagistic technology of the tattoo. Both are means of capitalist signification. Rather than imprint their flesh with images of yin-yangs, butterflies, Chinese symbols, sex objects, barbed wire or the like, subjects decorate themselves with corporate logos. Waiting in line to order at a Burger King, for instance, Billy notices "five or six teenage boys . . . approaching the store, all baggy clothes and tattoos. . . . Billy saw that their tattoos weren't ordinary designs, they were logos. He saw a lot of Nike swooshes and NRA designs. The leader had a US Alliance logo on his shaved head" (277). Like naming, these tattoos are signs of allegiance; but they are also fashion statements. This raises a few questions. In capitalizm, what constitutes en vogue fashion? What is the purpose of fashion. What does fashion represent in terms of society, culture, and identity? I want to address these questions using the tattoo as an example. First, however, I will briefly discuss the tattoo as it has been represented and perceived now and in the past.

Jessica Hong writes: "The ancient Polynesians were the ones who created tattoos. They pounded sharp sticks tipped with ash and coconut oil repeatedly into their flesh with mallets. . . . Patient[s] . . . [were] tied to a tree so that they cold not run away from the pain" (*Tattoos*). For the Polynesians, tattoos were status symbols, and the painful process of their inscription were rites of passage necessary for elevating them to positions of power. Virginia Burrus claims that early Thracian cultures considered tattooing a positive social marker for similar reasons. In contrast, Ancient Greeks and

Romans "used tattoos to mark bodies of criminals and slaves, that is, to inscribe the violence of punishment or possession" (*Macrina's* 404). They dismissed cultures that held tattoos in high regard as primitive and barbaric. Hence the tattoo originally functioned as a sign of degradation as well as nobility; and no matter why it was inscribed and how it was perceived, "the body that was marked by another [was] also marked *as* other" (405). For better or for worse, the tattoo was at its core an instrument of individuation, a technology of the image that was used to demarcate a specific kind of self/other.

Today the tattoo has been ascribed a new meaning. Compared with its origins, this meaning is an illusion. In an article that explores the postmodern fascination with cult media and *raisons d'être* called "Stupid Underground," Paul Mann writes:

> How much can be made of a brightly colored scar? Only yesterday the tattoo was presented . . . as a radical form of self-expression, an intense and immediate means of repossessing the body, taking it back from all the social systems that, one believes, have stolen it. In various claims, developed more through repetition than through thorough investigation, the tattoo is a risk, an adventure, a gamble with permanence . . . it resexualizes and resacralizes the body and is hence an attack on a desacralized culture, a culture that separates spirit and body, purity and sexuality; it is transcendentally abject . . . it is a provocation aimed at the straight world . . . it is a way to link those who have undergone the ritual of tattooing in a sub-community, and therefore a mode of communication

as well; it is also, as we shall see, a peculiar and stupidly characteristic

instance of fun. (*Postmodern* 38)

Mann's portrayal of the tattoo is in reference to its manifestation in the earlier and

middle postmodern era, particularly in the 1980s when subcultural praxis evolved into

mainstream phenomenon. He explains that the tattoo's proliferation during this time

was followed by the proliferation of logo clothing, namely the shirt. "Every T-shirt is

the sign of advocacy, even if one is not particularly invested in the product. . . . One is

recognized, even if it is by proxy. . . . One submits to the objectification of the human

body by the fashion industry" (38). Not only that, one desires the objectification of the

body by fashion, actively engaging in the pursuit of creating a self by clothing it,

literally and metaphorically.[68] At this point, however, tattoos were not fashionable on a

mass scale; the bodies that wore them were for the most part associated with "fringe

subcultures (biker, carny, sailor, con)," and their "brightly colored scars" served the

purposes Mann states in the above passage. The tattoo was an eccentric, audacious

technology, an imagistic extension of the self that individuated the self from normative,

conservative technologies like shirts. Ironically, shirts produced by the likes of Polo,

Izod, Ambercrombie, Calvin Klein and so on individuated subjects as well. The two

differ in that shirts individuated subjects through community, by associating bodies with

a particular brand of capitalist media. The irony is that it is as much a process of

massification (by creating a group of branded bodies) as individuation (by creating a

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[68] Such an awareness hearkens to Horkheimer and Adorno's notion of the cult of personality in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "personality scarcely signifies anything more than shining white teeth and freedom from body odor and emotions. The triumph of advertising in the culture industry is that consumers feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them" (167).

group of branded bodies in opposition to groups of non-branded bodies).[69] Tattoos have

achieved this very state today. No longer confined to subcultural status, the tattoo has

become a part of mainstream culture. This is primarily a result of the great

dissemination of media over the last two decades that have increasingly glorified what

was once considered to be "a risk, an adventure, a gamble with permanence" and an

"attack on desacralized culture." Presenting the illusion of individuation through

massification, today's tattoo represents the same thing as designer clothing, with two

minor differences. First, there is a threshold of pain involved in tattooing. As with the

Polynesians (although not to the same degree), the pain is a right of passage whereby a

body becomes individuated/massified, an experience that does not occur when one, say,

puts on a shirt. Hence the illusion of becoming individuated is enhanced as the pain is

perceived as an additional (and unpleasant) part the process. Second, tattooing is

capitalist in a different sense than designer clothing as it is only produced by capitalist

media technologies. Designer clothing, however, also carries the imprint of its media

production, explicitly calling attention to itself as a commodity.

Mann comments on the signification of the "neo-tattoo" and its illusory impact:

> Despite all the claims that are made for the neo-tattoo—again: that it is a
>
> way to repossess one's alienated body, that it connects one symbolically
>
> with more integrated societies, that it is a sacralizing sacrifice, that it is a
>
> spiritual record, that it is a protective charm against spiritual and political

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[69] This example is further complicated when we consider Polo and Izod in terms of class. While Izod products were desirable commodities in the 1980s, Polos were generally more expensive and therefore more desirable. In this light, wearing a Polo was a true expression of individuality whereas wearing an Izod was merely an expression of one's desire to express one's individuality, if only they had the economic means. Individuation becomes a matter of creating a group of branded bodies in opposition to non-branded *and* inadequately branded bodies.

demons, the subjective intensity of the experience subverts cultural

anaesthesis—the very proliferation of the tattoo indicates that, like just

about everything else proposed as the exercise of difference, it too links

the individual with the "economy of signs" in his or her most intimate

dimensions. If we have not yet been subjected to the tattooed corporate

logo, its time is doubtless imminent. (39)

Concretizing Mann's anxiety of imminence, *Jennifer Government* deploys the tattooed

corporate logo as a seminal form of identity-construction, rendering it the ultimate

fashion statement. On top of being a capitalist media production, it recognizes itself as a

commodity, that is, as something purchased for the sake of indicating allegiance to a

specific capitalist organization. It also involves the rite of passage of physical suffering.

Above all, capitalizm's tattoo is a mode of communication, as it used to be when it was a

reactionary, sub-communal artifice. Now it is entirely unreactionary—not a way of

dissociating or distancing oneself from the norm, but a way of expressing alliance with

the norm, which has assimilated the subcultural and put it to use. What is the norm?

The ideology of hyperconsumption, terminal choice, the mediatization of the human

psyche by the desiring-machine of capitalism. Consider the teenagers Billy sees at

Burger King. They are not just a gang of young thugs looking for trouble because they

are bored, high, or want to maintain "respect." They are corporate thugs, and their

neighborhood "is a [US] Alliance town" (277), US Alliance being one of two dominant

global corporate conglomerates (the other is Team Advantage). They look for trouble in

the name of capitalist production, defending the image of the companies with which they

are allied and by which they are branded. The purpose of capitalizm's tattoo is

consequently to signify, by the process of signification itself, that one is an active, productive member of the social system. The tattoo is a symbol that represents what it did for primitive cultures as well as for the ancient Greek and Romans and some aspects of earlier postmodern communities: social status, communication, bodily (re)possession, and perhaps more than anything, slavery.

This coagulation of meaning is most poignantly illustrated by the novel's protagonist, who has a tattoo herself. Hack considers it strange when he first sees it: "There were two agents in an office across the corridor, and one of them had a weird smudge underneath her left eye, like a rectangular bruise. No: a tattoo, a barcode tattoo. That was strange, Hack thought. The Government was meant to be against all that consumer stuff" (70). Later we are told that Jennifer was not always a Government operative. Her name/identity used to be Jennifer Maher, when she was the account manager for Mattel Corporation. It wasn't until after she was impregnated and abandoned by John Nike that she turned into a would-be good Samaritan. Despite her apparent enmity for consumerism, however, she cannot escape the technology of her terminally constructed self. That her tattoo is "the product code for a Malibu Barbie" accentuates this point (313). Jennifer is an agent of the law, but the tattoo serves as a constant reminder that the law is entirely subject to capital. According to John, there is no difference between the old and new Jennifer: "You think you changed when you left Maher? You think you grew a conscience when you got pregnant? Bullshit. You don't give a shit about those Nike teenagers. You're after me for what I wouldn't give you eight years ago. This is *personal*" (309). It's personal because John is the father of Jennifer's daughter and she resents him for leaving them. John's critique of her ethics is

not altogether true; by and large, she is altruistic and empathic. But that doesn't matter in the capitalist scheme of things. The central figure in the novel is a paradox. Even though she is in a position of power (given a sufficient amount of capital, of course), her tattoo designates that her ontological status, language and body, no matter what context they are positioned in, are commodities, products of a totalitarian free market paradise.

The Space Merchants

Jennifer Government's commoditocracy alludes to an older science fiction novel written in the early postmodern era, C. M. Kornbluth and Frederik Pohl's *The Space Merchants* (1952). Barry mentions the book, implying that his book is an extrapolation of it:

> John Nike was reading a novel called *The Space Merchants*; it had been reissued and he'd seen a review in *Fast Company*. They called it "prescient and hilarious," which John was having a hard time agreeing with. All these old science fiction books were the same: they thought the future would be dominated by some hard-ass, oppressive Government. Maybe that was plausible back in the 1950s, when the world looked as if it might turn Commie. It sure wasn't now.
>
> In *The Space Merchants*, the world was dominated by two advertising companies, which was closer to the truth. But still, there were so many laws the companies had to follow! If these guys had all the money, John wondered, who could stop them doing whatever they wanted? (115-16)

John is obsessed with his image as a corporate icon and capitalist artisan, exerting power through he medium of his image at any given time.[70] Fierce yet suave, immaculately groomed, and invariably looking to close a deal, he is very much like Alec Baldwin's hard-nosed salesman, Blake, in *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992), who lives by his A-B-Cs (Always-Be-Closings). Likewise does the protagonist of *The Space Merchants*, Mitchell Courtenay, resemble Blake, at least until he is blackmailed by a rival advertising executive, demoted from bourgeois kingpin to working, "occupational" class slave, and his personal values and beliefs undergo a transformation. The appearance of Kornbluth and Pohl's novel is important for two main reasons. First and foremost, it allows Barry to further demarcate the boundaries of his diegesis by situating it in the tradition of science fictions that have portrayed futuristic societies governed by capitalist media politics.[71] *The Space Merchants* expresses the same anxiety as *Jennifer Government* about the technology of commodity-culture. This anxiety is a recurrent theme in the science fiction genre, and Barry metafictionally insinuates it by placing a reissue of the novel in John's hands. In so doing, he also gives his narrator the opportunity to explain how his book is an extrapolation of Kornbluth and Pohl's, a more extreme version with fewer barriers to commodity production and consumption, or, as

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[70] The importance of a marketer's image is underscore when John is hit in the face by an iron: "It was hard to tell, with all the bandages. That girl Violet had really let him have it: the doctors still weren't sure if there was brain damage. Personally, John thought the bigger problem was his face. He hoped a lot of the swelling was temporary. There was no place in marketing for a man who looked like that" (106). John's fears are very similar to those of *Vanilla Sky's* David Aames, whose face is disfigured in a car accident. Confronted with damaged physical images, both characters experience anxiety, worrying that they have become ineffective, if not altogether neutered, capitalists.

[71] Science fictions that depict hostile commoditocracies are among the most well-respected and widely read and studied. In addition to *The Space Merchants*, for example, there is George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (1956), Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron" (1961), William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), and a number of Philip K. Dick novel's, most notably *The Simulacra* (1964) and *Ubik* (1969).

Deleuze and Guattari might say, fewer blockages in the schiz-flow of desire. More interesting, however, is the way *The Space Merchants*, the actual book, functions in the narrative as an instrument of the image rather than a purveyor of the word.

Most of the action in *Jennifer Government* takes place in Australia, Barry's home country and a newly acquired member of the US Federated Economic Blocs. John is reading *The Space Merchants* on a plane from Australia to the Nike Los Angeles office. He is not reading it to entertain or inform himself, it seems, but because he has nothing else to do. When the plane lands, he leaves the book in his seat pocket instead of taking it with him. For John, the narrator says, "It was turning into a sly, anti-free market statement, and irony irritated him. There was no place for irony in marketing: it made people want to look for deeper meaning. There was no place in marketing for that, either" (116).[72] Later, while he is sitting in a waiting room to meet a Nike executive, he rues leaving it on the plane. "He wished he'd held onto that novel now. It would have been good to be seen reading it: relevant yet left-field, demonstrating initiative and a creative approach to problem solving" (117). *The Space Merchants* then is a piece of media that has the capacity to enhance John's capitalist image. It is a capitalist technology John could have used to empower the technology of his self. That *The Space Merchants* is an anti-capitalist text is yet another irony. What is important is its use-value, or rather, the image of its use-value, which would be to signify an active awareness of "anti-freedom." Such a power-knowledge, in John's eyes, would not

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[72] John's sentiments harmonize with Baudrillard's maxim, "He who strikes with meaning is killed by meaning" (*Simulacra* 161). For him, the desert of the real is an exemplary site for capitalizm. Barry and Baudrillard hold similar views, except for a crucial one: in Baudrillard's future, late capitalism implodes and culminates in an ultraviolent apocalypse; in Barry's future, late capitalism has not imploded, but exploded into a more dynamic and fluid system.

signify his desires, but rather his consciousness of the desires of the "enemy." Through

the filter of would-be knowledge, the word (of the novel) becomes the image (of the

self). Unfortunately for John, he must "live on his wits."[73]

In a recent review of *The Space Merchants*, Matthew McGowan writes: "To

readers today, it may seem nothing short of amazing that a book like *The Space*

Merchants was published where and when it was—in an America enthralled by the

hysterical moral panic that was McCarthyism and driven by a post-war economic boom

that had the United States plotted on a steep upward trajectory." The novel can be read

as a reaction to the Red Scare, representing the paranoid condition of the subject invoked

by the threat of the rise of communism, which is to say the fall of capitalism. At its

center, McCarthyism was not so much about the fear of communism as it was of the

collapse of the capitalist system. The fear still exists today, especially in the wake of

9/11. Whether the enemy is a communist, a terrorist, or a bug-eyed monster is not the

point. All of these iconoclasts are ultimately perceived in the same way: as viruses that

have infected the system. If the virus is not destroyed, the system will eventually be

altogether taken over from head to toe. Kornbluth and Pohl, however, do not focus on

this orthodox conservative fear of the infestation of the Americanized world's

socioeconomic order by some foreign entity. In their dystopian satire, the enemies of

the system are "Consies," conservationists who seek to foil the colonization and

commodification of Venus by corporate powers. While they can be read as an allegory

for McCarthy's communists, at no point do they pose a real threat, literally or

perceptually, to the existence of the capitalist system. They are mere thorns in its side.

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[73] Says slick-talking Ricky Roma of his salesman colleagues in *Glengarry Glen Ross*: "Anyone in this office lives on his wits."

Kornbluth and Pohl's narrative is a flagrant critique of early postmodern commodity-culture, but it does not contain a viral element (except for the virus it represents as capitalism itself). Moreover, it does not aver prescience, mapping out a potential future. As Peter Nicholls writes, "Stories like *The Space Merchants* were never intended to be serious predictions of a possible tomorrow: they exaggerated aspects of the present in order to comment upon, not the future, but the present itself" (*Encyclopedia* 793-94).

Extrapolation as a vehicle for contemporary social critique is perhaps one of the science fiction genre's most valuable characteristics. Many postmodern science fictions are best regarded as critical theories that can be used to read against the fictional text of the "real," mediatized world. The same can be said for some earlier narratives, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and many of H.G. Wells' scientific romances, which are useful for reading and in some cases theorizing the condition of today's social machinery.[74] *Jennifer Government* certainly provides a schematic for interpreting late capitalism. Unlike much cyberpunk, however, it also provides a likely vision of the not-too-distant future, using simple, colloquial language. Traditional cyberpunk narratives do neither of these things. According to Larry McCaffery, they "present an intense, vital, and often darkly humorous vision of the world space of multinational capitalism" (*Storming* 12). But these world spaces are almost always saturated in high technologies that have "blipped" the human subject, actually splicing its flesh and psyche with the machine and turning it into some kind of cyborg. Generally the cyborg emerges as more of a metaphor for the impact that biological and computer technologies have had on the

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[74] The scientific romances I am thinking of include *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), and *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), all of which feature errant technologies of the self.

subject, rather than as something that might materialize in the imminent future.[75]

Cyberpunks' narrative strategies frequently involve varying levels of montage, "mixing together genres, borrowing devices from cinema, computer systems, and MTV, infusing the rhythms of its prose with those of rock music and TV advertising, pastiching prior literary forms and otherwise playing with literary elements, and, above all, adopting the familiar postmodernist device of developing familiar 'mythic' structures and materials which can then be undercut and exploited for different purposes" (14). Additionally, cyberpunks employ a techno-surrealist "language of spectacle and simulation" that effectively represents how, in their extrapolated diegetic universes, the human has been redefined by the hi-tech machinery of postcapitalist space (Bukatman 11).

By postcapitalist, I do not mean that these narratives transcend our current socioeconomic ontology, but that they push that ontology to its outer limits, terminalizing it (just as postmodernism is in some ways a terminal extension of modernism). Barry does not terminalize late capitalism through the use of the cyborg, genre mixing, or technocratic jargon. He does so by getting rid of taxes—by disempowering the government and the law, empowering the neo-bourgeois, and creating a monstrous free market where the blockages in the flows of consumer desire are minimized. It is not a difficult diegesis to imagine given the condition of contemporary consumer-capitalism; in many respects, the social, cultural, and ideological reality of the novel is a stone's throw from here. Unlike much postmodern science fiction, *Jennifer Government* does not represent a paraspace, "a site of

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[75] For instance, we are a long way from being able to neurally interface with machines, jack into cyberspaces, and disembody our consciousness in the ways that have been extrapolated by Gibson, Cadigan, Sterling, Dick, Cronenberg, Rucker, the Wachowskis, and others.

ontological confrontation characterized by an intensified engagement with the structures

of language and experienced by the reader as being in collision with mundane reality"

(175). Bukatman recognizes Samuel R. Delany's argument that many science fiction

texts are paraspatial, cognitively estranging readers from their extrapolated diegeses.[76]

In light of how these texts delineate "rhetorically heightened 'other realm[s],' . . . the

notion of a paraspace might be endemic to the genre . . . The language in such works

transcends the descriptive, instead offering the reader an experience of explicit

'otherness'" (157). Cyberpunk paraspaces produce the greatest degree of cognitive

estrangement, using language to allegorize technology.[77] One of the most dynamic

allegories of this kind are William S. Burroughs' cut-up novels. In these proto-

cyberpunk texts, language manifests as protagonist and antagonist, disease and cure,

good and evil. Burroughs treats language "as a system, as code, as an already received

structure against which we all struggle" (Porush 100). Ironically, he seeks agency from

language through language, employing a fractal, pathological patois to critique an

increasingly fractal, pathological society. The original cyberpunks of the 80s harnessed

this technique. Their use of language has similar effects, albeit its critique of capitalist

technologies is more acute and graphic. This is absent from *Jennifer Government*.

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[76] Conceived of by Darko Suvin in *Metamorphosis of Science Fiction*, cognitive estrangement is a determining axiom of science fiction, "a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment (7-8). The estrangement is accomplished, Suvin argues, when the writer promotes "the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional 'novum' (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic" (63). The important word here is *novum*, which implies both "estrangement" (experiencing something innovative) and "cognition" (assessing that innovative thing).

[77] "The figures of allegory break the transparency of language and institute instead a metafigural zone of problematic identifications . . . The mutability of language in the zones and paraspaces of postmodern science fiction coincide with this allegorical impulse (although the exigencies of narrative often recontain the paraspatial excess)" (Bukatman 175). Specifically, cyberpunk narratives allegorize the technology of the self as it is produced by the machine.

Barry thematizes advanced capitalism like a cyberpunk, but he does not allegorize

technology like one. His novel is not, as the *Kirkus Reviews* blurb on its cover contends,

"*Catch-22* by way of *The Matrix*." Like pre-cyberpunks Pohl and Kornbluth, Barry de-

emphasizes hard technology in favor of the commodity and its raw effects on human

relations, beliefs, and values.

Commodity Warfare

The absence of cybernetic technologies is what sets *Jennifer Government* apart from the

conventional cyberpunk narrative. Both are avant-pop narratives, however, exhibiting

similar overarching themes and critical angles of incidence by way of, McCaffery says,

combining "Pop Art's focus on consumer goods and mass media with the avante-garde's

spirit of subversion and emphasis on radical formal innovation" ("Still" xviii). Above

all, they panic-theorize how subjectivity and the technology of the self are terminally

constructed by the society of the spectacle, the postmodern mediascape, the desert of the

real. The most effective tactic authors use to articulate their panic theories is violence.

Deployed on physical, ideological, psychological and theoretical levels, violence

expresses the limitations as well as the transcendency of the self and society. This is

strikingly visible in texts like the Matrix trilogy where the rebel protagonists are

simultaneously enslaved and empowered, existing as down-and-out bohemians in the

real world and as dynamic superheroes in the simulated reality of the Matrix. But in

Jennifer Government there are no irreal, high-flying, Bruce Lee-style kung fu fights.

Nor are there incidents of body invasion by cybernetic organisms, or grandiose battles

between disillusioned, debilitated humans and sentient, spit-shined machines. Violence

and the act of war are not extraneous to the process of hyperconsumption, the text's

dominant metaphor. Rather, the process of hyperconsumption is consistently equated

with violence and the act of war.

The marriage of the commodity to warfare is signified in a number of ways.

First, recall the job title of the antagonist of the novel, Guerrilla Marketing Operative. It

suggests that he is a soldier, fighting for the best interests of the "American people" (that

is, the Americanized world.)[78] This is an interesting piece of identity construction.

John Nike's title indicates that capitalist corporations and businesses have become

military formations devoted to serving and protecting their own private interests, which

everybody considers to be the "best" interests of society. With the abolition of taxes

came the abolition of public, government-funded services like welfare, social security,

retirement, health care, and so on. Privatization is the absolute rule, and the moral order

is premised upon *self* interests. In a sense, civilization has been derepressed: subjects

can deliberately act upon their desires and pursue the construction of their own capitalist

selfhoods without experiencing the specter of altruistic, anti-capitalist guilt. This

condition smacks of Freud's interpretation of the Biblical commandment "love thy

neighbor" in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. He argues that the commandment is a

social construct and that the act of loving somebody else is merely the act of seeing and

loving oneself in somebody else. Thus loving thy neighbor is simply loving thyself, as

the neighbor is the other, and the other is a potential threat to the self. "Not merely is

this stranger in general unworthy of my love; I must honestly confess that he has more

claim to my hostility and even my hatred" (67). The culmination of Freud's argument is

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[78] John's m.o. seems all to familiar given America's ongoing attempt to establish a "free" capitalist system in Iraq.

that humans are not "gentle creatures who want to be loved," they are "creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness" (68). As a system of "organized narcissism,"[79] capitalism is a ripened site for this aggressiveness to unleash itself. Clayton Morgareidge goes so far as to suggest that capitalism is a "system of organized crime: it organizes the predatory activity of individuals against each other to make life safe for the winners" ("Capitalism"). His sentiment is noticeably illustrated in Barry's system of capitalizm, whose subjects all externalizes their aggressive narcissism to varying degrees.[80] The result is a constant state of war that ebbs and flows in intensity.

In *Jennifer Government*, a warlike sensibility is woven into the fabric of everyday life. One scene, for example, shows Hack Nike shopping at Sears. Before leaving the store, he pauses to observe its layout: "On impulse, he turned to look back at the registers. There were thirty or forty stations, lined up like battlements. Each was staffed by a clean-cut girl or boy in a Sears uniform. Their blue badges winked at him" (95). In this short passage, a paramount capitalist venue, the department store, is likened to an army of soldiers. These soldiers are the American(ized) youth. Defined by their infantry-like attire, their job is not only to ring up customers, but to defend the American

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[79] Clayton Morgareidge says, "We live in a society organized around private property, the right of private individuals and corporations to own the resources we all need in order to live. These resources, belonging to a small proportion of the top one percent of the population, include the natural products of the planet, what grows in the soil, the oceans and the forests, as well as all of the products of human culture and industry—the techniques and knowledge and art we have created over the centuries. Even the techniques of nature encoded in the genes of plants and animals and the human body are now being swept up into the vaults of private corporations to be exploited for their financial benefit."

[80] Nobody is more aggressive in this capacity than John Nike, who, shortly before he is captured, explains to a fellow liaison, "Without the Government, we can eliminate Team Advantage. Without Team Advantage, we have no competition. That's worth a little conflict. This is all just aggressive competition within a free market" (296). By this logic, violence is not a means of obtaining freedom. It is a fundamental component of freedom.

way from behind the "battlements" of their cash registers by facilitating the process of consumerism. The violence committed here is imagistic and ideological, the power of capitalizm being exerted by the military effigy of Sears and its arsenal of employees. The processes of corporate naming and tattooing that I discussed earlier are also examples of this kind of violence. More prominent, however, is the actual, physical violence that is committed. It begins with Hayley McDonald's murder and ends with the war between Team Advantage and US Alliance. The man responsible for the war is John Nike, who garners a constituency by accusing the Government of enslaving the American(ized) people. At a press conference with the Government president, John accuses the Government of "conducting raids against us. It targeted our companies, only because we've been successful at providing products people want to buy. It trespassed on our private property and assaulted some of our executives" (201-02). This said, he denounces the Government's authority.

> By this action, the Government has proved that so long as it exists, none
> of us are truly free. Government and freedom are mutually exclusive.
> So if we value freedom, there's only one conclusion. It's time to get rid
> of this leftover we call Government. . . . US Alliance has had enough of
> being persecuted for the crime of making money. From this moment, we
> no longer recognize them as an authority. It's time for a brave new age.
> I hereby declare the end of Government. And you, sir, are out of a job.
> (202)

John believes the Government is an impediment to the freedom provided by capitalizm. It is also distinct from capitalizm, operating under the aegis of a different set of ethics.

At the same time, it is subject to capitalist praxis insofar as it cannot pursue criminals and exert punishment in the absence of private funding. Justice is the Government's commodity. As a violation of the privatization of postcapitalist life, however, justice is a highly undesirable, pestilent commodity that obstructs the exchange of desirable, "healthy" commodities. John vows to liquidate the obstruction once and for all. After orchestrating the assassination of the Government president without the consent of his superiors, he must answer to the US Alliance board of directors, who are itching to expel him so that they can disavow responsibility for his actions. None of the directors care for the Government of its dead president, but they worry that the conflict will provoke a consumer backlash. John assures them it won't, reprimanding them for their lack of capitalist resolve.

> I'm getting rid of the Government, the greatest impediment to business
>
> in history. . . . I've given you a world without Government interference.
>
> There is now no advertising campaign, no intercompany deal, no
>
> promotion, no action you can't take. You want to pay kids to get the
>
> swoosh tattooed on their foreheads? Who's going to stop you? You
>
> want to make computers that need repair after three months? Who's
>
> going to stop you? You want to reward consumers who complain about
>
> your competitors in the media? You want to pay them for recruiting
>
> their little brothers and sisters to your brand of cigarettes? You want the
>
> NRA to help you eliminate your competition? Then do it. Just do it.
>
> (222)

John's use of the widely publicized Nike slogan, "Just do it," is a nimble tactic. As it
has appeared in commercials, the use of the slogan conveys two key, conflicting
messages. First, it assures consumers that, given the proper work ethic, they can excel in
athletics; second, it assures consumers that, despite a work ethic, they are likely to excel
(or at least improve) athletically, and by extension personally and professionally, if they
are wearing or using some form of Nike product. In the absence of a Nike product,
consumers won't be "just doing it," not in sports, not in life in general. The slogan
essentially encourages us to establish our identities as successful athletes and human
beings by way of the commodity. John's use of the slogan puts a spin on this message
by infusing it with an element of combat. Not only does "just doing it" signify buying
and wearing a pair of souped up, state-of-the-art, not-so-reasonably-priced cross trainers,
it signifies fighting a war in the name of the commodity itself. Like good capitalists and
consumers, the board of directors takes the bait. John is not expelled from US Alliance.
With the help of General Li, a representative of the NRA, he devises a plot to use
military force against the Government as well as US Alliance competitors before he is
finally apprehended by Jennifer Government.

In the last chapter of the book, John is applying for a job. It is implied that he
has spent twelve years in jail. He tells the woman who is interviewing him that he spent
the time "working on special projects" (318). After the interview is over, John forces
himself to be polite even though he knows he won't land the job. "Thank you for the
opportunity," he says. "I really appreciate it" (318). From this exchange, we learn that
John's punishment entails being sentenced to jail as well as to non-executive, lower-
middle class life, which is more of a stigma than imprisonment. Out on the street he

bumps into his old sidekick, the Pepsi kid. No longer the hip-hop, streetwise punk he used to be, he is now the vice president of sales at PepsiCo. The kid offers him a job in accounts. Infuriated, John says, "I'm an *executive*. I was *this close* to executing the greatest goddamn business coup in history! . . . One day we're going to finish what we started! . . . Nothing's changed, you know! One day, we're going to try this again, and *win!*" The kid calmly replies, "Maybe. . . . But not with you, John" (320).

Dog clearly has his day here: the bad guy gets what he deserves. John's last words, however, are revealing, not necessarily because they are accurate, but because they indicate the state of perpetual breakdown that the capitalism system must maintain in order to properly function. As I discussed in my last chapter, Deleuze and Guattari speak to this point in *Anti-Oedipus*, arguing that breakdowns are the cocoons that lead to breakthroughs and vitalize the flow of capitalist desire and production. Slavoj Žižek addresses the same issue in *They Know Not What They Do*, suggesting that class struggle is paradoxical insofar as "society is 'held together' by the very antagonism, split, that forever prevents its closure in a harmonious, transparent, rational Whole—by the very impediment that undermines every rational totalization" (7). In other words, the world needs John Nike, who exists in more than one form. Violence is essential to the interrelations of subjects and to postmodern socioeconomic reality. This includes the kind of violence inflicted upon bodies as much as on ideologies, psyches, and reality itself, all of which are increasingly fractured and fragmented by the hatchet of technocapitalist media. The society that Barry maps out in *Jennifer Government* is thus highly functional in its terminal disharmony.

If Freud is right about our aggressive desire for the dominance of the self, capitalism is merely a technological extension of it on a mass scale. The cyberpunks represented this extension by impregnating the body with hard, cybernetic technologies; Barry does it by impregnating the mind with the hard ideology of hyperconsumption. But both projects produce and entertain the same turbulent effects, which are a matter of ontological necessity. The ultimate embodiment of terminal identity may be "the electronically enhanced simulation of a human" (Bukatman 253), but violence is most certainly its defining characteristic. What genuinely distinguishes writers of postmodern science fiction, then, is the manner in which they represent the dynamics of violence and the desiring-machines that enact it.

CHAPTER 5

Terminal Choice and the Wachowski Brothers' Matrix Trilogy

Comic Book Worlds

The villainy of the Green Goblin and Dr. Octopus in Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* films is defined by their technological extensions. These extensions are remakes of their selfhoods that redirect the flows of their desires, compelling them to tear holes in the moral fabric of society. Like many comic book antagonists, each is a doppelgänger, an externalized Id who can neither control nor escape the primal, machinic commands of his liberated self. The Green Goblin is the product of a nerve gas experiment gone awry. Once a prominent businessman, the experiment schizophrenizes him, spawning the "bad" personality, a terrorist with superhuman strength whose hard technologies include a metallic green exoskeleton, a military glider that functions simultaneously as an airborn surfboard and tank, and an arsenal of chic-looking grenades, bombs and blades. Dr. Octopus experiences a similar breakdown/breakthrough. A good-willed, cutting-edge scientist, he is the product of a fusion experiment gone awry whereby giant, sentient, mechanical tentacles implanted into his spine overtake and control his mind, forcing him to reek havoc. The difference between the two villains is that the technological/self of one is a product of the schism (the Goblin's artillery) and the technological/self of the other is the producer of the schism (Dr. Octopus's tentacles). Nonetheless the "badness" of both is a correlative of their extensions.

Likewise does the "goodness" of Spider-Man correlate with his extensions. Similar to the Green Goblin, he is a product of technology, bitten by a spider that redirects his desires in the opposite way: he feels compelled to use his superhuman

strength and power for altruistic rather than narcissistic means. It could be argued that his extensions are "natural" insofar as he possesses the characteristics of another living organism, one that exists in the same fashion in the natural world. But the way those characteristics are infused in him are made possible by high technology, the spider that bit him being a radioactive, genetically modified mutation. His job is to negate the "bad" technology of villains like the Green Goblin and Dr. Octopus with his "good" technology and uphold the moral order. Ironically, the moral order is dictated almost exclusively by the media, namely *The Daily Bugle*, the premier newspaper in *Spider-Man*'s New York City. The editor-in-chief of the newspaper is J. Jonah Jameson, an industrious capitalist who impugns or glorifies Spider-Man and his enemies depending on what will make the most marketable story. Like any good postmodern enterprise, truth is subservient to the profits that fiction can garner, and morality is a sliding signifier.

The logic of the film, however, suggests otherwise. It indicates that Spider-Man, the Green Goblin and Dr. Octopus possess the power of choice and thereby the power to subjectively produce their selfhoods as they please. "We are who we choose to be," says the Goblin as he threatens to kill his girlfriend Mary Jane with one hand and a gondola full of children with the other. The standoff is a metaphor for how Spider-Man's immediate actions will reflect upon his identity. He must choose who to save. Saving the children and letting his girlfriend die affirms his will to be a superhero and to sacrifice having an ordinary life; saving his girlfriend and letting the children die will render him an everyman. He saves them both, of course, but the crisis of choice afflicts him in each film as he struggles to come to terms with his uncle Ben's dictum that "with

great power comes great responsibility." The villains endure similar struggles, albeit their ability to choose, unlike Spider-Man's, is inhibited by their technologies. The Goblin is the doppelgänger of Norman Osborn. Despite the occasional desire to do and be "good" (especially as a father to his estranged son), he is subordinate to the alternate personality spawned by the machine and must obey it. The same can be said of Dr. Octopus, formerly Dr. Otto Octavius, who becomes subordinate to the machines jacked into his back when the microchip prohibiting them from controlling his mind is accidentally destroyed. Osborn and Octavius are marginalized by the technologies of the Goblin and Octopus, which, in robbing them of the power of choice, inexorably destroy them. Granted, their marginalized halves are reinstated as dominants in the end, but only after they have been beaten by Spider-Man and their deaths are impending.[81] In short, they are not at all who they "choose to be." They are what technology produces them to be. Spider-Man's subject-position is no different. In the second film he quits the superhero business for a short period and tries to lead a normal life. Normalcy is equated with narcissism in that Peter Parker disavows his dominant half so that he may pursue his own self interests, especially an education and a relationship with his beloved Mary Jane. In a sense, Peter Parker becomes a villain by dint of refusing to use his powers for the benefit of mankind, much like his enemies. The stand he makes against his technologies doesn't take, however, and he returns to his crime-fighting ways. Like truth, choice is rendered a fiction. It is the central theme of the narrative, and it is presented as a tangibility, an agency that can be manifested one way or the other. But it

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[81] Prior to his death, Osborn apologizes for his actions and asks Peter Parker not to tell his son Harry about it. Octavius, in turn, is killed as a result of regaining control of his mind (by willpower alone) in order to destroy the deadly energy mass that the A.I. tentacles force him to create.

is ultimately nothing more than an artifice, an illusion that reifies the tenuousness of morality and above all the idea that we have the power to govern the high technologies which define the postmodern self.

The illusion of choice plays a role in the lives of many other comic book superheroes and villains. To be or not to be a schizo—they grapple with this question, each in their own uniquely pathological ways, and invariably choose schizohood. Being the only option available to them, it is a terminal choice, an ontological imperative. In the case of Dr. Octopus and the Green Goblin, choosing otherwise results in their literal deaths; in the case of Spider-Man, it results in the metaphorical death of his messianic identity, which is insufferable. To not be a schizo is not an option as it would rob one of a sense of purpose, a highly prized possession and a fundament of superhero narratives. But purpose is also an illusion which is used to validate the idea that the technology of the self can be determined and controlled by the subject. In my final chapter I want to explore how this dynamic manifests itself in certain aspects of the comic book world of the Wachowski brothers' Matrix trilogy. Employing a stark comic book sensibility, the films are together a caricatured representation of how late capitalist technologies produce postmodern identity. I will show how the Wachowskis manifest notions of terminal purpose, morality, and most importantly choice, all of which are linked to one another. Like Raimi's Spider-Man films, the Matrix trilogy operates under the assumption that these notions are agencies, rather than fantasies that merely establish the subject as a desiring-machine. As Slavoj Žižek states, "Fantasy is usually conceived as a scenario that realizes the subject's desire. . . . it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the

subject assumes in it. It is only through fantasy that the subject is constituted as desiring" (6). The trilogy portrays the fantasy that the human, while dependent upon the technological, is distinct from it—morally, ideologically, ontologically and metaphysically. This fantasy gives the coordinates of a collective panic desire for a "natural" selfhood, one that is not produced by the machinery of late capitalism. It fails to acknowledge that, in the postmodern world, nature has become a machine.

Towards a Neurorealism

Ian Watson writes, "Cyberpunk narratives tend to be fundamentally Earth-based, since to set them offworld is to add an unnecessary layer of strangeness. So here is a new realism. Or neurorealism" (153). Simultaneously set in a futuristic, apocalyptic wasteland circa 2,199 and a neurorealistic simulation program circa 1999 (although not our 1999[82]), *The Matrix* (1999) is a paradigm of the cyberpunk form, borrowing its central conceit from the matrix of William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984). Erected on this conceit is a virtual burlesque of cyberpunk themes, tropes, attitudes, insignia, *mise en scènes*, and fashion statements—everything from mirrorshades to technophilic body/mind invasion to stylized, detail-oriented, pioneering imagery. Inevitably, *The Matrix* and its sequels, *Reloaded* (2002) and *Revolutions* (2003), reach back into the historical bowels of the science fiction genre as well as many other genres and philosophies. As Bruce Sterling writes:

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[82] James Patrick Kelly explains that "it isn't quite the 1999 that we remember, but rather some discount 1999 in which clothes don't quite fit and all jobs crush men's spirits and the sky approaches 'the color of television tuned to a dead channel,' as William Gibson once memorably wrote" (232). Moreover, the Matrix is a wholly urban space. Conventional pastoral space is not part of the program. The machines insert their human batteries into a city, an axis of technological life that inexorably translates humans into technological beings.

> *The Matrix* is a postmodern philosophical movie in which fragments of
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> *philosophy* do this *Casablanca* cliché dance. There's Christian exegesis,
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> a Redeemer myth, a death and rebirth, a hero in self-discovery, the
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> Odyssey, Jean Baudrillard (lots of Baudrillard, the best parts of the film),
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> science-fiction ontological riffs of the Philip K. Dick school,
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> Nebuchadnezzar, the Buddha, Taoism, martial-arts mysticism, oracular
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> prophesy, spoon-bending telekinesis, Houdini stage-show magic, Joseph
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> Campbell, and Godelian mathematical metaphysics. (23-24)

This is notwithstanding the abundance of literary nods, especially to the works of

Shakespeare, Lewis Carroll, L. Frank Baum and William Blake. There is also the thread

of the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale that pervades the narrative, scenes that reference the

tradition of the Spaghetti western and Arthurian romance, a ridiculously callow

Hollywood-romance subplot, the infusion of Goth culture and animé, and, as I have

already indicated, both the diegetic reality and simulated hyperreality of the Matrix

trilogy are distinguished by the mythos of DC comics. Sterling is right to call the film a

"real mess" in terms of its many artifices, allusions and postulates (4). It is like an essay

with too many theses and loose ends, a rhizomatic assemblage of desiring-machines, a

"map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple

entryways and exits and its own lines of flight" (*A Thousand* 21). These entryways and

exits lead into the past, present and future, embodying the system of technologies that

define the human subject. As a collective "imitation of a peculiar or unique,

idiosyncratic style" (as well as a collection of science fiction clichés), the trilogy is a

quintessential postmodern pastiche á la Frederic Jameson. Unlike the pastiche I treated

in my third chapter, the multigeneric film *Army of Darkness* in which comedic parody was a central component, the trilogy is "a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter of any conviction . . . blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs" (Jameson 17). In their dire seriousness, the films are thoroughbred postmodern texts, depicting neuroreality as the schizophrenic body of the postmodern condition.

The volume of critical writing about the first film alone is already rather large, including scores of pop and scholarly articles as well as a number of books.[83] *The Matrix* has been read from many points of view for its religious, racial, metaphysical, mystical, epistemological, ontological, Marxist, philosophical, erotic, cinematic, geopolitical, psychoanalytic, and gendered connotations. It has of course been analyzed for its ode-to-science-fiction attributes, too, and some criticism has attended to *The Matrix* in terms of class and advanced capitalist technologies. My reading of *The Matrix*, and especially its sequels, is allied with David Brande's reading of Gibson's matrix in an article that deliberates symbolic economy and ideology in *Neuromancer*. Says Brande: "What is at stake . . . in my reading of Gibson's cyborgs (and of his construction of cyberspace) is not the degree to which they reflect or represent 'reality,' but the degree to which they stage the ideological fantasy that structures reality" (526). The Wachowski's Matrix is an explicit illustration of this basic Žižekian theme; in their films, subjectivity and the reality it perceives is literally structured by fantasy, and the Matrix serves as an allegory for the mediatized psyche and space that is pathologized by

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[83] Three books that inform this chapter are *The Matrix and Philosophy*, *More Matrix and Philosophy: Revolutions and Reloaded Decoded*, and *Exploring the Matrix*. The first two are collections of essays written by philosophers and cultural theorists; the third is a collection written by science fiction writers.

capital and governed by the law of terminal choice.[84] Given this dynamic, Brande's big

question in his reading of *Neuromancer* is "what unconscious desire is articulated in the

'work' or form of dream" as represented by cybernetic figurations (528). Using Deleuze

and Guattari to draw his conclusion, he surmises that the novel "helps to structure real

capitalist social relations by providing constitutive fantasies of the final subsumption of

all symbolic exchange, and the subject itself, into the money form of value: cyberspace

as the answer to the crisis of overaccumulation and the means to reterritorialize the

deterritorialized flows of advanced capitalism" (528). Gibson's matrix emerges as a

symptom of the Lacanian Real around which the rivers of consumer desire ebb and flow

as they negotiate the constant breakdowns/breakthroughs of capitalism's machinery.

The difference between *Neuromancer*—as well as the two novels that followed it, *Count

Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), both set in the same imploded future and

together called the Sprawl trilogy—and the Matrix trilogy is that the latter wears this

conclusion on its surface, treating Gibson's symbolic economy as a matter of course.

Whereas Gibson speaks in the technologized, fractal, jargon-infested language of

deterritorialization, the Wachowski's speak plainly, in the common everyday language

of today's masses, underscoring that our primal desire is to be defined by being

controlled by our technocapitalist extensions. There is another crucial difference

between the two. In the Sprawl trilogy, capitalism remains the dominant operative

socioeconomic system. In the Matrix trilogy, on the other hand, capitalism is dead; all

that is left is the powerful, antagonistic residue of capitalist technologies, signifying the

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[84] Says Žižek: "The utter passivity [of the fetal bodies of Matrix-going subjects] is the foreclosed fantasy
that sustains our conscious experience as active, self-positing subjects—it is the ultimate perverse fantasy,
the notions that we are ultimately instruments of the Other's (Matrix's) *jouissance*, sucked out of our life-
substance like batteries" (203).

dream life of the contemporary commodity form from the wasteland of a postapocalyptic future that is a regression to a primitive, precapitalist past. By overtly demonizing high technology and turning it into the films' primary antagonist, the Matrix trilogy's critique of capitalism is clear, direct and ultimately cliché, since one of the science fiction genre's foremost practices has always been to express the fear of technology gone wild. This is merely one of a veritable *cirque de soleil* of clichés that distinguish the films. In effect, the Wachowski's critique of capitalism does not belong to the them so much as it belongs to the history of the science fiction genre. I will say more about this idea in the final section of the chapter.

The Matrix trilogy's critique begins with the use of humans as batteries by the machines, as John Shirley explains:

> Certainly, the use of humans as batteries in the film is powerfully
> symbolic of our mindless submission to the consumer economy. We're
> *driving* the economy by buying things we don't need, by submission to
> the marketplace, as a *battery* adds its power to the machine—and being
> caught up in the consumer culture, the herdlike movement from one big-
> media entertainment to the next, keeps us hypnotized, maintains the
> dreamy alienation from the present moment that insures our slavish
> sleep. (55)

Shirley hints at a key element of the concept of postmodern slavery, which I discuss in my third chapter: the terminal dependence upon and surrender to the Other that is capitalist technology—an Other that, as an extension of the human, is also the self. In this sense, the commodity is the doppelgänger of the self, just as Agent Smith is the

doppelgänger of Neo. "He is you," the Oracle tells Neo. "Your opposite. Your negative. The result of the equation trying to balance itself out." One cannot function without the Other, and when the Other dies, so does the One. This is exactly what happens to Neo, "the One" who saves Zion by destroying Agent Smith in *Revolutions*. The inevitable result is the death of Neo and the balancing out of the system. As the Architect of the Matrix warns the Oracle at the end of *Revolutions*, however, the peace treaty invoked by Neo's sacrifice is ephemeral.[85] The system can only remain balanced for a short time before another breakdown occurs as it is the nature of the system to breakdown, to be unbalanced. Another One will be manufactured (Neo has five predecessors). Likewise will *an Other-One* surface to butt heads with the One and maintain the violence and the chaos that are the ontological imperatives of society. This is precisely how capitalism works according to Deleuze and Guattari. "Capitalism is in fact born of the encounter of two sorts of flows: the decoded flows of production in the form of money-capital, and the decoded flows of labor in the form of the 'free worker'" (*Anti-Oedipus* 33). In this schema, Smith is money-capital, Neo is the "free worker" (who is not really free), and both are decoded desiring-machines. Together they are like capitalism itself. Two halves of the same schizophrenic body, their purpose is the deterritorialization of the socius to the nth degree. Smith admits it when he and Neo square off for the first time in *Reloaded*. "Are you aware of it?" he asks him. Neo replies," What?" Smith says:

> Our connection . . . I killed you, Mr. Anderson. I watched you die . . .
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> Then something happened . . . You destroyed me, Mr. Anderson. After

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[85] "Just how long do you think this peace is going to last?" the Architect asks the Oracle. She responds, "As long as it can."

that, I understood the rules, I knew what I was supposed to do, but I didn't. I couldn't. I was compelled to stay, compelled to disobey. And now, here I stand because of you, Mr. Anderson. Because of you, I'm no longer an Agent of this system. Because of you, I've changed. I'm unplugged. A new man, so to speak. Like you, apparently, free. . . . But, as you well know, appearances can be deceiving, which brings me back to the reason why we're here. We're not here because we're free. We're here because we're not free. There is no escaping reason, no denying purpose. Because as we both know, without purpose, we would not exist. It is purpose that created us. Purpose that connects us. Purpose that pulls us. That guides us. That drives us. It is purpose that defines us. Purpose that binds us. We are here because of you, Mr. Anderson. We're here to take from you what you tried to take from us: *purpose.*

The latter part of Smith's dialogue is articulated by a gang of his clones that suddenly appears in the scene. As the ensuing kung fu fight in which Neo battles against 100 or so of these clones suggests, the purpose of the One and the Other—that is, the purpose of the fragmented self—is thus to do violence against *One anOther*, to decode their collective body and, in so doing, render the socius a BwO. Such is the nature of capitalism, which "tends toward a threshold of decoding that will destroy the socius in order to make it a body without organs and unleash the flows of desire on this body as a deterritorialized field" (33). But of course the BwO can never be achieved, and the death of the self enacts a temporary reterritorialization of the socius.

In addition to this aspect of postmodern slavery, Shirley mentions another: the collapse of reality and fantasy. Pathologized by hypermediatized society, the postmodern subject, he suggests, is imprisoned in a dream world, alienated from the real world by "the sensurround pleasure dome of everyday life" (Gitlin 115). This seems to be the essence of neurorealism. Cyberspace is an alternate reality, an illusion that is used to either deceive subjects into believing it is genuine or to offer subjects a conscious escape from reality and the prison of the body. The same can be said for the "real" late capitalist world of "pseudo-events"[86] for which cyberspace functions as a metaphor. But this idea reaches further back in postmodernity than cyberpunk. As I indicate in my second chapter, I locate the literary beginnings of it in the cut-up novels of William S. Burroughs, who was a seminal influence on the iconic cyberpunk writers (Gibson in particular). Written in the late 50s, the cut-ups map out the increasingly irreal contours of postmodern life, representing the postmodern subject as a slave to and production of media technology. Representations of the (high) technologization of subjectivity have been largely the business of science and speculative fiction, and Burroughs, writing on the fringe of the science fiction genre, does this most effectively in his time. He isn't the only one who does it. Before the cut-up trilogy were Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (1957), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), George Orwell's *1984* (1948), Fredric Brown's "The Waveries" (1945) and Theodore Sturgeon's "Ether Breather" (1939) to name just a few texts that express how the real is

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[86] In *The Image*, an early postmodern text that focuses on the diversity of ways that reality has taken a back seat to fiction, Daniel Boorstin contends that pseudo-events are a "new kind of synthetic novelty which has flooded our experience" that are "part of our social image condition(ing)" and that "mix up our roles as actors and as audience" (9, 27, 29). Boorstin's culminating argument is that "the American citizen thus lives in a world where fantasy is more real than reality, where the image has more dignity than its original" (37). Nowadays this sentiment is a bald-faced cliché that both the cyberpunks and the Wachowskis have brought into play.

manipulated into a fiction by sources of power. Between Burroughs and the cyberpunks of the 80s were authors like Richard Matheson, Robert Sheckley and Philip K. Dick, all of whom were exponents of paranoia as a vital symptom of postmodernity and the dominance of technocapitalism. Most notable are Dick's numerous novels and stories that feature characters who are always-already executing hermeneutics of suspicion on the state of reality and their subject-position within it. Dick had a profound influence on the cyberpunks, too. In the absence of Dick and Burroughs, the cyberpunks may not have come to fruition.[87]

Cyberpunk no longer exists as a distinct subgenre. Peter Nicholls suggests the reason has do to with a discontent on the part of its authors. "Towards the end of [the 80s] . . . it became clear that the term 'cyberpunk' no longer pleased all those whose work it had come to envelop. Perhaps it had begun to represent too many clichés, too many literary constraints, too big a readership wanting more and more of the same" (290). This may be true. More probable, however, is that the motifs and themes of cyberpunk began to leak into the science fiction mainstream, which itself was leaking into mainstream literature as the Internet and computer technologies rapidly matured in the 90s and became a central part of everyday life. While it is unlike the cyberspaces imagined by William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, Rudy Rucker, Pat Cadigan, Neil Stephenson and others, the Internet is certainly a neurorealist matrix in which subjects can exist as figuratively "disembodied consciousnesses" with multiple identities, as electric signs and avatars maneuvering through the "rich fields of data" that have

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[87] Ian Watson admits that Dick is a crucial cyberpunk resource. "Without Dick, cyberpunk might not have arisen, or at least not in the same way—although the *visual* treatment of Ridley Scott's movie adaptation *Blade Runner*, the noir mean streets with rain forever falling (replacing Dick's 'radioactive motes, grey and sun-beclouding') and the neon ads and street junk of an Asian third world in high-tech America has perhaps been just as influential in focusing cyberpunk style" (154).

become intimate components of human perception, identity, and choice (*Neuromancer* 5). Like Gibson's matrix, the Internet is a sheer technology of late capitalism produced and perpetuated to facilitate the process of commodification and consumerism. The Wachowski's Matrix is the metaphorical result (or demonic version, if you prefer) of the evolution of media like the Internet. Neurorealism then is a stark technocapitalist production. Born in the postmodern era, it is a *neo* reality generated from the collective desire for the commodity. Say Deleuze and Guattari: "Desire produces reality, or stated another way, desiring-production is one and the same thing as social production" (*Anti-Oedipus* 30). Above all, the neuroreal is the body hardwired to the capitalist machine. This seems to be the next logical phase of aesthetics. The Matrix trilogy is merely a beginning, and cyberpunk is a prototype. In the post-postmodern, postcapitalist era, science fiction will inundate the mainstream. The mainstream will in turn become a complex articulation of how the technology of the machinic self is connected to and affected by the machinery of technocapitalism.

In the sections that follow, I want to isolate a few key attributes of the latter two Matrix neurorealities, examining how they represent the terminal commodification of individual and collective subjectivity and selfhood. The figurehead of my investigation is Neo, a romanticized depiction of human nature as it has been represented by the history of postmodern and pre-postmodern science fiction. Neo is a superhero (in the Matrix), but he is also an everyman (in the real world) and a doppelgänger (in the Matrix and the real world). He embodies the postmodern condition and all of its schizophrenic pockmarks and fluidities. He is a Deleuzoguattarian "line of escape," a sublime instrument of deterritorialization who maintains order by enacting violence against

himself. The films suggest that Neo makes a choice to enact violence and, if he wanted, he could have chosen otherwise. As the renegade program Merovingian says, however, "choice is an illusion created by those with power and those without," even though the logic of the films overturn this claim in the end by instilling in Neo a "natural" will to power that allows him to defeat his doppelgänger and die for the cause of himself, that is, the cause of the human (as distinct from the technological). But it is the nature of the capitalist subject to be powerless and technologized. Neo may be Jesus, but his martyrdom is not a redemption for the sins of humanity. It is a mere reification of the way in which humanity is defined by the technological.

The Freud-Thing

In Philip K. Dick's story "The Father-Thing" (1954), a boy named Charles Walton learns that his father has been surrogated by an alien. The alien "eats" his father's insides and discards the shell of his body in a trash can in the garage. Then it takes the place of his father as the head of the household. Mrs. Walton suspects nothing, but Charles wises up to the father-thing immediately. He discovers his real father's remains in the garbage. He also discovers that the father-thing is growing a mother-thing and a Charles-thing in the back yard. With the help of his friends, he kills the aliens. Dick explains in a note to the story:

> I always had the impression, when I was very small, that my father was
> two people, one good, one bad. The good father goes away and the bad
> father replaces him. I guess many kids have this feeling. What if it were
> so? This story is another instance of a normal feeling, which is in fact

incorrect, somehow becoming correct . . . with the added misery that one

cannot communicate it to others. (413)

In Freudian terms, the father-thing is an unconscious manifestation of Charles' primal

fear; he is the "bad one" that threatens to castrate the child and deny him the love of his

mother. The would-be castration takes place when the father-thing attempts to feed

Charles to the larval Charles-thing. Freud notes the frequency with which "little boys

are afraid of being eaten up by their father" ("The Question" 31), and while the father-

thing is not the one doing the eating here, he is the instigator. The killing of the father-

thing doesn't function as the symbolic death of the father, however, even though both

authority figures are dead. The object that controlled the father-thing is still alive.

Earlier in the story Charles and his friend Tony Peretti are spying on the father-thing

through a window. They watch it turn off like an appliance. "As soon as Mrs. Walton

was gone from the room, the father-thing sagged in its chair. It became limp. Its mouth

fell open. Its eyes peered vacantly. Its head fell forward, like a discarded rag doll"

(106). The two boys quickly surmise that the surrogate is being controlled by some

other source. They find the source under a rock in the front yard. It is "a metallic body.

A thin, jointed thing with endless crooked legs . . . Plated, like an ant; a red-brown bug"

(107). They try to kill the creature, but the father-thing interferes and the creature

escapes down a tunnel. Thus when the father-thing is destroyed, its power source, even

in its absence, steps into its patriarchal shoes. An epistemological uncertainty is

established that in part determines a specific ontological subject-position. The children

don't know where the creature went, nor do they know if and when it will return to

finish the job it presumably started. Power and control exist jointly as an invisible

specter that may or may not materialize at any time. It is this invisible specter that, following in the father-thing's footsteps, has now surrogated Charles' symbolic father.

The relationship between Charles and his symbolic father is equivalent to the relationship between Neo and the Architect of the Matrix, who he meets in *Reloaded*. Given the arboreal, patriarchal nature of Freudian psychoanalysis[88] and Freud's penchant for projecting his father-thingness onto his subjects (as in the case study of Dora[89]), it is appropriate that the Wachowskis dressed up the Architect to resemble him. Donning a trim, stark white beard and hairdo, an unassuming yet sleek-looking bourgeois suit, and a crisply articulate vernacular with which he dialectically explains to Neo the history of the Matrix and the inflexible nature of cause and effect, he is a program, a machine, an A.I. whose purpose is to uphold the Law of the Father—a Freud-thing. Equating Freud with the father of the Matrix is an evocative tactic, particularly in terms of schizoanalysis. According to Deleuze and Guattari, schizoanalysis has the capacity to *produce* the unconscious whereas the business of psychoanalysis is merely to *reduce* it. They argue that pychoanalysis does the unconscious an injustice by subjecting it to a fixed, hierarchal structure of control.

> Psychoanalysis cannot change its method in this regard: it bases its own
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> dictatorial power upon a dictatorial conception of the unconscious.

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[88] Deleuze and Guattari pit their schizoanalytic theory of rhizomatics against the Freudian arborescent system of psychoanalysis, which they call a "hierarchical system with centers of significance and subjectification, central automata like organized memories" (*A Thousand* 16).

[89] One of the best known instances of Freud Oedipalizing himself occurs in *Dora: An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*, a document of his psychoanalysis of an emotionally disturbed eighteen-year-old girl. He reveals that Dora's family life is rife with traumatic kernels, including an obsessive mother, an adulterous father, and would-be pedophilic neighbors. He tentatively concludes that Dora's hysterical outbursts are the result of lesbian tendencies and a confusion between a love for her father and her father's mistress. Before he can complete the psychoanalysis, however, a transference takes place and Dora falls in love with Freud, who "replac[es] her father in her imagination" (108). In the end of the narrative, Freud becomes the father-thing, posing a threat to Dora's unconscious self.

> Psychoanalysis's margin of maneuverability is therefore very limited. In
> both psychoanalysis and its object, there is always a general, always a
> leader (General Freud). Schizoanalysis, on the other hand, treats the
> unconscious as an acentered system, in other words, as a machinic
> network of finite automata (a rhizome), and thus arrives at an entirely
> different state of the unconscious. (*A Thousand* 18)

Psychoanalysis and schizoanalysis are not in opposition to one another. The latter is merely an alternative of the former, one befitting of the fragmented subjectivity characteristic of the mediatized, postmodern world. "The important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel" (20). It is incongruous that the Architect is cast in the arboreal role of root-tree and tracer while Neo is cast in the role of canal-rhizome and mapmaker. In terms of desire, it renders Neo and his human colleagues more machinic than the machines themselves, constantly producing rifts and breakdowns in the body of the socius. They do so by means of aggressive, carnivalesque violence, unlike the machines, whose violence is essentially reactionary. Had all of the humans remained in their pods, had they continued to harbor the illusion of the Matrix under the supervision of the machines as somnambular "coppertops,"[90] there would be no reason for the machines to antagonize them. The

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[90] In a Marxist reading of *The Matrix*, Martin A. Danahay and David Rieder equate the subject-position of the worker under capitalism with that of the human beings, who Morpheus compares with a coppertop battery: "The coppertop reference can be read as an expression of Marxist concerns over the plight of the worker, who, like slaves or conscripted soldiers, provides power for the machines" (215).

Zionites started the war, and it wasn't the first war they started. As the Architect explains to Neo, Zion has been destroyed and rebuilt five times prior to the present conflict. Desire has thus kept the system in a steady state of production (insofar as destruction is the act of producing a particular effect.) The valence of human desire differs from that of the machine. Human desire is predominantly a matter of free will. People want to be able to choose their reality, to choose their selfhood and identity, to choose their subject-position, ultimately to choose the dynamic of their relationship with technology. The desire of the machines, on the other hand, is a matter of orderliness— simply to maintain the order of things that was established with their initial rise to power. This conflict of desire continually frustrates the Architect, who, despite the impeccability of his self-proclaimed creative brawn, cannot produce a Matrix that humans will accept and live happily in.[91] This frustration is tantamount to Freud's frustration with the non-compliant Dora, whose refusal to submit to his fascist will to orderliness (that is, to be structuralized by the Law of the Father) led to an abandonment of the psychoanalysis. Freud blamed the impasse on transference.[92] The architect blames it on "human imperfection." Michel Foucault calls *Anti-Oedipus* an "introduction to the non-fascist life" (xiii). Neo is a comparable introduction, a cure for the imperial ego of Oedipus.[93]

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[91] Unable to come to terms with his failure, the Architect refers to the Matrix as an anomaly: "The Matrix is older than you know. I prefer counting from the emergence of one integral anomaly to the emergence of the next in which case this is the sixth version."

[92] "In this way the transference took me unawares, and, because of the unknown quantity in me which reminded Dora of Herr K. [her father], she took her revenge on me as she wanted to take her revenge on him, and deserted me as she believed herself to have been deceived and deserted by him" (*Dora* 109).

[93] The machines, of course, don't share this outlook. They see things the other way around. In *The Matrix*, Agent Smith, playing the role of the Freud-thing, accuses humanity of being a virus and the

The scene in which Neo encounters the Architect is the central moment of exposition in the trilogy. It is set in a room adjacent the Matrix's "Source," the machine mainframe that both generates the reality of the Matrix and serves as a kind of funeral pyre for errant or broken down programs to come to die. Neo is told by the Oracle that his terminal purpose is to go there as it is the place "where the path of the One ends." Appropriately, the Source is located in a liminal space somewhere between the Matrix and the real world. The Keymaster explains, "There is a building. Inside this building there is a level where no elevator can go and no stair can reach. This level is filled with doors. These doors lead to many places. Hidden places. But one door is special. One door leads to the Source." In order for Neo to enter the "door made of light" that leads to the Source, he must be there during a specific window of time and open it with one of the Keymaster's innumerable keys. Beyond the door is an ovular room entirely circumscribed by walls constructed out of television screens. For the most part, these screens feature identical head shots of Neo. This is a redolent *mise en scène*. The room is a hypermediatized womb to which Neo has returned, both as the One and as a symbolic late capitalist subject who has been constructed by media technologies. In the middle of the womb reposes the Freud-thing in a tall, black, leather executive swivel-chair. He is immediately represented as the CEO of the Matrix, a corporation Neo is employed by in a Marxist sense as he is exploited for his power (first as an ordinary coppertop providing energy to the machines, then as a unique One capable of providing the means of constructing another Matrix) and "'alienated' from the realities of work"

machines of being the cure. From their respective temporal locations, Freud himself very likely would have accused Deleuze and Guattari of the same hysterical sickness.

(Danahay 217). At the same time, Neo is the Jimmy Hoffa of the Matrix's labor union, the prodigal child who will not do as daddy says.

The grid of television screens that describes the room recalls a number of postmodern texts. The silk screen paintings of Andy Warhol that exhibit repeated images of celebrities' faces as a critique of media-saturated culture immediately come to mind. The central position of Neo's image in the screens, the chalky and computerized texture of its skin, and its sharply robotic gesticulations are reminiscent of Max Headroom, a literal cybernetic talking head who "embodies the notion of an electronically constituted culture" (Bukatman 257).[94] The décor is fittingly structured like a comic book, too, each screen representing a block of action in which each of Neo's images plays a singular role, albeit there is no top-to-bottom, left-to-right linearity to the wall's schizophrenic narrative. Also notable is Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976). In this film, an alien posing as a corporate executive (played by David Bowie, at the time a pop star and mogul of spectacular culture), comes to earth to retrieve water for his dying planet and inadvertently becomes a mediatized body. He does so mainly by watching the televisions he surrounds himself with in his hotel room, stacked one atop the other. The process of his mediatization makes him more human. Paradoxically, it also makes him a different kind of alien, assuming we perceive him as a genuine Other that comes to earth and is reconstructed as *another Other*—the condition

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[94] Bukatman describes Max Headroom as an "imperfect duplicate" who "was of course a literalization of television's talking heads—he consisted of only head and shoulders, usually seen against a shifting electronic pattern or against a few computer-generated props. . . . Max only *exists* through television" (257). Likewise does Neo only exist through the Matrix, initially as an ignorant subject, finally as an omniscient superhero. The Matrix's destruction at the end of *Revolutions* is contingent upon and caused by Neo's death by sacrifice. Furthermore, the Max Headroom television series, which consisted of 14 episodes and ran for one season in 1987, addressed many of the same issues as the Matrix trilogy, including "information control and the invasion of privacy" and "terrorism and the media" (67).

of the postmodern human, or posthuman. The Other/alien is the mediatized body, an

extension of the self that redefines the nature of the self as a (high) technological being.

This is the very condition of Matrix-going subjects like Neo. He exits the alien world of

the simulation and enters the real, "machine" world,[95] which is distinguished by a

mechanized landscape and populated by electronic hardware that the formerly

somnambulant, unknowing subject is compelled to awaken to and negotiate as a newly

subjected organism.

The circumscription of Neo by his own televised images also points to a great

deal of postmodern theory. Most visible is the well-known assertion made by

Baudrillard in *The Ecstasy of Communication*: "In the image of television, the most

beautiful prototypical object of this new era, the surrounding universe and our very

bodies are becoming monitoring screens" (12). It is no surprise that Baudrillard is

referenced in the first film.[96] Neo is clearly recreated in the image of television here,

surrounded and monitored by a multifaceted, multi*faced* "screening" of his own

schizophrenic psyche.[97] This screening can be read as a representation of the

postmodern subject who is the mirror of television rather than the other way around, a

figuration conferred by Arthur Kroker and David Cook: "In postmodernist society, it's

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[95] In *Revolutions*, the Oracle implies a distinction between the two diegetic realities of the trilogy: one created by the machines, the other inhabited by them. Thus the real is bound to the machinic and would not exist in its absence.

[96] Neo keeps the illicit software he hacks in a hollowed out copy of *Simulation & Simulacra.*

[97] Of *The Matrix*, Karen Haber writes, "The wonderful sexy use of rearview mirrors, doorknobs, spoons, all manner of reflections, and multiple images in video screens, could have come out of a fashion video or commercial. Slick. Clever. Oh-so-knowing. So many oddly slanted perspectives working to increase the viewers sense of dislocation, and hint at Neo's literal dislocation" (216). "Reflections" of this dislocation climax in the mediatized womb as Neo is digitally illustrated as a schizophrenic subject with multiple "personalities."

not TV as a mirror of society, but just the reverse: *it's society as a mirror of television.* And it's not TV as a reflex commodity-form, but the commodity-form in its most advanced, and exhausted, expression living finally (as Marx prophesied) as a pure image-system, as a spectral television image" (268). Brian McHale expresses a similar view in *Postmodernist Fiction*,[98] as does Paul Virilio in *The Information Bomb*, although Virilio pits the television against the computer screen: "Screen against screen—the home computer *terminal* and the television *monitor* are squaring up to each other in a fight to dominate *the global perception market*, control of which will, in the near future, open up a new era both in aesthetics and in ethics" (112). Virilio's argument is particularly resonant if we identify Neo as the television monitor and the Freud-Thing as the computer terminal. Both parties are striving for perceptual control and, in the process, redefining the nature of subjectivity. This brings me to Scott Bukatman's *Terminal Identity*, a book that has served as a foundation for my dissertation. I mentioned in my first chapter that Bukatman defines terminal identity as "an unmistakably doubled articulation in which we find both the end of the subject and a new subjectivity constructed at the computer station or the television screen" (9). It is in the mediatized womb of the Matrix where this articulation truly begins to flourish as Neo finds himself at a crossroads where he must choose what kind of technology will define the future of humankind.

Neo's meeting with the Architect is as much a conversation as a confrontation. They do not come to physical blows. But there is an aggressive verbal battle, one in

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[98] "Instead of serving as a repertoire of representational techniques, the movies and television appear in postmodernist writing on an ontological level: a world-within-a-world, often one in competition with the primary diegetic world of the text, or a plane interposed between the level of verbal representation and the level of the 'real'" (128).

which the Architect emerges as a kind of linguistic Bruce Lee. As he stuffily drops a virtual "information bomb" on Neo's worldview, he reads and diagnoses Neo's reactions, his vernacular peppered with the sundry thuses, hences and ergos indicative of causal, deductive reasoning. It is a therapy session during which the Architect, wary of the One's history, psychoanalyzes him in an attempt to exert authority and oblige him to return to the Source. In his whet, rapidfire manner of speaking, the Architect says:

The function of the One is now to return to the Source allowing a temporary dissemination of the code you carry reinserting the prime program after which you will be required to select from the Matrix twenty-three individuals (sixteen females, seven males) to rebuild Zion. Failure to comply with this process will result in a cataclysmic system crash killing everyone connected to the Matrix which coupled with the extermination of Zion will ultimately result in the extinction of the entire human race.

By providing Neo with a structural history of the system in which he is interpellated, by assuring him that it is in his nature to be flawed, and by insisting that his future is set in stone, he attempts to structuralize him according to his code of morality. But Neo has his own code of morality—that which decodes and deterritorializes the Freud-thing's fascist territorialization. Playing the role of the Deleuzoguattarian nomad warrior, he resists the Law of the Father. His resistance is articulated by his televised images. The "real" Neo—that is, the real "mental projection" into the Matrix of Neo's "digital self"—is standing in the center of the room, defying the Freud-thing only by looming over him, rather than adopting the role of the stereotypical analysand who lies supine on a couch, beneath the gaze of his analyst. Despite his commanding stance, however, Neo keeps his cool. He is clearly perplexed and upset, but his responses are always

controlled and unemotional. In contrast, his images respond violently, shouting "Fuck you!" and "You can't control me!" and "You can't make me do anything!" A few of the images flip the Freud-thing the bird. Each collective outburst is followed by the camera zooming into one of the images, which then dissolves into the "real," pacified Neo standing in the middle of the room. Together the images comprise his schizophrenic body; they are the unconscious desiring-machines, schiz-flows, multiplicities, channels and offshoots that describe the technology of his selfhood as canal-rhizome.

James A. Steintrager writes, "Deleuze and Guattari thus take aim at the Oedipus complex, which they see as functioning to perpetuate exploitation by normalizing the essential unity of capitalist relations of production: the nuclear family" (216). As the Architect calls to attention, the Matrix functions in the same way, albeit doubly. It perpetuates the exploitation of the human body for its bioelectric power by maintaining the illusion of the naturalized conditions of capitalist relations and the production of the nuclear family. It is the illusion of an illusion, the naturalization of a naturalization, a thoroughbred simulacra created by the machines, which are terminal technologies of capitalism. In the diegesis of the trilogy, the Matrix can therefore be interpreted as late capitalism on literal and figurative levels. Literally it is the terminal end-product of the capitalist system, the point where the human is utterly disempowered by technology and the only option is to destroy the system and all of its components and start over from scratch. Figuratively it is an allegory for contemporary commodity-culture and the society of the spectacle "where fantasy is more real than reality, where the image has more dignity than its original" (Boorstin 37). Each figuration represents a medium of control and subjugation that jeopardizes the subject's use of free will, just as Deleuze

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and Guattari's rhizomatics do. Moreover, the Matrix trilogy and Deleuze and Guattari both posit agency from their respective kakistocracies. In their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, "Rhizome," perhaps the most important piece in their work on capitalism and schizophrenia alongside *Anti-Oedipus*'s "The Desiring-Machines," Deleuze and Guattari enthusiastically urge subjects to adopt the way of the schizo: "Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots! Don't be one or multiple, be multiplicities! Run lines, never plot a point! Speed turns the point into a line! Be quick, even when standing still! Line of chance, line of hips, line of flight. Don't bring out the General in you! . . . Make maps, not photos or drawings" (24-25). They encourage the application of violence to the despotic machine of Freudocapitalist economy as a means of breaking out of and fleeing it in the form of a new machine. They ask the subject to make a choice between slavery and freedom. In so doing, they imply that the subject has a choice. The Matrix films do likewise, employing Neo, who flies like Superman and kung fu fights in fast-time, as the ultimate speedster and line of flight. He *chooses* this ontology, although not without some difficulty. Choice is presented as the keynote problem, here and elsewhere, but in the end the trilogy romantically suggests that it is a tangibility. The difference between this position and Deleuze and Guattari's is that the films are not making this assertion of their own volition. An assemblage of science fiction body parts, they function more as a mouthpiece for the genre itself, which has frequently expressed a boyish desire for free will in the grip of technology. In this way, the Wachowski's successfully critique science fiction, exposing it as a wish-fulfillment enterprise (like Freudian dreams). They also critique schizoanalysis, exposing it as a science fiction (choosing to be under the

liege of General Freud or to be the Pink Panther[99] both situate the subject in/as the

machine).

In the end of their conversation/confrontation, Neo must pick between returning

to the machine world and trying to save his beloved Trinity (even though the Architect

insists that it is impossible), and returning to the Source to allegedly save humanity.

"There are two doors," the Architect intones. "The door to your right leads to the

Source and the salvation of Zion. The door to your left leads back to the Matrix and to

her and to the end of your species. As you adequately put, the problem is choice. But

we already know what you are going to do, don't we." What makes Neo different from

his predecessors is his capacity for emotion, namely his love for Trinity; as such, both

the Freud-thing and his analysand know that, despite their claim that the "problem is

choice," there is only one possible choice that can be made. In effect, the problem is not

choice at all. Unlike his predecessors, Neo's emotional constitution has been

preprogrammed to experience a specific kind of love by the Oracle, who was solicited

by the frustrated Architect to help him build a more functional Matrix.[100] Neo's exiting

the door on the left is an inevitability. He returns to the Matrix and saves Trinity, but

only temporarily; she dies in *Revolutions*, having served her purpose—to love and be

loved by Neo. Thus she partially fulfills the Architect's prophesy that "she is going to

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[99] An example of a line of flight that Deleuze and Guattari use in "Rhizome." They write: "The Pink
Panther imitates nothing, it reproduces nothing, it paints the world its color, pink on pink; this is its
becoming-world, carried out in such a way that it becomes imperceptible itself, asignifying, makes its
rupture, its own line of flight, follows its 'aparellel evolution' through to the end" (*A Thousand* 11).
Spawned by the 1963 film that starred Peter Sellers as the bumbling Inspector Jacques Clouseau, *The Pink
Panther* was a cartoon that appeared in the late 1960s. It featured a panther that persistently defied and
was on the run from the law.

[100] Says the Architect: "Thus the answer was stumbled upon by another, an intuitive program, initially
created to investigate certain aspects of the human psyche. . . . She stumbled upon a solution whereby
nearly 99% of all test subjects accepted the program as long as they were given a choice, even if they were
only aware of the choice at a near unconscious level." Choice then has been wired into the system.

die and there is nothing you can do to stop it." But the flip side of his prophesy, the death of humanity, goes unfulfilled. In *Revolutions*, Agent Smith invades and overtakes all of the Matrix's virtual bodies, and he threatens to extend his domination to the machine world. Neo prohibits this from happening by sacrificing his life. As a result, the machines grant the Zionites amnesty. The implication is that Neo's choice led to this denouement. But we are talking about a terminal choice, one that is constructed by exterior, externalized technological forces to culminate in a specific way.[101]

Even if choice, "vis à vis love,"[102] had not been wired into the system, it would still be a terminal phenomenon in terms of the technology of the self. This is the point I have been leading up to and want to explore a bit further in the next section. According to the Architect, exiting either door would be a return for Neo—one to the womb, the other to the grave. Both places, however, are defined by high technology. Let's assume for a moment that Neo has the capacity to choose the door that will return him to Zion and the real world. While it is not a cyberspatial realm, it is nonetheless a realm in which humans are dependent upon machines in order to survive, individually and as a community.[103] More importantly, it is a realm ruled by the technological. The human

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[101] Žižek considers the crisis of choice more generally in a short reading of the Matrix trilogy called "Reloaded Revolutions": "In short, the choice is not between bitter truth and pleasurable illusion, but rather between the two modes of illusion: the traitor [Seifert] is bound to the illusion of our 'reality,' dominated and manipulated by the Matrix, while Neo offers to humanity the experience of the universe as the playground in which we can play a multitude of games, freely passing from one to another, reshaping the rules which fix our experience of reality" (202).

[102] Says the Architect: "Your five predecessors were by design based on a similar predication, a contingent affirmation that was meant to create a profound attachment to the rest of your species facilitating the function of the One. While the others experienced this in a very general way, your experience is far more specific, *vis à vis love*." It is Neo's ability to give and receive love that lends him the (illusory) power to choose.

[103] Zion, for example, is energized by a gigantic engine that bears a strong resemblance to certain architectures found in the machine city.

has been marginalized. In order to maintain its identity, it needs its dominant half. My general argument is that this need exists today in our spectacular reality, the dominant half of our binary being late capitalist media technologies. We have gradually projected these technologies out of our collective body, creating a selfhood, and now this selfhood is returning to us, worming back into our body, swimming back to the womb. In effect, it is revising human nature, which has always been defined by its technological extensions, but only recently by its capitalist technological extensions. The primary difference between our condition today and our precapitalist condition is that now we want to embrace our extensions as much as we want to escape them. And we believe that we can escape them—that we can choose to escape them. What we don't want to admit is that, if "everything is a machine" (*Anti-Oedipus* 2), and if the machine is essentially the self, and if the self is simultaneously the Other, there can be no "lines of escape." As Žižek says, "freedom is only possible within the system that hinders its full deployment" ("Reloaded" 202).

The Nature of/is Technology

Bruce Sterling explains that the fields of pods in which humans are grown and farmed for their bioelectricity that we are shown in *The Matrix* are a "technorganic version of hell" derived from Kevin Kelly's *Out of Control: The New Biology of Machines, Social Systems, and the Economic World* (25). The book was published in 1994 and probes the development of the relationship between hard technology and the living organism. Wellsian in tone, Kelly speculates on the future of control, emphasizing in his thesis that

the machine is increasingly becoming indistinguishable from the human. In a key

passage, he writes:

> This marriage between life and machines is one of convenience, because,
>
> in part, it has been forced by our current technical limitations. For the
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> world of our own making has become so complicated that we must turn
>
> to the world of the born to understand how to manage it. That is, the
>
> more mechanical we make our fabricated environment, the more
>
> biological it will eventually have to be if it is to work at all. Our future is
>
> technological; but it will not be a world of gray steel. Rather our
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> technological future is headed toward a neo-biological civilization. (2)

Kelly's argument is something of a cross between the panic theories of McLuhan and

Baudrillard, combining a technonaturalist determinism with a technofatalist

dystopianism. Like much science fiction and nonfiction, however, he neglects to

acknowledge a fundament of technology as it relates to the human body. In saying that

the "future is technological," he implies that the present and the past are otherwise, and

by extension, that the further one travels into the past, the less technological the world

and the self become. As I mention above and in my first chapter, the world and the

self—or rather, the world as it is constituted by the self—has always been defined by

technology, by extensions of the body that create certain typographies. It doesn't matter

if this extension is a heiroglyphic on a cave wall, a hand-carved arrowhead, a Tommy

gun, or an artificial intelligence: all are technologies that describe a particular form of

selfhood. Technology is not something that is disconnected or dissociated from the

human, it is an intimate part of the human. It is in fact what makes the human human.

I should make a brief clarification regarding the difference between human nature and the natural world. Like a good postmodernist, I consider them linked insofar as the natural world is constructed by the gaze of the subject as a representation (of God, of the non-human, of that which cannot be represented, and so on). At the same time, I recognize that the natural world is separate from the human and that "nature" or the pastoral is something in which the human can insert itself or experience on some metaphysical level. One is a matter of perception, the other is matter of being. But both are created by the act of a projection of the self, and in a sense, both belong to the technology of the self. This linkage often goes unacknowledged by the science fiction genre. Broadly speaking, in science fiction high technology functions as the central definitive characteristic, the vehicle most frequently used by writers and filmmakers to "cognitively estrange" readers and viewers. The pastoral has typically been represented in a romantic and nostalgic manner as something that is not only distinct from technology, but gradually being snuffed by it.[104] This is most recently visible in Peter Jackson's adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkein's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy,[105] especially *The Two Towers*, in which preindustrial machinery is used by the malevolent powers of Sauron to rid the physical landscape of its flora and fauna. Eventually nature, in the form of the treelike Ents, fights back; and the defeat of Sauron in the final film represents a defeat of the alleged evils of technology and a return to pastoral tranquility where the human (and the humanlike) can exist in a state of non-technological purity.

[104] Such representations have of course not been limited to the science fiction genre, as Leo Marx explicates in *The Machine and the Garden*, which analyzes the "poetic fantasy" of the pastoral and the inexorableness of the technological in the work of Emerson, Fitzgerald, Hawthorne, Melville and Thoreau (3).

[105] While the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is generally acknowledged as a fantasy narrative, its use of technology in this way inevitably allies it to science fiction.

Such a dynamic is a science fictional cliché, as Brian Stableford and Peter Nicholls indicate: "Sf is, of course, the natural medium of antitechnological fantasies as well as of serious extrapolations of technological possibility" (1203). Whatever the case, very few texts problematize the relationship between nature and technology, representing the latter as a destructive or constructive anti-natural entity.

While the Matrix trilogy takes pride in the patchwork of clichés that constitutes its narrative body, it problematizes this relationship on a number of occasions, conflating nature and technology. When Neo and Trinity use Captain Naobi's ship to travel to Machine City in *Revolutions*, for instance, there is a scene in which a seeming distinction is drawn between the two. The closer they get to the city, however, the more this distinction is blurred. Their reason for going there is unclear at first. "I just have to," Neo reluctantly, ignorantly soothsays. By degrees, they learn that it is to fulfill their terminal purposes. Trinity's is simply to die (when the ship crashes) and consequently imbue in Neo a grief that allows him to confront the Deus ex Machina[106] without fearing for his own life, which, in the absence of Trinity, he no longer values. His purpose is to defeat Smith and save the world—to make peace, if only temporarily, between the human and the technological, between the subject and the self. As they enter into Machine City airspace, Neo and Trinity encounter heavy fire from a legion of bombers and sentinels that stretches across the horizon. By way of some form of destructive telekinesis,[107] Neo is able to fend them off for a time; their ship plunges into the brigade

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[106] Looking something like a large, satanic porcupine, Deus ex Machina is the representative of the machinic hive mind who is sent to negotiate terms with Neo when he infiltrates Machine City.

[107] The first appearance of this power occurs at the end of *Reloaded* when Neo and his cronies are running away from a small pack of sentinels in an underground catacomb. Suddenly Neo stops running, turns around. "I can feel them," he whispers. He raises a spread-fingered hand into the air. The moment before

and machines begin to explode like fireworks. But there are too many of them. They steer the ship upwards and pierce through the scorched, electric clouds. Above them is a vista that is in complete contrast to the dark, gritty, flickering texture of the machine world. The pastel of soft colors that comprise the sky belong to a Magritte painting. For a moment everything is quiet and peaceful as the ship reaches the peak of its ascent. This heavenly skyscape is a pastoral utopia set in contrast to the hellish landscape of the urban dystopia beneath it, and when Trinity beholds it, she says, simply, "Beautiful." Then the ship loses power and plunges back into the abyss.

The contrast in this scene elicits two binaries: human/pastoral and machine/urban. The human/pastoral is represented as a lost paradise and thus "good." The machine/urban is represented as a "bad" consequence of that loss, a fall from Eden. But as Neo and Trinity enter the city limits and we get a closer view of its machinery, this contrast is progressively more disturbed. The city is a live thing. Pulsing, greasy, pyrotechnic and febrile, it is an organism in itself as well as a housing for other, smaller organisms. It has its own wildlife. After their ship crashes and Trinity dies, Neo walks down a narrow pathway towards the promontory where he will confront Deus ex Machina. Surrounding this pathway are the branches and vegetation of a mechanical jungle crawling with diverse motorized insects and animals. Once Neo reaches the promontory, we see that the entire city is a jungle. There are creatures everywhere, creeping and scuttling across the vastness of the cityscape's electrified rainforest. The

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the sentinels fall on him, his hand gesticulates. The sentinels freeze and writhe as if strangulated, then fall dead to the ground. The implication is that Neo is a machine, too, constructed for a specific purpose and neurally connected to the hive mind shared by the machine collective. Neo is unaware of this connection, however, and when the sentinels go down, so does he. Not so in *Revolutions*. When he confronts the sentinels on the periphery of Machine City, he is on the verge of fully realizing his power as a machine. He is nearing the finish line of the awakening that the entire trilogy marks. Ironically, when he reaches the point where he can truly "see," he is blind, having lost his eyes in a brawl with Smith. This blindness marks his passage from human to technological, from subject to self.

problem is deepened when Deus ex Machina appears to Neo in the form of a giant

human face constructed out of a swarm of metallic bees. In these respects, Machine City

seems more human/pastoral than machine/urban. The skyscape, in turn, seems more

unreal—not machine/urban, but a representation of nostalgia/desire. We might say that

the skyscape is "more real than real" (*Simulacra* 81), as Baudrillard says of our

mediatized world. It is no longer part of the natural world, after all, which has been

overrun and redefined by technologies spawned from capitalist production. In short,

what Neo and Trinity's journey into the Machine City shows is that nature only exists

through the vehicle of the technological, which has redefined the behavior and the gaze

of the subject.

The usurpation of nature by the technocapitalist machine culminates in the final

battle royal in *Revolutions* between Neo and his doppelgänger Agent Smith. The battle

is staged in the form of *wuxia pian*, a style of fighting invented by Chinese filmmakers

dating back to the 1920s. "Based on legends, popular fiction, or Chinese opera, these

films feature action as well as a strong supernatural element, in which kung fu masters

fly through the air, display deadly mental powers, or shoot death rays out of their heads"

(Williams 125). For the Matrix trilogy's climax, this style is an adequate means of

expressing the ultraviolence characteristic of the trilogy's diegetic reality on top of the

late capitalist reality from which it was extrapolated. Smith and Neo are two break-

flows plugged into the same machinic entity. The violence they commit against each

other is representative of a violence committed against an individual, pathological self

born from technocapitalist subjectivity. In the schizoanalytic scheme of things, violence

is their terminal purpose, and together they are the bipolarity that keeps the system in

(dis)order. Ian Watson writes, "What precisely does Agent Smith, tormented by nausea, hope for? For something—or for *nothing*, nihilistically? For sheer oblivion? Do the machines have any agenda other than eradicating Zion and the Resistance and continuing indefinitely as before?" (167). From a Deleuzoguattarian perspective, no, they don't. Smith is the epitome of this agenda. He craves purpose yet thinks he lacks it, blaming Neo for stealing it from him. Hence he creates a purpose for himself: becoming God. But this is illusory. His real purpose, as it turns out, is solely to wreak havoc in the process of becoming God since becoming God is tantamount to manifesting the BwO and therefore impossible. Neo's purpose in turn is to counter Smith's havoc-reeking. Engaged in the terminal production of violence, both characters are desiring-machines tearing across the surface of the same BwO. By my reading, they reveal the nature of the technologized capitalist subject, who creates an illusory sense of purpose by means of commodity production and consumption. Buried in the unconscious is the subject's real purpose: the mere creation and perpetuation of violence.

Ironically, perhaps, this is a basic Freudian tenet developed most poignantly in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. Freud's thesis is that human nature is inherently narcissistic, aggressive and self-destructive. At the end of the book, he speculates as to what effects the extension of the subject's modern (and inevitably capitalistic) technologies will have on civilization:

> The fateful question for the human species seems to me to be whether
> and to what extent their cultural development will succeed in mastering
> the disturbance of their life by the human instinct of aggression and self-
> destruction. It may be that in this respect precisely the present time

deserves a special interest. Men have gained control over the forces of

nature to such an extent that with their help they would have no difficulty

in exterminating one another to the last man. (111-12)

Put differently, we have reinvented nature by projecting our technologies onto it, and

what remains to be seen is the aftermath of this violent act. One potential aftermath is

the diegesis of the Matrix trilogy. This diegesis is an effect of nature, which has been

reconfigured by the technological, turning against and reconfiguring the human. Freud

implicitly acknowledges that, in Smith's words, what "pulls us," "guides us," "drives

us" and "defines us" is our instinctual knack for violence, that is, the process of

committing violence, if only unconsciously. Here Freud and Deleuze and Guattari are

more or less on the same page. Where they are not on the same page, and where

Freudian theory prevails, is the issue of choice. The Matrix trilogy suggests that Neo

has the power to choose his identity and path in life. So do Deleuze and Guattari

suggest that the subject has the power to choose to be a schizocratic revolutionary.

Freud, however, claims that we are slaves to our unconscious desires and that the

choices we make are machinic productions of those desires. It is in this crucial way that

the Matrix trilogy, in spite of its schizoanlytic current, is a kind of Freud-thing itself.

The problem is not choice. The problem is the films propose that the problem is choice

when in fact they delineate a deterministic universe.

The final battle is orchestrated by the machines. Squared off against Deus ex

Machina, Neo says, "The program Smith has grown beyond your control. Soon he will

spread throughout this city as he had spread throughout the Matrix. You cannot stop

him. But I can." His words are not well-received. Deus ex Machina is disgusted by the

prospect of being dependent upon a human and exclaims, "We don't need you! We need nothing!" Paradoxically, of course, human bioelectricity is the life support system for the machines. And despite its claim, Deus ex Machina realizes that Smith poses a formidable threat. It quickly concedes. A chair constructed from thick fiberoptic tendrils "grows" out of the promontory beneath Neo and eases his body into it. Another tendril looms behind his head like a cobra reading itself to strike. It lashes out, thrusting its sharp head into his cortical shunt and jacking him into the Matrix. Waiting for him is a dark, rainy city populated entirely by his doppelgänger. A soaking wet Neo is standing in the middle of a street surrounded by row after row of Agent Smiths. Smiths are also staring out the windows of the buildings that loom overhead. Then one of them strides into the street. Neo says, "It ends tonight." "I know it does," the Smith retorts. "I've seen it. That's why the rest of me is just going to enjoy the show. Because we already know that I'm the one that beats you." Always decreeing the inevitability of his dissemination and dominance, Smith is a sheer determinist, claiming to have foreknowledge of the future and his position in it. The ensuing dogfight is a kung fu extravaganza. Most of it takes place in the air. Neo and Smith throw a flurry of stylized punches and kicks. They repeatedly blitz and collide with one another as lightning strikes and thunder crashes. Neo catches the brunt of the fracas, and finally Smith piledrives him into the street. Once again he gets up. Frustrated and perplexed, Smith utters the following climactic monologue:

> Why do you do it? Why keep fighting? Do you believe you're fighting
>
> for something, for more than your survival? Can you tell me what it is?
>
> Do you even know? Is it freedom or truth? Perhaps peace. Could it be

for love? Illusions, Mr. Anderson. Vagaries of perception. Temporary constructs of a feeble human intellect trying desperately to justify an existence that is without meaning or purpose. And all of them as artificial as the Matrix itself. . . . You can't win. It's pointless to keep fighting. Why, Mr. Anderson? Why, why, why do you persist?

In reply, Neo murmurs, "Because I choose to." The assertion reifies the trilogy's central irony. Smith assumes Neo is privy to the same foresight that he is. In his eyes, Neo knows Smith is going to defeat him. He knows it is inevitable, and he can't understand why Neo won't give up. We viewers don't know whether or not Neo actually possesses that foresight. In all likelihood he doesn't; he is merely performing his constructed role, fulfilling his preprogrammed destiny as a metaphorical and literal machine plugged into the system. And yet he tells Smith that his persistence is the result of an act of free will. As he sees it, he alone makes the choice to keep fighting, not knowing that the power of choice is encoded into his machinic subjectivity. This maddens Smith even more. At last he shoves his hand into Neo's chest, imprinting himself onto the One just as he has imprinted himself onto all of the Matrix's subjects. Little does he know that Neo jacked into the Matrix in Machine City, giving the machines full access to his virtual self. Once Smith surrogates that self, they have access to him. In the end Neo's real body operates as a medium through which the collective body of Smith is destroyed and peace is established between the Zionites and the machines. Neo dies in the process, solidifying his role as messiah. When he is transported away from the promontory on a coffinlike lath, his body is fittingly splayed out like Christ on the cross.

In reference to the Žižekian idea that watching television has become a performative act by which the postmodern subject "does its duty," Brian Donohue writes:

> This notion has significant implications for theories of both ideology and subjectivity. For example, the determining effect of objective activity regardless of subjective intention can be read as another way of stating the existentialist slogan that there is no 'dress rehearsal' for life: at each moment actions are final and decisive, even if one believes oneself to be, for example, merely "performing a role" temporarily before returning to some other "real life." That real life is being determined at each instant by numerous material factors in the face of which a concept like 'personal choice' loses the certainty of its suggestion of direct action in pursuit of clearly understood interests. (20)

This passage is translatable to Neo's selfhood and to the terminal choice that speaks it. He is a cyborg body and his identity is defined by his being a technological extension both inside and outside the Matrix. Inside he is a heroic "mental projection of [his] digital self" who fights for the existence of humanity. Outside he is a docile body perceptually and cerebrally connected to the machines—despite his blindness, he sees Machine City as a spectacle of code and light (just as he sees the Matrix at the close of the first film), and he short-fuses sentinels at will. Both sites see Neo functioning as a technology, and both are "determined at each instant by material factors" deriving from the opposing schemas implemented by the Architect and the Oracle as to the "function of the One." Like Smith and Neo, the Architect and the Oracle are two sides of the same

coin; their purpose is merely to offset each other and, in so doing, to balance the "equation" out. Whatever their metaphysical context, they are all performative technologies and have no "real life" to return to. Choice is a fantasy in the Matrix trilogy that poses as a reality. More than anything, the films indicate that the subject can choose to divide the human from the technological. As Neo shows us in spite of himself, however, this division is an ontological impossibility. Like Christ, he is simultaneously a common man and a superhero, and it is his existence as a fluid, schized technology that allows him to preserve the existence of humanity. In this respect, everything is dependent upon and (pre)determined by technological "capital," by the residual capitalist technologies that have adopted the role of Frankenstein's monster and theoretically re-engaged in the very "schizosophic" capitalist praxis that exists in our postmodern world.

Capitalism and Science Fiction

Historically, comic book narratives have been situated to some degree within the science fiction cosmography, dating back to 1938 when the first issue of *Superman* was published by Action Comics. Mark Oehlert explains that this period marks the beginning of the "Golden Age" of comics, which lasted from 1939 to 1950 and truly came to fruition when Marvel hit the scene (112).[108] In 1941, Marvel introduced Captain America, the first cyborgian comic book hero. Rejected from the military because of his meager physical stature, he is given a "super-soldier serum" that jacks up

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[108] This period coincides with the Golden Age of science fiction, which Peter Nicholls says began in 1937 when John W. Campbell took over as editor for the pulp magazine *Astounding Stories* and ended in the late 1940s ("Golden" 506).

his physiology and turns him into a war machine of a particular type: the anti-Nazi. At the time, World War II was unfolding and Nazism was spreading across Europe. Adolf Hitler was appropriately Captain America's virgin nemesis. Both the science fictional *Superman* and *Captain America*, then, were preoccupied with subverting fascist hostility, Lex Luther playing the part of Hitler in Superman's diegesis. Many of the comics that followed these originary texts indulged the same anxiety, focusing on the cold war and the threat of communism.[109] Today fascist villainy has been superseded by capitalism and the technologies it disseminates. "The great evils in the [contemporary] comic book world are the multinational corporations" (120), as is the case in much cyberpunk fiction. Corporate power is thus represented as the modern day equivalent of would-be Nazi imperialism. This, too, is the role of the machines in the Matrix trilogy, which reaffirms the Wachowski brothers' use of a comic book aesthetic.

Oehlert identifies three types of "latter day cyborg" comic book characters: the simple controller, the bio-tech integrator, and the genetic cyborg. All of them interface with or are infected by hard technology in some way. Most complicated is the third category that includes characters like Neo and Smith. "Characters in this class may or may not have artificial implants but their primary power rests in a purposeful alteration of their genetic code. The issues of purposefulness and intent are critical and defining ideas for this group. It is intent that distinguishes the genetic cyborg from the comic characters that have been created by accident" (116). Unlike Spider-Man, Neo is created on purpose, by the machines, as the Freud-thing makes clear. He is a veritable Captain America, designed to uphold the Law (of the Father) in the name of the technocapitalist

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[109] For instance, "the title of *Captain America*'s comic book became 'Capt. America . . . Commie Smasher'" (113).

desiring-machine. All superheroes are schized to some degree by some form of

technology—schizophrenia is the nature of the superhero—and most of them are

situated within an urban capitalist milieu. Classic superheroes like Captain American

are pro-capitalist figures, capitalism being synonymous with American morality and

opposed to fascist immorality. The Matrix trilogy adopts the thematic of the cyberpunk

narrative and inverts this dynamic, painting the consumer-capitalist machine as a vital

source of immorality and villainy. Even the films' credits do this, as John Shirley

explains:

> In his commentary on the DVD, one of the special effects men says that
>
> the Wachowski Brothers were firm about showing the logos of their
>
> financiers, Village Roadshow Pictures, and the corporate monolith,
>
> Warner Bros., in their own digital styling, colored sickly green and
>
> digitized to mesh with the tone of the [first] film. They wanted to co-opt
>
> the logos and thus somehow repudiate the power of these media despots.
>
> (53)

Despite such repudiations, however, the trilogy undermines the cyberpunk thematic by

suggesting the potentiality of free will as well as the potentiality of the separation of the

human subject and the technological self that defines it. In this capacity, they represent

the utopian desires of much pre-cyberpunk and proto science fiction, dating back to the

optimistic narratives of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and Edward Bellamy up to the stories

published in pulp magazines like *Amazing Stories*, *Astounding Stories of Super-Science* and *Weird Tales*.[110]

This brings me back to something I mentioned earlier. As an elemental and topical assemblage of science fictional clichés extracted from the genre's beginnings up to the present, the trilogy is a cognitive map of the genre that theorizes science fiction with its own machinery. It is not necessarily the Wachowskis that posit agency from the technology of the self; it is the cinematic desiring-machine that they compile. At its core, the trilogy is like the science fictions of Baudrillard and Haraway; as Istvan Csicery-Ronay, Jr. says, it is an articulation of the "fusion of SF and theory . . . that seeks to generate a 'futurology'" (389), the only difference being that it masquerades as fiction rather than theory. Csicery-Ronay, Jr. emphasizes the theoretical importance of mapping out "a futurological dimension in every area of research [which] should be as obvious in the postmodern age as the need for a historical one. Only by attempting to limn the possible directions of evolution, and to clarify the ethical principles that one wishes to see guiding action, can intellectual work maintain a sense of connection with the breakneck acceleration of technological innovation" (402). The futurological dimension that the Matrix trilogy outlines is a postcapitalist dystopia in which the technology of the capitalist self has turned against and reinscribed the subject. Postmodern science fiction is a product of late capitalism that usually references or signifies the capitalist system in some way. A representation of the history of the science fiction genre, the Matrix trilogy serves as a schized critique and reification of that system. More than this, however, it points to the future of the genre, suggesting that

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[110] Peter Nicholls writes, "In the most simplistic version of the history of sf, sf was always (and rightly) an optimistic literature until the New Wave came along in the 1960s and spoiled everything" ("Optimism" 891).

its primary business will inevitably be preoccupied with the way in which

technocapitalism remakes its maker.

CODA

In the war that unfurls in *The Matrix Revolutions*, human soldiers literally use their technological extensions to defend themselves against the squidlike machines that storm Zion. Manning giant mechanical exoskeletons that are nightmarish caricatures of the human body, the soldiers are efficiently pulverized by the machines, although they put up a good fight. The exoskeletons allude to the climactic scene in the film *Aliens* (1986). While larger, they are virtual spitting images of the anthropomorphic forklift Ripley uses to square off against and defeat the mantislike alien queen. The allusion is no doubt deliberate in light of the Matrix trilogy's own body armor, an assemblage of science fiction motifs and themes. Unlike the soldiers, however, Ripley's opponent is a genuine alien. It is an Other from a distant planet that has no connection to the human community whereas the machines are spawned by that community. Specifically, they are spawned by the high technology created in order to build a more fluid and productive capitalist system. Technology of any kind, whether it be language or a killer robot, is a creative extension of the subject. In *Technologized Desire*, I have viewed this extension in terms of selfhood, which defines subjectivity as an individual and collective phenomenon. *Revolutions'* war is a battle in which the technological self confronts the technological self. At the same time, it is a battle in which the Other confronts the Other. This implosive relationship is an effect of the mediatization and subsequent massification of selfhood by the commodity-culture machine. Individuality is an evolving fiction. Soon what differentiates one body from another will be the mere semblance of its technocapitalist armor. Beneath this diversity of armor will crouch the

same coppertop subject, terminalized by an oppositional panic-desire to technologically extend itself *ad infinitum* and shed its technocapitalist self so as to exist *au naturel*. In many ways this is already the case. And as we plunge further into the matrix of our own diegetic reality, science fiction will serve as a kind of aggressive atlas, mediating the "complex trajectory between the forces of instrumental reason and the abandon of a sacrificial excess" and hypertheorizing the denovation—and devolution—of technologized desire (Bukatman 329).

Broadly speaking, Bukatman wrote about how science fiction represented the postmodern condition. I have tried to write beyond this point, visualizing how science fiction represents the dawning popstcapitalist condition by examining the postmodern landscape. In other words, my angle of incidence uses science fiction to point to a postcapitalist subjectivity that has become an extension of technocapitalism rather than vice versa.

Deleuze and Guattari are the twentieth century's poet laureates of technocapitalism, especially in light of the way they terminally plug desire into the machinery of the capitalist world system. In their books on capitalism and schizophrenia, they equate the social field with the realm of desire, claiming that the way they engage in production is the same under the determinate conditions of commodity-culture. Moreover, they argue that this is the only ontological and psychic space: "There is only desire and the social, and nothing else" (*Anti-Oedipus* 29). This space offers an illusion of existential freedom while in reality it is a prison, enslaving subjects by remaking them in the form of capital and then hotwiring them to each other as producing-machines. The effect is a communal capitalist technology of the self

whose only business is the reproduction of itself. What intrigues Deleuze and Guattari is a basic problem in political philosophy: the process of subjects, conscious of the illusion that describes reality, desiring to be fascisized slaves.

Nick Land disturbs the Deleuzoguattarian spatial plane of existence, arguing that desire is dissociating itself from the social. The reason lies in the melting division of public and private life invoked by technocapitalist media.

> Between the private and the public there is no longer serious
>
> competition. Instead there is an evaporating social field invested solely
>
> by the defeated and stale affects of insecurity and inertia. The real
>
> tension is no longer between individuality and collectivity, but between
>
> personal privacy and impersonal anonymity, between the remnants of a
>
> smug bourgeois civility and the harsh wilderness tracts of Cyberia, "a
>
> point where the earth becomes so artificial that the movement of
>
> deterritorialization creates of necessity and by itself a new earth." Desire
>
> is irrevocably abandoning the social, in order to explore the libidinized
>
> rift between a disintegrating personal egoism and a deluge of post-human
>
> schizophrenia. (480-81)

Land's claim incites a number of questions. At what point did desire begin to abandon the social? Was it already abandoning it thirty-five years ago when Deleuze and Guattari were writing *Anti-Oedipus* in the late sixties and early seventies? Where specifically is desire going if it is leaving the social in its dust? The "harsh wilderness tracts of Cyberia," after all, still constitute a type of socius. Where is the location of the "libidinized rift" desire desires to explore? Is this dissociative tendency the nature of all

technologized (or, as Land calls it, machinic) desire? At what point did desire become

technologized? Is it a purely postmodern phenomenon spurned by the technology of the

image, or does it reach back further? How much further? To what degree do modern

industrial forces account for such a wayward technologized desire? More significantly,

what will technologized desire look like in the future? And how will it behave? And

where will it go?

The answers to these questions are embedded in the science fiction genre, which

is the most capable medium for charting the spacetime worm-body of technologized

desire's past, present and latent destiny. The purpose of this dissertation has not been to

historicize technologized desire so much as it has been to analyze its contemporary

condition and gesture towards its imminent emergence as a postcapitalist schiz-flow.

My discussion does not go back further than the adherents of the Frankfurt School; I

locate the beginnings of my concept of desire, selfhood, and the body in their proto-

theoretical science fictions (Horkheimer and Adorno's "The Culture Industry" and

Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" above all). But

this is not to say that they are *the* beginning. Before them, for instance, there was Fritz

Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), a science fiction/theory that schizoanalyzes capitalist

subjectivity from a Marxist perspective. And in the nineteenth century there was Marx

himself, theorizing the technology of the self by turning the body into an alienated,

subjugated machine.

Some scholars mark the beginning of the science fiction genre with Mary

Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1817). Brian Aldiss calls it "the first real science fiction novel"

(5), and George Slusser claims that it "is indeed the first SF novel, by which I mean

simply that it seems to be the first work in which the processes of traditional fiction and modern science meet in any meaningful fashion" (46). Others reach back further, citing texts as antiquated as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Cyrano De Bergerac's *Voyage dans la lune* (1650), Bishop Godwin's *The Man in the Moon* (1638), Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (1634), and Lucian's *True History* (circa 150) as points of origin. These earlier fictions are at least in part based on scientific principles as formulated or understood at the time of their composition, and they are distinguished by a sense of wonderment and discovery. As Mark Rose contends, however, labeling them as science fiction is "retroactively recomposing [them] under the influence of a generic idea that did not come into being until well after [they] were written" (5). This is a fair contention, but it isn't altogether viable in that history is inevitably named and spoken from the perspective of the future (whether it's true or false). While the first appearance of the term *science fiction* was in Hugo Gernsback's editorial to a June 1929 edition of *Science Wonder Stories*, the origins of the genre are most firmly located in the nineteenth and early twentieth century novels of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, which popularized the deployment of high technology in literature. Products of industrialism, these authors' respective boyish fantasies and "scientific romances" combined a utopian sensibility with a plaintive fatalism. This is especially the case with Wells, whose romances functioned as social critiques and were laden with a desire to overcome human folly.

Science fiction's evolution from modernist to postmodernist formation marks a distinctive process: the increasing disappearance of the human. The rise to power of late capitalist electric technology has mechanized the body, perception, and ideology. As

texts like the Matrix trilogy explicitly illustrate, it has induced a slavelike dependency in

the human condition. Says Marshall McLuhan:

> It is this continuous embrace of our own technology in daily use that puts
>
> us in the Narcissus role of subliminal awareness and numbness in
>
> relation to these images of ourselves. By continuously embracing
>
> technologies, we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms. That is
>
> why we must, to use them at all, serve these objects, these extensions of
>
> ourselves, as gods or minor religions. (55)

This is precisely what McLuhan's successor Jean Baudrillard means when he says "God

is not dead. He has become hyperreal" (159), redirecting the connotation of Nietzsche's

war cry from Christian to commodity-capitalist morality. The cyberpunks were the first

to effectively represent this cultural condition. At the thematic center of their narratives

is the machine of technocapitalism and its pathological affects. Their stories are

cognitive maps of how the technocapitalist self has (re)coded subjectivity and the body.

The sense of wonder and discovery that typified early science fiction does not exist in

these maps inasmuch as the technological innovations that used to invoke that sense

have been injected into the human body. These innovations have thus been denovated.

In other words, the bodily internalization of technology has (re)produced perception in

such a way that the process of technological extension has become a banal activity. In

cyberpunk diegeses, subjects regard their monstrous, machinic environments idly, if they

regard them at all. This sentiment inevitably informs science fiction today. And it

certainly informs the real world, which is in many ways a representation of what was

imagined by the cyberpunks and their predecessors. In his latest book, *Matters of*

Gravity, Scott Bukatman writes: "No longer is 'the future' a harmless fiction, a utopian era that, by its very definition, will never arrive; it is instead upon us with a vengeance" (15). Reality as a representation of the future as portrayed by science fiction—this is perhaps the first sign of the beginning of postcapitalist life.

There are two dominant visions of postcapitalism. Some have associated it with a reversion to a primitive society in the wake of a global cataclysm. Here the postcapitalist is the postapocalyptic. More commonly it is used to denote an amplification or extrapolation of capitalism in its current form. As Walter Benn Michaels reveals, for instance, Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy,[111] a series of novels about the colonization and terraformation of Mars, "attempts to imagine postcapitalism at the moment when Earth is beginning to understand itself as postsocialist. . . . Robinson's postcapitalism looks a lot like postsocialism—everything is corporations, everything is private property, it is just that the corporations are 'employee-owned'" (664). The subjects that populate Robinson's postcapitalist space, however, are not afflicted by the technozombification of perception and desire that characterized cyberpunk subjects. Rather, they are colorful, wide-eyed personalities who take an active interest in exploring their (new) world and selfhoods. Regardless of their intimate relationship with high technology, they are not residual bodies, mediatized and marginalized by the commodity-culture machine. In this way Robinson romanticizes Golden Age science fiction and creates an authentic fantasy instead of an extrapolated potential reality. His trilogy does not depict a postcapitalist universe insofar as his characters are not sufficiently pathologized by what is essentially the eclipse of subjectivity by the technological self. This, it seems, will be the fundament of

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[111] The trilogy includes *Red Mars* (1993), *Green Mars* (1994) and *Blue Mars* (1996).

the postcapitalist future. Slavoj Žižek rightly equates such a formation with Frankfurt School partisans, calling it "the extrapolated embodiment of *Kulturindustrie*, the alienated-reified social Substance (of Capital) directly taking over, colonizing our inner life itself" ("Reloaded" 198). Science fiction will continue to cognitively map the "colonization of our infer life" by the media technologies of our present commoditocracy as we slip into the next phase of sociosymbolic economy. It began as a genre of fancy. It will end as the genre of capital.

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